

## Interview with Fountain Hughes <sup>[1]</sup>

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*Fountain Hughes was born into slavery near Charlottesville Virginia in 1848. In 1949, when Hughes was 101 years old, he was interviewed by Hermond Norwood, a Library of Congress employee. Although Hughes was very young when the Civil War began and still young when slavery was abolished, he remembers his experience as an enslaved person and then as a free person. The interview of Hughes was completed on June 11, 1949 in Baltimore, Maryland. Below is an excerpt of the interview where Hughes discusses the treatment of enslaved people, especially in regards to money and freedom of movement.*

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**Fountain Hughes:** My name is Fountain Hughes. I was born in Charlottesville, Virginia. My grandfather belong to Thomas Jefferson. My grandfather was a hundred and fifteen years old when he died. And now I am one hundred and, and one year old. [recording stops and starts again]

**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, uh, Burnleys, when I was a slave. My mother belonged to Burnleys. But my, uh, but, uh, we, uh, was all slave children. And after, soon after when we found out that we was free, why then we was, uh, bound out to different people. [names of people] Andrews and an all such people as that. And we would run away, and wouldn't stay with them. Why then we'd just go and stay anywheres we could. Lay out a night in underwear. 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, uh, lot of, uh, wild people, we didn't, we didn't know nothing. 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 uh, what you call, I might call it now, uh, jail centers, 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 call a pass, if I had that pass, I could go wherever he sent me. And I'd have to be back, you know, when uh. 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. They send you. Now, say for instance I'd go out here to Shirley's place. I'd have to walk. And I would have to be back maybe in a hour. Maybe they'd give me 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 tell who I belong 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 a 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, uh, 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 what to the, what was call 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.

**Hermond Norwood:** Were you ever sold from one person to another?

**Fountain Hughes:** Mmmm?

**Hermond Norwood:** Were you ever sold?

**Fountain Hughes:** No, I never was sold.

**Hermond Norwood:** Always stayed with the same person. [Hermond Norwood and Fountain Hughes overlap]

**Fountain Hughes:** All, all. 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 uh, my father got killed in the Army, you know. So it left us small children just to live on whatever people choose to, uh, give us. I was, I was bound out 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, in, 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, uh, give an account of it. Now, uh, 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, uh, we didn't know nothing. There wasn't, 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, uh, we had what you call, worse than dogs has got it now. Dogs has got it now better than we had it when we come along., fifty dollars a month. You paying a man now fifty dollars a month, he don't want to work for it.

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