



*Transforming our community together toward equity and justice through community organizing.*

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## Don't Mourn, Organize!

By Rev. Dr. William Huston Wilkinson

The famous expression of international workers of the world organizer Joe Hill who was killed in the struggle and was imagined as showing up on a picket line some years later were "don't mourn, organize". Reflected in the song Joe Hill where the author says, "I dreamed I saw Joe Hill last night, alive as you and me. Says I, 'But Joe, you're 10 years dead,' 'I never died' said he, 'I never died' says he."

The call to build up the beloved community to live as a witness and a worker for compassion peace and justice is a call to organize. For people of faith, the call to organize is a call to build up the relationships in the beloved community. When the Rochester Alliance of Communities Transforming Society (RocACTS), offers itself as a partner for compassion peace and justice in the greater Rochester area and surrounding counties, it's not just offering to join in fighting on particular issues no matter how important decisions might be. It is offering its commitment to building up relationships in the form of congregation- and organization-based community organizing.

Every faith community has at its heart the building up of the beloved community of God; for the humanist faith community building up of humankind for its own well-being. It is understood that no matter how sincere the effort is to seek justice, to offer compassion, and to offer public life, it's not done by any one person alone or any one small group alone it's done by partnership and relationship solidarity.

RocACTS see that is one of its central purposes in the midst of organizations acting as if their silos in the field multiple people seeking the community microphone or to be the leader of a particular movement -- RocACTS understands that its gift is the building of joy to work coalitions, partnerships, public actions.

The organizing work RocACTS joins is in the tradition of faith-rooted organizing of Dorothy Day in the Catholic Worker Movement, Cesar Chavez and the United Farmworkers Movement, Martin Luther King and SCLC in the Civil Rights Movement, and many, many others.

The hard work in local communities is to join with others through our faith congregations and other community organizations to build local organizing committees that work on local issues in the neighborhoods and coming together from time to time in mass public action for issues that affect our entire region. As Joe Hill might offer were he among us today, "don't just sing, organize!"

## GET INVOLVED

To learn more about Trainings, RocACTS Task Forces, and how to become a member, visit our website at: [rochesteracts.org/get-involved](http://rochesteracts.org/get-involved)



Visit our [Website Here>>>](http://rochesteracts.org/get-involved)

## VISION

An empowered and engaged community, grounded in shared values, working to build and sustain an equitable, just and moral society.

## MISSION

Transforming our community together toward equity and justice through community organizing.

## CONTACT US

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# Antiracist Education in Today's Schools

By Shane Wiegand and Kesha James

Rochester students, parents, teachers, and community members have always advocated for antiracist education. Formerly enslaved New Yorkers like Austin Steward and Thomas James opened schools that Black children could attend in the 1800s when public education was only for white children. Black educators in the 1960s like Hannah Storrs, Dr. Walter Cooper, and Dr. Alice Holloway Young demanded Black History be taught and racist books like 'Black Sambo' be removed from mandatory curriculum. Student organizers in the 1970s like Nancy Padilla, Nydia Padilla, Henry Padron, and Roberto Burgos protested for bilingual education and Latino History. And students at Charlotte H.S. like James Beard and his friends in the Black Student Union who organized to keep themselves safe from the rocks, flying glass, and slurs thrown by white parents as the students attempted to integrate the school in the early 70s.

Today the need for students, parents, teachers, and the faith community to advocate for antiracist education is still great. Jeffrey Sachs recently reported for Pen America that "Since January 2021, 122 educational gag order bills have been introduced or prefiled in 33 different states, 12 have become law in 10 states, 88 are currently live. Of those currently live: 84 target K-12 schools, 38 target higher education, 48 include a mandatory punishment for those found in violation." States like Virginia now have hotlines where parents can report teachers for talking about systemic racism. In New York State Assembly Bill A8253 sponsored by Colin Schmitt, R-New Windsor, is currently in committee and aims to "Prohibit instruction on critical race theory within the state". In Monroe County white parents are attending school board meetings and asking that examples of systemic racism like enslavement, redlining, and segregation not be discussed in classrooms. Fearing that white children might feel bad learning this history.

At the Antiracist Curriculum Project our team of local teachers is committed to empowering students, educators, and communities with instructional resources about their local history of racism and civil rights. We support students, educators, and community members in the co-creation, implementation, and evaluation of curriculum that allows learners to explore and interpret their local history through rich primary sources. We equip learners to be critical consumers of information, share their unique perspectives, and work collaboratively to make claims supported by evidence. Ultimately, we work to cultivate more informed and engaged community members to build a more just and equitable society. On March 12th The Anti racist Curriculum Project, The SUNY Brockport School of Education, SUNY Geneseo Ella Cline Shear School of Education, Nazareth College School of Education, St. John Fisher Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education, University of Rochester Warner School of Education, and Center for Urban Education and Success are inviting students, parents, educators, and members of the faith community to carry on the legacy of Steward, Storrs, Cooper, Padilla, and so many others. We invite you to attend the conference and to participate in civic action and call on your local school district and state representatives to have the courage to stand firm. To teach true history and work for equity. Take your children, grandchildren, and friends with you to school board meetings to advocate for anti-racist education. Hold your districts accountable. Ask them if they are using the curricular resources created by the Race, Class and Inequities Inquiry Project or our resources at the Anti-racist Curriculum Project.

