



# 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...**census records 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.)

SCHEDULE of the whole number of persons within the division allotted to

Name of County, City, Town, Precinct, Hamlet, or District.	NAMES OF HEADS OF FAMILIES.	FREE WHITE PERSONS, INCLUDING HEADS OF FAMILIES.																	FREE COLORED PERSONS.																				
		MALES.													FEMALES.				MALES.				FEMALES.																
		Under 5	5 under 10	10 under 15	15 under 20	20 under 30	30 under 40	40 under 50	50 under 60	60 under 70	70 under 80	80 under 90	90 under 100	100 and upwards.	Under 5	5 under 10	10 under 15	15 under 20	20 under 30	30 under 40	40 under 50	50 under 60	60 under 70	70 under 80	80 under 90	90 under 100	100 and upwards.	Under 10	10 under 24	24 under 36	36 under 55	55 under 100	Under 10	10 under 24	24 under 36	36 under 55	55 under 100		
Delaware District Harford County	James Parnell			2		1			1						1	1		2	2		1																		
	Elisha Mitchel	1	2			1	1													1																			
	John L. Webster							2										2																					
	John Webster									1								3																				1	
	Margaret Daugerty																																					1	
	William Dever											1								1																	1	1	1
	Evan Mitchel									1																													
	William Deems	1						1								2	2	1				1																	
	Nicholas Alenau		1					1								1	1					1																	
	James Townsley	2	1	1	1				1																														
	William Hoops	1					1														1																		
	John Mc Kenley	1	1				1	1													1	1																	
	Thomas Preston	1	1			1					1					1	1	1				1																	
	Moses Preston	1	1	2	1						1											2																	
	Pulbert Mitchel		1	2			2	1								1																							
	Briston Snoden																												1								1		
	John Hing																																						
	William Anderson			1																	1	2																	
	James Banks																																						
	John Erass		1	1			2									2	1			1																		1	
Carrel Hall																											1	2								2	1		
John Anderson	1		1							1										1																			
Christopher Mason																																							
Sarah Smith																					2	2															1		

Free Colored Persons

Family Members Numbered

Briston Snoden: “Head of Household”

Delaware District Harford County

# 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 occasions).
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



*M 9 Magistral Dist 4*  
**SCHEDULE 2.—Slave Inhabitants in the *N. E. No. 100* District in the County of *Fauquier* State of *Va*, enumerated by me, on the *21<sup>st</sup>* day of *June*, 1860. *Gleabot* Ass't Marshal.**

1	2	3			4	5	6	7	8	9	1	2	3			4	5	6	7	8	9
		Number of Slaves.	Age.	Sex.									Color.	Number of Slaves.	Age.						
<i>in Triplett</i>	1	10	f	B							<i>P. N. Jeffries</i>	1	8	f	m						
	1	8	f	B							<i>born after 1<sup>st</sup> Jan</i>										
	1	4	m	B							<i>George Brown</i>	1	65	m	B						1
	1	2	m	B								1	30	m	m						
	1	1	f	B								1	16	f	B						
	1	54	f	B					1		<b>Owner: Henry G. Dulany</b>	1	12	f	m						<b>"Tom" Slave</b>
<i>Elmira Seaton</i>	1	24	f	B								1	10	f	B						
	1	3	f	B								1	7	m	B						
	1	34	f	B							<i>James H. Rector</i>	1	30	m	m						
	1	17	f	m								1	100	m	B						
	1	9	f	B								1	90	f	m						
	1	5	m	B								1	74	m	B						
	1	2	f	B								1	74	m	B						
	1	6	f	m								1	68	f	B						
	1	35	f	B					1		<i>Thomson Cropp</i>	1	52	m	B						
	1	12	f	B								1	57	f	B						
	1	10	m	B								1	50	f	B						
	1	60	m	B							<i>John H. Lewis</i>	1	50	m	B						
	1	50	m	B								1	45	f	B						
	1	30	m	B								1	38	m	B						
	1	27	m	B								1	37	m	B						
	1	20	m	B								1	36	m	m						
	1	20	f	B								1	20	f	B						
	1	50	m	B								1	50	m	B						
	1	57	f	B							<i>P. A. C. Justice</i>	1	57	f	B						
	1	30	m	B								1	30	m	B						

# “Slave Schedule”

1860 Fauquier County, Virginia

“In rare instances, slaves were sometimes named”

Owner:  
John H. Lewis

Owner:  
Henry G. Dulany

“Tom”  
Slave

*George named after  
George Washington  
born in birth*

Slave named “George”  
50 years old,  
“idiotic from birth.”

