

**Teaching American History Seminar
Prelude To Civil War
The Dred Scott Decision**

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“You will readily ask me how I am affected by this devilish decision--this judicial incarnation of wolfishness? My answer is, and no thanks to the slaveholding wing of the Supreme Court, my hopes were never brighter than now... Step by step we have seen the slave power advancing; poisoning, corrupting, and perverting the institutions of the country; growing more and more haughty, imperious, and exacting. The white man’s liberty has been marked out for the same grave with the black man’s.”

Frederick Douglas, May 1857

MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN OF THE CONVENTION: If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do, and how to do it. We are now far into the fifth year since a policy was initiated with the avowed object and confident promise of putting an end to slavery agitation. Under the operation of that policy, that agitation has not, only not ceased, but has constantly augmented. In my opinion, it will not cease until a crisis shall have been reached and passed. "A house divided against itself cannot stand." I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved; I do not expect the house to fall; but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other.

Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction, or its advocates will push it forward till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new, North as well as South.

Abraham Lincoln, June 17, 1858

Proposal: Prelude to Civil War: The Dred Scott Decision

This proposal will look at the affect this decision had on both the North and South; on the abolitionist who opposed slavery and on those who had, until this decision been content to live and let live.

Students will read "The Taney Court's" decision on the Dred Scott case along with the Compromise of 1850 and the Kansas Nebraska Act of 1854.

Grade Level: 9-10

The grade level for this unit will be 9th and 10th graders. This unit could be adapted and then used in either more advanced levels of high school U. S. History classes or adapted for an eighth grade history class.

Seminar Impact:

I have enjoyed this seminar. I enjoyed the trip to Rokeby and the presentation by Dr. Beth Salerno. She was able to bring the people she spoke of to life and make them human. It was interesting to note that the husband of Elizabeth Caddy Stanton was not in favor of her involvement in the abolitionist movement.

Dr. Donald Yacovone, and Jon Peterson, were also very interesting and shared a lot of valuable information.

I especially enjoyed the trip to Seneca Falls. This was very eye opening and I learned a lot of things I was not familiar with. The Women's Rights Museum was excellent and there was much more there to see then one had time for in a day. I found the biography

display of famous women very interesting and it was difficult to select which ones to read, as our time was limited. It always helpful when teaching to have personally been to the area you are discussing.

During the course of the year I have found the book discussions to be insightful. The professors who have led these discussions have done a good job of involving us as a group. When everyone gets involved a lot of different viewpoints are shared and while I may not agree with them all they certainly give me food for thought. I especially enjoyed the discussion around "The Black Hearts Of Men." This was an informative book and I will certainly use it when I am teaching in a classroom again.

With that said this has been a challenging year. As a result of my testimony before the Vermont Senate Judiciary Committee I found myself without a classroom to teach in as well as a job. Therefore I have not had the opportunity to share my Unit with students' thought I expect I will get that opportunity in the near future.

My Unit will start with a book on Dred Scott. The book is titled, "Dred and Harriet Scott: A Family's Struggle For Freedom ." My students will be expected to read this approximately two weeks before we begin our unit. This will give them insight into the Scott family and the situation they faced as well as a feel for the mood of the country at that time.

With Barack Obama as our new President it will be interesting to see how my students balance these two situations. Will they see this as proof of how far their country has come? Will they question why it took so long? Will they see the election of Barack Obama as a turning point in race relations in the United States? Will they even make the connection? Will they see the Dred Scott Decision as a major turning point in bringing about the end of slavery and the beginning of civil rights for blacks in America?

During this unit students will be expected to write two responses to the Taney Court Decision. One response will be from a Kentucky slave owner's viewpoint and another will be from the viewpoint of a Pennsylvania farmer. Students should be able to pose a strong argument for either view. This type of exercise allows students to try and understand how people on the opposing side are formulating their opinion on the same subject.

I consider myself very fortunate to have had the pleasure of taking this course over the past three years. I would not have met so many other educators who are clearly dedicated to their students and profession. Educators who care about the state of education, their students, their community and what is taking place in their country. To be associated with people who take what they are learning back to their classrooms, back to their students, so that they might become informed citizens, gives me hope for education and our future.

