

UNCOVERING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF BAYARD RUSTIN

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GUIDING QUESTION:

How did Bayard Rustin contribute to the Civil Rights Movement?

OVERVIEW

Students will examine primary and secondary sources to discover Bayard Rustin's contributions to the modern Civil Rights Movement. Students will explore events related to Rustin's activism, use evidence from the lesson to design a descriptive title for Rustin, and explain how Rustin contributed to the modern Civil Rights Movement.

OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this activity, students will be able to:

- > Interpret primary and secondary sources to discover how Bayard Rustin influenced the Civil Rights Movement;
- > Identify reasons that his participation was downplayed; and
- > Explain how his work contributed to the Civil Rights movement.

STANDARDS CONNECTIONS

CONNECTIONS TO COMMON CORE

- > CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.
- > CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CONNECTIONS TO C3 FRAMEWORK

- > D2.Civ.12.9-12. Analyze how people use and challenge local, state, national, and international laws to address a variety of public issues.
- > D2.His.3.9-12. Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time and is shaped by the historical context.
- > D2.His.16.9-12. Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past.

DOCUMENTS USED

PRIMARY SOURCES

Bayard Rustin, "Working Paper #1," January 10–11, 1957
Documents Collection Center, Lillian Goldman Law Library, Yale Law School
<https://documents.law.yale.edu/working-papers>

Flyer, *Why Should We March?*, 1941
Civil Rights Digital Library, Library of Congress
<https://memory.loc.gov/mss/mssmisc/ody/ody0808/0808001v.jpg>.

Pamphlet, Bayard Rustin, "Interracial Primer: How You Can Help Relieve Tensions Between Blacks and Whites," 1944
Documents Collection Center, Lillian Goldman Law Library, Yale Law School
<https://documents.law.yale.edu/interracial-primer>

Pardon Certificate of Bayard Rustin, February 4, 2020
Office of Governor Gavin Newsom, State of California
<https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Pardon-Certificate-Bayard-Rustin-02.04.2020.pdf>

SECONDARY SOURCES

Article, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Who Designed the March on Washington?," 2013 (excerpt)
PBS
<https://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/history/100-amazing-facts/who-designed-the-march-on-washington/>

Online Exhibition, *Pacifism and the American Civil Rights Movement: A Celebration of the Centennial of Bayard Rustin (1912–2012)*
Documents Collection Center, Lillian Goldman Law Library, Yale Law School
<https://documents.law.yale.edu/bayard-rustin>

Documentary Clips, Nancy D. Kates, Producer/Director, *Brother Outsider: The Life of Bayard Rustin* (excerpts)
Introductory Clip: <https://vimeo.com/802687633>
Preparation for the March on Washington Clip: <https://vimeo.com/802688348>
March on Washington Montage Clip: <https://vimeo.com/802688811>

TEACHER-CREATED MATERIAL

- › Exploring Bayard Rustin Handout

ACTIVITY PREPARATION

- › Make one copy of the Exploring Bayard Rustin handout for each student.
- › Organize students into eight groups of two to five students each and arrange the classroom for group work.

PROCEDURE

ACTIVITY ONE: RUSTIN'S EMERGENCE AS AN ACTIVIST (45 MINUTES)

- › Introduce students to Bayard Rustin by playing the *Brother Outsider* Introductory Clip [2:44]. Ask students, *Had you ever heard of Bayard Rustin before seeing this clip?* If any student has heard of him, ask them to share where and how they learned about him.
- › Distribute the Exploring Bayard Rustin handout to each student. Review the focus question.
- › Explain that as students learn more about Rustin, they need to look for evidence supporting the claim that he was the "unknown hero" of the modern American Civil Rights Movement.
 - › **Teacher Tip:** Before moving on, be sure students are familiar with pacifism, conscientious objection, civil disobedience, and reconciliation.
- › Assign each group one section of the handout to explore. For five minutes, have students work to complete their assigned section. Then, allow each group two minutes to synthesize their research and present their findings while students fill in their handout.
- › Lead a reflective discussion about what students learned about Bayard Rustin through this exploration:
 - › *What types of nonviolent protest did Rustin engage in?*
 - › *Why did Rustin have to downplay his involvement in the movement?*

ACTIVITY TWO: RUSTIN IN ACTION (30 MINUTES)

