

# Dr. Martin Robinson Delany (1812-1885)

Abolitionist, Soldier, Civil Rights Activist, Editor, Doctor, Author

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## SECTION ONE

### Quick Facts

SOURCE: <https://www.biography.com/people/martin-robison-delany-9270228>

Name: Martin Robison Delany

Occupation: [Editor](#), [Civil Rights Activist](#), [Doctor](#), [Author](#)

Birth Date: [May 6, 1812](#)

Death Date: [January 24, 1885](#)

Education: [Harvard Medical School](#)

Place of Birth: [Charles Town \(now West Virginia\)](#), [Virginia](#)

Place of Death: [Wilberforce, Ohio](#)

AKA: Martin R. Delany; Martin Delany

Full Name: Martin Robinson Delany

### Time Line

SOURCE: [http://www.EncyclopediaVirginia.org/Delany\\_Martin\\_R\\_1812-1885](http://www.EncyclopediaVirginia.org/Delany_Martin_R_1812-1885)

- **May 6, 1812** - Martin Robison Delany is born in Charles Town, Virginia (now West Virginia).
- **1831** - Martin R. Delany journeys 160 miles on foot from Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, to Pittsburgh, where he studies Latin, Greek, classics, and medicine while apprenticing with an abolitionist doctor.
- **1839** - Martin R. Delany tours Texas, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas, observing slave life.
- **1843-1847** - Martin R. Delany founds and edits the *Mystery*, a black newspaper.
- **1847-1849** - Martin R. Delany co-edits the *North Star* with Frederick Douglass.
- **1850** - Martin R. Delany enrolls at Harvard University, where he and two others become the first African Americans accepted to Harvard Medical School. Protests from white students force Delany's withdrawal after a only a few weeks.
- **1852** - Martin R. Delany writes his manifesto *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States, Politically Considered*, calling for emigration of blacks from the United States to Central America. It is viewed as a decisive break with mainstream abolitionism.
- **1856** - Martin R. Delany moves to Canada with his wife, Catherine, and their children.
- **1859-1862** - Martin R. Delany's novel *Blake; or, The Huts of America* is published in serial form in the *Anglo-African Magazine* and *Weekly Anglo-African*.
- **1863** - 54<sup>th</sup> Regiment Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry is formed; it would comprise African American enlisted men but commanded by white officers. Martin R. Delaney got his son, Toussaint L'Ouverture Delany, to join the 54<sup>th</sup>.

- **1865** - After meeting with President Abraham Lincoln, Martin R. Delany is commissioned a major [104th Regiment of the United States Colored Troops] and becomes the U.S. Army's first black field officer in 1865. [However, before the regiment could deploy for military action in the field the war ended.]
- **1874** - Martin R. Delany runs as an independent Republican for South Carolina lieutenant governor but loses the election to Richard Howell Gleaves.
- **January 24, 1885** - Martin R. Delany dies in Ohio.

## Martin Robison Delany Biography

SOURCE: <https://www.biography.com/people/martin-robison-delany-9270228>

(Image not part of original article)

Abolitionist Martin Robison Delany was both a physician and newspaper editor, and became one of the most influential and successful anti-slavery activists of the 19th century.

### Synopsis

Born in Charles Town, Virginia (now West Virginia), on May 6, 1812, Martin Robison Delany spent his life working to end slavery. He was a successful physician—one of the first African Americans admitted to Harvard Medical School—who used his influence to educate others about the evils of slavery with a number of abolitionist publications. He later served in the Civil War. Delany died on January 24, 1885, in Wilberforce, Ohio.

### Early Life

Martin Robison Delany was born free on May 6, 1812, in Charles Town, Virginia, now within West Virginia. The youngest of five children, Delany was the son of a slave and grandson of a prince, according to family reports. All of his grandparents had been brought over from Africa to be slaves, but his father's father was by some accounts a village chieftain, and his mother's father a Mandingo prince. His mother, Pati, may have won her freedom because of this and she worked as a seamstress, while her husband Samuel was an enslaved carpenter.

