In the Service of God and Humanity
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Introduction

Writing for the *Pittsburgh Courier* over eight decades ago, historian W. E. B. Du Bois asked this poignant rhetorical question: “[Martin Delany’s] was a magnificent life, and yet how many of us have heard of him?” Du Bois was right. This remarkable person—the man who collaborated with Frederick Douglass to coedit nineteenth-century Black America’s leading newspaper, the *North Star*, and considered by some to be second only to Frederick Douglass as a leading Black abolitionist and activist; the man who crisscrossed the country for antislavery, and who in 1849, helped save several lives in the Cholera epidemic that hit Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and in consequence received commendations and certificates of appreciation from the city council and board of health; the man who in 1850 became one of three Black students to enter Harvard Medical School, and after being forced out due to racism, led the emigration movement in the second half of the nineteenth century, earning a national and international reputation as a leading Black nationalist and Pan-Africanist; the man who, on the outbreak of the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln referred to as “this most extraordinary and intelligent Black man” and commissioned him the first Black combat major in the Union army, and who subsequently helped recruit several Colored regiments; and the man who was appointed a sub-assistant commissioner of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands (Freedmen’s Bureau) after the war, became active in local South Carolina politics, and competed for nomination for the office of lieutenant governor, the second highest political office in the state—had simply and mysteriously been erased from America’s collective historical memory. By the 1930s, Martin Robison Delany (1812–1885) and other leading Black citizens of his generation had been buried beneath the weight of the emergent and triumphant New South ideology and Jim Crow culture and historiography, which their accomplishments were sacrificed to consecrate. Fundamentally, this culture and historiography deliberately misrepresented and de-emphasized the achievements and contributions of Black Americans, especially of their heroes and heroines whose careers seemed to challenge and contradict the dominant and entrenched tradition of White supremacy.
Not even the Harlem Renaissance of the previous decade could rescue Delany from historical oblivion. The Delany “renaissance” would have to wait for another four decades, when the rise of instrumentalist historiography in the 1960s and the civil rights movement would inspire increased scholarly interests in researching and recovering Black history. This was the historical and cultural context that birthed the Delany rediscovery. Thanks to the efforts of Delany aficionados (Dorothy Sterling, Victor Ullman, Cyril Griffith, Theodore Draper, and Floyd J. Miller) we now know much more about Delany’s magnificent life and can confidently answer Du Bois’s question. The pioneering works of these Delany scholars have, in the last five decades, been complemented by an outpouring of publications on Delany’s life, struggles, and accomplishments.

Martin Delany was born of a free mother in 1812 in Charlestown, Virginia (now in West Virginia), at a time in the nation’s history when, for African Americans (slave and free), being free meant nothing. In nineteenth-century America, free Blacks were, according to one historian, “Slaves without Masters.” Black Americans generally were considered and treated less than human. Delany grew up witnessing his grandparents and parents suffer the daily inhumanities and horrors of enslavement. This reality compelled young Delany at a very early age to “register his vows against the enemies of his race.” Determined to escape the fate of his parents and grandparents, Delany took the momentous decision in July of 1831 (at the age of 19) to relocate from Chambersburg, Pennsylvania (where they had sought refuge after escaping Virginia), to Pittsburgh. It was in Pittsburgh that Delany encountered a growing and thriving community of like-minded Black activists, many of whom had also migrated from other states, working together toward, and committed to, advancing the cause of Black freedom and equality. Here, he continued his education and met leaders who would help shape and guide his career. It was here also that his antislavery career began. He worked part time loading coal and pig iron into barges while pursuing his education at the African Methodist Episcopal Church Cellar School. As secretary of the Philanthropic Society of Pittsburgh, an organization dedicated to aiding fugitives, Delany also began helping with Underground Railroad activities.