Central Questions:

- **How was the Dred Scott Decision used in the Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858?**
- **Why did the Dred Scott Decision further polarize relations between the North and the South?**
- **What was the Compromise of 1820?**
- **What was the Kansas-Nebraska Act?**

Challenge Questions:

- Was the Civil War inevitable?
- What might have been done to avoid it?
- Did the Tenth Amendment give the South the right to secede?

Unit Length:

7 class periods of 45 minutes each.

One week prior to beginning this unit students will have been given and expected to have read, “Dred And Harriet Scott: A Family’s Struggle For Freedom.”

Monday

Discuss with the students their understanding of how people in the North and the people in the South felt about slavery in the early 1850’s. Students will have some understanding of this from previous classes and having read Dred Scott the previous week. It should be expected that students will refer to this book in stating their understanding of this issue. After this discussion, handout out quiz on the book Dred and Harriet Scott.

For homework, handout the Compromise of 1850 and The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. These will have been discussed in previous classes as students studied slavery and causes of the American Civil War. The students will be expected to read copies of the actual documents in order to have a better understanding of the impact these two acts had on the people living in these territories.

Tuesday

Discuss the significance of these two documents. How do they affect the people in the Northern Territories and those in the Southern Territories? How would you have felt as a person living in the Northern or Southern Territories. Discuss with them how territorial expansion has created this. The term, Manifest Destiny and the Mexican War should be discussed. The United States has acquired land but at what cost?

For homework handout the “Tanney Court Decision.” The students will be familiar with this as it is discussed in the book they have previously read.

Wednesday

Ask them what their first reaction is after having read the courts decision. What effect does this decision have on the United States as a whole? At this point is a Civil War inevitable.

Have the students begin working on their arguments both for and against the Tanney Court Decision. Tell them that in order to do this they must look at this from the viewpoint of a Southerner and that of a Northerner.

It’s understood that not all people felt the same whether from the South or the North. But for the purpose of this class students will assume a Southerner is in favor of the decision while a Northerner is not.

Students should be allowed to work in pairs if they wish while the teacher moves about the classroom fielding questions and clarifying arguments. For homework students will be expected to come into class on Thursday with a first draft of their arguments.

Thursday

Students will read aloud the first draft of their arguments. Fellow students will give feedback on these. The discussion will then focus on a group called the “Radical Abolitionist” and how the Dred Scott Decision has perhaps provided the spark for them to act.

The question will be asked, if the Tanney Court had ruled that Dred Scott was a citizen of the United States and as a result of having resided in a free territory, a free man, could the Civil War have been averted long enough, to bring an end to slavery through the legislative process?

Friday

The class period will be taken up with a test on the documents we have used during the week. The Compromise of 1850, Kansas-Nebraska Act, Tanney Court Decision, and the Radical Abolitionists.

Monday/Tuesday

Students will present their arguments both for and against the Tanney Court Decision.

Key Ideas:

The effect the Dred Scott decision had on bringing the issue of slavery to the forefront of citizens in the Northern States.

Also students should ask themselves whether it was slavery itself that those in the North questioned or did they feel that government had no right to tell them what could be in their own state.

Intended Learning Outcomes:

- Students will have an understanding of the political atmosphere in which the Taney Court's decision was handed down.
- Students will read and be able to discuss the Taney Court's decision.
- Students will read and understand the Compromise of 1850 and the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854.
- Students will understand the affect this decision had on the radical abolitionist movement.
- Students will be able to argue whether the Dred Scott decision played a key role in bringing about the American Civil War.
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National History Standards:

The National History Standards that will be addressed in this unit are:

Historical Thinking:

Standard 1: Chronological Thinking

Standard 2: Historical Comprehension

Standard 3: Historical Analysis and Interpretation

Standard 4: Historical Research Capabilities

Standard 5: Analysis and Decision making

Putting Historical Thinking Skills to Work

Content Standards- Era 3 Revolution and the New Nation (1754-1820s)

Standard 1

Standard 2

Standard 3

Vermont Standards:

The Vermont Standards that will be addressed in this unit are:

Vital Results

- 1.3-Reading Comprehension**
- 1.7-Responses to Literature**
- 1.8 Reports**
- 1.18 Information Technology**
- 1.19 Research**
 - Fields of Knowledge
- 6.1- Causes and Effects in Human Society**
- 6.3- Analyzing Knowledge**
- 6.4- Historical Connections**
- 6.6- Being a Historian**
- 6.10- Types of Government**
- 6.14- Forces of Unity and Disunity**

