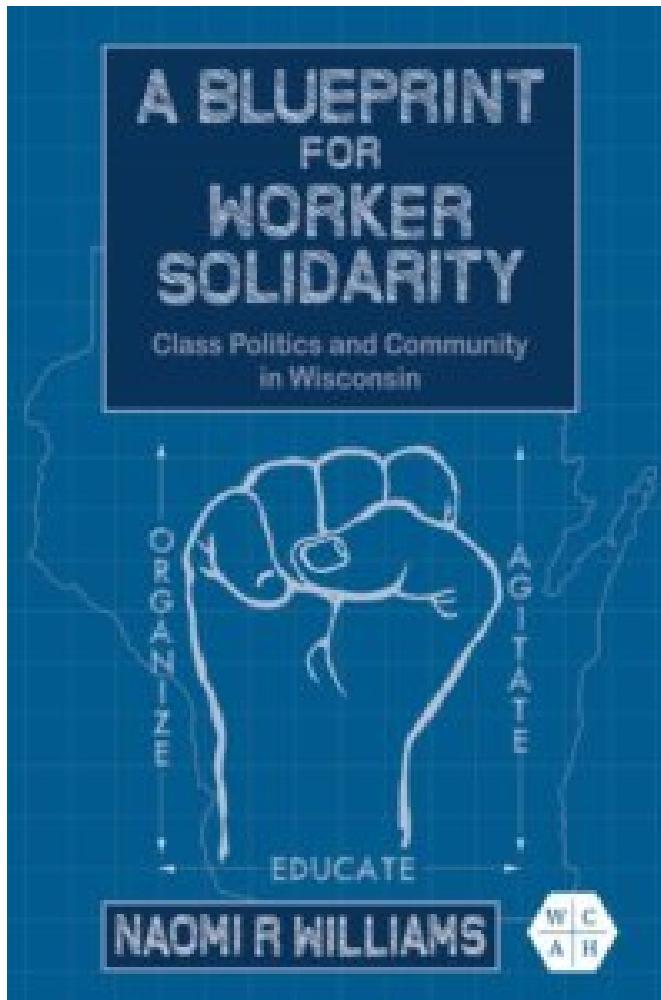


Naomi R Williams on their new book, A Blueprint for Worker Solidarity

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[A Blueprint for Worker Solidarity: Class Politics and Community in Wisconsin \(2025\)](#)

Ian Rocksborough-Smith interviewed Naomi R Williams about their recent book, *A Blueprint for Worker Solidarity: Class Politics and Community in Wisconsin*, published by the University of Illinois Press in 2025. As this timely book makes clear, worker activists from Racine, Wisconsin over the long-mid through the late 20th Century “sustained a vibrant working-class community deep into what many still point to as labor’s decline. The lessons they provided highlight how we can support workplace democracy and economic freedom in the twenty-first century” (p.4).

Focused on the activism of local labor and community leaders like Harvey Kitzman, Tony Valeo, Corinne Reid-Owens (“Racine’s Rosa Parks”) and William Jenkins, *A Blueprint for Worker Solidarity* is full of first-hand accounts of efforts to achieve progressive social change in a medium-sized, Midwestern American city.

Video segments (viewable once you press play)

0:00 Intro

1:50 Inspirations for study

13:57 How unique was Racine?

22:17 William Jenkins and Corinne Reid-Owens; intersections of race and class

36:27 Gender and women's activism

44:54 Impact of Early Cold War Politics

54:40 Pragmatism v. ideals in the local community and labor movement

1:00:48 Lessons for organizers today: people power and acknowledgement of differences

1:05:25 Current and future projects

Authors

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Ian teaches primarily U.S. history at the University of the Fraser Valley in Stó:lō / S'ólh Téméxw / Abbotsford, B.C., Canada. His research interests include public and urban history, social movements, and histories of race, labor, religion, and empire in the Atlantic world. He has published academic articles and book reviews in a variety of journals like *The Black Scholar: Journal of Black Studies and Research*, *Reviews in American History*, and *The Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* and has a book entitled: *Black Public History in Chicago: Civil Rights Activism from World War II Into the Cold War* (April/May 2018). He has written op-eds in *Canadian Dimension* and *The Conversation (Canada)* and is on the editorial team for *Labor Online* (LAWCHA). He has served as an international solidarity and human rights officer for his faculty

union, local 7 of the Federation of Post-Secondary Employees of British Columbia (2021-2023).



- [Naomi R Williams](#)

Naomi R Williams (they/them) received their PhD from the History Department at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Their primary research interests include labor and working-class history, urban history and politics, gender and women, race and politics, and more broadly, social and economic movements of working people. Naomi focuses on worker voice and late-capitalism at the end of the 20th century. Naomi's research also examines the ways working people impact local and national political economies and the ways workers participate in collaborative social justice movements. Naomi engages working-class history in urban settings, looking at low-wage service work, industrial employment, and workers in higher education. Their first book, *A Blueprint for Worker Solidarity: Class Politics and Community in Wisconsin* (2025), uses life histories of union leaders and labor community resources to examine the transformation of class identity and politics in the second half of the twentieth century.