Pati was determined to educate her children, but Virginia was a slave state, and she was reported to the sheriff for teaching them to read and write from *The New York Primer for Spelling and Reading*, which she had procured from a



traveling peddler. She quickly moved the family to Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. Samuel could not join them until he had bought his freedom a year later.

Delany continued his education in Pennsylvania, alternating with work to help support his family. When he was 19, he walked the 160 miles to Pittsburgh to attend the Bethel Church school for blacks and Jefferson College, where he studied Latin, Greek and classics. He also apprenticed with several abolitionist doctors to learn medicine.

## **Life of Activism**

In Pittsburgh, Delany became active in abolitionist activities, including leading the Vigilance Committee that helped relocate fugitive slaves, helping to form the Young Men's Literary and Moral Reform Society, and joining the integrated militia to help defend the black community against white mob attacks.

He traveled through the Midwest, down to New Orleans and over to Arkansas, including a visit to the Choctaw Nation, before settling down and marrying Catherine Richards, the daughter of a well-to-do merchant, in 1843. They went on to have 11 children.

Delany resumed his interest in medicine, but also founded *The Mystery*, the first African-American newspaper published west of the Allegheny Mountains. His articles about various aspects of the anti-slavery movement were picked up by other papers and his renown began to spread, but a libel suit against him, filed (and won) by Fiddler Johnson, forced him to sell the paper.

[Frederick Douglass](#) quickly hired Delany to write for his paper, *The North Star*, in 1847, but they didn't always agree on the right course for the abolitionist movement, and the collaboration ended after five years.

In 1850, Delany was one of the three first black men to enroll in Harvard Medical College, but white [student] protest forced him to leave after the first term.

So he returned to writing, publishing *The Origin and Objects of Ancient Freemasonry; Its Introduction into the United States and Legitimacy Among Colored Men* and prior to that, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States Politically Considered*, a treatise that explored the option of blacks returning to their native Africa.

This prompted a trip to Nigeria in the mid-1850s to negotiate land for African-American emigrants, as well as exploring Central America and Canada as options. Delany wrote about what he found there as well as a novel, *Blake: Or the Huts of America*.

The Emancipation Proclamation gave Delany hope that emigration might not be necessary, and he became active in promoting the use of African Americans in the Union Army, recruiting one of his own sons, Toussaint L'Ouverture Delany, to the Massachusetts 54th Regiment.

In 1865, he even reportedly met with President Lincoln to discuss the possibility of African-American officers leading African-American troops. As a Civil War major in the 104th Regiment of the United States Colored Troops, Delany became the highest-ranking African American in the military up to that point.

After the war, Delany tried to enter politics. A quasi-biography, written pseudonymously by a female journalist under the name Frank A. Rollin—*Life and Services of Martin R. Delany* (1868)—was a stepping stone to serving on the Republican State Executive Committee and running for lieutenant governor of South Carolina.

Although he supported African-American business and advancement, he would not endorse certain candidates if he did not think they were fit to serve. But his support did help elect Wade Hampton governor of South Carolina, and he was appointed trial judge.

Delany resumed emigration initiatives when the black vote was suppressed, serving as chairman of the finance committee for the Liberia Exodus Joint Stock Steamship Company. In 1879 he published *Principia of Ethnology: The Origin of Races and Color, with an Archeological Compendium and Egyptian Civilization, from Years of Careful Examination and Enquiry*, which detailed the cultural achievements of the African people as touchstones of racial pride. But in 1880 he returned to Ohio, where his wife had been working as a seamstress, to practice medicine and help earn tuition for his children attending Wilberforce College.

Frederick Douglass' most famous quote about him underscores Delany's legacy as a spokesman for black nationalism: "I thank God for making me a man, but Delany thanks Him for making him a *black* man."

## Death and Legacy

Martin Delany died of tuberculosis on January 24, 1885, in Wilberforce, Ohio. He has been described as a Renaissance man: publisher, editor, author, doctor, orator, judge, U.S. army major, political candidate and prison inmate (for defrauding a church), and the first African American to visit Africa as an explorer and entrepreneur.

