

City of Philadelphia



Council of the City of Philadelphia
Office of the Chief Clerk
Room 402, City Hall
Philadelphia

(Resolution No. 120218)

RESOLUTION

Recognizing the week of May 6th through May 12th as Martin Delany Week.

WHEREAS, Martin Delany Week serves to commemorate the 200th Anniversary of Martin Delany's birth on May 6, 1812 and in honor of Delany's achievements and contributions to the world, as well as to the ongoing influence of his words and ideas as they continue to inform contemporary dialogues on the nature of race and class in America; and

WHEREAS, Martin Delany lived an extraordinarily life as a social activist, reformer, black nationalist, abolitionist, physician, reporter and editor, explorer, jurist, realtor, politician, publisher, educator, army officer, ethnographer, novelist, and political and legal theorist; and

WHEREAS, Martin R. Delany believed: "Every people should be originators of their own destiny" and his actions exemplified this world view; and

WHEREAS, Delany was born in Charlestown, West Virginia (then a slave state) to Samuel Delany, an enslaved carpenter, and Pati, a free seamstress; and

WHEREAS, When Delany was just a few years old, attempts were made to enslave him and a sibling. Their mother Pati carried her two youngest children 20 miles to the courthouse in Winchester to argue successfully for her family's freedom based on her own free birth; and

WHEREAS, As he was growing up, Delany and his siblings learned to read and write using *The New York Primer and Spelling Book*, given to them by a peddler; and

WHEREAS, In 1843, Delany began writing on public issues. He began publishing *The Mystery* (1843 – 1847), one of the first black-controlled newspapers. His activities brought controversy in 1846, when he was sued for libel by a black man whom Delany accused, in *The Mystery*, of being a slave catcher; and

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WHEREAS, While Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison were in Pittsburgh in 1847 on an anti-slavery tour, they met with Delany. Together the men conceived the newspaper that became the *North Star*. It was first published later that year in Rochester, New York; and

WHEREAS, In 1850, Martin Delany, was among the first three black men to be accepted to Harvard Medical School, after presenting letters of support from seventeen physicians. The month after his arrival, however, a group of white students wrote to the faculty, complaining that "the admission of blacks to the medical lectures is highly detrimental to the interests, and welfare of the Institution of which we are members". Within three weeks, Delany and his two fellow black students were dismissed by the Dean, Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, who was Delany's preceptor in anatomy and physiology and the future Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court; and

WHEREAS, Delaney published the first novel by a black man in the United States, *Blake: Or The Huts of America*. It was a response to Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in which he believed that Stowe had portrayed slaves as too passive, although he praised her highlighting the cruelty of Southern slave owners; and

WHEREAS, He worked for a brief period as principal of a colored school before going into practice as a physician. During another cholera outbreak in 1854, most doctors abandoned the city, as did many residents who could leave, as no one knew how the disease was caused nor how to control the epidemic. With a small group of nurses, Delany remained and cared for the victims; and

WHEREAS, After Abraham Lincoln had called for a military draft in 1863, Delany began recruiting black men for the Union Army. His efforts in Rhode Island, Connecticut, and later Ohio raised thousands of enlistees, many of whom joined the newly formed United States Colored Troops; and

WHEREAS, In early 1865, Delany was granted an audience with Lincoln. He proposed a corps of black men led by black officers who could serve to win over Southern blacks. Although a similar appeal by Frederick Douglass had already been rejected, Lincoln was impressed by Delany and described him as "a most extraordinary and intelligent man."; and

WHEREAS, Delany was commissioned as a major a few weeks later, becoming the first black line field officer in the U.S. Army and achieving the highest rank an African American would reach during the Civil War. He shocked white officers with his strong call for the right of freed blacks to own land; and

WHEREAS, On the 24th of January 1885, Delany died of tuberculosis in Wilberforce, Ohio; and

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WHEREAS, 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.; now therefore

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Recognizes the week of May 6th through May 12th as Martin Delany Week.

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CERTIFICATION: This is a true and correct copy of the original Resolution, Adopted by the Council of the City of Philadelphia on the fifteenth of March, 2012.

Darrell L. Clarke
PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Michael A. Decker
CHIEF CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Introduced by: Councilmember Blackwell

Sponsored by: Councilmembers Blackwell, Goode, Greenlee, Jones, O'Neill, Squilla, Bass, Quiñones Sánchez, Johnson, Oh, Henon, Kenney, Tasco, O'Brien and Council President Clarke