Teaching Genealogists AI™
Instructor: Sylvia Vargas

Census Records for Puerto Rican Genealogy

Foundational Reference — The Genealogical Proof Standard

Course Instructor: Sylvia Vargas
Organization: Puerto Rican Genealogy Group
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Why This Reference Exists

Every module in this course uses the phrase "Genealogical Proof Standard" or mentions analyzing sources and evidence. This document explains what those phrases mean — in plain language, with census-record examples drawn directly from Puerto Rican research.

You do not need to memorize this material before starting Module 1. But you should read it before Module 8, and refer back to it whenever you find yourself asking: *"How do I know if my conclusion is good enough?"*

What Is the Genealogical Proof Standard?

The **Genealogical Proof Standard (GPS)** is a set of five requirements developed by the Board for Certification of Genealogists (BCG) to define what makes a genealogical conclusion reliable.

It was created because genealogy — done carelessly — produces conclusions that *feel* solid but aren't. A name match in a database is not proof. An online family tree is not proof. Even a document is not automatically proof: it depends on who recorded the information, when, and how close they were to the event.

The GPS gives researchers a consistent way to evaluate their own work and communicate the strength of their conclusions to others.

> The GPS is not a checklist you complete once. It is a standard of care applied throughout the research process.

The Five Elements of the GPS

Element 1 — Reasonably Exhaustive Search

You must search all records that are reasonably available and likely to contain relevant information. This includes:

- Records that *directly* name the person
- Records that name close associates: neighbors, witnesses at marriage, godparents, business partners
- Records you expect to find *and don't* — because their absence is also information

In this course: For a Puerto Rican ancestor in Rincón in 1899, a reasonably exhaustive search would include the 1887 Spanish census, the 1899 Military Census, the 1910 U.S. Federal Census, civil registration records, and (where available) parish records. Stopping after finding one census entry is not exhaustive.

Element 2 — Complete and Accurate Citations

Every fact you record must include a complete citation identifying:

1. **Who** created the record (enumerator, registrar, informant)
2. **What** the record is (title, series, collection)
3. **When** it was created
4. **Where** it is held (repository, URL, access date for digital records)
5. **Where within** the record the information appears (page, entry number, image number)

Why it matters: A citation is how another researcher — including your future self — can find the same record you found. Without it, your conclusion cannot be verified or built upon.

In this course: When you extract an entry from the 1887 Spanish census, you will record not just the names but the full citation: collection name, municipality, page number, and the platform through which you accessed it.

Element 3 — Analysis and Correlation of Evidence

After collecting records, you must analyze what each one actually says — not what you hope it says — and then compare them against each other.

This means asking: - Do these records agree? If not, why might they differ? - Is the information recorded by someone who was present at the event, or reported secondhand? - Are there patterns across multiple records that support the same conclusion?

In this course: A man recorded as age 45 in the 1899 Military Census and as age 56 in the 1910 U.S. Federal Census — an 11-year gap over 11 years — provides strong corroboration. But an age gap of 17 years over the same period requires explanation: was the enumerator rounding? Did he misrepresent his age? Is this a different person?

Element 4 — Resolution of Conflicting Evidence

When records disagree, you cannot simply choose the one you prefer. You must explain why one source is more credible than another, using systematic reasoning:

- **Original sources** generally outweigh derivative sources (a civil registration original outweighs a database index)
- **Primary information** (from a direct witness) generally outweighs secondary information (reported secondhand)
- **Contemporary records** generally outweigh records created long after the event

When two high-quality, independent sources conflict and resolution is not possible, you must say so explicitly rather than forcing a conclusion.

In this course: Census records frequently conflict on ages, birthplaces, and spelling of names. Module 8 covers the systematic method for resolving these conflicts.

Element 5 — Soundly Reasoned, Coherently Written Conclusion

Your conclusion must be written down. Unwritten conclusions cannot be evaluated, shared, or built upon.

The form depends on complexity:

Situation	Form
Simple fact, no conflict, direct evidence	**Proof statement** (one sentence)
Minor conflicts, straightforward resolution	**Proof summary** (one to three paragraphs)
Indirect evidence, major conflicts, complex reasoning	**Proof argument** (detailed narrative with full analysis)

In this course: Worksheets and research logs serve as the written record of your reasoning. They are not merely organizational tools — they are the documentation that makes your conclusions verifiable.

The Three-Layer Analysis Framework

The GPS requires analysis, but it also requires a shared vocabulary for *what you are analyzing*. Without consistent terminology, "this is a primary source" can mean completely different things to different researchers.