Delany attended a convention in Pittsburgh in 1834 at which there was a split between advocates of moral suasion and those in favor of more militant approaches. Moral suasion was then being discussed by the leadership of the emerging National Negro Convention movement which opened in Philadelphia in August of 1831. He sided with the moral suasionists who also pushed for temperance and nonviolence. Shortly thereafter he was appointed secretary
of the newly created Temperance Society of the People of Color of Pittsburgh. That same year, he helped found the Young Men’s Moral Reform Society of Pittsburgh. By 1837, he had become librarian of the Young Men’s Literary and Moral Reform Society of Pittsburgh. In 1839, with increased anti-Black violence in Pittsburgh, Delany became a central figure in organizing resistance efforts. He was appointed by the Mayor to form a biracial vigilante committee for law and order. Subsequently, he was elected to the Board of Managers of the Pittsburgh Anti-slavery Society. Delany’s antislavery efforts no doubt endeared him to some of the leading and wealthiest Pittsburgh socialites. In 1843, he married Catherine Richards, daughter of Charles Richards, who was the son of “Daddy” Ben Richards, one of the wealthiest men in Pittsburgh. The union was blessed with eleven children, seven of whom survived (Toussaint L’Ouverture, Charles Lenox Remond, Alexander Dumas, Saint Cyprian, Faustin Soulouque, Rameses Placido, and Ethiopia). The marriage also brought in much-needed income, for Catherine inherited property valued at $200,000. Less than six months after his marriage, Delany began his newspaper the *Mystery*. He published the *Mystery* until 1847 when he gave it up to join Frederick Douglass as coeditor and roving lecturer for the *North Star*—a move that launched his nationwide antislavery career.

In the two years Delany worked with Douglass (1847–1849), he made numerous trips to Black communities in the North and Midwest to deliver antislavery lectures and propagate moral suasion; the reform strategy Black abolitionists had adopted. Delany, Douglass, and other leading Black abolitionists, believed that through the cultivation of the tenets of moral suasion (thrift, industry, economy, education, and character reform) Blacks would change their condition and thus appeal favorably to the moral conscience of the nation, and thereby, compel concessions of their rights and privileges. The upsurge of anti-Black violence and race riots in several states including Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Massachusetts eroded their faith in moral suasion. Free Blacks had thought they would find an atmosphere receptive of and sympathetic to their desires and efforts to change their condition. Instead, they encountered resentments and violence. These race riots and violence targeted successful Black businesses, institutions, and symbols of Black cultural, economic, and social progress (such as churches and schools). The last straw for Delany was the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850 which convinced him that Blacks would never be given the opportunity to strive for progress in America. The race riots and his experiences of racism during his journeys convinced Delany that however hard Blacks struggled to improve their
condition, racism was so rooted and entrenched that their efforts would always be “rewarded” with hostility and violence. He presented a dark and gloomy description of the prospects for Black elevation in America. According to Delany, “The most prominent feature of the American policy is to preserve inviolate the liberty of the WHITES in this country, and to attempt to deny or disguise this, is both unjust and dishonest [emphasis in original].” He referred to the “expulsion” of the Indians from their lands, and “the continued wrongs perpetrated against” them to bolster the contention that Whites would go to any lengths, including nationalizing slavery, in order to preserve and defend their power and privileges. Delany reflected and expressed a growing conviction among Blacks which the “Colored Citizens” of Pennsylvania articulated in their 1848 “Appeal” to the Commonwealth:

The barrier that deprives us of the rights which you enjoy finds no palliative in merit—no consolation in piety—no hope in intellectual and moral pursuits—no reward in industry and enterprise . . . we may exhaust our midnight lamps in the prosecution of study, and be denied the privileges of the forum—we may be embellishing the nation’s literature by our pursuits in science . . . yet with all these exalted virtues we could not possess the privileges you enjoy in Pennsylvania, because we are not “White.”

