

## Birthright Citizens: A History of Race and Citizenship in Antebellum America

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*Birthright Citizens: A History of Race and Citizenship in Antebellum America* asks how nineteenth-century African Americans would tell the story of race and citizenship. I recognized that many historians had told this story by way of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, and that still other had concluded that citizenship was a non-story in American law before the Civil War. With antebellum black activists as guides, *Birthright Citizenship* explores a story that begins in the 1820s as black Americans began claiming their status as citizens as a bulwark against black laws and colonization, and concludes in the early years of Reconstruction, as citizenship is radically remade. The book examines black thought on race and law. But citizenship was not merely ideas in the antebellum United States, it was the subject of claim-making and performance. And to discover this, I have examined the records of the antebellum courthouse to explain how citizenship was enacted in everyday legal encounters. This story is then interwoven with that with which historians are better acquainted. Lawmakers also grappled with the question of free black citizenship – in legislatures, constitutional conventions, and in high courts. Their conclusions were much less clear than Roger Taney's decision in *Dred Scott* suggests. Many openings existed for the assertion of rights claims, claims that sometimes cloaked black Americans in citizenship-like garb.