

Running the Rails: The Forgotten History of the Philadelphians Who Built Their Transit System

An African American History Month Program: Philadelphia exploded in violence in 1910. The general strike that year claimed the lives of some two dozen people and made Philadelphia a prominent point in the tumultuous national conflict over workers' rights. That strike was a notable point, but not a unique one, in the history of Philadelphia's transit system. In this presentation, author James Wolfinger recounts the history of Philadelphia's sprawling public transportation system to explore how labor relations shifted from the 1880s to the 1960s. As transit workers adapted to fast-paced technological innovation to keep the city's people and commerce on the move, they also had to challenge management to secure their rights. Raw violence, welfare capitalism, race-baiting, and smear campaigns against unions were among the strategies managers used to control the company's labor force and enhance corporate profits, often at the expense of the workers' and the city's well-being. Although public service workers and their unions come under frequent attack for being a "special interest" or a hindrance to the smooth functioning of society, *Running the Rails* presents a different, historically grounded, way of thinking about the people who keep their cities running.

Speaker's Bio:



James Wolfinger holds a joint appointment in History

and Education at DePaul University where he is a professor and also associate dean in the College of Education. He is the author of *Running the Rails: Capital and Labor in the Philadelphia Transit Industry*

(Cornell University Press, 2016) and *Philadelphia Divided: Race and Politics in the City of Brotherly Love* (UNC Press, 2007) as well as numerous articles and reviews that have appeared in the *Journal of Urban History*, *Labor*, *Pennsylvania History*, *Journal of American History*, and *American Historical Review*.
