

When and its initial opposition to u.s involvement



When the topic of Human Rights activists are in discussion, usually names such as Martin Luther King Jr, Rosa Parks, Nelson Mandela and Gandhi are mentioned. Today I would like to speak about a man who has remained in the background, the 'invisible man' of human rights, Bayard Rustin.

Good Afternoon and thank you for inviting me to speak at the 2017 National Conference of the United Nations Association of Australia. We join here today to celebrate the 71st anniversary of the founding of the United Nations and to discuss key identities of Human Rights. Today I will speak about a man who influenced many during his lifetime, and bring attention to his remarkable efforts acknowledging Human Rights.

* Born in West Chester, Pennsylvania, on the 17th of March, 1912, Rustin's life was always one of complication. Until adolescence, he was raised to believe that his parents were Julia and Janifer Rustin, when these were actually his grandparents. The woman he believed to be his sister turned out to be his real mother.

His father, Archie Hopkins was a West Indian immigrant.* During his university years, he engrossed himself in both the African American culture and also in Pennsylvania's gay communities. Inspired by the party's activism on behalf of black Americans and its initial opposition to U. S involvement in World War II, he also joined the Youth Communist League, but shortly lost faith in communism like many others and became an opponent to the notion. Rustin could have avoided the military draft by seeking conscientious objector status, but refused to take part in the government's alternative service program.

For this act of refusal, Bayard was given more than two years in federal prison. After release, he landed a job on the field staff of a Christian pacifist group then later visited India and studied the works of Gandhi, a famous Indian civil rights activist. * Many influenced Rustin on his philosophy, but the two most prominent people he honoured were Gandhi and A. Philip Randolph which led to his beliefs being a mix of non-violent resistance, pacifism and socialism, supported by a fight against racial discrimination in war-related conscription. * Bayard Rustin was most famous for his efforts linked to Martin Luther King Jr. He was a mentor to King and taught him about non-violent resistance and tactics of civil disobedience. He was a key organiser of the March on Washington for jobs and freedom, where King, delivered his 'I have a dream' speech to over 250,000 people .

(Biography. com , 2015). He also assisted him in the creation of his own institution: the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and with the boycott of segregated buses in Montgomery, Alabama 1965, after chaos rose when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a public transit bus. Rustin also spoke at the march stating his seven demands of equality, which included: the access of public accommodations, decent housing, integrated education, fair employment practices, the right to vote, no withholding of federal funds. * Bayard Rustin's efforts in Human Rights started in the 1930s after he moved to New York. He got involved in pacifist groups and early civil rights protests.

In 1958, he was a key coordinator of the march in Aldermaston, England with 10,000 attendees protesting against nuclear weapons. In the 1950s he worked alongside MLK Jr as an organiser and strategist. 1965, he and his

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mentor Randolph co-founded the A. Philip Randolph institute, labour organisation for African American trade union members. Everywhere he went he was invited to speak to the public about his beliefs and strategies. Later on, his writings about civil rights were published in the collection 'Down the line 1971.

' He was seen as the 'perfect' social activist, liberal scholar Paul Berman writes, " except for the single disabling quirk of his notoriously promiscuous homosexuality" (American Radio Works, 2017). His known sexual orientation caused strain amongst peers and also caused many to belittle him and his efforts, but Rustin's boundless talent as an organiser made him too valuable to the community to discard. He presented a speech at the Center for Democratic Institutions, he proposed for the Democratic Party in the United States to be open to all faiths and colours. His personal life settled down during the 1970s-80s. He committed to a long-term relationship, travelled and dwelt on his hobbies.

While doing so he campaigned for gay rights and against HIV-AIDS.

* Throughout his lifetime, Rustin did whatever he could to promote change in society. His personal motives can be clearly seen by his words, ' It is now concerned not merely with removing the barriers to full opportunity but with achieving the fact of equality. '(From protest to politics, 1965). For his efforts in influencing society, he was punished and served many sentences in prison.

In 1943 he was arrested and sentenced to work on a chain gang for several weeks for taking part in the protests against segregated public transport. He was also arrested for 60 days on moral charge for publically engaging in

homosexual activity. Despite this, he continued to live proudly as a gay man in a homophobic society. * Bayard Rustin's legacy still lives on today. Films, books and artworks reference his effect on society, and many awards are given to him in respect to his outstanding efforts in Human Rights. ' Several buildings and schools have been named after him as well as a number of LGBT community programs and centers' (Great Black Heroes, 2015).

A commemorative marker was created in his honour on the grounds of his high school in his hometown. Also, many universities such as Harvard and Yale have awarded him honorary degrees which is highly regarded. He was inducted into the Legacy Walk, an outdoor public display in Chicago that celebrates LGBT history and people. In 2013, he was announced into the US Department of Labour Hall of Honour and was also awarded the most prestigious award given in the US, the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Barack Obama, recognising his efforts related to the infamous March on Washington for jobs and freedom.* Although Rustin was initially just a background figure of Human Rights, people are now starting to recognise his significant effects on society and its changes to the way many people live. His actions inspired many other young activists such as Martin Luther King Jr and made pathways for many to advance with.

Without Rustin's efforts, many aspects of society would be vastly different. His contribution to Human Rights should not only be recognised but praised by society. It can be clearly seen why he should no longer be known as the 'Invisible man'. Thank you all for watching my presentation today and hope this speech is one you can all reflect on greatly.