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Genealogical Research and the Moorland- Spingarn Research Center

1st Delivered at orientation in the Digital Lab (FGL) to a group from Psychology Dept. (HU)

Leida I. Torres

Genealogical Research and the Moorland Spingarn Research Center

Moorland-Spingarn Research Ctr. is widely noted for its holdings relevant to Africa and the African Diaspora, but its resources for research in Genealogy are less well known.

Please find below a very simple guide to start a genealogical research, as recommended by the National Genealogical Society.

1. Find out the names of your grandfather, great -grand father and so on, going as far back as you probably can. You must also find out where they lived, where they died. To do this search your homes and relatives' homes for the names, dates and places you need. Look in the family's Bible (s), picture albums, journals, certificates and any other document that might contain this information.

2. Visit your oldest living relatives and ask them which country or state your ancestors are/were and the dates of the ancestors birth, marriage and death. Interview them/and tape, if possible, on what they can remember. This is considered *Oral History*.

3. It is important that in the beginning, you follow only one line of your family- your own last name. If you try immediately to trace aunts, uncles and other relatives, you'll end up bogged down in an ocean of material.

4. Once you gather all the names, dates and places you can from homes sources and relatives the next step is to locate introductory books, videos and websites on the process of doing further genealogical research. You also can use some history books to familiarize yourself with the country, state, county, city or town of residence of the family being researched. This will give the researcher an overview of life during the period in that country/state, etc.

5. Next step is checking public records. Here is an example of how you move from one generation to another. If you know your father is from Baltimore City, MD, you would obtain copies of his birth (and death) certificates and marriage license from the courthouse or vital statistics department there. These will provide his father's name and right there you have another generation. To get the certificate from a courthouse/vital statistics you need the name and the approximate year of the event. County courthouses are prime sources of ancestral data in the U.S. Their records contain wills, marriage licenses, death certificates and land records. For most states you can do this by using the Internet.

6. Local churches, as well as local undertakers' records also contain helpful information like the date of baptism, death, names of relatives and place of burial. These can lead you to a cemetery where you might find graves of parents and their dates of birth and death.

7. The *National Archives* is an incredibly rich source of military and military pensions records. Besides the Headquarters (both here in Washington, DC and College Park, MD), it has 11 regional branches.

8. Census records can provide such valuable data of the names of everybody living in a household, at the time of the census, as well as many other type of information. Many libraries have old census, but the Library of the *Bureau of the Census* can also help.

9. The *U.S. Immigration and Naturalization* is another good source of information.

10. The *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons)* Library is an excellent source of information of people of every race , creed and nationality from some 40 countries. It's genealogical information is from 1538 to 1885. This too could be accessed through the Internet. Also with the signing of the *Freedmen's Bureau Records Preservation Act of 2000*, eventually all the records will be available through the *National Archives*.

11. Black Genealogy is one dimension of a multifaceted movement to reconstruct our own historical memory and identity.

12. Finally if you were going to hire a professional genealogist to help or do the research for you, you need to consider the following:

- a. Check a directory of professional genealogists.
- b. Find a genealogist, specially checking the area of specialty, location and fees/cost involved.
- c. Evaluate the professional qualifications.
- d. Define the researcher's work.
- e. Examine the results.
- f. If there are differences, questions or complaints, they should be directly to the professional first, so that misunderstandings should (would) be corrected (dissolved) quickly. If this doesn't work, there are other alternatives, like hiring somebody else or contacting a professional genealogy association or organization.
- g. Conclude the research. You need to be aware of the work and indicate

when you want it ended, in other words, you decide how far you want to go.

To summarize, the MSRC has material for genealogical research in the following categories:

Library Division

Autobiographies, biographies, collective biographies, obituaries
Slave Narratives, diaries
Business reports and histories
Church records, histories and reports
College & Univ- histories, catalogs, directories, yearbooks and annual reports
Secondary publ. & private sch-
Directories-social, business, trade, professional, and religious
Histories-countries, states, counties, cities & towns; social, economic and political
Periodicals
Vertical Files- both biographical and by subject

Manuscript Division

Individual papers, family histories and diaries and papers of organizations, society clubs, and churches
Photographs
Oral Histories
Three collections worth highlighting are: *Clothing Accounts of the U.S. Colored Troops*, for Civil War research-It includes, regiments, date and place of death as well as other inf.; *Historic Cemeteries*, listing of burials and 1,500 questionnaires used by Franklin Frazier to write his famous book *The Negro in the U.S.*

Howard University Archives (Howardiana)

Inf. related to Howard U., like annual reports, alumni directories, yearbooks, HU publications and others

*Also the Library Division has on Ready Reference some guides for
Genealogical Research, like:*

Burroughs, Tony. *Black Roots; a Beginner's Guide to Tracing the African American Family Tree*. New York: Fireside, 2001. (M929.1B9452)

Byers, Paula K., ed. *African American Generalogical Sourcebook*. New York: Gale Research, 1995. (M929.1Af83)

Smith, Franklin Carter and Emily Anne Croom. *A Genealogist's Guide to Discovering African-American Ancestors; How to find Your Heritage*. Cincinnati, OH: Betterway, 2003. (M929.1Sm561)

Woodtor, Dee Parmer. *Finding a Place Called Home; A Guide to African-African Genealogy and Historical Identity*. New York: Random House, 1999. (M929.1W861)

Updated 2/12/04