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Nota di contenuto	A radical indeterminacy of status -- "With the ease of a veteran litigant" -- "[B]y the help of God and a good lawyer" -- Slavery from liberty to equality -- "[W]orking his emancipation" -- Exploiting the uncertainties of federalism -- Remembering slavery and freedom in the American confluence -- Conclusion.
Sommario/riassunto	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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