



# I MUST RESIST

Bayard Rustin's  
Life in Letters

Edited by Michael G. Long  
Foreword by Julian Bond

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City Lights Books • San Francisco

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## FOREWORD

If you know anything at all about Bayard Rustin, it is probably that he was the organizer for the civil rights movement's momentous 1963 March on Washington, and if you know a little more, it is that he was gay and out when that was unusual.

But by reading *I Must Resist*, Michael G. Long's collection of Rustin's letters, you learn that he was much more than that—he was a master theorist and strategist for Martin Luther King and the greater civil rights movement in which King was the most prominent figure; an activist opponent of racial discrimination since he was a child and a supporter of gay rights as he grew older; a skilled practitioner, promoter, and teacher of nonviolent direct action; an international advocate against nuclear weapons; a prison reformer; a promoter of African decolonization; an anti-war crusader and war resister and conscientious objector who went to jail for his convictions; a vigorous advocate of trade unionism, and more. He was a constant and tireless resister, organizer, and agitator. He was also a prolific letter writer and we are the beneficiaries.

In an early letter, written in September 1942, he describes traveling to twenty states and speaking to “more than 5,000 people” as a youth secretary for the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), an organization called a “movement half-way house” by sociologist Aldon Morris.

Morris says these “half-way houses” were small, generally less well-known groups that were incubators of the larger civil rights movement. The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), in which Rustin was also active, played the same role. In the same way, Bayard Rustin was an “incubator” of the many movements in which he played an important role.

Many letters refer to or reproduce sections of various memoranda Rustin wrote to guide some protest or action or another, demonstrating the breadth of activity in which he was involved.

The memo Rustin sent Martin Luther King on December 23, 1956, provides an incisive analysis of the Montgomery bus boycott movement and lays the groundwork for the establishment of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which, as Long writes, acted “as King’s institutional base for launching numerous civil rights campaigns between 1957 and 1968.”

Another memo, also sent to King, lays out the goals and aims of the Crusade for Citizenship, a southwide registration campaign King wanted Rustin to lead. King selected Ella Baker instead, fearing Rustin’s sexuality would be exposed.

Two older men, one white and one black, played important roles as Rustin’s mentors in his early years—first, A. J. Muste, chairman of FOR, and then A. Philip Randolph, organizer and then president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Rustin introduced King to Randolph. Both men were sympathetic to Rustin’s politics, and Muste, as head of the country’s most prominent pacifist organization, had a great influence reinforcing Rustin’s commitment to nonviolence.

Rustin’s many letters to Muste speak of the respect Rustin had for him; the smaller number of letters to Randolph reflects a working relationship where letter writing was less necessary.

This serves to remind us, though, of how much is lost when letter writing falls in disfavor, as it has now, as a primary means of communication. We are so much richer and wiser because Rustin wrote letters and they survived him. His large range of correspondents—presidents, newspaper editors, colleagues, and students—gives us a measure of the man, his activities, and his foresight.

He was an early Freedom Rider in 1941, decades before that phrase and the activity it described entered the common vocabulary. He was a budding communist in the 1930s, abandoning the party when the party gave the war against fascism precedence over the war against racism.

At various times, he was a staunch integrationist, and at other times a defender of tactical voluntary segregation, as when he insisted that A. Philip Randolph’s March on Washington Movement, a predecessor

organization to the triumphant '63 march, remain all-black, fearful that white involvement would mean communists would join and negatively dominate the organization.

One element in the letters is Rustin's eagerness to engage in self-examination and self-criticism, both of what he considered personal faults and of his political strategies. He also did not hesitate to critique his friends.

I knew Bayard Rustin; he was a commanding and charismatic figure. I was taken by his platform personality, his way with words, and his ability to persuade. He once gave me an attractive pocket watch. I watched him adopt more conservative positions in the late '60s and '70s with dismay.

We must look back with sadness at the barriers of bigotry built around his sexuality. We are the poorer for it.

We are also a poorer nation without him, but richer for having had him with us for a while. And lucky that he was a great letter writer.

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## INTRODUCTION

### *Resisting the Shadows*

Bayard Rustin arrived at the Ashland Federal Correctional Institute in Kentucky on March 9, 1944, just eight days before his thirty-second birthday, and he quickly arranged a meeting with Warden R. P. Hagerman to discuss racial injustice at the prison. After their talk, Rustin decided to take a pen in hand and school the warden a bit more in the options one might choose when confronting discrimination. It was a remarkably bold move for a young black man in a Southern prison.

“There are four ways in which one can deal with an injustice,” Rustin wrote. “a. One can accept it without protest. b. One can seek to avoid it. c. One can resist the injustice nonviolently. d. One can resist by violence.”

By the time he finished reading the letter, Hagerman must have known, unmistakably, that this new prisoner from New York City did not have the slightest interest in accepting or avoiding any of the racial injustices that Hagerman and other Ashland authorities had institutionalized through the years. He would have been absolutely right: Bayard Rustin was a resister.

Like others who have written about Rustin, I have often found myself facing a blank stare when discussing my subject. “I’m afraid I don’t know who that is” is a common response. This is true not only of everyday people at my favorite coffee shop but also of teachers steeped in history.

The rare person familiar with Bayard Rustin typically has some knowledge of his historic role as the brains and brawn behind the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. And this is an excellent

start. Rustin was indeed the brilliant organizer of that pinnacle event in protest politics, when millions of Americans directed their attention to a prophetic young minister attempting to change the course of U.S. history from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. As the one in charge on that hot—and monumentally historic—day in August 1963, Rustin was largely responsible for launching the international reputation of Martin Luther King, Jr., and his daring dream for America.

So why our lack of familiarity? During his lifetime, especially up to the time of the March, Rustin often remained in the shadows of the leading figures of the civil rights movement. As a gay man convicted of lewd vagrancy in 1953, and as a socialist with a background in the Communist Party, Rustin was well aware of the possibility that civil rights opponents would use him as fodder in their public denunciations of all things related to civil rights. And because of this possibility, he either opted to remain in the shadows of the movement or was kept there by other civil rights leaders, King among them.

But there was another force at work, too: for most of his life, Rustin lacked an established base and a reliable constituency. Unlike King, he did not enjoy a foundation of support from black church members who saw him as their spiritual leader. Unlike Roy Wilkins and Thurgood Marshall of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Rustin was not able to turn to a national community of politically active blacks who identified him as their public spokesman or their legal counselor about racial injustice. And unlike Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., Rustin could not tap into an electoral base that acknowledged him as their political leader. Exactly because he was not a prominent leader in any of the traditional venues for civil rights work—the black church, the NAACP, and Congress—Rustin was (and remains) often overlooked in civil rights stories and histories.

In spite of these limitations, the historical fact is that Bayard Rustin was one of the most influential civil and human rights advocates in US history. But pulling Rustin out of the shadows and onto the main stage of US history remains a challenge to this day, even though first-rank historians like David Garrow and John D’Emilio have done tremendous work in raising public awareness of his enormous contributions.

It is vitally important that we continue our efforts to resurrect

Rustin for a new generation of globally aware citizens. His lifework of civil disobedience in the face of violence and injustice can offer desperately needed inspiration and creative instruction. But it is especially important that we remember Rustin correctly. And it is my belief that depicting him merely as “Mr. March on Washington”—which is how his mentor, labor leader A. Philip Randolph, fondly referred to him—does a grave injustice not only to Rustin but also to our understanding of the remarkable history of dissent in the United States and beyond.

Bayard Rustin is one of the most important figures in nonviolent protest politics in twentieth-century America. If he found an attitude or action unjust and oppressive—any attitude or action, not just those related to race and ethnicity—he would more than likely seek, nonviolently, to tame it, transform it, or destroy it, no matter how legal, customary, or religious it appeared to be. It was his nature to do so, and perhaps it was unavoidable that he turned out this way.

Bayard Rustin was born in West Chester, Pennsylvania, on March 17, 1912, to parents who chose to run away from their expected roles. His father, Archie Hopkins, was a hard-partying laborer, and his mother, Florence Rustin, was just seventeen years old at the time of Bayard’s birth. Hopkins left Florence during the pregnancy, and neither showed any sustained interest in fulfilling their long-term commitments to the newborn. Lucky for baby Bayard, though, his loving maternal grandparents, Julia and Janifer Rustin, decided to rear him as their own.

Rustin often referred to his grandparents as “Mamma” and “Pappa,” and both proved to be influential in his development. But it was Julia who became the most inspirational figure for her grandson. Educated in a school run by the Religious Society of Friends, she modeled a life dedicated to nonviolence, racial justice, and community service. Her Quaker sensibility, with its rich history of resistance, left an indelible mark on young Rustin, and just like the early Pennsylvania Quakers who had fought against the violence of politics, the horrors of slavery, and the injustice of unfettered capitalism, Rustin soon, and often, found himself struggling against the tide of conventionality.

As a child, Rustin accompanied Julia to the local African Methodist Episcopal church in West Chester, but he would never fully embrace the pie-in-the-sky theology preached from so many church pulpits in

the early twentieth century. Julia had taught Bayard that among the most significant Bible lessons were those depicting the liberation of the Jews from the land of Pharaoh, that the most faithful believers were the ones who led the slaves out of Egypt, and that God had created the Promised Land right here on Earth. It was this type of faith—an earthly spirituality focused on freeing the slaves and leading them to a land of milk and honey—that the adult Rustin would tap when helping to shape the civil rights movement in the 1950s. In fact, Rustin’s letters suggest that the spirituality of human liberation that came to such positive expression in the modern civil rights movement was present in no small measure because of his early insistence.

