

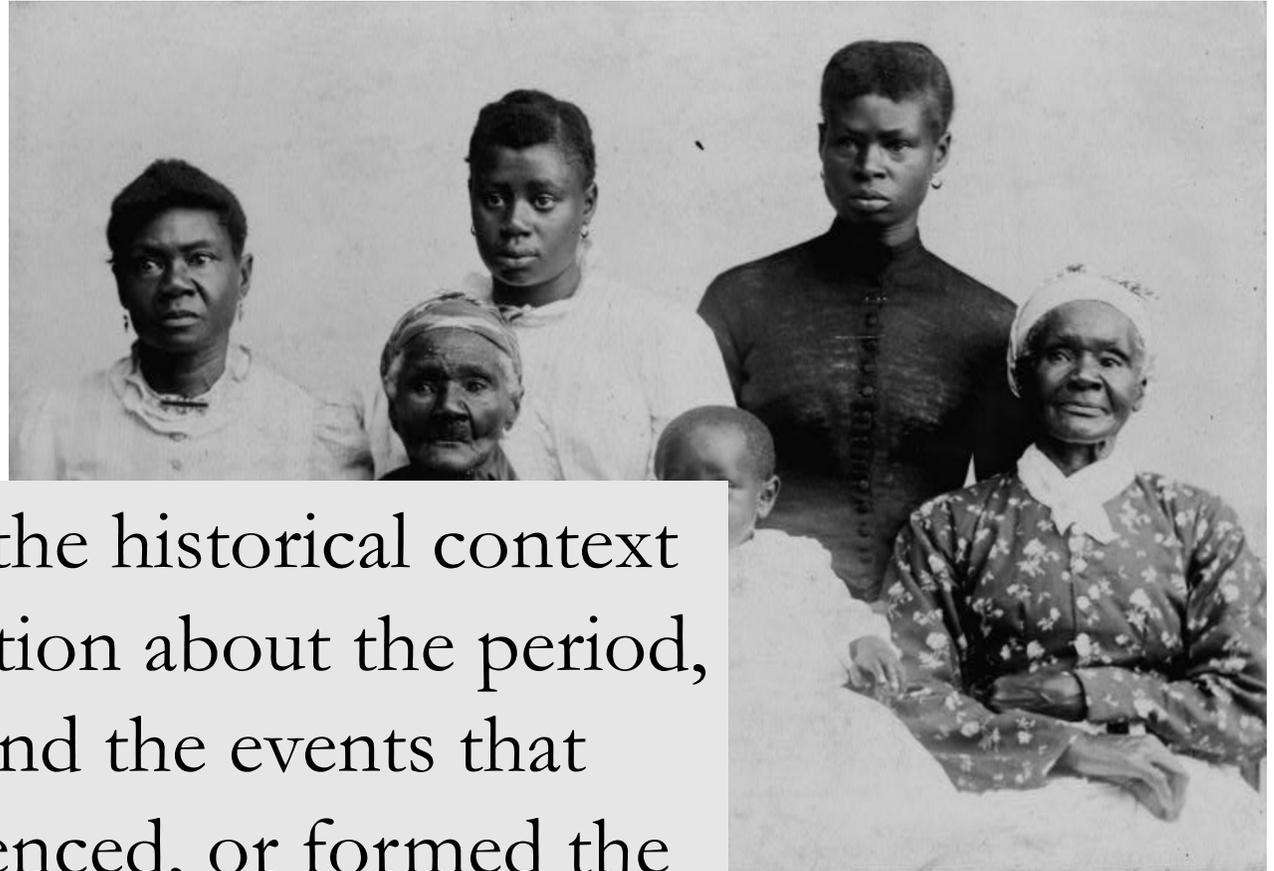
Beginning African American Genealogical Research

