

Transformations of Oppression

The Case of Bayard Rustin

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Considering his numerous contributions to social justice in the United States, Bayard Rustin (1912–1987) deserves to be a household name. His tireless work for equality and peace before, during, and after the Civil Rights movement had a considerable impact on American society. Yet, compared to other prominent figures of the Movement, such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, or Rosa Parks, Rustin, the organizer of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (1963) and a close political advisor and personal mentor to Dr. King, did not receive a fraction of their public recognition.¹ Apart from very few incidents, the Civil, Labor and Human Rights activist and Quaker remained “the man-behind-the-scenes” throughout his lifetime (D’Emilio 1). Until the late 1990s, Rustin was largely ignored by historiography, resulting in a public silence about both the name and the story behind ‘Bayard Rustin’ (333). Only in recent years has his case enjoyed renewed interest, culminating so far in the posthumous award of the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2013.

1 The employment of Rustin’s case for this analysis primarily serves the purpose of providing a concrete example for how oppression continually adapts to the circumstances in order to persist. These structural power dynamics tend to remain too abstract if they are not illustrated with (historical) examples, though. Rustin’s case study, rather than amplifying his unique accomplishments and experiences, should then also be read as a paradigm for the neglect of many other merited Civil Rights activists advocating for equality.

Scholars frequently state that Rustin's position at the margins of society derives from having been an openly gay African American and a former communist (D'Emilio; Levine; Miller; Podair;). The fact that he is still primarily referred to as an outsider and that certain facets of his personality tend to be highlighted, while others continue to be downplayed, proves both startling and interesting at this point, especially since this phenomenon does not solely pertain to the present, but also ties in with the oppression Rustin experienced during his lifetime. To begin with, the issue of his omission in historiography, the continued absence of Rustin's case in most college textbooks, for example, is mainly attributed to the lack of support from both the African American community and whites who dominate mass media, academia, and society. Since Rustin was not fully accepted by either of the two groups, he was left without advocates and thus fell into oblivion.

Whereas it shall not be disputed that Rustin and his public reception suffered from stigmatizations due to his skin color, sexuality, and the allegation of being a communist, it seems evident that a consideration of merely these factors falls short of providing a deeper understanding not only of his story, but also of the transformations of oppression on a larger, social scale. What is more, the aforementioned reasons for Rustin's marginalization fail to account for his – if intermittent – rise to power, bearing in mind that all of the aspects that allegedly marked him an absolute outsider were known to exist from the beginning of his career as an activist.

The contemporary discussion of Rustin's case reveals insights about today's society and the transformation of oppression. How and by whom is someone (to be) remembered in order to be recognized for his or her merits today? Are the categories through which (the legacy of) a person is both remembered and evaluated not a perpetuation of forms of discrimination, such as racism, homophobia, and the like, that continue to be widely spread in society? In the following, these questions will be addressed by examining aspects of Rustin's life with an emphasis on 'class' and 'race',² as these

2 I would like to point out that, in line with the figurational approach, the employment of the terms 'class' and 'race' in this article certainly does not imply an essentialist notion of them. Rather, both 'class' and 'race' are regarded as social constructs that merely tend to evoke an essentialist perception due to social power relations. It is the effects of this essentialist perception with which I am concerned.

two concepts are key to understanding (the misperception of) his case and its social implications. Moreover, the silencing and unsilencing of his story will also be touched upon before I conclude with some brief remarks on what the discourse about Rustin says about these issues in Civil Rights-movement American society.³

Norbert Elias's framework of figurational sociology and some theoretical insights by Pierre Bourdieu will serve as analytical tools for this endeavor. Since Rustin marks the central figure of this analysis, the figurational approach with its emphasis on group relations may appear counter-intuitive at first. However, Rustin's case will of course be regarded in relation to social dynamics (Elias, *Civilizing Process* 472) and may thus serve as a lens through which larger, social power dynamics can be made visible. To capture those larger power dynamics in relational terms, it is furthermore crucial to adopt a long-term historical perspective even when dealing with short-lived moments. When it comes to the constructs of 'class' and 'race' in particular, it is long-term developments that need to be analyzed in order to understand the persistence of certain structures in people's thinking, a persistence that frequently tends to be considered 'common sense' but is rarely scrutinized with regard to how the structures in question have developed and prevailed over time.