As a young boy, Bayard also excelled at school, and his radiant personality took him to places few other blacks could access in his hometown. But there were harsh and impenetrable borders erected around his emerging talent because West Chester, although above the Mason-Dixon line, mirrored life in a small southern town, replete with its own branch of the Ku Klux Klan and segregated theaters, stores, restaurants, neighborhoods, and churches.

It made for a terribly disjointed life. Young Rustin deeply embraced the Quaker values that Julia had taught him—“the concept of a single human value and the belief that all members of that family are equal.” But everyday life in West Chester showed him that the human family was divided against itself and that most whites did not treat blacks as equal members of the family. The dissonance was deafening, but rather than avoiding or ignoring it, Rustin cried out in the way that Julia had modeled so well—by fighting back.

Julia Rustin was a founding member of the local branch of the NAACP, and she opened her home to nationally known civil rights advocates traveling through the area (leaders like Mary McLeod Bethune and W. E. B. Du Bois). She also helped to lead local groups designed to improve the material conditions of struggling blacks. Young Bayard sat up and took notice of Julia’s quiet life of protest and advocacy, and by the time he left high school he had already organized his fellow black student-athletes in protest against the segregated accommodations they had to endure during out-of-town trips. Rustin was not altogether like his grandmother, though; he was less patient, more impetuous, far more

demanding. And because the time-honored, and moderate, methods favored by his elders—educating the public and filing lawsuits—did not satisfy his desire for immediate action and results, the young activist would eventually plan and lead direct acts of resistance against racial injustices.

As a founding member of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and a young staffer at the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) in his twenties and thirties, Rustin organized and conducted race institutes during which he and the participants, militant in attitude and bold in style, entered local businesses that denied service to blacks in order to protest for integration. Before they knew it, of course, they often found themselves thrown back onto the streets, rejected in standard racist fashion but energized to protest at the next business on their hit list.

One might think that he would follow in Julia's footsteps as he grew older and take up the more moderate ways of the NAACP, but Rustin never was, and never would be, an entirely predictable personality. And for the rest of his life, inside and outside of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s inner circle, Rustin would lead and participate in numerous direct-action campaigns against oppression—rallies, marches, sit-ins, strikes, boycotts, and much more—even long after he encouraged his civil rights colleagues in the 1960s to think about shifting their energies away from protesting in the streets to building coalitions in the corridors of power. Bayard Rustin, in short, played one of the most important roles in making direct action commonplace in the 1960s and 1970s, inspiring and activating millions of individuals for protest movements on the streets and elsewhere across the globe.

Most important, there was always and everywhere an essential ingredient in his direct action campaigns—nonviolence. Julia had no doubt schooled her grandson not only in the Exodus story but also in the nonviolent life of Jesus, a favorite topic among the pacifist Quakers. And given Rustin's message in his letter to the local draft board during World War II—"The social teachings of Jesus are: (1) respect for personality; (2) service the "summum bonum"; (3) overcoming evil with good; and (4) the brotherhood of man. Those principles as I see it are violated by participation in war"—it seems that he took the message to heart.

Not many could or did resist the clarion call to defeat Hitler and his legions of Nazis in the Good War. But Rustin had no intention of bayoneting, shooting, or bombing anyone, even evil Nazis, and so he carefully explained to his local board that he found both war and conscription to be wholly “inconsistent with the teachings of Jesus.” For Rustin, preeminent moral authority resided in the Prince of Peace and his call to love one’s enemies, to turn the other cheek, to walk the extra mile, to take up the cross, even when one’s enemies are intent on killing you. By contrast, the commander in chief held no such authority over the pacifist Rustin and his unswerving belief that each personality is sacred and worthy of life and love.

Equally lacking in credibility—and wrong—in Rustin’s eyes were those who accepted or favored the use of force to establish the good goal of racial justice. This included leaders like Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, or other Black Power advocates who found themselves in heated debates with Rustin. And, yes, even the young Martin Luther King, Jr., who allowed his bodyguards to bear weapons inside and outside his house at the beginning of the Montgomery boycott. Rustin would have none of it, and he encouraged King and other local leaders to lay down their guns and take up nonviolence, if not as a way of life, then at least as a smart tactic that could avoid the wholesale slaughter of countless blacks. King found Rustin’s arguments compelling on several different levels—spiritual, intellectual, and practical—and to this day many of us rightly celebrate King as a nonviolent revolutionary and the civil rights movement as the most powerful peaceful protest in US history. For this we have Bayard Rustin to thank. No one was more effective in rooting the modern civil rights movement in nonviolence than Rustin was.

One might think that he would grow tired of the energy-draining work required by nonviolent direct action, but Rustin was relentless. In a 1969 letter to a woman who had complained about how tired she was from having to deal with anti-Semitism, Rustin had this to say:

I am not sympathetic to your cry of being tired. Mrs. Greenstone . . . I am black and I have lived with and fought racism my entire life. I have been in prison 23 times—serving 28

months in a federal penitentiary and 30 days on a North Carolina chain gang among other punishments.

I have seen periods of progress followed by reaction. I have seen the hopes and aspirations of Negroes rise during World War II, only to be smashed during the Eisenhower years. I am seeing the victories of the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations destroyed by Richard Nixon.

I have seen black young people become more and more bitter. I have seen dope addiction rise in the Negro communities across the country.

I have been in a bombed church. My best friends, closest associates and colleagues-in-arms have been beaten and assassinated. Yet, to remain human and to fulfill my commitment to a just society, I must continue to fight for the liberation of all men. There will be times when each of us will have doubts. But I trust that neither of us will desert our great cause.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about Rustin's "great cause" is that it was so multifaceted, so multidimensional, so deep and wide in its elusive quest for a just society. It was not just violent politics that he resisted. Not just racial discrimination and segregation. There was also, among so many other injustices, the machismo culture that demanded he be a "real" man.

As a high school athlete, Rustin had played football in West Chester and tackled his opponents with the full ferocity that his wiry body could muster. He even did it so well that he was named to the all-county football team. But although young Bayard embraced masculine athleticism, he also adored music, art, poetry, and dance. And, believe it or not, he even took to reciting his favorite poems to the running backs he dragged to the ground. No trash talk from Bayard Rustin—just tackles and Tennyson.

The football player let the girls love him, but it was the boys who really caught his eye. And throughout his life, when individuals, colleges, prisons, and even so-called liberal organizations condemned or disciplined him for expressing his gay sexuality, he steadfastly resisted their

prudish piety. Rustin was not straight—not even close—and he would not contort and distort his gay sexuality to please uptight heterosexuals.

There were serious negative consequences for being (relatively) openly gay, and Bayard felt them most pointedly, and painfully, when Martin Luther King, Jr., accepted his resignation as his special assistant in 1960. King's star was on the rise, and when Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., concocted a story about an affair between King and Rustin and threatened to take it to the media, it was decided that Bayard's contributions would have to be sacrificed to the greater good of the movement. King was terrified that he would never be able to recover from the apparently awful taint of gayness in a homophobic society. It would take a while, but Rustin would fight back, and when King later expressed similar fears while floating the possibility of hiring him to take charge of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), Rustin scoffed at King's lack of backbone, and then simply walked away from the hint of a job offer. He was gay—deal with it.

Many years later, Rustin would offer public testimony on behalf of a gay rights bill in New York City, and he made sure to inform Mayor Ed Koch along the way. "On April 17," Rustin wrote, "I testified before the General Welfare Committee regarding the proposed amendments to the so-called Gay Rights Bill. In my statement I cited the major lesson I had learned in fighting for human rights for 50 years for people all over the world. That lesson is simple: *no group is ultimately safe from prejudice, bigotry, and harassment so long as any group is subject to special negative treatment.*"

Rustin's resistance through the years was so deep and wide exactly because it recognized the interconnectedness of the multitude of injustices plaguing the downtrodden. This holistic approach helped him to make connections and build coalitions that other leaders simply neglected in their single-issue politics. For instance, more than anyone else early on, Rustin strongly encouraged the modern civil rights movement, as well as King's own thinking, to unfold in a way that tended especially to poor whites. Rustin's understanding of oppression was rooted in class analysis, and he deemed it essential for the civil rights movement to take up the cause of economic injustice. Consider, for example, a historic 1957 letter in which he pitched King about ideas

for his upcoming speech at the Prayer Pilgrimage in Washington, D.C. It would be the first time King would enjoy a national platform of this sort, and Rustin, who self-identified as a socialist at this point, encouraged King to focus his speech on

[t]he need to expand the struggle on all fronts: Up to now we have thought of the color question as something which could be solved in and of itself. We know now that while it is necessary to say No to racial injustice, this must be followed by a positive program of action. The struggle for the right to vote, for economic uplift of the people. A part of this is the realization that men are truly brothers, that the Negro cannot be free so long as there are poor and underprivileged white people.

This leads to the realization that economic and social change for the uplift of all poor people is part of the struggle of Negroes for justice.

In this United States one of the most important groups for action on the economic uplift of underprivileged peoples is the American labor movement. Equality for Negroes is related to the greater problem of economic uplift for Negroes and poor white men. They share a common problem and have a common interest in working together for economic and social uplift. They can and must work together.