"Delany is a figure of extraordinary complexity," wrote historian Paul Gilroy, "whose political trajectory through abolitionisms and emigrationisms, from Republicans to Democrats, dissolves any simple attempts to fix him as consistently either conservative or radical."

A few months after his death, all of his papers, which could have further clarified his position on issues for subsequent scholars, burned in a fire at Wilberforce University in Ohio.

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## SECTION TWO

### Martin R. Delany

American physician and abolitionist

SOURCE: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Martin-R-Delany>

**Martin R. Delany**, in full **Martin Robison Delany**, (born May 6, 1812, Charles Town, [Virginia](#), U.S.—died January 24, 1885, [Xenia](#), Ohio), [African American](#) abolitionist, physician, and editor in the pre-Civil War period; his espousal of [black nationalism](#) and racial pride anticipated expressions of such views a century later.

In search of quality education for their children, the Delanys moved to [Pennsylvania](#) when Martin was a child. At 19, while studying nights at an African American church, he worked days in [Pittsburgh](#). Embarking on a course of militant [opposition](#) to [slavery](#), he became involved in several racial improvement groups. Under the tutelage of two sympathetic physicians he achieved competence as a doctor's assistant as well as in dental care, working in this capacity in the South and Southwest (1839).

Returning to Pittsburgh, Delany started a weekly [newspaper](#), the *Mystery*, which publicized grievances of blacks in the [United States](#) and also championed women's rights. The paper won an excellent reputation, and its articles were often reprinted in the white press. From 1846 to 1849 he worked in partnership with the abolitionist leader [Frederick Douglass](#) in [Rochester](#), New York, where they published another weekly, the [North Star](#). After three years Delany decided to pursue formal medical studies; he was one of the first blacks to be admitted to Harvard Medical School and became a leading Pittsburgh physician.

In the 1850s Delany developed an overriding interest in foreign colonization opportunities for African Americans, and in 1859–60 he led an exploration party to [West Africa](#) to investigate the [Niger](#) Delta as a location for settlement.

In protest against oppressive conditions in the United States, Delany moved in 1856 to Canada, where he continued his [medical practice](#). At the beginning of the [Civil War](#) (1861–65) he returned to the United States and helped recruit troops for the famous 54th Massachusetts Volunteers, for which he served as a surgeon. To counter a desperate Southern scheme to impress its slaves into the military forces late in the war, in February 1865, Delany was made a major (the first black man to receive a regular army commission) and was assigned to [Hilton Head Island](#), [South Carolina](#), to recruit and organize former slaves for the North. When peace came in April he became an official in the [Freedmen's Bureau](#), serving for the next two years.

In 1874 Delany ran unsuccessfully for lieutenant governor as an Independent Republican in South Carolina; thereafter his fortunes declined. He was the author of *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States Politically Considered* (1852).

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## SECTION THREE

### Martin R. Delany

SOURCE: <http://www.nndb.com/people/363/000165865/>

(Image not part of the original article)

