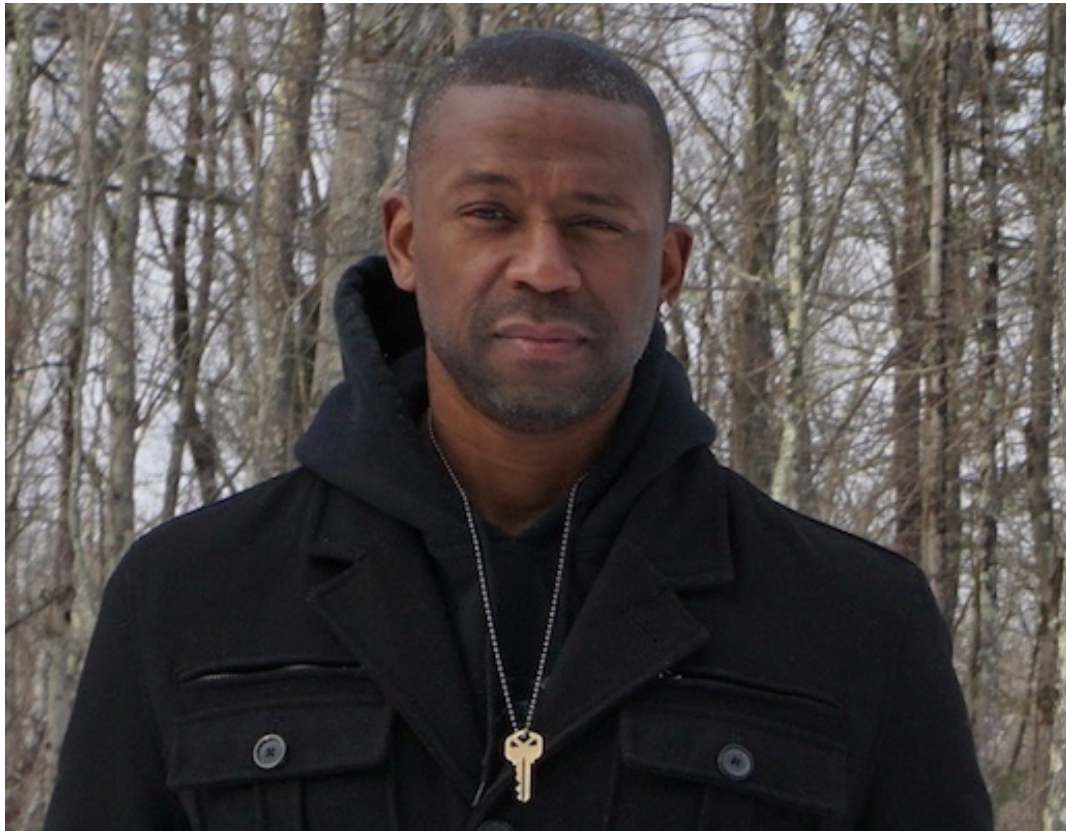


Reclaiming History through Genealogy: How a BU Alumnus Restores the Legacies of Black Americans



While uncovering his family history, John Mills stumbled upon a truth that shook the foundation of his identity: many of his ancestors had been enslaved in the American South. Ned Mills - John Mills's great-great-grandfather - grew up on a Georgia plantation and was given the family name by the man who enslaved him. This pivotal moment motivated him to delve deeper into his own lineage and connect the descendants of enslaved Black Americans with their ancestral roots.

With his sister's help, Mills was able to piece together a more complete picture of the life of Ned Mills, who was enslaved until emancipation in 1865 and worked as a farmer and blacksmith for the remainder of his life. In 2003, Mills's research led him to Kilgore, Texas, where he stood amidst the unmarked graves of his ancestors, including Ned Mills, in the woods behind a well-preserved Whites-only cemetery.

Twenty years later, Mills enrolled in [Boston University's Certificate in Genealogical Research course](#) to learn how to navigate the challenges posed by a lack of genealogical records for enslaved Black Americans. "Prior to the course, I lacked structure in how I approached, organized, and documented my research. This created inefficiencies, causing me to have to revisit sources months later, or inadvertently revisit sources that I had already assessed," Mills

summarized the obstacles to his research prior to his studies at BU. “During the course, I was almost immediately able to start applying the standards and best practices I was learning. The course was immensely valuable...something I would recommend to anyone.”

Equipped with his newfound [genealogical research skills](#), Mills has dedicated his life to reclaiming and memorializing the lost narratives of enslaved individuals and Black soldiers, including his own ancestors, who were marginalized and forgotten by history. From funding the restoration of headstones to commissioning murals and petitioning for changes to street names, Mills is weaving the threads of Black history back into the fabric of society.

[\[Read More about John Mills's Story\]](#)