

## CPCS Commemorates the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's Day - 2024

The theme for the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day 2024 announced by the King Center is "It Starts with Me: Shifting the Cultural Climate Through the Study and Practice of Kingian Nonviolence," as a "sustainable solution to violence and injustice in our world."

Nonviolent struggle was at the core of Dr. King's advocacy, and the massive achievements for racial respect, including the Freedom Riders, the Montgomery Bus Strike and the March on Washington. What is not as well-known is the impact of Bayard Rustin on Dr. King's commitment to nonviolent struggle and his organizing efforts within the civil rights movement. Born in 1912, Mr. Rustin was raised by his grandmothers in West Chester, Pennsylvania, within a Quaker home guided by faith in nonviolence as a fundamental tenet.

Along with being Black, Mr. Rustin came out as gay early in life, which compounded to challenges of ridicule, hatred, and personal harm. Over his lifetime, Rustin's sexuality and his political activism led to arrests and sanctioning that over time led to problems in his support of the civil rights movement. Rustin's nonviolent values and cause for change led him to Communist and socialist thinking, and membership in groups that supported his beliefs. Through this commitment, he met and began work with A. Phillip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. With Randolph, he tried to hold a March on Washington in 1941, focused on employment discrimination and segregation in the military, at a time of war, but that effort failed due to political compromise.

In 1956, Bayard Rustin took leave from his work against war, to advise Dr. King on the philosophy of nonviolence, at the time King was organizing the Montgomery bus boycott. Dr. King was aware of Gandhi's efforts and successes through nonviolent protest, but he was then protected by associates who carried guns and had himself applied for a gun permit. Rustin and King engaged in long dialogues about nonviolence and what it meant both for Dr. King and the movement, with Dr. King excluding weapons from his life, studying Gandhi more deeply, and incorporating references to Gandhi's philosophy in his speeches. As Dr. King's commitment to nonviolence became clearer, some members of the media began to refer to Dr. King as "Alabama's Gandhi." by some in the press.

For all they shared, Dr. King was too often reminded and even threatened with false exposure of his relationship to Rustin based on Bayard Rustin's sexuality, history of arrest, and past Communist affiliations. This challenge led Dr King to sever ties with Bayard Rustin, just as Mr. Rustin was helping to lead a civil rights march at the National Democratic Convention in 1960, which was ultimately cancelled because of this pressure.

The 1963 March on Washington required leadership to pull together the infrastructure and organization needed to mobilize masses from across the country to come to Washington D.C. Bayard Rustin's name was floated for this role, but his past remained a liability that few in leadership were willing to risk. As a compromise, A. Phillip Randolph volunteered to lead and named Rustin his chief aide. Bayard Rustin directed what was needed to pull the march together – in only eight weeks. For all the success of this quarter-million people mobilization and Dr King's visionary "I Have a Dream" speech, it was Rustin who led the March on Washington to be seamlessly designed and magnificently executed.

Bayard Rustin remained active throughout the remainder of his life, on national and international fronts, primarily as president of the A. Phillip Randolph Institute, and in the struggle for LGBTQ rights. He was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Obama in 2013, and in 2023, the Obamas' production company produced the film "Rustin," a dramatic history on the life and impact of this great leader that is currently on Netflix.

For CPCS, the story of Bayard Rustin helps to illustrate the power of diversity and how we can all share in the difficult road to justice and equality. Happy MLK Day to all!

[Here are some exceptional links for further viewing and reading on Bayard Rustin and his achievements, including organizing manuals for the March on Washington and FBI investigative files.](#)

CBS Spotlight on Bayard Rustin

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=998663584523124>

Debate – Malcolm X and Bayard Rustin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YmVjl0oLCe8&t=72s>

Letter from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., indicating his need of Rustin's assistance  
<https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/rustin-bayard>

Songs by Bayard Rustin – collection

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLVaesGfLES-bmNySfNxOmusBciaCLHae>

Bayard Rustin: While MLK's Right Hand Man was Nearly Written Out of History

<https://www.history.com/news/bayard-rustin-march-on-washington-openly-gay-mlk>

How Bayard Rustin Inspired Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Nonviolent Activism

<https://lithub.com/how-bayard-rustin-inspired-martin-luther-king-jr-s-nonviolent-activism/>

Outsports article – Bayard Rustin – Offensive Lineman for Freedom

<https://www.outsports.com/2009/2/15/3862980/bayard-rustin-offensive-lineman-for-freedom>

Organizing Manual 1 – March on Washington – from National AA Museum

[https://nmaahc.si.edu/object/nmaahc\\_2010.45.2?destination=/explore/collection/search%3Fedan\\_q%3D%252A%253A%252A%26edan\\_fq%255B0%255D%3Dp.eda\\_nmdm.indexedstructured.name%253A%2522Rustin%252C%2520Bayard%2522%26edan\\_local%3D1%26op%3DSearch](https://nmaahc.si.edu/object/nmaahc_2010.45.2?destination=/explore/collection/search%3Fedan_q%3D%252A%253A%252A%26edan_fq%255B0%255D%3Dp.eda_nmdm.indexedstructured.name%253A%2522Rustin%252C%2520Bayard%2522%26edan_local%3D1%26op%3DSearch)

Organizing Manual 2 – March on Washington

[https://nmaahc.si.edu/object/nmaahc\\_2010.45.3?destination=/explore/collection/search%3Fedan\\_q%3D%252A%253A%252A%26edan\\_fq%255B0%255D%3Dp.eda\\_nmdm.indexedstructured.name%253A%2522Rustin%252C%2520Bayard%2522%26edan\\_local%3D1%26op%3DSearch](https://nmaahc.si.edu/object/nmaahc_2010.45.3?destination=/explore/collection/search%3Fedan_q%3D%252A%253A%252A%26edan_fq%255B0%255D%3Dp.eda_nmdm.indexedstructured.name%253A%2522Rustin%252C%2520Bayard%2522%26edan_local%3D1%26op%3DSearch)

FBI Investigative Files on Bayard Rustin

<https://vault.fbi.gov/bayard-rustin>



Photo

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/bayard-rustin>