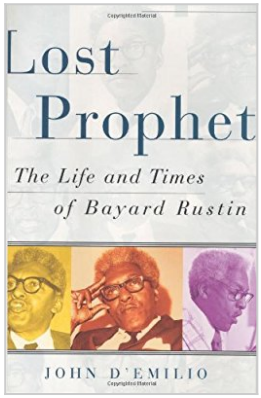

Lost Prophet : The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin

By John D'emilio

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Bayard Rustin is one of the most important figures in the history of the American civil rights movement. Before Martin Luther King, before Malcolm X, Bayard Rustin was working to bring the cause to the forefront of America's consciousness. A teacher to King, an international apostle of peace, and the organizer of the famous 1963 March on Washington, he brought Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence to America and helped launch the civil rights movement. Nonetheless, Rustin has been largely erased by history, in part because he was an African American homosexual. Acclaimed historian John D'Emilio tells the full and remarkable story of Rustin's intertwined lives: his pioneering and public person and his oblique and stigmatized private self.

It was in the tumultuous 1930s that Bayard Rustin came of age, getting his first lessons in politics through the Communist Party and the unrest of the Great Depression. A Quaker and a radical pacifist, he went to prison for refusing to serve in World War II, only to suffer a sexual scandal. His mentor, the great pacifist A. J. Muste, wrote to him, "You were capable of making the 'mistake' of thinking that you could be the leader in a revolution...at the same time that you were a weakling in an extreme degree and engaged in practices for which there was no justification."

Freed from prison after the war, Rustin threw himself into the early campaigns of the civil rights and anti-nuclear movements until an arrest for sodomy nearly destroyed his career. Many close colleagues and friends abandoned him. For years after, Rustin assumed a less public role even though his influence was everywhere. Rustin mentored a young and inexperienced Martin Luther King in the use of nonviolence. He planned strategy for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference until Congressman Adam Clayton Powell threatened to spread a rumor that King and Rustin were lovers. Not until Rustin's crowning achievement as the organizer of the 1963 March on Washington would he finally emerge from the shadows that homophobia cast over his career. Rustin remained until his death in 1987 committed to the causes of world peace, racial equality, and economic justice.

Based on more than a decade of archival research and interviews with dozens of

surviving friends and colleagues of Rustin's, *Lost Prophet* is a triumph. Rustin emerges as a hero of the black freedom struggle and a singularly important figure in the lost gay history of the mid-twentieth century. John D'Emilio's compelling narrative rescues a forgotten figure and brings alive a time of great hope and great tragedy in the not-so-distant past.

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Editorial Review

Review
George Chauncey author of *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* In this absorbing reappraisal of Bayard Rustin's tumultuous life and times, John D'Emilio shows how Rustin became one of the most brilliant and influential strategists of the peace and civil rights movements in the 1950s, and then came to be reviled as a conservative by many leftists in the late 1960s. D'Emilio also provides a stunning account of how Rustin's homosexuality shaped his career, as his foes -- from Strom Thurmond to Adam Clayton Powell -- tried to use it to discredit his leadership and force him into the shadows. This revelatory work of biography finally restores Rustin to history in all of his complexity and humanity. -- *Review*

About the Author
John D'Emilio is professor of history and of gender and women's studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago. A Guggenheim and National Endowment for the Humanities fellow, from 1995 to 1997 he served as the Founding Director of the Policy Institute at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. He is the co-author of *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (1997). He earned his Ph.D. from Columbia University in 1982.

Introduction

"Who is Bayard Rustin?"

I have been asked this question enough times to know that "Bayard Rustin" is not a household name in America.

Rustin was not a president, not a four-star general, not a celebrity. He did not die young under tragic circumstances, as did Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X, two more renowned African Americans whom we do remember. Instead, depending on the circumstances, Rustin was dismissed during his lifetime as a Communist, a draft dodger, or a sexual pervert -- and sometimes all three. None are characteristics designed to win a revered place in our nation's history.

Less than two decades after Rustin's death, his enormous contributions to American life -- in the struggle for racial equality, a peaceful international order, and a democratic economic system -- have been covered over, his name mostly forgotten, his contribution to a world worth living in largely obscured. Except for the briefest walk-on part as the man-behind-the-scenes of the historic 1963 March on Washington, Rustin hardly appears at all in the voluminous literature produced about the 1960s. Instead, he has become a man without a home in history.

