



## IVY TAYLOR

President of Rust College in Holly Springs, Mississippi, and former Mayor of San Antonio, Texas.

A native of Queens, New York, Ivy R. Taylor, is the 12th and first female President of Rust College in Holly Springs, Mississippi.

Prior to her selection as President, she spent twenty years in San Antonio, Texas as an affordable housing advocate, lecturer at the University of Texas at San Antonio, Texas, a member of the San Antonio City Council, and Mayor of San Antonio.

In 2020 she obtained a Doctor of Education degree from the University of Pennsylvania. In 1992 Ivy received her Bachelor's Degree from Yale University and in 1998 she obtained a Master's from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Ivy and her husband Rodney are the parents of a teenage daughter, Morgan.

# The American Brief

August 2020

Designed and launched by the Fundación Consejo España - EE.UU., **The American Brief** releases a monthly series of transcribed interviews on current topics to American personalities from politics, business, culture and academics.

...

**Before assuming the Presidency of Rust College, you served as Mayor of San Antonio, Texas, from 2014 to 2017, becoming the first African American and the second woman to be elected. How would you value this experience in office? What reasons drove you to redirect your professional career from politics to education?**

My experience as Mayor was very valuable. I learned a great deal about leadership and bringing a community together to pursue common goals. For many years, my focus was on creating opportunities for people through making places better because I was an urban planner. I focused on neighborhood revitalization and city government as the

“ The most rewarding aspect of my position are the interactions with students.



platform for helping people. At a certain point, I became more interested in how to make direct investments in people themselves. I realized that access to educational opportunities would give individuals the chance to thrive. That is the reason I redirected my career from urban planning through political office to higher education.

**Currently in charge of Rust College, what would you say is the most rewarding aspect of your position?**

The most rewarding aspect of my position are the interactions with students and the knowledge that the education and experience that they receive here will likely change the trajectory not just for them, but for their entire family.

**Rust College is one of the oldest colleges in Mississippi and belongs to the Historically Black Universities and Colleges (HBCU). We would like to learn more about the institution, its ethos and mission, its history, its students, its main achievements, and its future.**

Rust College was established in 1866 by the Freedman's Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Its founders were missionaries from the North who opened a school in Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church, accepting adults of all ages, as well as children, for instruction in elementary subjects. A year later the first building on the present campus was erected. In 1870, the school was chartered as Shaw University, honoring the Reverend S.O. Shaw, who made a gift of \$10,000 to the new institution. In 1915, the name was changed to Rust College. As students progressed, high school and college courses were added to the curriculum, and in 1878 two students were graduated from the college department. As public schools for African Americans became more widespread, the need for private schools decreased, and in

“The recent months of social unrest and protests in the United States have revealed that there are still many divisions and that systemic racism affects outcomes for Black Americans.

1930 the grade school was discontinued. The high school continued to function until 1953.

Among approximately 20,000 former students of Rust College, many completed only their elementary or secondary education. However, more than 5,500 have graduated from the college department. Among these alumni are bishops of the United Methodist Church and other church denominations, public school teachers and administrators, college presidents, lawyers, physicians, business and government leaders and ministers. The institution's mission remains relevant: “Rust College is a historically Black, co-educational, senior liberal arts college founded in 1866 by the Freedman's Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church to offer quality programs in business, education, humanities, science and math, and social science to prepare students for leadership and service in a global society.”

**101 institutions, both public and private, are member of HBCU. How necessary is the HBCU network within the framework of the American higher educational system?**

HBCUs are still very relevant in American society. The recent months of social unrest and protests in the United States have revealed that there are still many divisions and that systemic racism affects outcomes for Black Americans. Access to higher education can level the playing field but unfortunately due to systemic racism, Black Americans do not always receive the same support in a predominately white college that they do in an HBCU. America's HBCUs have been responsible for educating many Black professionals including doctors, lawyers, judges and scientists. HBCUs continue to graduate more Black students in the sciences than other institutions of higher education. HBCUs have an important role to play in continuing to produce leaders to address our nation's challenges.

**The educative community has been deeply affected worldwide by the COVID-19. What kind of measures did the educational authorities implement in the state of Mississippi? What is the general situation now? According to your view, was society prepared to face such an unexpected and disruptive challenge, especially within the family sphere?**

Leaders at the state level in Mississippi were originally hesitant to mandate specific responses to COVID-19. Local and municipal leaders were often more aggressive and when I arrived in Holly Springs in June there was a city order to wear face masks and to limit the size of gatherings. The last few weeks saw a big spike in COVID-19 cases in Mississippi. That is beginning to subside, but we are wary because some surrounding counties are still considered hotspots. I do not believe that most Americans were prepared to face the disruptive challenges associated with COVID-19 but many institutions have adapted well. Families that were already under tremendous strain due to health or financial challenges, are bearing the

“ COVID-19 has revealed many weaknesses in our communities.

brunt of the disruption and pain that is ongoing due to the pandemic. Households that cannot afford access to the internet have difficulty continuing work or educational activities from home. There are many children who relied on the school system for meals. Many community partners are working together to support these families, but in general COVID-19 has revealed many weaknesses in our communities.

### How has Rust College been affected by the pandemic?

Rust College has continued to offer academic instruction, though in a different format due to the pandemic. We have fewer students in our dormitories; on campus activities observe social distancing and students wear masks. In addition, many of our classes are offered via online platforms or in a hybrid format.

**The 2020/21 academic year is due to start and there is still a widespread sense of uncertainty about the re-opening of classrooms. Are we really facing a new educational model?**



Although Rust College is a traditional, residential liberal arts college, it is apparent that we will have to embrace more online and distance learning options even after the pandemic is over.

**As you may know, Spain and the United States exchange a significant number of students every year. Many Spanish students are closely following the latest news worried about the sudden change on the immigration policy that would affect not only international students but also visiting lecturers. Is Rust College particularly concerned by these new regulations that would restrict international mobility? What is your position on this regard?**

Yes, we are very concerned about restrictions on international students and visiting lecturers. We have decided that we will be flexible in our policies and procedures to accommodate our international students to ensure that they can stay at Rust until they graduate.

**After George Floyd and Rayshard Brooks's deaths, the movement Black Lives Matter quickly spread across the United States and worldwide calling to stop police violence and the excessive use of force against black people.**

**“We are very concerned about restrictions on international students and visiting lecturers.**

**How was the Holly Springs community involved in BLM? Can we eradicate systemic racism through education? What is the role of institutions such as Rust College in this collective effort?**

Holly Springs is a small community, but there was a BLM protest in the downtown square. Since students were not on campus during the protests because of the pandemic, there was not much opportunity for them to get involved in the protest. Rust College, historically, has been the center of civil rights activities in this part of the country in the 1960's. Even earlier, Rust produced a famous activist named Ida B. Wells-Barnett who was a suffragette, activist against lynching, journalist, and founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. We remind our students of her legacy and the need for them to be involved in active efforts to improve communities.

