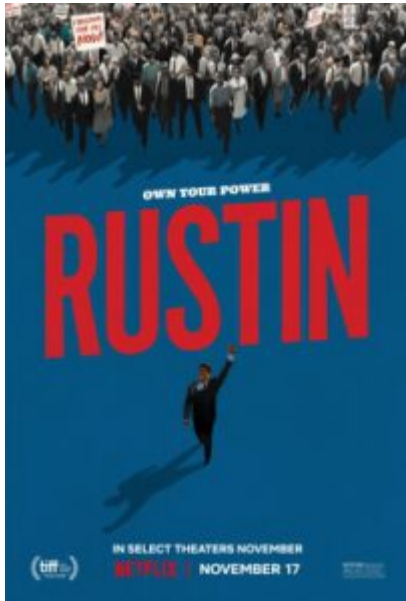


Upcoming CR Film in November: RUSTIN



I want to alert you to the new film *Rustin*, due out on November 3 in theaters and then on November 17, on Netflix. But first, a little background.

Bayard Rustin is not as well known in the Civil Rights Pantheon as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, or even Ralph Abernathy, but without him there probably would have been no March on Washington in 1963. Or, at least, not as well organized and as effective as it turned out to be. And even earlier, during the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Dr. King would not have become as effective a leader without the savvy counsel of this organizing genius.

Sadly, in the otherwise fine Abby Mann 1978 TV miniseries about MLK, simply titled [King](#), this leader who was such a great influence on Dr. King personally is written out of the film. This despite the fact that Rustin, having traveled to India shortly after Gandhi's murder to study the Mahatma's non-violence, was the one who persuaded Dr. King to give up his handgun and to accept Gandhian pacifism as a way of life.

(This is, by the way, depicted in the HBO film *Boycott*.)

Bayard Rustin had a long history of civil rights advocacy, even organizing freedom rides in the Forties, long before the famous ones of the Sixties. When word of the Montgomery Bus Boycott spread, Rustin traveled from New York to Montgomery to offer his organizing skills to Dr. King, thereupon becoming one of his chief advisers. Dr. King knew that Rustin was gay and had been arrested for "sexual perversion." But the man was so valuable that he felt he could overlook his sexuality—until later on enemies threatened a smear campaign about not only Rustin's sexual life but also his past membership in the Communist Party and a claim that he and Dr. King were in a relationship.

With regrets, the two leaders parted by mutual consent, though Rustin still helped in the background and A. Philip Randolph chose him as chief organizer of the March on Washington in 1963. Abby Mann, while writing the script for *King*, must have known about the importance of Rustin to King—he was a friend of Dr. King—but either he or the executives at NBC decided Rustin's homosexuality was too hot a topic to deal with. Remember this was the Seventies when both the government and the public so stigmatized homosexuals that the AIDS epidemic was at first ignored.

In *Boycott*, Bayard Rustin shows up at the King home about three-fourths of the way in the film—and over 70 days into the boycott. It is night, and the armed guards tell the stranger to come back the next day. Coretta emerges and immediately recognizes him from hearing him speak at Antioch College when she was a student. Inside, she tells him what a deep impression he had on her when he stressed that a single person can make a big difference in the world. When he addresses the MIA staff, he tells them they must now look at the bigger picture, that they have started a new kind of movement that must spread throughout the nation. Later, talking privately with Dr. King, he urges him to get rid of his gun and the

armed guards. As they talk back and forth, he insists that non-violence is not just a tactic but a way of life. (For more on this and the split-up of their partnership, see my review with its set of 15 discussion questions by clicking onto [Boycott](#).)

In *Boycott* Rustin was well played by Erik Todd Dellums. In the new film the multi award-winning actor Colman Domingo portrays the social justice advocate. You can see him in the trailer and read more about the film by clicking [here](#).

Remember, *Rustin* will be in select theaters on Nov. 3 and streams on Netflix Nov. 17, 2023. The film was developed to mark the 60th anniversary of the March on Washington. I can hardly wait to see this brave and much-wronged man finally receive his due!

Image