Although King did not use this particular suggestion for his Prayer Pilgrimage speech, the civil rights leader would eventually make exactly the same case about the need to build coalitions between blacks and poor whites. He did this at various points in his career—the Chicago campaign in 1965 comes to mind—but he used Rustin’s advice most forcefully when making his case for the Poor People’s Campaign in 1968, when he called for poor folks of all colors to converge on Washington, D.C., and demand policies that would lift them out of poverty.

By the end of his life, King was indebted to Rustin for more than a few things—for helping school the budding movement in nonviolence,

for envisioning the coalition organization that would become the SCLC, for giving him his first national platform during the Prayer Pilgrimage, for introducing him to major benefactors and strategists, for planning the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, and for being one of the few individuals who openly disagreed with him. Rustin steadfastly resisted being a King worshipper—especially when he became a leader of an organization in his own right.

At the time of the Poor People's Campaign, Rustin was leading the A. Philip Randolph Institute (APRI)—he had taken the reins at its founding in 1964—and his primary focus was on helping to alleviate economic injustices suffered by blacks and poor whites. As head of the APRI, Rustin built coalitions with the white labor movement—labor leaders George Meany and Walter Reuther provided the bulk of APRI's financial support—and devoted considerable time to proposing and lobbying for policies that would benefit laborers of all colors and especially the poor. Given this, one might think that Rustin would have been an enthusiastic supporter of the Poor People's Campaign. But Rustin was far from supportive early on, and he detailed numerous tactical objections (among them, his sense that the growing white backlash created bad timing for the campaign) in a carefully drafted memorandum to King. For Rustin, principled resistance was never good enough; it had to be tactically sharp, attentive to the opportunities and limitations of its particular time in history.

There was at least one other major point of tactical disagreement between King and Rustin—the Vietnam War. Rustin had counseled the civil rights leader in the mid-1960s to make a statement against the Vietnam War, but by 1968 he was cautioning King against publicly drawing a connection between advocacy for civil rights and dissent from the Vietnam War. Among other reasons driving this counsel was Rustin's well-grounded fear that such a move would undermine King's ability to secure additional civil rights victories from a president inclined to lash out against anyone who publicly criticized his execution of the war.

Rustin followed his own counsel. Because he did not want to jeopardize any chances of securing additional victories for civil rights during the Johnson years, and because his rejection of communism

made him wary of calling for an immediate and unconditional withdrawal from Vietnam, Rustin never fully joined the peace movement against the Vietnam War.

Rustin's resistance took surprising turns, and not just during the Vietnam War. His radical pacifist friends were also shocked—even hurt—when he engineered a public appeal to the US government to send military jets to Israel so that it could defend itself against Arab states that refused to recognize its existence. It seems that when any clash erupted between Israelis and Palestinians, Rustin rushed to the defense of Israel, considering the country to be among the most oppressed in the international community.

Predictably, Rustin received his fair share of criticism through the years. Race moderates thought his ideas were naïve, not attuned to the power dynamics of Washington and Wall Street. Radicals called him an ineffective Uncle Tom, and pacifists came to see him as a sell-out, a compromiser.

While reading through the letters collected here, readers will no doubt make their own judgments, but one unmistakable conclusion is that from the beginning to the end of his career, Bayard Rustin was a global resister. In the early and middle parts of his career, he devoted considerable attention to anti-colonialist revolts in India and Africa. And in the latter part of his life, he shifted his focus to refugee camps and liberation campaigns across the globe, especially Africa, South America, and Southeast Asia, as he had never done before. Although he did not lead the peace movement, Rustin was among the quickest in civil society to demand that the United States open its borders to refugees fleeing war-torn Southeast Asia upon the conclusion of the Vietnam War. In a 1975 letter to President Ford, Rustin expressed sheer disgust with the victorious communists and their brutal reprisals against their enemies, and pleaded for the US government to take the lead in helping to alleviate the plight of the refugees.

Refugees across the globe became a major passion for Rustin as he neared the end of his life, and even while he remained active in liberation campaigns at home, he traveled indefatigably from refugee camp to refugee camp in order to express his solidarity with the world's

oppressed and give them a sense of hope. The entire world had become Rustin's place to resist.

An important coda: Bayard Rustin was much more than a resister *extraordinaire*. In the pages ahead, you will certainly encounter the full force of Rustin the Resister—a conscientious objector, an anti-nuclear activist, a Korean War dissenter, an anti-colonial activist, a racial apartheid fighter, a loud opponent of communism, a hater of racial segregation, and much more. The story of Rustin's professional life of resistance, as revealed in these letters, offers nothing less than a rich history of the major national and international campaigns for human rights from the 1940s to the 1980s.

But you will also meet Rustin the Reveler. His letters, especially the ones written during his years in prison during World War II, show that if there is one thing that Bayard Rustin did not resist, it was his inclination to love the good things that life offered—music, art, books, and friends—and to share them with those close to him. By all accounts, he loved life and lived it to its fullest.

It is my hope that the letters collected here will give all of us new insight into the struggles and joys that Rustin experienced in the deepest recesses of his heart as a gay, socialist, pacifist African American man in a world that often insisted he be someone else. Rustin resisted that deadly dictate with nonviolent grace, power, and dignity, and the rest of us would do well to listen to his words anew so that we, too, may be able to resist the injustices that enslave us.

## A NOTE ON THE TEXT

In editing the letters of Bayard Rustin, I have made minimal changes to correct misspellings, typographical errors, and run-on sentences. Because I wish to preserve the flow of his thought in the letters, all of my changes are “silent”; they are not marked by the use of brackets or [*sic*].

Rustin usually handwrote his letters when he was on the road, as he often was. He took special care when writing these letters, and the result is that they are pleasing to the eye. Marked by wide loops and a low-to-the-ground style, his easily recognizable handwriting is even artistic at points, further evidence of the creativity of this unique personality.

In the office, Rustin continued to write letters by hand, primarily because he did not know how to type well. He often used a pencil or a blue pen when writing on unlined paper, and if he did not mail the written copy to his correspondent, he asked his administrative assistants to type the copy and mail it on his behalf. In addition, he often dictated instructions for writing letters, or sometimes the full letters themselves, and the evidence suggests that he excelled at dictating.

Rustin had several assistants through the years, and some of them wrote and signed letters on his behalf. For example, Rachele Horowitz, the talented assistant whose concern for detail landed her the dizzying job of organizing transportation for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, occasionally wrote and signed letters on Rustin’s behalf. I have kept all this in mind when selecting letters for this volume, trying to choose those that Rustin had a hand in writing or approving.

Throughout his lifetime, Rustin wrote thousands of letters on everything from child rearing to presidential politics. Some of the most reflective, and revelatory, letters, no doubt because he had so much time

on his hands, are those he penned while serving prison sentences; the letters he wrote during his imprisonment for refusing to register for the draft during World War II are simply breathtaking at points for the ways they reveal Rustin's inner struggles with his sexual identity.

Although he was prolific, his letter production dropped off as he took on more staff members and allowed them to write the letters that he would otherwise have written. It also seems that his letter production dipped markedly as he became consumed by various campaigns.

In addition, Rustin did not compose letters about every aspect of his civil and human rights work, let alone every social issue he confronted, or all the personalities he encountered, and if there are apparent gaps in the book, it is most likely because I could not locate letters that he wrote on the subject. Rather than sitting down to write or dictate a letter, Rustin often worked the phones, as he did frequently with civil rights leaders, politicians, and labor leaders.

I have searched in numerous libraries and archives across the country, from the A. Philip Randolph Papers at the Library of Congress to the Martin Luther King, Jr., Papers Project at Stanford University, but I do not claim to have exhausted all possible sources. A list of my sources for the letters is included at the end of this volume.

## CHAPTER ONE

*“War Is Wrong”*

**1942–1944**

### **Rustin to the New York Monthly Meeting**

*Julia Rustin’s Quaker sensibility left an indelible mark on young Bayard, and after moving to Harlem in 1937, he eventually became active in the New York Monthly Meeting (NYMM). Although Rustin felt at home among these Manhattan Quakers, he grew alarmed when he learned, not long after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, that his Quaker friends were thinking about the possibility of providing U.S. soldiers with hospitality services. The letter below—Rustin’s pointed response to the proposal—is the best early evidence of his fervent commitment to an uncompromising pacifism.*

*Rustin refers here to Civilian Public Service (CPS) camps. Thanks to lobbying efforts by the historic peace churches (Friends, Mennonites, and Brethren), the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940 made formal provision for conscientious objectors (COs) to be able to carry out nonmilitary “work of national importance under civilian direction” in camps organized and funded by the churches. Rustin also refers to the remarkably progressive Quaker Emergency Service (QES). In January 1942, NYMM members established the QES partly to train young men heading to CPS camps and to funnel COs into existing nonmilitary service projects.*

*Yet another historically significant part of the letter below is Rustin’s use of the now-popular phrase “speak truth to power.” Rustin credits Patrick Murphy Malin, a professor of economics at Swarthmore College, for having used the*

*phrase at the Friends General Conference at Cape May, New Jersey, in July 1942. But scholar Wendy Chmielewski points out that Malin's speech did not include the exact phrase, and that "it is possible that it is Rustin himself who standardized the phrase in his 1942 letter, distilling Malin's message that truth may be proclaimed in the midst of power."*

August 15, 1942

Dear Friend,

Since it is probable that I will not be at the monthly meeting, I offer the following letter for your consideration.

