

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with George McKenna, III

PERSON

McKenna, George

**Alternative Names:** George McKenna, III;

**Life Dates:** September 6, 1940-

**Place of Birth:** New Orleans, Louisiana, USA

**Residence:** Los Angeles, CA

**Occupations:** High School Principal

## Biographical Note

George McKenna III was born in New Orleans into a family that was steeped deeply in the culture and history of the city. At the age of twenty, he received a B.A. in mathematics from Xavier University and was awarded a teaching fellowship to Loyola University, where he earned an M.A. in mathematics. He also holds a doctor of education degree from Xavier University.

In 1962, McKenna accepted a teaching position in the Los Angeles Unified School District. While continuing his education at Loyola University Law School, the University of California, Los Angeles and California State University at Los Angeles, McKenna remained a teacher, working at both the secondary and college levels.

McKenna became principal of George Washington Preparatory High School in 1979. At the time, this high school was one of the most notorious and violent in Los Angeles, replete with gangs, drug dealing and gun fights. McKenna and his reform tactics turned George Washington Preparatory High School around, transforming it from a failing institution to one where nearly eighty percent of its graduates went on to college.

McKenna's programs have been modeled throughout the nation. He has served as a consultant to numerous school districts and law enforcement agencies. He is also the author of several articles that have appeared in local and national newspapers and educational journals. McKenna has received more than 400 citations and awards from civic, legislative and professional organizations. His work led to his being the subject of the award-winning CBS movie, *The George McKenna Story*, starring Denzel Washington.

In 1989, McKenna received the Congressional Black Caucus' Chairman's Award and

in 1997 was elected into the National Alliance of Black School Educators' Hall of Fame.

## Related Entries

**Valena C. Jones Elementary School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**St. Augustine High School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**diploma**

**Xavier University of Louisiana** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**B.S.**

**Loyola University Chicago** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**M.A.**

**Xavier University of Louisiana** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Ed.D.**

[STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Compton Unified School District** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Superintendent**

**Los Angeles Unified School District** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1962 to 1970]

**Teacher**

**Los Angeles Unified School District** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1970 to 1988]

**principal, administrator**