

1845. A letter from Frederick Douglass to Thurlow Weed (The Liberator, January 16, 1845)

<http://www.mrlincolnswHITEHOUSE.org/templates/display.search.cfm?ID=40>

<http://www.tulane.edu/~latner/Weed.html>

<http://www.yale.edu/glc/archive/1090.htm>

<http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h217.html>

Thurlow Weed was born in Cairo, New York in 1797. As the son of a poor farmer, he worked for a blacksmith and a printer and on Hudson River boats. He entered politics and was elected to the New York State Assembly in 1824. He later became a New York State Whig and Republican Party leader and was the and editor of the *Albany Evening Journal*. Throughout his political career he was known as a strong political ally and friend of William Seward. After the Mexican-American War, Weed supported the prohibition of slavery in the newly acquired territories, promoted the presidential prospects of Zachary Taylor and opposed the passage of the Compromise of 1850. Although an abolitionist, as the Civil War approached, he placed preservation of the union above emancipation. During the war he was sent as a special emissary with General Winfred Scott and New York Archbishop John Hughes to Europe where they helped keep England and France out of the war. He died in New York City in 1882.

Frederick Douglass

Great Brunswick Street, Dublin

December 1st, 1845

To Thurlow Weed

Dear Sir:

Allow me to thank you for your noble and timely defence of my conduct on board the British steamship Cambria, during her passage, 27th Aug., from Boston, U. S. to Liverpool, England; and also to thank you for the friendly manner with which you regard and treat every movement tending to improve and elevate try long enslaved and deeply injured race. In attempting speak on board the Cambria, I acted in accordance with a sense of duty, and with no desire to wound or injure the feelings of any one on board. My object was to enlighten such of our passengers as wished to be enlightened, and to remove the objections to emancipation and false impressions concerning slavery, which I had heard urged during our passage. Nor should I have done this, but that our popular and gentlemanly commander, as well as a most respectable number of our passengers, gave me a pressing invitation to do so. It is clear that slavery in our country can only be abolished by creating a public opinion favorable to its abolition, and this can only be done by enlightening the public mind— by exposing the character of slavery and enforcing the great principles of Justice and Humanity against it. To do this with what ability I may possess, is plainly my duty. To shrink from doing so, on any fitting occasion, from a mere fear of giving offence to those implicated in the wickedness, would be to betray the sacred trust committed to me, and to act the part of a coward. The question to be answered is: Had the passengers, through the Captain, a right to ask me to give them my views of slavery? To ask the question is to answer it. They had as much right to ask me my views on that subject, as those on any other subject. To deny that they had such right, would be to deny that they had the right to exchange views at all. If they had the right to ask, I had the right to answer, and to answer so as to be understood by those who wished to hear. But then, it will be said, the subject of slavery is not open to discussion. Who say so? The very men who are continually speaking and writing in its favor. But who has a right to say what subject shall or shall not be discussed on board of a British steamer? Certainly not the slaveholders of South Carolina, nor their slaveholding abettors in New-York or elsewhere. If any one has such a right, the ship's commander has. Now, all I did on the occasion in question, was in perfect agreement with the wishes of the Captain and a large number of our most respectable passengers. The English papers have had much to say respecting the affair, and of course have in all cases taken a view favorable to myself. I say of course, not because I regard English journalists more disposed to pursue an honorable course in general than those of America; but because they are all committed against Negro slavery within their own dominions and elsewhere; and in this, whatever may be said of them in other respects, they hold a decided advantage over those of America. The whole conduct

of the Americans who took part in the mob on board the Cambria, was in keeping with the base and cowardly spirit that animated the mob in Lexington, Kentucky, which murderously undertook to extinguish the light of Cassius M. Clay's noble paper, because his denunciations of slavery were offensive to their slaveholding ears. Not being able to defend their "peculiar institution" with words, they meanly—and I may add foolishly—resort to blows, vainly thinking thus to cover up their infamy. When will they learn that all such attempts only defeat the end which they are intended to promote, as it only calls attention to an institution which can pass without condemnation, only as it passes without observation. The selfishness of the slaveholder and the horrible practices of slavery must ever excite in the true heart the deepest indignation and most absolute disgust. "To be hated, it needs but to be seen." Again accept my thanks, and believe me to be most gratefully,
Yours, Frederick Douglass