Delany, Martin R(obison)

(b. May 6, 1812, Charles Town, Va., U.S.--d. Jan. 24, 1885, Xenia, Ohio), U.S. black 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 a Negro 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 U.S. 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](https://search.eb.com/blackhistory/micro/163/95.html) in Rochester, N.Y., 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 the Harvard Medical School and became a leading Pittsburgh physician.

In the 1850s Delany developed an overriding interest in foreign colonization opportunities for his people, 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 U.S. 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, S.C., to recruit and organize former slaves for the North. When peace came in April he became an official in the [Freedmen's Bureau](https://search.eb.com/blackhistory/micro/163/95.html), 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).