by James L. Tanner

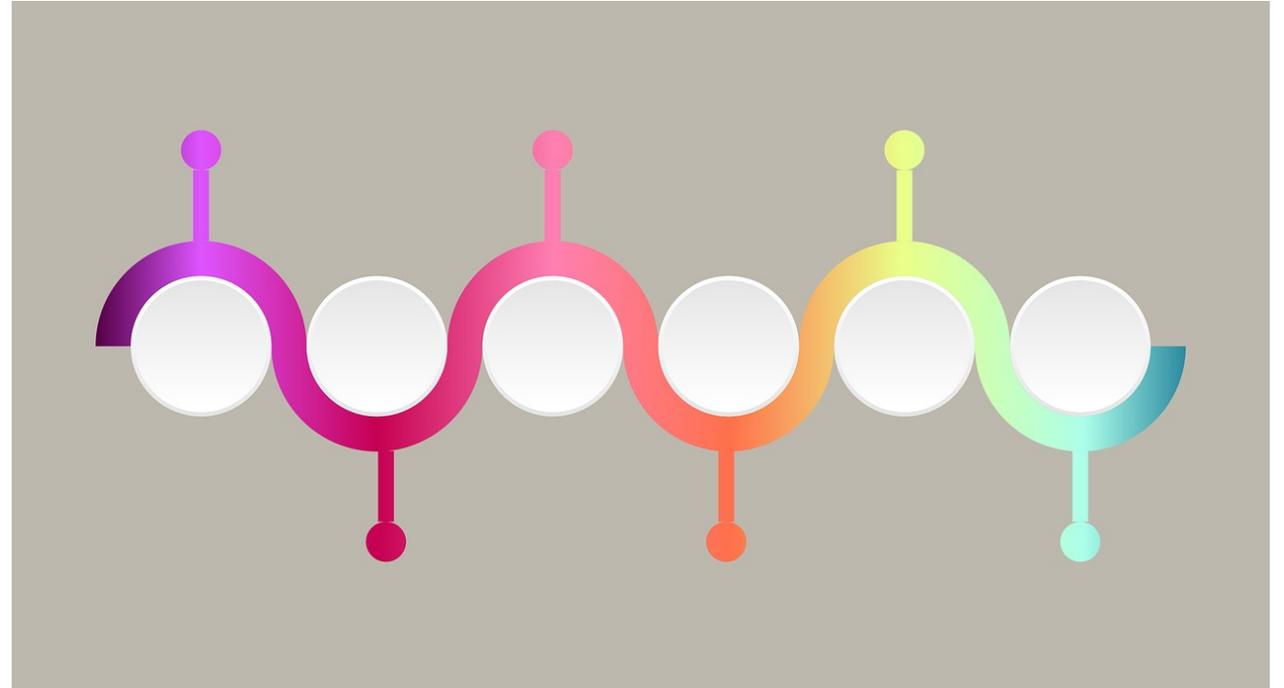


All genealogical research should begin with an understanding of the history of the ancestors and the history of the time and place they lived in.

This is called the historical context or the information about the period, the place, and the events that created, influenced, or formed the backdrop to the historic records.



When and where
your ancestors were
brought to the
Americas may
determine what
records exist to find
them.

