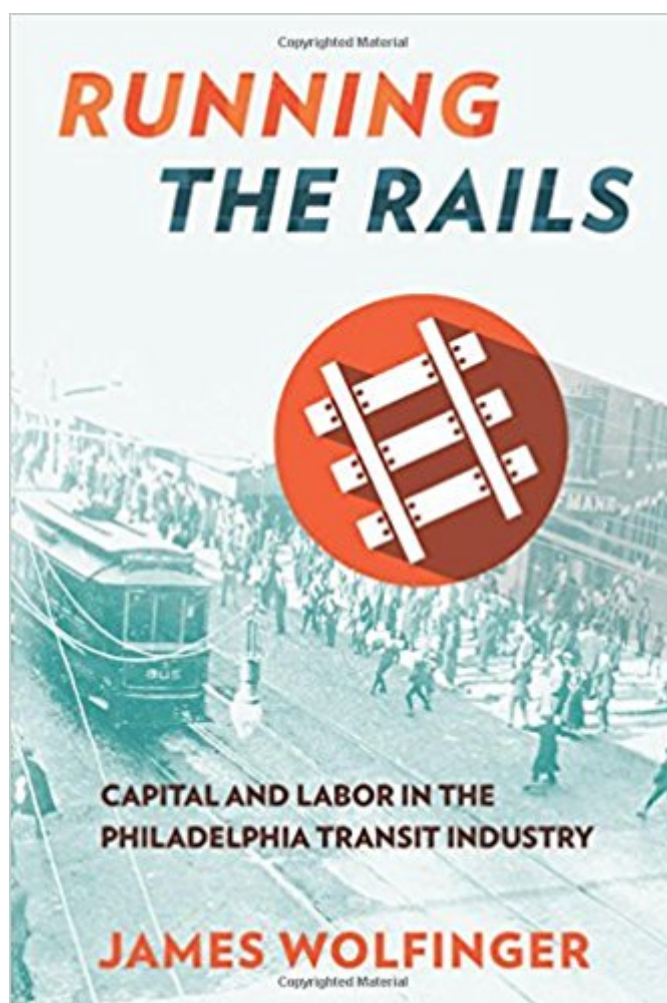


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Running The Rails: Capital And Labor In The Philadelphia Transit Industry



Synopsis

Philadelphia exploded in violence in 1910. The general strike that year was a notable point, but not a unique one, in a generations-long history of conflict between the workers and management at one of the nation's largest privately owned transit systems. In *Running the Rails*, James Wolfinger uses 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, management sought to limit its employees' 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. Public service workers and their unions come under frequent attack for being a "special interest" or a hindrance to the smooth functioning of society. This book offers readers a different, historically grounded way of thinking about the people who keep their cities running. Working in public transit is a difficult job now, as it was a century ago. The benefits and decent wages Philadelphia public transit workers secured—advances that were hard-won and well deserved—came as a result of fighting for decades against their exploitation. Given capital's great power in American society and management's enduring quest to control its workforce, it is remarkable to see how much Philadelphia's transit workers achieved.

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Customer Reviews

"This very readable book will be an essential source in Philadelphia history, transportation history, and labor history. Running the Rails is first and foremost an engaging history of the public transit industry in Philadelphia with a particular focus on the interactions between its management and workers over almost a century of private ownership of the system. This history, and the many important issues it informs, is one that must be told, and Running the Rails is the authoritative work on the subject. James Wolfinger contributes to current discussions in the history of capitalism, in particular the place of private ownership of public services and management strategies in controlling labor."-Daniel Sidorick, author of *Condensed Capitalism: Campbell Soup and the Pursuit of Cheap Production in the Twentieth Century*"In his penetrating study of Philadelphia's transit industry, James Wolfinger shows how owners and managers used harsh working conditions, long hours, and trigger-happy strikebreakers to keep dividends high and payrolls low. Running the Rails gives mass transit its proper place in the histories of American labor and capitalism."•Zachary M. Schrag, author of *The Great Society Subway: A History of the Washington Metro*"Running the Rails is a fascinating and compelling account of the history of Philadelphia transit workers over a very long period of time. It is a work of classic labor history in that James Wolfinger tells the story of a group of workers and their efforts to unionize and, crucially, of management's efforts to control those workers and destroy or challenge their unions."•Eric Arnesen, James R. Hoffa Professor of Modern American Labor History and Executive Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs, The George Washington University, author of *Brotherhoods of Color: Black Railroad Workers and the Struggle for Equality*"Running the Rails is a deeply researched book exhibiting a mastery of many intersecting subjects, from the technology of transit systems to complex financial and regulatory systems to the political milieu of the Philadelphia region. It is essential reading for anyone interested in the development of modern urban transportation, especially its social and political dimensions."•Joshua B. Freeman, Distinguished Professor of History, Queens College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York, author of *Working-Class New York: Life and Labor since World War II*

James Wolfinger is Professor of History and Education at DePaul University. He is the author of *Philadelphia Divided: Race and Politics in the City of Brotherly Love*.

I don't always agree with the authors perspective but the book is well written and informative. A good read for anyone who uses mass transit. A great experience if you read it while riding mass transit!

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