When a man enters the armed forces, the military takes complete control of his life for the very real purpose of building him into an effective fighting machine. The major responsibilities of the High Command are to give effective military training, to find relaxation for the soldier, and to develop morale. At a time when the creation of a military training program is proving a vast problem, the government readily encourages the church and other civil institutions to assist it in building morale and in providing recreational facilities. The government is also pleased when the church offers spiritual assistance—if such assistance is consistent with the military's final aim.

The problem before us is not an easy one. We must decide whether or not we wish to assist the government in making men into efficient soldiers. We must decide whether we wish to cooperate in an essential phase of war waging. We must face with reality the fact that rights we now enjoy as a society came because of our traditional peace testimony. We must discover our peculiar world task in these times and answer this question in light of this duty.

As Patrick Malin said at the General Conference, the primary social function of a religious society is to "speak the truth to power." The truth is that war is wrong. It is then our duty to make war impossible first in us and then in society. To cooperate with the government in building morale seems inconsistent with all we profess to believe. Indeed, from the professional militarist's point of view, "morale" is that which makes it possible for one willing to do without moral qualm, if not with some moral justification, many things he previously has felt

wholly wrong. If morale and recreation are essential military needs for waging battle effectively, let us avoid relieving the government of its responsibility. Let us avoid the possibilities of spiritual suicide. The moral letdown following the last war was due in part to the lack of faith the world had in a church which had cooperated in waging war.

Certainly we do not want to separate ourselves from millions of human beings simply because they see no alternative to violence in the solution of conflict—simply because they are in the armed forces. But we must clearly examine the contribution our society can make to these men. Perhaps there is no immediate manifestation of the course we should take. As we reject building morale, we have the duty spiritually to fortify all men. Can we through our Meeting for Worship inwardly strengthen soldiers?

Certainly in our meetings they would hear numerous messages which might further cause inner anxiety. Would this be fair to them? Further, would the Army look favorably upon such meetings? I must clearly state that I see no objection to inviting a particular soldier to Meeting, but we must see the danger in exposing a person to a philosophy diametrically opposed to the stand to which he has committed himself, unless there is going to be time for completely bolstering the new ideal.

At the point of inviting soldiers and sailors to social entertainments and parties with young Friends, I see several difficulties. Friends generally have a “peace testimony” which carries with it in our larger society certain recognition and rights. Civilian Public Service, Quaker Emergency Service, and other institutions are largely possible by our long stand on war. Now to cooperate with the government in setting up any part of its military program is supporting in specific a principle and institution we reject in general.

If soldiers were to come in contact with young Friends at social affairs and we were to discuss those ideals and problems closest to many of our hearts, a series of embarrassing situations could result. In these times live and controversial issues are essential common conversation. Discussion of CPS, failure to pay taxes for military purposes, and non-registration might easily be construed as “spreading disaffection in the armed forces,” which is punishable under the Espionage and Sedition Act.

The government will confine social activities to functions similar

to those now carried on by the USO and the Stage Door Canteen. When any church presents spiritual material through a recreation program, it will no longer be asked to assist. In this kind of program the government will allow the church to go just so far. Would it not then seem better not to duplicate a function being excellently carried out by such organizations as the USO? Might it not be better for those in the Society of Friends who wish to support such work to make their contributions to an organization which already has available personnel for efficient execution?

We would then be in the best position to carry on those works of mercy and goodwill, such as CPS, QES, Refugee and Starvation Relief. These are our peculiar social responsibilities. They will not be done by others.

Finally, I believe that the greatest service that we can render the men in the armed forces is to maintain our peace testimony and to expend our energies in developing a creative method of dealing non-violently with conflict. In their hour of despair, what these men in the armed forces need most is hope and belief in the future. They need most to return and find the church which has not forsaken the principles of Christ. If we have a pattern for a “way of life that can do away with the occasion of war,” now is the time to develop it. But we can do this only by failing to cooperate with any essential phase of the military, such as the building of morale or the creation of entertainment in order that men will fight more effectively.

I hope the Monthly Meeting will reject any plans which will compromise our peace testimony.

Sincerely yours,  
Bayard Rustin

### **Rustin to the FOR Staff**

*In addition to his work with the NYMM, Rustin had a full-time position with the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR)—a Christian pacifist organization based in New York City. A. J. Muste, the executive leader of FOR, had recruited*

*Rustin during the summer of 1941 in a deliberate effort to mold the organization as the nation's most important center for nonviolent direct action campaigns designed to advance peace and human rights.*

*Muste hired Rustin to be one of FOR's youth secretaries—a role that Bayard relished as he traveled the country delivering speeches and organizing workshops for young people interested in nonviolence and conscientious objection. Rustin made it a special point during his trips to identify African American youths who might undertake nonviolent direct action campaigns against racial discrimination and segregation, and one of his earliest extant lesson plans included the following points: “The American Negro is in a highly favorable position today to use nonviolent direct action. The suffering which the Negro has already endured fits him well for the disciplines necessary for nonviolent direct action. . . . The use of violence by a minority group is suicidal.”*

*Below is a memorandum that Rustin uses to detail his early activities as a youth secretary. The report is stunning for its assessment of African American attitudes in light of a world war that appeared to promise democracy abroad but not at home. Rustin refers to the Sojourner Truth Housing Riot of 1942, when white mobs had sought to prevent blacks from moving into a housing project built in one of Detroit's white neighborhoods, and to the budding March on Washington Movement (MOWM), a plan for African Americans to march in protest of racial discrimination in the U.S. military and in the defense industry. Labor leader A. Philip Randolph, the head of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the nation's largest union of black workers, had called for the march, and Rustin was elated at the possibility of direct action on a national stage.*

September 12, 1942

*Area Covered and Program*

Since Cincinnati I have traveled in 20 states and covered something over 10,000 miles. I estimate that I have spoken before more than 5000 people. I have visited 8 CPS camps, 10 denominational conferences for high school youth. I have spoken in 17 colleges; conducted classes in four historic peace church summer camps; counseled with numerous men and boys considering the CO position; visited 4 work camps; and traveled among Negro groups, attempting to create an interest in non-violent direct action.

### *Racial Tension*

During normal times changes in the social pattern cause fear and frustration which lead to aggression. This is much more true in times of war when emotional stress is heightened. Thus today wildcat strikes where white workers resent Negroes, violent anti-Negro outbursts by southern politicians, an unwise Negro press advocating economic and political justice now with or without violence, and general economic depression have created fear and increased tension in the racial scene. Only a spark is needed to create a terrible explosion.

### *What the Negro Thinks*

The average Negro looks upon the line of prejudice as being clearly drawn both vertically and horizontally. As one elderly man said, "Nigger used to know who his friends were, now he ain't got none; nigger used to know where he could get a sandwich, now he can't get none nowhere."

The average Negro is aware that there is a new element in the racial scene—groups organized for violence. The KKK, responsible for the Sojourner Truth Housing riot in Detroit, was a streamlined group which had dropped the "white sheet" and "fiery cross" technique for the more subtle "boring from within cell" method.

There is a growing feeling that the Negro must solve his own problem. Black nationalism is rampant. For this reason the constituency of the March On Washington Movement rejects white leadership or white membership. One of the Movement's leaders said, "These are black men's problems and black men alone will have to solve them."

Negroes have generally lost faith in the "pink tea social methods" which I have heard described as "well-meanin' but gettin' us nowhere." However, the Negro is still somewhat open to leadership of any kind which addresses itself to his economic condition. "How can I get a decent job?" is invariably the question. Then, "How can I get the rights for which America says she is fighting?"

Many Negroes have little faith in the present struggle. I have heard many say that they might as well die right here fighting for their rights as to die abroad for other people's. It is common to hear outright joy expressed at a Japanese military victory. For thousands of Negroes look

upon the successes of any colored people anywhere as their success. As one Negro student said, "It is now a question of breaking down white domination over the whole world or nowhere." No situation in America has created so much interest among Negroes as the Gandhian proposals for India's freedom.

In face of this tension and conflict, our responsibility is to put the technique of nonviolent direct action into the hands of the black masses. . . .

### *The Message in Time of War*

Today there are thousands of young men and boys who are having to make the terrible decision of what to do with their lives. They must decide whether they are to support the war or to become conscientious objectors. In many parts of this country I have found men completely cut off from a knowledge of pacifism. This is an indication that there may well be millions of men who would be eager to follow the truth if they could but hear it. It is merely democratic, to say nothing of Christian, that in reaching such vast decisions each man should be able to hear both sides. I therefore have a deep concern when I hear many FOR people across this nation say that they feel they ought to be still at this time. I believe this is the time to say louder and more frequently than before the truth that war is wrong, stupid, wasteful, and impeding future progress and any possibilities of a just and durable peace. . . .