Elias's premise that power dynamics will never cease to exist (*What Is Sociology?* 74) marks the basis for analyzing various forms of oppression, such as racism or homophobia. Power struggles constitute a given in any society, and new alleged reasons for marginalization and domination can, or rather must, constantly be invented by those groups who possess more power than others. Rustin's biography, I argue, perfectly illustrates how an individual is repeatedly turned into a threat so that current power relations may be sustained. At this point, a closer look at the analytical instruments is in order: According to figurational sociology, a synchronic perspective is insufficient when assessing what seems to be an entirely unique individual case (Elias and Scotson 30-31). To account for longstanding, embodied structures of thinking, feeling, and acting, figurational theory employs the concept of *habitus*. With its historical and sociological perspective on the

3 Some passages as well as parts of the main argument of this article are taken from my monograph *Oppression as Process*; see also my article "Homophobic und Rassismus."

status quo, this concept delivers useful insights about how the collective past shapes what is frequently considered an individual's "nature" (Bourdieu, *Logic* 56). Especially in a case like Rustin's, whose rise to and fall from power is usually attributed to his personal qualities, the concept of habitus reveals its wide repercussions in social dynamics, holding up a mirror to society that shows the ideological lenses through which people's lives (still) tend to be viewed. Moreover, in refusing essentialism that commonly works toward the stigmatization of the individual, figurational theory also helps to shed light on positive, even empowering figurations in a person's life.

The term "empowerment" is often juxtaposed to the concept of "privilege." Whereas empowerment evokes the notion of liberation from oppression, privilege is commonly identified as one of the main sources and reasons for oppression (Mullaly and Mullaly; Kimmel and Ferber). However, as my analysis of Rustin's case will demonstrate, one and the same aspect of a particular life story can be regarded as empowerment or as privilege depending on which of two interdependent groups – labeled by Elias the *outsiders* and the *established* – interprets the case (Elias and Scotson 5-6).

THE ESTABLISHED AND THE OUTSIDERS

Before I briefly outline the main ideas in Elias's *The Established and the Outsiders*, it is important to clarify that these terms refer to a power differential in the relation of two groups. While the terms 'the established' and 'the outsiders' can evoke a simplistic, binary opposition, it is crucial to understand that both of these groups can be further subdivided along the same lines (e.g., established/outside within the overall outsider group). In Rustin's case, this differentiation allows to reveal the complexity and interplay of oppression, empowerment, and privilege in his story. 'Race' and 'gender' have become naturalized so much that it requires great analytical effort to lay open the fact that they actually constitute social constructs and reveal the force of stigmatization connected with them. As Rustin was simultaneously part of both the established and the outsiders, the oppression he was subjected to was neglected by some who only considered his privilege. Due to the profundity with which the belief in essentialism has become ingrained in society, race thus occupies a special position within

Rustin's and many other figurations. But what makes his case particularly interesting with regard to race is that discrimination due to his skin color ironically seems to have had less of a negative impact on Rustin's life in the short run – i.e., at the very period when racial inequality seemed to be the most prevalent issue – than it did in the long run. Indeed, it was mainly after Rustin's death that racist thought structures (in Blacks and whites alike) either neutralized or devalued certain empowering forces in his life, by regarding them as privilege or dismissing them altogether. While figurational sociology and the analytical concept of an established-outsider relation does not lead to a complete dissolution of this dichotomy, it helps to form a more complex image by placing an emphasis on the underlying power relations that produce, or rather surface as, racism.

A closer look at Elias's book will now elucidate the dynamics between the established and the outsiders. In their sociological field study, Elias and his colleague Scotson examine two groups of residents in a small community in England they name "Winston Parva" (39), revealing a sharp division between them although there are no differences in terms of nationality, ethnicity, religion, or social class. Whereas the established stigmatize the outsiders in ways reminiscent of mechanisms frequently employed to justify racist or homophobic discrimination, none of the commonly given reasons apply here because the groups only differ in the amount of time they have lived in the same area. The families of the first group, the established, have known each other for two or three generations. Thus, their social networks are very dense, and they also hold the monopoly on positions in local organizations, such as city council, church, etc. (cf. 4). The outsiders, on the other hand, do not form a coherent group because as newcomers who only recently moved into a new housing development they are strangers both to the old residents and to each other (4). This observation makes Elias conclude that aspects commonly associated with discrimination, such as skin color or the like, are a less significant reason for oppression. Instead, both the power differential between groups and the process of group formation itself deserve closer attention.

