Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker

Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator: Walker, Wyatt Tee
Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker,
Dates: June 24, 2010
Bulk Dates: 2010
Physical Description: 31 Betacam SP videocassettes (0:57:14).
Abstract: Civil rights activist and pastor Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker (1929 - ) 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.
Identification: A2010_069
Language: The interview and records are in English.

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 is 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
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1993. A survivor of 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.

Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker was interviewed by "The HistoryMakers" on June 24, 2010.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker Walker was conducted by Crowe, Larry on June 24, 2010, in Chester, Virginia, and was recorded on 31 Betacam SP videocassettes. Civil rights activist and pastor Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker (1929 - ) 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.

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®.

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.

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

African American civil rights activists.

African American clergy--Interviews.

African American civic leaders--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Southern Christian Leadership Conference

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

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

ReligionMakers

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


Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 6/19/2012 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

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.

**Detailed Description of the Collection**

**Series I: Original Interview Footage, June 24, 2010**

Video Oral History Interview with Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker, Section A2010_069_001_001, TRT: 0:28:06 2010/06/24

Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker was born in 1929 and raised in southern New Jersey, a segregationist region with a Klan presence. He enrolled in his father Rev. John Walker’s alma mater, Virginia Union University, for a degree in chemistry and physics. He received an M.Div. from VUU in 1953. Walker was actively involved in interseminary racial politics. Walker founded the Petersburg Improvement Association and held executive positions in the NAACP and CORE while ministering the Gillfield Baptist Church in Petersburg, Virginia. Walker practiced the non-violence method and was arrested numerous times as he glamorized resistance to local segregation. In 1960 Walker became executive director of SCLC and oversaw its expansion in funding and staff from four employees and a $57,000 budget to over 100 employees and a $1,000,000 budget by 1964. SCLC assisted SNCC in its early days, which caused some friction as egos and organizational methods clashed.

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 Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker, Section A2010_069_001_002, TRT: 0:29:08 2010/06/24

Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker was the architect of “Project C” in 1963, known in history as the Birmingham Campaign. Walker and Birmingham native Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth counted on overreaction from city officials to quash their non-violent protests against segregation; this campaign in turn moved the United States towards aggressive desegregation and is perceived by Walker to be his greatest accomplishment and legacy as an organizer. Walker was frequently arrested, including a 1967 arrest in Birmingham where he shot the iconic jail photo of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. After Rev. King’s assassination Walker turned to cultural history on the subject of religious music and American-African relations, publishing dozens of books and serving in organizations like the American Committee on Africa. Walker and a delegation of American ministers met Nelson Mandela in 1994 and again during Mandela’s first trip to the United States as President of South Africa.

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.)