

# WE EXIST

## EVIDENCE OF MAINE'S BLACK FAMILIES

from 1800 to the 20th Century



### Series 1: Family—Quotes

“We Exist: Evidence of Maine’s Black Family from 1800 to the 20th Century” is the first of a six-part digital exhibit series. The exhibit centers on Black inhabitants in the state of Maine and seeks to tell their stories through a variety of institutions. This series focuses on the family with specific interests in family demography, childhood experiences (parents and offspring), parent-child relationships (attitudes and behaviors), romantic relationships, and family traditions, of Black inhabitants who lived or are currently living in Maine from the 1800s to the 20th century. The exhibit is comprised of photos, written transcripts, and audio interview clips from the Gerald E. Talbot and African American Collections.

In this section, we have selected quotes that represent how Black residents in Maine view their family life. The quotes are taken from transcripts of the oral history project “Home Is Where I Make It”: African American Community and Activism in Greater Portland, Maine.” The interview subjects are all native to Maine or are longtime residents of Maine. The original intent of the “Home Is Where I Make It” project was to highlight Black residents’ history and struggle for community in southern Maine in both their formal organizational memberships and day-to-day activities. The interviews, however, unearthed a wealth of rich data related to family forms and functions and provided insight into how Black residents in Maine conceptualize various aspects of family.

There is a brief biographical data description of each of the interviewees and a photo. The quotes that are attributed to the interviewees are arranged by themes. The themes include:

- Family Demography
- Childhood Experiences
- Children's Experiences
- Impact of Maine on the Family
- Parenting Attitudes and Behaviors
- Holidays and Family Traditions
- Family Challenges

Childhood experiences refer to the experiences of the interviewees whereas children’s experiences refer to the experiences of the interviewees’ offspring. Themes can be browsed by scrolling down or by pressing CTRL+F/Command+F on your keyboard and typing in your search terms. **Please visit the main site learn more about this exhibit and to browse additional resources:** <https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/we-exist-exhibit/>.



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# Family Demography

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## EVIDENCE OF MAINE'S BLACK FAMILIES from 1800 to the 20th Century



### Mr. Edgar Anderson



"I've been married twice. In my first marriage, I married my high school sweetheart... No. I married the woman I dated from high school. So, we have, well, we have a son who's just turned 32 two weeks ago. He also has a wife. I have three grandchildren... He has three kids. He has a son, Lamont, who is eight. And he just had twin girls, Marisa and Mariah, who are gonna be one on June 30th of this year."

Mr. Edgar Anderson (Male; age 51; born 1950 in Chicago suburb called Harvey)

Keywords: family demography, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Anderson, Edgar](#)

### Ms. Beverly Bowens



"...I have one brother who's older than I am...My own family. I was married to a surgeon who died shortly after I was married; three years after I was married. I have one child, Alison. And I have a granddaughter and I have a brand new grandson-relatively new grandson."

Ms. Beverly Bowens (born in Maine; age 67; left at 21 years old for about 35 to 40 years and then returned to Maine)

Keywords: family demography, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Bowens, Beverly](#)

### Ms. Odessa Barret



"My own family? I have two adult children and two grandchildren...No. I have been married...A few times...I have two. I have a daughter and a son...They're right here in Maine, Portland, as a matter of fact."

Ms. Odessa Barret (age 53; born 1948 in Port Arthur, Texas; born in a middle-class, blue collar family; moved to Maine in October 1979)

Keywords: family demography, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Barret, Odessa](#)

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## EVIDENCE OF MAINE'S BLACK FAMILIES from 1800 to the 20th Century



### Reverend Albert and Clemmie Jackson



"Neville Knowles who, ah -- ah I met him. Ah, I was a teenager at the time and we lived next door. And, ah, him and his family was hardworking."

Reverend Albert Jackson (born in Slabfork, Virginia; age 61; lived in Maine for 43 years) and Mrs. Clemmie Jackson (born March 1948 in Marengo County, Alabama; age 55; lived in Maine for 3.5 years)

Keywords: childhood experiences, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Jackson, Rev. Albert and Clemmie Jackson](#)

### Ms. Wahidah Muhammad



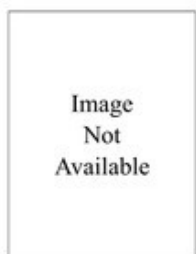
"I have one son. He is, um -- he'll be 40 this year. And I'm a grandmother of one 13-year-old son."

