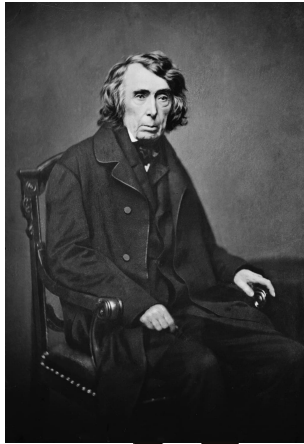




Roger B. Taney

March 17, 1777 - October 12, 1864

Washington, District of Columbia

Roger Brooke Taney, who sat for nearly three decades as the fifth chief justice of the United States and whose name is forever bound to the Dred Scott decision, died in Washington on October 12, 1864. He was eighty-seven.

He was born on March 17, 1777, in Calvert County, Maryland, into a Catholic planter family. After studying at Dickinson College he read law in Annapolis, practiced in Frederick, and rose through Maryland politics as a Federalist turned Jacksonian Democrat. President Andrew Jackson named him attorney general in 1831 and later secretary of the treasury, where he helped dismantle the Second Bank of the United States. When Chief Justice John Marshall died, Jackson nominated Taney to succeed him. After a bitter confirmation fight he took the center chair in 1836.

Taney's Court decided cases that shaped commerce and federal power, but history remembers him chiefly for Dred Scott v. Sandford in 1857. Writing for the majority, he held that people of African descent could not be citizens of the United States and that Congress lacked power to ban slavery in the territories. The opinion inflamed the North, cheered slaveholders, and helped drive the country toward civil war. During the war he clashed with President Lincoln over the suspension of habeas corpus in Ex parte Merryman.

He remained on the bench until the end, frail and often ill, still writing opinions as Union armies closed on Richmond. He died in lodgings in Washington a few weeks before the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery. He was buried in Frederick, Maryland, beside his wife, Anne Key Taney, sister of the author of "The Star-Spangled Banner." Even admirers of his earlier jurisprudence have had to reckon with the decision that overshadowed everything else he did.

Services

Died in Washington, DC, October 12, 1864, aged 87. Portrait: Photograph by Mathew Brady (Brady-Handy Collection, Library of Congress; public domain), hosted by Notice Nearby.

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