

BELINDA SUTTON

The Petition of Belinda an African

Commonwealth of Massachusetts

To the Honourable the Senate and House of Representatives
in General Court assembled.

The Petition of Belinda an African, humbly shews

That seventy years have rolled away, since she on the banks of the Rio da Valta, received her existence—the mountains covered with spicy forests, the valleys loaded with the richest fruits, spontaneously produced; joined to that happy temperature of air which excludes excess; would have yielded her the most compleat felicity, had not her Mind received early impressions of the cruelty of men, whose faces were like the moon, and whose Bows and Arrows were like the thunder and the lightning of the Clouds.—the idea of these, the most dreadful of all Enemies, filled her infant slumbers with horror, and her noon tide moments with cruel apprehensions!—but her affrighted imagination, in its most alarming extension, never represented distresses equal to what she hath since really experienced—for before she had Twelve years enjoyed the fragrance of her native groves, and e'er she realized, that Europeans placed their happiness in the yellow dust which she carelessly marked with her infant footsteps—even when she, in a sacred grove, with each hand in that of a tender Parent, was paying her devotions to the great Orisa who made all things—an armed band of white men, driving many of her Countrymen in Chains, rushed into the hallowed shade!—could the Tears, the sighs, and supplications, bursting from the Tortured Parental affection, have blunted the keen edge of Avarice, she might have been rescued from Agony, which many of her Countrys Children have felt, but which none hath ever yet described.—in vain she lifted her supplicating voice to an insulted father, and her guiltless hands to a dishonoured Deity! She was ravished from the bosom of her Country, from the arms of her friends, while the advanced age of her Parents, rendering them unfit for servitude, cruelly separated her from them forever!

Scenes which her imagination had never conceived of—a floating World—the sporting Monsters of the deep—and the familiar meetings of Billows and clouds, strove, but in vain to divert her

melancholly attention, from three hundred Africans in chains, suffering the most excruciating torments, and some of them rejoicing that the pangs of death came like a balm to their wounds.

Once more her eyes were blest with a Continent—but alas! how unlike the Land where she received her being! here all things appeared unpropitious—she learned to catch the Ideas, marked by the sounds of language, only to know that her doom was Slavery, from which death alone was to emancipate her.—What did it avail her, that the walls of her Lord were hung with Splendor, and that the dust trodden underfoot in her native Country crowded his Gates with sordid worshipers—the Laws had rendered her incapable of receiving property—and though she was a free moral agent, accountable for her actions, yet she never had a moment at her own disposal!—fifty years her faithful hands have been compelled to ignoble servitude, for the benefit of an Isaac Royall, untill, as if Nations must be agitated, and the world convulsed, for the preservation of that freedom, which the Almighty Father intended for *all* the human Race, the present war was Commenced—the terror of men armed in the Cause of freedom, compelled her master to fly—and to breathe away his Life in a Land, where, Lawless domination sits enthroned, pouring bloody outrage and cruelty, on all who dare to be free.

The face of your Petitioner, is now marked with the furrows of time, and her frame feebly bending under the oppression of years, while she, by the Laws of the Land, is denied the enjoyment of one morsel of that immense wealth, a part whereof hath been accumulated by her own industry, and the whole augmented by her servitude.

Wherefore casting herself at the feet of your honours, as to a body of men, formed for the extirpation of Vassalage, for the reward of Virtue, and the just returns of honest industry—she prays, that such allowance may be made her out of the Estate of Colonel Royall, as will prevent her, and her more infirm daughter, from misery in the greatest extreme, and scatter comfort over the short and downward path of their Lives—

and she will ever Pray

Boston 14th February 1783

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Belinda

The Memorial of Belinda an African

To the Honorable, the Senate & House of Representatives in General Court assembled June 4. 1793.

The Memorial of Belinda an African, formerly a servant to Isaac Royal Esq late of Medford, an Absentee, Humbly sheweth,

That upon her petitioning the General Court in the year 1783 for support, they were pleased to make her the following grant, viz:

“Resolved that there be paid out of the Treasury of this Commonwealth, out of the profits & rents arising from the Estate of the late Isaac Royal Esq an Absentee, Fifteen pounds twelve shillings p annum to Belinda an aged servant of said Royal for reasons set forth in her petition until further order of the General Court,” Dated Feb. 19. 1783.

That your memorialist then received out of the Treasury one year’s allowance only, & was afterwards denied by the Gov^r & Council any further or order on the Treasury for the grant beforementioned, till petitioning again in the year 1787 the Court granted her one year’s allowance & no more—

That upon her applying to Sir Wm Pepperell one of the Heirs of said Royal’s Estate, he has hitherto made her some allowances, but now refuses to allow her any more—That she is now much in debt, & being aged & infirm she cannot support herself by labour—She therefore humbly prays your Honours to take her distressed condition into consideration, & in your great goodness be pleased to grant that what still remains unpaid of the beforementioned bounty be now paid to her, & also would be pleasd to continue to her the annual allowance of Fifteen pounds twelve shillings during her life; or to afford her relief & support in such way & manner as your Honours shall think fit, & your memorialist as in duty bound shall ever pray—

Tish. Willis Hall
Priscilla Sutton

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—Belinda x Sutton
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