

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with James Breeden

PERSON

Breeden, James P. (James Pleasant)

**Alternative Names:** James Breeden;

**Life Dates:** October 14, 1934-September 21, 2020

**Place of Birth:** Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

**Residence:** Easthampton, MA

**Occupations:** Civil Rights Leader

## Biographical Note

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.

## Related Entries

**Dartmouth College** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**William H. Harrison Elementary School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Abraham Lincoln Junior High School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**North High School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Harvard Graduate School of Education** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Union Theological Seminary** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Diocese of Massachusetts** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Curate**

**St. James Episcopal Church** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Curate, leader of the youth ministry**

**Cathedral Church of St. Paul** [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from ? to ?]

**University of Dar es Salaam** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from ? to ?]

**Teacher**

**Citywide Coordinating Council** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from ? to ?]

**Director**

**Boston Public Schools** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from ? to ?]

**Director of Planning and Public Policy**

**Harvard Graduate School of Education** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from ? to ?]

**Professor, Visiting Scholar**

**Howard University** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from ? to ?]

**Professor**

**School for International Training Graduate Institute** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from ? to ?]

**Professor, Advisor**

**Dartmouth Christian Union** [MEMBEROf]  
[from ? to ?]

**Member**

**Boy Scouts of America** [MEMBEROf]  
[from ? to ?]

**Member**

**Palaeopitus Senior Society** [MEMBEROf]  
[from ? to ?]

**Member**

**Episcopal Society for Racial Unity** [MEMBEROf]  
[from ? to ?]

**Operations Crossroads Africa** [MEMBEROf]  
[from ? to ?]