This neglect of Rustin is tragic because he is, I believe, a vitally important historical character. He deserves a place in our national memory as one of the key figures of his time. More than anyone else, Rustin brought the message and methods of Gandhi to the United States. He insinuated nonviolence into the heart of the black freedom struggle. He presided over the transformation of direct action tactics from the cherished possession of a few initiates to its embrace by millions of Americans. He resurrected mass peaceful protest from the graveyard in which cold war anticommunism had buried it and made it once again a vibrant

expression of citizen rights in a free society.

Rustin was a visionary. He believed that violence could never bring justice and that war could never bring peace. He stood by these convictions during the "good war" against Hitler, during the first decades of the cold war, and during the years of a spiraling nuclear arms race. Rustin was an internationalist long before globalization became a catchword in American life. He viewed nationalism as a destructive force in human affairs and conducted himself as if world citizenship already existed. He organized and led protests not only in the United States but across several continents as well.

Rustin was smart. His associates recognized him as a master strategist of social change. He dedicated himself to figuring out how human beings, individually and collectively, could do more than simply go about the business of living. He studied the workings of insurgent movements around the globe so that he might better understand how permanently to alter powerful institutions and longstanding national policies.

Rustin was inspirational to the countless thousands who knew him. He wished more than anything else to remake the world around him. He wanted to shift the balance between white supremacy and racial justice, between violence and cooperation in the conduct of nations, between the wealth and power of the few and the poverty and powerlessness of the many. He believed that the most antagonistic human relationships -- between a white sheriff and a black sharecropper, between the European colonizer and the Africans he lorded over, between the filthy rich and the struggling poor -- could be transformed. He believed that ordinary individuals could make a vast difference in the world, and he communicated this conviction widely.

Rustin was also wildly controversial in his lifetime. He had been a member of the Young Communist League in the 1930s. He refused the call to defend his country after the United States had been attacked at Pearl Harbor. Segregationists, of whom there were many, and anti-Communists, of whom there were even more, always had ammunition to fire in Rustin's direction. Rustin repeatedly found himself the target of the FBI, local police, conservative journalists, State Department officials, and anyone else beating the drums of patriotic fervor during the cold war decades.

Rustin had ways to counter these vulnerabilities. His Quaker beliefs were a legitimate explanation for his pacifism. He publicly broke with and repeatedly repudiated the Communist Party. His pacifist friends and his associates in the black freedom movement applauded his integrity and courage, and they stood by him when cold warriors and defenders of the racial status quo launched attacks on him.

Not so for his homosexuality. If Rustin has been lost in the shadows of history, it is at least in part because he was a gay man in an era when the stigma attached to this was unrelieved. There were no islands of safety, no oases of acceptance in the decades when Rustin was forging a career as an agitator for justice. In the mid-twentieth century, every state criminalized homosexual behavior. Gay men could be -- and commonly were -- arrested for touching hands in a bar, for asking another man to spend the night, and for doing in parked cars in secluded places what young heterosexuals did all the time. Rustin's sexual desires brought him trouble repeatedly. Police locked him up. Judges humiliated him in the courtroom. Newspapers exposed him. Worst of all, friends, mentors, and close allies repeatedly abandoned him because how he chose to love and whom he chose to desire put him beyond the pale of what America at that time defined as acceptable.

Initially I came to Rustin's life because I wanted to write about the 1960s. At the time, and forever since, the sixties were recognized as a watershed decade in the United States. Look at a photograph of almost anything from 1958 and find a comparable one for 1972. The visual evidence of change will be striking. It was a time of revolutionary upheavals that left almost nothing in America untouched. Americans fought each other in the 1960s, and they have continued to fight about the meaning of the 1960s ever since.

One common plot line of the sixties traces a trajectory that moves from good to bad. The good sixties were composed of heroic student sit-ins and freedom rides, the crusading rhetoric of the New Frontier and the Great Society, the inspiration of an interracial March on Washington and a war against poverty. Trailing right behind were the bad sixties of war in the jungles of Southeast Asia, American cities in flames and occupied by troops, students shot dead on their own campuses by the National Guard and, when it all ended, the stench of Watergate. Why did sweet dreams of hope metastasize into nightmares?

Rustin first commanded my attention because, just as the good sixties were about to turn toward the bad, he authored a bold manifesto titled "From Protest to Politics." More than a generation after its writing, it still reads as a compelling piece of political analysis. Rustin addressed himself to the question of how the growing number of Americans who were protesting racial injustice might move from the margins of the political system to the centers of power. He argued that out of the civil rights movement there could emerge a coalition of conscience capable of becoming a new progressive majority in the United States. His strategy rested on a bedrock optimism that the American political system was flexible and responsive enough to embrace change of revolutionary dimensions. He believed that peaceful democratic means were adequate to the task of remaking relations of power. Rustin also had faith that individual human beings themselves were just as flexible and that, over time, they could be moved to recognize the worth of every one of their fellows and act accordingly.

