

Free Black Slave owners

By H.V. Traywick, Jr. on Aug 5, 2020

Dr. Carter G. Woodson (1875-1950), known as “The Father of Black History,” was born in Buckingham County, Virginia, the son of former slaves. He received his doctorate from Harvard, rose to prominence as a writer and historian, and was the editor of The Journal of Negro History. He is best known for establishing Black History Week, which evolved into Black History Month.

In 1924 Dr. Woodson compiled from the U. S. Census records of 1830 the names and numbers of free Black owners of slaves, listed by State, along with the number of slaves owned by each. The statistics were copied by three assistants under his supervision, personally reviewed by Dr. Woodson, and published in Free Negro Owners of Slaves in the United States in 1830, Together with Absentee Ownership of Slaves in the United States in 1830. (Washington, DC: The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1924.)

Most of the listings are in the South, but there are also listings of free Black owners of slaves in the District of Columbia, Illinois, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island. In the North, Pennsylvania had the most number of free Black owners of slaves, numbering twenty-three, with New York and New Jersey next.

In the South, the majority of free Black owners of slaves were to be found in Maryland, Virginia, South Carolina, and Louisiana. In many of these cases, Dr. Woodson says, the ownership was philanthropic, with the free husband purchasing his wife, or the free wife purchasing her husband. In many other cases the land and slave holdings of these free Blacks rivaled those of White planters. **In South Carolina there were over six hundred free Black owners of slaves listed, thirty-four of whom were listed as owning over one hundred slaves each, among whom were three owning two hundred or more.**

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In Virginia, there are listed over nine hundred free Black owners of slaves in 1830. These, on average, had smaller holdings than those in South Carolina. Over two hundred and thirty of them were residents of the City of Richmond. In all, over 9,600 slaves in Virginia in 1830 were owned by free Blacks, including over 1,150 in the City of Richmond.

Somehow this important research on slavery by Dr. Carter G. Woodson, "The Father of Black History," has been cast down the Orwellian "memory hole." By whom? And why? About H.V. Traywick, Jr. native of Lynchburg, Virginia, the author graduated from the Virginia Military Institute in 1967 with a degree in Civil Engineering and a Regular Commission in the US Army. His service included qualification as an Airborne Ranger, and command of an Engineer company in Vietnam, where he received the Bronze Star. After his return, he resigned his Commission and ended by making a career as a tugboat captain. During this time he was able to earn a Master of Liberal Arts from the University of Richmond, with an international focus on war and cultural revolution. He is a member of the Jamestowne Society, the Society of the Cincinnati in the State of Virginia, the Sons of Confederate Veterans, and the Society of Independent Southern Historians. He currently lives in Richmond, where he writes, studies history, literature and cultural revolution, and occasionally commutes to Norfolk to serve as a tugboat pilot.