Ms. Wahidah Muhammad (born 1948 in Chicago, Illinois; lived in Maine since December 1991; lived in Lewiston since 1997)

Keywords: family demography, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Muhammad, Wahidah](#)

### Mr. Rupert Richardson



"Yes, I'm married. My wife is Canadian. In fact, my oldest brother, he married a Canadian. So in this particular case, brothers married sisters. So his children and my children, they can't get any closer as far as being blood relatives."

Mr. Rupert Richardson (born in Portland, Maine; living in Maine for 71 years)

Keywords: family demography, Black Families, Maine

Selected Audio: [Series 1: Family - Recordings](#)

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Richardson, Rupert](#)

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## EVIDENCE OF MAINE'S BLACK FAMILIES

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### Mr. Richard Tarrence



"Loretta. Loretta-my ex wife; I'm now divorced. But we did move back here and raised my son. Eventually had a daughter in '83."

Mr. Richard Tarrence (age 57; born 1945 in Cleveland, Ohio; moved to Maine in October 1975)

Keywords: family demography, Black Families, Maine

**Selected Audio:** [Series 1: Family - Recordings](#)

**Full Length Interview:** [Home is Where I Make It: Tarrence, Richard](#)

# Childhood Experiences



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## EVIDENCE OF MAINE'S BLACK FAMILIES from 1800 to the 20th Century



### Mr. Edgar Anderson



"Well, being the second of six children and the only boy in the family, it was sort of different for me. Not having any brothers set up sort of how I was raised. My parents were divorced when I was ten, so I grew up in a house with six women: my mom and my five sisters. So, I learned to do everything that women traditionally do. I can cook, clean, sew, bake. I grew up doing all that. Clean house and doing all of those things."

Mr. Edgar Anderson (Male; age 51; born 1950 in Chicago suburb called Harvey)

Keywords: childhood experiences, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Anderson, Edgar](#)

### Ms. Beverly Bowens



"...And in evaluating it, I would say that I had a wonderful childhood here on Munjoy Hill..."

Ms. Beverly Bowens (born in Maine; age 67; left at 21 years old for about 35 to 40 years and then returned to Maine)

Keywords: childhood experiences, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Bowens, Beverly](#)

### Mr. James Mathews



"My father's name was Oscar Mathews, Jr., and he worked for the railroad. Not like a chef, but he was a cook on the railroad, and he traveled between Boston, Massachusetts, and Portland for a number of years. And my mother, her name was Llewena Hill Mathews, and she was one of the first graduates of Gorham Normal School which is now the University of Southern Maine. And she was an accomplished pianist, and she also was attempting to become a school teacher, but at the time Black school teachers were not hired."

Mr. James Mathews (age 59; born 1941 in Portland Maine; married with five children; lived in Maine all his life – lived in South Portland for over 26 years)

Keywords: childhood experiences, Black Families, Maine

Selected Audio: [Series 1: Family - Recordings](#)

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Mathews, James](#)

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## EVIDENCE OF MAINE'S BLACK FAMILIES

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### Mrs. June McKenzie



Mrs. June McKenzie (age 72; born 1929 in Portland Maine; fifth-generation Mainer; lived in Maine all her life)

Keywords: childhood experiences, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: McKenzie, June](#)

### Mr. Rupert Richardson



"I think it was great. I know, I lived here. As I pointed out, you know, I was born and raised here in the city. And the section of the city that we lived in all the people got along famously. We were one large, happy family, in the west end. And to this day, those that are still living: you know, we're still one happy family."

Mr. Rupert Richardson (born in Portland, Maine; living in Maine for 71 years)

Keywords: childhood experiences, Black Families, Maine

Selected Audio: [Series 1: Family - Recordings](#)

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Richardson, Rupert](#)

### Mr. Richard Tarrence



"Good question. It certainly is different than growing up in the inner city. When I came to Maine I had a pretty difficult adjustment period. Just some of those cultural things that I'm used to are not here. It's often difficult to get a haircut. You know, exposure that you would have normally in the inner city or growing up somewhere with your own population, it's just a lot of little things missing—connections are missing. And, you know, raising my children is interesting in that as they grew older and as they noticed the very differences, they were starting to mix in very well. They were making friends, and, you know, they were involved in sporting activities and community."

Mr. Richard Tarrence (age 57; born 1945 in Cleveland, Ohio; moved to Maine in October 1975)

Keywords: childhood experiences, children's experiences, Black Families, Maine

Selected Audio: [Series 1: Family - Recordings](#)

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Tarrence, Richard](#)



# Children's Experiences

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**Ms. Odessa Barret**



"...When I came here, there weren't very many Blacks, so there was no real sense of community. There was no place where you can go and see yourself en masse. So my kids, being from the South, had already had their sense of identity so it was really hard for them because they either had to teach people who they were or struggle to maintain their own identity."

