

# **Re-imagining American Democracy: Learning from the Lives of Wyatt Tee Walker, Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, Martin Luther King, Jr, and Other Civil Rights Icons and Allies**

**Spring 2024**

**Teaching Faculty:** Dr. Betty Neal Crutcher and Dr. Thad Williamson

[bcrutche@richmond.edu](mailto:bcrutche@richmond.edu), 105B Jepson Hall

[twillia9@richmond.edu](mailto:twillia9@richmond.edu), 132 Jepson Hall

Class Meetings: Wednesdays, 9:00 – 11:45 am, Boatwright Library 205

Office hours: Dr. Williamson, Monday 4:30-5:30 p.m. or by appointment; Dr. Crutcher by appointment. Students are encouraged to meet with the instructors in office hours at least once during the semester.

## **Background and Rationale for the Course**

American Democracy in 2024 stands at a crossroads. We must decide whether we will embrace becoming what we never have been, a genuinely inclusive multiracial democracy, or whether we will allow white supremacy to persist for yet another generation. The stakes are heightened because it has become clear that formal democracy and white supremacy can no longer co-exist: as we move inexorably to becoming a majority non-White nation, there will be efforts to restrict both democratic powers (what government can do) and democratic rights (who is able to vote and influence government).

Our specific circumstances are new, but the underlying conflict is not. For our entire history, democracy has been circumscribed and restricted by the realities of racial oppression. Yet previous generations of leaders struggled within difficult contexts to fight for progress, for racial justice, and to redeem the promise of American democracy. The most effective leaders did not do so naively: they utilized moral arguments and sought to argue for the democratic principles, but they were also realists who knew that “power concedes nothing without a demand.”

One such leader was Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker, who struggled persistently on behalf of racial and social justice for over sixty years—here in Virginia, in New York, in Africa, in the Middle East. Walker gives us a potent example of what it means to “reimagine” democracy: to envision a different future, *and* to envision strategies and actions to realize that vision. Walker’s concern was not small improvement, but dismantling systems of formal racism and building new systems of racial inclusivity involving new social and economic rights. He stated clearly and persistently, long before it was popular, the view that American capitalism had exploited and deprived Black Americans and that nothing short of reparations and the reconstruction of a new political-economic system could possibly achieve either liberation or justice. And yet while Walker’s vision was large, it was not a vision for a library shelf or an academic journal; it was a vision he worked to realize, in the world, drawing on the institutional base of the Black Church but also engaging political structures and political actors, from grassroots leaders to governors. Walker

was concerned with both *vision* and *power*, and with developing not only skillful opposition or resistance to power, but skillful acquisition and use of it.

While Walker is the central figure in this course, we also will be engaging the ideas, lives, and work of several other Civil Rights leaders, icons and allies, famous and less famous: Bayard Rustin, Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella Baker, Martin Luther King, Jr, Howard Thurman, Virginia Durr, Lillian Smith, Edward Peeples, and the “Syracuse 8.” These individuals—female and male, Black and White, in the North and in the South, in a variety of social settings—pushed creatively for constructive social change, using the resources and opportunities available to them.

Throughout the course we will engage these leaders’ vision and work on their own terms, as well as the institutional and historical contexts in which that work took place. But we also will continually return to the question of what this means for us, and to the project of re-imagining American Democracy today and for the foreseeable future. This is a creative project to which all of us—faculty, students, classroom visitors, others we engage with over the course of the semester—can contribute. We thus wish for this class to be a creative collaboration as we all learn together from these remarkable leaders, and from each other.

## **Course Overview**

This course examines the linkages between leadership, power, and struggles for social and racial justice as exemplified by the life of Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker, a former chief of staff to Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and longtime pastor of Canaan Baptist Church in Harlem, New York. The class will focus on Walker’s early years in central Virginia and the context of twentieth-century racial segregation; crucial episodes in the Civil Rights Movement in which Walker played a crucial role alongside King; his leadership in the political, economic and civic arenas while serving as pastor of Canaan Baptist Church; his scholarly interest in the Black Church and in particular his sacred music; and his involvement in global human rights activism including the anti-Apartheid struggle in South Africa.

We will compare Walker’s specific methods of leadership with several other major figures in the Civil Rights movement: Martin Luther King, Jr, Ella Baker, Bayard Rustin and Fannie Lou Hamer. We will also examine the perspectives of Whites in the South (and elsewhere) who resisted change, as well as surprising stories of ally-ship by Whites who came to reject the racist narratives of the early twentieth century South. Finally, we will consider how the methods of Civil Rights activism were taken up in a very different settings across the country, as exemplified by the protests of the Syracuse 8 football players in the early 1970s.

