

## Research Essay for Portfolio 2

For my portfolio, I decided to research Robert Garner, Margaret Garner's husband. I learned about Margaret Garner last year when my English class read Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, but I wanted to learn more about her husband. There was remarkably little information about him when I did an initial search on Google. All of the pages that mentioned a Robert Garner were talking about a different person. Therefore, I had to start my research by looking for information about Margaret.

Almost all of the articles and documents that I found related to Margaret Garner included at least some mention of Robert as well. Many of the sources that recounted the event of Margaret killing her own child rather than letting it be returned to slavery mentioned Robert's role in the affair. These articles described how he fired shots at the US Marshal who came looking for the Garner family after they escaped to Cincinnati. In some of these articles, Robert was referred to as Simon Garner which made me believe that I might find more relevant sources if I looked for Simon Garner rather than Robert. Unfortunately, no new, relevant sources appeared when I searched for Simon Garner. It was extremely difficult to find sources that dealt specifically with him, so I realized I would have to broaden my search.

When the Garner family was placed on trial following their escape from Boone County, Kentucky, the main issue in their case regarded the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. Since this law played a significant role in Robert Garner's life, I decided that it might be interesting to add some sources regarding this law to the bibliography. I found some great primary sources that showcased individuals' reactions when the law was first passed, as well as a report that revealed how this law was interpreted in an actual court case. I felt like the search for more information about the Fugitive Slave Law went well because it provided a more nuanced depiction of Robert Garner's life by revealing how society operated at the time in which he lived.

The most useful research tool for me was the Library of Congress Archives. It was there that I found several newspaper articles regarding the Garner family's escape, recapture, and subsequent trial.

These articles came from a variety of newspapers which created a more robust depiction of Robert Garner's character. Some articles were extremely negative while others were positive, so by balancing their opposing depictions, I was able to gain a more complete understanding of who Robert Garner was.

I initially had little success in using resources from Fondren Library. While there were no sources regarding Robert Garner, there were very few sources even regarding Margaret Garner. I eventually decided to go to the library to look at one book regarding Margaret Garner and another regarding the Fugitive Slave Law. When I arrived, I found that the book about Margaret Garner, *Driven Toward Madness*, was extremely helpful in providing information not only about the Garner incident in general, but also about Robert Garner's personal life. While I was unable to find much information through other sources about Robert Garner's life after the case, *Driven Toward Madness* revealed that he served in the Union army, eventually remarried, and then died of tuberculosis. While Fondren Library did not house several sources for my bibliography, it did contain my most relevant and valuable source.

Overall, this research project taught me that almost everyone who has ever lived has left their mark on this earth. With the rise of technology, it is easier than ever to find information about individuals who would otherwise fade into oblivion. While it can be frustrating to not find information about someone simply by typing their name into a search bar, it is rewarding to search for information related to that individual and to eventually piece together the story of their life.