

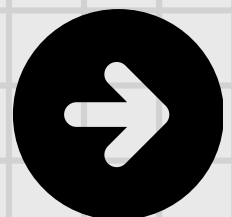


YES,

BLACK PEOPLE

OWNED SLAVES

But the history is
more complicated
than that.





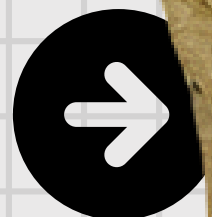
OWNERSHIP DOES NOT

EXPLAIN MOTIVE

Historians have identified different motives behind Black slaveholding.

Benevolent owners purchased spouses, children, relatives, or friends to keep families together or eventually secure their freedom.

Exploitative owners used enslaved people for labor and economic gain. They could work them on farms and plantations, hire them out, sell them, or use them as property to accumulate wealth.





HISTORIANS DISAGREE

ON MOTIVE

Historian Carter G. Woodson argued that most Black slave owners were motivated by benevolence. Contemporary historian Larry Koger challenged this interpretation after finding substantial evidence of commercial slaveholding in South Carolina

Historian Philip J. Schwarz found protective ownership to be more significant in Virginia, while scholars Lightner and Ragan's later analysis of the 1830 South generally supports Woodson's conclusion.

Historians agree that **both** motives existed. The debate is over how common each was and represent the majority of Black slaveowners





EXAMPLE

LEWIS TURNER

(Benevolent Owner)

Lewis Turner was a freeman who legally owned his wife, Aggai. In his 1818 will, Turner referred to her as his “beloved wife” and requested that she be emancipated.

Virginia’s 1806 law required newly emancipated people to leave the state within a year. To protect his wife, Turner requested that the legislature allow Aggai to remain in Virginia after receiving her freedom.

Turner’s story reveals how some free Black people used legal ownership to protect family members in a society that made Black freedom difficult to maintain.





EXAMPLE

WILLIAM ELLISON

(Exploitative Owner)

William Ellison was formerly enslaved in South Carolina. He gained his freedom and eventually became a wealthy planter.

By 1860, Ellison owned nearly 900 acres and 63 enslaved people. His slaveholding extended beyond protecting relatives and transformed into a reliance on enslaved labor for economic success.

Ellison's story shows that some Black slave owners participated in slavery for economic gain and profited from the exploitation of other Black people.





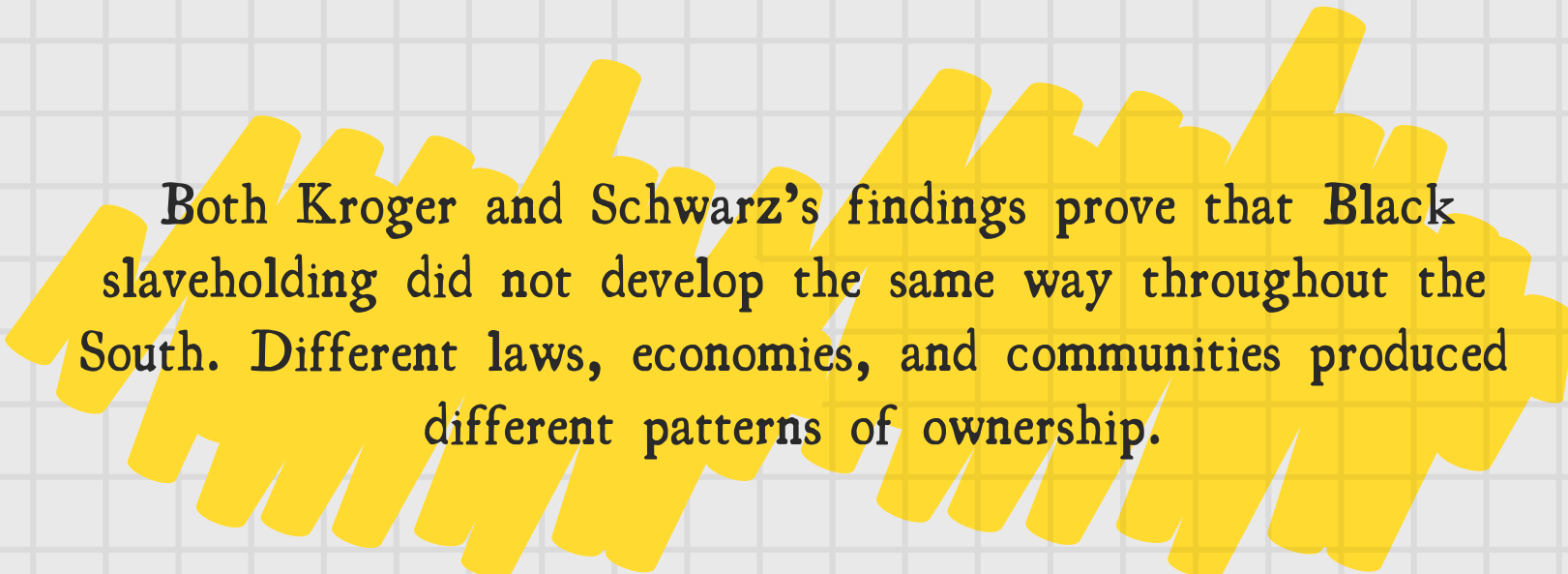
LOCATION

MATTERS



Koger's research on South Carolina found substantial evidence of commercial Black slaveholding, particularly among Black people who had accumulated enough wealth to purchase enslaved labor.