### **Rustin to A. J. Muste**

*Writing from Columbus, Ohio, Rustin informs Muste about a conference on the question of which tactics would best serve African Americans in search of political power. As the letter below suggests, Rustin had little tolerance for the Communist Party's (CP) exclusive focus on winning the war against Hitler's Germany. Rustin had been an active member of the Young Communist League (YCL) in the late 1930s, helping to establish communist-controlled American Student Union groups on numerous college campuses. He had found the YCL attractive because the CP was one of the very few political groups that actively advocated for racial*

*justice in the 1930s. But Rustin left the YCL in 1941 after the CP shifted its attention from fighting for racial justice to winning the war against fascism, even directing Rustin and others to stop their public agitation against racism.*

*A. Philip Randolph was one of the main speakers at the Ohio conference, and Rustin refers below to the March on Washington Movement [MOWM]. Randolph had decided not to follow through with his threat of a national march after President Roosevelt, who was rarely known as a friend to the African American community, signed the Fair Employment Act (Executive Order 8802), banning racial discrimination in the defense industry and establishing the Fair Employment Practices Committee. Although he had halted plans for the march, Randolph kept the MOWM administrative structure in place and used the organization to hold rallies against discrimination in several U.S. cities during the summer of 1942. By the end of the year, Randolph also stated that he would like to hold a conference on the possibility of using nonviolent direct action in MOWM's campaign against racial injustice; he then asked Muste whether FOR would let staff members Rustin and James Farmer, the future head of the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE), help in the effort to inject nonviolence into the MOWM.*

February 22, 1943

Dear A. J.,

Enclosed is the folder of the conference by the Negroes of Ohio on the *means by which Negroes shall struggle for political power in order to make social gains*. Although the heading says for victory at home and abroad, not one word was said about winning the war except by a few communist delegates who were so out of general sympathy that they soon felt it better to be silent.

There was absolute distrust of this war and, indeed, voiced distrust with war as a means to freedom. There was resolution by all to obtain rights, however.

1. A. Philip Randolph spoke in a way that convinced me that he is really concerned to develop an understanding and use of nonviolence by the American Negro. *After the statements he made here, he is committed to follow thru or to face political suicide*. I feel very much

better about the whole situation now. I talked with him and he is anxious to have us (Jim and me) work with him. I hope I can save the month of May for the MOW work exclusively. . . .

I must say again that Randolph really “hit the gong.” We had a superb meeting.

Bayard Rustin

*In July 1943, Rustin attended MOWM’s national convention in Chicago, successfully urging the participants to adopt nonviolent direct action as their major strategy for effecting social change. Upon hearing the news, Rustin’s friend Bill Sutherland, an imprisoned conscientious objector, wrote: “Congratulations!!!! I know that you . . . must have worked tirelessly in order to put that move across. When one of the fellows read us the news from his letter, we all cheered spontaneously.”*

*On a speaking tour in California several months later, Rustin emphasized that nonviolent direct action was not just an effective strategy; it was also a dictate of Christian conscience. An extant outline of a workshop he conducted during this period—“Five Kinds of Nonviolent Direct Action Jesus Used”—depicts Jesus of Nazareth as practicing civil disobedience (“He deliberately violated the Sabbath laws”), noncooperation (“He refused to answer ‘quisling’ Herod when questioned by him”), mass marches (“Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem with a large procession of his followers [including many from Galilee] shouting revolutionary statements”), and even personal nonviolent direct action (“He drove by drastic action the exploiters [moneychangers] from the temple”).*

*Rustin also took the occasion of the tour to speak about MOWM and to start local chapters for the all-black organization. On October 17, for example, he delivered a lecture advocating MOWM’s approach. “When enough Negroes can be organized into a strong pressure group, they will be able to obtain their rights,” he stated, pointing to Randolph’s success with President Roosevelt. Although he would argue against a separatist position in years to come, at that time Rustin offered a vigorous defense of MOWM as an all-black movement. “[I]f whites were admitted to the MOW, they might control the movement, just as the directors of the NAACP are largely white people,” he stated. “They would take the leadership away from young Negroes, who ought to have it. If money*

*were accepted from whites, they would control the thinking of the movement as well. In addition, good-thinking whites will come to meetings but it will be the Communists who will bore into the movement and control it. There must be a peculiarly Negro organization to face the peculiarly Negro problems of today.”*

### **Rustin to Local Board No. 63**

*Rustin had completed the Selective Service questionnaire, declaring himself a conscientious objector, in the fall of 1940. Like other COs, he could have chosen to go to a CPS camp, but his visits to the camps had made him wary. In April 1942, for example, he had written Muste of a CPS camp that was racially segregated, and a few months later he reported on COs who believed that camp administrators were cutting off their contact with the outside world and forcing them to remain isolated until after the war. Others in CPS registered regular complaints about doing menial work rather than work of national importance.*

*Rustin was not only gathering reports of discontent within CPS camps during this time; he was also receiving ongoing accounts of nonviolent direct action campaigns staged by COs who had chosen prison over CPS. His good friend Bill Sutherland and others, for instance, were agitating for racial integration by coordinating hunger strikes at the penitentiary in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, and Dave Dellinger, who had resisted the draft while a student at Union Theological Seminary, and others were doing the same at the federal prison in Danbury, Connecticut. There is little doubt that Rustin would have seen the federal prison system as the center of some of the most exciting work undertaken by radical pacifists during World War II.*

November 16, 1943

Gentlemen:

For eight years I have believed war to be impractical and a denial of our Hebrew-Christian tradition. The social teachings of Jesus are: (1) respect for personality; (2) service the “sumum bonum”; (3) overcoming evil with good; and (4) the brotherhood of man. Those principles as I see it are violated by participation in war.

Believing this, and having before me Jesus’ continued resistance to

that which he considered evil, I was compelled to resist war by registering as a conscientious objector in October 1940.

However, a year later, September 1941, I became convinced that conscription as well as war equally is inconsistent with the teachings of Jesus. I must resist conscription also.

On Saturday, November 13, 1943, I received from you an order to report for a physical examination to be taken Tuesday, November 16, at eight o'clock in the evening. I wish to inform you that I cannot voluntarily submit to an order springing from the Selective Service and Training Act for War.

There are several reasons for this decision, all stemming from the basic spiritual truth that men are brothers in the sight of God:

1. War is wrong. Conscription is a concomitant of modern war. Thus conscription for so vast an evil as war is wrong.
2. Conscription for war is inconsistent with freedom of conscience, which is not merely the right to believe, but to act on the degree of truth that one receives, to follow a vocation which is God-inspired and God-directed.

Today I feel that God motivates me to use my whole being to combat by nonviolent means the ever-growing racial tension in the United States; at the same time the state directs that I shall do its will; which of these dictates can I follow—that of God or that of the state? Surely, I must at all times attempt to obey the law of the state. But when the will of God and the will of the state conflict, I am compelled to follow the will of God. If I cannot continue in my present vocation, I must resist.

3. The Conscription Act denies brotherhood—the most basic New Testament teaching. Its design and purpose is to set men apart—German against American, American against Japanese. Its aim springs from a moral impossibility—that ends justify means, that from unfriendly acts a new and friendly world can emerge.

In practice further, it separates black from white—those supposedly struggling for a common freedom. Such a separation also is based on the moral error that racism can overcome racism, that evil can pro-

duce good, that men virtually in slavery can struggle for a freedom they are denied. This means that I must protest racial discrimination in the armed forces, which is not only morally indefensible but also in clear violation of the Act. This does not, however, imply that I could have a part in conforming to the Act if discrimination were eliminated.

Segregation, separation, according to Jesus, is the basis of continuous violence. It was such an observation which encouraged him to teach, "It has been said to you in olden times that thou shalt not kill, but I say unto you, do not call a man a fool"—and he might have added: "for if you call him such, you automatically separate yourself from him and violence begins." That which separates man from his brother is evil and must be resisted.

I admit my share of guilt for having participated in the institutions and ways of life which helped bring fascism and war. Nevertheless, guilty as I am, I now see as did the Prodigal Son that it is never too late to refuse longer to remain in a non-creative situation. It is always timely and virtuous to change—to take in all humility a new path.

Though joyfully following the will of God, I regret that I must break the law of the state. I am prepared for whatever may follow.

I herewith return the material you have sent me, for conscientiously I cannot hold a card in connection with an Act I no longer feel able to accept and abide by.

Today I am notifying the Federal District Attorney of my decision and am forwarding him a copy of this letter.

I appreciate now as in the past your advice and consideration, and trust that I shall cause you no anxiety in the future. I want you to know I deeply respect you for executing your duty to God and country in these difficult times in the way you feel you must. I remain

Sincerely yours,  
Bayard Rustin

P.S. I am enclosing samples of the material which from time to time I have sent out to hundreds of persons, Negro and white, throughout our nation. This indicates one type of the creative work to which God has called me.

