The Dred Scott decision is a landmark case in the legal and political history of the United States. The case originated in Missouri, where Scott, a free black man, sued for his freedom after he had been held as a slave in Illinois and the Wisconsin Territory, both of which were free soil areas. Scott argued that his residence in free territory qualified him for freedom under the Missouri Compromise, which prohibited slavery in the territories north of the 36° 30' parallel. The Supreme Court ruled against Scott, upholding the decision of a lower court and declaring that African Americans were not citizens of the United States and could not sue in federal court. The decision was based on the principle of 'res nullius' or 'without people,' which held that Africans were not in fact a people and thus could not be considered citizens. This decision was a cornerstone of the antebellum debate over the expansion of slavery and played a significant role in the lead-up to the American Civil War.