

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with James Breeden

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## Overview of the Collection

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| <b>Repository:</b>           | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616<br>info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com   |
| <b>Creator:</b>              | Breeden, James P. (James Pleasant)  |
| <b>Title:</b>                | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with James Breeden,   |
| <b>Dates:</b>                | September 12, 2007  |
| <b>Bulk Dates:</b>           | 2007  |
| <b>Physical Description:</b> | 7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:16:56).   |
| <b>Abstract:</b>             | Civil rights leader James Breeden (1934 - 2020) became a dean at Dartmouth College in 1984. In 1994, Breeden became a visiting scholar at the Howard Graduate School of Education, and in 2001 joined the School for International Training as adjunct faculty. Breeden was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 12, 2007, in Boston, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| <b>Identification:</b>       | A2007_258   |
| <b>Language:</b>             | The interview and records are in English.   |

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Civil rights leader James Pleasant Breeden was born on October 14, 1934 in Minneapolis, Minnesota to Florence Beatrice Thomas, a secretary and homemaker, and Pleasant George Breeden, a railroad dining car waiter. He was raised by his mother and stepfather Noah Smith and attended Harrison Elementary School and Lincoln Junior High School, both in Minneapolis. In 1952, Breeden graduated from North High School in Minneapolis and attended Dartmouth College.

In 1956, Breeden graduated cum laude from Dartmouth College with his B.A. degree. Two years later, he married Jeanne Marie Savoye in Geneva, Switzerland. The following year, Breeden obtained a certificate from the University of Geneva in connection with his work at the Ecumenical Institute World Council of Churches in Bossey, Switzerland. In 1960, Breeden graduated from Union Theological Seminary with his M.Div degree and moved to Boston, where he joined the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts.

From 1960 until 1965, Breeden was a member of the Episcopal Diocese as a deacon, priest and canon at St. James Church and St. Paul's Cathedral. He became an advisor to Bishop Anson Phelps Stokes in the area of civil rights. During this period, Breeden was heavily involved in the Civil Rights Movement. In 1961, he participated in the Freedom Rides and was arrested in Jackson, Mississippi for "action likely to cause a riot." He and others were later freed when the case was dismissed. In 1963, Breeden helped organize the first "Stay out for Freedom" event in Boston protesting the city's lack of quality public education for African American students. The following year, Breeden was involved in rent strikes against landlords who were taking advantage of their tenants.

Breeden joined the National Council of Churches' activist leadership in 1965, where he would remain for two years coordinating non-violent mass protests. In 1967, Breeden became the Director for the Commission on Church and Race for the Massachusetts Council of Churches during the time of the Boston race riots. In 1969,

Breeden joined the faculty at Harvard Graduate School of Education, and in 1972 he earned his Ed.D. degree from the school. Breeden moved to Tanzania and became Professor of Education at the University of Dar Es Salaam in 1973, where he set up a master's degree program in education administration.

Breeden returned to Boston two years later, joining the Citywide Coordinating Council in 1976 and monitoring the Boston Public Schools' compliance with the federal order to desegregate. In 1980, Breeden became a Senior Officer for Planning and Policy at Boston Public Schools. Breeden became a dean at Dartmouth College in 1984 of the William Jewett Tucker Foundation. In 1994, Breeden became a visiting scholar at the Howard Graduate School of Education, and in 2001 joined the School for International Training as adjunct faculty.

Breeden was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on September 12, 2007.

Breeden passed away on September 21, 2020.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with James Breeden was conducted by Larry Crowe on September 12, 2007, in Boston, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Civil rights leader James Breeden (1934 - 2020) became a dean at Dartmouth College in 1984. In 1994, Breeden became a visiting scholar at the Howard Graduate School of Education, and in 2001 joined the School for International Training as adjunct faculty.

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## 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®.

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## 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.

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## Controlled Access Terms

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

### Persons:

Breeden, James P. (James Pleasant)

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Breeden, James P. (James Pleasant)--Interviews

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## Occupations:

Civil Rights Leader

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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## 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 James Breeden, September 12, 2007. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

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## 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 James Breeden, Section A2007\_258\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:24 ?

James Breeden was born on October 14, 1934 in Minneapolis, Minnesota to Florence Thomas Smith and Pleasant Breeden. His maternal great-grandparents were Swedish and German. His maternal grandmother, Johanna Johanson Thomas, was born in Malmo, Sweden, and moved to the United States at fourteen years old; while his maternal grandfather, Frederick Thomas, was the son of an escaped African American slave and a Cherokee woman. Breeden's maternal grandparents met while working at a hotel in Minneapolis, where they later married, built a home and raised three children, including his mother. Breeden's father was born in Des Moines, Iowa, and left home at ten years old. He worked as a hearse cleaner, and then as a waiter on the Great Northern Railway, before settling in Minneapolis. There, he met Breeden's mother, who worked as a secretary. After marrying, they raised Breeden in the house his maternal grandfather built, located in a European immigrant community on the north side of Minneapolis.

