

# The Clerk's Black History Series

## Debra DeBerry

### Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County

## June Bacon-Bercey

(October 23, 1928 – July 3, 2019)

# “First Black Woman Meteorologist”



**June Bacon - Bercey** was born June Ester Griffin on October 23, 1928, in Wichita, Kansas. Her mother abandoned June after her father died, leaving her to be raised by an aunt and uncle. She was an only child, and despite her family circumstances, she enjoyed a full childhood of playing with neighborhood children, bike riding, hiking, and participating in Girl Scouts. A high school teacher is credited with encouraging June to pursue a career in Meteorology.

June graduated from high school and first attended Friends University to study math. After her second year of college, June transferred to the University of California, Los Angeles to study meteorology. Even though she was discouraged by college advisors, June earned a bachelor's degree in atmospheric science in 1954, making her the first black woman to be conferred a meteorology degree from UCLA.



After graduation, June accepted a position as a weather analyst and forecaster with the National Meteorological Center (now known as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration National Weather Service (NOAA)), in Washington, DC. In 1959, June accepted a position as a senior adviser at the Atomic Energy Commission because of her interest to better understand the effects of hydrogen and atomic bombs on Earth's atmosphere, as well as studying fallout patterns caused by nuclear detonations.



In the early 1960s, June rejoined the National Weather Service in its New York City offices as a radar meteorologist. By the end of the decade, however, a new opportunity had presented itself: a job opening for a TV meteorologist at WRC-TV in Washington, D.C. Although June was initially hesitant to appear on the air, the following year, she became chief meteorologist at WGR-TV in Buffalo, N.Y.



June was a reporter with WGR-TV, in Buffalo, New York. On September 9, 1971, she was on the scene covering the historic Attica Prison Riots where 33 inmates and 10 correctional guards died.

In December 1972, June was the first woman to be recognized by the American Meteorological Society (AMS) with its Seal of Approval. She also served on the board for the AMS Board on Women and Minorities, encouraging young women, girls, and minorities to explore atmospheric sciences. She served on the board of directors of the National Consortium for Black Professional Development. She was a highly sought-after speaker for events such as the Black Consortium Science Competition.



In 1977, June established the June Bacon-Bercey Scholarship in Atmospheric Sciences for Women to support women interested in meteorology. She used her winnings of \$64,000, from her winning appearance on the game show "The \$128,000 Question". The student that became the first recipient of the scholarship became a space physicist and an assistant director of Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Haystack Observatory in Westford.

After serving as a public affairs specialist for NOAA in Washington, D.C., June moved to the San Francisco Bay Area. At the age of 59, she earned a teaching credential to teach elementary and high school math and science courses. She volunteered her time at Jackson State University, a historically Black university in Mississippi, to help set up a meteorology lab there.

June Bacon-Bercey passed away on July 3, 2019, due to frontotemporal dementia. Her namesake scholarship, per her final wish, restarted in 2021 for the first time since 1998.

