



# WILLOWBROOK MEMORIAL LECTURE

May 3, 2018, 3:00pm-4:30pm  
Center for the Arts (Building 1P), Recital Hall

**SPEAKER: DR. MICHAEL WILKINS**



**DR. WILKINS GAVE THE KEY TO ONE OF THE WILLOWBROOK WARDS TO GERALDO RIVERA. TOGETHER THEY CREATED A REVOLUTION THAT LED TO THE CLOSING OF THE WILLOWBROOK INSTITUTION.**

Dr. Michael Wilkins' courage in advocating for change in the Willowbrook institution led to the Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act (CRIPA) of 1980 that improved conditions in all institutions. When Dr. Wilkins arrived, Willowbrook already had a bad reputation. Was designed to hold 4000 residents with intellectual disabilities, it held 6000. As a result of the overcrowding and unsanitary conditions, virtually all children developed hepatitis. Wilkins cared for more than 70 residents with severe disabilities along with 2 or 3 attendants. Few went to school; they would be on the floor in straightjackets so as not to scratch themselves or assault others. Some would rock on the floor, while others sat motionless. Wilkins began advocating for change. After trying to organize the parents Wilkins was fired. Now unemployed, Wilkins contacted his friend, a local WABC-TV New York newsman, Geraldo Rivera. Fortunately, when Wilkins was fired, the administration had not asked for his key and he used it to let Rivera come to Willowbrook and expose the conditions through "Willowbrook: The Last Great Disgrace", that garnered national attention and won a Peabody Award for Rivera. The institution closed down in 1987. The College of Staten Island moved in in 1993.

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