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Tracks stars

These subway VIPs have gone above, beyond—and in this case, below—the call of duty

Photographs by **C. Jones**



BRUCE DAVIDSON
Photographer

In the late '70s, Bruce Davidson had been pouring his energy into writing and producing a feature film; when the project dissolved, he was devastated. He started taking long subway rides "to reroute myself," he recalls. "I found out that the subway was in a deeper depression than I was! It pulled me out of it." Inspired, Davidson, who first came to public notice when *Esquire* published his photos of a Brooklyn street gang in 1959, began to document his fellow travelers. "I worked very simply, a couple of Canon cameras with three lenses," he says. "Most of the shots are from a foot and a half away. And it was tense at that time. You didn't know who was going to walk onto that train." The commuter chronicles were eventually compiled in *Subway*, published by Aperture in 1986, an indelible document of a volatile period in New York City history. Though it was out of print for a time, St. Ann's Press recently reissued the book, and Davidson's images will be exhibited at the Museum of the City of New York starting in October (see "All aboard!," page 32). The portraits maintain their power, Davidson says, because "they relate to things that are happening outside the subway. They're not just photos of people on the train. Any tourist can do that." —*Soren Larson*



COPE 2
Graffiti artist

Back in the '80s, "bombing the subway" connoted something more benign than it does today, but it still made Cope 2 a wanted man. The South Bronx native got his start writing graffiti in 1979 when, armed with a black Pilot marker at just ten years old, he laid claim to the 4 line. "Watching your name flow by on a train was so exciting," he says. "Forget it, man—you have to live it to actually know it." Cope soon formed a crew called KD, and as his style evolved from tags to full-blown wild-style murals, his fame grew—earning him the focus of a documentary in 1999; a biography, *Cope 2: True Legend* (Ecko), this year; and a spot in Peter Sutherland's new *Autograf* (powerHouse Books), which chronicles the history of NYC graffiti artists. "There's times I lay down and I think, Damn, man, it's sad," Cope says. "It was cool because you could chill inside a train and just look at the tags. You go inside of a train now, it's clean, it's boring. You gotta look at people's ugly faces." —*Jordan Hadley*



MIKE HANNA
Retired superintendent of the Division of Car Equipment for the New York City Transit Authority

"When a subway car breaks down today, you need a computer to fix it," Mike Hanna says. That wasn't always the case, though. When Hanna went to work as a machinist on the city's subway cars in 1950, he used his own two hands and a few tools to change the wheels of trains stuck in two feet of snow. When the New York Transit Museum launched 25 years later, the unrivaled repairman was called on to restore the vintage cars that would be displayed there. And later, in 1986, when the Transit Authority decided to put many of those cars in storage, the Brooklyn native helped form a non-profit called the Railway Preservation Corporation to purchase the cars and continue their upkeep at a workshop in Coney Island. —*Katherine Wheelock*



GENE RUSSIANOFF
Straphangers Campaign staff attorney

We all bitch and moan about screeching trains and sauna-like platforms. Gene Russianoff takes it a step further: He issues performance reports, fires off letters to newspapers and lobbies politicians for a living. But while Russianoff, 51, is known for pounding on the MTA, he acknowledges that "things are much better than they were 25 years ago." The MTA certainly has changed since 1979 (the year the Straphangers Campaign was founded by the New York Public Interest Research Group), when gang members in the film *The Warriors* complained about subway maps being unreadable. Now, as the fearless lawyer points out, "The cars have been overhauled or replaced, and a third of the stations have been rehabilitated, and they ended graffiti." Though many New Yorkers mourn the loss of the aerosol art, opinions are hardly mixed about another development: "There are even audible improvements in the announcements!" —*Elisabeth Vincentelli*

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