Throughout the course we will return to these questions: what does a life devoted to creative and sustained struggle for social justice look like? How did Walker (and others) conceptualize and practice *leadership*, in different settings? What lessons might Walker’s life hold for social justice struggles and democratic renewal today? Assignments will include engagement with scholarly secondary literature as well as primary sources held by the University of Richmond’s Wyatt Tee Walker collection, and classroom sessions will include frequent conversations with former associates of Walker and other leaders working in social change spaces.

## **Learning Outcomes**

This course covers a lot of material, and will raise many specific questions. Overarching learning outcomes include (but are not limited to):

1. Increased understanding of the U.S. civil rights movement and the institutional and cultural contexts that shaped it, including specifically the Black Church and Christian theology but also other influences; and including also the background context of systemic racism in which the movement was formed
2. Understanding the strategic framework and specific choices civil rights leaders adopted to advance their aims
3. Understanding why Wyatt Tee Walker and other leaders saw local, national and global issues as linked
4. Understanding the contributions of Walker to the re-imagining of American democracy as an inclusive, multiracial democracy marked by greater social, civic, and economic equality
5. Coming to an understanding of the character, intellectual framework, and habits of mind of Walker; and how they contrasted with or complemented those of other civil rights leaders with whom Walker was associated
6. Understanding differences and similarities between the experiences of Blacks and White activists in the Civil Rights Movements, as well as the impact of gender and sexuality on Civil Rights activism
7. Reflecting upon the lessons from Walker's lifelong commitment, successes and disappointments upon how students might shape their own lives.

We also hope in the course to show how dialogue across racial, gender, generational and other differences in identity and life experience can fruitfully shed light on both the challenges facing American democracy as well as possible pathways towards change. We invite all students to be full participants in this journey and aim to create an environment in which all students can draw on their respective backgrounds and experiences to contribute to this conversation.

### *Course format*

The course meets from 9 am to 11:45 a.m. each Wednesday. We will begin each class period with a piece of music relevant to the time period and events under discussion that week. The first half of each class period will be in standard academic format of guided discussion. Each student will be responsible for a brief presentation concerning the week's readings at least once during the semester. We will break at approximately 10:15 each week.

The second part of the course, from 10:30 to 11:45, will consist of either a visit with a guest speaker; a film excerpt; or time spent examining archival material from the University's Dr. and Mrs. Wyatt Tee Walker Collection.

### **General Course Expectations**

To succeed in this course, you will need to meet several core expectations. These are not optional and not negotiable.

- You must attend every class (arriving on time—i.e. two minutes early).
- You must prepare for class by doing the assigned reading in a thoughtful manner, prior to class
- You must be attentive in class
- You must make an effort to participate in class discussions
- You must complete the written assignments on time

In addition, it is also highly advisable that you:

- Visit the instructors periodically in office hours, especially when you have questions
- Take good notes both while reading and in class
- Review those notes after each class session
- Write down questions as you are reading you would like to raise in class
- Spend time with your classmates talking about the ideas in the reading outside of class time

Finally, there are a few key classroom comportment rules we will observe:

- All phones must be turned off and put away before entering the classroom, and must stay off until you leave the classroom, except during the short class break at approximately 10:15 a.m. Laptops are permissible exclusively for the purpose of taking notes, but if you use a laptop you should maintain eye contact with the instructor and must not have other windows open on your desktop.
- You should go to the bathroom prior to class and not get up in the middle of class to go, barring a genuine emergency
- Don't bring food into the classroom, but beverages are acceptable provided you dispose of them appropriately after class
- Pay both the professors and your classmates the respect of listening to what they have to say. The way to indicate you are listening is through periodic eye contact.

### **Assignments & Evaluation**

- Students must attend and actively participate each week. No absences permitted except for illness or truly extraordinary circumstances.
- Students are responsible for a *short*, weekly “Three Things” response to be printed and brought to class, beginning the second week of class. Note three facts, arguments, observations, or questions from the week’s reading that you believe are significant, and explain in 2-3 sentences (per item) why you think it is significant. You will be asked about your list in the class period, and you will turn it in and at the conclusion of each class period.
- Students are to attend **at least one** of the following three on-campus events and submit a one-page response paper: “Commitment to Humanity” MLK event, Thursday January 18, 6 p.m., “Beloved Community” MLK event, Tuesday January 23, 4 p.m.; Charles Blow Jepson Forum event, February 13, 7 p.m. Submit your response paper within 72 hours of completion of the event.

