

Miss Harriet Hill was interviewed by Miss Irene Robertson. At the time of her interview, she was 84 years old and lived in Forrest City, Arkansas.

“I was born in Lithonia, Georgia, at the foot of Little Rock Mountain, close to Stone Mountain, Georgia, I been sold in my life twice to my knowing. I was sold away from my dear old mammy at three years old but I can remember it. I remembers it! It lack selling a calf from the cow. Exactly, but we are human beings and ought to be better than do sich. I was too little to remember my price. I was sold to be a nurse maid. They bought me and took me on away that time. The next time they put me up in a wagon and auctioned me off. That time I didn’t sell, John George (white man) was in the war; he wanted some money to hire a substitute to take his place fightin’. So he have Jim George do the sellin’. They was brothers. They talked ‘fore me some bit ‘fore they took me off. They wouldn’t take me to Atlanta cause they said some of the people there said they wouldn’t give much price—the Negroes soon be set free. Some folks in Atlanta was Yankees and wouldn’t buy slaves. They ‘cluded the best market to sell me off would be ten or twelve miles from home. I reckon it was to Augusta, Georgia. They couldn’t sell me and start on back home. A man come up to our wagon and say he’d split the difference. They made the trade. I sold on that spot for \$1400. I was nine or ten years old. I remembers it. Course I do! I never could forget it. Now mind you, that was durin’ the war.

“Master Jake Chup owned mammy and me too. He sold me to John George. Jim George sold me to Sam Broadnax. When freedom come on that was my home. Freedom come in the spring.

Source: Interview with Harriet Hill, Works Progress Administration Slave Narratives, Arkansas, vol. II, part 3, (Washington D.C.: The Federal Writers Project, 1941), 258-31. <https://memory.loc.gov/mss/mesn/023/023.pdf>

A Note on Language of the WPA Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936-1938

These oral histories reflect both the experiences of formerly enslaved people and the historical moment in which the interviews were recorded. Interviewers often tried to record the interviewee’s spoken language as they heard it. But this process was not as straightforward as it seems. Historians recognize that “what most interviewers assumed to be ‘the usual’ patterns of speech of their informants’ speech was unavoidably influenced by preconceptions and stereotypes.”

For more information: <https://www.loc.gov/collections/slave-narratives-from-the-federal-writers-project-1936-to-1938/articles-and-essays/note-on-the-language-of-the-narratives/>