

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Reverend Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Walker, Wyatt Tee
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker,
<b>Dates:</b>	June 24, 2010
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2010
<b>Physical Description:</b>	2 uncompressed MOV digital video files (0:57:14).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Civil rights activist and pastor Reverend Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker (1928 - 2018 ) founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1957. He also served as the senior pastor of Canaan Baptist Church in Harlem for thirty-seven years. Walker was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 24, 2010, in Chester, Virginia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2010_069
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Pastor and civil rights activist Wyatt Tee Walker, also known as “The Harlem Preacher,” was born on August 16, 1928 in Brockton, Massachusetts to John Wise and Maude Pinn Walker. He attended primary and elementary schools in Merchantville, New Jersey and went on to attend Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia, where in 1950 he earned his B.S. degree in Chemistry and Physics, *magna cum laude*. He remained at Virginia Union and attended the Graduate School of Divinity, where he received his M.A. degree in 1953. Walker

was heavily involved with the Civil Rights Movement as president of his local NAACP chapter and state director of the Congress of Racial Equality. He met Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at an interseminary meeting, forging a connection that continued until Dr. King's assassination in 1968.

Walker, together with Dr. King, founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1957; he served as the organization's third Executive Director in 1960 and helped Dr. King organize the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. In 1964, Walker left the SCLC and worked as a marketing specialist for the Negro Heritage Library, which aimed to make African American history a more integral part of the revisionist school curricula. Three years later, Walker became the Senior Pastor of Canaan Baptist Church in Harlem, New York City, where he would serve for thirty-seven years. At Canaan Baptist, Walker reenergized the music program, leading it down a new path to several choral albums. In 1975, he earned his D.Min. degree from the Colgate-Rochester Divinity School, where he wrote his dissertation on the music of the black religious tradition. The urban affairs liaison for New York Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller, Walker served on the National Committee on the American Committee on Africa, which brought many African leaders to the Canaan Baptist Church, including Nelson Mandela. He concerned himself deeply with the apartheid struggle in South Africa as founder of the Religious Action Network of the American Committee on Africa in 1988.

Walker was a published author of many essays, including "The Soul of Black Worship: A Trilogy – Preaching, Praying and Singing" in 1984. He was named as one of *Ebony* magazine's "15 Greatest Black Preachers" in 1993. After experiencing four cerebral strokes in 2002 and 2003, Walker retired from his post at Canaan Baptist Church and moved to Chester, Virginia with his wife Ann in 2004. After his retirement, he continued to speak and make appearances and was honored with induction into the International Civil Rights Walk of Fame at the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site in Atlanta, Georgia.

Walker passed away on January 23, 2018 at age 89.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Reverend Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker was conducted by Larry Crowe on June 24, 2010, in Chester, Virginia, and was recorded on 2 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Civil rights activist and pastor Reverend Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker (1928 - 2018 ) founded the Southern

Christian Leadership Conference with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1957. He also served as the senior pastor of Canaan Baptist Church in Harlem for thirty-seven years.

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## **Restrictions**

### **Restrictions on Access**

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

### **Restrictions on Use**

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

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## **Related Material**

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

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## **Controlled Access Terms**

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### **Persons:**

Walker, Wyatt Tee

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews  
Walker, Wyatt Tee--Interviews

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African American civil rights activists.

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African American clergy--Interviews.

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African American civic leaders--Interviews.

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## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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Southern Christian Leadership Conference

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Canaan Baptist Church of Christ (New York, N.Y.)

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## **Occupations:**

Civil Rights Activist

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Pastor

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

CivicMakers|ReligionMakers

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## **Administrative Information**

## **Custodial History**

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

## **Preferred Citation**

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker, June 24, 2010. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

## **Processing Information**

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

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## **Other Finding Aid**

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

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## **Detailed Description of the Collection**

### **Series I: Original Interview Footage**

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker, Section A2010\_069\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:06 2010/06/24

Reverend Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker describes his life before 1963. He was born on August 16, 1929 in Brockton, Massachusetts to pastor John Wise Walker and nurse Maude Pinn Walker. His father, born near Emporia, Virginia, graduated from Virginia Union University (VUU) in Richmond, Virginia in 1899 and was pastor of a

church in Merchantville, New Jersey. Walker attended VUU, receiving his B.S. degree magna cum laude in chemistry and physics in 1950 and his M.Div. degree in 1953. He recalls Samuel DeWitt Proctor, his mentor and the dean of VUU's divinity school. In 1953, Walker became pastor of Gillfield Baptist Church in Petersburg, Virginia and president of the city's NAACP chapter. He also founded the Petersburg Improvement Association and became CORE's Virginia State Director. He met Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1958, and he recalls the Civil Rights Movement in Virginia. In 1960, King named him executive director of SCLC in Atlanta, Georgia. Walker describes the relationship between SCLC and SNCC.

Civil rights— Virginia

Congress of Racial Equality.

Virginia Union University (Richmond, Va.)--Alumni and alumnae

Southern Christian Leadership Conference—History

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee—History

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker,  
Section A2010\_069\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:08 2010/06/24

Reverend Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker talks about his role as principal organizer of Project C, a 1963 desegregation campaign headed by Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the SCLC in Birmingham, Alabama. In 1967, Walker was arrested with Dr. King. He remembers taking a famous photo of King in Birmingham Jail. He describes HistoryMaker Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, whom he calls the bravest man in the Civil Rights Movement; HistoryMaker Reverend James Bevel; and the 1963 March on Washington. In 1967, Walker became pastor of Canaan Baptist Church in Harlem, New York. As a cultural historian, he has published fifty-two books since 1983. He describes his work with Nelson Mandela against South African apartheid and his hope that African Americans will recognize their connection to Africa. He talks about King's 1968 assassination, his legacy, how he would like to be remembered, and his family. Walker's parents financed their life insurance policies to send him to

Virginia Union University in Richmond.

Civil rights demonstrations Alabama

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.

Shuttlesworth, Fred L., 1922-2011

American Committee on Africa.

Religious music

Canaan Baptist Church of Christ (New York, N.Y.)