

Bayard Rustin

and the
Civil Rights Movement

“The principal factors which influenced my life are: nonviolent tactics; constitutional means; democratic procedures; respect for human personality; a belief that all people are one.”

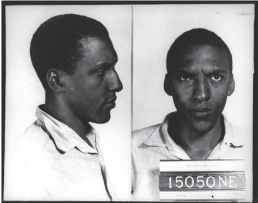
—Bayard Rustin

Essential Questions

- How did ideas about the place of African Americans in American society change between Reconstruction and the 1950s and 1960s?
- How did Bayard Rustin’s homosexuality influence his effectiveness as a civil rights activist?
- How successful was nonviolence as a strategy in the civil rights movement?
- Evaluate Rustin’s statement that nonviolence had to be not just a strategy, but an ideology.

1940s

- 1944—Refused to do military service; convicted, he served two years in jail
- 1946—Joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation and took part in a bus trip through the South testing Jim Crow laws; also participated in sit-ins in restaurants
- 1947—Went to India to study passive resistance with Gandhi



Rustin’s mugshot after he was arrested for failing to report for his Selective Service physical exam during World War II

1950s



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
and Bayard Rustin



Rosa Parks, whose arrest sparked
the Montgomery Bus Boycott

- 1956 – Went to Montgomery, Alabama, to offer Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. advice on how to use Gandhi's methods of nonviolence in the bus boycott
- 1957 – Helped organize the Southern Christian Leadership Conference

1960s



August, 1963—Organized the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom that brought 250,000 people to Washington, D. C. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his "I Have a Dream" speech there

1970s

- Founded and became Director of A. Philip Randolph Institute
- Co-chair of Socialist Party
- Organized Black Americans in Support of Israel; worked to free Soviet Jews
- Served on the Board of Trustees of Notre Dame University
- Served as a global human rights and elections observer for Freedom House



1980s



- Became an advocate for gay rights
- Testified on behalf of New York's Gay Rights Bill
- Gave speech: "The New Niggers Are Gays," which claimed that gay rights should be the new focus for civil rights activists
- Died in New York City after a trip to monitor human rights in Haiti

"The barometer of where one is on human rights questions is no longer the black community. It's the gay community, because it is the community which is most easily mistreated."²⁷

Bayard Rustin, 1987