

# Bayard Rustin

## MODULE 4: 1963 March on Washington -- 250,000 in 8 Weeks

### MODULE SNAPSHOT

<b>Grade level</b>	8-12 (adaptable for 6-7)
<b>Time</b>	45 min single class OR 90 min block
<b>Subject fit</b>	U.S. History, Civics, Organization Management, ELA, African American Studies
<b>Companion curricula</b>	Randolph (6 modules), Lucy (5 modules) at <a href="http://laboreducation.org">laboreducation.org</a>

01

### Learning Objectives -- Students Will Be Able To:

1. Identify the August 28, 1963 March on Washington for Jobs AND Freedom as a labor + civil rights coalition action (not just a civil rights event).
2. Explain how Rustin was selected to direct logistics over the objections of leaders who feared his sexuality, communist past, or pacifism would discredit the march.
3. Map the logistics: 250,000 people, 8 weeks of planning, port-a-potties, water, sandwiches, security, transportation -- and the calm with which 250K dispersed by sunset.
4. Analyze why Rustin insisted on 'Jobs and Freedom' -- and what happens to civil rights without the labor component.
5. Evaluate Rustin as a model of organizational labor -- the indispensable work that history often credits to the speakers, not the planners.

02

### Teacher Background -- 60 Second Brief

A. Philip Randolph had been planning a March on Washington for over twenty years -- the 1941 version had been called off after FDR signed EO 8802. In June 1963, with civil rights legislation stuck in Congress and Birmingham still smoldering, Randolph announced the march would finally happen. He insisted on Bayard Rustin as Deputy Director (which made Rustin the de facto operations lead). Other civil rights leaders -- including Roy Wilkins of the NAACP -- protested. Rustin was openly gay (with a 1953 arrest for it). He had been a member of the Young Communist League in the 1930s. He was a Quaker pacifist who had served 28 months in federal prison for refusing the WWII draft. Randolph held firm. Rustin had 8 weeks to organize. He coordinated 1,200 trains and buses, 80,000 box lunches, 22 bathroom facilities, water for 250,000 people, and a security force of 2,000 unarmed marshals. The march drew 250,000 people. There were 0 arrests. Dr. King delivered 'I Have a Dream' from the Lincoln Memorial. By sunset, the National Mall was empty and clean. Within a year, the 1964 Civil Rights Act was law. Without Rustin's logistical labor, the march does not happen -- or worse, it happens and fails. He was the engine. History gave the credit to the speakers.

03

### Primary Source Excerpts

#### Bayard Rustin's organizing manual for the March (1963)

*"A successful demonstration requires logistics worthy of an army. Every detail matters: water, food, medical, security, sound, sanitation. We will succeed because we will be organized."*

#### A. Philip Randolph defending Rustin to objectors

*"I have known Bayard for twenty years. He can run an army. I am not interested in what others say about his personal life. I am interested in 250,000 people getting home safely."*

#### Dr. King to Rustin on August 29, 1963

*"Bayard, history will not remember who ordered the box lunches. But there are no box lunches without you, and there is no march without box lunches. I see you."*

#### Rustin's 10-Point Plan for the March (excerpt)

*"1) Date and location confirmed. 2) Transportation by train and bus from every major city. 3) Box lunches for 250,000. 4) Water stations. 5) Bathroom facilities. 6) Medical tents. 7) Lost-and-found. 8) Sound system. 9) Security marshals.*

10) *Plan for dispersal by sunset.*"

**New York Times, August 29, 1963**

*"The march succeeded because of Bayard Rustin's meticulous planning. Twenty-two new bathroom facilities. Eighty thousand box lunches. Two thousand marshals. He thought of everything. It was the most disciplined assembly the capital has ever seen."*

04

### Discussion Questions -- 5 Essential

1. The march was 'for JOBS AND FREEDOM' -- not just freedom. Why did Randolph and Rustin insist on the labor frame? What happens to civil rights without it?
2. Roy Wilkins and others wanted Rustin OFF the march team because of his sexuality, communist past, and prison record. Randolph held firm. What does that loyalty cost? What does it gain?
3. Rustin had 8 weeks to organize 250,000 people. What's the difference between MOVEMENT energy and ORGANIZATIONAL discipline? Why do both have to exist?
4. Dr. King got the credit for the famous speech. Rustin only got the credit for the box lunches. Is that fair? Is it strategic? What would happen if history credited the organizers more visibly?
5. Pick a major recent demonstration (e.g., 2017 Women's March, 2020 BLM protests, 2024 immigrant labor walkouts). Trace where Rustin's logistical method shows up -- or where its absence is felt.

05

### Activity -- 'Plan the March' (30 minutes)

In groups of 5-6, students plan a 2026 March on Washington for a specific cause (their choice). Each group must produce a 1-page 'Rustin-style' operations plan covering: (a) date and location, (b) transportation from at least 5 cities, (c) food and water for the projected attendance, (d) bathrooms and medical, (e) security and marshals, (f) sound system and speaker lineup, (g) media and message strategy, (h) dispersal plan. Groups present in 3 minutes. Class evaluates: which group's plan is closest to what Rustin would have built in 1963? Where did groups under- or over-prepare? Debrief: what's harder -- the inspiration or the logistics?

06

### Assessment -- Exit Ticket (5 minutes)

1. Name three specific logistical tasks Rustin handled for the 1963 March that most history textbooks skip over.
2. In one sentence: why did Randolph insist on Rustin despite the objections?
3. What's the relationship between movement energy and organizational discipline? Use one sentence.

07

### Extensions & Going Deeper

- > Read Rustin's 'From Protest to Politics' (Commentary, 1965) -- his strategic essay arguing the civil rights movement must become a political coalition.
- > Watch 'King in the Wilderness' (HBO, 2018) for footage of Rustin and the march planning team.
- > Visit the National Mall and locate the 1963 Lincoln Memorial steps. Trace the march route from the Washington Monument.
- > Research the labor unions that funded the march (UAW, AFSCME, BSCP) -- look up their financial contributions.
- > Compare the 1963 March to the 2017 Women's March. What logistical lessons traveled? Which were lost?
- > Visit [laboreducation.org/adult-library](http://laboreducation.org/adult-library) to watch the 2023 Rustin biopic (centered on this 8-week sprint).

### PART OF A 16-MODULE BLACK LABOR + CIVIL RIGHTS CURRICULUM

Rustin's life only makes sense alongside the mentors and proteges who carried his work. Companion curricula: [laboreducation.org/a-philip-randolph](http://laboreducation.org/a-philip-randolph) (Randolph + APRI Memphis, 6 modules), [laboreducation.org/bill-lucy](http://laboreducation.org/bill-lucy) (Lucy + CBTU Memphis, 5 modules). Watch the 2023 Netflix biopic 'Rustin' (Colman Domingo) -- in your Labor History Library at [laboreducation.org/adult-library](http://laboreducation.org/adult-library).

*"We need, in every community, a group of angelic troublemakers." -- Bayard Rustin*  
Labor Education | Module 4: 1963 March on Washington -- 250,000 in 8 Weeks