According to Elias, the power of the established over the outsiders is then mainly due to the fact that their group is very tight-knit and integrated, which allows them to close ranks against the newcomers. Within their dense social networks, the established have developed distinct norms and modes of behavior to which they attribute a high value (8, 147-48). This

ascription of positive qualities results in a feeling of superiority shared by all members of the established group, which Elias refers to as “group charisma” (103). The practice of gossip constitutes the most important and effective instrument to maintain group charisma among the established and to simultaneously attribute “group disgrace,” i.e., to ascribe the worst qualities of a minority to the whole group of outsiders (104). Group disgrace is accomplished through the practice of “blame gossip” (122) in which outsiders are accused, for example, of smelling bad, being lazy, or being less intelligent than members of the established. The established, on the other hand, talk about themselves in exactly opposite terms: They constantly reaffirm the best qualities and accomplishments of their group members through “praise gossip” (122). Indeed, the social control exerted through these two types of gossip plays a decisive role in the reproduction of the unequal power balance between both groups.

Interestingly, today’s discourse about Rustin still appears to be organized along the same paradigm of praise-gossip and blame-gossip as outlined in Elias’s study: Rustin’s story is viewed in terms of how it might affect the existing power dynamics; consequently, qualities or facets of his case that truly challenge or even undermine the current relations between groups are either ignored, distorted, or judged negatively. For example, while Rustin’s work has been honored by naming a high school after him in his native town of West Chester, Pennsylvania, the text about Rustin’s life on the school’s website says nothing about his homosexuality and his advocacy for gay and labor rights, topics that continue to be considered controversial by some in contemporary America (cf. “Rustin History”). The fact that certain pieces of information are deliberately left out when it comes to shaping his legacy shows the continuous control over the narrative of his persona. Thus, the reception of Rustin’s story can be said to reveal the persistence of established-outsider figurations that equally affects all those who choose to talk about or ignore his case.

Not belonging to the established obviously constitutes a disadvantage. In the case of Winston Parva, the outsiders are not even aware of the power dynamics that result in the formation of groups, since the ostensive prerogative of defining and naming members of *both* groups is entirely left to the established. In fact, the newcomers at first do not even regard themselves as a group, let alone a group of outsiders that in the eyes of the established does not come up to their norms. If, in line with the long-term approach of

figurational sociology, we transfer this insight to the historical situation of Blacks in the U.S., it becomes clear how deep-seated and also how constructed the notion of race and the corresponding status of black and white individuals are in society: The black people who were abducted from their home countries and later sold as slaves, did not initially see themselves as a group either, for they often were divided by different languages and dialects, cultures, and also the point of time they were enslaved and forced on ships to America (Beer and Jacob 26). Rustin, through his black ancestors, shared this past collective experience. However, he also possessed a habitus shaped by the behavioral religion of Quakers that seemed to work against some of the negative forces imposed on black bodies by whites through slavery. His belief not only provided Rustin with an empowering mind-set but also with embodied knowledge that stood in stark contrast to the stigmatization connected with race.

According to Elias, the established always attribute the worst qualities of an anomic minority of outsiders to the entire group. This explains why in a case of an exceptional outsider like Rustin even a single individual can constitute a threat to the social standing of an entire group of outsiders if that group is being subjected to discrimination by a group of established. In addition, aspects that are regarded as positive character traits or accomplishments in the group of the established take a negative turn when a member of the outsiders possesses them. These qualities are then either devalued or ignored (Elias and Scotson 120). Rustin's case again illustrates this practice: Neither his adherence to Quakerism nor his clear statements against the Communist Party (Levine 20), gained him respect from the established, in real life or in discourse. Instead, these aspects were either dissociated from him as an individual or linked to other issues, such as his sexual orientation, resulting in a strong rejection of Rustin (Podair 20).