**AKA** Martin Robison Delany

**Born:** [6-May-1812](#)

**Birthplace:** [Charleston, WV](#)

**Died:** [24-Jan-1885](#)

**Location of death:** [Xenia, OH](#)

**Cause of death:** [Tuberculosis](#)

**Remains:** Buried, Massie's Creek Cemetery, Xenia, OH

**Gender:** Male

**Race or Ethnicity:** Black

**Sexual orientation:** Straight

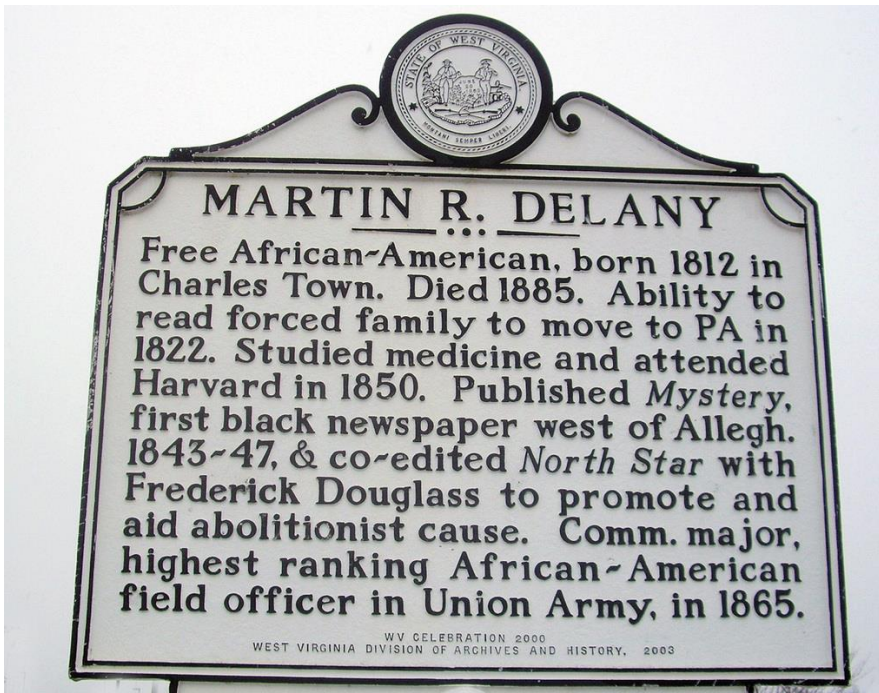
**Occupation:** [Activist](#)

**Party Affiliation:** Democratic

**Nationality:** United States

**Executive summary:** Black nationalist

**Military service:** US Army (1865-66, Maj.)



Martin Delany was a radical pre-Civil War abolitionist, black nationalist, explorer of Africa, and veteran of the American Civil War. His father was a slave, and all four of his grandparents had been captured in Africa and brought to America as slaves, but his mother was free, and by law this meant Delany was born free. From earliest childhood, he was told by his parents that his ancestors were African royalty. His family fled north when his mother faced prosecution for educating her children.

From 1843-47, Delany published *Mystery*, a weekly newspaper advocating abolition, with [Frederick](#)

[Douglass](#) eventually joining the efforts. Delany then closed *Mystery* and became co-editor of Douglass's newspaper, *North Star*. He apprenticed under several physicians in the Pittsburgh area, then opened his own practice, specializing in dentistry and leech therapy. With letters from 17 local doctors attesting to his skill, he applied to several medical schools but was rejected on account of his color, before being admitted at Harvard in 1849. He attended for only a few months, however, before his presence became so controversial that the Dean of the Medical School, [Oliver Wendell Holmes](#), rescinded Delany's admission.

Returning to Pittsburgh, he expanded his medical practice to include women's and children's diseases, and became deeply involved in the Underground Railroad and abolitionist movement. Addressing an 1850 rally, Delany said, "My house is my castle. If any man approaches that house in search of a slave... if he crosses the threshold of my door, and I do not lay him a lifeless corpse at my feet, I hope the grave may refuse my body a resting place, and righteous Heaven my spirit a home."

His 1852 book, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States, Politically Considered*, was the first widely-read call for black nationalism. His novel, *Blake, or The Huts of America*, was written as something of a response to [Harriet Beecher Stowe](#)'s novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, as Delany was frustrated by Stowe's portrayal of black slaves as passive victims. One of the first black-authored novels to be published in America, *Blake* was based on Delany's own underground activities and stories told by friends who had been slaves, and it is seen as a generally accurate portrayal of insurrectionist efforts within slave communities.

Delany helped organize the **National Emigration Convention of Colored People**, held in Cleveland in August 1854, where he called for abolition, and for free blacks to resettle in the Caribbean, Central or South America, or East Africa. In 1858 he led an expedition to Africa's Niger Valley, where he negotiated treaties with several tribes as a first step for resettlement of American blacks. He then traveled to London, where he spent several months lecturing to scientific groups about his two years in Africa, and to human rights groups about his life in America. In 1861 he addressed a colony of fugitive slaves and American Negro expatriates in

Canada. During the Civil War he was assigned to the 104th Colored unit, and became the first African-American to reach the rank of Major in the US Army.

