The **Dred Scott v. Sandford** decision, issued by the **U.S. Supreme Court on March 6, 1857**, is one of the most infamous rulings in American legal history. It heightened national tensions over slavery and contributed to the political and social divisions that led to the **Civil War**.

**Who Was Dred Scott?**

* Dred Scott was an enslaved African American man born around 1799.
* He was owned by **Dr. John Emerson**, a U.S. Army surgeon, and lived in Missouri, a slave state. However, Emerson had taken Scott to Illinois and the Wisconsin Territory, where slavery was prohibited under the **Northwest Ordinance** and the **Missouri Compromise (1820)**.
* After Emerson’s death, Scott sued for his freedom, arguing that his residence in free territories had made him free.

**The Supreme Court Case**

1. **Initial Lawsuits**:
   * Scott initially won his case in a Missouri court in 1846, but the decision was overturned on appeal.
   * The case eventually reached the U.S. Supreme Court in 1856.
2. **The Court's Decision**:
   * The Court, led by Chief Justice **Roger B. Taney**, ruled against Scott in a 7-2 decision.
   * The decision had three major points:
     1. **Scott Could Not Sue in Federal Court**:
        + The Court declared that African Americans, whether free or enslaved, were not citizens of the United States and therefore had no right to sue in federal court.
     2. **Slaves Were Property**:
        + Taney emphasized that enslaved individuals were property protected by the Constitution. The federal government could not deprive slave owners of their property without due process.
     3. **Missouri Compromise Was Unconstitutional**:
        + The Court ruled that Congress had no authority to prohibit slavery in the territories, invalidating the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which had limited slavery's expansion north of the 36°30′ parallel.

**Impact of the Decision**

1. **For African Americans**:
   * The ruling denied citizenship to all African Americans, effectively enshrining their status as inferior under the law.
   * It nullified decades of legal and political efforts to limit slavery.
2. **On the Nation**:
   * The decision further polarized the already divided North and South.
   * It emboldened pro-slavery factions while outraging abolitionists and Northern politicians.
   * Many viewed the decision as a blatant act of judicial activism in favor of Southern slaveholders.
3. **For the Republican Party**:
   * The ruling galvanized the anti-slavery **Republican Party**, which opposed the expansion of slavery.
   * **Abraham Lincoln**, in particular, criticized the decision and used it to rally support for his political platform, which sought to halt the spread of slavery.
4. **Prelude to Civil War**:
   * The Dred Scott decision effectively eliminated legal avenues for compromise over slavery.
   * It accelerated the sectional conflict that erupted into the **Civil War** in 1861.