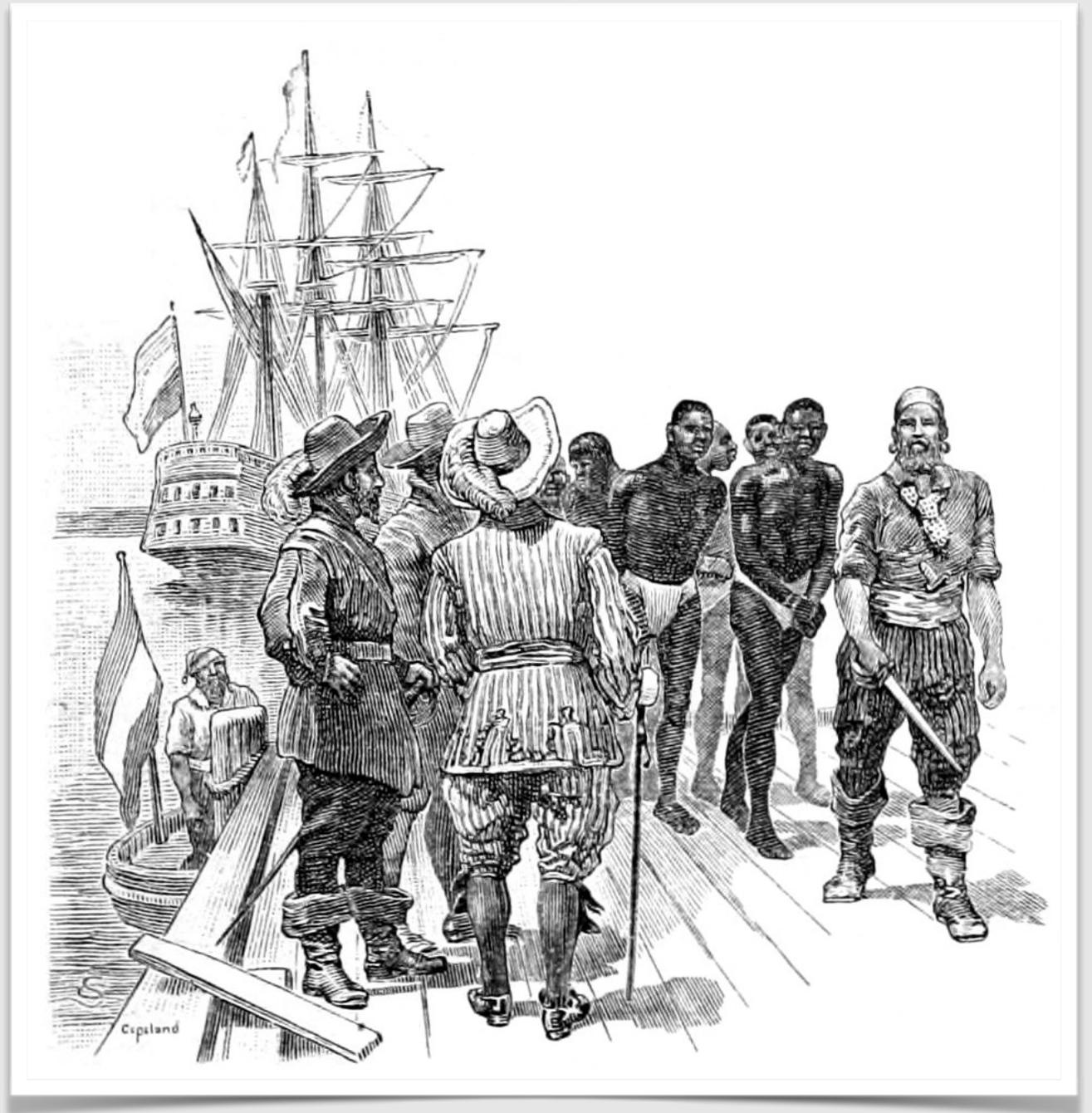




Transatlantic slave trade
from Africa to Europe
began in the 1400s.

This illustration from Christoph Weiditz's 1529 ethnographic study, *Trachtenburg*, presents perceptions of slavery and race in the New World.

In about 1501, enslaved people were brought from Africa to the Dominican Republic and the Trans-Atlantic African slave trade to the American continents began.



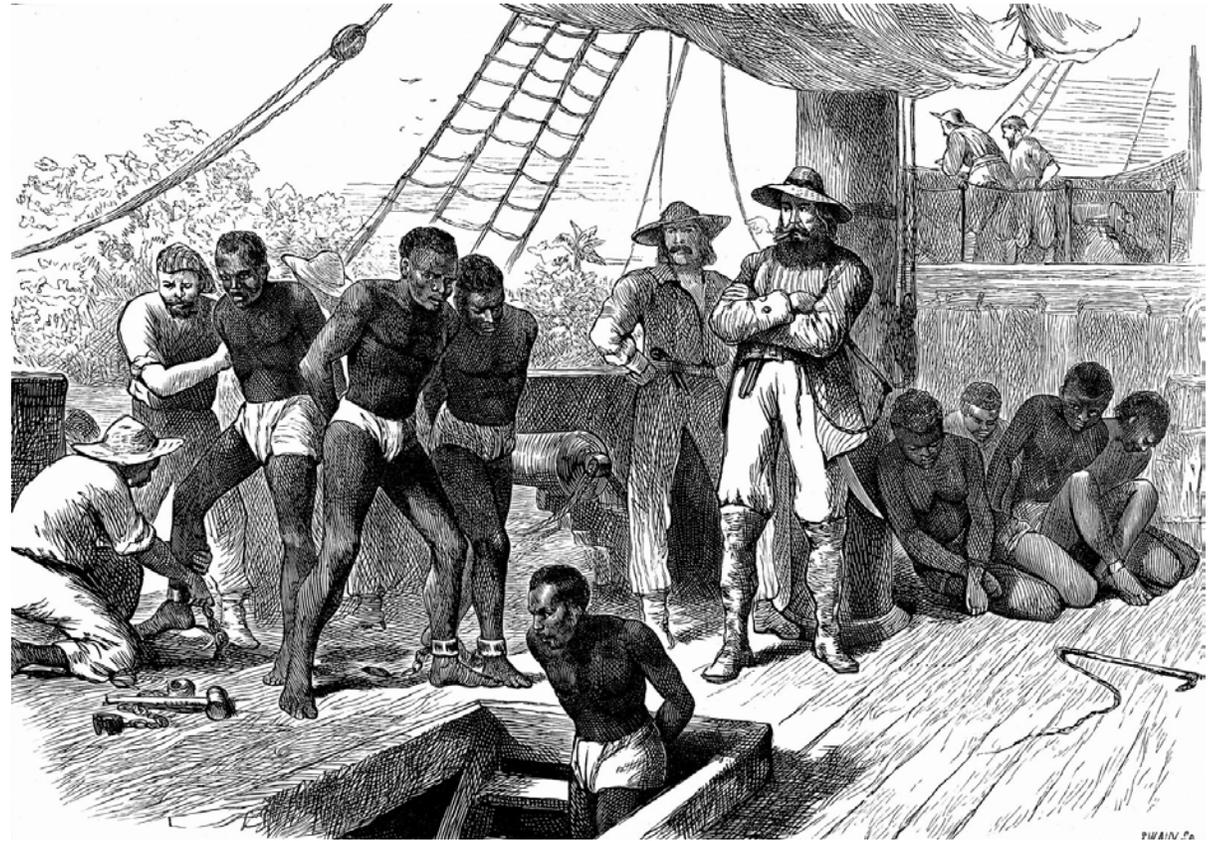
The enslaved people in the Americas also included indigenous people. Columbus took American indigenous slaves back to Spain.



