

4-19-2021

5. Parenting Attitudes and Behaviors

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Recommended Citation

Gibbs, Lance PhD, "5. Parenting Attitudes and Behaviors" (2021). *Series 1: Family - Quotes*. 7.
<https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/we-exist-exhibit-quotes/7>

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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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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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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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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](#)

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

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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](#)

Acknowledgements

We are indebted to our partners at the University of Southern Maine (USM) Special Collections, the University of Southern Maine Libraries for their support in digitizing and building the exhibit site, and the Osher Map Library (OML).

This site was built by USM Libraries and Digital Projects staff members **Mary Holt**, Library Specialist in Digital Projects and Special Collections with USM Libraries, and **Jessica Hovey**, Library Specialist in Digital Projects and Access Services with USM Libraries.

Nora Ibrahim, Digital Imaging Assistant with the OML and Smith Center for Cartographic Education, assisted with photographing the Talbot Collection and many of the images featured in the exhibit. **Sara Nazirli**, Digital Projects Assistant with USM Libraries, assisted with uploading images for the exhibit.

Shiloh Parker, Administrative Assistant with USM Libraries, and **Carrie Bell-Hoerth**, Library Specialist in Digital Projects and Access Services with USM Libraries, assisted with marketing and outreach.

Special thanks and gratitude are in order for **Susie Bock**, Coordinator of USM Special Collections and Director of the Jean Byers Sampson Center for Diversity in Maine, **David Nutty**, Director of Libraries and University Librarian, and **Dr. Libby Bischof**, Executive Director of the OML.

Dr. Lance Gibbs is the curator of this exhibit and served as the research lead for the project, providing historical background from news and scholarly references, and authoring the short contextual catalogue essay entries which complement the photos, written, and audio galleries. Dr. Gibbs is a lecturer in Race and Ethnic Studies and is currently the director of the Race and Ethnic Studies program at the University of Southern Maine. Dr. Gibbs is also the Talbot Fellow for the Gerald E. Talbot and African American Collections. Dr. Gibbs' research interests focus broadly on the family, in particular in father involvement/fathering/fatherhood, among immigrant fathers from the African Diaspora. For more information, contact Lance Gibbs, at lance.gibbs@maine.edu



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