



*Teaching  
Genealogists AI™*  
**Instructor:** Sylvia  
Vargas

---

---

## **Puerto Rican Slave Record Research**

### **Module 1 – Understanding the Registro Central de Esclavos (1872)**

**Course Instructor:** Sylvia Vargas

**Organization:** Puerto Rican Genealogy Group

**Website:** <https://puertoricangenealogy.org>

**Date Created:** 2026-02-26

**Estimated Time:** 30–45 minutes

---

### **Learning Objectives**

By the end of this module, you will:

- Know what the Registro Central de Esclavos (1872) is and why it was created
- Understand what fields of information the schedules contain

- Recognize the difference between the 1872 registry and the related 1859–1880 slave registers
  - Understand the historical context of abolition and why 1872 and 1873 are key dates
- 

## What Is the Registro Central de Esclavos?

In 1872, Spanish colonial authorities compiled a central register of all enslaved people in Puerto Rico. This registry was organized by district and municipality and recorded in Spanish.

The 1872 registry is preserved at the U.S. National Archives as part of Record Group 186 (Records of the Spanish Governors of Puerto Rico) under microfilm publication T1121.

It is also available in digitized form through FamilySearch, organized by district film.

---

## What the Schedules Contain

Each entry in the 1872 registry typically includes:

Field	Spanish Term	What It Records
Name	Nombre	The enslaved person's given name
Place of origin	Natural de	Country or region of birth
Residence	Vecino/a de	Town or municipality where they lived
Parents' names	Padres	Mother and father, when known
Sex	Sexo	Male or female
Marital status	Estado civil	Soltero/a (single), casado/a (married), viudo/a (widowed)
Occupation	Oficio	Trade or labor
Age	Edad	Age at time of registration
Physical description	Descripcion	Complexion, height, distinguishing features
Owner's name	Amo / Ama	Name of the enslaver

---

Not every entry contains all fields. Entries vary by the enumerator and the municipality.

---

## Why 1872 and 1873 Matter

The 1872 registry was compiled one year before abolition. Spain abolished slavery in Puerto Rico on March 22, 1873 (the Moret Law of 1870 had already freed children born to enslaved mothers after 1868, and elderly enslaved people).

After abolition in 1873, formerly enslaved people were required to enter labor contracts (*contratos de trabajo*) with their former enslavers for three additional years. This conditional freedom means you may find the same individuals in records both before and after 1873 under different legal categories:

- Before 1873: *esclavo/esclava*
  - After 1873: *liberto/liberta*
  - Later: recorded by surname in civil registration records
- 

## The Related 1859–1880 Collection

FamilySearch also has a partially indexed collection called “Puerto Rico, Slave Registers, 1859–1880” (Collection 3755445). This collection covers a broader time period and includes some name-level searching. It overlaps with the 1872 registry and can serve as a searchable entry point.

**Strategy:** Search the 1859–1880 collection first when an indexed entry is available. Then use the 1872 registry film images for surrounding context and unindexed individuals.

---

## What Is Next

In Module 2 – Finding and Navigating the Records, you will learn how the 1872 registry is organized by district, which films cover which municipalities, and how to browse the digitized images efficiently.

---

[\[← Course Overview\]](#) [\[Module 2 →\]](#)

© 2026 Sylvia Vargas. Teaching Genealogists AI™. All rights reserved.