

Researching the Enslaved

Researching enslaved African Americans can be difficult if you don't know the specific obstacles that come with researching past 1870. Many African Americans were enslaved until Emancipation and therefore were not counted before the 1870 Census which was the first census that counted all Americans. To find many African Americans before 1870, use the following research strategies to help successfully locate records.

1. **Research your family back to the 1870 Census.**
 - a. Interview your relatives for information on all your recent ancestors
 - b. Compile vital records for recent ancestors: birth, marriage, and death records
 - c. Create a family tree, online, on a pedigree chart, or in a computer program
 - d. Keep track of all you learn in a research log (these become the index to ALL your records)
 - e. Review what you find for clues that will lead you to more information
2. **Know what Federal Records are available and where to find them.**
 - a. Census Records & Slave Schedules
 - b. Military Records & Pension Files
 - c. Freedmen's Bureau & Bank Records
 - d. Slave Narratives
 - e. Southern Claims Commission
3. **Create a list of sources for your family.**
 - a. Family naming conventions
 - b. Compile records available from local sources (City Directories, Obituaries, New Articles, etc.)
 - c. Compile a specific list of sources for each family (in each location)
 - d. Locate Information on each available state record
4. **Know where to find the sources you seek.**
 - a. Regional Repositories
 - b. Historical & Genealogical Societies
 - c. State and Local Government Archives

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