Elias stresses that the power differential between established and outsiders is primarily held up by the feeling of either superiority or inferiority on the part of the members of the respective group. Yet when the power differential changes and the outsiders gain more power, new norms and modes of behavior must be found by the established to ascertain that they may once again set themselves apart from the outsiders. This observation is also crucial to understanding some of the transformations that oppression has undergone in the 21st century: Especially a closer examination of 'race' and 'class' shows that while power differentials may have changed, the

practices of oppression have not disappeared but rather transformed according to the social dynamics within figurations. A figurational perspective therefore also takes the underlying and slow-changing structures of thinking into account, and thus helps explain why the implementation of new laws or acts, for example, does not immediately lead to the intended results in society. Consequently, 'transformation' constitutes the more appropriate term in this context, for the connotation of 'change' suggests a much more drastic effect than can actually take place both within and between figurations. Transformation instead captures the social processes initiated *by* change and conveys the aspect of persistence concerning certain stigmatizations and self-images. While it also emphasizes that human relations can by no means be characterized as stable, it acknowledges the continuity of power relations and alludes to the fact that the respective stigmatizations are revised according to the dynamics both within and between figurations.

SILENCING AND UNSILENCING

Against the background of figurational theory, the lack of Rustin's public recognition, or his so-called *silencing*, can now be conceptualized as one of the examples of the transformations of oppression. As I would argue, the silence about Rustin after his death is directly related to the very established-outsider figuration that affected him throughout his life. Yet the thesis of a continuing power differential between the two groups contradicts the progressive narrative prevalent in the historiography of the Civil Rights movement that suggests a successful outcome of the struggle in the form of a constant development toward a more equal, better future (Alexander 101-02). According to this narrative, power relations after Rustin's death would have changed to his benefit, so that the ongoing lack of recognition was ascribed to his personality rather than to persistent oppressive structural forces. However, Rustin does not cater to that progressive narrative. In fact, his very existence could even be seen to subvert the predominantly optimistic view of the Civil Rights movement. His subversive potential provides yet another explanation for why he was rarely (prominently) included in the literature about the Civil Rights era. Given the social significance of so-called individual cases, we may assume then that Rustin's story has never been irrelevant to larger debates. In fact, when at the height of the Civil

Rights movement he had become a public persona, his example was repeatedly used in arguments about the moral or political future of the United States (D'Emilio 191-92). Yet laying claim to his case usually meant that certain aspects of his person were either played down (if not ignored) or exaggerated – depending on the respective agenda of the established.

As the following example will illustrate, the Movement used Rustin's 'personal image' to counter outward attacks against him and – by proxy – defend the Movement as a whole. At first, white supremacists targeted Rustin, one of the key strategists of the Movement, on account of his former brief communist affiliation and his homosexuality. Since some black leaders also felt uneasy about supporting Rustin due to too many controversial issues connected to his personality, it was not until later, shortly before the March on Washington, that he received strong public support from other prominent black leaders: In view of the underlying charges of immorality, Rustin was (and had to be) primarily defended as 'a man of character.' Yet, this strategy also (erroneously) affirmed the conceptualization of 'morality' as something universal that was not subject to power dynamics. In fact, however, ideas of morality were clearly shaped by the more powerful whites and their norms and could be used to easily discredit an entire group if only a single member was believed to stray from the path that they, the established, had identified as the acceptable one. Consequently, Rustin's endorsement prior to the March on Washington did not include his sexuality, nor was it shared by all Civil Rights proponents. On the contrary, the fact that Rustin was gay required a supportive statement by fellow activists, lest the entire Movement suffer from Rustin's bad reputation (Podair 59). As the main organizer and strategist of an event embedded in a mass movement that was about to profoundly impact social relations in America, Rustin was deemed significant enough by both his allies and his adversaries to manipulate information and create partial and thus distorted images of him. Thus, as independent as he strove to be, he was and continues to be subject to the bene- (and male-) violence of the established, in various kinds of figurations.

Rustin's example thus reveals how individual stories fall victim to larger dynamics of power. This happens through the aforementioned silencing of certain aspects and thus the distortion of the person's public image – if he/she is not erased altogether from public memory. Whoever does not neatly fit into the distinct categories that hold the power relations in place is

perceived as a threat by the established and will therefore be either misrepresented by or eliminated from the discourse.

