



Before Dred Scott: Slavery and Legal Culture in the American Confluence, 1787-1857 (Cambridge Historical Studies in American Law and Society)

Anne Twitty

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Before Dred Scott draws on the freedom suits filed in the St Louis Circuit Court to construct a groundbreaking history of slavery and legal culture within the American Confluence, a vast region where the Ohio, Mississippi, and Missouri Rivers converge. Formally divided between slave and free territories and states, the American Confluence was nevertheless a site where the borders between slavery and freedom, like the borders within the region itself, were fluid. Such ambiguity produced a radical indeterminacy of status, which, in turn, gave rise to a distinctive legal culture made manifest by the prosecution of hundreds of freedom suits, including the case that ultimately culminated in the landmark United States Supreme Court decision in *Dred Scott vs Sandford*. Challenging dominant trends in legal history, *Before Dred Scott* argues that this distinctive legal culture, above all, was defined by ordinary people's remarkable understanding of and appreciation for formal law.

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