Juan Garrido became the first documented black person to arrive in what would become the U.S. when he accompanied Juan Ponce de León in search of the Fountain of Youth in 1513, and they ended up in present-day Florida, around St. Augustine.



Regular slave trade to the English colonies started in 1619 with the first Africans in Jamestown in the Colony of Virginia.





In 1626, The Dutch West India Company imported 11 black male slaves into New Netherlands.

Colonial North
America's slave
trade began in 1636
with the first
American slave ship,
Desire, launched in
Massachusetts.

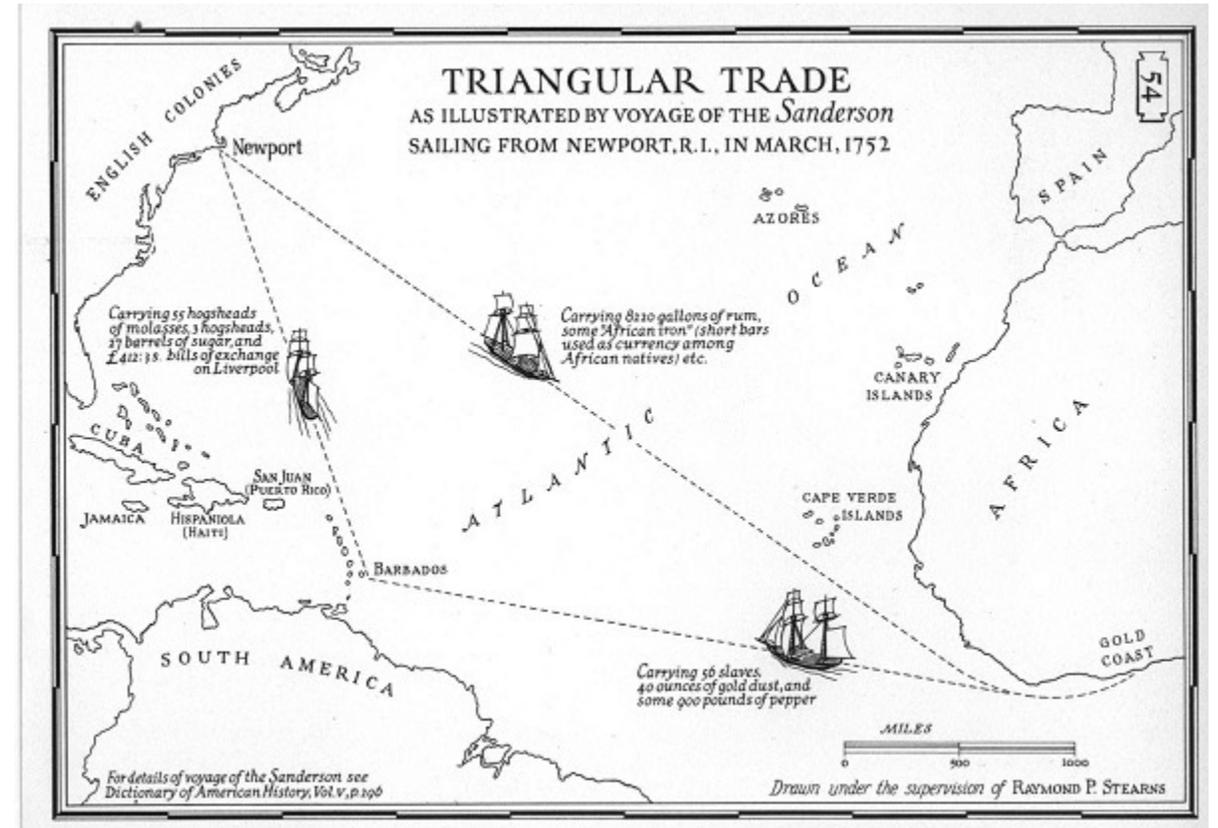


In 1640, John Punch, a runaway black servant, is the first documented slave for life.