CLASS

In Rustin's case, 'class' constitutes one of these aspects that have not received adequate consideration and thus caused a distortion of his story. For example, Rustin's socialization in one of the most influential, predominantly white religious groups in the United States, the Religious Society of Friends, is routinely mentioned, but rarely analyzed. This leaves room for uninformed, simplified ideas or even stereotypes about Quakerism, for instance as regards whiteness or wealth.⁴

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- 4 It is crucial to clarify that while Quakers, compared to many of their contemporaries, possessed the *spiritual* foundation to consider Blacks or women as equals, these beliefs did not immediately translate into social practices. In fact, the rather common narrative of Quakers as ultimate equalizers who were exempt from racism is not supported by historical evidence. Although Quakers were among the first *in relation to* their contemporaries to fight against injustice and include marginalized groups into their community, their practices, such as segregated seating during meetings, were in fact not as detached from the secular world as one would be inclined to think. The complicated process of coming to terms with their history, including racism, is ongoing for Quakers and sheds a new light on the past (cf. McDaniel and Julye). Yet, from a figurational perspective, these comparatively new insights about Quaker history must still be considered against the strong background of the Quakers' we-image and collective fantasies that inform the habitus of their community members. In other words, reality is not 'void' due to the revelation of new facts according to a figurational perspective. Reality is indeed never 'fact-based,' but rather always the result of beliefs, power dynamics, and social practices. This helps us understand why, in contrast to a non-figurational perspective, the lived experience of many marginalized groups does indeed *not* immediately change significantly, even though newfound evidence would suggest otherwise. Since incorporated 'knowledge' persists in people, buildings, and institutions even when new facts call into question the very beliefs that informed and created them, change can never be as drastic as a substantialist approach would suggest.

According to this reasoning, Rustin, as a black Quaker, is either labeled an ‘Uncle Tom’ because he is said to betray his race, or he is declared an odd exception that can be dismissed. Without considering the theology of the Religious Society of Friends, however, these notions easily confirm the categories ‘black’ and ‘white,’ working toward perpetuating existing but rarely scrutinized structures that link skin color with economic and social standing. That being said, how can it be explained that Rustin’s Quaker faith received significantly less attention than his homosexuality, his skin color, or his interest in labor rights?

Seen through the lens of an established-outsider figuration, it becomes clear that the tightly-knit pacifist community of Quakers with their great amount of *social capital*,⁵ their belief in the equality of all people, and their emphasis on education does not fit the negative image the established have of the outsiders. The very fact that Rustin mentored Dr. King in pacifist tactics, for example, is closely related to his Quaker upbringing: The Quakers traditionally hold strong pacifist convictions and regard it as an integral part of their faith to act upon their spiritual beliefs and to become politically active (Hamm 12). Moreover, the power differential between groups is inextricably bound to differentials of *cohesion* and *integration*. Due to resources within the Quaker community, such as their group cohesion and trusted reputation, Rustin’s affiliation with the Religious Society of Friends afforded him the social capital of a very influential and special kind of privileged group. Given the 370-year history of Quakers, a history that, particularly during its early years, was marked by marginality and rebellion, such a claim of ‘privilege’ may seem ironic if not paradoxical. Yet, the Quakers’ image gradually changed with their steady development from “a peculiar people” (Hamm 194) to a both economically and politically active and successful group.

Indeed, the example of the Quakers illustrates how a formerly oppressed group – in the course of centuries – has been able to redefine its role in society. Interestingly, the Quakers’ notorious skepticism, or even rejection, of authority can be regarded as one of the main reasons for this

5 “Social capital is the totality of resources (financial capital and also information etc.) activated through a more or less extended, more or less mobilizable network of relations which procures a competitive advantage by providing higher return on investment.” (Bourdieu, *Social Structures* 194-95)

development. To speak with Elias, Quakers, according to their habitus, were prone to ignoring or even rejecting the group disgrace that had formerly been attributed to them by the established, i.e., the commonly recognized religious denominations. Instead, they cultivated their own virtues, such as pacifism, integrity (e.g., in trade), and education and, over time, earned the public's respect. The recognition by mainstream America was not even a goal of the Quakers; they simply rigorously abided by their own standards and thus resembled a common behavior put forth by the established.

