James Forten’s friendship with a young white author and activist, William Lloyd Garrison, helped establish the most widely circulated anti-slavery newspaper in the United States, The Liberator. Forten and Garrison met around 1830, when Forten was about 54 and Garrison was perhaps 25. Despite being from different places, backgrounds, and generations, the two men formed an alliance and a friendship based on mutual respect and their shared dedication to abolishing slavery.

Garrison’s newspaper, with Forten’s financial support, first appeared in 1831. “I will not equivocate,” declared Garrison, “— I will not excuse — I will not retreat a single inch — and I will be heard.” The Forten family eagerly awaited each issue of The Liberator, and they contributed letters and poetry to its pages. The newspaper stirred debate and helped sway some public opinion towards abolition.