

Dred Scott v. Sandford / Editorial Analysis—Answer Key

Each of the following are excerpts of newspaper editorials¹ published at the time of the *Dred Scott* decision. Editorials express the opinion of the editor of a newspaper and often, but not always, reflect that of the community where the paper is published.

Directions:

Read the following excerpts from editorials in newspapers and consider these questions:

- a. Does the author of the editorial appear support or oppose the Dred Scott decision?
- b. What makes you think that? What evidence in the editorial supports your answer?

1. Albany Evening Journal, Albany, NY (March 7, 1857) [Republican]

Chief Justice Taney delivered to-day the opinion of the U. S. Supreme Court in the *Dred Scott* case. The points are that Scott is not a citizen; that he was not manumitted [freed] by being taken by his master when a slave into the then Territory of Illinois, and that the Missouri Compromise was an act unconstitutionally passed by Congress.

It is no novelty to find the Supreme Court following the lead of the Slavery Extension party, to which most of its members belong. Five of the Judges are slaveholders, and two of the other four owe their appointments to their facile ingenuity in making State laws bend to Federal demands in behalf of “the Southern institution.”

- a. Does the author of the editorial appear support or oppose the *Dred Scott* decision?

The author opposed the *Dred Scott* decision.

- b. What makes you think that? What evidence in the editorial supports your answer?

The author was from New York, a free state. The author pointed out that the Supreme Court justices who decided the case were slave holders.

2. New Orleans Daily Delta, New Orleans, LA (March 19, 1857) [Democratic]

The late formal decision of the Supreme Court in the *Dred Scott* case has been undergoing the most vigorous and untiring explanation and discussion The Court decrees that negroes, bond or free, are not citizens of the United States under the Federal Constitution;

¹ Source: <http://history.furman.edu/editorials/sec.py>

that the ordinance of 1787 was superseded by the Constitution; that the Missouri restriction against slavery of 1820 was unconstitutional; that slaveholders have the right to take their slaves into the Territories; that the legal status of a slave is not affected by his temporary sojourn in a free State; and that Congress has no power over slavery in a Territory, and consequently can delegate none to a Territorial Legislature.

This decision has but little practical importance and bearing at this time. As far as the South is concerned, it is much like having the gap closed after the wolves have devoured all the sheep; it is but little satisfaction to her to know that she had a right to what has been stolen from her, and that she has been denied the benefits of a Constitution which should have protected her.

- a. Does the author of the editorial appear support or oppose the *Dred Scott* decision?

The author supported the *Dred Scott* decision but feels it has come too late.

- b. What makes you think that? What evidence in the editorial supports your answer?

The suggestion in the editorial was that “as far as the South is concerned” the *Dred Scott* decision was already settled by the Constitution and that enslaved persons were not citizens.

3. **Baltimore Sun, Baltimore, MD (March 9, 1857) [American]**

It appears that the owners of the slave Dred Scott, who brings the action, carried him to Rock Island, in Illinois, and Fort Snelling, north of the Missouri line, and resided there for years. He carried him back to Missouri, and then claimed that the status of slavery resumed. The court sustains the action.

It is said, but we do not know upon what specific authority, that the opinion of the court does not reach directly, if at all, that a master may take a slave to a free State, even in transit [on the way/in transit], and hold in slavery there his slave—only that a slave is not thus made free when re-taken to the State whence he departed. The decision, we are glad to say, seems to be welcomed in most quarters.

- a. Does the author of the editorial appear support or oppose the Dred Scott decision?

The author supported the *Dred Scott* decision.

- b. What makes you think that? What evidence in the editorial supports your answer?

The author said, “The decision, we are glad to say, seems to be welcomed in most quarters.”