The landing of the first Negroes

In 1641
Massachusetts was
the first colony to
legalize slavery



Slavery was legalized...

- 1641 Massachusetts
- 1650 Connecticut
- 1663 Maryland
- 1664 New York and New Jersey
- 1664 Maryland, the Carolinas and Virginia imposed lifelong servitude
- 1700 Pennsylvania

Note that slavery did not begin in the South

Abolition

1777 Vermont is the first of the thirteen colonies to abolish slavery and enfranchise all adults

1780 Pennsylvania begins gradual emancipation

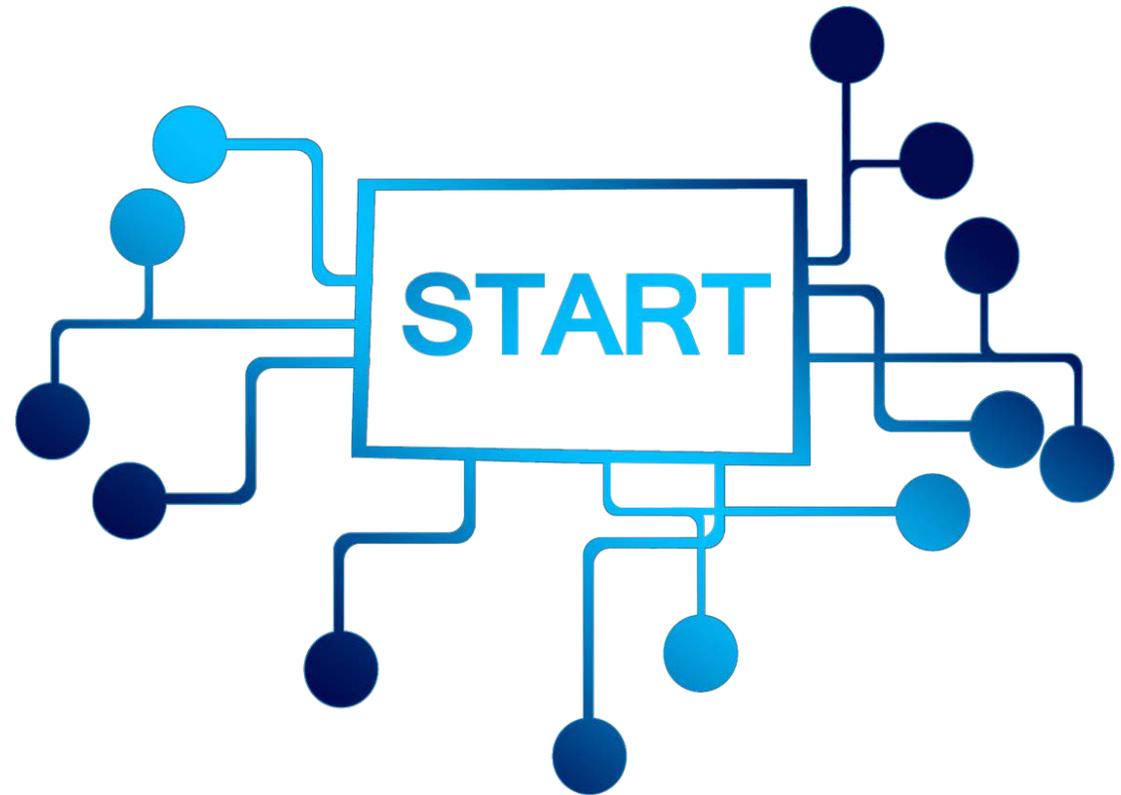
1784 700,000 slaves in the United States

1857 Dred Scott decision: Blacks can never be citizens and the Federal Government cannot outlaw slavery

1863 Emancipation Proclamation: all slaves freed in rebel territory

1865 Slavery abolished

Start with what you know and make sure you know what you know



Researching back to about 1870...

