



African American Mini Series

Beginning African American Research, post 1865

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Overview of Series

This set of four classes focuses on African American research from 1865 to the present. To be successful in locating your ancestors back to slavery, you must first locate all records for your ancestors and all their family members (parents and siblings). Verification of family oral information and the additional clues provided by documentation will be essential in determining possible slave owners and pushing your research beyond 1865.

“Where Do I Begin? Getting Started with African American Research, Post 1865”

“Finding Helpful Resources, Post 1865”

“How FamilySearch Tools Can Help with Post 1865 Resources”

“Unique African American Records, Post 1865”

Where Do I Begin? Getting Started with African American Research, Post 1865

Home Sources and Asking Family Members

Look for any possible information about your family and ancestors in records you may have in your home or in a relative's home. The more information you gather, the easier it will be to locate and recognize individuals in other records. Records to look for include obituaries, death records, funeral programs, birth records, journals, diaries, family Bibles, family letters, and photographs.

Organize Gathered Materials and Facts

Label the documents and photos you have discovered and organize them. You may want to build a tree using an online program or home computer software. Be sure to thoroughly go over all documents for all the facts.

Create Your Research Question

A research question will help you stay focused. A good research question is about one person and one event. One at a time.

Prepare Your Research Plan and Research Log

One of the biggest rookie mistakes is not keeping track of your research. If you do not you will likely repeat searches and miss other searches. A research log is the best way to keep track. There are many different variations of logs. They can be created on paper or digital. Use the format you are most comfortable with.

Some Strategies to Remember

Strategy #1 Go from the known to the unknown

Start with the present and work back in time. Look for death records for your ancestor instead of jumping to the birth record. Clues from the death record can help you find the correct birth record. Example of working back in time: look for the death records, census records, marriage record, and then birth records.

Strategy #2 Find a Person in Every Record

Find each person in every possible record. For example, when looking for death records search for a death certificate or register, obituary, cemetery record and funeral program. Each record can contain different and helpful information.

Strategy #3 Find all known family members

Search for everyone in the family – that includes siblings, aunts, and uncles and sometimes even nieces and nephews. The more you know about the structure of the family, the more success you will have in locating your family in other records.

Strategy #4 Be aware of name changes

Surnames can have multiple spellings for the same name. Be liberal in your thinking about how a surname is spelled. Make a list of all possible variants and search using the versions. African American names may change over generations. Less than 25% of those with enslaved ancestors carry the ancestors last slave master surname.

Helpful Resources for Beginning Research

FS Research Wiki article *Researching African American Genealogy*

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Researching_African_American_Genealogy

FS Research Wiki article *How to Begin a Search for Your Ancestor*

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/How_to_Begin_a_Search_for_Your_Ancestor

FS Webinar *Getting Started in Genealogy* by Rhonda R. McClure

<https://www.familysearch.org/ask/learningViewer/313>

FS Webinar *If I'd Only Known? Beginner Genealogy Mistakes* by Beth Foulk

<https://www.familysearch.org/ask/learningViewer/61>

Helpful Resources for Sharing Family Sources

FS Research Wiki article *Putting Photos and Documents as Memories in FamilySearch Family Tree*

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Putting_Photos_and_Documents_as_Memories_in_Family_Search_Family_Tree

Helpful Resources for Research Logs

FS Research Wiki article *Research Logs* https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Research_Logs

FS Research Wiki article *Keeping a Research Log*

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Keeping_a_Research_Log

FS Research Wiki article *Document AS YOU GO!*

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Document_AS_YOU_GO!

FS Webinar *Research Logs part 1* by David Dilts

<https://www.familysearch.org/ask/learningViewer/45>

FS Webinar *Research Logs part 2* by David Dilts

<https://www.familysearch.org/ask/learningViewer/46>

Finding Helpful Resources, Post 1865

Census Records

Census records are a great place to start your research. They can quickly tell you where a family is residing which is vital information for effectively locating them in other records. United States Census records began in 1790 and were taken (and still is) every ten years. The most recent census available is the 1940 Census. The first census which lists African Americans by name is the 1870 census. Free African Americans were enumerated on earlier censuses.

Census records are helpful in estimating dates and events, such as: death, marriage, birth, and migration. Locate your ancestor in every possible census. Locate all their siblings and parents. This is especially helpful if your ancestor disappears from the censuses. They may be living with other family members.

Vital Records

Vital records include birth registers and certificates, marriage licenses and certificates and death registers and certificates.

State Certificates

States have different laws regulating the creation and archiving of state vital records. Check the state of interest for compliance years and where the certificates are housed. Most states offer certificate copies for a fee at the state and county level.