- › Explain to students: The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom has become an iconic moment of unity and inspiration in the modern Civil Rights Movement. The "I Have a Dream" speech that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial has come to represent the founding principles of America. Yet none of this would likely have been possible without Bayard Rustin's organizing efforts.
- › Play the clip, Preparation for the March on Washington [6:31].
- › Lead a class discussion about Rustin's role in the March on Washington.
 - › *What challenges did Rustin face in preparing for the March on Washington?*
 - › *How did South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond respond to the idea of a march?*
 - › *How did Dr. King react to Senator Thurmond? Why does this matter?*
 - › *What did you find most surprising or interesting?*
- › Explain to students that the publicity commemorating the leaders that day notably left out Bayard Rustin, but he was there. As they watch a montage of footage from the March on Washington, ask them to watch for Rustin. Where do they see him? What is he doing?
- › Play the March on Washington Montage Clip [4:18].
 - › **Teacher Tip:** In the scene where Rustin is addressing the crowd on the microphone, he is reading from the demands that the demonstration was making of the U.S. government and the American people.
- › Lead students in a discussion about what they saw. Ask:
 - › *How does this change your understanding about the March on Washington?*
 - › *How has the downplaying of Rustin's role in the movement affected the historical narrative?*
 - › *Why is it important to know about Bayard Rustin and his contributions?*

CONNECTIONS

At the core of change are individuals. This resource contains lessons about Founding Mothers, Anna Coleman Ladd, and Buffalo Soldiers who were awarded the Medal of Honor. People make America a more perfect union.

- > Explain that after the success of the March on Washington, Rustin never again faced the level of scrutiny for his past as he had before the march. He continued his work in human rights, and his public activism never wavered.
- > To prepare for the assessment, ask students:
 - > *What impressed you most about Rustin?*
 - > *What lessons does his story teach us?*

ASSESSMENT OPTIONS

- > The focus questions describes Rustin as an "unknown hero" in the Civil Rights Movement. Ask students to create a new title to describe Rustin's role in the Civil Rights Movement and support that title with evidence from the sources. Students can submit as a written response, oral explanation, or informational poster.
- > Students can research Rustin's debate with Malcolm X or other actions in which he participated after the March on Washington.

STUDENTS INTERESTED IN THIS TOPIC MIGHT BE INTERESTED IN RESEARCHING THE FOLLOWING FOR AN NHD PROJECT:

- > Jo Ann Robinson (1912–1992)
- > Fred Kameny (1925–2011)
- > Fannie Lou Hamer (1917–1977)
- > Harvey Milk (1930–1978)
- > Claudette Colvin (1939–)
- > Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), (1942–)
- > The Freedom Rides (1961)

To access a PDF containing all of the sources and materials to complete this lesson plan, go to:

NHD.ORG/250

EDSITEment!

RELATED RESOURCES

Lesson Plan: Civil Rights and the Cold War

<https://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plans/civil-rights-and-cold-war>

Media Resource: The LGBTQ Community in American History

<https://edsitement.neh.gov/media-resources/lgbtq-community-american-history>

Media Resource: Voices of Democracy: Women Leaders of the Civil Rights Struggle

<https://edsitement.neh.gov/media-resources/voices-democracy-women-leaders-civil-rights-struggle>

Student Activity: U.S. Civil Rights Movements of the 20th Century

<https://edsitement.neh.gov/student-activities/civil-rights-movements-late-20th-century>

EXPLORING BAYARD RUSTIN

Focus Question: Bayard Rustin has been called “the unknown hero” of the modern American Civil Rights Movement. How did Rustin contribute to the movement?

Instructions: Explore the events and experiences that shaped Bayard Rustin by using the source links provided.

<p>Group One: Childhood Influences</p> <p>How did Rustin’s upbringing influence his activism?</p>	
<p>Group Two: Early Activity</p> <p>What causes did Rustin advocate for?</p>	
<p>Group Three: Interracial Primer</p> <p>What are three key political themes put forth in the pamphlet that became characteristic of Rustin? Scroll through the primer. What do you notice about this publication?</p>	
<p>Group Four: Rustin Arrested</p> <p>Why was Rustin arrested in 1944? In 1947? How did he use his time in prison?</p>	

EXPLORING BAYARD RUSTIN (CON'T)

**Group Five: Spreading
Nonviolent Action**

How was Rustin received when he traveled overseas?

**Group Six:
A Lapse in Judgement**

How did Rustin's arrest in 1953 impact his activism? When and why was he pardoned?