- U.S. Federal Census
- Vital Records
- Land and property records
- Church records
- In short, all the records we normally use for genealogical research

Freedmen's Bureau

<https://www.freedmensbureau.com/>



Navigation

States

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Discover your family's story.
Enter a grandparent's name to get started.
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First name

Last name

choose a state:

Search

Search this site:

The Freedmen's Bureau

The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands...
...often referred to as the Freedmen's Bureau, was established in the War Department by an [act of March 3, 1865](#). The Bureau supervised all relief and educational activities relating to refugees and freedmen, including issuing rations, clothing and medicine. The Bureau also assumed custody of confiscated lands or property in the former Confederate States, border states, District of Columbia, and Indian Territory. The bureau records were created or maintained by bureau headquarters, the assistant commissioners and the state superintendents of education and included personnel records and a variety of standard reports concerning bureau programs and conditions in the states.

RELATED WEBSITES

[Freedmen and Southern Society Project](#)

No event in American history matches the drama of emancipation. More than a century later, it continues to stir the deepest emotions, and properly so. In the United States, emancipation accompanied the defeat of the world's most powerful slaveholding class and freed a larger number of slaves than did the end of slavery in all other New World societies combined. Clothed in the rhetoric of biblical prophecy and national destiny and born of a bloody civil war, it accomplished a profound social revolution.

The Freedmen and Southern Society Project was established in 1976 to capture the essence of that revolution by depicting the drama of emancipation in the words of the participants: liberated slaves and defeated slaveholders, soldiers and civilians, common folk and the elite, Northerners and Southerners.

[Freedmen's Bureau Marriages, Fort Smith Arkansas](#)

[Freedmen's Bureau Marriage Register, Gibson County, Tennessee](#)

[The Freedmen's Bureau by W. E. B. DuBois](#)

[Freedmen's Bureau Records at the Africana Archives](#)

As part of our ongoing effort to provide you with new and unpublished records that document slaves, freedpersons and their descendants, we have begun to transcribe microfilmed Freedmen's Bureau records from the National Archives. We will continue to add records to our database, and this page, as our work continues.

[Freedmen's Bureau Reports - Hernando County, Florida](#)

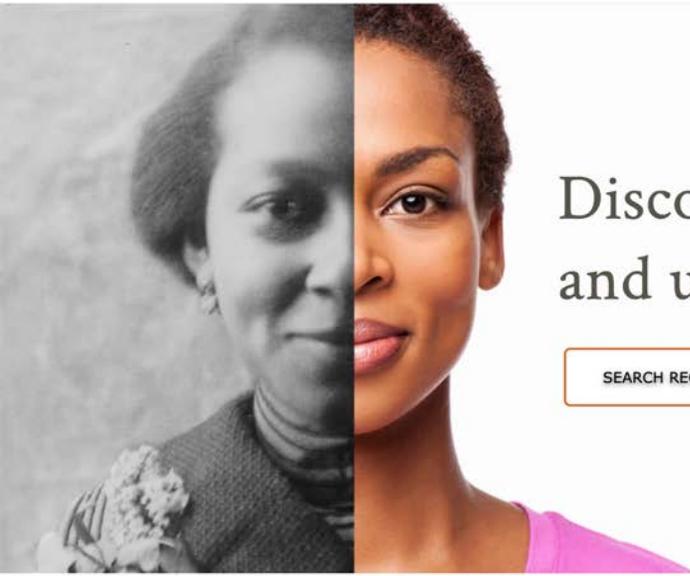
This part of the Freedmen's Bureau page is dedicated to those reports I was able to find. I have transcribed these reports as to provide very specific details as to life in our county during the Reconstruction Period after the Civil War. I have put these reports in chronological order so that a timeline of events may be established. These are personal correspondence between our local Freedmen's Bureau agents and state level agents.

[The Valley of the Shadow Freedmen's Bureau Records](#)

The Valley of the Shadow is a digital archive of primary sources that document the lives of people in Augusta County, Virginia, and Franklin County, Pennsylvania, during the era of the American Civil War. Here you may explore thousands of original documents that allow you to see what life was like during the Civil War for the men and women of Augusta and Franklin.

The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands...

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Discover your roots
and unlock your future.

SEARCH RECORDS

WATCH EVENT 

The Freedmen's Bureau Project

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



The Freedmen's Bureau Project

The Freedmen's Bureau Project is helping African Americans reconnect with their Civil War-era ancestors. Join us in discovering your roots, and begin building your own family tree.

LEAD US INTO THE LIGHT



DISCOVER YOUR ROOTS

Begin your own family history by reaching out to parents, grandparents, and any relative who can share stories, photos, or other information.

If you already have the name of ancestors and you would like to find more information, type the name in the field below. This will search FamilySearch.org's extensive database of more than 5 billion searchable names in historical records and allow you to add them to your own family tree.

