

African American Records and Strategies

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Objectives

- Explain key methodology for African American genealogical research
- Demonstrate five success strategies for locating your ancestors in historical records
- Guide you in organizing and evaluating your research results
- Enable you to access unique African American sources and use FamilySearch tools to make your research time more effective

Methodology

- After 1865
 - Follow the standard research process
- Before 1865
 - If your ancestor was free, follow the standard research process for your ancestor
 - If your ancestor was enslaved, identify the slaveholder, then follow the standard research process *for the slaveholder*

The Standard Research Process

- Gather known information—start with yourself, then ask your relatives
- Choose a research goal—ask a specific question
- Find new information—search historical records
- Evaluate new information—decide what the evidence means and whether it is reliable
- Share new information—learn even more



Five Strategies for Success

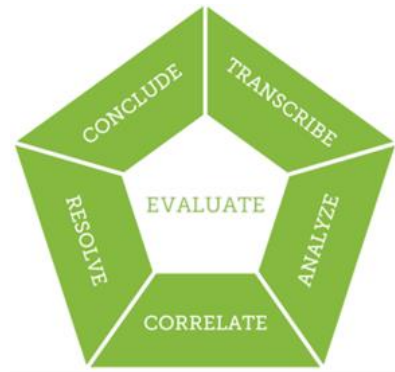
- Go from the known to the unknown—follow the paper trail starting with the most recent records and move back in time
- Search every available record—different records often contain different clues, even if the main information is the same
- Find all known family members—records of siblings can contain missing information about parents and other relatives
- Be aware of name changes—after the Civil War, many African Americans chose new names. Some changed their names often throughout their lives.
- Study the local history—to understand migration, laws and customs, and occupations

Organize Your Research

- Create a research plan—use your goal to decide what records to search
- Prepare a research log—remember what you searched and find it again
- Use charts and forms—record, evaluate, and correlate the evidence you discover

The Evaluation Cycle

- Transcribe the record—copy it down
- Analyze the evidence—pick it apart
- Correlate the evidence—compare the pieces
- Resolve conflicts—explain the problems
- Conclude facts—reach an “answer”



Evaluate the Evidence – Helpful Questions

- To whom does this apply?
- What does it mean?
- Does this evidence fit with what I know?
- Is there conflicting data?
- Can I trust this information?
- What clues does this give me for future research?

African American Sources

- Seek out records that specifically mention African Americans
 - Newspapers
 - Slave narratives
 - Records of the Freedmen’s Bureau
 - Records of the Freedman’s Bank
 - Land and property records
 - Probate records
 - Church records
 - Cemetery records
 - Manuscript collections

Unique African American Records Collections and Resources

The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, or “The Freedmen’s Bureau”

- <http://www.freedmensbureau.com> (Freedmen’s Bureau website)
- <http://www.discoverfreedmen.org/> (records online at FamilySearch)
These records were created between 1865-1872. Includes censuses, marriages, medical records, court records, contracts, rations, homesteads, and other records. Information can contain full names, former enslavers and plantations, ages, complexions, property, etc.
- <http://www.mappingthefreedmensbureau.com>
Locate the field office closest to where your ancestors lived and access films online.

Freedman’s Bank Records

- <http://www.freedmansbank.org>
These records were created between 1865-1874. Bank signature cards or registers can contain names, ages, birthplaces, residences, employers, family members, former enslavers and plantations, and other information.

Library of Congress

- [Research Guide – African American Genealogical Research](https://guides.loc.gov/african-american-genealogical-research)
<https://guides.loc.gov/african-american-genealogical-research>
Provides researchers with basic tools and resources to get started. Includes a bibliography, guidebooks, and case studies.

- [African American Family Histories and Related Works](https://www.loc.gov/rr/genealogy/bib_guid/aframer/)
https://www.loc.gov/rr/genealogy/bib_guid/aframer/
183 books that cover topics ranging from abolitionists, American Loyalists, and revolutionaries to masters and slaves, freedmen, Civil War soldiers, and Cherokee Indians.
- [Voices from the Days of Slavery](https://www.loc.gov/collections/voices-remembering-slavery/about-this-collection/)
https://www.loc.gov/collections/voices-remembering-slavery/about-this-collection/
Surviving voice recordings from formerly enslaved persons
- [Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938](https://www.loc.gov/collections/slave-narratives-from-the-federal-writers-project-1936-to-1938/about-this-collection/)
https://www.loc.gov/collections/slave-narratives-from-the-federal-writers-project-1936-to-1938/about-this-collection/
Collections of experiences of formerly enslaved persons as told in their own words
- [Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers](https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/)
https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/
Find what newspapers existed at the time and place your ancestors lived. Many newspapers are digitized and available to view for free.

University of North Carolina's Documenting the American South

- <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/>
Large collection of North American slave narratives. All are digitized and available to view for free. Vary from a few pages in length to hundreds of pages.

Enslaved: Peoples of the Historical Slave Trade

- <https://www.enslaved.org>
Growing collection documenting slave ships and their passengers, records of enslaved persons, and slave traders.

Saving Slave Houses

- <http://savingslavehouses.org>
Photographs and drawings of former slave houses and enslaved persons. Includes sections for genealogy, education, and preservation.

Accessible Archives

- <https://www.accessible-archives.com/collections/african-american-newspapers/>
Subscription database containing African American newspapers and information about life and history in the nineteenth century.

Black Press Research Collective

- <http://blackpressresearchcollective.org/resources/scholarship-archives/>
The BPRC is dedicated to generating digital scholarship and archiving the Black Press to preserve the significance of the historical and contemporary role of black newspapers in Africa and the African Diasporas.

Readex's African American Newspapers, 1827-1998

- <http://www.readex.com/content/african-american-newspapers-1827-1998>
Subscription website available at many public libraries. Contains African American Newspapers from 1827-1998.

Afrigeneas

- <https://www.afrigeneas.com/>
This is a collaborative website for people to share what they have found.

Access Genealogy

- <https://www.accessgenealogy.com>
Directs researchers to free United States genealogy resources online. Includes sources for birth records, death records, marriage records, census records, tax records, church records, court records, military records, historical newspapers, cemeteries, and ethnic records. Also provides some historical details about different times and people in America's history.

FamilySearch Resources – Highlights

Pamphlet – 10 Steps to Reclaiming Your African Roots

<https://cms-z-assets.familysearch.org/21/8e/07066ff34520a097519c2e4a0608/10-steps-to-reclaiming-your-african-roots.pdf>

African American Search Page

<https://www.familysearch.org/en/united-states/ethnicities/african-american>

African American Genealogy (includes links to many collections housed in the library)

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

Southern States Slavery and Bondage Collections (library collections listed by county and state)

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

African American Online Genealogy Records (links to many online databases)

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

The Quick Guide to African American Records

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

The Freedmen's Bureau records

<http://www.discoverfreedmen.org/>

The Freedman's Bank records

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1417695>

African American Digital Bookshelf (digital copies of books to aid in your search)

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

Full-Text Search Experiment (U.S. Land and Probate Records)

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/full-text>

FamilySearch Juneteenth Resources

Juneteenth at FamilySearch

<https://www.familysearch.org/en/rootstech/events/juneteenth-at-familysearch>

FamilySearch Blog – History of Juneteenth Holiday

<https://www.familysearch.org/en/blog/history-of-juneteenth-holiday>