**Group Seven:
A Week in Montgomery**

Why was Rustin sent to Montgomery, Alabama in January 1956? Why did he leave?

**Group Eight:
Working Papers**

What did Rustin's Working Papers lead to? On the first page of Working Paper #1, Rustin explains the nine qualities required for mass movement. Which of the nine do you think would be the most difficult to achieve today? Why?

SOURCE PACKET: GROUP ONE

CHILDHOOD INFLUENCES

Bayard Rustin's childhood instilled in him the activism and pacifism he would later infuse into the Civil Rights Movement. Born in 1912 to a teenage mother without the resources to raise him, Rustin was taken in by his maternal grandparents. His grandmother, Julia Davis Rustin, was especially influential. She taught Rustin the Quaker philosophy that all people belong to a "human family within which everyone is equal," and introduced him to some pioneering black figures, like W.E.B. DuBois and Mary McLeod Bethune, whom she hosted in her home as part of her work as a charter member of the NAACP. At age 14, Rustin acknowledged his homosexuality. Because of his grandmother's acceptance, Rustin acknowledged in a 1987 interview that he "never felt it necessary to do a great deal of pretending. And I never had feeling of guilt."¹ These influences emboldened Rustin to be an outspoken activist for human rights. Later in life, he said, "my activism did not spring from being Black. Rather, it is rooted fundamentally in my Quaker upbringing and the values instilled in me by my grandparents, who reared me."²

Read more about Rustin's Quaker background at <https://documents.law.yale.edu/bayard-rustin/exhibit?page=1>.

¹ Bayard Rustin, Devon W. Carbado, and Donald Weise, *Time on Two Crosses: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin* (Minneapolis: Cleis Press, 2015), xi.

² "Remembering Bayard Rustin: The Man Behind the March on Washington," NPR, February 25, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/970292302>.

SOURCE PACKET: GROUP TWO

EARLY ACTIVISM

When Rustin attended college in New York, he became politically active in the Young Communist League (YCL) in 1938. The organization appealed to him because members backed up their words with actions by supporting the Scottsboro Boys in 1936 and protesting U.S. intervention in World War II—unlike the Black Civil Rights establishment at the time. Rustin’s work included coordinating the Committee Against Discrimination in the Armed Forces. Concerned about the economic inequalities that plagued African Americans, Rustin applied to work for the most influential African American labor union, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, in the spring of 1941. The creator of the Brotherhood, A. Philip Randolph, initially turned Rustin away because of his ties to the Communist Party. This caused Rustin to break from the party in June 1941, and he was then invited by Randolph to join a committee planning for a march on Washington to pressure President Franklin D. Roosevelt to desegregate the military and end discrimination in the defense industry. To Rustin’s dismay, the march was called off less than a week before it was scheduled to happen when President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802 on June 25, 1941, prohibiting discrimination in defense industries. Rustin was discouraged that the order fell short of desegregating the military.

Rustin denounced Randolph for selling out to the president and became involved in the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), the most influential pacifist organization in the country. Its leader, A. J. Muste, was profoundly impacted by the nonviolent direct action advocated by Mahatma Gandhi, which moved beyond passive resistance to confrontation. Rustin became Muste’s “hands and feet and eyes” by late 1941, serving as youth secretary.⁴ It was in the Fellowship of Reconciliation that Rustin would get to practice the strategies of nonviolent direct action.

View the flyer, *Why Should We March?* at <https://memory.loc.gov/mss/mssmisc/ody/ody0808/0808001v.jpg>.

⁴ Bayard Rustin, Devon W. Carbado, and Donald Weise, *Time on Two Crosses: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin* (Minneapolis: Cleis Press, 2015), xi.

SOURCE PACKET: GROUP THREE

INTERRACIAL PRIMER

Read about Rustin's work with the Fellowship of Reconciliation at <https://documents.law.yale.edu/bayard-rustin/exhibit>.

Access Rustin's "Interracial Primer: How You Can Help Relieve Tensions Between Blacks and Whites" at https://dev.documents.law.yale.edu/sites/default/files/yale_rustin_interracial_primer.pdf.

SOURCE PACKET: GROUP FOUR

RUSTIN ARRESTED

Read about Rustin's 1944 arrest at <https://documents.law.yale.edu/bayard-rustin/exhibit?page=2>.