African American Heritage

Home > Research Our Records > African American History > The Freedmen's Bureau

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Washington, DC Area



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The Freedmen's Bureau

The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (Record Group 105), also known as the Freedmen's Bureau, was established in the War Department by an act of Congress on March 3, 1865. The Bureau was responsible for the supervision and management of all matters relating to the refugees and freedmen and lands abandoned or seized during the Civil War, duties previously shared by military commanders and US Treasury Department officials. In May 1865, President Andrew Johnson appointed Maj. Gen. Oliver Otis Howard as Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau. Howard's headquarters were in Washington, DC, but assistant commissioners, sub-assistant commissioners, and agents conducted the Bureau's daily operations in the former Confederate states, the border states, and the District of Columbia.

Although the Bureau was not abolished until 1872, the bulk of its work was conducted from June 1865 to December 1868. While a major part of the Bureau's early activities included the supervision of abandoned and confiscated property, its mission was to provide relief and help formerly enslaved people become self-sufficient.

Bureau functions included issuing rations and clothing, operating hospitals and refugee camps, and supervising labor contracts between planters and freedpeople. The Bureau also managed apprenticeship disputes and complaints, assisted benevolent societies in the establishment of schools, helped in legalizing marriages entered into during slavery, and provided transportation to refugees and freedpeople who were attempting to reunite with their family or relocate to other parts of the country. As Congress extended the life of the Bureau, it added other duties, such as assisting Black soldiers and sailors in obtaining back pay, bounty payments, and pensions.

Because the Bureau's records contain a wide range of data about the African American experience during slavery and Reconstruction, they are an invaluable source for historians, social scientists, and genealogists.

[Search the Catalog for Records on the Freedmen's Bureau](#)

Digital access to the records of the Freedmen's Bureau is currently available through [FamilySearch.org](#). See the [section below](#) for more information and links to images (organized by their microfilm publication). Viewing images on FamilySearch may be [restricted](#).

Resources

Select Images

Freedmen's Bureau Brochure

Microfilming the Records

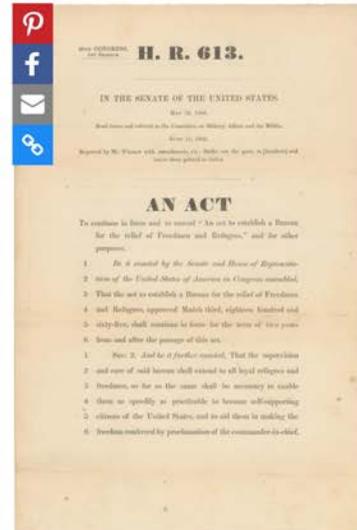
More information and images of the Freedmen's Bureau Records

[Headquarters Records](#)
[Marriage Records](#)

[State Records of Assistant Commissioners](#)

[Field Office Records](#)

[Adjutant General's Office Records](#)



HR 613 - An act to continue in force and to amend "An act to establish a Bureau for the relief of Freedmen and Refugees"... May 20, 1866

Freedmen's Bureau

Records are also available on [Ancestry.com](#), [FamilySearch.org](#), and [Archives.gov](#)

Digging deeper

- Southern plantation records
- Property records
- Probate records
- Deeds and other local records
- Runaway slaves from newspapers or other documents



The Family History Guide

thefhguide.com

African American

Goal 1: Get Started



Goal 1: Get started with African American research. Vault

Choices

A Learn the basics of African American research.

1. FamilySearch: Here is an overview of African American genealogy on FamilySearch.

☆ FS—African American Genealogy ⓘ

2. Introduction: Get an introduction to research.

☆ AC—Resources for African American Genealogy—34:12



☆ FS—Beginning African American Research—6 pgs.

3. Learn about the building blocks of African American genealogy.



FamilySearch.org Research Wiki

Research Wiki

- Wiki Home
- About the Wiki
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- Guided Research
- Research Resources
- Wiki Policies

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- Family History Centers
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- Special pages
- Printable version
- Permanent link
- Page information
- Cite this page
- Browse properties

African American Genealogy

[United States Genealogy](#) → **African American Genealogy**

Welcome to the African American Research page

Its most unique genealogical features:

- Family name changes were common after the Civil War
- Slavery research is usually challenging
- Freedman's Bank Freedmen's Bureau Records
- Researching African American Genealogy
- Join the Facebook African American Genealogy Research Community.