Video Oral History Interview with James Breeden, Section A2007\_258\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:38 ?

James Breeden grew up in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where he began his education at William H. Harrison Elementary School. He was one of three black students, and had a close knit group of white friends who defended him from racial discrimination. Breeden went on to attend Abraham Lincoln Junior High School, where he was active on the debate team; and later the all-male North High School, where he excelled academically. At twelve years old, he joined the Boy Scouts of America, and attended the Many Point Scout Camp in Ponsford, Minnesota, where he later served as a camp counsellor. At sixteen years old, Breeden was invited to attend the World Scout Jamboree in Austria. His trip was sponsored by white attorney John B. Faegre, Jr., who encouraged him to apply to Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, and assisted with his financial aid application. In 1952, Breeden graduated as salutatorian of his high school class, and received a scholarship to Dartmouth College.

Video Oral History Interview with James Breeden, Section A2007\_258\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:59 ?

James Breeden majored in philosophy and comparative literature at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, where he was mentored by Professor Francis Gramlich. He was one of three black students in his class, and was placed in segregated housing during his freshman year. He excelled on the debate team, but was barred from competing in the national freshman debate due to his race. Breeden also joined the Dartmouth Christian Union; which, in 1955, refused to attend a conference in Athens, Ohio due to the town's discriminatory practices. During Breeden's senior year, he was inducted into the Palaeopitus Senior Society, and won a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. He graduated cum laude in 1956; and, with the encouragement of Chaplain George H. Kalbfleisch, enrolled at the Union Theological Seminary in New York City. In 1958, Breeden took part in Operation Crossroads Africa's inaugural project in Nigeria, and then studied at the Graduate School of Ecumenical Studies in Switzerland.

Video Oral History Interview with James Breeden, Section A2007\_258\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:36 ?

James Breeden was mentored by theologian and activist Robert McAfee Brown at New York City's Union Theological Seminary. Upon graduating in 1960, he

was unable to obtain a position in the Episcopal Diocese of Minnesota, and accepted a curate position at St. James Episcopal Church in the Roxbury neighborhood of Boston, Massachusetts. There, Breeden led the youth ministry, and developed a peer tutoring program. He also joined the Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity, with which he took part in a Freedom Ride. He rode a bus to Jackson, Mississippi, where his integrated group was arrested for entering a segregated cafeteria, and found guilty of causing a civil disturbance. Breeden later served as a canon and civil rights advisor to Bishop Anson Phelps Stokes III at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul in Boston, where he led a boycott of the public schools to protest segregation. Later in 1964, he led a rent strike to protest inferior housing conditions. Breeden also remembers his visit to Ghana in 1958.

Video Oral History Interview with James Breeden, Section A2007\_258\_001\_005, TRT: 0:30:31 ?

James Breeden advocated for a civil rights platform during Massachusetts' gubernatorial election in 1964. He endorsed Republican candidate John A. Volpe, who appointed a civil rights secretary after his election. In 1969, Breeden accepted a teaching position at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, while also working on a doctorate in education administration. In 1973, he moved to Tanzania to teach at the University of Dar es Salaam, where he founded the education department's master's degree program. In the late 1970s, he supervised the desegregation of South Boston High School, where black students were bused from Roxbury. He was later appointed as director of the Citywide Coordinating Council, which monitored schools' compliance with court ordered integration; and became the director of planning and policy for the Boston Public Schools in 1980. Breeden also talks about Boston activists Sarah-Ann Shaw, Melvin Miller and Byron Rushing; community organizer training; and Tennessee's Highlander Folk School.

Video Oral History Interview with James Breeden, Section A2007\_258\_001\_006, TRT: 0:28:15 ?

James Breeden became an associate professor in 1969 at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, where he met activist Charles Willie. He also met activist Robert Parris Moses while teaching at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania from 1973 to 1975. From 1984, Breeden served as the dean of Dartmouth College's William Jewett Tucker Foundation in Hanover, New Hampshire. In this role, he supervised the social services and religious activities on campus. He also encouraged the college to build low income housing in Hanover, and divest from South Africa. From 1994 to 1996, Breeden was a visiting scholar at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He then left to teach at Howard University in Washington, D.C., where he founded the graduate program in education administration. In 1998, Breeden joined the faculty of the School for International Training Graduate Institute in Battleboro, Vermont. In addition, Breeden talks about The Dartmouth Review, a conservative campus newspaper.

Video Oral History Interview with James Breeden, Section A2007\_258\_001\_007, TRT: 0:22:33 ?

James Breeden and his wife, Jeanne Savoye Breeden, had four children: Margaret Breeden, Johanna Breeden, Frederick Breeden and Paul Breeden. Breeden describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community. He also reflects upon his life, legacy and how he would like to be remembered, and concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.