Delany fully agreed and concluded that Blacks had no future in America. He distrusted White abolitionists and denounced their liberal ideas as limited in scope, paternalistic, racist, and phony. Almost a decade before it would become a slogan in the prelude to the Civil War, Delany described the “Cry of Fee Men” by Northern Whites and abolitionists as

not for the extension of liberty to the black man, but for the protection of the liberty of the white. The liberty of the whites of the North was endangered by the encroachments of the slave power; hence, an alarm was necessary to arouse the North and alarm the South, who determined on the permanent establishment of slavery, as the North is well advised of, is ever ready to compromise, and always able to find one.

He urged Blacks to embrace emigration, and for the next few years (1852–1863) he embarked on a search for an independent Black nationality. This quest took him to Liberia and the Niger Valley of West Africa where, in southwestern Nigeria, he convinced the local chiefs to cede a portion of their lands for his Black nationality. However, this phase of Delany’s career ended abruptly with the outbreak of the Civil War.
Like Frederick Douglass and other leading Black Americans, and with renewed hope and optimism about the prospects for change in America, Delany reversed course and became actively involved in the pursuit of Black integration in America. His renewed integration zeal and dedication to the Union cause led to his appointment as the first combat Black major in the Union army; a rank he held until after the end of the war when he was transferred to the Freedmen’s Bureau as sub-assistant commissioner and field agent in Hilton Head Island, South Carolina. He was assigned to take charge of several government plantations in Hilton Head. Delany served the Bureau until its demise in 1868 when he thrust himself into the political arena of South Carolina. He would play a pivotal role in both Republican and Democratic Party politics, contesting for lieutenant governor as an “Independent” in 1874. Delany seemed to have won the confidence of both Republican and Democratic state governors, Daniel Chamberlain and Wade Hampton respectively, who appointed him trial justice for the city of Charleston.

Though Delany’s political career in South Carolina was marked by conflicts and hostilities provoked in part by the controversial decisions and choices he made, his overall accomplishments were quite remarkable. Against the political wishes and inclinations of fellow Blacks and the ruling Republican Party, Delany persistently pushed for reconciliation with, and compromise toward, the defeated Democrats (the party of slavery). By the late 1870s, his hopes and aspirations for racial reconciliation were dashed, paradoxically, by the ascendance of Democrats to political power (supporters of the ancien régime); the very group he had defended and whose support he courted. The “redeemers” as they proudly referred to themselves introduced anti-Black policies designed to undo and reverse the reforms and progress of the Civil War and Reconstruction. Delany, their one-time vocal defender, did not escape their anger and retribution. Disappointed, frustrated, and alienated from the mainstream Black leadership, Delany left South Carolina. His integrationist aspirations shattered, Delany reverted to his old nationalist back-to-Africa scheme. He joined a resurgent Liberia Exodus Movement, and appealed to the American Colonization Society in Washington, DC, for financial assistance for the emigration cause. No help came from the Colonization Society. But time seemed to have taken its toll, and Delany had neither the physical ability nor pecuniary resources to relaunch a new initiative. In late 1884, he returned physically and psychologically a broken man to Xenia, Ohio, where his wife and children had relocated. He died shortly thereafter on January 24, 1885.

Martin Delany’s life and accomplishments therefore spanned about seven decades of the nation’s history (1812–1885). In 1895, just ten years after his death,
Booker T. Washington would address the Atlanta International Cotton Exposition and deliver a speech that would go down in history as the Atlanta compromise. Anyone familiar with Delany’s ideas and arguments in furtherance of compromise and accommodation in Reconstruction South Carolina would find nothing new in Washington’s Atlanta Exposition speech. Much of his arguments derived almost verbatim from some of Delany’s writings and speeches in South Carolina. Ironically, Washington earned the unenviable reputation as a compromiser, while Delany slipped into historical oblivion. Less than fifty years after his exit from the political scene, Delany’s accomplishments would almost be completely erased from peoples’ memories. Thanks to the works of the aficionados, and those of subsequent scholars for challenging and reversing this Jim Crow historiography. Delany would ultimately be resurrected and valorized as exemplar of uncompromising radicalism. Despite increased publications on, and hence increased knowledge about, Martin Delany, there is still much about him that remains unexplored and unappreciated.