After the war he worked at the Freedman's Bureau, seeking to secure voting rights for former slaves. Settling in South Carolina, he ran for Lieutenant Governor in 1874, losing narrowly, on the ticket of the Radical Independent Republican Party, a short-lived party formed to oppose the Republican Party. In the next election cycle he endorsed the Democrats' ticket, and after the Democrats' victory he was appointed to a judgeship. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society, and active in the Masonic fraternity.

**Father:** Samuel Delany (slave)

**Mother:** Pati Peace Delany

**Wife:** Catherine Richards (m. 1843, eleven children)

**Son:** Genefred L'Ouverture (d. infancy)

**Son:** Toussaint L'Ouverture Delany

**Daughter:** Catherine Matilda Delany

**Daughter:** Martha Priscilla Delany

**Son:** Charles Lenox Remond Delany

**Son:** Martin Boling Delany

**Son:** Alexandre Dumas Delany

**Son:** St. Cyprian Delany

**Son:** Fairstin Soulouque Delany

**Son:** Placido Rameses Delany

**Daughter:** Ethiopia Hallie Amelia Delany

Medical School: [Harvard Medical School \(attended 1849, but forced to leave after a few months \[due to white student racism\]\)](#)

[South Carolina State Official](#) Trial Judge, Charleston, SC (1875-76)

[Underground Railroad](#)

[Freemasonry](#)

[Royal Society](#) Fellow

[Expelled from School](#)

[Fraud](#) defrauding a church (convicted 1876)

[Pardoned](#) by SC Gov. Daniel Henry Chamberlain (29-Aug-1876)

#### **Author of books:**

*The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States, Politically Considered* (1852)

*Blake, or The Huts of America* (1859, novel)

*The Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party* (1861, with Robert Campbell)

*Principia of Ethnology: The Origin of Races and Color* (1879)

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## **SECTION FOUR**

### **Delany, Martin Robison (1812-1885)**

Martin Robison Delany was an African American [abolitionist](#), the first African American Field Officer in the [U.S Army](#), and one of the earliest African Americans to encourage a return to [Africa](#).

Delany was born in Charles Town, [Virginia](#) (now [West Virginia](#)) to a [slave](#) father and a [free](#) mother. Delany's mother took her children to [Pennsylvania](#) in 1822 to avoid their enslavement and persecution brought on by attempting to teach her children to read and write, which was illegal in the state at that time. In 1833 Martin Delany began an apprenticeship with a Pittsburgh [physician](#) and soon opened a successful medical practice in cupping and leeching (it was not necessary to be certified to practice medicine prior to 1850). In 1843 he began publishing a newspaper in Pittsburgh called [The Mystery](#). Later Delany joined [Frederick Douglass](#) to produce and promote [The North Star](#) in Rochester, [New York](#).

Martin R. Delany entered Harvard Medical School in 1850 to finish his formal medical education (along with two other black students) but was dismissed from the institution after only three weeks as a result of petitions to the school from white students. Two years later he published [The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States, Politically Considered](#), claiming that even abolitionists would never accept blacks as equals and thus the solution to the black condition lay in the emigration of all African Americans back to Africa. In 1859 Delany led an emigration commission to West Africa to explore possible sites for a new black nation along the [Niger](#) River, "We are a nation within a nation, we must go from our oppressors," he wrote.

When the [Civil War](#) began in 1861 Delany returned to the United States. Jettisoning for a time his emigrationist views, Delany recruited thousands of men for the [Union Army](#). In February 1865, after meeting with President [Abraham Lincoln](#) to persuade the administration to create an all-black Corps led by African American officers, Delaney was commissioned a Major in the 52nd U.S. Colored Troops Regiment. With that appointment he became the first line officer in U.S. Army history.