- **Twice** during the semester, each student will be responsible for providing an extended, verbal response to the week's readings. Two students will be selected per week. The students' presentations will be independent: we want you to share your honest reaction from your perspectives
- **Once** during the semester (at least), students will visit the Speech Center prior to your verbal presentation. It is encouraged that you do this prior to your first presentation. **(25% Course Grade: Attendance, one-page response paper, participation, weekly responses, in-class presentation)**
- There will be a one-hour mid-term exam on March 6. **(20% Course Grade)**
- Students will prepare a final project that may be a term paper (minimum length 12 pages) or a multimedia presentation of equivalent depth. Students are to consult with the Writing Center in development of their project. Presentations of approximately 15 minutes will take place the last day of class. **(30% Course Grade)**
- Final comprehensive exam, consisting of both an in-person test and a take-home essay **(25% Course Grade).**

## Course of Study

### *A. Theological and Historical Background*

#### Wednesday January 17

1. Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Chapters 1-3 (pp. 1-63)
2. Wyatt Tee Walker, "The Black Church and the Revolution of the 1960s," in Walker, *Occasional Papers of a Revolutionary*, pp. 1-19.
3. Erica Chenoweth, "Rustin's Legacy of Civil Resistance in the U.S.," from *Bayard Rustin: A Legacy of Protest and Politics*, pp. 10-24.

*Film Excerpt: The Black Church (Henry Louis Gates, Jr.), Episode Two*

#### Wednesday January 24

4. Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Chapters 4-5 and Epilogue (pp. 64-101)
5. Wyatt Tee Walker, 2016 Oral History, Parts I and II.
6. Randall Kennedy, "Moving from the Streets to the Corridors of Power," from *Bayard Rustin: A Legacy of Protest and Politics*, pp. 25-34.

*Invited Speaker: Ms. Patrice Walker Powell, Richmond, VA*

## ***B. Black and White Women in the South, I***

### **Wednesday January 31**

7. Susan Tucker, *Telling Memories Among Southern Women: Domestic Workers and Their Employers in the Segregated South*, Part One, pp. 13-67.
8. Walter Naegle, "The Legacy of Grandmother Julia Rustin," from *Bayard Rustin: A Legacy of Protest and Politics*, pp. 35-40.
9. Lillian Smith, *Killers of the Dream*, pp. 78-79, pp. 83-155 (Part Two).

Field Trip to Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Dawoud Bay: Elegy exhibit. *Tentative: details to be confirmed.*

### **Wednesday February 7**

10. Kate Larson, *Walk With Me: A Biography of Fannie Lou Hamer*, Chapters 1-9 (pp. 1-165)

*Confirmed Guest Speaker: Dr. Andrea Simpson, University of Richmond*

## ***C. Black and White Women in the South, II***

### **Wednesday February 14**

11. Virginia Durr, *Outside the Magic Circle*, Chapters 1-4 (pp. 3-88), Chapters 6-7 (pp. 101-134), Chapter 10 (pp. 171-182), Chapters 19-22 (pp. 274-338).

*Confirmed Guest Speaker (via Zoom): Mr. Omar Neal, former Mayor of Tuskegee, Alabama*

### **Wednesday February 21**

12. Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, Chapters 3, 6-8 (pp. 64-104, 170-272)
13. Danielle L. McGuire, "Rustin and Ella Baker: Revolutionary Trailblazers," from *Bayard Rustin: A Legacy of Protest and Politics*, pp. 54-74.
14. Kate Larson, *Walk With Me: A Biography of Fannie Lou Hamer*, Chapter 10 (pp. 166-185)

*Confirmed Speaker: Ms. Sue Thompson, Attorney, Tuscaloosa, Alabama*

## ***D. Birmingham Campaign***

### **Wednesday February 28**

15. Diane McWhorter, *Carry Me Home*, Introduction, p. 1-10, Chapters 11-20, pp. 289-412, Chapter 27, pp. 501-512.

*Invited Speaker: Dr. Gill Hickman, University of Richmond (Emeritus) and Birmingham, AL native*

### **Wednesday March 6**

16. Martin Luther King, Jr. "Letter from Birmingham Jail," 1963.
17. Jonathan Eig, *King: A Life*, Chapters 24-25 (pp. 279-309)
18. Wyatt Tee Walker, Archival Materials from Birmingham Campaign
19. John D'Emilio, "Troubles I've Seen: Rustin and the Price of Being Gay," from *Bayard Rustin: A Legacy of Protest and Politics*, pp. 131-144.

