

1812

**BIRTH OF MARTIN R. DELANY**

Martin Robison Delany was born free in Charles Town, Virginia (now West Virginia), although his father was enslaved. When Delany was just a few years old, attempts were made to enslave him and a sibling. His mother, Pati, carried her children 20 miles to the courthouse to argue (successfully!) for their freedom based on her own free birth. Pati moved her family to Pennsylvania to ensure their continued freedom and education.



In 1831, Delany moved into Pittsburgh and attended Jefferson College, where he apprenticed with abolitionist doctors. In 1850, he became one of the first three Black men admitted to Harvard Medical School. Three weeks later, the men were expelled because of protests by White students. A furious Delany returned to Pittsburgh, convinced the White ruling class would never allow People of Color to become leaders. His 1852 book, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States, Politically Considered*, argued Blacks had no future in the United States and should leave to found a new nation, alienating moderate abolitionists.

During a severe cholera outbreak in 1854, most doctors and many residents abandoned Pittsburgh; Delany was one of the few who remained and cared for the ill. In 1856, Delany moved his family to Canada, where they assisted the Underground Railroad to resettle escapees for about three years.

In 1859, Delany sailed from New York to Liberia, a colony founded by the American Colonization Society to relocate free blacks outside of the United States. He signed an

agreement with eight Liberian chiefs to permit settlers to live on “unused land”, though it was unsuccessful due to warfare in Liberia and the outbreak of the American Civil War.

Starting in 1863, Delany recruited Black men for the Union Army, resulting in 179,000 enlistees for the new U.S. Colored Troops. Delany met with President Lincoln in 1865 to propose an all-Black corps, including officers. As a result, Delany was commissioned as a major, the highest rank an African American reached in the Civil War.

After the war, Delany established a land brokerage business and helped Black farmers improve their business & negotiation skills. In 1885, he died of tuberculosis in Ohio. His ideas of Black nationalism and racial pride were finally embraced during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.

1937

**BIRTH OF RUBIN “THE HURRICANE” CARTER**

In 1999, Denzel Washington starred in “Hurricane”, the movie based on Rubin Carter’s life and wrongful convictions. Born in New Jersey, as the fourth of seven children, at the age of 12, Rubin Carter was arrested for attacking a man with a pocket knife. Carter claimed the man was a pedophile, but was still sentenced to six years in a reformatory. Carter escaped a year early and joined the Army. While enlisted, he began training as a boxer and won two European light-welterweight championships.

When Carter entered boxing, he almost immediately gained “pro” status as a middleweight. It was well known that police in his hometown resented his success. In October 1966, he was



arrested for the triple murder of three patrons at the Lafayette Bar & Grill. During the trial, the prosecution produced no evidence, a shaky motive, and only two eyewitnesses (who were later found to have given false testimonies). Carter was convicted of triple murder and sentenced to three life sentences, but he maintained his innocence for years.

Bob Dylan visited Carter in prison and penned “Hurricane” in his honor. Muhammed Ali also visited Carter, and became active in the campaign to have Carter freed.

In 1974, he published his well-received autobiography, *The 16th Round: From Number 1 Contender to Number 45472*. That same year, the “witnesses” recanted their testimonies. Two years later, an incriminating tape of a police interview led to a New York Times

expose. Carter’s conviction was subsequently overturned, but one “witness” reversed his testimony and Carter was reconvicted. Despite an appeal, the New Jersey State Supreme Court rejected a third trial.

Thanks to the efforts of a Canadian business community, who was in correspondence with Carter, a writ of habeas corpus was issued by U.S. District Court Judge H. Lee Sarokin, citing racism as the cause of Carter’s convictions. New Jersey state protested the decision until 1988, when the charges were finally dropped. Once free, Carter moved to Canada and dedicated the rest of his life to advocating for the wrongly convicted. On April 20, 2014, Carter died from prostate cancer.

1960

**EISENHOWER SIGNS CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1960**

34th President of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower, signed the Civil Rights Act of 1960. intended to strengthen voting rights and expand the enforcement powers of the Civil Rights Act of 1957. It included provisions for federal inspection of local voter registration rolls and authorized court-appointed referees to help African Americans register and vote, as well as provided criminal penalties for anyone attempting to prevent people from voting. authorizing the FBI to investigate certain bombings or attempted bombings of schools, churches and other structures. Controversial at the time of passage, the act foreshadowed an increasing emphasis on enforcement of voting rights and paved the way for additional civil rights legislation in 1964 and 1965. Upon signing, Eisenhower noted, “It holds great promise of making the Fifteenth Amendment of the Constitution fully meaningful”.