Rustin's religious belief gave him the feeling of belonging to a community and the ability to "speak truth to power" (American Friends Service Committee 1967) – i.e., to question authority with "plain speech" (Hamm 23). It also made him less susceptible to feelings of inferiority which the established strive to instill in the outsiders. On the contrary, Rustin was part of one of the religious groups that in hindsight were considered the spiritual founding fathers and thus, quite literally, the establishment of America. Although Quakers had been regarded as outsiders in times gone by, their important role in U.S. history increasingly bestowed them with a very unique and well-respected standing in American society (Hamm 3-4; 10-12).

HABITUS

As has already been mentioned above with regard to slavery, which marks a collective experience for most African Americans, the behavioral creed of Quakerism likewise inscribed itself onto *Friends'* bodies. Rustin, too, came to embody cognitive structures and modes of behavior based upon Quaker values, and it is this Quaker habitus that makes his development into one of the great Civil Rights leaders more plausible than mere contingency (cf. Bourdieu, *Distinction* 333). To quote William Deal and Timothy Beal's summary of Bourdieu's concept:

a *habitus* is a set of dispositions that generate and structure human actions and behaviors. It shapes all practice, and yet it is not experienced as repressive or enforcing. Its effects on us typically go unnoticed. [...] How does one come to or learn a particular habitus? Bourdieu describes this process as one of informal, unconscious

learning rather than formal instruction. [...] The habitus one occupies shapes the practices that one engages in. [...] Once internalized, habitus dispositions are taken for granted. (50-51)

Frequently accused of determinism (see Bourdieu and Wacquant 132-36), Bourdieu in fact always insisted that habitus was a product of history. Thus, while the habitus of an individual makes his/her practice, conduct, decisions, etc. seem ‘natural,’ one should not conclude that a habitus constitutes essential or innate characteristics of that person. Yet, this reasoning is frequently applied to the issues of ‘class’ and ‘race.’ A set of allegedly inherent qualities is attributed to people based on their ancestry, upbringing, or skin color, which results in a certain evaluation of that group and its individual members. While Bourdieu clearly distances himself from such essentialist thinking, he stresses the (symbolic) power attached to both the perception and possession of a particular habitus:

Bourdieu’s notion of habitus is not simply about a process of socialization or enculturation into a set of practices, but is also concerned with the power relations that exist between social classes, that is, with how social inequality is perpetrated and maintained. Habitus functions to distinguish social classes from each other. [...] [T]his is so socially powerful, [...] because class inequalities and the dominance of one class over another occur covertly. Rather than the application of overt force, symbolic power is harnessed to maintain class distinctions and the appearance of their naturalness. (Deal and Beal 51)

Against this background, it is interesting to return to the correlation of habitus and class in Rustin’s life: According to Bourdieu, ‘class’ comprises the amount of *economic, social, and cultural capital*. This results in a particular lifestyle that is bound to certain values as well as a corresponding degree of *symbolic power* (Swartz 333). As Rustin’s Quaker upbringing went along with a traditionally high regard of education, a great amount of social capital, and a long tradition of political activism based on one’s spiritual beliefs, ‘class’ can be said to have played a crucial part in enabling his rise to power. But it was then either dismissed or even blotted out from current accounts of his life – thus depriving Rustin (and perhaps people he could have been seen to represent, such as gays or African Americans) of that source of symbolic power.

Considering Rustin's Quaker upbringing in the light of figurational theory challenges commonly racist, divisive structures in dominant thinking, for this spiritual background introduces a new perspective on issues that usually tend to be solely regarded in terms of race – which means to run the risk of perpetuating racist thinking by means of a reasoning similar to that of the established. In order to truly challenge racism, however, the unscrutinized naturalization of this term, as it occurred in the course of a long and continuing process of social construction, must be pointed out and revealed as rooted in power dynamics.

