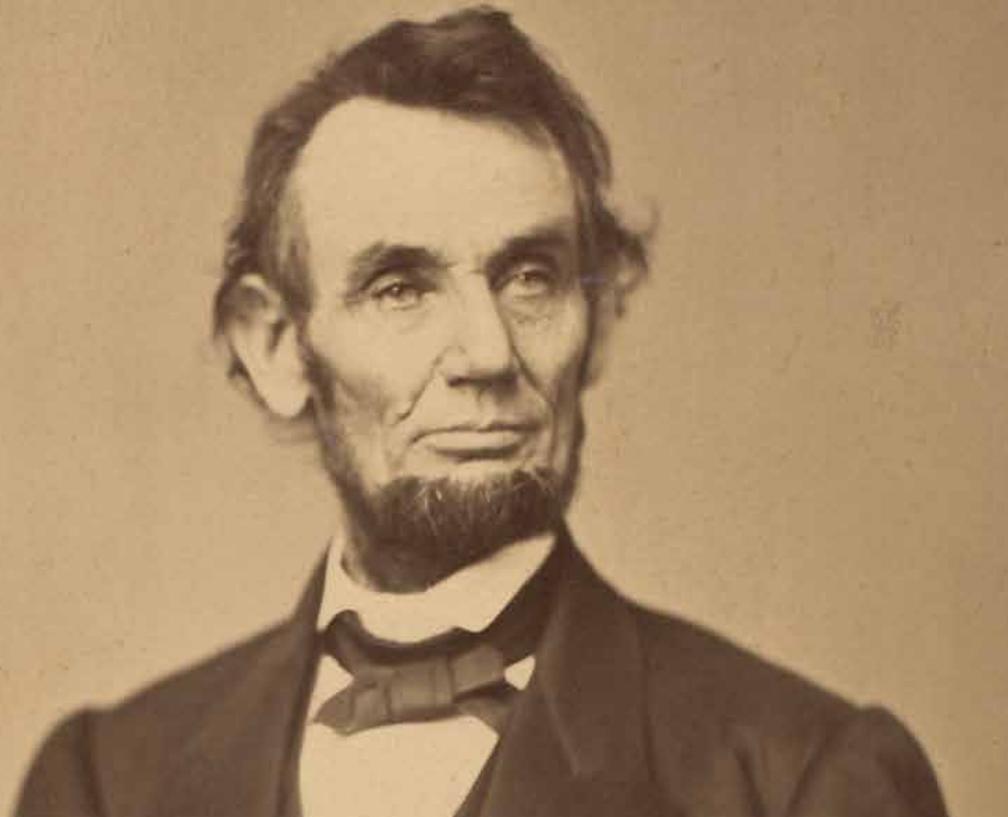


“This is the very thing I have I have been looking and hoping for ... When I issued my Emancipation Proclamation, I had this thing in contemplation.”

—Abraham Lincoln



How. Sec. of War, please  
see this very intelligent  
colored man; Mr. Dela-  
my — who wants to assist  
in raising colored troops.  
Feb. 21, 1865 A. Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln promotes Black Americans' efforts to fight for their own freedom

## Abraham Lincoln and Martin Delany: Black troops to bring about the end of the Civil War

### LINCOLN, ABRAHAM.

*Autograph note signed,  
concerning Martin Delany,  
abolitionist and first  
African American field  
officer in the United States  
Army, to Secretary of War  
Edwin Stanton.*

[Washington:] February 21, 1865.

Written by Lincoln in dark ink on the note card he customarily used at the White House (2 x 3 ¼ in.). Light soiling, a few letters smudged.

Provenance: Mrs. Kenneth Simpson and Mrs. McIntyre Faries, Los Angeles, with a copy of a 1962 newspaper article mentioning the note.

Reference: Frank [Frances] Rollin, *The Life and Public Services of Martin R. Delany* (Boston: Lee & Shepard, 1868).

**T**his extraordinary Abraham Lincoln manuscript led to Martin Delany's commission as the first Black field officer in the U.S. Army. This act helped fulfill the promise of the Emancipation Proclamation by allowing Black leaders and soldiers to help free the enslaved people in the South. Lincoln writes in full: "Hon. Sec. of War, please see this very intelligent colored man, Mr. Delany - who wants to assist in raising colored troops. A. Lincoln Feb. 21, 1865."

At his meeting with Lincoln, Delany laid out a plan to arm black soldiers, led by black officers, and send them into the interior of the South, freeing the enslaved as they went. Lincoln replied, "**This is the very thing I have I have been looking and hoping for. ... When I issued my Emancipation Proclamation, I had this thing in contemplation.**"

Martin R. Delany was a leading abolitionist, journalist, physician, "father of Black nationalism," author, recruiter for the famed Black 54th Massachusetts regiment, and following his meeting with Lincoln, the first black American field officer in the United States Army.

