

# *Dido Elizabeth Belle*

*An 18th Century Woman*

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## Dido Elizabeth Belle Lindsay

- Born June 1761
- Parents: Captain John Lindsay (1737-1788) and Maria Belle
  - Maria Belle was an African slave found by Lindsay in a Spanish vessel in the West Indies
- “Adopted” by the Mansfield family, headed by her great-uncle William Murray, first Earl of Mansfield (1705 - 1793) and chief justice on the King’s Bench
  - She was made neither servant nor “official” family member, despite being loved and given household responsibilities.
- Married John Davinier, a Frenchman and steward. They lived in what is now Ebury Street in Belgravia, and they had three children.
- Died 1804





*“A Black came in after dinner and sat with the ladies,” he writes, “and after coffee, walked with the company in the gardens, one of the young ladies having her arm within the other. [...] I knew her history before,” he continues, “but My Lord mentioned it again. Sir John Lindsay having taken her mother prisoner in a Spanish vessel, brought her to England where she was delivered of this girl, and which was taken care of by Lord M., and has been educated by his family. He calls her **Dido**, which I suppose is all the name she has.”*

*- Governor of Massachusetts Sir Thomas Hutchinson (1779)*





Painted by  
Scottish Artist  
**David Martin** in  
Kenwood  
(approx. 1779)

## Lord Mansfield, Sir William Murray

- Prominent political figure w/ abolitionist tendencies
- Presided over several slavery-related cases
- Somerset vs. Stewart Case (1772)
  - James Somerset, a slave who had been brought to England, escaped, was caught by owner and then forced onto a ship bound for the West Indies.
  - Famous judgment on labour law and human rights which held that traditional slavery was unsupported by the common law in England
- The Zong Case (1781)
  - Killing of more than 130 African slaves by the crew of the British slave ship *Zong*
  - *Zong*'s owners made a claim to their insurers for the loss of the slaves. Insurers refused to pay.
  - Mansfield ruled against the ship's owners in this case, suggesting the captain and crew were at fault
- It is inferred that Dido had some influence on these decisions.







*"He knows he has been reproached for showing fondness for her," Hutchinson observes, before recalling one of Mansfield's cases. "A few years ago there was a cause before his Lordship brought by a Black for recovery of his liberty. A Jamaica planter, being asked what judgment his Lordship would give. [answered] 'No doubt...he will be set free, for Lord Mansfield keeps a Black in his house which governs him and the whole family.' "*

*- Governor of Massachusetts Sir Thomas Hutchinson (1779)*



• *Clip from the 2013 movie “Belle” by Amma Asante* •

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