Ms. Odessa Barret (age 53; born 1948 in Port Arthur, Texas; born in a middle-class, blue collar family; moved to Maine in October 1979)

Keywords: children's experiences, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Barret, Odessa](#)

**Reverend Albert and Clemmie Jackson**



"Harrison loves it...He don't want to live in no place but in Maine...And, ah, my son Randy was born here and, ah, he --he's been exposed to Maine I guess ever since -- he's born here. Ah, he doesn't know any other place that, ah, -- or actually he hasn't moved but he has, ah, been here. He went to high school here, went to college. And, ah, he's, ah -- he's raising two children, him and his wife. And he -- he seems to be very satisfied -- very stable. So, you know."

Reverend Albert Jackson (born in Slabfork, Virginia; age 61; lived in Maine for 43 years) and Mrs. Clemmie Jackson (born March 1948 in Marengo County, Alabama; age 55; lived in Maine for 3.5 years)

Keywords: children's experiences, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Jackson, Rev. Albert and Clemmie Jackson](#)

**Mrs. Emma Jackson**



"Well, I suppose we had a sense of who we were and a sense of self -- self worth anyway... So it -- they were able to live here. They enjoyed it. It wasn't really -- they didn't have a struggle to live here... And they kind of knew who they were and had a sense of who they were so they were able to make their own way... And we came here with family. I came here with family. Years ago that's the way a lot of people came to Maine."

Mrs. Emma Jackson (age 62; born 1941 in Atlanta Georgia; lived in Maine for 46 years; has three children)

Keywords: children's experiences, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Jackson, Emma](#)

# Impact of Maine on the Family

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## EVIDENCE OF MAINE'S BLACK FAMILIES from 1800 to the 20th Century



### Mr. Edgar Anderson



"I moved to Portland on my honeymoon with my second wife; and she's white. We moved to Portland in 1985, and we have two kids: Ashley, who just turned 14, and she's going to be going to Deering, I guess... And I have a son, Jordan, who's ten, who's going to Lincoln. My daughter and Ashley Brownlee played basketball together this past weekend and they won a tournament down in Massachusetts. So all the basketball coaches and softball coaches are after her because she's probably gonna start as a freshman on the basketball team at Deering."

"I came to Maine in 1985 and, as I said before, I believe, my wife and I came here on our honeymoon. And we came here, basically, to get away from the city, away from the hustle and bustle and thought that the pace of the city of Portland was slow enough that we could have a good quality of life. And that has, in fact, been the case. We've been able to come here and raise our family, and have decent jobs, and enjoy what Maine has to offer, not only from the standpoint of the ocean and other things, but also the people."

Mr. Edgar Anderson (Male; age 51; born 1950 in Chicago suburb called Harvey)

Keywords: impact of Maine on the family, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Anderson, Edgar](#)

### Ms. Beverly Bowens



"As I mentioned, I don't feel that it was any different than any other family in Maine. I think I am very Maine oriented. I am very loyal to Maine. When I went to New York and anyone said anything about Maine, I was very much on the defensive. So, all I can say is that I am a Maine person and that will never change. When I went to New York., it was okay. I'm not a cosmopolitan person, although I loved New York. But you feel that this is a part of your home. Your upbringing. Maine people, I feel, are very diligent in their work. And that was the effort that we were all brought up with."

Ms. Beverly Bowens (born in Maine; age 67; left at 21 years old for about 35 to 40 years and then returned to Maine)

Keywords: impact of Maine of the family, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Bowens, Beverly](#)

# Parenting Attitudes and Behaviors

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## EVIDENCE OF MAINE'S BLACK FAMILIES from 1800 to the 20th Century



### Mr. Edgar Anderson



"I'm still raising mine, so the difference for me has been that my older son, because his mom and I were not together a lot. I really didn't get the opportunity as a young person to raise my older son. However, with my current wife, I'm older. I was a lot older when I had my kids that we have now. I am a lot more mature and have been able to try and appreciate more the fact that I have a family and to spend time with my kids. So, I think just by being older and having kids later on in life gives me a chance to appreciate them more as a parent. Because before I was just, really just like an older kid that had some kids. You know what I mean?"

"I'm currently involved in my kids' lives. This interview, I guess, was designed for people who are like, like grand kids; their kids are already up and grown. I just spent last weekend down in Massachusetts with-as I said before-with my daughter who played in basketball tournaments Saturday and Sunday, so we spent the weekend in Massachusetts playing basketball. This weekend her mom will spend time with her in Hudson, New Hampshire, playing softball. She's also a softball player... Yeah, and two weeks from now we're gonna be in Connecticut, and the week after that we'll be playing basketball in D.C. So we're very involved with our kids, and they get a chance to see other places, too, besides Maine, which is good."