During the Civil War the fiery abolitionist continued to devote himself to the emancipation of enslaved Americans while promoting the recruitment of Black soldiers into the Union Army. Delany was instrumental in recruiting Black troops to join the 54th Massachusetts and served as its surgeon. His son, Toussaint L'Ouverture Delany, enlisted in the regiment at age fifteen and survived the battle at Fort Wagner. Thanks to Delany and others, by war's end 179,000 Black men had enlisted in the United States Colored Troops, about 10 percent of all who served in the Union Army.

In February 1865, Delany traveled to Washington to convince Abraham Lincoln that Black men would be more likely to join the Union Army if they could serve under

## Abraham Lincoln promotes Black Americans' efforts to fight for their own freedom



Black officers. Up until then, white officers had led units like the 54th Massachusetts. Frances Rollin's *The Life and Public Services of Martin R. Delany* (1868) recounts that meeting, with the dates varying slightly from this note. Rollin presents the conversation between Lincoln and Delany at length, "in Major Delany's own language." Delany suggested to the president,

"I propose, sir, an army of blacks, commanded entirely by black officers, except such whites as may volunteer to serve; this army to penetrate through the heart of the South, and make conquests, with the banner of Emancipation unfurled proclaiming freedom as they go, sustaining and protecting it by arming the emancipated taking them as fresh troops, and leaving a few veterans among the new freemen, when occasion requires, keeping this banner unfurled until every slave is free, according to the letter of your proclamation.

"I would also take from those already in the service all that are competent for commission officers, and establish at once in the South a camp of instructions. By this we could have in about three months an army of forty thousand blacks in motion, the presence of which anywhere would itself be a power irresistible. You should have an army of blacks, President Lincoln, commanded entirely by blacks, the sight of which is required to give confidence to the slaves and retain them to the Union, stop foreign intervention, and speedily bring the war to a close."

Lincoln replied, "**This is the very thing I have I have been looking and hoping for; but nobody offered it; I hoped and prayed for it; but till now it has never been proposed. ... When I issued my Emancipation Proclamation, I had this thing in contemplation.**"

*“This card showed [Lincoln] perfectly understood my views”*

– Martin Delany

After further discussion of ways to use this Black army to help bring about the end of the war, Lincoln asked, “Will you take command?” Delany demurred, stating that he had no experience. Lincoln observed that “tactics are easily learned” and that “it is the head that we now require most—men of plans and executive ability.” Delany then offered letters of introduction, but Lincoln waved them away, saying, “I know all about you. I see nothing now to be done but to give you a line of introduction to the secretary of war.” Delany recalled, “He soon handed me a card, on which was written, “February 8, 1865. Hon. E. M. Stanton, Secretary of War. Do not fail to have an interview with this most extraordinary and intelligent black man.”

Delany’s vivid recollection of Lincoln handing him a card was accurate, but the president’s precise words were slightly different from those published in 1868. **This is the very card that Lincoln gave to Delany—independent corroboration of Delany’s dramatic account.**

Lincoln’s characterization of Delany as “this very intelligent colored man” reflects both the fact that they had a long, substantive conversation and the president’s emphasis on Delany’s role as a Black man representing other Black Americans wishing to fight on their own behalf. As Delany observed, “This card showed he perfectly understood my views

and feelings; hence **he was not content that my color should make its own impression, but he expressed it with emphasis, as though a point was gained.** The thing desired presented itself; not simply a man that was *black*, because these had previously presented themselves, in many delegations and committees,—men of the highest intelligence,—for various objects; **but that which he had wished and hoped for, their own proposed measures matured in the council-chamber had never been fully presented to them in the person of a black man”** [emphasis added].

This document set in motion the meeting with Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. Six days later, on February 27, 1865, Delany was commissioned a Major in the U.S. Colored Troops, becoming the United States Army’s first Black field officer and achieving the highest rank of any African American during the Civil War. Delany joined and recruited for the 104th and 105th U.S.C.T. in Charleston. After the war he stayed in South Carolina as an agent of the Freedmen’s Bureau, and he later ran for political office and served as a judge.

**This splendid autograph note by Abraham Lincoln, representing a key step toward the fulfillment of the promise of the Emancipation Proclamation, is worthy of any great private or institutional collection.**

please inquire

*19th Century Rare Book and Photograph Shop*

www.19thshop.com • info@19thshop.com • (410) 602-3002 • (347) 529-4534