Ironically, the more we know about Delany, the more we yearn for more knowledge. The versatility of his thought, and the fact that his antislavery and nationalist careers spanned five decades (1831–1885), which also coincided with major political developments in the nation’s history, underscore and help us better appreciate the complexity and ambivalence that several scholars characterize as possibly the single defining attribute of his life. As Victor Ullman noted, Delany “simply cannot be classified with either the ‘good guys’ or the ‘bad guys.’” His ideas and choices reflected and encompassed multiple and complex ideologies. His life touched on virtually every aspect of American history—slavery, racism, abolitionism, religion, colonization, emigration, Civil War, and Reconstruction. The fact that Delany embodied and experienced so much makes the task of studying him all the more challenging. In essence, what Ullman acknowledged was that you could not compartmentalize Delany or his life within narrow and simplistic ideological categories. The more you explore Delany, and are drawn deeper into his life, the more you are likely to realize how much more there is to learn about him, and the more you would want to probe even deeper the inner dynamics of his erudite and prolific mind. In other words, the more we know about Delany, the more we realize how little we actually know, and thus are motivated to explore him even further.

One area of Delany’s life that had escaped scholarly scrutiny, despite the outpourings of publications in the last several decades, relates to the particular dynamics of the ideas he propagated—the political choices he made and defended. While it was clear that Delany made certain controversial decisions and
choices, with the exception of the emigration movement about which he wrote extensively, there remains a gap in our understanding of the ideological underpinnings of his controversial, ambivalent, and quite often provocative political decisions and choices. Overcoming this challenge would require slow and deliberate reexamination and analysis of his writings and speeches. For instance, we need to understand why he took so many seemingly anti-Black and unpopular choices and decisions in the closing years of Reconstruction in South Carolina. Furthermore, we know from the scholarship that he was not born a nationalist and that, like many of his peers, Delany spent his early life fighting for integration in America. How did he conceptualize and rationalize integration? Some of the strategies he adopted are well documented, but we still do not know much about their rationale. Delany not only actively participated in the Black struggles but also reflected and philosophized at length about the ideas he espoused and strategies he embraced. This book is about interrogating and analyzing Delany’s ideas in relation to some of the core themes that infused the nineteenth-century Black struggles in America. The objective is to gain informed understanding of the dynamics of his thought that compelled him to make controversial and seemingly contradictory decisions and choices. The central question this book seeks to answer is: what precisely can help us better understand, if not appreciate, Delany’s ambivalent, and at times, counterintuitive decisions and choices? Put differently, the book probes the rationale that motivated Delany to advocate political ideas and choices that at times sharply contradicted, and conflicted with, those of the mainstream leadership.

I have identified four crucial areas—emanating from, or associated with, his long engagement with American history—to which he made significant contributions and about which he was passionate. These four areas represent possibly the major dynamics, preoccupations, and strategies of the nineteenth-century Black struggles: religion, education, violence, and politics. Martin Delany had much to say about, and helped shape public opinion on, these subjects. Curiously, we know relatively little about his thought specific to each subject. This could be attributed to the fact that, with the exception of politics, in which he actively participated late in his life, Delany was never publicly associated with the other three factors. His participation in state politics in South Carolina was short-lived (1872–1876)—not long and impactful enough to distinguish his political career. It did not earn him recognition as a political theorist either. And yet Delany was no silent political witness. He offered constructive and insightful (if provocative) political ideas; and no discussion of the political participation and Black experience in Reconstruction South Carolina would be complete
without engaging the ideas he espoused. Similarly, Delany was never a minister or religious prelate. He was not an educator either; and certainly, he did not openly advocate or lead violent insurrection. Nevertheless, he was very open and vocal in expressing his opinions and views on religion, education, and violence. Along with politics, Delany felt very strongly about these particular subjects that also engaged the attention of other Black leaders, and he left few in doubt about his views. He reflected deeply about them and, in scattered and piecemeal writings, in public speeches and addresses, offered insights into the rationale undergirding the choices and decisions they compelled. This book therefore is more of an intellectual history and seeks to probe deeper Delany’s thoughts on, and contributions to, four vital areas of the nineteenth-century Black struggles in America.