Mr. Edgar Anderson (Male; age 51; born 1950 in Chicago suburb called Harvey)

Keywords: parenting attitudes and behaviors, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Anderson, Edgar](#)

### Mrs Odessa Barret



"I was there. I taught them pride in themselves. I taught them to have faith and to be strong. And I taught them that there was a direction that was uphill and that there was another direction that was downhill, but I would wish that they would choose the uphill direction." "The experience of trying to keep your children secure in who they were was very hard."

Ms. Odessa Barret (age 53; born 1948 in Port Arthur, Texas; born in a middle-class, blue collar family; moved to Maine in October 1979)

Keywords: parenting attitudes and behaviors, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Barret, Odessa](#)



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### Ms. Beverly Bowens



"Well, I don't know. That's very difficult. Who knows what a success is. Some people don't know until they're forty or fifty. I think with the children today, if you can get them through school, academically and economically, that's pretty good. If you can keep them away from drugs or alcohol, I think that's something to be accomplished today. I can't think of anything that I did that was special. I don't know if my daughter is a success; she's doing well, but you would have to ask her if she's a success. I think most parents then and today try to do the best they can with their children, so I don't know. She's a very charitable person, I think, and a caring person, and a very tolerant person. And that's all I ask.."

Ms. Beverly Bowens (born in Maine; age 67; left at 21 years old for about 35 to 40 years and then returned to Maine)

Keywords: parenting attitudes and behaviors, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Bowens, Beverly](#)

### Ms. Rose Jackson



"With me, you couldn't use them alike. You always had to use each individual child differently. My oldest son was my friend; he was always there for mama. My oldest daughter: I loved her, but she was a headache. You know, the one that's dead. She was as sweet as she could be, but she was always finding something to do. She would always knock one of her brothers out [laughter] with something. But the boys got along good together; they got along good together, the boys did. But you imagine me having four sons and a daughter that many years before I had another baby girl? Ah, that was so wonderful when they told the doctor I was having another girl. We was a close family."

"I never did drink. You know, and never did do things that I didn't want them to do. You know, I see a lot of parents what they go and do these things and then they'll beat the kid because they did it. My things was to talk to the child more. Long years ago all they believed in getting a switch or something to whup them. But I would talk to them more because beatings is not the answer. Yeah, sometimes we had to spank them, sure, but just to beat them about everything. No, no, I don't think so. 'Cause you know, long years ago we had children that wet the bed. And I seen a lot of people whup their children, but I wouldn't because they couldn't help that. I remember I had three bedwetters at once; and you know they gotta go to school, so what you gonna do? You're not gonna let them go to school smelling. So, know what I did? I would wait until five o'clock the next morning and wake them up and bathes them. You know? Yeah, because if they go to school without being bathed, you know what they're going to smell like, don't you? So this one little girl, they picked at her at school all the time. Cried. And my son come home, say, 'I feel so sorry for Judy, Mama.' I say, 'What happened?' [cont. next page]

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### Ms. Rose Jackson (cont..)



[cont. from previous page] And he told me. And I said, 'Get her telephone number, and I'll call her mom.' And I call her mother and she says, 'What do you do?' I says, 'Well, I don't bathes them at night, I wait til the morning to bathes them, after they done slept and wet the bed.' And she says, 'How do you do that?' I says, 'Well.' She says, 'I gotta wash my daughter's hair.' 'That's what I want to do for your daughter; put a night cap on her head. It's because she's got that long hair and you can't wash it every morning. Put a night cap on her head and wake her up in the morning an hour early and bathe her.' And, oh, that woman was so happy. And that's the way I did my boys because I wasn't gonna have nobody saying that they were smelling. And then I would take all the sheets off the bed and wash them, and got a line in he kitchen in the winter time and hang them up on the line. And have that bed back first when they come home. That's the way I did. That's why I look at so many people. How they would let the children go dirty and they wouldn't clean the house. Why? The children is in school. You do your house and then go on to your job. And I'd be back in time they got home from school. Done made cookies for them. And I went and did two houses, and I'd be right back at that house, made cookies for my babies when they get home, and be right there for them. And, see, I remember the state worker telling me they gonna give me a state check. I said, 'No way.' I say, 'I ain't living on no state.'"