Helpful Resources for Locating State and County Vital Records Certificates

FS Research Wiki article United States Genealogy

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Genealogy

- Birth records: if the date you are searching for is earlier than state regulated birth records check for a birth register at the county level. A register is a book which lists the births as they occurred. Birth records usually contain parent's names, often revealing the mother's maiden name. Church christening records are another source for important birth information.
Delayed birth records were created in the 1930s and 1940s for those whom a record was not created at the time of birth. Delayed births were often recorded in the county where the individual was residing at the time and not necessarily in the county where they were born.
- Marriage records: Most marriage records only include the name of the couple, their ages, and their residence. However, some marriages include the names of their parents (such as Virginia and North Carolina). In the south, marriage records might be separated by race, thus located in different labeled volumes. Be sure you are checking the correct volume. Church records are a good source for obtaining marriage information.
- Death records: Most counties and states recorded death records earlier than birth records. A death certificate or register may contain valuable information about birth, age, marital status, spouse name and burial information. If the date you are searching for is earlier than state regulated death records check for a death register at the county level. Church burial records are also helpful.

Social Security Death Index (SSDI)

The SSDI is a national index of millions of people whose deaths were reported to the U.S. Social Security Administration. This index includes 98% of the deaths that took place after 1962. There are many free online websites containing this index.

With the Social Security number of the deceased, you can order a Social Security Application (SS-5) from the Social Security Administration for a fee. You will receive a copy of the original

application your ancestor filled out and signed. The application may include birth date, birthplace, parent's names, and parent's birthplace.

To search SSA index:

www.familysearch.org

www.ancestry.com \$

www.genealogybank.com \$

To order a SS-5 online:

<https://secure.ssa.gov/apps9/eFOIA-FEWeb/internet/main.jsp> \$

Helpful Resources for Vital Records

Website *FamilySearch* www.familysearch.org

Website *Ancestry* www.ancestry.com

Website *AfriGeneas* (free): African American specific death database – small but always growing! <http://www.afrigeneas.com/drdb/>

Website *Online Searchable Death Indexes & Records* (links to indexes and images both free and \$) <http://www.deathindexes.com/>

FS Research Wiki article *United States Vital Records*

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Vital_Records

FS Research Wiki article *How to Find United States Birth Records*

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/How_to_Find_United_States_Birth_Records

FS Research Wiki article *How to Find United States Marriage Records*

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/How_to_Find_United_States_Marriage_Records

FS Research Wiki article *How to Find United States Death Records*

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/How_to_Find_United_States_Death_Records

FS Webinar *United States Vital Records* by Joni Kesler

<https://www.familysearch.org/ask/learningViewer/16>

FS Webinar *United States Church Records* by Joni Kesler

<https://www.familysearch.org/ask/learningViewer/41>

Military Draft Records

World War I Draft Registration Cards

All males born between 13 September 1873 and 12 September 1900 were required to register for the World War I Draft. There were three different registrations for different ages asking different information. Registration does not mean the individual served in the war. Information may include birth date and place of registrant and next of kin. The value of these records is the fact that they were filled out by the registrant.

World War II Draft Registration Cards

Nicknamed the "Old man's draft," this registration was taken in April 1942 for men born between April 27, 1877 and Feb 16, 1897. These cards can be found on Familysearch.org Historical Records.

Helpful Resources for Military Draft Records

Website *FamilySearch* www.familysearch.org

Website *Ancestry* (\$) www.ancestry.com

FS Webinar *Selective Service Records (WWI) Draft Cards and More* by Linda Woodward

Geiger <https://www.familysearch.org/ask/learningViewer/201>

Cemetery Records

Cemetery records are a great source for birth and death information. Be aware that after the Civil War and into the early 1900s many families could not afford stone tombstones and wood markers were used. Many of these markers do not survive. Sexton records can be helpful when tombstones are missing.

Helpful Resources for Cemetery Records

Website *FindAGrave* www.findagrave.com

Website *BillionGraves* www.billiongraves.com

Website *USGenWeb* (choose state, county; free) <http://www.usgenweb.org/>

Website *Interment.Net* <http://www.interment.net/Default.htm>

FS Research Wiki article *Cemeteries* <https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Cemeteries>

FS Webinar *Researching Funeral Homes, Gravesites, and Cemetery Records* by Debbie Hagner <https://www.familysearch.org/ask/learningViewer/272>

Obituaries and Newspapers

Obituaries are a great resource for locating information about an individual's birth and death as well as spouse and other surviving family members. Some obituaries are extracted out of newspapers and can be found as compiled records sets. Most likely you need to search for local newspapers. African American obituaries can be found in local newspapers as well as African American newspapers.

Helpful Resources for Obituaries

FS Research Wiki article *United States Obituaries*

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Obituaries

Helpful Resources for Newspaper Names

Website *Chronicling America: Historical American Newspapers* by the Library of Congress <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>

Website *United States Newspaper Program* <https://www.neh.gov/us-newspaper-program>

Website *United States Newspaper List* <http://www.usnpl.com/>

Website *Online Historical Newspapers Site*

<https://sites.google.com/site/onlinenewspapersite/Home>

Website *Historical Newspapers Online* <http://viewshare.org/views/refhelp/historical-newspapers-online-usa-2/>

Website *Public Libraries* <http://www.publiclibraries.com/> Contact the Public Library in the county of interest