When Reconstruction began Delany was assigned to the [Freedman's Bureau](#) in [South Carolina](#). There he called for black pride, the enforcement of black [civil rights](#) and land for the [freedpeople](#). Delany became active in local [Republican](#) politics, losing a close election for Lieutenant Governor of South Carolina but later serving briefly as a judge in Charleston, South Carolina. As the Republicans lost power in the state Delany renewed his calls for emigration, becoming in 1878 an official in the [Liberian](#) Exodus Joint Stock Steamship Company. He also wrote in 1879 *The Principia of Ethnology*, a book that argued for race pride and purity.

In 1880 Delany withdrew from the Liberian Exodus Company and moved first to Boston, [Massachusetts](#) and then to [Wilberforce College](#) in Xenia, [Ohio](#). Martin R. Delany, considered many as the "father of [black nationalism](#)," died in Xenia, Ohio on January 12, 1885.

#### **Sources:**

Victor Ullman, *Martin R. Delany: The Beginnings of Black Nationalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971); Jim Haskins, *Black Stars: African American Military Heroes* (John Wiley and Sons, Inc., New York, New York, 1998).

## **SECTION FIVE**

### **Martin Robison Delany**

SOURCE: <http://pacivilwar150.com/ThroughPeople/AfricanAmericans/MartinRobisonDelany.html>



## He gave activism a new voice.

During the Civil War, Martin Robison Delany was a vigorous proponent of African American participation in the military defense of the nation, and he became the highest ranking African American officer of a field regiment during war in U.S. military history. Prior to this success, he broke color barriers through his academic studies, journalism and his leadership in abolitionism.

Delany was born in Charles Town, Virginia, on May 6, 1812, to mother, Pati, a free-born African, and father, Samuel, an enslaved laborer. Although Virginia had begun to outlaw the education of blacks by the early 1820s, Pati was insistent on teaching her children how to read. When a white neighbor overheard Martin and his siblings reading and reciting the alphabet, Pati was forced to uproot her family and move to Pennsylvania in 1822 to allow her children educational opportunities. Samuel was unable to join his family in Pennsylvania for nearly a year until he bought his freedom.

At 19, Delany set out on his own for Pittsburgh to attend the free school for Blacks at Bethel Church. The oldest black congregation in Pittsburgh, Bethel had opened a school for its members under the pastorate of Reverend Lewis Woodson, funded by the African Education Society.

Delany was increasingly involved in abolitionist and civil rights causes, attending Negro conventions, leading the Vigilance committee that helped fugitive slaves move and settle, and helping form the Young Men's Literary and Moral Reform Society, which eventually turned into the Philanthropic Society as its activism increased.

In the late 1830s, Delany took part in defending the black community of Pittsburgh from white mob attacks when he joined Mayor McClintock in an integrated militia. He was one of the signers of a resolution defending the suffrage of African American men in Pennsylvania in 1837 that was defeated by a suit that effectively stripped the voting rights from blacks until 1871. He traveled down the Mississippi River to New Orleans, Texas and then Arkansas where he visited the Choctow Nation and was enlightened on the plight of African Americans in terms of free lands to settle and inspired to write the novel *Blake: Or the Huts of America*.

In 1843 he married Catherine Richards, daughter of Charles Richards, an affluent meat provisioner and land owner. After having 11 children, he began to study medicine again and founded the *Mystery* newspaper. It was the first African American paper published west of the Allegheny Mountains, and it helped spread the word of the abolitionist cause.

After reporting the Pittsburgh fire of 1845, Delany was sued for libel by an African American named Fiddler Johnson. Delany was found guilty of libel in reporting that Johnson was implicit in helping slave catchers in Pittsburgh. Delany's colleagues in the abolitionist community and journalism profession helped pay the fine of \$650, but the resulting damage meant Delany had to sell *The Mystery* sheet to the African Methodist Episcopal Church where it was published as the *Christian Recorder*.

