Getting Started in African American Family Research

Class 1: Getting Started

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Laying the Foundation for a Successful Research

1. Talk to your Family.
2. Fill out a Chart.
3. Create a system to document and organize your research.

Where to Find Records

1. Ancestry – https://Ancestry.com
2. FamilySearch – https://FamilySearch.org
3. 10 Million Names Databases - https://10millionnames.org
4. Archives/Libraries/ Museums – Local and National
5. State/Local/County governmental offices

Records that Lead to Connections

1. Census
2. Vital Records - Birth, Death, Marriage, Divorce
3. Military - Draft Registrations, Pension Records, Bounty Land Record
4. The Search Process -
   - Find someone born before the 1950s.
   - Search for them in the 1950 census.
   - Move backwards in time using the census to trace your ancestor to their parents, to their grandparents and so on.

Finding Free People of Color

- Free people of color can be found in the same records as other free people.

Finding Enslaved Ancestors

- Locate your ancestor in the closest document to 1865. Try to find the 1867 Voter Registration.
- Look at their age, surname, and how long they have been in the state and county and where they were born.

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- Find the 1860 Slave Schedule for that county; find an enslaver with the same surname and who was born in the same state as the enslaved. Do a search using the year your enslaved ancestor was born.
- If you find a potential match for gender and age, look for family (enslaver) probates, inventories, and bills of sale that name your ancestor.
- You will need to follow your ancestor through the White family that enslaved them using documents where they name their enslaved.
- This could be probates/wills, inventories, manumission, petitions etc., or document that the state used to record enslaved individuals.
- If you do not find a likely candidate with the same surname, you should look at all the enslavers who have an enslaved individual that fits the age and gender of the person you are looking for.

Tips, Techniques, and Strategies

1. Cluster and Fan Research focuses on the people surrounding or living close to your ancestor to uncover information about your ancestor. This includes FANs, or **friends, family, associates,** and **neighbors.**
2. When you are stuck or have hit a brick wall, create a timeline on national, state, local, and African American history. Locate the decade you are stuck in, then figure out what documents are available for that time that might help you connect. If there are no documents, what might explain their absence from a census record, death, marriage, migration, etc.

Common Challenges

3. Nicknames and alternate spellings of first and surnames can pose challenges for researchers. When interviewing family, ask about first names, nick names, surnames.
4. Location changes can also make it difficult to trace your ancestor. African American Migration happened at various periods in time. The 19th century migrations are listed below.

19th-Century African American Migrations

- **1890 -1900 – Oklahoma** -This state held more than 50 African American colonies and at one time was proposed by promoters to be an all-black state.
- **1870 -1880 – Colorado** - Was also a place of migration during the California gold rush. At one point in time, they had more than 20 African American colonies.

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- **1870 -1880 – Kansas** - An estimated 30,000 people moved from the southern states to settle in Kansas. This movement was known as the Great Exodus and the migrants were called Exodusters. They created 26 known colonies in Kansas.
- **1850 -1860 – California** - An estimated 4,000 African Americans settled in California following the gold rush.

Resources

American Ancestor's Interview Questions, Research Logs, and Genealogy Charts.
https://www.americanancestors.org/tools/research-templates

Online webinar: Creating a Research Plan for Cluster Research
https://www.americanancestors.org/video-library/creating-research-plan-cluster-research?refreshed=true

United States Census Records
https://www.census.gov/history/www/genealogy/other_resources/state_censuses.html