# 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

Example from 1860 Census

Page No. 1 2<sup>nd</sup> ward  
 SCHEDULE 1.—Free Inhabitants in the City of Washington in the County of District State 417  
 of Columbia enumerated by me, on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of June 1860. William Lacey Ass't Marshal.  
 Post Office Washington D.C.

Dwelling-house— number in the order of visitation.	Families numbered in the order of visitation.	The name of every person whose usual place of abode on the first day of June, 1860, was in this family.	DESCRIPTION.			Profession, Occupation, or Trade of each person, male and female, over 15 years of age.	VALUE OF ESTATE OWNED.		Place of Birth, Naming the State, Territory, or Country.	Married within the year.	Attended School within the year.	Persons over 20 yrs of age who cannot read & write.	Whether deaf and dumb, blind, insane, idiotic, pauper, or convict.
			Age.	Sex.	White, black, or mulatto.		Value of Real Estate.	Value of Personal Estate.					
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1	1	J. M. Davis	36	M		Upsholder	1200	200	Free North Virginia				
		No upsholder	23	F					Washington D.C.				
		M. Upsholder	47	F					Washington D.C.				
5	4	Abel Dyson	60	M	B	Barber	1600	300	Maryland				
		Lidney Dyson	42	F	M				Maryland				
		J. A. Dyson	16	F	M				Washington D.C.		1		
		Georgia Dyson	14	F	M				Washington D.C.		1		
		Martina Dyson	12	F	M				Washington D.C.		1		
		Abel A. Dyson	10	M	M				Washington D.C.		1		
		Emma L. Dyson	8	F	M				Washington D.C.				
		Laura Dyson	6	F	M				Washington D.C.				
		Frank Dyson	4	M	M				Washington D.C.				
		Augusta Turner	38	F	B	Servant—			Virginia				
		Newton Pinner	19	M	M	Servant—			Virginia				
6	5	Madison C. Steig	50	M		Book Binder	300	200	Hope Chapel				
		Delia Steig	42	F					Frankfort—				
									Nebo Baker				

“The Dyson Family:”  
Free Blacks in DC



# 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

Sex.—Males (M.),  
Females (F.).  
Color.—White (W.), Black  
(B.), Mulatto (M.), Chi-  
nese (C.), Indian (I.).

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Inquiries numbered 7, 16, and 17 are not to be asked in respect to infants. Inquiries numbered 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 19, and 20 are to be answered (if at all) merely by an affirmative mark, as /.

SCHEDULE 1.—Inhabitants in Georgetown, in the County of Washington, State of Columbia, enumerated by me on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of June, 1870.  
Post Office: Georgetown D.C. W. S. Neal, Ass't Marshal.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		9	10	11		12	13	14	15		16	17	18	19	20	
							Value of Real Estate.	Value of Personal Estate.			Father of foreign birth.	Mother of foreign birth.				Cannot read.	Cannot write.						
1	65	68	Thornton Oscar	45	M	M	Common Laborer			Virginia									/				
2			Elizabeth	40	F		Keepinghouse			"									/				
3			Mary	9	"		"			"									/				
4		69	Taylor Joseph	30	M	B	Parm Laborer			"									/				
5			Sarah	21	F		Keepinghouse			"									/				
6			Abraham	5	M		"			Dist Columbia													
7			Lydia	1/2	F		"			"			July										
8		70	Stevenson George	50	M	M	Common Laborer			Maryland									/				
9			Margaret	40	F		Keepinghouse			Virginia									/				
10																			/				



# 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

769 Marvine Street  
South Philadelphia

7-224.

TWELFTH CENSUS OF THE UNITED STATES

## SCHEDULE No. 1.—POPULATION

State Pennsylvania

County Philadelphia

Township or other division of county \_\_\_\_\_  
[Insert name of township, town, precinct, district, or other civil division, as the case may be. See instructions.]

Name of incorporated city, town, or village, within the above-named division, Philadelphia

Enumerated by me on the 5th day of June, 1900.

