



Image from: [A popular magazine of the time reports on the... in \*Encyclopedia of Emancipation and Abolition in the Transatlantic World\*](#)

### Summary Article: **Dred Scott Decision**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

US Supreme Court decision of 1857 which denied 'blacks' (African Americans) US citizenship and made slavery legal in all US territories. The decision heightened regional tensions, and pushed the country further toward Civil War. Dred Scott (c. 1800–1858), a slave from Missouri, had sued for his freedom from his owner John Sanford (originally in the Missouri courts), arguing that he had lived with his owner in Illinois, a free state, and the Wisconsin Territory, where slavery had been outlawed by the Missouri Compromise. The Supreme Court ruled that black people were not US citizens, and therefore were not entitled to the right to sue in federal courts; that those who had achieved their freedom could lose it by returning to a state that allowed slavery; and that the Missouri Compromise was illegal, as it interfered with the right to own slaves, guaranteed by the Fifth Amendment of the US Constitution.

The case reached the Supreme Court after a series of reversals, and Chief Justice Roger B Taney, leader of the Supreme Court's southern, proslavery majority, announced its decision on 6 March 1857. The overturning of the Missouri Compromise was only the second Congressional act overturned by the Supreme Court.

With the country sharply divided on the slavery issue, the Dred Scott case further inflamed both proslavery and antislavery factions and featured prominently in many political debates, including the Lincoln–Douglas debates during the 1858 Senate race (in Illinois, Republican Abraham Lincoln campaigned against the incumbent Democrat Stephen Douglas, who had been largely responsible for repeal of the Compromise).

Scott himself was sold shortly after the Supreme Court ruling but was set free by his new owner. The Dred Scott decision was overturned after the passing of the Thirteenth Amendment (1865), which abolished slavery; and the Fourteenth Amendment (1868), which gave US citizenship to anyone born or naturalized in the USA, including African Americans. See also United States: history 1783–1861, **the Dred Scott Case and Harpers Ferry**.

#### **documents**

Douglas, Stephen A.: Reply to Lincoln at Freeport

Lincoln, Abraham: House Divided Speech

Lincoln, Abraham: Statement at Alton (Seventh Lincoln-Douglas Debate)

#### **weblinks**

Supreme Court Decision: The Dred Scott Case

**APA**

Chicago

Harvard

MLA

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Dred Scott decision. (2018). In Helicon (Ed.), *The Hutchinson unabridged encyclopedia with atlas and weather guide*. Abington, UK: Helicon. Retrieved from [https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/dred\\_scott\\_decision](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/dred_scott_decision)

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## APA

Dred Scott decision. (2018). In Helicon (Ed.), *The Hutchinson unabridged encyclopedia with atlas and weather guide*. Abington, UK: Helicon. Retrieved from [https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/dred\\_scott\\_decision](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/dred_scott_decision)

## Chicago

"Dred Scott Decision." In *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*, edited by Helicon. Helicon, 2018. [https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/dred\\_scott\\_decision](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/dred_scott_decision)

## Harvard

Dred Scott decision. (2018). In Helicon (Ed.), *The Hutchinson unabridged encyclopedia with atlas and weather guide*. [Online]. Abington: Helicon. Available from: [https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/dred\\_scott\\_decision](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/dred_scott_decision) [Accessed 17 November 2019].

## MLA

"Dred Scott Decision." *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*, edited by Helicon, 2018. *Credo Reference*, [https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/dred\\_scott\\_decision](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/dred_scott_decision). Accessed 17 Nov. 2019.