In 1847, Delany joined Frederick Douglass in his newspaper *The North Star*, but due to differences in opinion on the way blacks were being treated, Delany left the paper five years later.

Delany enrolled at Harvard College Medical School in 1850 but within a few months was asked to leave following a petition presented by his fellow white students that demanded his expulsion. The following year he was back in Pittsburgh facing the black flight due to the Fugitive Slave Act, which forced abolitionists to consider new strategies for African Americans. The Fugitive Slave Act was a provision of the Compromise of 1850 to appease Southern slaveholders. Delany turned

to emigration ideas, chairing the National Emigration Convention, and became a central figure in the effort to establish African American settlement in Canada, West Africa and the Caribbean.

Delany resumed his writing, and in 1852 he published *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States Politically Considered*, a treatise on the subject of emigration. The book was reviewed in William Howard Day's *The Alien American* newspaper in 1853. He also published a sheet called *The Origin and Objects of Ancient Freemasonry; Its Introduction into the United States and Legitimacy Among Colored Men*.

In the mid-1850s Delany left Pittsburgh for Canada, met with John Brown in Chatham in 1858 and left for Nigeria to negotiate land for African American emigrants.

Only the Civil War brought Delany back to America, and he joined others in proposing the use of African Americans in the Union Army. He recruited Blacks for the cause, even enlisting his son Toussaint L'Overture in the Massachusetts 54<sup>th</sup> regiment.

In February 1865, he met with President Lincoln at the White House to discuss African American officers commanding African American troops. He was commissioned a Major in the 104<sup>th</sup> regiment of the United States Colored Troops and served until the end of the war, making him the highest ranking African American officer in U.S. history.

After the war, Delany worked for the Freedmen's Bureau and Liberian Exodus Joint Stock Exchange Company. By 1879, he had published *Principia of Ethnology: The origin of Races and Color with an Archeological Compendium and Egyptian Civilization from Years of Careful Examination and Enquiry* in Philadelphia. He returned to Wilberforce, Ohio, with his family where he died on January 24, 1885.

*Information for this section was contributed by Samuel W Black , Curator of African American Collections, Senator John Heinz History Center.*

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## SECTION SIX

### **Martin Robison Delany**

SOURCE: [http://www.EncyclopediaVirginia.org/Delany\\_Martin\\_R\\_1812-1885](http://www.EncyclopediaVirginia.org/Delany_Martin_R_1812-1885).

Martin Robison Delany was born free on May 6, 1812, in Charles Town, Virginia (now West Virginia). His father, Samuel, was an enslaved carpenter, his mother, Pati, a free seamstress whose parents were African and, according to some accounts, of royal heritage. After having been found guilty of illegally teaching her children to read and write, Delany's mother moved the family to Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. (Samuel later bought his freedom and joined them.) In 1831, Delany journeyed on foot 160 miles west to Pittsburgh, where he studied Latin, Greek, classics, and medicine, apprenticing with an abolitionist doctor. Delany enrolled at Harvard University in 1850—he and two others were the first African Americans accepted to Harvard Medical School—but protests from white students forced his withdrawal after only a few weeks.

In 1839, Delany toured Texas, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas, observing slave life. He soon became a member of the abolitionist movement, founding and editing the *Mystery*, a black newspaper, from 1843 until 1847, and co-editing with Frederick Douglass the *North Star* from 1847 until 1849. Douglass and the prominent abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison generally counseled

peace and patience for slaves and integration for freed blacks. When, in 1852, Delany wrote his manifesto, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States, Politically Considered*, calling for emigration from the United States to Central America, it was viewed as a decisive break from mainstream abolitionism and, according to some scholars, the birth of black nationalism. "I should be willing to remain in this country," Delany wrote in a letter to Garrison, "fighting and struggling on, the good fight of faith. But I must admit, that I have not hopes in this country—no confidence in the American people—with a few excellent exceptions."

