

MEDIA BACKGROUNDER

DOUGLASS DAY 2018

WHY WE ARE CELEBRATING FREDERICK DOUGLASS / DOUGLASS DAY

Although Frederick Douglass (1818 to 1895) often towers above other Black figures of the 19th century, he spent his life deeply invested in collective efforts. For half a century he was involved as an editor and activist in organizing for African American and women's rights. Celebrating his extraordinary life teaches us to remember him not only as an exceptional individual but as someone who was involved, from 1843 to 1883, in the Black-led Colored Conventions movement alongside many other campaigns for 19th-century justice. Proclaiming "Right Is of No Sex, Truth is of No Color" from the masthead of his newspaper, he also stood strongly for Black women to be included in Black and women's institutions and organizations as equal partners. Rather than celebrating Douglass as a singular figure, we celebrate him on his 200th birthday as an example of collective organizing for freedom and equal justice.

WHAT IS DOUGLASS DAY?

After the passing of Frederick Douglass in 1895, Black communities across the U.S. gathered to celebrate Frederick Douglass' birthday every year on February 14th. Together they gathered to remember, celebrate and protest against racial violence and white attacks on their civil rights. Douglas Day may have been one of the original inspirations for Black History Month, shaped by Mary Church Terrell and Carter G. Woodson. In 2017, the Colored Conventions Project revived Douglass Day on his chosen birthday as a day of collective action and radical love for preserving Black history.

ABOUT THE COLLECTIVE NATURE OF THE CCP

One of the [Colored Conventions Project](https://coloredconventions.org)'s central values is to adopt and advance the community-building that the conventions themselves modelled. The records of people and movements that have been dismissed and undervalued, and so lost and unarchived, are often only recovered through collective, community-sourced, commitment. The CCP's organizing for Douglass Day is one such effort.

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WHAT IS THE COLORED CONVENTIONS MOVEMENT?

The Colored Conventions Movement began in 1830 and continued through the end of the century. It laid the foundation for “early” civil rights efforts such as Equal Rights Leagues and Councils and the NAACP. The Colored Conventions movement spawned and supported early Black newspapers and universities such as [Talladega College](#) and [Florida A&M University](#). Participants gathered in multi-day conventions where they fought for educational, labor and legal rights for decades. Delegates included a veritable who’s who of 19th-century Black activism. Black writers, religious leaders, editors, entrepreneurs and educators came together not only to end white mob and state violence but to build Black institutions and communities. Tens of thousands participated in the hundreds of meetings they held in almost every state in the growing United States and throughout North America.

National Museum of African American History and Culture Freedmen’s Bureau Records

This site gives an overview of the story of the Freedmen’s Bureau, complete with digital reproductions of original photographs and illustrations from the era. It also tells the story about the origin of the Freedmen’s Bureau Paper transcription project at the Smithsonian, and how to use the archive online. Links to NMAAHC’s exhibitions based on Bureau Records are available here.

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/initiatives/freedmens-bureau-records>

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The Smithsonian Transcription Center Freedmen's Bureau Papers

This site offers procedural and technical answers to the following key questions about the archive and the public engagement in document transcription and review.

- What are the Freedmen's Bureau Papers?
- How does the volun-peer transcription and review process work?
- Why does the Smithsonian ask for volun-peer engagement in the effort to get the archive transcribed for public searchability?
- Where are the papers housed in physical form and where can one find them online?

<https://transcription.si.edu/instructions-freedmens-bureau>

Quick Facts: the Frederick Douglass Day Transcribe-a-thon

- Colored Conventions Project launched its inaugural Douglass Day transcribe-a-thon in 2017.
- The first year 250 people participated across nine national locations from Rhode Island to Chicago to Baltimore.
- In 2018, more than 60 groups have volunteered to host including universities, student groups, public libraries, museums, social justice groups, public history organizations, and archival groups.
- In 2018, more than 1,600 individuals are registered to join from across the United States, Ireland, and Spain.

