



New Project Will Recover the Names of Up to 10 Million People Enslaved in America Before Emancipation and Locate their Living Descendants

American Ancestors® and Collaborators Announce the Launch of “10 Million Names,” a Project to Honor the Family Histories of African Americans Whose Ancestors Lived Under Slavery, with a Permanent, Free, Publicly Accessible Database at 10MillionNames.org

ABC News to Serve as Exclusive Media Partner of Historic 10 Million Names Project

August 3, 2023—Birmingham, Alabama—American Ancestors, a national center for family history, is partnering with family historians, leading African American scholars, and cultural institutions to recover the names of the 10 million people of African descent who were enslaved between the 1500s and 1865 in the territory that is now the United States of America. The project—10 Million Names—will centralize genealogical and historical information about enslaved people of African descent and their families on a free website.

ABC News will serve as the exclusive media partner of 10 Million Names. The year-long, network-wide initiative will feature the findings, research, and work of a collaborative network of genealogists, cultural organizations, and community-based family historians through impactful and informative storytelling and reporting across ABC News programs and platforms.

The project advisory board includes Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Harvard scholar and host of the popular PBS Series *Finding Your Roots*, which often reveals surprising information to celebrity guests about their ancestors. Other members of the 10 Million Names Advisory Board are Richard Cellini, founder of the Georgetown Memory Project and a Research Fellow at the Harvard Radcliffe Institute, Gwill York, Advisory Board chair, entrepreneur, prominent business leader, and civic volunteer for more than thirty years, and Paula Williams Madison, author of *Finding Samuel Lowe: China, Jamaica, Harlem, and* Chairman and CEO of Madison Media Management LLC and 88 Madison Media Works Inc.

Dr. Gates and others associated with the project have described it as having the potential to connect millions of people with American history through genealogy in ways never possible before.

“For the first time ever, we have the means to accomplish a project of this importance and magnitude,” said Cellini, the founding director of the 10 Million Names project. “The institutional will and the technology exist. We have a collective obligation as a nation to tell African American family stories.”

Beginning in 2018, American Ancestors worked with Cellini to create a free, searchable public portal at [GU272.AmericanAncestors.org](https://www.americanancestors.org) that presented the family histories of more than 300 men, women, and children sold by the Jesuit priests of Georgetown University (then known as Georgetown College) in 1838 to Louisiana sugar plantations. When he first discovered the sale, Cellini, a Georgetown alumnus, created an independent non-profit dedicated to finding the people who were sold, and worked with American Ancestors to publish the results.

“Our collaboration with Richard Cellini on the Georgetown Memory Project served as a model and launch pad for 10 Million Names,” said Ryan Woods, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer for American Ancestors. “The work done on the Georgetown project demonstrated we could apply a different methodology to help more Americans of African descent recover their family history before 1870—which is often difficult. Community-based family historians will play a vital role in the success of this project. 10 Million Names will work alongside families, individuals, and organizations to amplify the voices of people who have been telling their stories for hundreds of years.”

To accomplish its goal, the 10 Million Names research team will reverse the typical approach used by genealogists, and borrow from the historian’s toolkit by starting with original source material, stretching from the 1500s to 1865. Genealogical researchers, historians, and data specialists will source data about enslaved people of African descent from archives, libraries, genealogical and historical societies, and organizations around the world. The team will also seek input from communities of family historians around the country and encourage the public to submit material that contains names of people and locations.

“ABC News is proud to be the exclusive media partner on this historic project to tell the untold stories of familial histories that have been a mystery until now, and we are looking forward to serving our audiences with straightforward reporting that shines a light on this chapter in American history,” said ABC News President Kim Godwin.

“Slavery separated families and obscured family history. Before the 20th century, genealogical data about enslaved Africans and their descendants was often deliberately obscured, altered, or simply unrecorded in the first place. This lasting legacy of slavery—the erasure of family history—remains with us today,” said 10 Million Names’ Chief Historian Dr. Kendra Taira Field, Associate Professor of History, Co-founder of the Du Bois Forum, and Director of the Center for the Study of Race and Democracy at Tufts University.

“So while those Americans attempting to claim Mayflower ancestry have had ample records to prove it, African Americans who have been collecting their family histories and stories privately for centuries have not generally had easy access to collective repositories of genealogical data. This divergence is a stark reminder of our unequal and uneven access to our familial past,” Field concluded. 10 Million Names is uniting its efforts with a number of collaborating institutions, such as the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society, and non-profit genealogical organizations, such as FamilySearch International, and the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution. In addition to Dr. Field, 10 Million Names is guided by a council of prominent scholars of African American history and studies that includes: Dr. Vincent Brown, Charles Warren Professor of History and Professor of African and African American Studies at Harvard University; Dr. Brandon M. Terry, John L. Loeb Associate Professor of the Social Sciences at Harvard University; Dr. Kerri Greenidge, Mellon Associate Professor in the Department of Studies of Race, Colonialism, and Diaspora at Tufts University; and Dr.

Thavolia Glymph, Peabody Family Distinguished Professor of History and Professor of Law at Duke University.

The public is immediately invited to begin exploring the free, public website at 10MillionNames.org, where a small but growing number of datasets are available at present, with more to be added on a regular basis. The site offers resources for self-directed research into African American genealogy and interactive historical context for 10 Million Names. People are also encouraged to submit original family materials containing names and locations such as family trees, copies of diaries or letters, bible records, and interviews with relatives to help create a publicly accessible repository about African American ancestors. More detail about what materials 10 Million Names is seeking is available online, at 10MillionNames.org/share.

About American Ancestors®

American Ancestors is a national center for family history, heritage, and culture based in Boston, Massachusetts, and one of the world's top destinations for family history research, according to *USA Today*. American Ancestors is the global brand of New England Historic Genealogical Society (NEHGS), America's oldest and largest genealogical society (founded in 1845). American Ancestors serves more than 400,000 members and millions of online users engaged in family history nationally and around the world through its website AmericanAncestors.org with more than one billion names in its databases. Located in Boston's Back Bay, American Ancestors is home to a world-class research center and archive, an expert staff, and the Wyner Family Jewish Heritage Center. It maintains a publishing division that produces original genealogical research, scholarship, and educational materials, including the *Register*, the flagship journal of American genealogy since 1847, and *American Ancestors*, its award-winning magazine.

For more information about 10 Million Names, please contact Claire Vail, VP of Communications for American Ancestors, at claire.vail@nehgs.org and download a press kit at 10millionnames.org.

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