

Phillis Wheatley's "On Being Brought from Africa to America," 1773

PHILLIS WHEATLEY WAS BORN IN WEST AFRICA, where slave traders captured her as a child. She arrived in Boston in 1761 and was bought by John and Susannah Wheatley. During her time as their slave, she converted to Christianity and received a classical education. She published her first poem in 1767. After a failed effort to publish a book in Boston, she sailed to England with one of the Wheatley sons, where she published *Poems on Various Subjects*. The book included a statement by Boston notables, including John Hancock, that a young black woman really had written the poems. Back in Boston, the Wheatleys freed her. She continued to publish her poems in magazines until her death in 1784, although she never made a living from them.

On Being Brought from Africa to America

'Twas mercy brought me from my Pagan land,
Taught my benighted soul to understand
That there's a God, that there's a Savior too:
Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.
Some view our sable race with scornful eye,
"Their color is a diabolic die."
Remember, *Christians*: Negros, black as Cain,¹
May be refin'd, and join th'angelic train.

From Phillis Wheatley, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*. By Phillis Wheatley, Negro Servant to Mr. John Wheatley, of Boston, in New England (London, 1773), 18.

Phillis Wheatley
1773