

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Byron Rushing

---

## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Rushing, Byron, 1942-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Byron Rushing,
<b>Dates:</b>	February 8, 2006
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2006
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:11:22).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Museum director and state representative The Honorable Byron Rushing (1942 - ) has sponsored civil rights and community development legislation in Massachusetts since his election in 1982. Between 1972 and 1985, he worked as president of the Museum of Afro-American History. Rushing was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 8, 2006, in Boston, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2006_013
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

---

## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Massachusetts state representative Byron Douglas Rushing was born in New York City on July 29, 1942. His father, William Rushing, worked as a janitor in the Washington Heights neighborhood of New York City. His mother, Jamaican native Linda Turpin, migrated to New York City working as a seamstress. The family moved to Syracuse, New York, where Rushing attended Madison Junior High. He was praised for his public speaking, and entered various oratorical contests. He also attended a youth summer camp, under the direction of the Universalist

Unitarian Church, which taught world peace and cultural understanding by bringing various racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious groups together. Rushing attended this camp throughout high school.

In 1960, Rushing graduated from Syracuse Central High School. Members of the Quaker church whom he met at his summer youth camp invited him to participate in another youth summer program operated by the American Friends Service Committee. Rushing was able to travel through Eastern and Western Europe. In the fall of 1960, Rushing attended Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. At the end of his junior year, Rushing decided to postpone his studies and fully dedicate his efforts to the Civil Rights Movement. He returned to Syracuse to work with the local chapter of CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] tackling issues of employment integration and police brutality.

Rushing moved to Boston, Massachusetts, in 1964 to work for the Northern Student Movement. He operated programs of youth tutoring, and voter education and registration. During this time, Rushing volunteered for various programs involving the Episcopalian church, his religious faith. He was hired by St. John's Church to set up a community information center. The Massachusetts Council for Churches then hired Rushing to establish a community organizing project called Roxbury Associates. It was at Roxbury Associates that Rushing met his first wife, Andrea Benton.

From 1967 to 1969, Rushing worked as an orderly at Rochester General Hospital. In 1969, Rushing returned to Boston as the Director of the Urban Change program for the Urban League. Between 1972 and 1985, he worked as president of the Museum of Afro-American History. As president, he helped raise money for the purchase and restoration of what was cited as the oldest African American church building in the United States, the African Meeting House.

In 1982, Rushing was elected as a representative of the Massachusetts House of Representatives. He was the chief sponsor of the law to end discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in public schools, and an original sponsor of the gay rights bill in Massachusetts. Rushing also led the Massachusetts state pension fund to launch community development investment of poor communities of Massachusetts. Rushing is an elected deputy to the General Convention of The Episcopal Church; a founding member of the Episcopal Urban Caucus; and serves on the boards of the Episcopal Women's Caucus and the Episcopal Network for Economic Justice.

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Byron Rushing was conducted by Robert Hayden on February 8, 2006, in Boston, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Museum director and state representative The Honorable Byron Rushing (1942 - ) has sponsored civil rights and community development legislation in Massachusetts since his election in 1982. Between 1972 and 1985, he worked as president of the Museum of Afro-American History.

---

## **Restrictions**

### **Restrictions on Access**

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

### **Restrictions on Use**

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

---

## **Related Material**

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

---

## **Controlled Access Terms**

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### **Persons:**

Rushing, Byron, 1942-

Hayden, Robert (Interviewer)

Burghlea, Neculai (Videographer)

### **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

Rushing, Byron, 1942---Interviews

---

African American state legislators--Massachusetts--Interviews

---

African American civil rights workers--Massachusetts--Boston--Interviews

---

Museum directors--Massachusetts--Boston--Interviews

---

### **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

---

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

---

Museum of Afro-American History (Boston, Mass.)

---

Massachusetts

---

### **Occupations:**

Museum Director

---

State Representative

---

### **HistoryMakers® Category:**

## **Administrative Information**

### **Custodial History**

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

### **Preferred Citation**

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Byron Rushing, February 8, 2006. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### **Processing Information**

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

---

## **Other Finding Aid**

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

---

## **Detailed Description of the Collection**

### **Series I: Original Interview Footage**

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Byron Rushing,  
Section A2006\_013\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:38 2006/02/08

The Honorable Byron Rushing was born on July 29, 1942

in New York City to Linda Turpin Rushing and William Rushing. An orphan born in the late 1880s, Rushing's father was divorced with children before moving to New York. His mother was born in Kingston, Jamaica in the late 1980s and brought to Ohio in her late teens as an indentured au pair. After repaying the family, she worked as a seamstress in New York City, where she married her first husband and lost a child. Rushing's father worked as a janitor in the Washington Heights neighborhood of Manhattan, New York. When Rushing was one year old, his father took an industrial job in Syracuse, New York. Rushing's parents separated soon after. Returning to live in New York City's South Bronx, Rushing attended P.S. 2 Morrisania and Trinity Episcopal Church of Morrisania. His parents reunited just before his father's death in 1951, and the family moved back to Syracuse. Rushing describes watching foreign films in Syracuse's theater, and his brothers' professions.