Schwarz's research on Virginia found protective and familial ownership to be more significant, especially as Virginia laws made emancipation increasingly difficult for free Black families.



Both Kroger and Schwarz's findings prove that Black slaveholding did not develop the same way throughout the South. Different laws, economies, and communities produced different patterns of ownership.





WHAT DO THE

NUMBERS SAY?



According to Carter G. Woodson's analysis of the 1830 Census, of approximately 2 million enslaved African Americans in the United States 12,907 were held by Black slaveholders.

Historian Thomas J. Pressly, using Woodson's data, found that most Black slaveholders held few people:

42% of Black slaveholders *owned only one enslaved person*, while only about **1%** *owned 20 or more.*



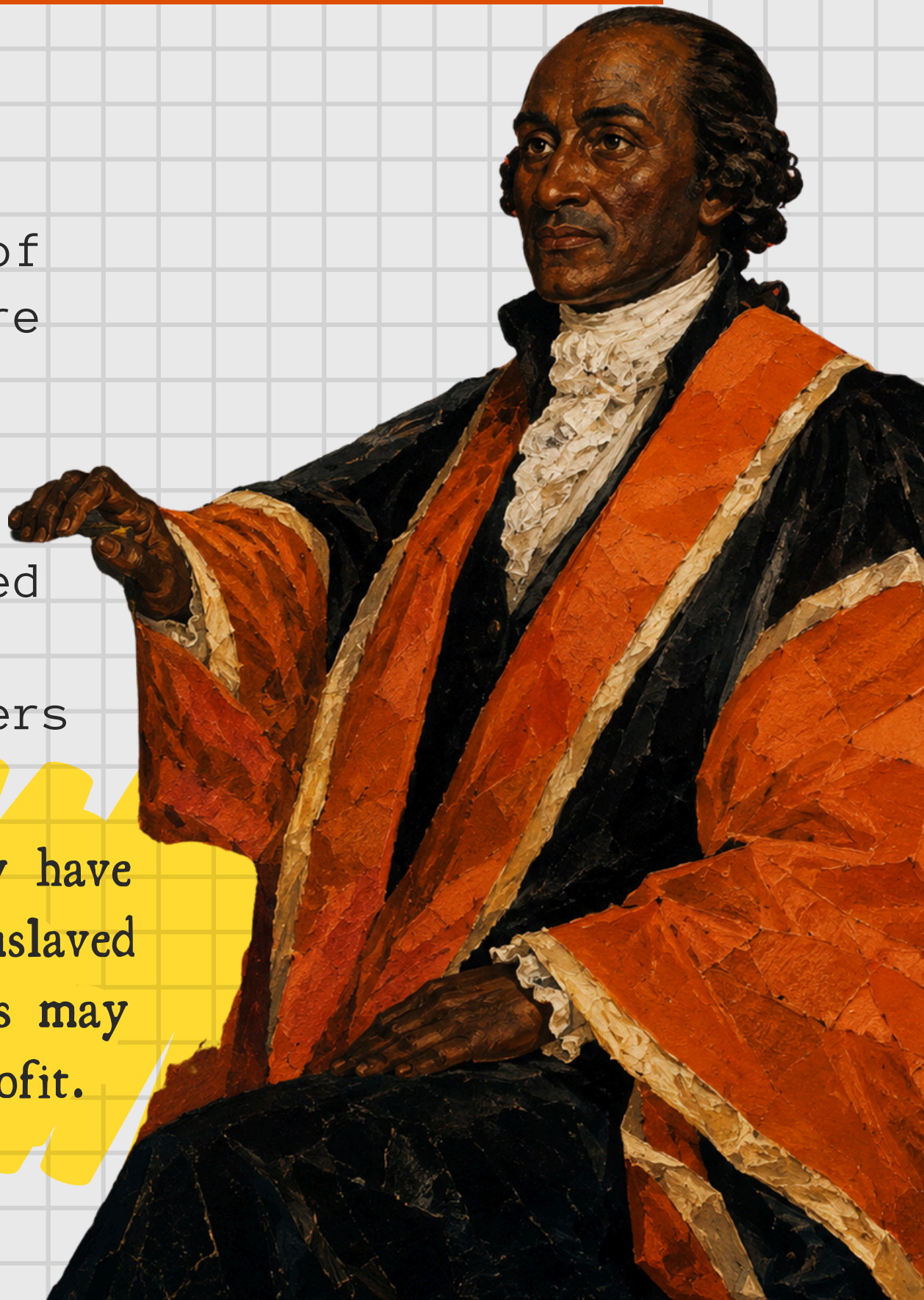
THE MAJORITY WERE

BENEVOLENT

Lightner and Ragan's quantitative models estimated that approximately 19–27% of Black slave owners were exploitative.

However, this smaller group held an estimated 57–66% of the people enslaved by Black owners

Most Black slaveholders may have been benevolent, but most enslaved people held by Black owners may have been exploited for profit.



SOURCES

USED

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