COLORED CONVENTIONS

BRINGING NINETEENTH-CENTURY BLACK ORGANIZING TO DIGITAL LIFE

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Media Liaisons for Satellite Host Sites					
No.	Group or organization	Media Contact Person	Email	City	State / Country
1	University of Georgia	Emily McGinn and Jean Cleveland	mcginn@uga.edu and jclevela@uga.edu	Athens	GA
2	Social Justice CALL (Citizenship, Activism, Law and Literacy)	Lisa Monroe	lambanister@gmail.com	New Haven	CT
3	Loyola Marymount University	Elizabeth Drummond	elizabeth.drummond@lmu.edu	Los Angeles	CA
4	Texas A&M University - San Antonio	James Finley	james.finley@tamusa.edu	San Antonio	TX
5	Trinity College (Hartford)	Jason B. Jones	jason.jones@trincoll.edu	Hartford	CT
6	Trinity University	Claudia Stokes	cstokes@trinity.edu	San Antonio	TX
7	University of Maryland, Baltimore County	Courtney Hobson	chobson1@umbc.edu	Baltimore	MD
8	Grinnell College	Liz Rodrigues	rodrigue8@grinnell.edu	Grinnell	IA
9	Bates College	Margaret A. Imber	mimber@bates.edu	Lewiston	ME
10	Saint Michael's College	Maura D'Amore	mdamore@smcvt.edu	Colchester	VT
11	Vanderbilt University	Nathan Dize	nathan.dize@gmail.com	Nashville	TN
12	Vanderbilt University	Juliet Larkin-Gilmore	juliet.larkingilmore@gmail.com	Nashville	TN
13	Brown University (John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities and Cultural Heritage)	Jim McGrath	james_mcgrath@brown.edu	Providence	RI
14	Florida Atlantic University Department of English	RJ Boutelle	rboutelle@fau.edu	Boca Raton	FL
15	Hobart and William Smith Colleges	Alex Black	black@hws.edu	Geneva	NY

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Media Liaisons for Satellite Host Sites

16	Institute for Digital Research in the Humanities, University of Kansas	Dhanashree Thorat (Advisory to: leahnel@ku.edu)	dthorat@ku.edu	Lawrence	KS
17	University of Pennsylvania	Stewart Varner	svarner@upenn.edu	Philadelphia	PA
18	University of Tennessee Knoxville	Katy Chiles	kchiles1@utk.edu	Knoxville	TN
19	University of Miami	Paige Morgan	p.morgan@miami.edu	Coral Gables	FL
20	West Chester Public Library (West Chester, PA)	Victoria Dow	vdow@ccls.org	West Chester	PA
21	Westfield State University	Emily Todd	etodd@westfield.ma.edu	Westfield	MA
22	Long Island University - Brooklyn Library	Tamara Townsend	tamara.townsend@liu.edu	Brooklyn	NY
23	American Antiquarian Society / Mass Humanities	James David Moran	jmoran@mwa.org	Worcester	MA
24	Howard University	Martha Pitts	martha.pitts@howard.edu	Washington	DC
25	Loyola University Maryland	Jean Lee Cole	jlcole@loyola.edu	Baltimore	MD
26	Nexus Digital Research Co-op (Arizona State University)	Jacqueline Wernimont	Jacqueline.Wernimont@asu.edu	Tempe	AZ
27	Northeastern University	Sarah Connell	sa.connell@northeastern.edu	Boston	MA
28	Princeton University	Jim Casey	jccasey@princeton.edu	Princeton	NJ
29	University of the Incarnate Word	Prof. Amy Gilmour	agilmour@uiwtx.edu	San Antonio	TX
30	Virginia Tech Libraries (Athenaeum)	Christopher Miller	sastra9@vt.edu	Blacksburg	VA
31	DILAC Lab (Georgia Tech)	Brad Rittenhouse	bcrittenhouse@gatech.edu	Atlanta	GA

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Media Liaisons for Satellite Host Sites					
32	University Writing Center, East Carolina University	Dr. Nicole Caswell	caswelln@ecu.edu	Greenville	NC
33	Troy University Writing Center	Patricia Harris	pharris151287@troy.edu	Troy	AL
34	Sam Houston State University	Jeffrey Littlejohn	littlejohn@shsu.edu	Huntsville	TX
35	Villanova University	Karyn Hollis	karyn.hollis@villanova.edu	Villanova	PA
36	Metropolitan State University of Denver	Elizabeth Kleinfeld	ekleinf@msudenver.edu	Denver	CO
37	St. Mary's University	Camille Langston	clangston@stmarytx.edu	San Antonio	TX
38	Universidad Camilo José Cela	Danielle Elliott	delliott@ucjc.edu	Madrid	SPAIN
39	University of Puget Sound Center for Writing, Learning, and Teaching	Julie Christoph	jchristoph@pugetsound.edu	Tacoma	WA
40	Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi	Sarah Salter	sarah.salter@tamucc.edu	Corpus Christi	TX
41	Marquette University	Lisa Lamson	lisa.lamson@marquette.edu	Milwaukee	WI
42	Michigan Technological University Writing Center	Alexandra Pippenger	abpippen@mtu.edu	Houghton	MI
43	Kennesaw State University, Writing Center	Jeanne Law Bohannon	jbohan12@kennesaw.edu	Kennesaw	GA
44	College of Saint Benedict / Saint John's University (MN)	Kyhl Lyndgaard	klyndgaard@csbsju.edu	Collegeville	MN

