



*Puerto Rican
Genealogy Group*
Instructor: Sylvia
Vargas

Looking for Ancestors in Historical Puerto Rican Newspapers

A Practical Self-Study Course

Course Instructor: Sylvia Vargas

Organization: Puerto Rican Genealogy Group

Website: <https://puertoricangenealogy.org>

Difficulty: Intermediate

Estimated Time: 3–4 hours total (30–45 minutes per lesson)

Who Is This Course For?

This course is for you if you:

- Have already searched civil records, census data, and church records for your Puerto Rican ancestors
- Want to go deeper but are not sure where to look next

- Have heard that historical newspapers contain genealogical information but do not know how to find or use them
 - Are researching ancestors who lived before 1885, when Puerto Rico’s civil registration system began
 - Want to find out what your ancestors owned, owed, witnessed, or were named in during their lifetimes
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What You Will Need

- A computer or tablet with internet access
 - A free FamilySearch account (helpful for cross-referencing)
 - A research notebook or digital research log
 - The Newspaper Search Log worksheet included with this course (WS-01)
 - The Esquela Extraction Form included with this course (WS-02)
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What You Will Walk Away With

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. Explain why historical newspapers fill gaps that civil records and census data cannot
 2. Search Chronicling America for Puerto Rican newspaper titles by date range and keyword
 3. Navigate at least three free Puerto Rico-based digital newspaper portals
 4. Apply name variation strategies and date-range techniques to improve your search results
 5. Extract genealogical data from legal notices, vital announcements, and obituaries using a structured extraction form
 6. Plan an on-site research visit to Puerto Rican archives if digital searches are exhausted
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Lessons in This Course

Lesson	Title	Estimated Time
1	Why Puerto Rican Newspapers Matter for Genealogy	30 minutes
2	The Gaceta de Puerto Rico and Chronicling America	45 minutes
3	Puerto Rico’s Own Free Portals	40 minutes
4	Search Strategies and a Case Study	45 minutes
5	What’s Not Online and Planning On-Site Research	30 minutes

Companion Materials

- **Newspaper Glossary:** Definitions for key Spanish-language terms you will encounter in historical newspapers
 - **WS-01: Newspaper Search Log:** Track every search you conduct — platform, date range, terms, and results
 - **WS-02: Esquela Extraction Form:** A structured form for extracting genealogical data from obituaries and death notices
 - **Quick Reference Card:** Platform comparison table, key search terms for slavery research, and condensed glossary
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A Note on Sources

This course focuses entirely on free, openly accessible platforms. Paid subscription services (Newspapers.com, GenealogyBank, ProQuest Latin American Newsstream) are mentioned briefly in Lesson 5 for awareness, but no paid access is required to complete this course.

A Note on Slavery Research

Historical Puerto Rican newspapers, particularly the *Gaceta de Puerto Rico* and the *Boletín Mercantil*, contain notices related to enslaved people: manumissions, slave sale advertisements, runaway notices, and post-1873 labor contract disputes involving freed persons. Lesson 2 includes a dedicated section on how to search for this content, with specific search terms and guidance for interpreting what you find.

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