Rustin's argument was not a mushy utopian exhortation in favor of universal fellowship and peace on earth. It was detailed, thoughtful, logical, and measured in its assessment of the political landscape. Reading it for the first time a quarter-century after it was published, I experienced a thrill of excitement, as if the moment when he wrote was still before me and the opportunities he sketched out still waited to be grasped. Yet the moment was not seized. Militant activists in the civil rights movement and burgeoning New Left scorned Rustin's analysis. They saw it as evidence that this Gandhian organizer of many years' standing, seasoned by decades of campaigns and two dozen arrests, had lost his radical edge. In what may be one of the cruelest ironies of this historical era, conservatives on the right rather than progressives on the left took up elements of Rustin's ideas and ran with them. Conservatives were the ones who used the electoral system to become the governing majority over the next generation.

I knew that Rustin was gay when I began to study his life. It was an important part of what attracted me to his story. I had already written about the history of homosexuality in America, and I knew the intensity of persecution directed not only at Communists and fellow travelers during the McCarthy era but at sexual nonconformists as well. I also knew that Rustin had been convicted for public lewdness in the 1950s and that in the final days before the March on Washington, segregationists exposed the incident. Yet I assumed that "the closet" was so sturdily constructed at this time and that habits of discretion in sexual matters operated so pervasively that Rustin's sexuality would serve at most as an interesting backdrop to the public career. I expected it to be tucked into the corner marked "private life" and imagined that it would only occasionally intervene in the telling of his story.

I now know differently. The boundary between public and private proved very porous in Rustin's life. As I dug through the evidence and interviewed those who knew him, it became abundantly clear that his sexuality -- or, more accurately, the stigma that American society attached to his sexual desires -- made him forever vulnerable. Again and again, Rustin found his aspirations blocked, his talents contained, and his influence marginalized. Yes, he also found ways to carve out a significant role in the movements he held dear. But he had to find ways to do this so that unpredictable eruptions of homophobia might not harm these causes. It is little wonder that so few Americans today know who he is.

And the disavowal of Rustin continues. As I write this introduction, parents of school-aged children in his hometown of West Chester, Pennsylvania, are rebelling against proposals to rename the local high school

after its most accomplished alumnus.

The book that I have written is not what I had originally intended. It still has much to say about the 1960s and the stirring events of that decade. But any thoughts I entertained that Bayard Rustin could be a vehicle for my purposes long ago fell victim to the dramatic nature of his story. *Lost Prophet* is centrally about Rustin -- the impact he had on events and the struggles he faced to sustain a role for himself in the most important movements of his times. To take Rustin seriously -- and, trust me, he insists that we do take him seriously -- requires paying as much attention to the decades when he toiled in obscurity as to the 1960s, when he had his moment as a national figure.

A biographer could not ask for a more compelling subject than Rustin. His story is heroic and harrowing. It abounds with triumphs and trials. It combines the narrative contours of the saint and the sinner. Rustin displays courage under circumstances that are terrifying to contemplate. His life reminds us that the most important stories from the past are often those that have been forgotten and that from obscure origins can emerge individuals with the power to change the world.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Bruce Butera:

Information is provisions for anyone to get better life, information currently can get by anyone in everywhere. The information can be a know-how or any news even an issue. What people must be consider whenever those information which is in the former life are hard to be find than now could be taking seriously which one would work to believe or which one often the resource are convinced. If you obtain the unstable resource then you obtain it as your main information we will see huge disadvantage for you. All of those possibilities will not happen within you if you take Lost Prophet : The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin as the daily resource information.

Randy Gable:

Lost Prophet : The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin can be one of your starter books that are good idea. Most of us recommend that straight away because this reserve has good vocabulary which could increase your knowledge in terminology, easy to understand, bit entertaining but nonetheless delivering the information. The author giving his/her effort to put every word into enjoyment arrangement in writing Lost Prophet : The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin yet doesn't forget the main level, giving the reader the hottest in addition to based confirm resource details that maybe you can be among it. This great information could drawn you into new stage of crucial imagining.

Tony Valdez:

The book untitled Lost Prophet : The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin contain a lot of information on that. The writer explains the girl idea with easy means. The language is very clear to see all the people, so do not

worry, you can easy to read it. The book was published by famous author. The author brings you in the new period of time of literary works. You can read this book because you can read on your smart phone, or gadget, so you can read the book inside anywhere and anytime. In a situation you wish to purchase the e-book, you can wide open their official web-site and also order it. Have a nice study.

Robert Russell:

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