Helpful Resources for Digital Newspaper Collections

Website *Newspaper Archive* (\$) <http://www.newspaperarchive.com>

Website *Genealogy Bank* (\$) <http://www.genealogybank.com/gbnk/>

Website *NewsBank* (\$) sometimes free with Public Library card) <http://www.newsbank.com/>

Website *Newspapers.com* (\$) <https://www.newspapers.com/>

Website *Ancestry* (\$) free at FHL and Family History Centers)

<http://www.ancestry.com/search/rectype/periodicals/news/>

FS Research Wiki article *Digital Historical Newspapers*

https://wiki.familysearch.org/en/Digital_Historical_Newspapers

FS Webinar *Finding and Using Historic Newspapers, part 1* by Billie Stone Fogarty

<https://www.familysearch.org/ask/learningViewer/238>

FS Webinar *Finding and Using Historic Newspapers, part 2* by Billie Stone Fogarty
<https://www.familysearch.org/ask/learningViewer/249>

FS Webinar *Finding and Using Historic Newspapers, part 3* by Billie Stone Fogarty
<https://www.familysearch.org/ask/learningViewer/239>

FS Handout *United States Newspaper Research: News You Can Use* by Jason Harrison
https://s3.amazonaws.com/ps-services-us-east-1-914248642252/s3/research-wiki-elasticsearch-prod-s3bucket/images/6/64/United_States_Newspaper_Research_October_2015.pdf

Unique African American Records, post 1865

Freedmen's Bureau Records

The official government title of this record set is The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands. The Bureau was created during reconstruction to help with relief efforts for freed slaves and poor whites. It was active 1865-1872 and contains a wide variety of data about the African American experience during slavery and transitioning to freedom. The collection contains 1.5 million digital images covering the following categories,

- Labor contracts
- Ration records
- Education records
- Claim records
- Records of complaints
- Hospital and medical records
- Land and property records
- Court records
- Marriage records
- Records of person hired
- Assistant Commissioner records

Helpful Resources for Freedmen's Bureau Records

Website *The Freedmen's Bureau Online-Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands* <http://www.freedmensbureau.com>

FS Historical Records *United States, Freedmen's Bureau Marriages, 1861-1872*
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1414908>

FS Research Wiki article *African American Freedmen's Bureau Records*
https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/African_American_Freedmen%27s_Bureau_Records

FS Research Wiki article *United States Freedmen's Bureau Marriages*
[https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Freedmen%E2%80%99s_Bureau_Marriages_\(FamilySearch_Historical_Records\)](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Freedmen%E2%80%99s_Bureau_Marriages_(FamilySearch_Historical_Records))

FS Webinar *Mine the Gold: - Effectively Research Millions of New Freedmen's Bureau Records from FamilySearch* by Thom Reed <https://www.familysearch.org/ask/learningViewer/1001>

Freedman's Bank Records, 1865-1874

Freedman's Savings & Trust Company was created to assist newly freed slaves. It was created in 1864 but failed in 1874. However, the registers have survived and contain personal information on depositors. Information may include name, residence, description, and family members. It is fully indexed, and images are online.

Helpful Resources for Freedman's Bank Records

FS Historical Records *United States, Freedman's Bank Records, 1865-1874*

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1417695?collectionNameFilter=true>

Ancestry Database *U.S., Freedman's Bank Records, 1865-1871*

<https://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=8755>

FS Research Wiki article *United States, Freedman's Bank Records*

[https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States,_Freedman%27s_Bank_Records_\(FamilySearch_Historical_Records\)](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States,_Freedman%27s_Bank_Records_(FamilySearch_Historical_Records))

U.S. Colored Troops

The United States Army began to organize African Americans into regimental units known as the United States Colored Troops (USCT) in 1863. The enlistment of free blacks and slaves was considered a key to winning the war. Many USCT regiments originated as state militia units before 1863. The regiments included cavalry, artillery, and infantry. Approximately 186,000 African Americans served in the USCT volunteer cavalry, artillery, and infantry units during the Civil War.

Helpful Resources for Civil War Colored Troops

FS Research Wiki article *United States Colored Troops in the Civil War*

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Colored_Troops_in_the_Civil_War

FS Historical Records *United States Civil War Service Records of Union Colored Troops, 1863-1865*

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1932431>

Ancestry Database (\$) *U.S., Colored Troops Military Service Records, 1863-1865*

<https://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=1107>

Fold3 Database (\$) *Compiled Service Records* https://go.fold3.com/civilwar_records

Additional Resources for Unique African American Records

FS Webinar *Mine the Gold: - Effectively Research Millions of New Freedmen's Bureau Records from FamilySearch* by Thom Reed <https://www.familysearch.org/ask/learningViewer/1001>

Website *Afrigeneas* <http://www.afrigeneas.com/welcome.html>

Website *Accessible Archives* <http://www.accessible-archives.com/collections/>

FS Research Wiki article *Southern Claims Commission*

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Southern_Claims_Commission

FS Research Wiki article *African American Genealogy*

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/African_American_Genealogy

FS Research Wiki article *Researching African American Genealogy*

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Researching_African_American_Genealogy