Richard Waltier  
Amanda Waltier  
William Waltier

Gilbert Anderson  
Mattie Anderson

James Campbell  
Annie Campbell  
Harold Davis, 8 yrs

LOCATION.				NAME of each person whose place of abode on June 1, 1900, was in this family.  Enter surname first, then the given name and middle initial, if any.  INCLUDE every person living on June 1, 1900. Omit children born since June 1, 1900.	RELATION.  Relationship of each person to the head of the family.	PERSONAL DESCRIPTION.							Place of birth of each person and States, give the State or Territory.		
IN CITIES.	House Number.	Number of dwelling-house, in the order of visitation.	Number of family, in the order of visitation.			Color or race.	Sex.	DATE OF BIRTH.		Age at last birthday.	Whether single, married, widowed, or divorced.	Number of years married.	Mother of how many children.	Number of these children living.	Place of birth of this PERSON.
Street.				Month.	Year.			7	8						
	765	155		Pasco, J. J.	Head	W	Nov	1860	39				Maryland	Maryland	Maryland
				Waltier, Richard	Wife	F	Sept	1860	39				Maryland	Maryland	Maryland
	767	166		Coath, Mary	Head	W	June	1836	63		4	1	Maryland	Maryland	Maryland
				Egleston, Eliza	Wife	F	June	1837	62				Maryland	Maryland	Maryland
	769	171		Waltier, Richard	Head	W	Nov	1860	39				Virginia	Virginia	Virginia
				— Amanda	Wife	F	July	1857	42		3	3	Maryland	Maryland	Maryland
				— William	Son	M	Feb	1895	5				Maryland	Virginia	Maryland
				Anderson, Mattie	Son	B	July	1895	4				Maryland	Virginia	Maryland
				— Gilbert	Son	B	Sept	1897	2				Maryland	Maryland	Maryland
				— Willie	Son	M	May	1899	1				Pennsylvania	Maryland	Maryland
				Campbell, James	Head	W	June	1860	39				Virginia	Virginia	Virginia
				— Annie	Wife	F	Dec	1867	32		3	0	Pennsylvania	Pennsylvania	Pennsylvania
				Davis, Harold	Son	B	June	1891	8				Maryland	Maryland	Maryland
	771	163		Brown, Effie	Head	W	Feb	1862	38				Maryland	Maryland	Maryland
	772	163		— George	Head	W	May	1860	39				New York	England	England







# Close-up of the Harold Davis Household

## 1930 Population Schedule: Harford County, MD

PLACE OF ABODE				NAME of each person whose place of abode on April 1, 1930, was in this family Enter surname first, then the given name and middle initial, if any Include every person living on April 1, 1930. Omit children born since April 1, 1930	RELATION Relationship of this person to the head of the family	HOME DATA				PERSONAL DESCRIPTION					EDUCATION			PLACE OF BIRTH		
Street, avenue, road, etc.	House number (in cities or towns)	Number of dwelling house in order of visitation	Number of family in order of visitation			Home owned or rented	Value of home, lot, or other real estate, monthly rental, if rented	Radio set	Does this family live on a farm?	Sex	Color or race	Age at last birthday	Marital condition	Age at first marriage	Attended school or college any time since Sept. 1, 1929	Whether this person reads and writes	Place of birth of each person enumerated and of his or her parents. If born in the United States, give State or Territory. If of foreign birth, give country in which birthplace is now situated. (See Instructions.) Distinguish Canada-French from Canada-English, and Irish Free State from Northern Ireland			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	PERSON	FATHER	MOTHER	
																	18	19	20	
		15	18	Davis, Harold	Head		8			M	W	35	M	25	No	Yes	North Carolina	North Carolina	North Carolina	
				P. Lucy	Wife - H					F	W	30	M	20	No	Yes	Pennsylvania	Maryland	Maryland	
				Dorothy	Daughter					F	W	10	S		No	Yes	Maryland	Maryland	Maryland	
				Mathew	Son					M	W	8	S		No	Yes	Maryland	Pennsylvania	Maryland	
				Edwin E.	Son					M	W	5	S		No	Yes	Maryland	Pennsylvania	Maryland	
				Edgar A.	Son					M	W	5	S		No	Yes	Maryland	Pennsylvania	Maryland	
				Samuel J.	Son					M	W	3	S		No	Yes	Maryland	Pennsylvania	Maryland	
				Walter H.	Son					M	W	1 1/2	S		No	Yes	Maryland	Pennsylvania	Maryland	

Harold Davis, 35  
 P. Lucy Davis, 30  
 Dorothy, 10  
 Mathew, 8  
**Edwin, 5**  
 Edgar, 5  
 Samuel, 3  
 Walter, 1