

# NEWS RELEASE

From the Office of the Indiana Attorney General

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **AG of Utah, Dred Scott descendant, teach Indiana students and attorneys about landmark case**

*Zoeller: Black History Month observance illustrates history-changing decision*

INDIANAPOLIS -- The U.S. Supreme Court decision of 155 years ago that helped ignite the Civil War but led ultimately to the eventual abolition of slavery was recreated today in the Indiana Supreme Court in a Black History Month observance that underscored for students the importance of the Dred Scott case on today's constitutional rights.

The Indiana Attorney General's Office and Indiana Supreme Court hosted the program for students from five area high schools that explored the legal and cultural aspects of the 1857 Dred Scott decision through two experts with unique knowledge of the case. Utah Attorney General Mark Shurtleff is the author of the book "Am I Not A Man? The Dred Scott Story" that he spent five years researching. Lynne M. Jackson is great-great granddaughter of Dred Scott and president and founder of the heritage foundation in St. Louis that bears Scott's name.

Indiana Attorney General Greg Zoeller had attended AG Shurtleff's presentation on the Dred Scott decision a few years ago in the old U.S. Supreme Court chamber in the U.S. Capitol, and Zoeller was so impressed he asked Shurtleff to present it to Indiana students and attorneys.

"Behind the historic cases lawyers study are real people who faced real hardships. The Dred Scott decision called into question the basic American notion of equality and today it reminds us that the system of justice is imperfect. Though it took the pain and suffering of the Civil War, justice eventually prevailed to right a wrong, and that's something students today should understand," Zoeller said.

Dred Scott was an African-American man held in slavery in the 1850s who sued to gain his freedom, waging his case all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. Though a lower court had freed Scott from slavery, the 1857 decision of the Supreme Court denied Scott and other enslaved persons their legal rights, resulting in Scott being enslaved again. Though Scott and his wife Harriett eventually were freed, he did not live to see the political outcome of the 7-2 Supreme Court ruling. Now considered a pivotal turning point in American history, the Dred Scott decision led to the political rise of Abraham Lincoln, secession of the slaveholding Southern states, outbreak of Civil War, Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, abolition of slavery nationwide and the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution.

At today's presentation in the Indiana Supreme Court chamber, "Celebrating Black History: The Life and Times of Dred Scott," Shurtleff described the legal and historical ramifications of the decision, while Jackson provided the family perspective of her famous ancestor who fought for his freedom in the courts and lost but inspired the antislavery Abolitionist movement. Students from five area high schools -- Arsenal Tech, Covenant Christian, Lawrence North, Plainfield and Silver Creek -- read aloud excerpts from the decision.

Later in the day at Martin University in Indianapolis, AG Shurleff and Jackson are scheduled to present a Continuing Legal Education (CLE) session to attorneys, focusing on legal analysis of the decision and its impact. Zoeller is moderator of that program.

The day's programs are also sponsored by the Indiana Bar Foundation, Martin University and the Indiana Supreme Court Legal History Lecture Series with support from the Indiana Commission on Continuing Legal Education. The student event is also sponsored by the Indiana Supreme Court's "Courts in the Classroom" program.

The majority opinion authored by U.S. Chief Justice Roger Taney in 1857 in the Dred Scott decision framed the individual's liberty status in the context of property rights, and now is considered one of the most disastrous decisions in U.S. Supreme Court history. Zoeller said Taney's infamous opinion still is studied today because it illustrated the danger of attempting to craft a legal decision to achieve entirely political results. "The dignity and perseverance of Dred and Harriett Scott are inspiring a century and a half later, and demonstrate the tremendous debt that Americans today owe to those who sacrificed so much so that constitutional rights would be guaranteed to all," Zoeller said.

Lynne Jackson noted that the Dred Scott Heritage Foundation has commissioned a life-sized statue of Dred and Harriett Scott that will be placed outside the Old Courthouse in St. Louis. "People remember his name from their history class, but they don't always recall the great significance of his case in our nation of ending slavery," Jackson said of her famous great-great grandfather.

**Informational Links:**

[Dred Scott Heritage Foundation](#)

[Am I Not A Man: The Dred Scott Story](#)

*NOTE: Indiana Attorney General Greg Zoeller's comment on the Black History Month observance of the Dred Scott case is attached.*

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