

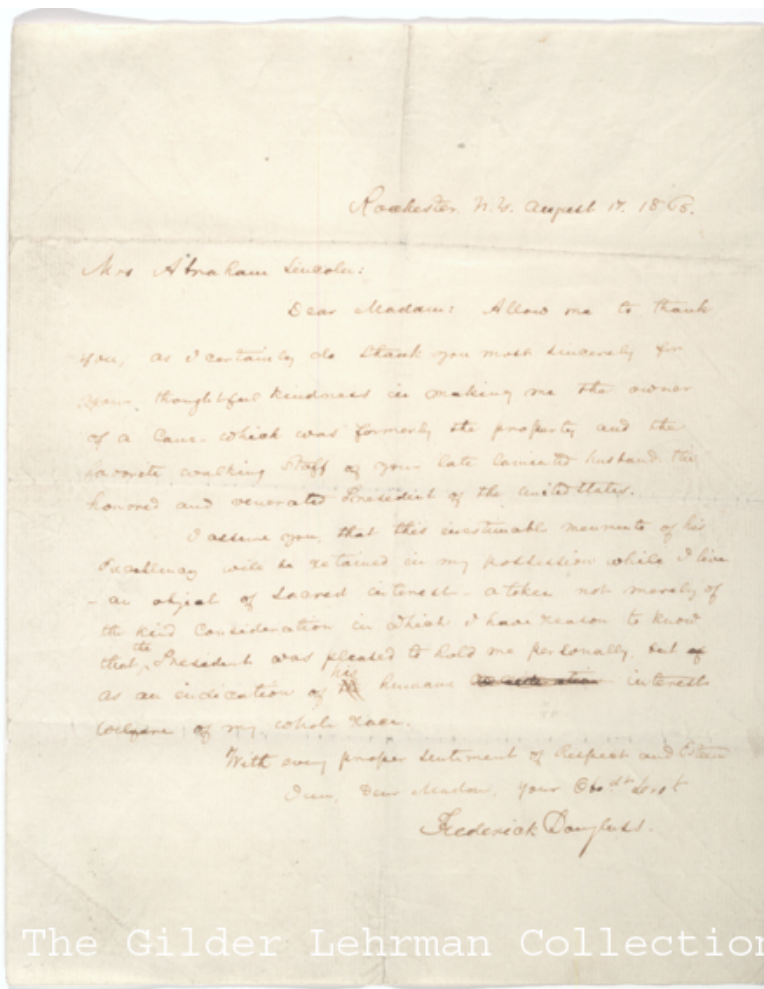
Letter From Frederick Douglass to Mary Todd Lincoln

Document Background:

Frederick Douglass became an admirer and advisor to Abraham Lincoln after the issue of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. In July of 1863 Frederick Douglass met with Lincoln in the White House to discuss concerns for black soldiers and camaraderie soon developed.

Douglass recalled in one of his autobiographies, "while in conversation with [Lincoln], his secretary twice announced Governor Buckingham of Connecticut, one of the noblest and most patriotic of the loyal governors. Mr. Lincoln said: Tell Governor Buckingham to wait, for I want to have a long talk with my friend, Frederick Douglass. I interposed and begged him to see the governor at once, as I could wait, but no, he persisted that that he wanted to talk with me and that Governor Buckingham could wait. In his company I was never in any way reminded of my humble origin, or of my unpopular colour."

After Lincoln's death in April of 1865, Mary Todd Lincoln sent some of the President's canes to special people. She sent Frederick Douglass the President's favorite walking staff which is on display today at Cedar Hill, Douglass's home in Washington D.C. The following is Douglass's thank you letter to Mary Todd Lincoln.



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Transcription:

Rochester N.Y. August 17, 1865.

Mrs. Abraham Lincoln: Dear Madam: Allow me to thank you, as I certainly do thank you most sincerely for your thoughtful kindness in making me the owner of a cane which was formerly the property and the favorite walking staff of your late lamented husband the honored and venerated President of the United States. I assure you, that this inestimable memento of his Excellency will be retained in my possession while I live - an object of sacred interest - a token not merely of the kind consideration in which I have reason to know that [inserted: the] President was pleased to hold me personally, but [struck: of] as an indication of [struck: the] [inserted: his] humane [illegible strikeout] interest [in the] welfare of my whole race. With every proper sentiment of Respect and Esteem I am, Dear Madam, your Obed[ien]t Serv[an]t. Frederick Douglass.

Class Discussion Questions:

1. Who was Frederick Douglass and what was his role in the national spotlight?
2. Based on the letter, how did Frederick Douglass interpret Lincoln's attitude towards blacks?
3. Notice the salutation of the letter. Why would Frederick Douglass call himself "your obedient servant"?
4. Why would Mary Todd Lincoln give away such a precious item to Frederick Douglass?