

Reverend Addie Wyatt: Faith and the Fight for Labor, Gender, and Racial Equality. By Marcia Walker-McWilliams. Illinois Press, 2016. Pp. ix, 266, illustrations, bibliography, notes, index, Paper, \$28.00.) Book Review by Amy Helene Forss in *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, Volume 110, Number 3-4, Fall/Winter, 2017, p. 403-405.

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Marcia Walker-McWilliams' *Reverend Addie Wyatt: Faith and the Fight for Labor, Gender, and Racial Equality* engaged readers in an enlightening examination of Addie Wyatt's professional trials and personal tribulations. It came as no surprise to discover that Wyatt, a humble brilliant woman who participated in a majority of the latter twentieth century's equality campaigns, needed two years' worth of coaxing from the author before she permitted Walker-McWilliams to "Tell the story" (p. 8.) And tell it, the author did. Working on the premise that most readers remain unaware of Wyatt's historical significance, the author patiently and expertly unfolded her multi-faceted accomplishments as labor leader, loving wife and mother, ordained minister, and women's movement feminist.

The strength of *Reverend Addie Wyatt* revolved around Walker-McWilliams' meticulous exploration of Wyatt's challenges to American labor unions concerning their treatment of African American workers. The author situated Wyatt within an array of solidly researched vignettes contextualizing the importance of events dating from World War II to the early 2000s. Starting with Wyatt entering the labor field, Walker-McWilliams explored Wyatt's original employment as a meat canner in 1944. The young wife, married at sixteen, mother of two and raising her six younger siblings with her husband Claude, resided in the Windy city's meatpacking district. Framing Wyatt within her work, family responsibilities, and co-founder of the Vernon Park Church of God and the Wyatt Choral Ensemble, made her linear rise even more impressive. Wyatt was the first black woman president of the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA) Local 56, and then the first female (regardless of skin color) attaining the position of international vice president of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters (AMC), and finally reached her highest position as the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) first woman international vice president and Director of Civil Rights and Women's Affairs. The author successfully argued her point that Wyatt's strategy of increased union activism augmented with exemplary leadership was the simultaneous turning point for her and the UPWA. In addition, Walker-McWilliams demonstrated that Wyatt's lengthy list of "firsts" acted as a resonating gold standard. It was a model she consistently utilized for urging on succeeding generations of African American women and African Americans in general.

While the text's minuscule backstories, such as Wyatt's union raising funds for the Montgomery Bus Boycott, supported Wyatt's leadership capabilities and supplied a historical cache of concepts for future labor scholars, in a few instances the author's sub-story format overshadowed the focus of the manuscript. In Chapter 7, Wyatt's tenure as a member on the Committee for a Black Mayor showcased her no-nonsense innovative approach to election

politics, her ingenuous sponsorship was eclipsed by the authors' peripheral examination of the eventually successful candidate, Harold Washington. It was also difficult to follow Wyatt's interactions with the various unions peppered throughout the single-spaced text. A list of unions with their corresponding acronyms would have assisted memory recall and manuscript comprehension. The author did supply photographs pertaining to Wyatt's labor activities, employment evolution, and personal milestones but these visual tools distracted more than enhanced as they were presented in a non-chronological order. There was reader assistance in the footnotes but the select bibliography included only archives and interviews. Unfortunately, the exclusion of primary and secondary sources underrepresented Walker-McWilliams' superb research and offered limited sources for future monographs.

Regardless of these side issues, Walker-McWilliams not only achieved her objective of establishing Wyatt as the labor union champion, the family woman, the church leader, and the ardent seeker of women's equality, but also demonstrated her undisputed place in several historical tracts. *Reverend Addie Wyatt* offers its audience of college students and scholars another must read in the Women, Gender, and Sexuality in American History series.

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