[African American Online Genealogy Records](#)

[Ask the FamilySearch Community](#)



A Tennessee Valley Authority African American worker

African American Genealogy Wiki Topics



Beginning Research

- Introduction
- Record Finder
- Research Steps
- Search Strategies

Original Records

- Bible Records
- Newspapers
- Obituaries
- Business
- Occupations
- Cemeteries
- Online Records
- Census
- Oral History
- Church Records
- Probate Records
- Court Records
- Slavery and Bondage
- Freedman's Bank
- Southern Claims Commission
- Freedmen's Bureau
- Taxation
- Funeral Homes
- Vital Records
- Land and Property
- Military Records

Compiled Sources

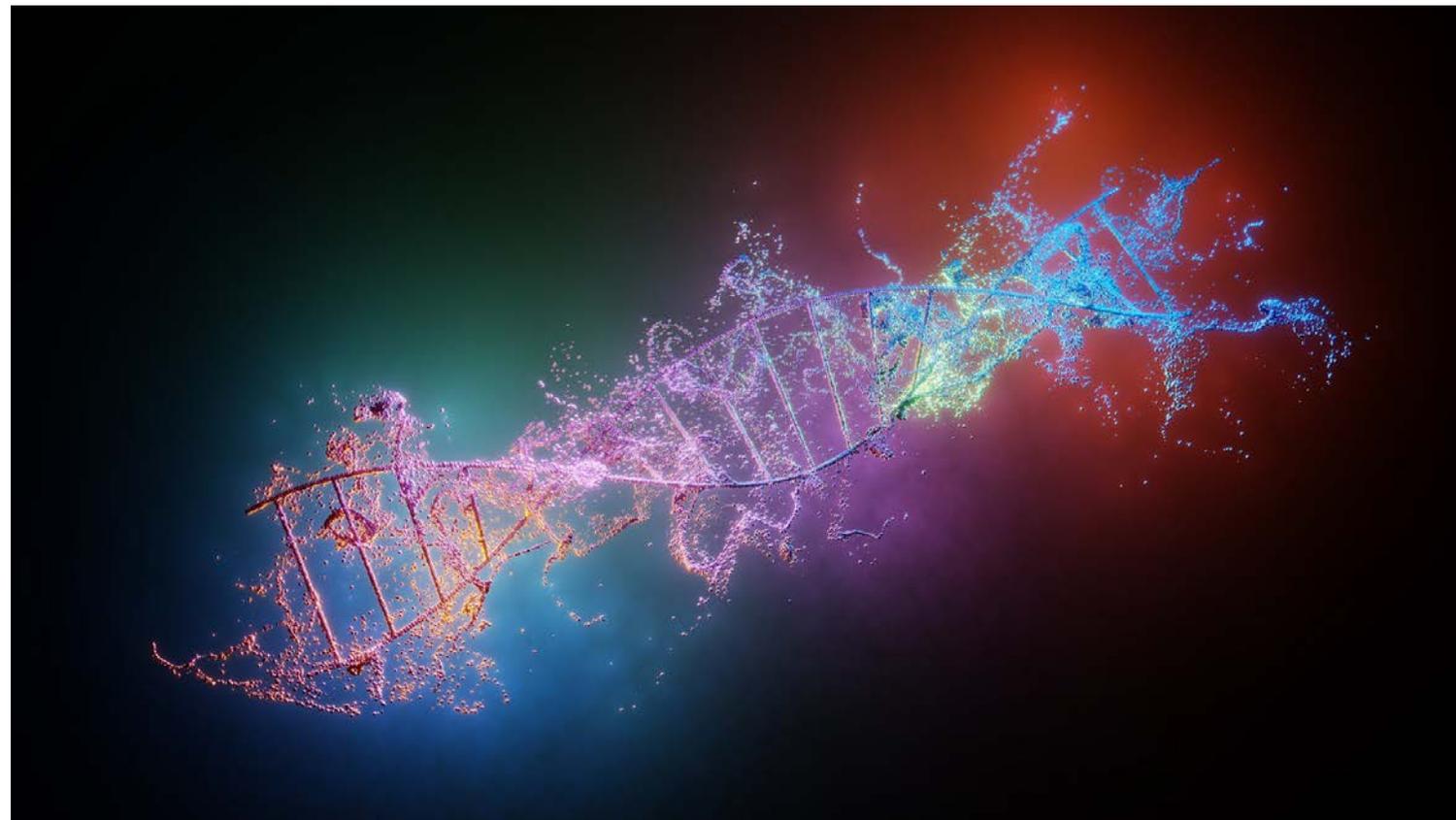
- Biography
- Periodicals

Background Information

State African American Pages [\[edit | edit source \]](#)

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arkansas
- Arizona
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- District of Columbia
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho

Take a DNA
test and
encourage
family members
to take a test
also.



Visit the
places, talk to
the people,
ask questions



Thanks for Watching

