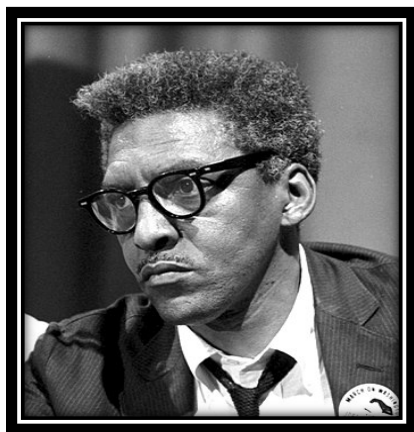


PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

Bayard Rustin organizer, activist

"We need in every community a group of angelic troublemakers"



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Background Information

Born: March 17, 1912

Died: August 24, 1987

Rustin was born in West Chester, Pennsylvania, to a single teenage mother. He was raised by his grandparents and learned his Quaker values of equality from them. Rustin attended Wilberforce University, Cheyney State College, and the City College of New York, where he spent his time singing and performing. Then he began a lifelong career of activism.

Rustin's Resistance

In high school, Rustin joined nonviolent student protests. He was also a player for the high school football team. When a restaurant served his White teammates but refused to serve Rustin, he staged a sit-in at the restaurant. A sit-in is a way to protest by sitting in places where not everyone is welcome.

Rustin was not only treated badly for being Black, but also because he was an openly gay man.¹ He experienced cruelty, threats and isolation. Despite this bad treatment, he continued to fight for the rights of all people in peaceful ways. Rustin helped plan the first freedom rides to bring people to the South to fight racism. He was arrested over 20 times for his civil rights activities. He also organized many peaceful protest marches, including the famous "March on Washington," where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech in front of 200,000 people.²

Achievements

Although Rustin's success with organized protests was noteworthy, he did not receive much support in his lifetime. Years after his death, however, President Barack Obama awarded him the Medal of Freedom for all that he did to fight for human rights.

¹ Rustin, Bayard, et al. *Time on Two Crosses: the Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin*. Cleis Press, 2015.

² Gates, H. L., & Root, J. | O. posted on T. (2013, January 20). Bayard Rustin, the Gay Civil Rights Leader Who Organized the March on Washington | African American History Blog. Retrieved October 24, 2019, from The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross website: <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/history/100-amazing-facts/who-designed-the-march-on-washington/>

Essential Questions

1. Rustin believed in non-violent protests. Do you think his methods would still be affective to make social change today? Why or Why not?

2. Rustin received the Presidential Medal of Freedom over 20 years after he died. Why do you think that some people only receive credit for their achievements decades after their accomplishments?

3. *“We need in every community a group of angelic troublemakers.”*
 - a. What do you think Rustin meant by “angelic troublemakers”?