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Partners' Social Media Contact Info						
No	Individual / Organization	Org Goal / Activity	Twitter handle	Facebook	Instagram	URL
1	Colored Conventions Project	DH	@ccp_org	https://www.facebook.com/ColoredConventionsProject/	Colored Conventions	http://coloredconventions.org/
2	NMAAHC	Inst.	@nmaahc	https://www.facebook.com/NMAAHC/	nmaahc	https://nmaahc.si.edu/
3	Smithsonian Transcription Center	Inst.	@TranscribeSI	https://www.facebook.com/SmithsonianTranscriptionCenter/?ref=br_rs	https://www.instagram.com/smithsoniantranscriptioncenter/	https://transcription.si.edu/
4	Kathy Chiles: The University of Tennessee, Knoxville	Uni	@katychiles			
5	English Department: University of Tennessee, Knoxville	Uni	@DouglassDayUTK			
6	Library: University of Maryland, Baltimore County	Uni	@UMBCLibrary	https://www.facebook.com/aoklibrary/	https://www.instagram.com/umbclibrary/	
7	History: University of Maryland, Baltimore County	Uni	@UMBCHistory		https://www.instagram.com/umbclibrary/	
8	Africana: University of Maryland, Baltimore County	Uni	@AFST_UMBC			
9	Humanities: University of Maryland, Baltimore County	Uni	@UMBCHumanities	https://www.facebook.com/DresherCenter?ref=hl		
10	University College Cork (Ireland)	Uni	@UCC	https://www.facebook.com/universitycollegecork		

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No	Individual / Organization	Org Goal / Activity	Twitter handle	Facebook	Instagram	URL
12	Trinity College - Education Technologies	Uni	@TrinEdTech			
13	Humanities: University of Maryland, Baltimore County	Uni	@UMBCHumanities			
14	Vika Zafrin: (Boston University)	Uni	@veek			
15	Brown University: Center for Public Humanities	Uni	@publichumans			https://www.brown.edu/academics/public-humanities/
16	Florida Atlantic University: English Department	Uni	@FAUEnglish			
17	Institute for Digital Research in the Humanities: University of Kansas	Uni	@idrh_ku			https://goo.gl/S12a7z
18	University of Pennsylvania: Price Lab	Uni	@PennPriceLab	https://www.facebook.com/pennpricelab	https://www.instagram.com/pennpricelab/	
19	Paige Morgan (University of Miami - Librarian)	Uni	@paigecmorgan			http://www.paigemorgan.net/
20	University of Miami: Library	Uni	@umiamilibraries	https://www.facebook.com/UMiamiLibraries/	https://www.instagram.com/umiamilibraries/	
21	West Chester, PA - Public Library		@WCPLnews	https://www.facebook.com/wcplnews		t.co/IDf0F98r6t
22	Humanities: Graceland University	Uni	@GUHumDiv			
Partners' Social Media Contact Info						

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No	Individual / Organization	Org Goal / Activity	Twitter handle	Facebook	Instagram	URL
23	American Antiquarian Society (AAS)		@AmAntiquarian	https://www.facebook.com/American.Antiquarian	https://www.instagram.com/americanantiquarian/	
24	Howard University	Uni	@HowardU			
25	Nexus Research Co-op	DH	@IHRNexus	https://www.facebook.com/IHRNexusLab/		
26	HASTAC	DH	@HASTAC			
27	Jacqueline Wernimont (English at Arizona State U)	Uni	@profwernimont			https://jwernimont.com/
28	Elizabeth Grumbach (Digital Director at Arizona State U)	Uni	@EMGrumbach			
29	Loyola University: University of Maryland	Uni	@Indlibrary			https://www.Indl.org/
30	Loyola University: English Dept	Uni	@LoyolaLit		https://www.instagram.com/loyolalit/	
31	NULab at Northeastern University	Uni	@NULabTMN			
32	Princeton Digital Humanities Center	Uni	@PrincetonDH			https://cdh.princeton.edu/
33	Digital Integrative Center: Georgia Tech	Uni	@DILAC_GT			
34	Writing Center - Troy University	Uni	@TroyWritingCtr			
35	University of Georgia: Libraries	DH	@ugalibs	https://www.facebook.com/ugalibraries		
36	solidarity conscious works	Black Media Organizing	@seeksolidarity			https://solidarityconscious.org/

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE

FREEDMEN'S BUREAU TRANSCRIPTION PROJECT

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How do I participate in the Freedmen's Bureau Transcription Project?