RACE

While 'class' can be considered an empowering factor in Rustin's life, 'race' undoubtedly plays a decisive negative role. Rustin experienced blatant racism throughout his lifetime. He was beaten and verbally abused as a Freedom Rider and activist as he put his body on the line to challenge racism. Compared to the time after his death and other aspects relevant to his story that were silenced, however, one could infer that 'race' did – at first glance – at least not completely hinder Rustin from exerting influence during his lifetime. For a certain period of the Movement, particularly during the time following the March on Washington, Rustin was by some even considered part of the Civil Rights establishment. His was a well-known name among radical pacifists; he worked closely with A. Philip Randolph and Dr. King and was a coveted speaker and advisor in non-violent tactics (D'Emilio 358-61). At the time, other issues connected to Rustin, such as his short-lived Communist affiliation or his sexuality, caused greater stigmatization than his skin color. After his death, however, race appears to outweigh any of the privileges Rustin's class affiliation may have suggested. Taking into consideration the numerous figurations of which he was part, this suggests that the reception of his case is still dependent on the established-outsider figuration that continues to operate along the lines of skin color. The stigmatizations, however, tend to be more complex and do not reveal their roots in racism immediately. Here, a figurational perspective helps lay open the dynamics leading to the silencing of Rustin.

In the time after the Civil Rights movement, when power differentials were beginning to change in favor of the African American outsiders, the

majority of whites did not show any interest in casting a positive light on the “troublemaker” Rustin (Levine 41) so that his negative image remained tied to his alleged communist beliefs. The majority of African Americans did not provide Rustin with much support either. Due to his cooperation with (primarily white) labor rights activists and his strong opposition to Black Power, Rustin was regarded as a “sell out” and further fell out of favor with many Blacks and whites when he and his white partner openly advocated for gay rights in the 1980s (Podair 33-34; Levine 191, 216-17, 242-43).

From a figurational perspective, one could explain this kind of detachment with the fear of an increase of stigmatization should the openly gay Rustin be seen as standing for their entire group. This could have been used by the established against the slowly growing power of outsiders, because homosexuality was then closely linked to immorality. Moreover, Rustin, who was active in various fields, did not maintain the distance that was usually upheld between the outsiders and the established (that is both Blacks and whites, as well as other outsiders and established) but in fact reached out and sought to integrate (all of) these separate camps, asserting that “[w]e are all one” (Chang and Terry 253). Against Rustin’s intention, however, this tireless effort of coalition-building made him even more suspicious (for either side) of being a traitor. Elias explains this phenomenon as follows:

The very existence of interdependent outsiders who share neither the fund of common memories nor, as it appears, the same norms of respectability as the established group, acts as an irritant; it is perceived by the members of the latter as an attack against their own we-image and we-ideal. The sharp rejection and stigmatisation of the outsiders are the counter-attack. (*Established* 30-31)

Indeed, one could say that Rustin, by being the complex person he was, revealed how Blacks and whites who had been systematically divided by skin color were associated with categories, preferences, or opinions that were by no means inherent to a certain ‘race.’ And yet this very mobility that allowed him to move between various groups should neither be considered an entirely deliberate choice, nor a merit of Rustin’s. Rather, it was his habitus that enabled and at times may even have forced him to repeatedly undermine, expand, and overstep the boundaries erected between groups. Thus,

Rustin's case demonstrates particularly well that any proclaimed essentialism is fictitious and that the naturalization of differences which people have come to accept is in fact a social practice of division in which they are complicit. Great efforts had to be continuously undertaken in order to uphold these apparently natural divides; gossip, written and unwritten laws, as well as segregation actually helped construct and perpetuate such differences.

In Rustin's eyes, these practices were oftentimes justified under the guise of protecting or restoring identity. Consequently, he initially spoke out against Black Power, an idea he thought wrongfully constricted the issue of justice and – as did so many other ideas related to identity – rendered collective action impossible. Given the importance of a positive we-image for groups, Rustin's opposition to Black Power caused significant irritation among its followers and attached the persistent label of a traitor to him once again (Levine 210). The former Freedom Rider and well-known Civil Rights activist James Farmer did not express a singular opinion when he said: "Bayard has no credibility in the Black community. Bayard's commitment is to labor, not to the Black man" (Levine 244). Rustin, however, whose intention it was to break the cycle of division between the races, classes, or nations, criticized Black Power not for the pride and dignity for which it stood but merely as a potential source of division.