The standard vocabulary distinguishes three separate layers: **Sources**, **Information**, and **Evidence**.

Layer 1 — Sources (How Was This Record Created?)

A **source** is the container — the document, record, or artifact you are examining.

Type	Definition	Census Example
Original	First recording of information, made at the time of the event	The original handwritten census ledger
Derivative	A copy, transcription, index, abstract, or digital image	A FamilySearch index entry; a microfilm image; a typed transcription
Authored	A compiled work drawing on other sources	A county history; a published genealogy; a Wikipedia article

> **Critical rule:** Never use the terms "primary source" or "secondary source" when describing source type. Sources are **Original**, **Derivative**, or **Authored**.

Most Puerto Rican census records you will access online are **derivative sources** — digital images of microfilm copies of original ledgers. Understanding this matters: if you see a discrepancy, it may have been introduced during microfilming, indexing, or transcription, not in the original.

Layer 2 — Information (Who Recorded This and How Did They Know?)

Information is the content within a source — the claims, names, dates, and relationships recorded there.

Type	Definition	Census Example
Primary	Reported by someone with firsthand knowledge of the event	An enumerator recording the name of the household head who answered the door
Secondary	Reported by someone without direct knowledge; heard secondhand	A spouse reporting a deceased husband's birthplace from memory
Indeterminate	The informant's knowledge or relationship to the event is unknown	A census entry where it is unclear who provided the information

> **Critical rule:** "Primary" and "Secondary" apply **only to Information** — never to Sources or Evidence.

In census records, information is often mixed. The enumerator is a firsthand witness to the people he sees in the house (primary information) but records ages and birthplaces as reported to him by whoever answered the door (potentially secondary information).

Layer 3 — Evidence (What Does This Information Prove?)

Evidence is how the information answers your specific research question.

Type	Definition	Census Example
Direct	Explicitly answers the research question	An 1899 census entry giving a man's birthplace as Rincón, Puerto Rico — when you are trying to confirm he was born there
Indirect	Implies an answer; requires inference to connect	The same man appearing in Rincón in 1887 *and* 1899 — suggests he was likely born there, but does not state it

Type	Definition	Census Example
Negative	Expected information is *absent* from a source where it would appear if true	A man's name is absent from the 1910 U.S. Federal Census — suggesting he may have died between 1899 and 1910, or migrated

One record can contain multiple types of evidence depending on the research question. The 1899 Military Census is direct evidence of a man's presence in a specific barrio in 1899 but only indirect evidence of his age at death if you are calculating a birth year.

Putting It Together: A Census Research Example

Question: Was Tomás Valentín, born approximately 1855, a resident of Rincón, Puerto Rico in 1887?

Step	What You Do
Source	Locate the 1887 Spanish census for Rincón. Classify as **Derivative** (digital image of a colonial-era original).
Information	Find an entry for Tomás Valentín, age 32, jornalero. The enumerator recorded this from the household head. Classify as **Primary** (enumerator recorded from direct contact) with some **Indeterminate** elements (who confirmed the age?).
Evidence	His presence in Rincón is **Direct** evidence he resided there in 1887. His listed age of 32 is **Indirect** evidence he was born ca. 1855 (requires arithmetic inference).
Conflict	If a 1910 U.S. census shows him as age 48 (implying birth ca. 1862), that conflict must be addressed — not ignored.
Conclusion	A proof statement noting which sources support the 1855 birth estimate and acknowledging the conflicting 1910 age.

Learn More

Resource	What It Offers
Board for Certification of Genealogists — Genealogy Standards	The authoritative source for GPS requirements. Includes the full BCG Genealogy Standards publication and links to the Genealogy Standards Manual.
Genealogy Explained — The Genealogical Proof Standard	A clear, accessible explanation of the GPS for everyday researchers. Includes visual summaries and practical examples.

Resource	What It Offers
FamilySearch Wiki — *Genealogical Proof Standard*	Overview and links to additional methodology resources.

How the GPS Applies Throughout This Course

Module	GPS Connection
Module 1 — Census History & Political Context	Element 1: Knowing the record landscape is prerequisite to exhaustive research
Module 2 — Spanish Colonial Census	Layers 1–2: Classifying colonial padrones as Derivative or Original; assessing information quality
Module 3 — 1899 Military Census	Layer 3: Using absence from the 1899 census as Negative Evidence
Module 4 — U.S. Federal Census	Elements 3–4: Correlating ages across 1910, 1920, 1930, 1940 census entries
Module 8 — Correlating Census with Civil Records	Elements 3–5: Full corroboration chain and written conclusions