



**Voices from the Days of Slavery:
Stories, Songs and Memories –Fountain Hughes (transcript)**

LC ANNOUNCEMENT: From the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.

FOUNTAIN HUGHES (VO): My name is Fountain Hughes. I was born in Charlottesville, Virginia. My grandfather belonged to Thomas Jefferson. My grandfather was a hundred and fifteen years old when he died. And now I am one hundred and one year old.

AFC ANNOUNCEMENT: Welcome to the American Folklife Center’s podcast series, “Voices from the Days of Slavery: Stories, Songs and Memories.” Drawn from the unique collections of the Center’s Archive, this series presents first-person accounts of African Americans whose experiences spanned the last years of slavery. They were recorded during the 1930’s and 1940’s, most often for the large-scale documentation projects sponsored by New Deal agencies during and after the Great Depression. Many of these recordings survive only as fragments and the audio quality occasionally suffers because of the deterioration of the original recorded media. Nevertheless, the compelling voices of these individuals transport the listener to a defining period in this country’s history. In this 1949 interview, conducted in Baltimore, Maryland, Mr. Fountain Hughes recounts his memories of slavery times to Hermond Norwood of the Library of Congress.

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HERMOND NORWOOD: Who did you work for Uncle Fountain when...?

FOUNTAIN HUGHES: Who'd I work for?

HERMOND NORWOOD: Yeah.

FOUNTAIN HUGHES: When I...you mean, when I was slave?

HERMOND NORWOOD: Yeah, when you were a slave. Who did you work for?

FOUNTAIN HUGHES: Well, I belonged to Burness [*unclear*], when I was a slave. My mother belonged to Burness. But ..we...was all slave children and ...soon after.. when we found out that we was free, why then, we was...bound out to different people...[*names unclear*] and all such people as that. And we would run away, and wouldn't stay with them. Why then, we'd just go and stay anywhere we could. Lay out at night anywhere. We had no home, you know. We was just turned out like a lot of cattle. You know how they turn cattle out in a pasture? Well, after freedom, you know, colored people didn't have nothing. Colored people didn't have no beds when they was slaves. We always slept on the floor, pallet here, and a pallet there just like...a lot of...wild people...we didn't...we didn't know nothing. [The slave owners] didn't allow you to look at no book.

And then there was some free-born colored people...why, they had a little education, but there was very few of them where we was. And they all had...what you call...I might call it now...jail sentence...[it] was just the same as we was in jail. Now, I couldn't go from here across the street, or I couldn't go through nobody's house without I have a note or something from my master. And if I had that pass...that was what we called a pass...if I had that pass, I could go wherever he sent me. And I'd have to be back...you know...when whoever he sent me to, they... they'd give me another pass and I'd bring that back so as to show how long I'd been gone. We couldn't go out and stay a hour or two hours or something like that. They send you [back]. Now, say for instance, I'd go out here to [*unclear*] place...I'd have to walk. And I would have to be back...maybe in a hour. Maybe they'd give me an hour...I don't know just how long they'd give me. But, they'd give me a note so there wouldn't nobody interfere with me, and [it would] tell who I belonged to. And when I come back, why, I carry it to my master and give that to him...that'd be all right. But I couldn't just walk away like the people does now, you know.

It was what they call... we were slaves. We belonged to people. They'd sell us like they sell horses and cows and hogs and all like that. Have an auction bench, and they'd put you on...up on the bench and bid on you just same as you bidding on cattle, you know.

HERMOND NORWOOD: Was that in Charlotte that you were a slave?

FOUNTAIN HUGHES: Hmmm?

HERMOND NORWOOD: Was that in Charlotte or Charlottesville?

FOUNTAIN HUGHES: That was in Charlottesville.

HERMOND NORWOOD: Charlottesville, Virginia.

FOUNTAIN HUGHES: Selling women, selling men...all that. Then if they had any bad ones, they'd sell them to the nigga traders, what they called the nigga traders. And they'd ship them down south, and sell them down south. But, otherwise if you was a good...good person they wouldn't sell you. But if you was bad and mean and they didn't want to beat you and knock you around, they'd sell you...to the, what was called the nigga trader. They'd have a regular...have a sale every month, you know, at the courthouse. And then they'd sell you, and get two hundred dollar...hundred dollar...five hundred dollar.

LC ANNOUNCEMENT:: Were you ever sold from one person to another?

FOUNTAIN HUGHES: Hmmm?

HERMOND NORWOOD: Were you ever sold?

FOUNTAIN HUGHES: No, I never was sold.

HERMOND NORWOOD: Always stayed with the same person?

FOUNTAIN HUGHES: I was too young to sell.

HERMOND NORWOOD: Oh I see.

FOUNTAIN HUGHES: See, I wasn't old enough during the war to sell, during the Army. And, my father got killed in the Army, you know. So it left us small children just to live on whatever people choose to... give us. I was bound out [as bonded laborers] for a dollar a month. And my mother used to collect the money. Children wasn't... couldn't spend money when I come along. In fact when I come along, young men...young men couldn't spend no money until they was twenty-one years old. And then you was twenty-

one, why, then you could spend your money. But if you wasn't twenty-one, you couldn't spend no money. I couldn't take...I couldn't spend ten cents if somebody give it to me. Because they'd say, "Well, he might have stole it." We all come along,...you might say we had to give an account of what you done. You couldn't just do things and walk off and say, "I didn't do it." You'd have to... give an account of it.

