

[Bayard Rustin: 7 things to know before seeing 'Rustin' movie](#)

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Discussion Guide: [Brother Outsider: The Life of Bayard Rustin Guide](#)

## **Pride Month Faith and Film Screening: Rustin**

### **Discussion Guide**

#### **1. Pre-Screening Discussion:**

- a. **Welcome and Opening Prayer:** Begin with a brief welcome and an opening prayer, inviting the participants to reflect on the themes of the film in the context of faith, justice, and LGBTQ+ pride.

"Spirit of Justice and Compassion, we gather today in a spirit of unity and reflection. As we watch and discuss the story of Bayard Rustin, in the context of PRIDE - guide our hearts and minds to understand the deep connections between love, justice, and the celebration of our diverse identities. May we be inspired by Rustin's courage, resilience, and unwavering commitment to equality. Help us to carry forward his legacy with love, understanding, and a steadfast dedication to justice for all. Amen."

- b. **Expectations:** Ask participants what they know about Bayard Rustin and what they hope to learn from the film.
- c. **Background on Bayard Rustin/Historical Context:** Provide a brief overview of Bayard Rustin's life, focusing on his role as a civil rights activist, his commitment to non violent protest, his mentorship of Martin Luther King Jr., and his identity as an openly gay man during a time of widespread discrimination.

Openly gay civil rights titan Bayard Rustin, the architect of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s March on Washington, is the subject of the **Netflix biopic "Rustin"** and **Colman Domingo stars** as Rustin.

The film focuses on Rustin's time as a close confidant of King and the mastermind of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

Despite Rustin's amazing activist skills, he was ignored and pushed to the back of the bus by homophobic Black leaders in the Civil Rights Movement.

"He was ostracized particularly by black leaders because they were homophobic. They said he would bring disgrace on them because he was gay," Angela Bowen, assistant professor of women's studies at Cal State Long Beach, told this reporter in 2003.

"Bayard knew they were little minded, and he was ahead of his time," she said.

In 1960, while leading the push for protests at the National Democratic Party Convention in Los Angeles, Rustin was attacked by Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. as an "immoral element" in the Civil Rights Movement. According to John D'Emilio's book, "Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin," Powell, Jr. phoned King and threatened to publicly charge that King and Rustin were lovers. King withdrew his support for the protests at the convention and removed Rustin from his staff.

"Bayard was so incredibly talented," Nancy Kates, co-producer and director of the documentary "Brother Outsider: The Life of Bayard Rustin," told this reporter in 2003.

“He would rise to the top of something, then somebody would take a pot shot at him because of him being gay or issues around his sexuality and that would force him to leave or they’d fire him.

“Then he’d (rise to the top) again. He was like the Energizer Bunny,” Kates said. “He refused to be vanquished by people because they didn’t approve of him.”

Rustin also has been largely forgotten in history books.

Here are seven things to know about Rustin.

- i. Born in 1912 in West Chester, Penn., Rustin was raised by his grandparents and deeply influenced by his grandmother, a fierce advocate for social justice.
- ii. By the 1940s, Rustin was a committed missionary of Gandhian nonviolence. Rustin spent three years (1943-46) in a federal penitentiary as a conscientious objector to World War II (He was a Quaker.).
- iii. In 1947, Rustin organized the first “Freedom Rides” through the South. The riders were beaten, arrested and fined. Rustin served 22 days on a North Carolina chain gang.
- iv. Rustin, 40, was arrested Jan. 21, 1953, in Pasadena, and convicted of “vagrancy” for violating a morality offense that was often used to discriminate against and criminalize LGBTQ and Black communities, but has been repealed. At the time, homosexuality was not only still classified as a mental illness, but also illegal in many parts of the nation. Members of the LGBTQ community also were persecuted under various morality codes in many states, including California. Rustin was arrested for having consensual sex with two white men in a parked car, but the white men were not arrested. After the arrest, Rustin was convicted, served 50 days in jail, and was forced to register as a sex offender. Rustin was posthumously pardoned by Gov. Gavin Newsom in 2020 for the more than 70-year-old “vagrancy” conviction.

- v. In 1956, during the initial stages of the Montgomery bus boycott, Rustin met the 26-year-old King, Jr. Rustin schooled the young leader in the mechanics of running a nonviolent protest. “Rustin’s greatest historical legacy is that he did more than anyone to bring the Gandhian message of militant nonviolence to the United States and to the black freedom struggle,” John D’Emilio, author of “Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin,” told this reporter in 2003.
  - vi. In 1963, A. Philip Randolph, president of the powerful Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, tapped Rustin to organize the March on Washington. Rustin and Randolph saw the event as far grander than ending the ruler for sitting at the back of the bus. They envisioned it as a “catalyst which mobilizes all workers behind demands for a broad and fundamental program of economic justice.”
  - vii. President Barack Obama awarded Rustin, who died in 1987 at the age of 75, a Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2013.
- d. **Significance of the Film:** Discuss why Rustin’s story is important to revisit today, especially during Pride Month and within faith communities.
- e. **Let’s watch!** You are encouraged to look out for themes of courage, justice, faith, identity, intersectionality.

## 2. Post-Screening Discussion:

### a. Initial Reactions

Open the floor for participants to share their immediate thoughts and feelings about the film. What stood out to them? What scenes were particularly powerful?

### b. Faith and Activism

Discuss Rustin's integration of his faith with his activism. How did his Quaker beliefs inform his approach to nonviolent protest and justice?

### **c. Intersectionality of Identities**

Explore how Rustin navigated his multiple identities – as a Black man, a gay man, and a person of faith. How did these intersect and inform his work and life?

### **d. Challenges and Resilience**

Reflect on the challenges Rustin faced both within and outside the civil rights movement due to his sexuality. How did he demonstrate resilience?

### **e. Legacy and Lessons**

- i. Discuss the legacy of Bayard Rustin. What lessons can we draw from his life for our current struggles for justice and equality?
- ii. How can faith communities honor Rustin's legacy and support LGBTQ+ rights today?

### **f. Theological Reflections:**

**Scriptural Connections** - Invite participants to connect themes from the film with scriptural passages. For example: - Micah 6:8 – “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” - Galatians 3:28 – “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

### **g. Faith in Action**

Discuss practical ways in which participants can live out their faith in support of LGBTQ+ rights and justice in their own communities.

### 3. **Closing:**

**Final Thoughts and Prayer** - Allow time for any final thoughts or reflections. - Close with a prayer, asking for courage, wisdom, and compassion to continue the work of justice and inclusion in the spirit of Bayard Rustin.

### **Additional Resources:**

Provide participants with a list of further readings, documentaries, and organizations related to Bayard Rustin, civil rights, and LGBTQ+ advocacy.

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