*Rustin had enclosed a copy of Interracial Primer: How You Can Help Relieve Tension between Negroes and Whites—a pamphlet he had authored as part of his work for FOR. The pamphlet included a critique of fighting for democracy in Europe while maintaining segregation at home.*

*On January 12, 1944, Rustin was arrested for failing to report for his Selective Service physical. He pled guilty, and the federal judge sentenced him to three years of imprisonment. “Upon hearing the news,” wrote Robert Vogel of the Syracuse Peace Council, “I was filled with mixed emotion. In the first place . . . you will be dreadfully missed in a field that you have given so much of your time to in recent years. But on the other hand . . . I know that you will be quite competent to find new ways of applying our technique in situations with which you will be confronted.”*

*In the spirit of civil disobedience, especially as exemplified by Gandhi, Rustin did not seek to avoid serving his sentence but voluntarily reported to the detention facility on West Street in Manhattan. Rustin was held there ten days, and it did not take long for him to become labeled as a troublemaker. He protested segregation in the dining hall, refused to cooperate with prison authorities during routine interviews, and threatened to bolt from any detention facility with low security. This aspect of Rustin’s noncooperation meant that he would be sent not to a prison camp with minimal security, as originally planned by James Bennett, the director of the federal prison system, but to the maximum-security prison in Ashland, Kentucky.*

*A. J. Muste wrote Rustin on March 1. “I need not tell you that you have my love, my faith, my daily prayer. Let all you do come from deep within—let it be what in your inmost being you want to do—and not determined by outer conditions or by other men. Those who truly bow the knee and the soul to God will never bow to men, whether they be friend or foe.”*

### **Julia Rustin to John Sayre**

*John Sayre, co-chair of the FOR, sent birthday greetings to Julia Rustin on March 9. Writing about her grandson Bayard, Sayre stated:*

*He has a combination of gifts in singing voice, dramatic recital of experiences, and personality inspired by loving nonviolence. I believe*

*that these gifts will take him very far . . . if he can maintain his inner sweetness and humility of spirit, on the one hand in the face of the bitter sufferings of the Negro race and himself at the hands of White prejudice, and on the other hand against the adulation which will come his way because of his talents and personality. The ordeal of prison which he must now go through will be a hard one. Like all suffering, the effect is to make a man either better or worse. In Bayard's case I believe it will be better, but the severity of temptation is such that I think we must continually pray for him, as Christ prayed for Peter.*

March 15, 1944

My dear Mr. Sayre:

It was with pleasure and appreciation, I received your kind letter about Bayard and your congratulations for my birthday.

It is very comforting and heartwarming to have so *many* kind expressions from Bayard's friends.

We do pray that this time when Bayard will have a chance to think may be a blessing to all with whom he comes in contact and a rest to his body as well as a blessing to his soul. Bayard's birthday is March 17 (St. Patrick's Day). In a letter to me he asked that at 1 o'clock P.M. I read the 56th Psalm and he would be reading it at the same time.

Oh! I do realize the temptations which can and will come to him in prison. But I also know that the Heavenly Father has promised to keep all those who are placed in His charge. Also in Romans 8:28 He has promised that all things work together for good to those who love God. So Mr. Sayre while I am concerned and anxious about Bayard, I have no real fear as I live in the promises of God. And I love the 91st Psalm—"He that abideth in the secret places of the Most High, shall dwell under the shadow of the Almighty."

So dear Mr. Sayre help us pray for Bayard.

We shall always be glad to hear from you.

Truly,

Janifer A. & Julia D. Rustin

## CHAPTER TWO

*“One Ought to Resist the Entire System!”*

### **March–August 1944**

#### **Rustin to Warden Hagerman**

*Rustin arrived at the Ashland Federal Correctional Institution in Kentucky on March 9, 1944, eight days before his thirty-second birthday, and he quickly arranged a meeting with Warden R.P. Hagerman to discuss racial injustice at the prison. Rustin also began to make connections with resident COs—about three dozen were imprisoned there at the time—and to advise them on strategies of noncooperation. In the letter below, Rustin schools the warden in the practices of nonviolence—a daring move for a young black man in a southern prison.*

March 30, 1944

Dear Sir:

I would like to submit to you my thinking on the situation we discussed yesterday.

1. Racial segregation exists in this federal correctional institution. In the Sermon on the Mountain, Jesus pointed to the fact that segregation is unchristian because it leads to a set of conditions which encourage unequal treatment. Modern sociologists agree that segregation is in most cases tantamount to discrimination. Therefore, both morally and practically, segregation is to me a basic injustice

and a denial of our hopes for America. Since I believe it to be so, I must attempt to remove it.

2. There are four ways in which one can deal with an injustice:
  - (a) One can accept it without protest
  - (b) One can seek to avoid it
  - (c) One can resist the injustice nonviolently
  - (d) One can resist by violence
3. (a) To use violence is to increase injustice  
(b) To accept it is to perpetuate it  
(c.) To avoid it is impossible  
(d) To resist by intelligent means and with an attitude of mutual responsibility and respect (education by nonviolence) is, according to the prophets and to history, much the better choice, since attitudes simply cannot be challenged by avoidance, by complete or continuous acceptance, or by stupidity and violence.
4. Nonviolent resistance does not mean any one kind of action but a variety of methods in which ends and means are consistent. Thus nonviolent resistance may first and most effectively be *education*, or when such an approach fails, *direct action*.
5. The chief aim of such methods of dealing with social change is to so behave that the attitude of those who believe in a system which creates injustice shall be challenged, and over a period change their feeling, which in turn affects their ideas and their outward behavior. *This is often a slow process and requires deft hands and a wide and considerate spirit.*
6. There is in this institution a limited number of men who have well-established prejudices toward Negroes. To avoid taking this fact into serious consideration is not to be realistic. These prejudices spring in part from economic and historical factors; and are accounted for partially by the long social practices concomitant to them.
7. Given these circumstances, one readily admits that a well-planned and carefully motivated educational program is by far the best procedure.
8. The administration of the Bureau of Prisons, as representatives of the federal government, is no doubt opposed to segregation, as

Mr. Bennett himself on occasion has stated. However, the official policy of the Bureau has at times been that of “necessary segregation,” because of the problem involved in the handling of men who come from states where segregation is legalized, and who consequently have been conditioned to think in such terms. Again, to deny that there is no difficulty for the administration in handling racial conflicts here is a mistake. Yet the administration and every intelligent Negro and white person who is overcoming the feeling for extreme separation have a responsibility to encourage the kind of thinking and feeling which all authorities agree will create a unified America and make for Christian living. As John Dewey of Columbia University has pointed out, education for brotherhood will be the basis of any well-planned and effective program of human rehabilitation.

9. By placing well-trained Negroes in positions where they (by their very presence and ability) become a tacit challenge to creative thinking in relation to democracy and race, the administration could realize one of the clearest educational practices. Sociologists agree that one of the better ways to effect attitude changes is by weighting positions of responsibility within the institution, thus creating a demonstration which quietly reveals to all what words often cannot accomplish.
10. I have previously indicated that my concern with racial segregation is not a new one. For ten years now I have sought to design ways and means by which intelligent and lasting changes could be accomplished. I have met with many successes and with many failures. Usually I have discovered the most intolerable attitudes in those areas where no educational measures were taken to condition properly or where remedial methods were lacking. These observations have convinced me that nonviolent resistance by investigation, negotiation and education are primary and far the better. When, however, such media (over a prolonged period) are closed, the only existing alternative is some form of nonviolent direct action. For I believe resistance to injustice is far superior to the continuation of present conditions which lead to degeneration for all involved.

11. It is because of my belief in the processes of education, first, that I should like to make the following suggestions:

(a) That according to my ability, training and experience, I be permitted to teach in the educational department. . . . The reason for this request is simple. If I were assigned to such a position, I believe a weight would be brought into the present scene that quietly would affect attitudes for the better. The School of Wish Psychology has amply demonstrated the ability of such an approach.

(b) I have also in mind the possibility of a course in the "History of America," to be presented with the accent on the cultural contributions of our various minority groups, all of which have excellently given to the civilization we call America. *In such a course there would be no emphasis on any particular religious, ethnic or political group, but rather the aim of such a course would be to encourage respect for all such groups on the basis of their contributions to our multiple and integrating culture.* Under no circumstances would such a course be made a sound board for pro-Negro or any other specific propaganda. On the other hand, at appropriate periods, the music, art, drama, and dance of each of our major minorities could be reviewed through and in the various art forms. . . . May I indicate that neither of these suggestions for dealing in an educational and nonviolent way with racial discrimination here is beyond that which is being advocated and practiced in American communities similar to those from which the various inmate populations here come.

I am certain that certain problems *may possibly* come up if the request I make is granted. Yet I am sure that any questions raised will be minor ones and that sensitivity, intelligence, flexibility and patience on my part and that of the administration will resolve them.

I hope you give these proposals prayerful consideration.

Sincerely yours,  
Bayard Rustin

## Warden Hagerman to Director Bennett

*The warden offers a damning assessment of his new inmate and makes a frustrated plea for transferring Rustin to another institution. In this letter to James Bennett, director of the U.S. Bureau of Prisons, Hagerman also refers to a report by W. E. Storm. The junior officer's report noted that Rustin had recently been speaking with a CO who had raised "holy hell" about a disagreeable officer, that Rustin himself had been planning to help lead COs in dissent, and that he had used the prison's pipe system to share a song "about the lovely natural scenes and the scented air from the flowers of Louisiana." The song "ended in a tragedy of a human body with bulging eyes being hanged and the air filled with the stench of burning flesh." Although Storm did not name the song, it was Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit," a lamentation about the lynching of a black man. Rustin's singing, according to Officer Storm, "was loudly applauded by the colored boys."*

March 31, 1944

Dear Mr. Bennett:

I have talked at some length with Bayard Rustin. His conversation largely concerned racial relationships and followed very closely in trend the statement prepared by him which I am enclosing.

I am convinced that Rustin is an extremely capable agitator whose ultimate objective is to discredit the Bureau of Prisons. His motives are well camouflaged with many references to his desire to bring about desirable changes in racial relations through patient understanding. He is plausible, smooth and ingratiating and, if our observations are correct, he possesses in abundance the rare quality of leadership. The radical conscientious objectors turn to him instinctively because of his reputation, but it is also quite evident that he has the ability to recruit followers from among inmates who might ordinarily be hostile to his announced intentions. He is adept at creating confusion and fostering resentment between groups and individuals without his role becoming apparent or perhaps suspected.

