



# **Great Projects: The Epic Story of the Building of America, from the Taming of the Mississippi to the Invention of the Internet**

*James Tobin*

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Since the earliest days of the republic, great engineering projects have shaped American landscapes and expressed American dreams. The ambition to build lies as close to the nation's heart as the belief in liberty. We live in a built civilization, connected one to another in an enormous web of technology. Yet we have all too often overlooked the role of engineers and builders in American history. With glorious photographs and epic narrative sweep, "Great Projects" at last gives their story the prominence it deserves. Each of the eight projects featured in this masterful narrative was a milestone in its own right: the flood-control works of the lower Mississippi, Hoover Dam, Edison's lighting system, the spread of electricity across the nation, the great Croton Aqueduct, the bridges of New York City, Boston's revamped street system, known as the Big Dig, and the ever-evolving communications network called the Internet. Each project arose from a heroic vision. Each encountered obstacles. Each reveals a tale of genius and perseverance. James Tobin, winner of a National Book Critics Circle Award, explains the four essential tasks of the engineer: to protect people from the destructive force of water while harnessing it for the enormous good it can do; to provide people with electricity, the motive force of modern life; to make great cities habitable and vital; and to create the pathways that connect place to place and person to person. Tobin focuses on the individuals behind our greatest structures of earth and concrete and steel: James Buchanan Eads, who walked on the floor of the Mississippi to learn the river's secrets; Arthur Powell Davis and Frank Crowe, who imagined a dam that could transform the West; Thomas Edison, who envisioned a new way to light the world; Samuel Insull, the organizational mastermind of the electrical revolution; the long-forgotten John Bloomfield Jervis, who assured New York's future with the gift of clean water; Othmar Ammann, the modest Swiss-American who fought his mentor to become the first engineer to bridge the lower Hudson River; Fred Salvucci, the anti-highway rebel who transformed the face of Boston; and J.C.R. Licklider, the obscure scientist who first imagined the Internet. Here, too, are the workers who scorned hardship to turn the engineers' dreams into reality, deep underground and high in the sky, through cold and heat and danger. In "Great Projects" -- soon to be a major PBS television series by the Emmy Award-winning Great Projects Film Company -- we share their dreams and witness their struggles; we watch them create the modern world we walk through each day -- the "city upon a hill" that became our America.

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