The Delany “renaissance,” restored him to the historical limelight. It also revealed his multifaceted and complex nature. Such knowledge has only bolstered interest in probing the dynamics of his thoughts and actions. What were his views on religion, and more specifically the place of the Black church in the promotion of the ideology of moral suasion that Black leaders and abolitionists had adopted as guiding philosophy? What did he think of violence as reform strategy? The subject of violence dominated discussions in some of the early Black conventions of the 1830s. Delany was certainly aware of the controversies that violence generated and possibly was present at some of the deliberations. Thus far, most scholars have analyzed Delany’s conception of violence within the discourse of the “hemispheric revolution” he mapped in his fictional novel *Blake, Or, The Huts of America* (1859). I hope to demonstrate the many other ways and circumstances Delany manifested his disposition toward violence as reform strategy. While officially Delany was no educator, he fully embraced and helped propagate moral suasion which had education as a key component. What were his views on education? How did Delany conceptualize education in relation to other Black liberation strategies? Though he ascended to a position of prominence in Charleston, as well as in statewide Republican and Democratic Party politics in Reconstruction South Carolina, we know relatively little about the political ideas and theories he espoused. What did Delany think of politics? What political strategies did he advocate and why?

Scholarship on African American thought and leadership consistently tends to situate Delany within the discourse of Black nationalism and Pan-Africanism. His thought has consequently been confined to this theme. Not surprisingly, he has been, and continues to be, narrowly framed as a Black nationalist. A relatively recent publication on African American Political thought exemplifies this
historiographical anomaly. In mapping the themes of African American political thought from David Walker in the late eighteenth century down to Barack Obama, *The Modern African American Political Thought Reader* (2013), edited by sociologist Angela Jones, identified six broad themes: the antebellum era, rise of abolitionism, Reconstruction and beyond, Black nationalism, Black radical feminism, modern Black conservatism, and the new Black moderate. Consistent with prevailing scholarship, Jones associated Martin Delany with Black nationalism. In reality, as this study will demonstrate, Delany could rightly be identified with all six themes. His life span and antislavery activism coincided with every major episode in American history. He actively participated and voiced his opinions. In his writings, Delany touched upon a wide variety of subjects and themes, including Black nationalism, Pan-Africanism, abolitionism, religion, education, women, violence, astrology, freemasonry, ethnology, political economy, and politics. Unfortunately, because of the ideological slant of the era of Delany’s rediscovery, scholars have narrowly focused on his nationalist and supposedly antiestablishment ideas. Yet, the nationalist ideas were only a dimension; minute reflection and representation of the versatility and complexity of his thoughts. This book is an attempt to challenge the ideological and skewed representation of Delany and argue instead for engaging and acknowledging other aspects of his thoughts (religion, violence, education, and politics). Probing these other dimensions would, I hope, yield better understanding of the contexts and dynamics of why he made certain decisions and staked certain positions that at the time seemed counterintuitive. Exploring and tapping into the mind of so versatile a human helps us better understand him and gain greater appreciation of his place in, and contributions to, the Black struggles in America. It also demonstrates how his ideas and thoughts embodied and anticipated some of the broader challenges and problems of humanity with which the world is still grappling: liberation theology, women’s education, the ethics of nonviolence, and political bipartisanship.

