

Dark Merit



by
Kathryn
Favors

The Free Negro

During slavery, there were a considerable number of Negroes who had won or been given their freedom. Seldom do we hear much about them.

In Carter G. Woodson's "The Negro in our History," he stresses the point greatly that there have been a few free Negroes practically ever since slavery began. "In some colonies Negroes were indentured servants before they were slaves, and became free upon the expiration of their term of service. The result was that there were in this country in 1790 as many as 59,557 free people of color, 35,000 of whom were living in the South. During the two decades from 1790 to 1810, the rate of increase of free Negroes exceeded that of the slaves, and the proportion of free Negroes in the black population increased accordingly from 7.9 per cent in 1790 to 13.5 per cent in 1810. After this date the tendency was in the other direction because of the reaction against the Negro,

which brought about a restriction on manumissions. Between 1810 and 1840 the Negro population almost doubled, but the proportion of the free Negroes remained about the same. Because of further restriction on manumission and the more secure foundation of plantation slavery with rigid regulations to prevent the fugitives from escaping, this proportion of free Negroes in the black population decreased to 11.9 per cent by 1850 and to 11 per cent by 1860. While the Negro population as a whole doubled its percentage of increase, then, that of the free blacks declined. It became smaller in parts of the North and declined to one-fourth of the rate of increase between 1800 and 1810. In 1860 the rate of increase was about one per cent a year. It is worthy of note however, that there were 434,455 free Negroes in the United States in 1850 and 488,070 in 1860. At this latter date 83,942 of these were in Maryland, 58,042 in Virginia, 30,463 in N. Carolina, 18,467 in Louisiana, 11,131 in the District of Columbia, 10,638 in Kentucky; in short, 250,787 in the whole South. About 50,000 of these had attained the independence of being heads of families by 1830, while a few thousand other free Negro families were reported among the white families as servants. Only a few of these free Negroes immigrated into this country, for merely 7,011 free Negroes enumerated in 1860 were born abroad.

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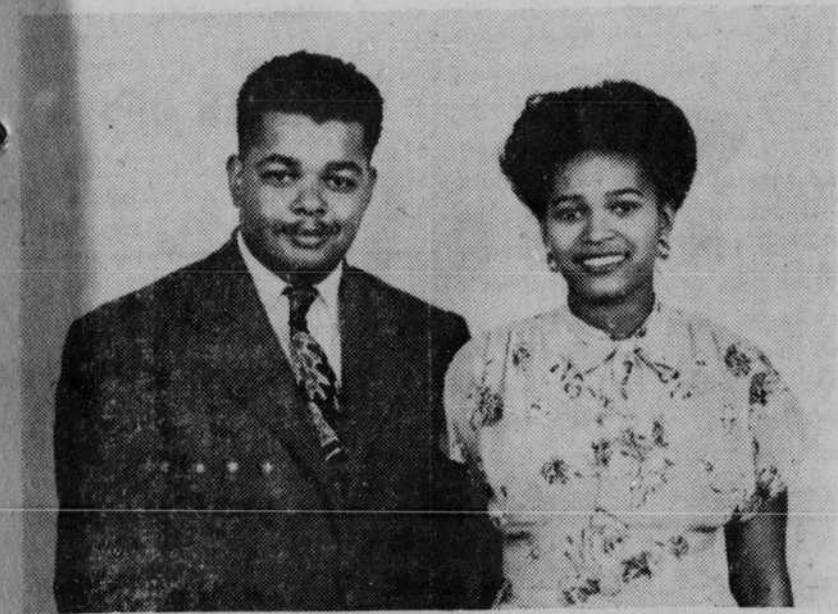
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Rev. Favors is pastor of the Mt. Zion Baptist Church, 12th and "F" Streets, Lincoln, Nebraska. Both Rev. and Mrs. Favors are teachers in the Omaha Public Schools.