**Pre-Civil War Legislation and Cases**

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| Missouri Compromise (1820) | \*Missouri would be a slave state and Maine a non-slave state in order to keep the balance of power equal in Congress.\*Banned slavery north of 36th parallel in Louisiana Purchase. |
| Amistad (1841) | \*Rebelling slaves take over ship and taken to Connecticut- where slavery was still legal.\*Abolitionists argue they were never slaves since it was illegal to import slaves at the time.\*Judge decides they were unlawfully kidnapped, and the Court directed the President to transport them back to Africa. |
| Compromise of 1850 | \*Five laws that mostly favored pro-slavery states.\***Fugitive Slave Act** required escaped slaves to be returned.\*California would be a non-slave state.\*Allowed slavery in Washington D.C., but outlawed trade. |
| Kansas-Nebraska Act 1854 | \*Allowed for ‘Popular Sovereignty’- right to choose slave/non-slave state.\*Led to Bleeding Kansas- a prelude battle involving John Brown and some argue the start of the Civil War. |
| Dred Scott Case | \*Supreme Court shows its racist views by claiming slave cases are illegal since they are ‘only property’.\*Case involved Dred Scott who lived in a free state for most of his life with his master after moving from a slave state. |

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| **Date** | **Case** | **Court** | **Ruling** |
| 1779 | *Brakkee v. Lovell* | Vermont Superior Court | Pompey Brakkee had been held as a slave by Elijah Lovell after [slavery was made illegal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_slavery_in_Vermont) in [Vermont](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vermont_Republic). Lovell failed to appear and Brakkee was awarded 400 pounds sterling.[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_slave_court_cases#cite_note-1) |
| 1781 | [*Brom and Bett v. Ashley*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_Freeman_%28Mum_Bett%29) | Berkshire County Court of Common Pleas | Slaves Brom and Bett ([Elizabeth Freeman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_Freeman_%28Mum_Bett%29)) were freed on the basis that the Massachusetts constitution provided that "all men are born free and equal." This case was a precedent for the following one. |
| 1781 | [*Quock Walker*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quock_Walker)*v. Jennison* | Worcester Conty Court of Common Pleas | Jennison's slave, [Quock Walker](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quock_Walker%22%20%5Co%20%22Quock%20Walker), was found to be a freedman on the basis that slavery was contrary to the Bible and the Massachusetts Constitution. |
| 1783 | [*Commonwealth v. Jennison*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quock_Walker) | Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court | Justice [William Cushing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Cushing) instructs jury that "slavery is in my judgment as effectively abolished as it can be by the granting of rights and privileges wholly incompatible and repugnant to its existence."[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_slave_court_cases#cite_note-SJC-2) |
| 1792 | [*Guardian of Sally v. Beatty*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Guardian_of_Sally_%28a_negro%29_v._Beatty) | Supreme Court of South Carolina | A slave owned by Beatty had bought a slave girl Sally and manumitted her. Chief Justice [John Rutledge](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Rutledge) instructed the jury that such an act of generosity on Sally's behalf should not be overturned. |
| 1806 | [*Hudgins v. Wright*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hudgins_v._Wright) | Virginia Supreme Court | Jackey Wright and her two children were freed based on her claim of maternal descent from [Native American](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Native_Americans_in_the_United_States) women. Indian slavery had been prohibited in Virginia since 1705. |
| 1818 | [*Harry v. Decker & Hopkins*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_v._Decker_%26_Hopkins) | Supreme Court of Mississippi | Decker's slave Harry was freed, and slaves residing in the Northwest Territory become free as per the Ordinance of 1787, and may assert their rights in court. |
| 1820 | [*Polly v. Lasselle*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polly_v._Lasselle) | Supreme Court of Indiana | Indiana gave freedom to blacks in the state who had been held as slaves in the territory prior to Indiana's state constitutional ban on slavery. |
| 1830 | [*North Carolina v. Mann*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Carolina_v._Mann) | Supreme Court of North Carolina | Slaveowners were ruled to have absolute authority over their slaves and could not be found guilty of committing violence against them. |
| 1834 | [*Rachel v. Walker*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rachel_v._Walker) | Supreme Court of Missouri | A [freedom suit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_suit) of Rachel, a slave who sued for freedom from John Walker in the Supreme Court of Missouri, and won based on his having held her in the free state of Illinois. |
| 1836 | [*Commonwealth v. Aves*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commonwealth_v._Aves) | Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court | A slave named Med was freed on the grounds that any slave brought to a free state by his or her owner was thereby set free. |
| 1838 | [*Hinds v. Brazealle*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinds_v._Brazealle) | Supreme Court of Mississippi | Denied a deed of manumission in Ohio for a citizen of Mississippi's [mixed-race](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mixed-race) son and his slave mother, because it was against Mississippi statutes (which required an act by the state legislature), and was considered fraud |
| 1841 | [*United States v. Libellants and Claimants of the Schooner Amistad*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_v._The_Amistad) | Supreme Court of the United States | As the Africans in question were never legal property, they were not criminals and had rightfully defended themselves in mutiny. They were unlawfully kidnapped, and the Court directed the President to transport them in return to Africa. |
| 1842 | [*Prigg v. Pennsylvania*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prigg_v._Pennsylvania) | Supreme Court of the United States | Overturned the conviction of slavecatcher Edward Prigg in Pennsylvania based on the ruling that Federal law (which provides for recovery of fugitive slaves) supersedes State law. |
| 1851 | [*Strader v. Graham*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strader_v._Graham) | Supreme Court of the United States | The status of three slaves who traveled from Kentucky to the free states of Indiana and Ohio depended on Kentucky slave law rather than Ohio law, which had abolished slavery. |
| 1852 | [*Lemmon v. New York*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lemmon_v._New_York) | Superior Court of the City of New York | Granted freedom to slaves who were brought into New York by their Virginia slave owners, while in transit to Texas. |
| 1853 | [*Holmes v. Ford*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holmes_v._Ford) | Oregon Territorial Supreme Court | Granted freedom to a family of slaves who had been brought to Oregon with their master from Missouri, as this action violated the [Organic Laws of Oregon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organic_Laws_of_Oregon), which did not allow slavery. |
| 1857 | [*Dred Scott v. Sandford*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dred_Scott_v._Sandford) | Supreme Court of the United States | People of African descent imported into the United States and held as slaves, or their descendants — whether or not they were slaves — were not included under the Constitution and could never be citizens of the United States. |
| 1859 | [*Ableman v. Booth*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ableman_v._Booth) | Supreme Court of the United States | Held that state courts cannot issue rulings that contradict the decisions of federal courts, in this case overturning the *unconstitutionality* ruling by the Wisconsin Supreme Court of the [Fugitive Slave Law of 1850](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fugitive_Slave_Law_of_1850). |