There are four chapters in this book corresponding with the four themes identified: religion, violence, education, and politics. These four areas preoccupied the attention of Black leaders and abolitionists throughout the nineteenth century. They constituted key elements of the strategies and options they considered and debated as represented in the minutes and records of their many and various proceedings. Since Martin Delany was a major participant, it is imperative to seek informed understanding of his ideas and the choices they dictated. What were his views on religion and the role of the Black Church? What was his position of violence as reform strategy? How did he view education? What political
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ideas and theories did he advocate and defend? These are the fundamental questions this book addresses.

Chapter 1 discusses and analyzes Delany’s ideas about religion and its place in the Black struggle. More directly, it deals with his projection of religion as means of liberation. This chapter is divided into two broad themes. In the first (religion and integration), Delany espoused a “this-worldly” interpretation of Christianity. His main objective was to activate human agency and self-determination. In the second (religion and nationalism), Delany invoked scriptural authority to bolster his call for emigration. His this-worldly theology was directed at encouraging Blacks to actively undertake measures that would enhance their prospects of attaining meaningful freedom, equality, and advancement in America. This was largely in response to what he characterized as the debilitating and destructive consequences of a fatalistic and otherworldly providential theology propagated by some of the leading Black churches. This developed within the broader context of his antislavery and abolitionist travels to propagate the ideology of moral suasion officially adopted as a philosophy at the 1835 National Negro Convention in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Moral suasion envisioned change and reform through thrift, industry, economy, education, and character reform. It sought to encourage Blacks to become more active in pursuit of means of improving their condition and elevating themselves. Moral suasion was directed at infusing in Blacks the awareness that they too had a role to play in facilitating change. Cultivating moral suasion was crucial. It was during his travels and lectures to encourage Blacks to actively seek to change their condition that Delany was drawn into a robust controversy and debate on the role of religion and the Black church. During the early phase of his career, therefore, Delany characterized religion as an integrationist tool that, properly cultivated and utilized, could help Blacks become elevated and empowered, and thus enhance their chances of attaining full integration in America. Delany’s theory of religion, however, conflicted with and challenged the providential and otherworldly theology propagated by leading Black churches. The chapter is fundamentally about how Delany’s engagement with, and involvement in, the Black abolitionist movement exposed a crisis and division within the early Black churches, and between the churches and the abolitionist movement. The second part of the chapter deals with Delany’s brilliant attempt to reformulate religion. Having seemingly failed in his integrationist aspirations, Delany now turned to Black nationalism and separatism and found religion also an effective weapon for advancing his quest for an independent Black nationality. In essence, the chapter analyzes how Delany framed religion to advance seemingly conflicting goals of
integration and separatism. Due to its subject matter (religion), this chapter is focused on the pre-Civil War epoch. Delany espoused his philosophy of religion most vividly first, in the late 1840s, during his brief stint as roving lecturer for Frederick Douglass’s *North Star*; and second, from the mid-to-late 1850s when he used religion to bolster his emigration scheme.

Chapter 2 focuses on Delany’s views on violence as a weapon of change. Given the condition of Blacks and the magnitude of the challenges they confronted daily, it should not be surprising that violence appealed to some nor that the subject was featured in the deliberations of several of the early conventions. As much as leading Blacks endorsed and emphasized moral suasion and reform through individual initiatives, violence as an option was never completely ruled out. Delany both experienced violence and was aware of the debates and controversies it generated among Black abolitionists. He was therefore in position to engage the subject and offer his views. Foregrounding the debates on, and controversies generated by, violence in the deliberations of the Negro National and State Conventions of the 1830s and 1840s, I discuss Delany’s background and the influences that shaped his views on violence. I address the moral dilemma violence represented and how leading Black thinkers, particularly those who were Delany’s ideological mentors, dealt with this dilemma. What they said about, and how they perceived, violence ultimately shaped Delany’s own ideas and position on the subject. This chapter, like the first, is focused on the pre-Civil War period. Delany was a leading proponent of the nonviolent philosophy of moral suasion in the 1840s. In the 1850s when he embraced emigration, Delany used the medium of fiction (*Blake*) and his response to John Brown’s insurrectionary scheme to reiterate his reservations about violence as a weapon of change. For a very brief period during the Civil War, Delany seemed to embrace violence. He was appointed the first Black combat major in the Union army. But this was in 1865, and shortly before the war’s termination (more on this later).

