

Daily Meditation 03-04-24

The Sickness and Treachery of Today's Supreme Court, continued

Good morning.

In this video, I'm addressing today both Monday's daily meditation, but also Tuesday's, which is an offshoot of Monday's.

I woke up this morning with the word "dread" on my lips. Dread. I sense a certain dread, when we talk about the upcoming presidential election. I'm going to share with you what Webster's Dictionary says about dread, the word that came to me in my sleep last night.

"Dread: to fear greatly. The archaic meaning: to regard with awe." (Of course, the word awe also has the word awful built into it.) "To feel extreme reluctance to meet or to face, to be apprehensive or fearful; Dread is a great fear, especially in the face of impending evil. Extreme uneasiness in the face of a disagreeable prospect; that which causes great fear or anxiety; dreadful, inspiring dread.

So I was feeling something in the air, called dread. And in today's daily meditation, there's a certain dread of the Supreme Court, as well as the dread of fascism that are named. When we dread what can happen in this year's election, if we are not vigilant, if we are not active. By active, I mean getting out the vote.

Now in tomorrow's meditation, Tuesday, I also name the dread of another horrific SCOTUS decision, made in the 19th century—in 1857, to be exact—that of Dred Scott. The Supreme Court has immense power in our system. And the Dred Scott decision made a vast impact on American history, and American politics. It was a big step toward the Civil War.

So I link, in tomorrow's daily meditation, the words Dred Scott, and dreaded SCOTUS, and the stories of Sister Dorothy Stang and Alexei Navalny, along with the 19th century spiritual activists and giants, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, and Harriet Tubman—these stories we've been meditating on in recent daily meditations.

There lies a real link between the SCOTUS today and the SCOTUS of yesteryear, of the Dred Scott decision of 1857. And let me fill in the brief story on the Dred Scott decision. First of all, of course, Dred Scott was a name. He was a black enslaved man. And the case went through several courts, and ultimately reached the US Supreme Court. It took 10 years to resolve this case. In 1857, the Supreme Court, the SCOTUS, ruled that living in a free state and territory, which Dred Scott was doing, denied this entitled him to have freedom, because as an enslaved man, he was not a citizen, but essentially, was another person's property. Yes, the Supreme Court said that, in 1857. The Supreme Court's decision incensed abolitionists, and gave momentum to the anti-slavery movement, which served as a stepping stone to the Civil War.

Now who was Dred Scott? He was born around 1799 in Virginia. In 1818, at the age of 19, he moved with his owner Peter Blow to Alabama. And in 1830, he moved to St. Louis, Missouri. Both Alabama and Missouri were slave states. And there, Peter Blow ran a boarding house. Blow died in 1832. And an army surgeon, Dr. John Emerson, purchased Scott, and took him to Illinois, which was a free state, and then to Fort Snelling in Wisconsin territory, where the Missouri Compromise had outlawed slavery. So both Illinois, a free state, and the Wisconsin area which was not yet a state, had outlawed slavery. Scott married Harriet Robinson, also a slave, in a rare civil ceremony.

Now, at the Supreme Court trial, Roger Taney was the fifth Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and he was from the southern aristocracy. He wrote the final majority opinion, Dred Scott vs. Sandford, which said that all people of African descent, free or enslaved, are not US citizens, and had no right to sue in federal court. In addition, he wrote that the Fifth Amendment protected slave owners' rights, because enslaved workers were their legal property. And he concluded that the Missouri Compromise legislation, which was passed to balance the power between slave and non-slave states, was unconstitutional. In effect, this meant that Congress had no power to prevent the spread of slavery.

Of course, this created outrage among many citizens. And ironically, Supreme Court Justice Taney swore-in Abraham Lincoln as President of the United States in 1861—he who eventually passed the Emancipation Proclamation.

What finally happened was, Dred Scott was released, and found freedom September 17, 1857, that very year. But he died in 1858 of tuberculosis, at 59 years of age. So he lived less than one

year as a free man, legally speaking. And it was this debacle of the Supreme Court, that had a lot to do with the Civil War that followed.

Thank you, we'll see you tomorrow.