

# **TROUBLEMAKER FOR JUSTICE**

*The Story of Bayard Rustin, the Man Behind the March on Washington*

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Published by City Lights, August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Trade paperback Original ISBN 9780872867659 \$12.95 166pp

eBook ISBN 9780872867987

**Guided Reading Level:** Z+

**Grade Level Equivalent:** High School

**Interest Level:** Young Adult, Grades 7-12

*Three Constitutional amendments extending rights to African Americans were ratified during Reconstruction, the period of rebuilding the South after the Civil War. The amendments made slavery illegal, extended citizenship to African Americans, as well as voting rights to former slaves and their descendants. Despite these achievements, African Americans, particularly in the South, were often denied these rights. They faced segregation, were prevented from voting, and threatened with or experienced violence, all of which made it impossible to live freely. Some civil rights activists in the 1950s and 1960s chose nonviolence as a way to secure and exercise legal rights for African Americans. Civil rights leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. came to believe that a nonviolent approach was the best way to address African-American inequality. Bayard Rustin was King's primary mentor, teaching him the techniques and philosophy of nonviolent civil disobedience. Rustin organized the March on Washington, but he is an often over-looked American hero in large part because he was gay. Rustin dedicated his life to civil and human rights and his inspired story is presented here.*

## **ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS**

### **Before Reading**

#### **Building background knowledge**

- What do you already know about the civil rights movement?
- When you think about the civil rights movement, who comes to mind?
- What are some important events in the movement that you know about?
- Why did the US need a civil rights movement in the 1950s & 1960s if America was founded on freedom and equality?
- What are the most effective ways to promote social change?
- What is the responsibility of the people and government of the United States to secure freedom and democracy at home and abroad?
- What were some key events in the civil rights movement?
- Was the civil rights movement successful in bringing about social change?

### **During Reading**

Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly, as well as inferences drawn from the text.

- Who participated in the civil rights movement? How did they participate?
- Why were people willing to risk their safety to participate in the civil rights movement?
- How did the civil rights movement change the United States?
- What is nonviolence?
- Why did many civil rights activists choose nonviolence as a way to pursue equal rights?
- What nonviolent strategies did they use?
- Why were nonviolent strategies often successful?
- What challenges did Bayard Rustin and other activists face?
- Why was Bayard Rustin kept “behind the scenes” during the movement?
- What was happening in the world during this tumultuous time?

**Determine** the central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details. Provide an objective summary of the text.

**Analyze** how the authors unfold their analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which their points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.

**Determine** the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the book, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings. Analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone. For example, how does the language of a court opinion differ from that of a newspaper?

**Analyze** in detail how the authors’ ideas or claims are developed and refined by particular sentences, paragraphs, or larger portions of the book.

**Determine** the authors’ point of view or purpose in *Troublemaker for Justice* and analyze how the authors use rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

**Delineate and evaluate** the argument and specific claims in *Troublemaker for Justice*, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient. Identify false statements and fallacious reasoning.

**Analyze** seminal US documents of historical and literary significance, for example, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “*I Have a Dream*” speech. Include how the speech addresses related themes and concepts.

## **After Reading**

### **Civil Rights Movement**

- What did you find most striking about the civil rights movement?
- What surprised or confused you about the civil rights movement?
- What were the goals of the civil rights movement?
- What were the strategies of the movement's participants?
- In what ways did the civil rights movement succeed?
- What made those successes possible?
- What remains to be done to create a truly just and equitable society?
- What questions do you still have about the civil rights movement?
- Who opposed equal rights for African Americans?
- How did they express their opposition?
- Why did people risk their lives to participate in the civil rights movement?
- Who died in the struggle for African American equality?
- Why is it important to know their names and their experiences?
- What are examples of the civil rights movement's victories?
- What actions contributed to these victories?
- How did everyday people help bring about change?
- How have people since the civil rights movement used nonviolence as a way to bring about change?

### **The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom**

1. What was the March on Washington?
2. What was the lasting impact of the March?
3. How long did the March last?
4. Who were the main players?
5. What role did the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. have?
6. What happened at the March?
7. Was the March successful?
8. What was the purpose of the March?
9. What was the purpose of the keynote address delivered by Dr. King ?
10. Why have the speech and the March become two of the most celebrated symbols of the civil rights era?
11. Why did so many everyday citizens get involved in civil protest during the civil rights era?
12. What, if anything, can encourage everyday citizens to get involved in the struggle for civil and human rights today?

