

Walter Williams essays answering questions at quora.com

AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE 20TH CENTURY

[Why do people have to link black civil rights movement and gay rights? Can anybody give me a real answer?](#)

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[Was Martin Luther King Jr. against homosexuality?](#)

Some of the responses written here are downright false. I have direct knowledge on this subject, because when I was a teenager in Atlanta, in 1965-1968 I was actively involved in the civil rights movement. I heard Martin Luther King speak on three occasions, once in his church, once at a civil rights protest where I held a picket sign, and once at Georgia State University where I was a student (1966-70).

At GSU I led a student protest movement that persuaded the hostile GSU administration to invite Dr. King as a speaker. I proudly sat in the front row as Dr. King gave the first speech by an

African American to be sponsored at GSU. He spoke in a very erudite academic manner, quite different from his style of speech at the civil rights demonstration, which was itself very different from his Baptist-preacher style of speaking at his church. I learned from his example the importance of speaking in a way that is appropriate to the particular audience being addressed.

After his speech I shook hands with him and told him about our student protest that got him the invitation. He smiled and warmly replied.

In 1963, when South Carolina's segregationist Senator Strom Thurmond made a speech in Congress lambasting the planned civil rights march, he railed against the main organizer of the march Bayard Rustin as "a homosexual pervert." Thurmond entered into the *Congressional Record* a police report about the arrest of Rustin in Pasadena, California, for having sex with two underage white gay teenagers.

In response, several leaders of the march advocated getting rid of Rustin because of the controversy. But Dr. King strongly spoke in defense of Rustin, saying he was the best organizer the movement had, and it would be unfair to dump him because of his sexuality. King's insistence held sway, and Rustin was not removed. Though the 1963 March on Washington is most remembered for Dr. King's famous "I have a dream" speech, it was due to Bayard Rustin's superior organizing skills that the march was such a grand success.

Dr. King remained close friends with Rustin, who had a major influence on King's philosophy of non-violent civil disobedience. Dr. King was also a close friend of the gay black writer James Baldwin.

Many years later, in the 1990s when I was a professor at the University of Southern California, Dr. King's widow and I were giving speeches on the same panel. Coretta Scott King stated that "If Martin were alive today, I am totally convinced that he would be in the forefront of the gay and lesbian rights movement. He treated all people with respect, opposed all kinds of discrimination, and supported equal rights for everyone." She reiterated that view even more strongly when I spoke with her individually.

Someone once asked me, "Who is the Martin Luther King of the gay rights movement?" Because I knew the real history, I replied, "It is Martin Luther King himself." It is impossible to know of Dr. King's actions, and to read his essential writings, without understanding that his doctrine of "equal justice for all" applies to all. That is the essential message that we must remember, and always honor

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LGBT people of color have served as obvious linkages between the movements. For example, Bayard Rustin, a black gay man who worked closely with Martin Luther King, was the chief organizer of the 1963 March on Washington. Coretta Scott King, Jesse Jackson, and Julian Bond were forthright in their efforts to build alliances between the two movements. The U.S. Congressional Black Caucus has been a steadfast proponent of civil rights legislation to be applied to sexual orientation.

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[Who organized the 1963 March on Washington?](#)

The person who did the main organizing for the 1963 March on Washington was a black gay man named Bayard Rustin. He had learned tactics of nonviolent massive civil disobedience while working in India, and he had a major influence on Martin Luther King. A couple years before the march he had been arrested while having sex with two teenage boys in the back seat of his car, in Pasadena CA. South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond, a strict segregationist, made a speech on the Senate floor, loudly denouncing Rustin as a “sex pervert.” The other civil rights leaders already knew that Rustin was gay, and accepted him, but Roy Wilkins tried to remove Rustin from his position in fear that the controversy would damage their march’s credibility. However, Dr. King strongly stood up for Rustin, calling him the best organizer they had.

Though the March on Washington is most famous for Dr. King’s “I have a dream” speech, it more properly should be called “Bayard Rustin’s March.” His skilled work was largely responsible for its smooth operation and public success. After that, Dr. King and especially his wife Coretta Scott King, spoke out strongly for LGBTQ rights. She was joined by Julian Bond, who later became a champion of Gay Rights when he was president of the NAACP. Bayard Rustin was their prime inspiration, and his 1963 march became the model for the first Gay and Lesbian March on Washington, in 1979.

[Were there any white people or any people from other races that support the Civil Rights Movement? Quora 2022](#)

Walter L. Williams, Ph.D.

I was a white teenager growing up in Atlanta in the 1960s. When a black friend of mine tried to register as a student at my segregated white high school in 1964, a group of students threw a hail of rocks at him until he was forced to run away. I was so upset when I saw the end of this encounter, that I wrote an editorial in our school newspaper, stating that the era of segregation was over, and we whites should adjust to reality and welcome black students to our school. That editorial earned me a trip to the principal's office, where I was berated by the vice principal for being "a communist agitator." My family was from the South since the colonial period, and I had never even met a communist, so I knew in my heart that he was wrong and I was right. This was the first time I really stood up to someone in authority. I refused to retract my editorial.

This incident made me so upset that I went downtown to Ebenezer Baptist Church to hear Rev. Martin Luther King preach. I was inspired by Dr. King to join the civil rights movement. I was in several protest demonstrations, I wrote several articles that were published, and I worked as a volunteer in the campaign of Maynard Jackson, the first black candidate for mayor of Atlanta. I also met and talked with Julian Bond, Coretta Scott King, Jesse Jackson, and others. In 1968 I was injured at a George Wallace rally when I showed up holding a sign stating "George Wallace is a Nazi." One of his supporters grabbed my sign and hit me over the head with it, knocking me to the ground. A whole riot broke out all around me. My parents were supportive of my activism, but when my parents saw my actions on TV in that evening's news my father made me promise I would not put myself in such physical danger again.