African American state legislators--Massachusetts--Interviews.

African American civil rights workers--Massachusetts--Boston--Interviews.

Museum directors--Massachusetts--Boston--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Byron Rushing, Section A2006\_013\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:56 2006/02/08

The Honorable Byron Rushing was baptized at the St. Augustine Presbyterian Church in the Bronx, New York by Elder Hawkins, who became the country's first African American Presbyterian moderator. Rushing attended P.S. 2 Morrisania in New York City, where the students and teachers were either African American or Jewish. His mother was a seamstress and brought Rushing to fittings in white middle class homes. Rushing also remembers visiting the Metropolitan Museum of Art and eating at automats with his mother. Rushing moved to the African American neighborhood known as the 15th Ward in Syracuse, New York when his parents reconciled. His father was a member of the NAACP, and his mother worked as a seamstress at local department stores. He attended Washington Irving Elementary School, Madison

Junior High School and Syracuse Central High School, where he was involved in oratorical contests and the honors society. His oldest brother joined the U.S. Navy, and his other brother attended The Juilliard School.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Byron Rushing,  
Section A2006\_013\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:52 2006/02/08

The Honorable Byron Rushing attended and served as a counselor at the Universalist Church's Camp Unirondack in Upstate New York, where he became involved in the Civil Rights Movement. In high school, Rushing was a member of the NAACP, took part in sit-ins at local department stores and met Ralph Abernathy and Eleanor Roosevelt. After graduating, Rushing travelled to Europe with the American Friends Service Committee. Upon returning to the U.S., he attended Harvard University. Rushing visited his brother in Boston, Massachusetts and became involved with the Congress of Racial Equality. He left Harvard University after three years to work for CORE in Syracuse, New York against urban renewal in the city. Rushing ran the CORE chapter in Syracuse for a year, and remembers shutting down one of the city's demolition projects. He met William Strickland, who connected Rushing with the Northern Student Movement. Rushing then returned to Boston to work for the organization's tutoring and voter registration programs.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Byron Rushing,  
Section A2006\_013\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:12 2006/02/08

The Honorable Byron Rushing was director of a voter registration program co-created by Boston's African American organizations, including James Breeden's Massachusetts Freedom Movement. He remembers the sense of community at the organizations' headquarters on Blue Hill Street, and learning about Boston politics from Royal Bolling, Sr. Rushing became the community organizer for the Massachusetts Council of Churches and established the Roxbury Associates with Charles "Chuck" Turner and Andrea Benton. The Roxbury Associates worked against urban renewal projects that displaced residents and created the Lower Roxbury Community Corporation. As a conscientious objector to the Vietnam War, Rushing was assigned to New York's Rochester

General Hospital in from 1967 to 1969. He then returned to Boston as director of Melvin King's Center for Inner City Change and Community Fellows Program, worked on Hubie Jones' congressional campaign, and created the Museum of Afro-American History in the African Meeting House.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Byron Rushing,  
Section A2006\_013\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:22 2006/02/08

The Honorable Byron Rushing was director of the Museum of Afro-American History at the African Meeting House in Boston, Massachusetts from 1972 to 1984. Rushing conducted an archaeological investigation of the building, recreated programs around the Black Heritage Trail, and worked to preserve African American buildings. Rushing reflects upon his achievements as director in exposing Boston's history to the public and establishing the Boston African American National Historic Site. He remembers giving a tour on the Black Heritage Trail and answering a young boy's questions about Boston. Rushing was elected into the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 1982. He replaced Melvin King as the representative of the Ninth Suffolk District. As a representative, Rushing was mentored by Doris Bunte and focused on public service programs and providing health insurance to those in need. He describes the racial and economic diversity of his district and the different neighborhoods he represents.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Byron Rushing,  
Section A2006\_013\_001\_006, TRT: 0:29:54 2006/02/08

The Honorable Byron Rushing's heard Malcolm X speak in Boston, Massachusetts when he was attending Harvard University. He describes how this influenced his religious beliefs. Rushing's first task as a Massachusetts state representative was to oversee Melvin King's divestment movement against South African apartheid. He helped pass legislation against companies invested in South Africa and remembers Nelson Mandela's visit to Boston. Rushing focused on civil and human rights in the United States and globally. He was instrumental in the creation of Massachusetts Burma Law of 1996, and he was one of the first proponents of Massachusetts' gay rights bill. At the



time of the interview, Rushing was working on legislation to alleviate homelessness and create housing. His partner, Frieda Garcia, worked for the United South End Settlements and Harriet Tubman House in Boston. He had one daughter, Osula Evadne Rushing, from his first marriage as well as a granddaughter. Rushing reflects upon his life and career.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Byron Rushing,  
Section A2006\_013\_001\_007, TRT: 0:11:28 2006/02/08

The Honorable Byron Rushing describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community and gives advice to young African Americans. He also talks about how he would like to be remembered. Rushing concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.