

Red Cotton

Elvis Costello

I'm cutting up her pure white dress
That I dyed red
That I dyed red
I'm putting scraps in cheap tin locket
What time erases and memory mocks
I'll send them over the ocean foam
Right into those gentle European homes

The slave ship "Blessing" slipped from Liverpool
Over the waves the Royal Navy rules
To go and plunder the Kingdom of Benin
Where certain history ends and shame begins

Dahomey traders paid in powder and shot
Line up their prisoners and they sell them in lots
They packed them tight inside those coffin ships
And they took them to the brand new world of
Auction blocks and whips

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White is the sheet on your fine linen bed
The blood stained red on each cotton thread
The merchants gather at St. George's Hall
To unveil the kneeling slave who is carved upon the wall

Picture the scene at the Old Salt House docks
Where they loaded the iron shackles and locks
Between a sandstone crocodile, a barrel and a bale
You will see the nameless faces they were offering for sale

So, I sing the praises of God's glory
As a blue cetacean floats in the basement
An elephant on the second storey
And they queue all day to see him
In my American Museum

But the Lord will judge us with fire and thunder
As man continues in all his blunders
It's only money
It's only numbers
Maybe it is time to put aside these fictitious wonders

But man is feeble
Man is puny
And if it should divide the Union
There is no man that should own another
When he can't even recognise his sister and his brother