Preparation for Teaching:

Primary Sources:

The Taney Course Decision
The Compromise of 1850
The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854

Secondary Sources: Text, American Government: Dred And Harriet Scott, A Family's Struggle For Freedom

Activities: Each student will prepare two arguments. One of which will be in favor of the Tanney Court Decision and one opposed. Students should be able to understand the viewpoints of another whether they agree or disagree with their point of view

Assessments:

- **Participation in class discussion**
- **Quiz on Dred and Harriet Scott**
- **Test on the documents covered**
- **Strength of arguments both Pro-Con**

Annotated Bibliography

Ginzberg, Lori. D. Untidy Origins A Story Of Woman's Rights In Antebellum New York. Chapel Hill and London. University of North Carolina Press, 2005.

I enjoyed this book. I would use it with students for a number of reasons. First it would be useful in discussing how a town and the surrounding area develop. I thought Ginzberg did a wonderful job of that in the book.

I would also encourage my students to try and see the issue of "Women's Rights" from the opposite point of view. That is men to view it from a woman's perspective and vice-versa. As I read this book I as the reader felt compelled to try and do this. I'm not sure if Ginzberg meant for the reader to feel this but for me it happened.

It's also captures the idea that the "Women's Rights Movement" didn't happen in a vacuum but evolved over time in many different places with the involvement of many different people. This movement was happening in other countries as well as in the United States.

However I found this book in many ways reads like a textbook. I think that many high school students would find it hard to stay focused and it therefore would serve them better as a book for doing research.

Salerno, Beth. A. Sister Societies. Illinois. Northern Illinois University Press, 2008.

I believe that this is a book that could hold the attention of high school students. If not the whole book certainly selected chapters such as 1,3, and 4. Salerno does a decent job of showing the reader what women had to suffer to be a part of this movement. Salerno opens the reader to the physical violence suffered by women and how their own families often ostracized them.

The book is important for the research into how men played a significant role in this movement. Because women didn't have the right the men in this movement often played the role of mediator or go between in delivering petitions and going before state legislatures.

Many of these women had husbands who were strong backers of what they were trying to do even if they did not always agree in how they went about doing it. I believe this book would be a vital resource in the study of the "Women's Rights Movement."

Stauffer, John. The Black Hearts of Men Radical Abolitionists And The Transformation Of Race. Cambridge and London. Harvard University Press, 2001

This was a very good book. The information is very important to the time period and to the "Radical Abolitionist Movement." The book introduces us to a couple of key characters in this movement that history texts have ignored. These two men, James McCune Smith, and Gerrit Smith, (no relation) are extraordinary of their time and yet like

all men, painfully human.

The book reads like a novel with a dramatic ending. Stauffer is able to keep the reader interested in this way while also giving a good history of the time period. I felt Stauffer gave the reader a better insight into the minds of John Brown and Frederick Douglas too.

In American history textbooks Frederick Douglas has often been portrayed as a man above suspicion and selfless. Stauffer shows us a man who struggles with his beliefs and how to go about creating change. His belief in the power of God to affect change is severely challenged. In the end Douglas realizes that even though the Civil War ended slavery, racism would continue in America for a long time.

Swain, Gwenyth. Dred And Harriet Scott A Family's Struggle For Freedom.

I found this book to be important for the unit I was doing on Dred Scott. While many students and adults might be familiar with the name and the decision, few of us have any idea of his life and how it was that he decided to ask the court for his freedom.

Swain humanizes Dred Scott and his family for the reader. The reader comes to see Dred Scott not only as a court case but also, as a man who has a wife and family and how he struggles to maintain that family unit while in slavery.

This is an easy read for high school students. I would give it to students a week prior to starting the unit so that they not only have an understanding of the case but a better understanding of Dred Scott as a person.

It could be said that the reading level, 9 and up is too easy, but I found the book to be informative. Because I would be using it as a way to familiarize my students with the person I believe it works.

www.supremecourthistory.org, The Taney Court. The Supreme Court Historical Society

This is an excellent site and one that is easy to use. This site gives the reader not only access to decisions but also to the court that handed down the decision. The site gives information on how other decisions were handled by the same court. It too gives insight into how each of the judges on that court felt about specific cases.

This site was relevant and important to my research.