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Researching African American Families That Came Out of Slavery: Focus on the first component of the Genealogical Proof Standard

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- I. Family history researchers should measure their work against the Genealogical Proof Standard (or “GPS”) to obtain the most accurate results possible.
 - a. This session will focus on the first component of the GPS—reasonably exhaustive research.
 - b. The following topics will be covered:
 - Historical context,
 - Universal research strategies, and
 - Information about selected sources.
- II. Historical Background: 1619-1940
 - a. From indentures to racialized slavery
 - b. Gradual Abolition in the North
 - c. Emancipation and Segregation
- III. Research Strategies
 - a. The First Step: Gathering family stories can provide important clues about the origins of a family’s surname, the area of the country where ancestors lived, and connections to other families.
 - b. Development of a Research Plan
 - Begin with the most recent U.S. census (1940) and working backwards.

- The Heightened Importance of Cluster research: The surname used by an ancestor soon after the Civil War may point to the identity of a former slaveholder, and documents created by or in respect of a slaveholder can provide genealogical information about enslaved ancestors.
- c. Once you have evidence of the likely geographic location where ancestors lived after emancipation, you will need to learn about the history of that location, including—
 - Any boundary changes; and
 - The current repositories of relevant records.

IV. Survey of Selected Records Specific to African American Ancestors

- a. Records of ancestors who were Free Persons of Color before slavery was abolished.
 - Pre-1870 census records, deeds of manumission, probate files
 - Registers of “free Negroes”¹
- b. 1850 and 1860 U.S. census slaves schedules
 - As well as 1790-1840 federal census records
- c. Federal records of formerly enslaved African Americans that predate the 1870 U.S. census
 - The War Department’s General Order 143 established the U.S. Bureau of Colored Troops in 1863, and compiled military service records² and pension applications also provide information about the formerly enslaved.³

¹ See, for example, Virginia and Louisiana registers. *Library of Virginia* (<http://www.lva.virginia.gov> : accessed 27 September 2017), search for “Free Negro register.”

² “Soldiers and Sailors Database” *National Park Service*, (<http://www.nps.gov/civilwar/soldiers-and-sailors-database.htm> : accessed 27 September 2017).

³ George P. Sanger, editor, “An Act to Establish a Bureau for the Relief of Freedmen and Refugees.” *The Statutes at Large of the United States, vol. 13* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1866) 507; viewed on *Books.Google.com* (<http://www.books.google.com>).

- The Field Office records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (“Freedmen’s Bureau”) cover the period 1865–1872.
 1. Marriage records of former slaves
 2. Labor contracts
 3. Register of complaints
- The Freedman’s Bank operated from 1865–1874.⁴
- d. Pre-1870 State census, tax, or voting records
- e. Relatively New Databases
 - *Last Seen: Finding Family After Slavery* (<http://informationwanted.org>)
 - *The Beyond Kin Project* (<http://beyondkin.gegbound.com>)
 - *New York Slavery Records Index* (coming in 2018 from John Jay College of Criminal Justice)

Selected Resources:

- Abrams, Alan. *Black and Free, The Free Negro in America, 1830: A Commentary on Carter Woodson’s “Free Negro Heads of Families in the United States in 1830.”* Sylvania, Ohio: Doubting Thomas Publishing, 2001.
- Burroughs, Tony, “Finding African Americans on the 1870 Census,” *Heritage Quest* (January / February 2001): 50–56. Image copy. (http://www.tonyburroughs.com/uploads/1/3/2/8/13281200/finding_african_americans_on_the_1870_census.pdf).
- Toni Carrier and Angela Walton-Raji, *Mapping the Freedmen’s Bureau* (<http://mappingthefreedmensbureau.com>).
- Cox, William A., “From Slavery to Society: The Jerry Moore Family of Virginia and Pennsylvania,” *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*, 103 (December 2015): 281-303

⁴ United States, Freedman’s Bank Records, 1865-1874,” index and images, *Familysearch* (<https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1417695> : accessed 27 September 2017); from NARA microfilm M816.

- Garrett-Nelson, LaBrenda, *A Guide To Researching African American Ancestors in Laurens County, South Carolina, and Selected Finding Aids* (Bloomington, Indiana: Xlibris, 2016). This is a model for research in SC counties and other states.
- “Researching African American Families that Came out of Slavery,” Board for Certification of Genealogists, *Springboard Blog*, 5 January 2016. (<http://bcgcertification.org/blog/2016/01/researching-african-american-families-that-came-out-of-slavery/>)
- Gutman, Herbert G. *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925*. New York: Vintage Books, 1976.
- Hait, Michael “In the Shadow of Rebellions: Maryland Ridgelys in Slavery and Freedom,” *National Genealogical Quarterly* 100 (December 2012): 245-66.
- Murphy, Ric, *Freedom Road, An American Saga from Jamestown to World War*, (Bloomington, Indiana: AuthorHouse, 2014). This book is an account of America’s oldest recorded African American Family.
- Rose, James M., and Alice Eichholz. *Black Genesis: A Resource Book for African American Genealogy*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2003.
- Russell, Judy G., “Born Free,” *The Legal Genealogist*, 21 May 2014. <http://www.legalgenealogist.com/2014/05/21/born-free/>.: 2017. This blog post discusses New Jersey birth records of children born to enslaved mothers.
- Smith, Robyn N., “Slave Research: Four Things You Need to Know,” *Reclaiming Kin*, 4 June 2015 (<http://www.reclaimingkin.com/slave-research-four-things/>). The author includes “things that will benefit you to know as you progress back into the era of slavery.”
- Washington, Reginald. “The Freedman’s Savings and Trust Company and African American Genealogical Research.” *Prologue Magazine* (Summer 1997). (<http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2005/spring/freedman-marriage-recs.html>)
- Williams, Heather Andrea, *Help Me to Find My People: The African American Search For Family Lost in Slavery*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012.