"Because I didn't want nobody looking down their nose at me; I'm a very independent person. And my children come to me and they wanna work. And the guy that lived at Portland Public Housing helped all my children start working at age 12 and 13. Doing the grounds. One of them was cleaning up around the projects, the other was working at the armory in South Portland. Those kind of things. You raise them to be independent, not al-ways, 'Mom, can I have this? Mom, can I have that?'"

"I was a tomboy mother; there were so many sons. We would play ball and I would throw the ball just as hard as they will, bat the ball. And when you're living in a place like Sagamore, you got this whole big field out there to play in, you got room for everybody."

"Yeah, I had to be a tomboy with all those boys-rough. I remember one day I was wrestling with my sons, and this guy come driving by in a car. He say, 'Hey, you're kinda rough with them, ain't you?' I says, 'Well sir, I'm their mama.' 'You what?' [laughter] I said, 'I was just learning them how to take care of themselves if they ever had to. Not bullying, but if you ever had to take care of yourself, be able to take care of yourself.' So he said, 'Oh, pardon me, I didn't know. I thought you...' 'See, every time one tried to wrestle me down, I get the best of them and put my foot on them, you know. And the guy thought I was being mean to somebody else's children. [laughter] They were so glad for me to be able to teach them, by them being males, you know. And just like I told you that number two was the only that kinda hard headed; he always complained about something."

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## EVIDENCE OF MAINE'S BLACK FAMILIES from 1800 to the 20th Century



### Ms. Rose Jackson (cont..)



"And my baby boy. I lived right by a school. And when he grew up old enough to go to school I walked him to school and he's, 'Mom, I'm old enough to go on my own.' So we lived by some woods. So what I would do, I would let him go down this trail and I'd tell him, 'Now don't ever go through the woods.' And I would slip through the woods so he wouldn't see me. I would hide over in the woods behind a tree and watch him until he got in the door. And then he got big enough to go to the neighborhood store to get a loaf of bread or whatever, and I would go round the trail, up the other way, and watch him. So then one day he caught me. He's, 'Mama, please, when is I gonna get old enough for you to let me go?' Then finally I let him start going. He talked about that the other night. 'Mom, why were you like that?' 'Well that's why I was too overprotective; cause you were my baby.' When he would get out of school at lunchtime, me and him would go to Grant's department stores. Well, we would go up there to the lunch counter and have lunch. Oh, that was a good time. Me and my boy had lunch."

"You know, it ain't always cake and cream. It was hard days, but I didn't ever let the kids know it. They didn't ask for me to have them. You know what I mean? The Lord give them to me. So, but I let them know, 'Don't come to me and ask me for fifty dollars,' because they know we ain't in that shape to get no fifty dollars. This is the way I told mine. 'If you need some clothes, we're gonna, we're gonna go buy clothes for school. And then if you get where you need some socks or something, I can pick that up for you.' I says, 'But other than that, don't ever come to me and ask me for a hundred dollar suit, because we can't afford it.' So what we did. We stayed in the spending limit, and none of them went, none of them went lacking. All of them are dressed. Daughters' hair all straightened long and-that's when they straightened with the hot comb. Straightened. The boys have a cut."

Mrs. Rose Jackson (age 66; born in Louisville, Mississippi; lives in South Portland for 39 years; married 34 years; has six children; had five children with her first husband; he died and she remarried and had a child with the current husband)

Keywords: parenting attitudes and behaviors, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Jackson, Rose](#)

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## EVIDENCE OF MAINE'S BLACK FAMILIES from 1800 to the 20th Century



### Mrs. June McKenzie



"Well, first of all, I had really good kids, so I was lucky that way. You have to train a child when they're small, values and things. And when they go to school, you have to be a part of whatever they do and be a part of the PTA and things like that because if you don't take an interest in what your kids are doing, then the people at school won't take an interest in them, either. I mean, if they know you're there for your children, then they get better care, you know. And I work a lot with the NAACP and I try to tell parents that if your child is in school, even if you can't speak the language, go and let them know that you're interested in your child's future, you know. Like when my daughter was in the seventh grade and she was getting ready to figure out what she was gonna be and she applied. She was gonna go to college, and the teacher told her, 'You can take that off of there, because you're not college material.' And she came home and told me and I said, 'If she's willing enough to work hard to go to college, you have no right to tell her that she can't.' But otherwise if I hadn't been interested in what she was doing, then I would never know that that happened. And it happens today all the time, you know. They try to put kids of color in one group and so parents have to be vigilant. I mean, they say even though the civil rights movement cleared up a lot of that stuff, you still have to be vigilant."