Anyone can participate in the project by going to the Freedmen's Bureau page on the Smithsonian Transcription Center's website (<https://transcription.si.edu/freedmens-bureau>).

How does the transcription process work?

Volunteers can begin by transcribing a new document or continuing the work that another volunteer has started. Once a volunteer decides he or she has "finished" a document and the document is ready for review, a different volunteer (who must have an account on the site) can review the transcription and either send it back for edits or complete the transcription. The finished transcript is sent to the Smithsonian for one final review, where it may then be used immediately, or undergo additional work.

What is the Freedmen's Bureau?

As the Civil War drew to a close, President Lincoln and members of Congress debated how to reunite the nation, reconstruct Southern society, and help formerly enslaved individuals make the transition to freedom and citizenship. As one response, in March 1865 Congress created the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, commonly referred to as The Freedmen's Bureau.

The Bureau was responsible for providing assistance to four million formerly enslaved individuals and hundreds of thousands of impoverished Southern whites. The Bureau set up offices in major cities in the 15 Southern and border states and the District of Columbia.

The Bureau provided food, clothing, medical care, and legal representation; promoted education; helped legalize marriages; and assisted African American soldiers and sailors in securing back pay, enlistment bounties and pensions. In addition, the Bureau promoted a system of labor contracts to replace the slavery system and tried to settle freedmen and women on abandoned or confiscated land. The Bureau was also responsible for protecting freedmen and women from intimidation and assaults by Southern whites.

By most accounts, the Bureau was only partially successful. Congress did not provide sufficient funds or staff for the Bureau to be truly effective. The Bureau only operated from 1865 to 1872. It generally failed to protect the freedmen or their political and civil rights from white Southerners intent on re-establishing their local power.

Administered by the War Department, the Bureau followed the record-keeping system inspired by the war effort and the expansion of the Federal Government it required. Those hundreds of thousands of documents provide an unexcelled view into the lives of the newly freed slaves.

Why is transcribing the Freedmen's Bureau records important?

Family historians, genealogists, students and scholars around the world will have easy online access to these records. In addition, these transcribed records will be word searchable, vastly reducing the effort required to find a person or topic. Anyone who has tried to read 19th century handwritten letters knows just how frustrating and time-consuming this can be. Providing typed versions of the original documents will make it more likely that more people will use these records. These records will enhance our understanding of the post-Civil War era and expand our knowledge of African American life in the South during this period.

What's the difference between the FamilySearch genealogical indexing project and the NMAAHC Smithsonian Transcription Center project?

The FamilySearch indexing project has created a searchable database of genealogical material drawn from the Freedmen's Bureau records: primarily, names, places, dates (<http://www.discoverfreedmen.org/>). This information is particularly useful for African American family historians who cannot rely on their ancestors appearing in the pre-1870 United State census or many other official records.

The NMAAHC Smithsonian Transcription Center project will transcribe every word of every document in the Freedmen's Bureau records. Once transcribed, those records will be word searchable. This will allow anyone to search for a name, a place, a topic and to read the full document and connect it to related documents.

Where are the original documents located/what if I want to see the original document?

The original Freedmen's Bureau records are preserved by the National Archives and Record Administration, headquartered in Washington, D. C. The original documents are not accessible to individuals but researchers can view microfilm copies of the records at many of the Federal Record Centers.

Where can I go to learn more about the Freedmen's Bureau?

National Archives and Records Administration

Custodian of the original Freedmen's Bureau records. NARA has microfilmed and made available the Freedmen's Bureau records for in person research at the National Archives Building in Washington, D.C. and at 13 regional archives nationwide. Resources and additional information are available on the NARA website. <https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/freedmens-bureau>

FamilySearch.org

Genealogical database that allows researchers to search for indexed names, dates, and locations in most of the Freedmen's Bureau records. Through the online database, a researcher can conduct a general search or browse by NARA microfilm publication. Great for searching names and locations that are hard to determine while transcribing. <https://familysearch.org>

Freedmen and Southern Society Project

Print and online resource. This project has published six volumes of *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*. Selected records from the print publications have been transcribed and made available on the Freedmen and Southern Society Project's website. <http://www.freedmen.umd.edu/>

Mapping the Freedmen's Bureau

Website that maps the location of Freedmen's Bureau field offices, schools, banks, contraband camps, and battle sites where US Colored Troops fought during the Civil War. www.mappingthefreedmensbureau.com

The Freedmen's Bureau Online

Online resource with transcriptions of key documents from the Freedmen's Bureau records and links to related websites and resources. www.freedmensbureau.com

What if I have additional questions about the Freedmen's Bureau or the transcription project?

Please contact the Freedmen's Bureau Transcription Project team via email: FreedmensBureau@si.edu.