

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Robert L. Wilkins

PERSON

Wilkins, Robert Leon, 1963-

**Alternative Names:** The Honorable Robert L. Wilkins;

**Life Dates:** October 2, 1963-

**Place of Birth:** Muncie, Indiana, USA

**Work:** Washington, D.C.

**Occupations:** Judge

## Biographical Note

Judge Robert L. Wilkins was born on October 2, 1963 in Muncie, Indiana to Joyce Hayes Wilkins and John Wilkins. After graduating from Northside High School, Wilkins received his B.S. degree in chemical engineering from the Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology in 1986, and his J.D. degree from Harvard Law School in 1989.

In 1989, Wilkins began his career as a law clerk for the Honorable Earl B. Gilliam of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of California. Following his clerkship, Wilkins returned to Indiana to practice law and worked briefly for DeFurVoran. In 1990, he joined the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia, where he served as a staff attorney in the trial and appellate divisions. In 1996, he was promoted to special litigation chief. From 2002 to 2010, he served as partner of Venable LLP; and, in 2005, he founded the D.C. Access to Justice Commission. Wilkins was appointed U.S. District Judge for the District of Columbia in 2010. In 2014, he was appointed to the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit.

Wilkins was a member of the American Bar Association, the National Bar Association, and numerous sentencing and juvenile justice related associations. In 2003, Wilkins was a member of the presidential commission that advised President George W. Bush on the establishment of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History and Culture; and, in 2016, Wilkins authored Long Road to Hard Truth: The 100 Year Mission to Create the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

In 2001, Wilkins was named Pro Bono Attorney of the Year by the American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland, and received the Henry W. Edgerton Civil Liberties

Award sponsored by the ACLU Fund of the National Capital Area. In 2008, Wilkins was named one of the 90 Greatest Washington Lawyers of the Last 30 Years by Legal Times Journal. In 2014, Wilkins received an honorary doctorate of engineering from Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology and the National Bar Association's Gertrude E. Rush Award. He was also named one of the 40 most successful litigators under 40 by the National Law Journal.

Wilkins was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on May 15, 2019.

## Related Entries

**Garfield Elementary School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Riley Elementary School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Westwood Elementary School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Burris Laboratory School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

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

**Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**B.S.**

**Harvard Law School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**J.D.**

**Gamble-Norris Junior High School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

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

**United States District Court for the Southern District of California** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1989 to 1990]

**Law Clerk for Judge Earl B. Gilliam**

**Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1990 to 2002]

**Staff Attorney**

**Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia** [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1996 to 2000]

**Chief of Special Litigation**

**Venable LLP** [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from 2002 to 2010]

**Partner**

**U.S. District Court, District of Columbia** [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from 20101227 to 2014]

**Judge**

**U.S. Court of Appeals, District of Columbia Circuit** [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from 20140115 to ?]

**Judge**

**D.C. Access to Justice Commission** [MEMBEROf]

[from 20050307 to 2011]

**Founder; Member**

**National African American Museum and Cultural Complex** [MEMBEROf]

[from 1999 to 2003]

**President**

**D.C. Advisory Commission on Sentencing** [MEMBEROf]

[from ? to ?]

**Member**

**D.C. Truth-In-Sentencing Commission** [MEMBEROf]

[from ? to ?]

**Member**

**D.C. Juvenile Justice Advisory Group** [MEMBEROf]

[from ? to ?]

**Member**

**National Museum of African American History and Culture Study Commission**

[MEMBEROf]

[from 2000 to ?]

**Member/Chairman**

**Public Defender Service, District of Columbia** [MEMBEROf]

[from 2002 to 2007]

**Trustee**

**Public Defender Service, District of Columbia** [MEMBEROf]

[from 2007 to 2008]

**Vice Chair**

