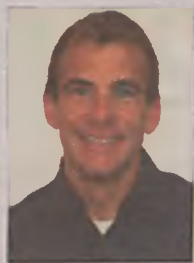
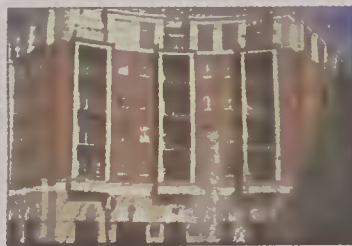


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For Black History Month: Remembering Bayard Rustin

Civil rights pioneer was openly gay during a dangerous era for the LGBT community

Bayard Rustin was an openly gay intellectual activist, important largely behind the scenes in the civil rights movement of the 1960s and earlier and principal organizer of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. He counseled Martin Luther King, Jr. on the techniques of non-violent resistance, and later in his life advocated on behalf of gay and lesbian causes.

A year before his death in 1987, Rustin said: "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."

Early years

Rustin was born in West Chester, Pa. He was raised by his maternal grandparents. Rustin's grandmother, Julia, was a Quaker, though she attended her husband's A.M.E. Church. He was also a member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). NAACP leaders such as W.E.B. Du Bois and James Weldon Johnson were frequent guests in the Rustin home. With these influences in his early life, Rustin campaigned against racially discriminatory Jim Crow laws in his youth.

In 1932, Rustin entered Wilberforce University. He left in 1936 before taking his final exams. He also attended Cheyney State Teachers College, now called Cheyney University of Pennsylvania. After completing an activist training program conducted by

the American Friends Service Committee, Rustin moved to Harlem in 1937 and began studying at City College of New York. There he became involved in efforts to free the Scottsboro Boys — nine young black men who had been accused falsely of raping two white women. He also became a member of the Young Communist League in 1936.

Later experiences

The Communist Party USA (CPUSA) was originally a strong supporter of the civil rights movement, but in 1941, after Germany invaded the Soviet Union, Joseph Stalin ordered the CPUSA to abandon civil rights work and focus on support for U.S. involvement in World War II. Disillusioned by this betrayal, Rustin began working with anti-Communist Socialists such as A. Philip Randolph, the head of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, and A. J. Muste, leader



Bayard Rustin served 30 days on a chain gang in North Carolina for violating Jim Crow laws.

of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR).

The three of them proposed a march on Washington to protest racial discrimination in the armed forces, but the march was canceled after President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued *Executive Order 8802* (the *Fair Employment Act*), which banned discrimination in defense industries and federal bureaus. Rustin also went to California to protect the property of Japanese-Americans imprisoned in internment camps. Impressed with Rustin's organizational skills, Muste appointed him as FOR's secretary for student and general affairs.

In 1942, Rustin assisted two other staffers of FOR, George Houser and James L. Farmer, Jr., and a third activist, Berniece Fisher, as they formed the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Rustin, Houser,

see next page >



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