

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Byron Rushing

PERSON

Rushing, Byron

Alternative Names: The Honorable Byron Rushing;

Life Dates: July 29, 1942-

Place of Birth: New York, New York, USA

Residence: Boston, MA

Occupations: Civil Rights Leader; State Representative

Biographical Note

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.

Related Entries

Syracuse Central High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Madison Junior High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

P.S. 2 Morrisania School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Washington Irving Elementary School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Harvard University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Congress of Racial Equality [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Northern Student Movement [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

St. John's Episcopal Church [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Organizer

Massachusetts Council of Churches [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Center for Inner City Change [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Director

Rochester General Hospital [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from ? to ?]

Orderly

Museum of Afro-American History/Museum of African American History
[EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1972 to 1985]

President

Massachusetts House of Representatives [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1982 to ?]

Legislator

Northern Student Movement [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]

Massachusetts Council of Churches [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]

Field Director

Roxbury Associates [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]

American Friends Service Committee [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]

Community Voter Registration Project [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]