Soon after that, I met Professor John Hope Franklin, the first black man elected as president of the American Historical Association. I explained my commitment to activism, but also told him of my father's fear for my safety. Dr. Franklin inspired me to refocus my activism, away from dangerous street protests and into academics. I went to graduate school, doing research on Black History. He helped me with my Ph.D. dissertation, that was eventually published as a book **BLACK AMERICANS AND THE EVANGELIZATION OF AFRICA**, published in the University of Wisconsin African Studies Series. I published many articles challenging racism as well.

Many people have asked me why I got involved in the civil rights movement. I think the main factor was that as a teenager I secretly recognized my homosexual feelings, and though I was at that time much too closeted to protest for my own rights, I could admire black people for standing up for their rights. I saw the South as not only racist, but also homophobic, and I rebelled against both those dominant structures. I wrote about this topic in an essay included in a book titled **GROWING UP GAY IN THE SOUTH** by Professor James T. Sears. My gay activism in the 1970s and 1980s grew directly out of my experience in the civil rights movement. Later I learned that many of the white Southerners who were involved in civil rights were either gay or lesbian or Jewish, all minorities in the South who questioned the dominant code of conduct.

At the time, people told me I was endangering my future if I kept up this activism. Now, I look back on my civil rights work as one of the proudest activities of my youth. In 2005 I was given an award from the Gandhi Center for Reconciliation, at Morehouse College, for my years of activism and publishing for human rights. It was certainly something I would never have expected when I was out there putting my body on the line in those civil rights movements, but I am grateful to have lived long enough to see major changes in society. This is proof that I was on the right side of history, and I have been battling against discrimination of all kinds ever since then. There is still much to be done in the campaign for civil rights, but I am proud of the contributions I have been able to make.

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Why does my DNA say I am 9 percent Native American? I am black and I only know one grandparent, but my mother’s people are from Louisiana and my father’s from Mississippi.

<https://www.quora.com/Why-does-my-DNA-say-I-am-9-percent-Native-American-I-am-black-and-I-only-know-one-grandparent-but-my-mother-s-people-are-from-Louisiana-and-my-father-s-from-Mississippi>

Many of these comments reveal a complete lacking of history. Indigenous Americans were living in the Americas for many thousands of years before the Europeans came. The Spanish and Portuguese, and later the French, Dutch and English, all started enslaving these Native people, forcing them to labor in mining and agriculture. Spaniards used force to make Native workers mine silver and gold in Bolivia, Peru, and Mexico. Portuguese, Dutch, French, and English forced Natives to raise rice, indigo, corn, and other crops. The Native people had very few diseases, and thus had no immunity to all the new diseases that the Europeans brought with them. The Europeans had no understanding that many diseases are caused by microbes, and as they saw the Natives dying in large numbers they claimed that God was killing them because they did not believe in Christianity.

Because so many Natives were dying from the new diseases, as well as from warfare and massacres, the Europeans had to look for other sources of labor. The Portuguese were the first to turn to West Africa as their labor source, and they brought more Africans as slaves than any other colonialists. More slaves were brought to Portuguese Brazil than to any other country.

The second largest number of Africans who were captured and packed onto slave ships, were sent to Spanish, Dutch, English, and French colonies in the Caribbean Islands. There they were forced to labor on sugarcane plantations. Working with sugarcane is particularly hard work, and the average lifespan of an African slave in the Caribbean was only seven years. They were literally worked to death. The slaveowners did not care, because they could sell the sugar at such a high profit that they could easily purchase more slaves. The most profitable colony in the Americas was the French colony that is today Haiti. The French exploited the African slaves so severely that this small island produced fabulous wealth for the French slaveowners. Some of those Frenchmen migrated to Louisiana, and developed sugar plantations there. As in the Caribbean, processing sugarcane was brutal work, and the death rate for slaves was very high.

The Dutch also developed plantations, and they were prominent in the African slave trade. In 1619, Dutch slave traders sold some African captives to British settlers in the colony of Virginia. They were put to work growing tobacco, which was also very profitable for the landowners. The British settlers started expanding their lands, and the Native Americans resisted. The British responded by capturing large numbers of Natives

and forcing them to work on their tobacco plantations as well. The labor force was both African and Indigenous American.

The British also developed slave plantations growing sugar in Barbados and other Caribbean Islands. As they expanded over all the small islands, they needed more land. A group of English settlers from Barbados migrated to the British colony of South Carolina, bringing African slaves with them. As they expanded, they came into conflict with the Indigenous people of that area, and they captured and enslaved many of them.

Therefore, in both Virginia (which expanded tobacco plantations into eastern North Carolina) and in South Carolina (which grew mostly rice and indigo), the slave population was both African and Indigenous American. Over time, many of these enslaved people had sex with each other. Especially in South Carolina, there was a high rate of interbreeding with the two groups.

Virginia and South Carolina became the two colonies where slavery was most entrenched, and as new lands were taken from the Indigenous nations, the Virginians and Carolina slaveowners made much of their profits from selling their young slaves to whites who settled in Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Florida, Tennessee and Kentucky.

If your ancestors came from Mississippi and Louisiana, it is quite likely that their ancestors were from South Carolina or Virginia. Thus, it is not surprising that you would have some Native American ancestry. In fact, people today who identify as African American have higher rates of Indigenous ancestry than any other group of Americans.

This fact should not be a cause for arguments about who is Native or who is not. The historical reality is that today's African Americans are a product of a brutal slave system that threw together two groups of people, and mistreated all of them. I taught Native American history for many years, at five universities. If you do not believe me, look at the historical sources and you will see that what I have said here is correct.

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