"Well, just like I said, I always taught the children to do the best they could and be the best that they could. And, you know, sometimes they'd say, 'Well, I don't want to do this.' And it was good when the younger children were young because my daughter taught at Jack when they were there, and my son worked for the City of Portland at the police athletic league and he worked here in City Hall. And I guess they knew a lot of people, so we knew where they were all the time. You know. After school they'd go and play sports at the police station or they'd be in sports at school. And they had a system. You had to be home every night for dinner. You know. And there wasn't any screaming and yelling; if you had a problem, we had family council meetings. And it was sort of diplomatic. You know. I worked two jobs a lot of times when they were growing up. It was hard, but we told them that education was important, and so, therefore, five out of the eight graduated from college. And three have their master's-no, four have their masters. And one is working for the Ph.D. And everywhere I go I hear nice things about them, because they'll say, 'Your kids are so nice to everyone.' And it makes me proud. They've never given me any trouble; they've never been in jail. So they're nice productive kids. I have to brag..."

Mrs. June McKenzie (age 72; born 1929 in Portland Maine; fifth-generation Mainer; lived in Maine all her life)

Keywords: parenting attitudes and perceptions, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: McKenzie, June](#)



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## EVIDENCE OF MAINE'S BLACK FAMILIES from 1800 to the 20th Century



### Ms. Wahida Muhammad



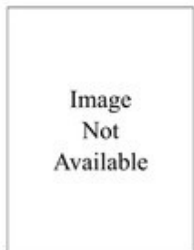
"...they're both back in Chicago. I'm hoping to get my grandson up here, though, urn, as soon as possible. I want -- I want him to get another way of life, some greenery."

Ms. Wahidah Muhammad (born 1948 in Chicago, Illinois; lived in Maine since December 1991; lived in Lewiston since 1997)

Keywords: parenting attitudes and behaviors, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Muhammad, Wahidah](#)

### Mr. Rupert Richardson



"My children listen; the children today don't listen. That's the biggest problem. Plus the fact my wife was home with our children, so we had a good handle on our children and we made sure that they didn't step out of line."

"I was there and I was there to answer any questions they had. They saw me as a role model. I wasn't a father that went out boozing it up. You know, I stayed home; our philosophy was that our children came first and that's what we believed. My wife and I, we believed in making sure that we raise our children properly so they can grow up to be, quote, solid citizens"

Mr. Rupert Richardson (born in Portland, Maine; living in Maine for 71 years)

Keywords: parenting attitudes and perceptions, Black Families, Maine

Selected Audio: [Series 1: Family - Recordings](#)

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### Mr. James Sheppard



"Whenever any of our children were participating in a program in a school, there's always the time when they invite the parents. We always made sure we were there. One of the two of us or both of us would be there to just be there and to show them that we're interested. Plus it helped when they went home. We could prompt them and school them in how to handle it next time. That sort of thing, you know? Whenever they played games, even though I was never really interested in track or football, really-still am not- but I made it a point to be there with my camera, so they could see their father there watching them. He's interested. That's all you have to do. You don't have to egg them and shake their hand and pat them on the back. Just being there makes the difference. I learned that when I was a kid. Just knowing my father was across the street there like that, watching me, made a big difference. And the parents aren't doing this now."

Mr. James Sheppard (born in New York City in 1924; both his parents immigrated from Antigua in the West Indies to Canada, then they came to the United States in 1923; moved to Maine in 1971)

Keywords: parenting attitudes and behaviors, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Sheppard, James](#)

### Ms. Lucille Young



"How was I involved in their life? You know, I've always stood by my kids. So I'm very involved with kids and my grandkids. I'm always taking care of some of them. I'm very involved with my family."

Ms. Lucille Young (age 73; born 1928 in Jackson, Mississippi; moved to Maine in 1967)

Keywords: parenting attitudes and behaviors, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Young, Lucille](#)



# Holidays and Family Traditions

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## EVIDENCE OF MAINE'S BLACK FAMILIES from 1800 to the 20th Century



### Mr. Edgar Anderson



"The kids' birthdays, that's a holiday to me. Christmas is probably one of the biggest. And also, for the last five years we've been doing Kwanzaa. Kwanzaa has been new for me to try and teach my kids, because my kids are Black and white. So they don't get as much exposure to Black people as they do to white people, just because of their friends, because of the high school my daughter's going to go to, and that whole thing."

"Well, Kwanzaa is one. Getting the gifts and the talking about the different meanings of each of the days and how we practice the different principles of Kwanzaa is something that we, all of us, have learned. Me and my wife also, we are all basically still learning about how to integrate those things during the year, not just at Christmas time."