Referring to Elias's theory, one could say that the group charisma promoted by Black Power in Rustin's eyes only entrenched positions instead of solving the larger, underlying problems. In his 1966 article, "'Black Power' and Coalition Politics," Rustin claimed that Black Power not only worked toward segregation but also distracted people from the actual challenge in society: injustice. Hinting at what he perceived to be the lack of a clear strategy behind the slogan "Black Power," one that would succeed at overcoming racism, he wrote: "The issue was injustice before 'black power' became popular, and the issue is still injustice" (39). With this statement, Rustin pointed out the larger, social issues at the core of oppression. His habitus led him to perceive the political struggles around him from the perspective of the Quaker principles he was socialized to hold, which also meant to prioritize the greater goal over smaller victories. The alienation this caused among other black activists is certainly understandable. In their eyes, Rustin was self-righteously skipping crucial steps in the process of liberation that – to them – formed the only solid foundation for a better

future. However, as the figurational perspective helps us understand, Rustin's take on Black Power should not be mistaken for a white perspective; rather, it was a spiritual perspective that became essentialized as white.

While it is not surprising that the heteronormative, white establishment did not make an effort to promote him, the question remains why it took more than ten years for a handful of scholars, mainly from the queer and African American communities, to rediscover Rustin after his death. In this context, the aspects of evaluation and norms become relevant again. The power of definition the established exert over the outsiders creates a profound and persistent feeling of inferiority amongst the latter. The established not only determine the virtues and forms of capital that are deemed important in any given field, they also declare themselves the 'yardstick' by which all others are to be measured. Since the established always attribute the highest value to their group and all of its members, it is virtually impossible for the outsiders to reach the standard defined by the established. This can result in feelings of inferiority that show in apathy or, as in Rustin's case, the intermittent absence of work about him.

Nevertheless, social dynamics at least seem to promise certain 'advantages' for those outsiders who learn to comply with the rules of the established. Rustin's case was (and may well be) misunderstood to constitute an example of that, as he was frequently accused of being 'a traitor to his race,' for instance. Rustin's case still runs the risk of being misread by (white) established who might use his story to infer that it was indeed possible to 'bypass' racism if an individual was capable enough, thus blotting out social and structural forces. According to this reasoning and in line with the behavior of the established, Rustin's story would then only serve the purpose of casting a negative light on all others who allegedly lacked that 'ability' – which is obviously highly problematic. It is therefore important to acknowledge that hardly any group of outsiders possesses, like the Quakers, a spiritual foundation that provides them with the historical background of successfully resisting the dominant norms and rules of conduct. Consequently, it is crucial to be aware of Rustin's unique socialization with Quaker values, for his case could otherwise easily be exploited for either colorblind, racist, or otherwise misinformed arguments that fail to take multiple facets of a person as well as social dynamics into consideration.

Seen from an established-outsider perspective, the fact that Rustin's biography is barely discussed, or for that matter fully recognized, can be regarded as an attempt to inhibit the power potential inherent in his case. Rustin's notorious crossing of the lines between various social groups carries the danger of providing cohesion within these separated and marginalized groups – and, consequently, unite and empower them (Elias and Scotson 5-6). Thus, it may not be altogether surprising that the discourse about the ultimate integrator Rustin still operates exclusively within the paradigm of the outsider, and thus fails to account for the content of his message. It is as if Rustin's greatest asset during his life, the fact that he was never 'either ... or' but always 'both ... and,' continues to work against him to such an extent that it prevents the larger implications of his story from coming to the fore. Indeed, the main decision about Rustin's legacy was made within an established-outsider figuration in which his persona – if for different reasons – was and continues to be claimed by the established in various figurations for their own respective purposes.

Instead of repeating that Rustin was an outsider in the conventional sense, research should address the question why society still tends to take for granted the reasons for the silencing of his full and complex story. The fact that certain parts of that story now enjoy renewed interest is subject to the very same power dynamics. Thus, both the phenomenon of silencing – the lack of public recognition of Rustin's whole story – and his unsilencing – the rediscovery of his case – constitute significant examples of the transformation and reproduction of oppression.

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