The institution had been running along quite smoothly with no upheavals and no worse than passive compliance by the Negroes and COs until Rustin arrived here. From that date there have been marked

fluctuations in inmate morale with some progressive deterioration. His influence was undoubtedly behind the demonstration last Saturday night. As proof of this, and to show what may be expected of him in the future, I am enclosing a copy of the report made by Officer Storm, who overheard Rustin's conversation with inmates involved in the disturbance. I might say that Rustin or the others do not know that these remarks were overheard.

It seems reasonable to predict that this man will be a constant troublemaker. . . . Rustin stated to me that he requested to be sent to Danbury when he was in New York because he believed that racial management at that institution was compatible with his feelings and that, therefore, he could adjust there without difficulty. A transfer to Danbury could probably overcome the objections of our group and most likely forestall mass resistance to this change. . . .

Sincerely yours,  
R. P. Hagerman

### **A. Philip Randolph to Rustin**

*Randolph was no doubt disappointed to lose his favorite lieutenant in the campaign against discrimination in the military and in the ongoing effort to embed the goals and aims of MOWM within Black America. As for Rustin, he could not have thought of Randolph more highly than he did, even at this early point in his life, and would always refer to him with great respect as "Mr. Randolph."*

April 17, 1944

My Dear Bayard:

I have read with great interest and feeling your statement to the Local Draft Board #63. I want to applaud you for your profound conviction as well as consecration to the principles of nonviolence and the brotherhood of man. Your action will give heart and spirit even to those who may disagree with your philosophy and enable them to stand firm on the ideals they profess to possess even when they are alone. I hope I may

have the pleasure of keeping in touch with you and getting a word from you now and then.

Be assured that the fight for racial equality and social justice will be carried on to the extent that my frail powers and abilities will enable me to do so, so that this world may be a better place to live in as the days and years speed on.

Your sincere friend,  
A. Philip Randolph

### **Rustin to Doris Grotewohl**

*In early April, Rustin and white CO Charles Butcher approached Warden Hagerman with a request that prisoners of different races be allowed to intermingle in cellblock E, where both of them resided. Hagerman considered the request and instructed the guards to open the gate separating black prisoners on the lower level from the white prisoners on the upper level. Rustin was the only black prisoner to take advantage of the open gate, and on Sundays he would join white COs on the upper level for an afternoon of listening to the symphony.*

*Rustin's presence in the common room on the upper level did not please all whites, and one of them, Elam "Judge" Huddleston, who had once been the state treasurer of Kentucky, "objected and said he'd beat [Rustin] up if he didn't stop coming up," according to a report from another CO. In light of the threat, Rustin took a short break from his trips to the upper level, but on the Sunday he returned, "Huddleston went to the utility room and got a stick (the size in diameter and length of a mop handle) and came back to hit Bayard over the head." After Huddleston "hit Bayard a mighty blow over the head," white COs in cellblock E attempted to intervene, but Rustin protested their defense. Huddleston then "continued to beat with the club about six times in all—the blows landing on all indiscriminately. The club splintered and broke but it was still large enough to use but Huddleston stopped," shaking uncontrollably as he collapsed to the floor. Following the fracas, a prison guard entered the room and ordered Rustin back to the lower level. The COs, including Rustin, who was sporting a bump on his head and a broken wrist, insisted that Huddleston not be punished. In the following letter to Doris*

*Grotewohl, his close friend and Muste's assistant, Rustin offers a brief analysis of the incident, but only after tending to a few scholarly and artistic inclinations. He also refers to his arrest in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1942, when he refused to sit in the back of a bus.*

May 5, 1944

Dear Doris,

. . . One of my interests here is to do something to revitalize the library here. It is an ugly and drab place and at present merely a place to which men come to get a book. . . . So lately I have been spending a good deal of time in research in order to discover, to label and to arrange material for a series of exhibitions and other visual methods (remember illiteracy is high here) on natural history, ethnic problems, Americanization (from an enlightened point of view) and finally one on cooperation and one on world government. On Monday I am setting up the first, which is on spring flowers and birds found in this general area of the U.S. The materials I have are most arresting and we are mounting them carefully. Most of the inmates are from rural areas with a great love for the out-of-doors and for animals, so we expect that they shall greatly appreciate the first display.

Our operetta was a high success. It was a beautiful affair. All groups and races participated; the stage setting was as good as many I have seen in N.Y. We spent ample time on it to have good singing despite the fact that no performer except Dallas had a worthy voice. We proceeded on the basis of two aims—that the performers themselves enjoy creating something beautiful and that those who observe it appreciate their efforts. Attendance was excellent, and this at the first show in the history of Ashland that has varied from the complete swing show. In production we activated 51 men. The inmates keep asking for another so we begin next week on a classical production. Pray for us. Enclosed is a program.

. . .

As you know there are many inmates here who are conditioned to believe that persons of “my expression” (to quote Father Divine) should “stay in their place.” Recently we worked with the administration to

achieve a major change in policy—mixing racially in the common or recreation rooms. This caused a crisis with a limited few of the reactionary group. Of course, there was great timidity on the part of the Negroes to go freely into the new situation as there had been several threats of violence as the result of the progressive move. I was convinced that one inmate was responsible for most of the reaction and this proved largely correct. At this point the administration seemed to shilly-shally and then the progressive step was removed. We felt this unjust and unnecessary so long as those who faced the threats proceeded on the basis of nonviolence.

Well, on last Sunday (amid twilight and uncertainty), several men (all members of FOR) went into the area and through an experience which makes my trial on the bus in Nashville pale into insignificance. To the man, blow after blow, all stood without “violence in word or deed,” to quote my dear and often-thought-of friend—J. Holmes Smith. And the power of it? The maintenance of nonviolence did several things: (1) served as an example to all of the power of nonviolence, (2) placed us in a position where we could ask the administration to maintain a firm and progressive position, (3) raised the CO in the minds of inmates, guards, etc., particularly in that “we took it” but refused to allow punishment to the user of violence, (4) revealed to the Negroes involved that progress is possible only if nonviolence is used (for certainly in this case, one violent word or act on our part would have meant defeat in ever so many ways). . . .

...

I want to learn to play a mandolin while I am here. Would you and Davis look about in second-hand stores to see if you can locate one that is a reasonable buy? I want an old one as age mellows them. Franny will pay for it for me.

...

Bayard Rustin

*On the same day he wrote this letter, Rustin met with Warden Hagerman about the Huddleston incident. According to a report Rustin sent his friends, the warden “proceeded through me to congratulate the men who so excellently*

*had handled the situation with Mr. Huddleston, and who thus had raised in the minds of all in the institution respect for Negroes and for the methods by which conscientious objectors face violence and try to win justice.” Rustin also reported that the warden had agreed to continue to allow the gate to be open between the upper and lower levels of cellblock E and, after Huddleston departed, to make the block “a model and interracial one. Only persons who accept the ideas of racial equality will be assigned there.” In the meantime, Huddleston agreed not to act violently and Rustin promised not to visit the common area while Huddleston was present.*

### **Rustin to Davis Platt**

*Davis Platt and Rustin had become lovers in June 1943, when the two met on the campus of Bryn Mawr College, where Rustin was speaking at a conference. Platt enrolled at Columbia University in New York City the following fall, partly to be close to Rustin, and the two established a long-term relationship.*

May 5, 1944

Dear Friend Davis,

. . . I am well provided for, but am happy to accept it, as one finds so many people who never get assistance from home. To be able to help them is a worthy effort, as the difference between life and slow death here may revolve around a candy bar or a package of cigarettes. Little things—a cigarette butt, a scrap of colored paper, a smile, or the snatch of a song—many, many little things, which on the outside are lost or wasted, take on real significance here. One of the fellows, who works on the prison farm, got the opportunity to plant . . . near the roads the other day. Usually he is a colorless . . . and fretful creature but on his return he was alive. Joyfully he ran into the cellblock with tears . . . in his eyes. On the road he had seen two little children playing. “Once again,” he said, “I have heard the laughter of children.” For three days now he has had a quiet beauty on his face. This afternoon he shared his last orange with me. And somehow I felt as if it was his Thanksgiving prayer.

Well, at last I have been given my class. Finally I am a full teacher with about 15 students. They are all typical of the poorer white people of the Kentucky and Tennessee hills country. Being taught by a Negro is for them a most revolutionary system. I feel the administration here is doing a very fine thing in this respect. On the other hand, it reveals that the masses of white Southerners may be ready for some real progressive changes if politicians would let them alone, or better, work for gradual progress. . . .

. . . I have been taught a great lesson since coming here—namely, that there is such suffering in this world that not one penny should be misplaced or one moment wasted by men of social concern. I shall see many fewer shows and drink many fewer beers when I am free. And this not merely for discipline of self, but because these pleasures pale into the distance as one is brought face to face with the suffering . . . in lives here. I say this to indicate that we, all of us, must be very careful to search ourselves and our enterprises to make certain that we are using our resources wisely.

. . .

Bayard Rustin

### **Rustin to Warden Hagerman**

*Although he was opposed to racial segregation in all its forms, and felt the need to resist it in total, Rustin maintained a finely nuanced understanding of timing and tactics when planning his strategy to defeat segregation within the prison system. His struggle to maintain a balance between his uncompromising principles and realistic tactics is evident in this letter to the warden.*

May 11, 1944

My Dear Dr. Hagerman:

May I inform you that I am pleased that the administration have given further evidence of their progressive racial policy by reopening the doors between the upper and lower sections of cell house E. Beyond

this, the aims which you outlined in our conversation of May 5th are quite encouraging and reveal a real degree of concern and courage.

