

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Vanzetta Penn McPherson

PERSON

McPherson, Vanzetta Penn, 1947-

Alternative Names: The Honorable Vanzetta Penn McPherson; Vanzetta Penn McPherson

Life Dates: May 26, 1947-

Place of Birth: Montgomery, Alabama, USA

Residence: Montgomery, Alabama

Occupations: Entrepreneur; Federal Judge

Biographical Note

Vanzetta Penn McPherson is a retired United States magistrate judge in her hometown of Montgomery, Alabama. McPherson was born on May 26, 1947, to Sadie and Luther Penn. McPherson received her B.A. degree in speech pathology and audiology from Howard University in 1969, her M.A. degree in 1971 from Columbia University, and her J.D. degree, also from Columbia, in 1974.

McPherson began practicing law as an associate at Hughes Hubbard & Reed, a Wall Street law firm. She stayed there until 1975, when she became an assistant attorney general for the State of Alabama. In 1978, McPherson began practicing law in Montgomery, focusing on family and constitutional law. McPherson was appointed United States magistrate judge for the Middle District of Alabama in 1992 and was re-appointed in 2000; she retired from the bench in 2006.

One of the most notable rulings for McPherson was a discrimination case involving the Alabama Two-Year College System. Three females at two different Alabama colleges were denied promotions because they were women and because of their age. McPherson ruled in favor of these women and ordered the college system to give them the promotions; she also ordered back pay for the women.

In 1989, McPherson and a fellow lawyer founded and built Roots & Wings, a cultural bookstore that serves as a showcase for black history, art and literature. McPherson holds life memberships of the National Bar Association and the American Bar Association. McPherson also served on Alabama's Federal Judicial Nominating

Commission, the Eleventh Circuit Advisory Council, and several advisory committees to the Alabama Supreme Court; she is also a past president and vice president of the Alabama Lawyers Association, past president of the Montgomery Chapter of the Federal Bar Association and chair of the Family Law Section of the Alabama State Bar.

McPherson has received awards from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Women of Distinction, South Central Alabama Girl Scout Council, and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

McPherson and her husband, Thomas, have raised four children.

Related Entries