

### **New grant funds research on transcontinental rail**

The Kinder Institute is pleased to support a new research initiative on the history of the world's transcontinental railways. Rail – and especially transcontinental rail – is often understood as a technology that linked up nations, drove economic development, and symbolized modernity. Less understood are the social histories of the ordinary men and women who engaged with railway projects as a site of work, domestic life, and cultural exchange.

Funded by the Australian Research Council, the “Derailing Empire” project (2025-2028) aims to uncover the rich social histories and cultural legacies relating to the development of Australia’s transcontinental railways. A collaboration between a group of scholars in Australia and Kinder Institute Professor of British History Robert Fletcher, it investigates the labor of non-European and women workers who helped construct and maintain Australia’s largest inland railways; the evolution of cross-cultural communities and systems of colonial governance that emerged along railway lines; and the domestic and gendered aspects of railway work and life. The project is also committed to placing Australian transcontinental rail within an international frame, connecting and comparing this story to that of other imperial and transcontinental railway projects in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including in the United States. The project aims to challenge more nostalgic histories of technological progress, and to explore a larger global history of ‘railway imperialism’. Supported by the Australian National Railway Museum and two State libraries, it will also see an international group of researchers on “railway imperialism” convene in Columbia in 2027 for a conference on the subject.