In light of these facts, all men of social vision will want to strengthen your hand and behave in such a manner as to make the proposed plans possible. This situation necessitates a brief comment on my part.

As you know I am generally opposed to racial segregation and I believe that it ought to be resisted by a variety of nonviolent means in any area of life where it exists. Yet before such resistance is possible, one often must cooperate with what he considers injustice in order to create positive experiences with all involved in the scene, or for a time one may accept segregation in certain areas if the basic needs are to be had and life is to go on.

On the basis of this analysis I have been accepting segregation in the dining room and in the living quarter. But to accept segregation in the theater is, indeed, another matter; the motion picture is not a necessity for existence, as are food and sleep.

For sometime past, I have found it a moral impossibility to go voluntarily into segregated amusement areas. Since I have been here, I have not sat at the theatre in the sections designated for Negroes. When attending I have sat without incident among the general inmate population. I had considered the implications of this action and had decided to raise the issue with the administration if I were instructed to move.

I assume that you have been aware of my behavior in the theatre and I want this letter to serve as assurance that I am not attempting to raise the issue of racial separation there at this time. For as I recall our conference, I am faced with a series of new facts which cause me to change my plan. It would be unfair for me to raise such an issue at a time when the administration plan to take the initiative in other areas. I am sensitive to the fact that you have certain problems in crystallizing gains and in carrying forward the illiberal. Also I am aware that it is impossible to work on all fronts simultaneously.

However, finding it impossible to walk voluntarily into a segregated amusement area on the one hand, and on the other, wishing to avoid any incident that might impede our common efforts to bring a major racial change in cell block E, etc., I find that there is no choice left for me but to refrain at present from attending the theatre at all.

I certainly enjoy the motion pictures, but if in any way my giving them up will help in bettering racial relations here and hasten the elimination of segregation, I give them up joyfully.

Sincerely,  
Bayard Rustin

### **Rustin to Davis Platt**

*Davis Platt was from a well-heeled family not far from Philadelphia, and in the letter below Rustin encourages his lover to spend the summer by immersing himself among the masses of the South. Platt was entertaining the possibility of taking a summer position with the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). Rustin himself had spent a few summers at AFSC camps and found the work to be immensely rewarding. As an AFSC camp counselor, Rustin had worked as a playground director and used the arts, including ballet, to teach children the ways of peace.*

May 12, 1944

Dear Friend Davis,

...

I am 100% in favor of your going to work with the Service Committee for a summer. As you know I did the work several summers and found it most stimulating. You will meet many fine young people, many of whom will be future leaders in American life. If you go to Nashville your eyes will see in a firsthand way things your heart and mind will require you to absorb. Surely you will never have any realistic grasp of the American racial scene or any intelligent and balanced solutions for dealing with the practices and attitudes which support it unless you spend time living among the masses in the South. Here is a golden opportunity. Perhaps never again will you have so excellent a reason (especially in the minds of the Negroes in a Southern city) to approach and observe gracefully. But more important, here lies an opportunity to be, to share—to share the humiliation, the hopes, the sacrifices, the

joy and the fears of the people, white and black, for they are all of them afraid. Davis, I could not urge you strongly enough. Needless to say, you will feel periods of question and of futility during your summer, but years in the future you will find that they also have been helpful. Let me know your decision soon.

You ask if you write too frequently. I don't know how to express my feeling about your letters. They are a kind of food for my spirit, which only seeing you could replace. No, Davis, you certainly are not writing too often. . . .

Your friend and brother,  
Bayard Rustin

*Platt took Rustin's advice and accepted AFSC work in Nashville.*

### **Rustin to Davis Platt**

*Rustin wrote the following letter the day after he had landed in administrative segregation for sitting at a dining table "reserved for colored men from quarantine." Perhaps more than any other letter, this one clarifies Rustin's understanding of prison authorities as tyrannical, and brutal, representatives of a police state. If he treated the authorities at times as potentially benevolent keepers of order, he did so primarily for tactical reasons.*

May 29, 1944

Dear Davis,

In the middle of last week a number of the conscientious objectors here met together to evaluate the work of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. . . .

I am not surprised that my letter concerning Sam's experience never reached you. I am sorry that it did not, however. The letter contained an analysis of the American police state. It sought to show a basic relationship between economic power and government—that such power is government . . . and when threatened will move toward the

right. I went on to discuss the imminence of increased police power, terror and brutality as the central government (reactionary groups frightened and openly more selfish), thru extension of a national service act, muzzling of labor . . . and peacetime conscription, will gain more and more power. . . . [P]olice brutality is not merely related to race but also it is a byproduct of the power given police in the modern state. I ought to have known that such letters will pass with difficulty, but I prefer to lose my privilege of writing, have my material held up or sent to the FBI before I bow pusillanimously or expediently write material that is so harmless as to please the limited minds that are selected to pass it on. To write such is to fail in raising the issues involved in censorship. . . . When I came here I was misguided enough to sign censorship papers—in effect giving away a birthright for a few boneless letters. This I now see as a mistake and am pledged to correct but I want to study and move in a clear way, in a slow way if that is possible. Strategically I believe the book censorship is the more logical point of attack. If I were to continue to consult officers here as to what books I may or may not read, I should not merely seem to recognize their right of controlling reading on the basis of their whims, prejudices and also their stomachs (indigestion) but also I should forfeit any right under the Constitution to read any desired material for intellectual and spiritual growth. Worse, I should do so voluntarily. Thus I have decided to write what I most feel and believe in letters. If they are constantly held up, I shall plan opposition later. I have decided not to request permission to receive printed matter. Now, clearly the responsibility of censorship (usurpation of the inmate's rights) rests upon the bureaucrat with the ink in his hand. I shall not help them rob me. Will you, therefore, refrain in future from consulting with censorship agents here who whether or not they are aware of it are representatives of tyranny? Be aware that tyranny is no harsh term for the deeds practiced here. While we are held behind a wall (which appears a fence) and behind bars (which seem mere windows), we are held slaves to a state which “grinds the faces of the unfortunate in the dust.” Every accommodation is privilege. One is held by men who refer to “their sense of duty” and “the law” but they themselves cannot see that more accurately they are obstructing justice; they stand between the inmate and his basic rights, they are . . . callous

to the urge and call for freedom; they reduce rights to privileges and sickly whine of helplessness to be just. One ought to resist the entire system! Perhaps the time rapidly approaches when such behavior will be the only honorable thing for several of us. But at present we proceed on the basis of possible change. My failure to consult on books may result in one or several forms of punishment. I am prepared to deal with these. . . .

Sincerely your friend,  
Bayard Rustin

### **Rustin to Davis Platt**

*Platt supplied Rustin with a steady diet of books, including Lillian Smith's Strange Fruit. Although its content seems tame by today's standards, Smith's depiction of interracial love created quite a controversy upon its publication in 1944. Rustin loved the book and passed it around the prison population as a way of educating inmates about racial justice. As he hints at in this letter, he also appreciated Henry Seidel Canby's work on Walt Whitman's homosexuality.*

*Rustin refers below to the Allied landings in France and to President Roosevelt's public prayer on June 6, 1944. In a national radio broadcast, Roosevelt prayed that, with the grace of God, "and by the righteousness of our cause, our sons will triumph."*

June 9, 1944

Dear Davis,

We are in the middle of school recess. We teachers have papers to correct, exams to give . . . I am going to send you outlines of the kinds of material I have been using thus far. It has all of it gone over quite well. From certain evidence I believe that the work in this department progresses exceedingly well.

I have been reading quite a deal lately and would like you to check on the following material, all of which I am sure you will find

rewarding: . . . (3) Just finished *Whitman, an American*, by Henry Seidel Canby of Yale, best analysis of Walt I have seen. Good job in chapter XIX. Read it, if not the whole. . . . (5) Chapter 7 from *Strange Fruit*, on which I shall comment fully later. . . .

There is much talk here of the fall of Rome and the invasion. Last evening the lights were left on after hours to permit our hearing the President's prayer. I wept inwardly—somehow—somehow the more for God, who must have been bewildered by it, by so many millions of his children asking for victory, for absence of fear, for courage and for his will to be done . . . I pray more these days and constantly for the end of hostilities—hoping that from such a beginning a creative end—real peace—can come. . . . I certainly am convinced that there is need of a spiritual revolution if we are to avoid complete moral degeneration. I am equally certain that some totally dedicated and spiritually radical group, giving itself constantly and wholly to a life of the spirit, will (by its virtues) usher in the forces that will make genuine change possible. Whether I am to be of that group I doubt. I admit that the thought has vaguely crossed my mind. But I am not completely misjudging my place and function. I know that at present I must work in the field of action. However, I believe that certain men are doing . . . a great deal thru their lives of prayer. They affect my life as a social activist. Read, if you get the time, the introduction to Sorokin's *Crisis of Our Age*. To paraphrase, political, social and economic change, no matter how radical, will not bring bread, beauty, and brotherhood to man. A radical spiritual revolution of our total culture is needed. This is all I mean. . . .

Your friend and brother,  
Bayard Rustin

### **Rustin to Davis Platt**

*By this time, it would have been clear to many inmates that Rustin was an openly gay man. The following letter suggests that he took a visit from Platt as an opportunity to enter into conversations with fellow inmates about sexual topics.*