***Mid-Term Exam, Second Part of Class***

## ***E. Music, Spirituality and Social Change***

### **Wednesday March 20**

21. Wyatt Tee Walker, *Somebody's Calling My Name: Black Sacred Music and Social Change*
22. Guy and Candie Carawan, *Sing for Freedom: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement Through Its Songs* (excerpts)

*Confirmed Guest Speaker (via Zoom): Dr. Tammy Kernoodle, Miami University of Ohio*

## ***F. Black and White Men in the North and South***

### **Wednesday March 27**

*Confirmed Guest Speaker, 9 am: Dr. Ronald A. Crutcher, University of Richmond, President Emeritus*

23. David Marc, *Leveling the Playing Field: The Story of the Syracuse 8*. Chapters 1-7 (pp. 3-164), Chapter 12 pp. 219-239).

*Confirmed Guest Speaker (10:30): Mr. Clarence "Bucky" McGill, Richmond resident and member of the Syracuse 8.*

**Wednesday April 3**

24. Edward Peeples, *Scalawag* (complete), pp. 3-182.

*Confirmed Guest Speaker: Ms. Jo Ann Deck in dialogue with Dr. Betty Neal Crutcher*

***G. Wyatt Tee Walker's Struggles for Democracy in New York and Around the World***

**Wednesday April 10**

25. Wyatt Tee Walker, *A Prophet from Harlem Speaks*, pp. 65-111.

26. Wyatt Tee Walker, *Road to Damascus*

*Invited Speaker: Dr. Corey D.B. Walker, Dean, Wake Forest University Divinity School*

**Wednesday April 17**

27. Sarah Azaransky, "Rustin's Internationalism: How A Great American Activist Learned from Movements Abroad." from *Bayard Rustin: A Legacy of Protest and Politics*, pp. 131-144.

28. Wyatt Tee Walker, "Reflections on Apartheid" (1990), in *A Prophet From Harlem Speaks*, pp. 93-96.

29. Wyatt Tee Walker, *Notes on Soweto*

*Student Research Project Workshop Second Half of Class*

**Wednesday April 24**

Final Student Presentations.

**Wednesday May 1**

Final Exam, 9 a.m.

**Final Projects due Thursday May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 5 pm, for graduating seniors; Friday May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5 pm, for other students.**



## ***Jepson School of Leadership Studies Common Course Policies***

### **Awarding of Credit**

To be successful in this course, a student should expect to devote 10-14 hours each week, including class time and time spent on course-related activities.

[registrar.richmond.edu/services/policies/academic-credit.html](http://registrar.richmond.edu/services/policies/academic-credit.html)

### **Disability Accommodations**

Students with a Disability Accommodation Notice should contact their instructors as early in the semester as possible to discuss arrangements for completing course assignments and exams.

[disability.richmond.edu/](http://disability.richmond.edu/)

### **Honor System**

The Jepson School supports the provisions of the Honor System. The shortened version of the honor pledge is: "I pledge that I have neither received nor given unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work." [studentdevelopment.richmond.edu/student-handbook/honor/the-honor-code.html](http://studentdevelopment.richmond.edu/student-handbook/honor/the-honor-code.html)

### **Religious Observance**

Students should notify their instructors within the first two weeks of classes if they will need accommodations for religious observance. [registrar.richmond.edu/planning/religiousobs.html](http://registrar.richmond.edu/planning/religiousobs.html)

### **Addressing Microaggressions on Campus**

Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership. Recent research has found that, when professors do not address microaggressions in class, microaggressions foster alienation of marginalized groups. Furthermore, both students and faculty that are exposed to microaggressions more often are more likely to have depressive symptoms and negative affect (a negative view of the world). A comfortable and productive environment where meaningful learning happens can be collectively created through actions, words, or environmental cues that promote the inclusion and success of marginalized members, recognizing their embodied identity, validating their realities, resisting sexism, ableism, and racism.

### **Sensitive and Offensive Material Warning and Class Policy**

In this course we are reading historical and literary documents concerning some of the most painful aspects of the American experience, including but not limited to racism, sexism, and <https://www.tikkun.org/soundalike/2013/03/15/seven-habits-of-civically-engaged-human->

beings/patently offensive terms, even when they are used in texts or textual passages we are discussing.