We can't continue to silence the history and voices of our students of color at the expense of white fragility. In our fourth-grade curriculum we teach our students about how ordinary Rochesterians like Dr. Walter Cooper stood up against redlining, school segregation, and inequity. Dr. Cooper always says "never give up. You are either involved or you are not. There is no middle ground. I choose to be involved."

## RocACTS Education Task Force

*Our goal is to advocate for children enabling a well-rounded, antiracist education by working directly with the school systems. Committed to building strong relations with educators, parents, school boards, and others who impact the learning of all our children.*

### Objectives:

- Create a unified message by coordinating letters to editors, organizing press conferences and other publicity campaigns, such as postcard campaign and parent testimony.
- Network to build relations and collaborate with other community groups, district personnel and parents, teachers, and students.
- Attend and present at School Board meetings in target districts.

**Interested in volunteering? Contact Joanne Balliet at [Joanne.balliet@rochesteracts.org](mailto:Joanne.balliet@rochesteracts.org) or Christine Jackson [linwood@rochester.rr.com](mailto:linwood@rochester.rr.com)**



## INTERNAL ORGANIZER

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Indigenous Spirituality

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# MEET REVEREND DR. WILLIAM HUSTON WILKINSON

*Rev. Dr. William Huston  
Wilkinson, Teaching Elder  
and Pastor of The First  
Presbyterian Church,  
Medina, New York*



Rev. Dr. William Huston Wilkinson, Teaching Elder and Pastor, The First Presbyterian Church, Medina, New York, is a graduate of the Boston Latin School, and the University of Massachusetts, Amherst (B.A., speech pathology and rhetorical theory, 1965). Rev. Dr. Wilkinson has worked as a sociologist/counselor (M.A.T., University of Massachusetts Graduate School/School of Education, 1970; M.Ed. University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Graduate School of Education, 1970), physician/educator and scientist (M.D., Yeshiva University, 1978: Honors in Community health, University of Nairobi, 1978; M.Sc., Epidemiology, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, University of London, 1984). While a hospital worker, he served as a union delegate, 1199-SEIU, and later in life, was a member of the Sheet Metal Workers Union. Rev. Wilkinson, active through the years in social justice ministries in the Society Of Friends, American Baptist Churches, United Church Of Christ, and the Unitarian Universalist Association, studied theology and ministry (M.Div., 2006). at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, the alma mater of Rev. Dr. Luther King, Jr., M. Div., 2006). The vision of contributing to the building of community social change, missional church and congregation-based community organization have guided his development.

Raised in Boston, MA, Rev. Dr. Wilkinson began the practice of community partnership facilitation in the 1960's New England peace movement. Under the training and supervision of the American Friends Service Committee, Cambridge, MA, Rev. Wilkinson served as a draft counselor in Roxbury, MA, during the mid-1960's, in the Vietnam War era. He was part of the push for the first African American Studies Program in the United States of America, at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and a counselor in its affirmative action program for African American students. In the growth and building of the national movement for African American Studies, Rev. Dr. Wilkinson went on to serve as the Chairperson (Acting) of the Black Studies Program, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH, with appointments in the Sociology and Counseling Departments deepened it in health care union (Local 1199) struggles in New York City (1970's), and in college/medical school teaching there. A Milbank Memorial Fellow in clinical epidemiology, 1983-1988, continued his engagement in social change as a member of the British Delegation to the 1985 Conference (Budapest, Hungary) of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), the organization recipient of the 1985 Nobel Prize for Peace. A founding Convener of the Community Conversations on Congregation-based Community Organizing, the forerunner of Rochester ACTS, initially an affiliate of the Chicago-based Gamaliel Foundation, and now of Faith in Action, Rev. Dr. Wilkinson serves as Vice President of the Board of Directors. Rev. Dr. Wilkinson served as the President of the Greater Rochester (NY) Community of Churches/Faith in Action Network 2013-2016. He now serves on the Executive Committee of the Board. A recipient of the Ecumenism Award (2018) from the New York State Council of Churches, Rev. Dr. Wilkinson now serves on their Board as the Second Vice President.

## PURPOSE

RocACTS is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit, multi-ethnic, multi-racial, interfaith community organization working to transform our community for the common good by:

1. Breaking down the barriers that divide us by working to eliminate systemic racism and other forms of discrimination in order to promote social and economic justice.
2. Training community members as leaders and preparing and supporting them in public engagement initiatives.
3. Addressing the issues that impact the quality of life in our neighborhoods and community, both independently and in collaboration with other like-minded organizations.
4. Promoting a faith-community centered model of community organizing.

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