13. What connections can be made between the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech, and current protests for civil and human rights?

14. Explain how Rustin followed *The Six Principles of Nonviolence* throughout his lifetime.

***\*The Six Principles of Nonviolence:***

1. Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people. It is active nonviolent resistance to evil.
2. Nonviolence seeks to win friendship and understanding. The end result of nonviolence is redemption and reconciliation.
3. Nonviolence seeks to defeat injustice, not people. Nonviolence recognizes that evildoers are also victims.
4. Nonviolence holds that suffering can educate and transform. Nonviolence willingly accepts the consequences to its acts.
5. Nonviolence chooses love instead of hate. Nonviolence resists violence to the spirit as well as the body. Nonviolent love is active, not passive. Nonviolent love does not sink to the level of the hater. Love restores community and resists injustice. Nonviolence recognizes the fact that all life is interrelated.
6. Nonviolence believes that the universe is on the side of justice. The nonviolent resister has deep faith that justice will eventually win.

15. How can you incorporate the *Six Principles of Nonviolence* into your school and community?

*\*From the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change  
<http://thekingcenter.org/king-philosophy/>*

## Think about it

### Make text to world connections

1. How has the modern civil rights movement succeeded? What inequalities remain? Why do you think those inequalities remain? Write your answer in the form of an essay or a letter to a friend or family member who wants to know more about what you have learned regarding the long-term effects of the civil rights movement.
2. How can I become an “angelic troublemaker”? What role can I play in making our society more just? Begin your reflections by writing a journal entry or discussing your thoughts with another student. Then come up with a plan for steps that you and your classmates can take to help create a more equitable situation in your school or community.
3. Bayard often said his Quaker upbringing fueled his fight for equality. How did his beliefs influence his vision of justice and equality?
4. Plan and design a historical timeline noting significant events in the life of Bayard Rustin.

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1. Where was Bayard born and raised? How was living in West Chester, Pennsylvania a positive influence for Bayard? What did he excel at as a young man?
2. Discuss how his Quaker upbringing contributed to his beliefs. Use examples from the book.
3. Discuss Bayard’s resistance to racial discrimination throughout his life.
4. How did Bayard “give back” or “pay it forward” over the course of his life?
5. What did Bayard Rustin mean when he said, “We need, in every community, a group of angelic troublemakers”?
6. Describe some of the personal challenges that Bayard faced which contributed to his life’s work.
7. Why was his sexual orientation significant in his life?
8. Explain his major accomplishments as an influential civil rights leader.
9. How did Bayard deal with human conflicts, racism, sexism, poverty, and violence?
10. How did Bayard’s upbringing influence his belief in the unity of family? Why is that important?
11. Who in your life has made an impact on how you view the world?
12. Why was Bayard Rustin basically an unknown?
13. What is the authors’ purpose for writing *Troublemaker for Justice*?
14. How did the story of Bayard Rustin inspire young leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.?
15. How does he inspire you?
16. Why is *Troublemaker for Justice* an important book?

## Research

- ✓ Compare and contrast Bayard Rustin and Malcolm X on their views, backgrounds, and approaches to creating change. Both Bayard Rustin and Malcolm X attended the March on Washington, but were not asked to speak because of their radical backgrounds. Learn more about these dedicated and passionate men and how their different views impacted society.
- ✓ Search the web, books, or other resources to read stories of real people who attended and participated in the March on Washington. Collect photographs from newspapers and journals. Identify any of the participants you've learned about, as well as citing "unidentified persons" in the photographs.
- ✓ Plan and design a historical timeline noting significant events in the life of Bayard Rustin.

## Create a Power Point Presentation

- ✓ Who was Bayard Rustin?
- ✓ Early life and education
- ✓ Political philosophy and civil rights career
- ✓ Martin Luther King Jr. and the March on Washington
- ✓ Later career, awards and publications
  
- ✓ Analyze various accounts of Bayard Rustin's life as told in different mediums. Describe how his story presented in both print and multimedia, and determine which details are emphasized in each account.

Watch the documentary "Brother Outsider: The Life of Bayard Rustin," and compare and contrast the book, *Troublemaker for Justice*, with the film.

<https://www.pbs.org/pov/brotheroutsider/>