Delany's new militancy was manifest in his novel *Blake; or, The Huts of America*, which ran as a [serial](#) titled "Blake; or the Huts of America.—A Tale of the Mississippi Valley, the Southern United States and Cuba" in the *Anglo-African Magazine* in 1859 and the *Weekly Anglo-African* in 1861 and 1862 (it was not published in complete book form until 1970). Hinting at the *Weekly Anglo-African's* politics, a quotation under its masthead read, "Man must be Free!—if not through Law, why then above the Law." *Blake* tells the story of a fugitive slave who travels across the South and in Cuba organizing insurrection. In Virginia's Dismal Swamp, he encounters mention of "the names of Nat Turner, Denmark Veezie, and General Gabriel." These are "the kind of fighting men they then needed among the blacks," *Blake* concludes, and spreads the news of their long-ago deeds throughout the slave community. Referring to Turner's 1831 uprising in Southampton County, Virginia, he notes, "Southampton—the name of Southampton to them was like an electric shock." Delany's story of a slave fomenting rebellion stood in stark contradiction to the philosophies of Garrison and Harriet Beecher Stowe. While Delany did not intend *Blake* to be a response to Stowe's 1852 antislavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, it still read like one, arguing that Christian endurance was not an adequate response to the horrors of slavery.

In 1856, Delany moved to Canada with his wife, Catherine, whom he married in 1843, and his children. (The couple had eleven children, seven of whom survived into adulthood.) He briefly dabbled in the politics of Liberia and during the Civil War helped to recruit and organize black soldiers in the Union army. Commissioned a major in 1865 after meeting with U.S. president Abraham Lincoln at the White House, Delany became the U.S. Army's first black field officer. After the war, he was transferred to South Carolina, where he remained for much of the rest of his life. He was active politically, often supporting Democrats, though he ran as an independent Republican for South Carolina lieutenant governor in 1874 and lost the election to Richard Howell Gleaves. He also served as a trial justice in Charleston before charges of fraud were brought against him. He was forced to resign and serve a prison term. Delany pursued business interests and practiced medicine until his death in Ohio on January 24, 1885.

Delany emerged as a symbol of black separatism during the Black Power and Black Arts movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and as a result he has been "invoked primarily as the dark binary opposite" of more moderate figures, from Douglass to Martin Luther King Jr., according to Robert S. Levine. (Tunde Adeleke has attributed such appropriations to the New Negro history movement inspired by [Carter G. Woodson](#).) Revisionist historians have since emphasized the complications of Delany's character. "Delany is a figure of extraordinary complexity," writes Paul Gilroy, "whose political trajectory through abolitionisms and emigrationisms, from Republicans to Democrats, dissolves any simple attempts to fix him as consistently either conservative or radical." Unfortunately, Delany's papers were destroyed in a fire at Wilberforce University in Ohio on April 14, 1865, leaving scholars forever to wonder which of his writings they haven't read and what other directions his mind might have taken him.

## Major Works

- *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States, Politically Considered* (1852)
- *The Origins and Objects of Ancient Freemasonry: Its Introduction into the United States and Legitimacy among Colored Men* (1853)
- *Political Destiny of the Colored Race on the American Continent in Proceedings of the National Emigration Convention of Colored People Held at Cleveland, Ohio the 24th, 25th and 26th of August, 1854* (1854)
- *Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party* (1861)
- *University Pamphlets: A Series of Four Tracts on National Polity* (1870)
- *Principia of Ethnology: The Origin of Races and Color, with an Archaeological Compendium of Ethiopian and Egyptian Civilization* (1879)
- Introduction to *Four Months in Liberia*, by William Nesbitt (1855)
- *Blake; or, The Huts of America* (serialized in *Anglo-African*, January–July 1859; *Weekly Anglo-African*, November 23, 1861–April 1862; published in book form in Boston by Beacon Press in 1970)

## Further Reading

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Sterling, Dorothy. *The Making of an Afro-American: Martin Robison Delany, 1812–1885*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1996.

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## External Links

- [West Virginia University Libraries Web Page: To Be More Than Equal: The Many Lives of Martin R. Delany](#)
- [The Lincoln Institute on Martin R. Delany](#)

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