"We had one last year, last August. All of my sisters came here, all except one. My sister from California came, my sister from Texas came with her son, my sisters from Chicago, both of them came, two of them came, and my mother showed up. Our next one's going to be in California next year. So we'll go to my sister's house out there... And the one before that, we had a family reunion for my grandmother's 90th birthday party. And we had that in Chicago, and, I mean, everybody turned out for that. My grandmother has 6 children, 26 grandchildren, and 56 great-grandchildren. My son, Jordan, is the 50th great grandchild. And then she has 16 great-great-grand kids. She's my only grandmother that's still living."

Mr. Edgar Anderson (Male; age 51; born 1950 in Chicago suburb called Harvey)

Keywords: holidays and family traditions, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Anderson, Edgar](#)

### Mrs Odessa Barret



"Christmas and Thanksgiving. Or Thanksgiving and Christmas. [laughter] Fourth of July. The regular ones I guess... Well, special traditions. We get together for Christmas Eve and prayer is a very big part of everything, and that was a tradition that was passed on. We pass on the tradition of food, preparing food for holidays. That's a big tradition."

Ms. Odessa Barret (age 53; born 1948 in Port Arthur, Texas; born in a middle-class, blue collar family; moved to Maine in October 1979)

Keywords: holidays and family traditions, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Barret, Odessa](#)

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## EVIDENCE OF MAINE'S BLACK FAMILIES from 1800 to the 20th Century



### Ms. Beverly Bowens



"I love Christmas. My daughter was born on Christmas Day. I always loved Christmas, even as a child. Well, I like every day. I try to make every day a little meaningful; it doesn't always work, but..."

Well, like any New England family, for Christmas we'll have a turkey, went to church. I don't think it was any different than anyone else in Maine.

Not really. There will be a family reunion coming up on my father's side in Wisconsin, but I don't know if I'll be able to attend. I attend my husband's family reunions.

Ms. Beverly Bowens (born in Maine; age 67; left at 21 years old for about 35 to 40 years and then returned to Maine)

Keywords: holidays and family traditions, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Bowens, Beverly](#)

### Ms. Rose Jackson



"Most of the holidays what we celebrate were Thanksgiving and Christmas, because you be able to give gifts and you get together. And Easter is another time; Easter was, oh, a really good time, because I remember one Sunday we all looked dressed up coming home from church and it snowed. On Easter Sunday. [laughter] But that was okay. We were used to riding buses; that's the transportation that we had to getting back for the church. The church people wanted to know could they get a cab for us or something. I said, 'No, we'll ride the bus.'"

Mrs. Rose Jackson (age 66; born in Louisville, Mississippi; lives in South Portland for 39 years; married 34 years; has six children; had five children with her first husband; he died and she remarried and had a child with the current husband)

Keywords: holidays and family traditions, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Jackson, Rose](#)

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## EVIDENCE OF MAINE'S BLACK FAMILIES from 1800 to the 20th Century



### Mrs. June McKenzie



"Well, I had a pretty nice childhood. Not as nice as my sisters and brothers, because when they were home my father was there, too. But he wasn't there after I was 13, I guess. We always lived in our own home and had a big yard and flowers and nice neighbors. We were the only Black family in the area, but we still got along well..."

"Well, we are very family oriented. So we celebrate everybody's birthday, and Mother's Day, Father's Day... On yes, naturally. Christmas and Thanksgiving. Still, even though the kids are all over, we pull names around Thanksgiving and everybody has a special person for Christmas... My oldest daughter is in Kwanzaa. And I participate in it, but the other kids- Ellen doesn't; the other children do not."

"Well, we always get together for Thanksgiving, as many as possible. Now that I'm older, I don't have to cook. If we go to my daughter's house or one of my sons' house, everybody brings something. Somebody does a turkey, somebody does a ham, you know. We always have more than our own family, so we end up about twenty, twenty-two people, you know, usually."

Mrs. June McKenzie (age 72; born 1929 in Portland Maine; fifth-generation Mainer; lived in Maine all her life)

Keywords: holidays and family traditions, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: McKenzie, June](#)

### Mr. James Mathews



Mr. James Mathews (age 59; born 1941 in Portland Maine; married with five children; lived in Maine all his life – lived in South Portland for over 26 years)

Keywords: holidays and family traditions, Black Families, Maine

Selected Audio: [Series 1: Family - Recordings](#)

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Mathews, James](#)

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## EVIDENCE OF MAINE'S BLACK FAMILIES from 1800 to the 20th Century



### Mr. Rupert Richardson



"For me the most important holiday is Christmas."

