

2021

McKenzie, June Quotes Transcript

June McKenzie

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Mrs. June McKenzie



"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 vigilant. I mean, they say even though the civil rights movement cleared up a lot of that stuff, you still have to be vigilant."

"I've been a member of the NAACP for 35-more than that-36 or 37 years."

"Well, mostly, you know, working with the NAACP. I don't know if you'd call them contributions, but I always man the phones at the NAACP office. Or mostly, before the last few years, we used to take the calls at home and then disseminate them to who they needed to go to. Now we have a new office which is being renovated. On 151 Federal Street. And we have the Martin Luther King breakfast. And I always coordinate the gospel extravaganza. We've done that; last year was our twentieth year. And I work sometimes with PeaceAction Maine. And, you know, a lot of the civil rights groups in town."

"Well, I don't think I'm a leader. I'm just a mother and a person that's interested in everybody's welfare. And I'm interested in my church. My pastor, Reverend Margaret Lawson, she's a good leader, too, in the community. She's active. And Reverend Jeffrey McIlwain, he's assistant pastor; he also works in the sheriff's department at the jail. He's the chaplain at the jail. We have a lot of senior citizens, like Mr. Talbot and Mr. Knowles -he's the president of the NAACP now. And Mrs. Johnson. And Mrs. Hershey. They're all active in doing things for youth, which is our most important product. If we can't get the youth going then -we need to because we're all getting older and we can't keep doing the things we're doing much longer. So we need to have young people in there to keep up the fight for us and for themselves. You know."



Mrs. June McKenzie (continued)



"I think it's important that I participate because a lot of people in middle age, like young adults. 30s and 35, they think that they just got their jobs because they were there, but the NAACP did a lot of work to try to make sure that the people with the right qualifications got the jobs that they were eligible for. And sometimes in job situations, there's a lot of discrimination. And we tried to work with the people and work with the employers and try to wipe that out. People in general think that there's not racism working today, but if you're Black you know every day of our life you face it somewhere. Maybe sometimes it's very subtle, and sometimes it's worse. That's the things that we do. And even though we work for the NAACP, we don't get paid. It's completely volunteer, but somebody has to do it. And it's hard to get young people to get out there and get interested because they figure they've got their jobs and they're doing fine and everything. But they don't realize that if it wasn't for the NAACP none of this would be possible, even in the city of Portland. We sued the school committee with the civil rights department in Massachusetts to make sure things are better, and we're still working on it. Even though they say they're cooperating, they aren't always. It's an ongoing thing. You have to be vigilant."

"Were you involved in the civil rights movement? Well, yes, since I worked with the NAACP, over civil rights things. We did marches and went to Washington and wrote letters and carried placards and did everything that we could. You know. Even though we were way up here in Maine, when the freedom fighters came here we realized that we had to get out there and fight. And that's what we did. We have to fight still today for housing and jobs and things; they'll try to keep you back, but you have to keep on keeping on. Do you have any memories of this time period? I went to one of the marches on Washington. Not the big one. You know, here in Maine, we mostly heard through the media about the things that were going on. But Mr. Knowles and Mr. Talbot were active; they went to the marches. And we'd do our part here, to try to make things the best that they are here. And during that time when Martin Luther King was doing his peaceful demonstrations. We were abreast of all that and did our best here to do whatever we could for freedom for everyone."

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](#)