

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Gabrielle Kirk McDonald

PERSON

## McDonald, Gabrielle Kirk

**Alternative Names:** The Honorable Gabrielle Kirk McDonald;

**Life Dates:** April 12, 1942-

**Place of Birth:** St. Paul, Minnesota, USA

**Residence:** McLean, VA

**Occupations:** Judge; Educator

### Biographical Note

Judge Gabrielle Kirk McDonald was born on April 12, 1942 in St. Paul, Minnesota to James Kirk and Frances English. McDonald was raised in Manhattan, New York and in Teaneck, New Jersey, where she graduated from Teaneck High School in 1959. In the early 1960s, she attended Boston University and Hunter College. She then went on to attend Howard University School of Law, where she was Notes Editor for the Howard Law Journal and received several academic awards. McDonald graduated cum laude and first in her class with her LL.B. degree in 1966.

Upon graduation, McDonald was hired as a staff attorney for the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. From 1969 to 1979, she was a founding partner, with her then-husband, attorney Mark T. McDonald, of the Houston, Texas law firm of McDonald & McDonald. While in private practice, she also taught law as an assistant professor at the Thurgood Marshall School of Law, Texas Southern University, and then as a lecturer at the University of Texas School of Law.

In 1979, McDonald was appointed as a judge on the United States District Court for the Southern District of Texas. She was the first African American to be appointed to the federal bench in Texas (and the South) and only the third African American woman federal judge in the country. McDonald resigned from the bench in 1988 and joined the law firm of Matthews & Branscomb. She also returned to academia, teaching first at St. Mary's University School of Law, and then at the Thurgood Marshall School of Law. In 1991, she became counsel to the law firm of Walker & Satterthwaite, and later served as Special Counsel to the Chairman on Human Rights for Freeport-McMoRan, Inc.

In 1993, McDonald received the highest number of votes from the General Assembly of the United Nations and served as one of eleven judges on the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. In 1997, she became the Tribunal's president. Then, in 2001, McDonald was called to serve as an arbitrator on the Iran-United States Claims Tribunal in The Hague, Netherlands, where she remained until her retirement in 2013.

Her publications include the co-edited volume, *Substantive and Procedural Aspects of International Criminal Law: The Experience of International and National Courts*, and numerous articles including *The International Criminal Tribunals: Crime and Punishment in the International Arena*, and *Problems, Obstacles and Achievements of the ICTY*.

McDonald was a member of the Board of Trustees of Howard University for twenty-three years. She also served on boards for the American Bar Association Human Rights Center and the American Arbitration Association, as well as on the Genocide Prevention Task Force. In 2014, she was elected Honorary President of the American Society of International Law. Her honors include the National Bar Association's first Equal Justice and Ronald Brown International Law Awards; the American Society of International Law's Goler T. Butcher Award for Human Rights; the Open Society Institute's first Women Groundbreakers in International Justice Award; the Dorothy Height Lifetime Achievement Award; and the Doctor of Laws Honoris Causa from several institutions. She was inducted into the Texas Women's Hall of Fame in 1993 and the National Bar Association Hall of Fame in 2008.

McDonald has two children, Michael and Stacy, who are both lawyers.

Gabrielle Kirk McDonald was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on August 27, 2014.

## Related Entries

**Howard University School of Law** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**LL.B**

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

**Boston University** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Teaneck Senior High School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**High School Diploma**

**The Manumit School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**JHS 101** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Ps 108 Philip J Abinanti School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**St Peter Claver School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Texas Southern University Thurgood Marshall School of Law** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Assistant Professor**

**University of Texas School of Law** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Lecturer**

**Freeport-McMoRan, Inc.** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Special Counsel to the Chairman on Human Rights**

**NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1966 to 1969]

**Staff Attorney**

**McDonald & McDonald** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1969 to 1979]

**Founding Partner**

**United States District Court for the Southern District of Texas** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1979 to 1988]

**Judge**

**Matthews & Branscomb** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1988 to ?]

**Lawyer**

**St. Mary's University School of Law** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1988 to ?]

**Visiting Professor**

**Walker & Satterthwaite** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1991 to ?]

**Counsel**

**International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1993 to 1997]

**Judge**

**International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1997 to 2001]

**President**

**Iran-United States Claims Tribunal** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from 2001 to 2013]

**Arbitrator**

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

**Board of Trustees Member**

**American Bar Association Human Rights Center** [MEMBEROf]  
[from ? to ?]

**Board Member**

**American Arbitration Association** [MEMBEROf]  
[from ? to ?]

**Board Member**

**Genocide Prevention Task Force** [MEMBEROf]  
[from ? to ?]

**Member**

**American Society of International Law** [MEMBEROf]  
[from 2014 to ?]

**Honorary President**