### **Note on Class Evaluations**

Student course evaluations will be completed in-class on the last day of the semester. Bring a laptop to the final day of class. All students are requested to complete the evaluation. Your participation is helpful in improving pedagogy and effective learning in the Jepson School.

### **Use of Artificial Intelligence**

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is not to be used in connection with *any* assignment for this class.

### **General grading standards:**

- A range grades are given for truly outstanding written work that not only meets the basic requirements of the given assignment but also demonstrates exceptional insight, clarity, and depth of thought. For instance, an A-range paper will not simply forward a coherent argument, but also anticipate and attempt to answer likely objections to the argument, and/or acknowledge points at which one's argument might be vulnerable. Such papers will also be very well-organized and well-written, and gracefully presented.
- B range grades are given for good and very good written work which amply meets all the basic requirements of the given assignment and reflects substantial effort and engagement with the material. Such work is generally well-written and well-organized, shows good understanding of the course material, and avoids major substantive or logical errors.
- C range grades are given for work which attempts to fulfill the requirements of the assignment but which falls short in some substantial way, with respect to organization, writing quality, understanding of the material, or argumentative logic.
- D and F grades are reserved for work which comes nowhere close to meeting the requirements of the assignment.

If you experience difficulties in this course, do not hesitate to consult with us. There are also other resources that can support you in your efforts to meet course requirements.

**Academic Skills Center** ([asc.richmond.edu](http://asc.richmond.edu)): Academic coaches assist students in assessing and developing their academic and life-skills (e.g., critical reading and thinking, information conceptualization, concentration, test preparation, time management, stress management, etc.). Peer tutors offer assistance in specific subject areas (e.g., calculus, chemistry, accounting, etc.) and will be available for appointments in-person and virtually. Peer tutors are listed on the ASC website. Email [Roger Mancastrappa \(rmancast@richmond.edu\)](mailto:rmancast@richmond.edu) and [Hope Walton \(hw Walton@richmond.edu\)](mailto:hw Walton@richmond.edu) for coaching appointments in academic and life skills.

**Boatwright Library Research Librarians:** ([library.richmond.edu/help/ask/](http://library.richmond.edu/help/ask/) or 289-8876): Research librarians help students with all steps of their research, from identifying or narrowing a topic, to locating, accessing, evaluating, and citing information resources. Librarians support students in their classes across the curriculum and provide individual appointments, class library instruction, tutorials, and [research guides \(libguides.richmond.edu\)](http://libguides.richmond.edu). Students can [contact an individual librarian \(library.richmond.edu/help/liaison-librarians.html\)](http://library.richmond.edu/help/liaison-librarians.html) or ASK a librarian for help via email ([library@richmond.edu](mailto:library@richmond.edu)), text (804-277-9ASK), or [chat \(library.richmond.edu/chat.html\)](http://library.richmond.edu/chat.html).

**Career Services:** ([careerservices.richmond.edu](http://careerservices.richmond.edu) or 289-8547): Can assist you in exploring your interests and abilities, choosing a major or course of study, connecting with internships and jobs, and investigating graduate and professional school options. We encourage you to schedule an appointment with a career advisor early in your time at UR.

**Counseling and Psychological Services** ([caps.richmond.edu](http://caps.richmond.edu) or 289-8119): Assists currently enrolled, full-time, degree-seeking students in improving their mental health and well-being, and in handling challenges that may impede their growth and development. Services include brief consultations, short-term counseling and psychotherapy, skills-building classes, crisis intervention, psychiatric consultation, and related services.

**Disability Services** ([disability.richmond.edu](http://disability.richmond.edu)) The Office of Disability Services works to ensure that qualified students with a disability (whether incoming or current) are provided with reasonable accommodations that enable students to participate fully in activities, programs, services and benefits provided to all students. Please let your professors know as soon as possible if you have an accommodation that requires academic coordination and planning.

**Speech Center** ([speech.richmond.edu](http://speech.richmond.edu) or 287-6409): Assists with preparation and practice in the pursuit of excellence in public expression. Recording, playback, coaching and critique sessions offered by teams of student consultants trained to assist in developing ideas, arranging key points for more effective organization, improving style and delivery, and handling multimedia aids for individual and group presentations. Remote practice sessions can be arranged; we look forward to meeting your public speaking needs.

**Writing Center** ([writing.richmond.edu](http://writing.richmond.edu) or 289-8263): Assists writers at all levels of experience, across all majors. Students can schedule appointments with trained writing consultants who offer friendly critiques of written work.