

African Americans in the Federal Census, 1790–1930

Using Federal Census Records to Find Information on African American Ancestors

African Americans and the Federal Census

The federal government conducts a census every ten years. The Federal Constitution stipulated that slaves were counted as **three-fifths of a resident** for tax purposes and the apportionment of the House of Representatives.

"Getting Started"

The First Steps in Your Genealogical Research

- 1. Gather data on your immediate family:
 - Names
 - Dates (Birth, Marriages, Death, etc.)
 - Places of residence
 - the persons' connection to the federal government?
 - ➤ Did he serve in the military?
 - ➤ Did she work for a federal agency?
- 2. Interview older family members
- 3. Organize information
- 4. Once done...<u>census records</u> are the FIRST federal records you should consult for genealogical research

Research Method Using Census Schedules

Census Schedules: The First Federal Records You Should Consult in Genealogical Research

- 1. Start with the most recent census and work backwards
- 2. Most recent is 1930. (The 1940 census opens April 2, 2012)
- 3. Proceed down each decade—1920, 1910, 1900, and so on back
- 4. Find ancestors and record all information provided

General Limitations of Census Records

"Recorded Information Not Always Fully Accurate or Complete"

- Information was recorded orally; unfamiliar accents and pronunciations caused misspellings
- People did not always cooperate
- Residents not always at home (traveling, moving, working) and might not be counted. Neighbors sometimes gave erroneous information to census enumerator

Limitations Specific to African Americans, 1790-1860

1. Some aspects of African Americans in the census differs from that of other groups (particularly before 1870). This is due to the enslaved status of the majority of the black population, and the legal marginalization of those who were free prior to the 1870 census. Even after 1870, the census often undercounted the black population.

Limitations Specific to African Americans, 1790-1860

2. During slavery, the Federal Census did not list the names of slaves (although there were rare instances where a first name is provided by the owner). Since most blacks were enslaved in the decades prior to 1870, the names of the majority of African Americans were not recorded in the census before that year. *Free African Americans WERE documented*.

1790-1840: Free African Americans

Free black households were listed according to the same terms used for white households. Only the name of the "head-of-household" is given while other family members are simply enumerated by age and sex.

Free blacks were designated as "Black" (B), "Mulatto" (M), or "Colored."

Federal Population Schedules, 1790–1840

Only "Heads of Free Households" are listed in records for these years. All other family members, including slaves, are noted numerically.

"Free Colored Persons:" Example from 1840 Census, Harford Co., Maryland (No. 4.) OF HEADS OF FAMILIES James Pannell Eliha Mitchel Free Colored Persons Van L. Relater margaret Daugerty William Deven Gran Mutchel William Denn Wich das Alender James Townslay **Family Members Numbered** William Toes In me Renter Thomas Reston Briston Snoden Briston Snoden: "Head of Household"

African-Americans and the 1850 & 1860 Schedules

These two censuses introduced separate **Slave Schedules** and **Free Schedules**.

Members of all free households (including free blacks) were listed in the "Free Schedules."

Enslaved blacks were documented numerically in the "Slave Schedules."

Slave Schedules: 1850 & 1860

1. They do not actually list the names of slaves (except on rare occassions).

2. They exist only for the historical "slave states" (including Delaware).

Alabama

Arkansas

Delaware

District of Columbia

Florida

Georgia

Kentucky

Louisiana

Maryland

Mississippi

Missouri

North Carolina

South Carolina

Tennessee

Virginia

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Free Schedules: 1850 & 1860

- 1. Lists the name, age, sex, place of birth, and color of each person in the household
- 2. Lists those that married within the year
- 3. Lists those in school within the year and literacy of those over 20
- 4. Lists whether the person is deaf and dumb, blind, insane, idiotic, a pauper, or a convict.

"Free Schedule" for District of Columbia

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The 1870 Census and African Americans

- ❖ Important: As the first after the Civil War, this is the first to list all African Americans by name and is often the first official record of a surname for former slaves. Of particular interest should be the date and place of birth listed for former slaves and their families. This information may be a gateway for searching (by state, county, and enumeration district) the slave or free schedules in 1850 and 1860.
- *Race was expanded to include and distinguish white, black, mulatto, Chinese, and Indian (Native American) persons.

1870 Schedule Georgetown, DC



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Census Schedules for 1880 to 1930: Provides More Details on Households

- 1. Gives relationship between head-of-household and each other person living in the house
- 2. Arranged by Enumeration Districts (ED)
- 3. Names the street & house number (in cities only)
- 4. Gives the state or country of birth for the father and mother of each individual listed
- 5. Notes personal descriptions:
 - Race or color
 - Sex
 - Literacy
 - Occupation
 - Age at last birthday; if under 1 year, provides the number of months

Limited Availability of the 1890 Census

Largely Destroyed by Fire in 1921

Some Schedules and Fragments Remain for Select States

- Alabama
- Georgia
- Illinois
- Minnesota
- New Jersey
- New York

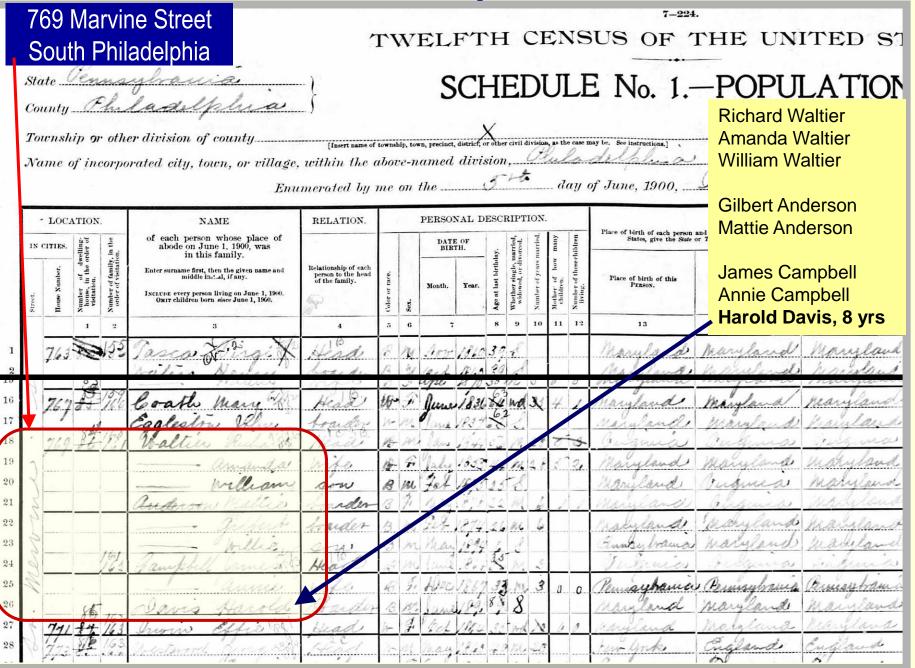
- North Carolina
- Ohio
- South Dakota
- Texas
- District of Columbia

1880-1930 Population Schedules

Provided More Details Than Earlier Censuses

*Note the following examples from the 1900 and 1930 Censuses Documenting "Harold Davis"

1900 Census, Philadelphia, PA



Full Scope Example of 1930 Population Schedule

1930 Census, Harford County, Maryland: The Davis Household

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Close-up of the Harold Davis Household

1930 Population Schedule: Harford County, MD

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