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Lynne M. Jackson, great-great-granddaughter of Dred Scott, discusses the historic court case at Metropolitan Community College's South Omaha Campus on Tuesday as part of Black History Month.

## Dred Scott descendant tells personal story of the family behind the historic 1857 court case

By [Julie Anderson](#) / *World-Herald staff writer*

Five trials. Eleven years. Two Supreme Courts.

But it was the U.S. Supreme Court that ruled in 1857 that African Americans, slave or free, could not be U.S. citizens, a ruling that helped spark the Civil War.

History knows it as the Dred Scott decision. But for Lynne M. Jackson of St. Louis, Mo., it's a family story.

Jackson, president and founder of the [Dred Scott Heritage Foundation](#), is the great-great-granddaughter of Dred and Harriet Scott.

On Tuesday, she told a class of Metropolitan Community College students about the couple behind the historic court case Tuesday. She talked about the family of the former owner who helped and ultimately freed them.

She also described some of the work the foundation has done to unearth that story, to commemorate the Scotts and to reconcile modern-day descendants on both sides of history. Jackson also gave a presentation at Metro's South Campus as part of the college's Black History Month programming.

Jackson said the story was passed down through the generations. But they largely kept it quiet. Even other African Americans at the time weren't particularly happy with Scott, because the decision affected even those who already were free.

But some years ago, Jackson said, she heard a call. In 1995, she started digging.

“I just think it was the voice of God,” she said.

In 2007, the foundation commemorated the 150th anniversary of the decision, with help from various partners in the St. Louis area. A statue of the couple was placed in front of the Old Court House in St. Louis where they filed their initial lawsuit. A St. Louis street was renamed Dred Scott Way.

Jackson said the foundation's mission also includes education. Many still don't know who Scott was, or that Harriett filed her own lawsuit. They filed two lawsuits, figuring that if one of them won, they could secure their daughters' freedom.

The sons of Scott's original owner, Peter Blow, helped pay Scott's legal fees. Scott's case rested on the time the Virginia-born Scott had spent in free states after Blow's death, when Scott was purchased by an Army surgeon. After the court decision, Blow's sons bought Scott and his wife and freed them.

Jackson said the foundation also focuses on reconciliation. Just as she was trying to figure out how to make that happen, organizers in Marshfield, Mo., a town near Springfield, recognized Scott among other famous people with Missouri ties during its annual Cherry Blossom Festival.

Several years later, an organizer asked if she wanted to hold a reconciliation forum at the event. She held up a photograph of herself with descendants of Martin Luther King Jr., Thomas Jefferson, Jefferson Davis and a Supreme Court justice who dissented in the Scott decision. This year, the Dred Scott Reconciliation Forum will focus on the integration of sports.

“It's a wonderful little town that loves history,” she said.

Jackson, meantime, continues to tell the family's story. So far, she's made 20 pages worth of stops.

Her favorite, she said, was an invitation to meet with a Daughters of the American Revolution chapter in Chesterfield, Mo.

The meeting was significant to her because another chapter in 1939 refused to allow African American opera singer Marian Anderson to sing in Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C. Eleanor Roosevelt found out and resigned, then invited Anderson to sing at the Lincoln Memorial.

Now, Jackson said, there are African American chapters of the organization, which is made up of women whose ancestors fought in the Revolutionary War.

“It's all different,” she said, “and that's a good thing.”



**Contact the writer: Julie Anderson**

[julie.anderson@owh.com](mailto:julie.anderson@owh.com) | 402-444-1223

Julie splits her time between K-12 education, covering several area school districts and private schools, and general assignment stories.

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