

# 10 Steps to Reclaiming Your African Roots

## A Guide to Navigating African American Genealogy

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The desire to navigate one's identity and heritage can be easily overwhelmed by an onslaught of information and resources. Tackling your family history does not have to be complicated if you follow the right steps. This handout is designed to help you follow a step-by-step process to get started.

### 1. Write Down What You Know

Contrary to modern instinct, capturing your family history doesn't begin online—it begins with you! Before you head online, write down everything you know about your family. Print out a pedigree chart to help keep track of everyone. Doing so will help you to easily spot any holes or gaps in information. At the back of this guide, you will find an example pedigree chart to use and fill out.

### 2. Find Artifacts around the Home

Look for any possible information about your family and ancestors in records you may have in your home or in a relative's home. The more information you gather, the easier it will be to locate and recognize individuals in other records. Records to look for include obituaries, funeral programs, death records, birth records, journals, diaries, family Bibles, family letters, and photographs. Though not always easy to access, the cemeteries where relatives are buried can help you collect useful information as well. Label and organize the documents and photos you have discovered, and thoroughly review them for additional information.

### 3. Interview Relatives

After you have exhausted your own personal knowledge, it's time to reach out to your parents, siblings, and extended relatives to document the people and facts that you've yet to uncover. Ask them for your help in filling in the blanks of your pedigree chart or My Family: Stories That Bring Us Together booklet. Beyond asking for basic information, conducting interviews with your relatives will help you in compiling an oral history. Oral histories add an invaluable layer with stories, personalities, and details that bring your ancestors to life. The FamilySearch Family Tree and the FamilySearch Memories app can help you to record those interviews.

For tips on how to successfully conduct an interview, head to the FamilySearch wiki page: [familysearch.org/wiki/en/Creating\\_Oral\\_Histories](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Creating_Oral_Histories)

For more information on the FamilySearch Family Tree and FamilySearch Memories app,

check out: [familysearch.org/blog/en/familysearch-apps-oral-histories/](https://familysearch.org/blog/en/familysearch-apps-oral-histories/)

#### **4. Create a FamilySearch Account**

Once you've laid the proper foundation, now is the time to get online and input the information you've collected. Head to FamilySearch.org and sign up for a free account. You will need an email address or an SMS phone number in order to create one. Creating a FamilySearch account will allow you to preserve your family's information. On FamilySearch, you can collaborate with others who have common ancestors. With your permission, others can also access your information to provide you with additional help if needed. Sign up for a free account here: [familysearch.org/register/](https://familysearch.org/register/)

#### **5. Create Your Own Family Tree**

As you complete the steps to sign up for a FamilySearch account, FamilySearch will direct you to begin inputting the information you've collected on your own and with other family members. Begin adding the names, dates, and locations as instructed. Once you've created an account, log in, click the "Family Tree" tab, and begin adding names to your family tree. Input the names, dates, and locations you've collected. You do not need all of an ancestor's information to add them to the tree. Simply input as much as you can, and then come back later to add more or correct the information. You can always edit and update an ancestor's profile at any time. For more information on adding names to the tree, head here: [familysearch.org/blog/en/how-to-start-a-family-tree/](https://familysearch.org/blog/en/how-to-start-a-family-tree/)

#### **6. Search for Existing Ancestors**

Look to see if your ancestors are already in the tree by accessing FamilySearch Family Tree. With a database of more than 1.2 billion ancestors, the FamilySearch shared tree is a cooperative public tree where FamilySearch users can see how they connect to each other. Instead of concentrating efforts on privately constructing individual trees, FamilySearch users work together to build a single shared tree that helps everyone discover more about their ancestors and other family members.

In many instances, people are already working on your tree unbeknownst to you. Search the FamilySearch shared tree to see if ancestors have already been captured on the tree, saving you a lot of time and unnecessary work.

For instructions on how to search the shared family tree and connect it to your profile, head here: [familysearch.org/blog/en/find-my-ancestors-familysearch-family-tree/](https://familysearch.org/blog/en/find-my-ancestors-familysearch-family-tree/)

#### **7. Look for Blanks**

Look for empty spots in your family tree by examining it in various formats. Formats such as the fan chart can help you to more clearly see where you're missing family information,

giving you a starting point for where to continue searching. Once you've identified blanks, search for additional information on existing ancestors, or begin searching records as defined in the next step. To discover the various ways of looking at your family tree, head here: [familysearch.org/blog/en/new-discovery-fan-chart-family-tree/](https://familysearch.org/blog/en/new-discovery-fan-chart-family-tree/)

## 8. Search for Historical Records

There are a host of records available to search on both the federal and state levels. While we are unable to review every kind of record in this guide, here are the following record types that will best help you as you get started:

- Census Records
- Vital Records (Birth, marriage and death)
- Military Records

### *Unique African American Records after 1865*

- Freedman's Bank Records: [familysearch.org/searchcollection/1417695](https://familysearch.org/searchcollection/1417695)
- Freedmen's Bureau Records: [discoverfreedmen.org](https://discoverfreedmen.org)
- U.S. Colored Troops: [familysearch.org/search/collection/1932431](https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1932431)

All these record collections are critical for researching African American ancestors, and many more collections are available as well. For more information, head to the FamilySearch wiki page dedicated to African American genealogy: [familysearch.org/wiki/en/African\\_American\\_Genealogy](https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/African_American_Genealogy)

## 9. Add Photos and Stories

Breathe life and personality into your genealogy by uploading photos and adding stories in the Memories section of FamilySearch. This is a perfect way to preserve artifacts, photos, stories, and oral interviews in a location where all of your family members can access it for free. Begin adding your memories here: [familysearch.org/photos/](https://familysearch.org/photos/)

## 10. Work Together as a Family

Throughout your entire journey, lean on the support of your family. Enlist your immediate and extended family in searching for names, collecting artifacts, and adding people to the family tree. Doing so will bring you joy and strengthen your family ties. Talk with your parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents about your family stories. Gather any photos or documents you and your relatives may already have.