PHILLIS WHEATLEY

c1753 b., West Africa (poss. Senegal or Gambia)

1760 Jupiter Hammon, a slave, publishes the first work by a black American, “An Evening Thought. Salvation by Christ, With Penitential Cries”

1761 arrives on the slave ship, The Phillis, in Boston; sold to John Wheatley, prominent tailor, and given as a servant to his wife Susanna; they name the girl Phillis

c1765 by about this time Wheatley has gain reading knowledge of Latin, Greek; family continues her education; will go to read the Bible and the poetry of John Milton, Thomas Gray, Alexander Pope; begins correspondence with Samson Occom


1768 “To the King’s Most Excellent Majesty”

1770 Wheatley publishes several poems (“On the Death of the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield,” “On the Affray in King-Street, on the Evening of the 5th of March,” and “On the Death of Mr. Snider Murder’d by Richardson”) which garnishes her wide attention in America and Britain

1772 John Wheatley attempts to get her poems published; Boston publishers refuse to believe a slave could have written them and won’t publish Wheatley appears before eighteen leading Massachusetts figures, including John Hancock, Gov. Thomas Hutchinson, and Lt. Gov. Andrew Oliver, to prove she had written her poems; she is judged an author and the “judges” sign a letter of attestation declaring publically that

We . . . do assure the World, that the Poems specified in the following Page, were (as we verily believe) written by Phillis, a young Negro Girl, who was but a few Years since, brought an uncultivated Barbarian from Africa, and has ever since been, and now is, under the Disadvantage of serving as a Slave in a Family in this Town [Boston]. She has been examined by some of the best Judges, and is thought qualified to write them.
**1773** Phillis travels with Nathaniel Wheatley to London for health treatment; meets Lord Mayor of London, Benjamin Franklin, and others, and was to meet with George III. July, returns to Boston to attend to ailing Susanna Wheatley. Sept., Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral (London). Wheatley manumitted.

**1774** Mar., Susanna dies.

**1775** “To His Excellency, George Washington”

**1776** meets George Washington at Mt. Vernon.

**1778** John Wheatley dies. Marries John Peters, grocer; Wheatley family apparently objected to her choice.

Jupiter Hammon publishes his poem, “An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatly, Ethiopian Poetess, in Boston.”

**1779** Wheatley circulates subscription proposal for another volume of poetry; fails to garner interest; most of the manuscripts are lost.

**1781** while writing on slavery in Notes on the State of Virginia, Thomas Jefferson denounces the Wheatley as an author: Religion indeed has produced a Phyllis Whately, but it could not produce a poet. The compositions published under her name are below the dignity of criticism.

**1784** Peters possibly jailed for debt; Wheatley takes up maid work at a boarding house. 5 Dec., Wheatley dies, alone with infant son, in poverty; buried in unmarked grave.

**1786** Poems on Various Subjects receives first American publication.

**1802** Poems on Various Subjects reprinted.

**1834** Memoir and Poems of Phillis Wheatley, A Native African and Slave (ed. Margareta Matilda Odell).