

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Reverend Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker

PERSON

Walker, Wyatt Tee

Alternative Names: Reverend Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker;

Life Dates: August 16, 1928-January 23, 2018

Place of Birth: Brockton, Massachusetts, USA

Residence: Chester, VA

Occupations: Civil Rights Activist; Pastor

Biographical Note

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.

Related Entries

Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

D. Divinity

Virginia Union University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

B. S.

Merchantville High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

H.S. Diploma

Virginia Union University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

M. Divinity

Gillfield Baptist Church [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1953 to 1960]

Senior Pastor

Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1960 to 1964]

Chief of Staff; Executive Director

Canaan Baptist Church of Christ [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1968 to 2004]

Senior Pastor

Petersburg Improvement Association [MEMBEROF]
[from 1999 to 2008]

Founder & Chair

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Local leader

Congress of Racial Equality [MEMBEROf]
[from 1993 to 1998]

Local leader

Religious Action Network [MEMBEROf]
[from 1987 to 2002]

Co-founder

American Committee on Africa [MEMBEROf]
[from 1997 to 2001]

Committee Member

Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) [MEMBEROf]
[from 1997 to 2003]

Co-founder and President

Negro Heritage Library Project [MEMBEROf]
[from 1997 to 2003]

Vice President

Wyatt Tee Walker Papers, 1963-1982, n.d., 1963-1982 Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.