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 lockets
What time erases and memory mocks
I'll send them over the ocean foam
Right into those gentle European homesThe 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 beginsDahomey traders paid powder and shots
Line up their prisoners, 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 whipsSo I'm cutting up her pure white dress
That I dyed red, that I dyed red
I'm putting scraps in cheap tin lockets
What time erases and memory mocks
I'll send them over the ocean foam
Right into those gentle European homesWhite is the sheet on your fine linen bed
The blood stained red on each cotton thread
The merchants gathered at St. George's Hall
To unveil the kneeling slave
Who is carved upon the wallPicture the scene at the Old Salt House docks
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 saleSo 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 MuseumBut the Lord will judge us with fire and thunder
As man continues with all his blunders
It's only money, it's only numbers
Maybe it is time to put aside these fictitious wondersBut man is feeble, man is puny
And if it should divide the union
There is no man who should own another
When he can't even recognize his sister and his brother

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