"Well, the only tradition is that we get together and we eat. I prepare the traditional food for our family. It's something that, you know, something my wife or my mother prepared; it's something, a recipe that I've learned and passed that on down to the family. So, that's about it. It's the idea of just getting together and just enjoying each other's company."

Mr. Rupert Richardson (born in Portland, Maine; living in Maine for 71 years)

Keywords: holidays and family traditions, Black Families, Maine

**Selected Audio:** [Series 1: Family - Recordings](#)

**Full Length Interview:** [Home is Where I Make It: Richardson, Rupert](#)

### Mr. James Sheppard



"Well, I would say, I would say Easter and Christmas, simply because it's a religious thing. My wife's the religious one; not myself as much as my wife. But Easter and Christmas, those religious holidays. Birthdays, naturally, if that's on the list. Always. Always. I remember my father and mother would never allow a birthday to go by. And we were always on the poor side. I didn't mention that before; that was in New York City. We were poor people in New York City. After they came to the United States, the kind of job he had really didn't pay that much money, you know. My father never let a birthday go by without a cake. On the day of the birthday. If it fell on Tuesday, there was a cake there on Tuesday when he came home. Didn't wait until Saturday to do it, it was Tuesday. And you learn a lot that way, you know, when you see that sort of thing. And we still do it. And when we're traveling and when someone's birthday falls while we're away, we pick up a little souvenirs, little things, so when we come back home to Portland we say, 'Here's something for your birthday.' You know, something worth five cents, ten, fifty cents, nothing expensive, that sort of thing. That's important. You've gotta let the kids know that you're there for them, that you care what they're doing. It doesn't mean you have to hang around them all the time; they just have to understand that by doing this sort of thing." [cont. on next page]



# WE EXIST

## EVIDENCE OF MAINE'S BLACK FAMILIES from 1800 to the 20th Century



### Mr. James Sheppard (cont.)



"As far as the services in church go, just attending the service and attending. Christmas Eve. We used to attend church on Christmas Eve; not any longer. But that's one of the things that we used to do on the day before Christmas. Take the kids along. But so much has changed since the kids have left and on their own that we don't have these things any longer. That's why I'm trying to remember what it was we used to do with them. But we used to gather together and go as a group, you know. Even back in the New York City days. It was a larger group because it was my parents had four of us. There was six of us that went to all these things: Christmas, Easter services in church. I'm still talking about church. But in addition to that we'd have lots of summer events: picnics and that sort. But that's separate; that's a different thing."

Mr. James Sheppard (born in New York City in 1924; both his parents immigrated from Antigua in the West Indies to Canada, then they came to the United States in 1923; moved to Maine in 1971)

Keywords: holidays and family traditions, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Sheppard, James](#)

### Ms. Lucille Young



"Well, we have Fourth of July. We have that every year. And we have Labor Day and Christmas; we always have that at my house."

"[Barbeque] Yeah. We have four picnic tables in the backyard, and chairs, and we have a grill. And I have a swimming pool, so they're always there. They're always at my house. Which I'm trying to get rid of half of them, but I know it'll never happen."

"Most of the things I share with my family I try to get them to get right with God. That's the every important thing; I try to get them all to do that. Around the holiday we just have food...we just cook, barbeque, and make all kinds of stuff and just have fun."

Ms. Lucille Young (age 73; born 1928 in Jackson, Mississippi; moved to Maine in 1967)

Keywords: holidays and family traditions, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Young, Lucille](#)



# Family Challenges

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## EVIDENCE OF MAINE'S BLACK FAMILIES from 1800 to the 20th Century



### Ms. Beverly Bowens



"I think just living was a challenge. My parents both were children of the Depression, so there was that challenge right there. I think being Black was a challenge, although not as much in my mind as a child. It was when I grew up that it was a challenge. Just getting through, getting through college was a challenge. Every day is a challenge."

Ms. Beverly Bowens (born in Maine; age 67; left at 21 years old for about 35 to 40 years and then returned to Maine)

Keywords: family challenges, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Bowens, Beverly](#)

### Mr. James Mathews



"...I guess, you know, life is a challenge. Coming up as a child, you know, we had a problem with a lack of finance. My uncle acted as my father. He was held back financially because he had the skills of an electrician, but he wasn't able to use them. And so I believe that that would be a challenge; you know. We were held back from being financially able to fund our needs on his standpoint."

Mr. James Mathews (age 59; born 1941 in Portland Maine; married with five children; lived in Maine all his life – lived in South Portland for over 26 years)

Keywords: family challenges, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Mathews, James](#)

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