Now... after we got freed and they turned us out like cattle...we could...we didn't have nowhere to go. And we didn't have nobody to boss us and we didn't know nothing. There wasn't no schools. And when they started a little school, why, the people that were slaves, there couldn't many of them go to school except they had a father and a mother. And my father was dead, and my mother was living, but she had three, four other little children, and she had to put them all to work for to help take care of the others. So we had...we had it what you call, worse than dogs has got it now. Dogs has got it now better than we had it when we come along.

I know...I remember one night, I was out after I was free, and I didn't have nowhere to go. I didn't have nowhere to sleep. I didn't know what to do. My brother and I was together. So we knew a man that had a...a livery stable. And we crept in that yard, and got into one of the hacks of the automobile and slept in that hack all night long. So next morning, we could get out and go where we belonged. But we was afraid to go at night because we didn't know where to go, and didn't know what time to go. But we had got away from there, and we afraid to go back, so we crept in, slept in that thing all night until the next morning, and we got back where we belong before the people got up. Soon as day commenced...come [day]break...we got out and commenced to go where we belonged. But we never done that but the one time. After that we always, if there was a way, we'd try to get back before night come. But then that was on a Sunday too, that we done that.

Now, when we were slaves we couldn't do that, see. And after we got free we didn't know nothing to do. And my mother, she, then she hunted places, and bound us out for a dollar a month, and we'd stay there maybe a couple of years. And she'd come over and collect the money every month. And a dollar was worth more then than ten dollars is now. And I...and the men used to work for ten dollars a month, hundred and twenty dollars a year.

Used to hire that a way. And... now you can't get a man for fifty dollars a month. You paying a man now fifty dollars a month, he don't want to work for it.

HERMOND NORWOOD: More like fifty dollars a week nowadays.

Fountain Hughes: That's just it exactly! He wants fifty dollars a week and they ain't got no more now than we had then!. And we [had] no more money, but course they bought more stuff and more property and all like that. We didn't have no property. We didn't have no home. We had nowhere or nothing. We didn't have nothing, only just... like cattle, we were just turned out. And [you'd] get along the best you could. Nobody to look after us. Well, we been slaves all our lives. My mother was a slave, my sister was a slaves, father was a slave.

And... my father belong to... Burness and Burness died during the wartime because...he was afraid he'd have to go to war. But, then... and in them days you could hire a substitute to take your place. Well, he couldn't get a substitute to take his place so he run away from home. And he took cold. And when he come back, the war was over but he died.

I don't know, to tell you the truth when I think of it today, I don't know how I'm living. None, none of the rest of them that I know of is living. I'm the oldest one that I know that's living. But, still, I'm thankful to the Lord. Now, if... if my master wanted to send me, he'd never say...you couldn't get a horse and ride...you walk, you know, you walk. And you be barefoot and cold. That didn't make no difference. You wasn't no more than a dog to some of them in them days. You wasn't treated as good as they treat dogs now. But still, I didn't like to talk about it. Because it makes, makes people feel bad you know. I could say a whole lot...I don't like to say. And I won't say a whole lot more.

I remember when the Yankees come along and took all the good horses and took all the.. throwed all the meat and flour and sugar and stuff out in the river and let it go down the river. And they knowed the people wouldn't have nothing to live on but they done that. And that's the reason why I don't like to talk about it. Them people...and if you was cooking anything to eat in there for yourself and if they...they was hungry, they would go and eat it all up, and we didn't get nothing. They'd just come in and drink up all your

milk.. just do as they please. Sometimes they'd be passing by all night long, walking, muddy, raining. Oh, they had a terrible time! Colored people that's free ought to be awful thankful. And some of them is sorry they are free now. Some of them now would rather be slaves.

HERMOND NORWOOD: Which had you rather be, Uncle Fountain?

FOUNTAIN HUGHES: Me? Which I'd rather be? You know what I'd rather do? If I thought... had any idea that I'd ever be a slave again, I'd take a gun and just end it all right away! Because you're nothing but a dog. You're not a thing but a dog! Night never come without you had nothing to do. Time to cut tobacco...if they want you to cut all night long out in the field you cut. And if they want you to hang all night long, you hang...hang tobacco. It didn't matter about your tired...being tired. You're afraid to say you're tired. They just...well ...[voice trails off]

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AFC ANNOUNCEMENT: That concludes this program in the American Folklife Center's podcast series, "Voices from the Days of Slavery: Stories, Songs and Memories." This episode was produced and edited by Guha Shankar, American Folklife Center and Lisa Carl, North Carolina Central University. The audio engineer was Jonathan Gold, American Folklife Center. The website for the online collection, "Voices from the Days of Slavery: Former Slaves Tell Their Stories," was developed by John Barton and the Library's American Memory Project team. To hear and read the unedited version of Fountain Hughes' story, along with other personal accounts of former slaves, please visit the Library of Congress website - ["memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/voices/](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/voices/).

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