



August 22, 2024

Dred Scott Heritage Foundation
Lynne M. Jackson
President and Founder
P. O. Box 705
Florissant, MO 63032

Missouri Parole Board
3500 Knipp Drive
Jefferson City, MO 65109

RE: Justice for “Celia,” an exploited and enslaved 19th Century Callaway County Woman

Dear Governor Parson and the Missouri Parole Board,

I write to you as the President of the Dred Scott Heritage Foundation to urgently implore you to grant the executive clemency application for “Celia,” 19-year-old enslaved woman, who was unjustly executed in Callaway County, Missouri on December 21, 1855, for the self-defense killing of her sexually abusive enslaver, Robert Newsom, a Callaway County farmer. Celia’s story of exploitation and legal injustice is central to our state’s history and captured in the 1991 book, “Celia, A Slave”. Her court case (*The State of Missouri v. Celia A Slave, 1855*) is now a famous U.S. trial, underscoring the deep racial injustices within the 19th century Missouri legal system.

In 1850, 60-year- old widower Robert Newsom purchased 14-year-old Celia to be his enslaved sexual property. Over the next 5 years, Robert forced Celia to submit to him sexually against her will. Celia bore two children, at least one of whom was Robert’s child.

In 1855, when Celia was pregnant once again, she pleaded with Robert and his adult children for Robert to leave her alone as she was extremely sick from her pregnancy. Despite Celia’s pleas, Robert made his intent to continue clear, and his children were either unwilling or unable to help her. On the night of June 23, 1855, Robert came to Celia’s cabin again demanding intercourse. When Robert refused to leave, Celia struck him over the head with a stick, killing him. The Judge ruled that as a slave, Celia had no right to self-defense, and prohibited any evidence of her rape from being introduced at the trial. Celia was found guilty of first-degree murder by a jury of twelve white men. After an unsuccessful appeal to the Missouri Supreme Court, Celia was executed by hanging on December 21, 1855, in Fulton, MO. A candlelight vigil is still held annually at the courthouse on December 21st in Fulton, Missouri to commemorate Celia.

The injustice against Celia would not be tolerated in this society. Neither should it have been in 1855. Although another enslaved mother, Harriet, aka Mrs. Dred Scott, and her husband hid their daughters during the intensifying time of their long 11-year case, they were fighting to save their children from a similar fate. No doubt, this type of case would create a cultural shift if it were tried today with the outcome that Celia received, regardless of race.

The Scotts are my great-great grandparents and although hearing of the tragedy of Celia's story, they were encouraged by her defense of self and her unborn child but surely mortified by her outcome. Unsure of their fate, however, they continued their fight for freedom. Less than two years after Celia's death, they were denied the freedom they already had by the US Supreme Court, yet their continued sacrifices led to a war that ended the abomination of slavery. If only Celia had lived another ten years to see her family's freedom.

Governor Parson and the Missouri Parole Board, **our great state can re-write the ending of Celia's story of human trafficking and sexual exploitation.**

I work with the descendants of Homer Plessy and Judge Ferguson of the 1896 US Supreme Court decision Plessy v. Ferguson which went against Plessy and validated Jim Crow opening the door to Jim Crow. *The Governor of Louisiana, John Bel Edwards, pardoned Mr. Homer Plessy of his conviction on January 5, 2022. The State of Missouri can also be numbered among those states which are righting centuries old wrongs.*

I humbly ask that you right this grave injustice and grant Celia's executive clemency application. In doing so, you will bring:

- Long overdue justice to one of the most vulnerable and exploited Missourians in our state's history
- Solace to Celia's descendants and supporters; and
- Hope to the many women today still cowering in the shadows of their trafficker.

Sincerely,

Lynne M. Jackson

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Great-great Granddaughter of Dred Scott