Read about Rustin's 1947 arrest at <https://documents.law.yale.edu/bayard-rustin/exhibit?page=3>.

Read about Rustin's time in prison at <https://documents.law.yale.edu/bayard-rustin/exhibit?page=4>.

SOURCE PACKET: GROUP FIVE

SPREADING NONVIOLENT ACTION

By 1948, Rustin had earned the nickname “Mr. Nonviolence.”⁵ On October 1, 1948, just days after being released from jail for protesting against the draft, Rustin boarded the *Queen Mary* heading to Europe for a five-month journey sponsored by Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR). He visited several European nations, meeting with pacifists and speaking about his nonviolent direct action experiences. Rustin also visited the newly independent India, where he was invited by Mahatma Gandhi to attend the first international pacifist conference in February 1949. Despite Gandhi’s assassination in January 1948, the conference went on, and Rustin made such an impression during his stay there that British FOR ambassador and Gandhi devotee, Muriel Lester, requested Rustin stay for a year. “He’s getting into the very center of power here, and perhaps no one else could work so effectively with [Indian Prime Minister] Nehru against militarism,” Lester wrote.⁶ FOR leader Muste insisted Rustin return to the United States to continue the work on the homefront. “Bayard’s qualities are such that he will practically never be in any country without the demand developing for him to stay,” admitted Muste.⁷

In 1952, FOR sent Rustin to Africa on a mission to foster pacifist coalitions with leaders as they struggled against colonization. Rustin remained committed to African decolonization efforts throughout his lifetime.

⁵ “Remembering Bayard Rustin: The Man Behind the March on Washington,” NPR, February 25, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/970292302>.

⁶ Bayard Rustin, Devon W. Carbado, and Donald Weise, *Time on Two Crosses: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin* (Minneapolis: Cleis Press, 2015), xi.

⁷ John D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 167.

SOURCE PACKET: GROUP SIX

RUSTIN'S ARREST AND PARDON

During a visit to Pasadena, California, in January 1953, Rustin made a decision that followed him through the next decades. After police found Rustin having sex with another man in a car, he was charged with “vagrancy” for having consensual sex with other men—a discriminatory law at the time used to brand LGBTQ+ people as criminals. Rustin’s criminal conviction landed him in jail for 50 days, and he had to register as a sex offender. “To be in prison, but not for something he believed in . . . broke him, just broke him,” recalled a fellow gay Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) member.⁸ FOR leader A. J. Muste was furious and accepted Rustin’s resignation from the most influential pacifist organization in the country. The arrest would “cast [Rustin] adrift from the cause to which he had devoted himself . . . it severely restricted the public roles he was allowed to assume,” explains historian John D’Emilio.⁹

Read the pardon certificate issued by California Governor Gavin Newsom on February 4, 2020:
<https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Pardon-Certificate-Bayard-Rustin-02.04.2020.pdf>.

⁸ Bayard Rustin, Devon W. Carbado, and Donald Weise, *Time on Two Crosses: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin* (Minneapolis: Cleis Press, 2015), xi.

⁹ John D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 167.

SOURCE PACKET: GROUP SEVEN

A WEEK IN MONTGOMERY

Late in 1955, Rustin found he could be of use once again to the cause for racial equality. Renewed by the recent Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), Rustin rejoined with A. Philip Randolph and other activists in a new group called In Friendship, dwhich was dedicated to providing economic aid to “race terror victims” in the South.¹⁰ The group was gaining ground when news of a new civil rights conflict emerged in Montgomery, Alabama—the Montgomery Bus Boycott. When news reached New York that, amid a rise of white supremacist violence in the city, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s home had been bombed, Rustin and others feared the Black community might resort to violence in retaliation. Despite some pushback from leaders who felt Rustin’s recent arrest and former Communist affiliation would make him too controversial for a task like this, Randolph insisted Rustin was the most experienced in nonviolent tactics and sent him South.

Read the 2013 article, “Who Designed the March on Washington?,” beginning at the section titled, “Enter (and Exit) Dr. King” at <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/history/100-amazing-facts/who-designed-the-march-on-washington/>.

¹⁰ John D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 167.

SOURCE PACKET: GROUP EIGHT

WORKING PAPERS

Read about Rustin's Working Papers here: <https://documents.law.yale.edu/bayard-rustin/exhibit?page=5>.

Access Working Paper #1: <https://dev.documents.law.yale.edu/sites/default/files/working-papers/scl001.pdf>.