Chapter 3 is about how Delany conceptualized and attempted to formulate a key component of the moral suasion ideology: education. Along with thrift, economy and industry, education was considered a critical area of improvement for Blacks as they sought meaningful freedom and equality. As a leading advocate of moral suasion, Delany not only observed the low and dismal state of education among Black Americans, but also felt compelled to share his views on ongoing debates about the importance of education as well as on what form of education to pursue. His educational philosophy evolved and developed over three decades beginning in Pittsburgh in the late 1830s to South Carolina in the late 1860s. Delany had always prioritized education; first as abolitionist and
moral suasion advocate in the 1830s and 1840s, and later as Freedmen’s Bureau sub-assistant commissioner in South Carolina in the mid-to-late 1860s. In his antislavery writings and speeches during the 1840s and 1850s, Delany stressed the importance of education. He discussed education in his 1852 publication, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*. He would revisit the subject even more extensively in his Bureau reports during the late 1860s. In these yearly reports, Delany commented at length on strategies for enhancing the education of free Blacks: curriculum, pedagogy, classroom management, teacher-pupil relationship, women’s education and race. Clearly, Delany was way ahead of his time on these aspects of education. Some of his ideas and suggestions would resurface in the thoughts and policies of future generations of Black educators. Delany’s thoughts on education, therefore, intersected the pre-and post-Civil War eras.

Chapter 4 is an attempt to give form and shape to a very difficult and controversial aspect of Delany’s career: his political thought. Though there is much information on, and knowledge about, Delany’s nationalist ideas and activism as well as his political activities in post-Civil War and Reconstruction South Carolina, we know relatively little about his political ideas and the rationale undergirding the controversial and provocative political choices and decisions he made. I attempt to develop our understanding of Delany’s political thought by foregrounding his early nineteenth-century involvement with promoting moral suasion. This was the springboard for much of the political ideas that he advocated in the postbellum period. In 1848 Delany identified two factors that determined and shaped his political decisions and choices. They represented the dynamics of his political thought: conscience and reason. Writing in an article in the *North Star*, Delany boldly proclaimed; “I care little for precedent, and therefore, discard the frivolous rules of formality... conforming always to principle, suggested by conscience, and guided by the light of reason [emphasis added].”[^38] Here Delany was unambiguous in identifying the two ideological underpinnings of his philosophy of life. However, their political implications and ramifications would not become fully manifested until Delany became actively involved in politics in Reconstruction South Carolina. It was here that a crucial dimension of Delany’s political thought emerged: political conservatism. Delany advocated political strategies and solutions, made choices and forged alliances dictated by his conscience and reason. Curiously, the dictates of Delany’s conscience and reason oftentimes mirrored contradictory and counterintuitive ideas and choices. The political ideas and values Delany proposed and defended during Reconstruction in South Carolina (1870–1876) contradicted those he had earlier proffered and...
defended as a Black nationalist (1852–1863). It would seem that the reforms of
the Civil War and Reconstruction profoundly impacted Delany’s political ideas
and thoughts in ways that proved detrimental to the image and reputation he
had earlier cultivated as an avowed advocate and defender of the rights of Blacks.
Fundamentally, this chapter is about authenticating the conservatism of Martin
Delany’s thought, a subject that seemed at odds with the historical reputation he
had garnered. Delany’s political thought, like his ideas about education, inter-
sected both the pre-and post-Civil War epochs. Much of his political writings
occurred in the 1850s. It was, however, during the Reconstruction that Delany
became actively involved in politics and thus had the opportunity and context
to formulate, and attempt to implement, his political ideas.

Delany’s was indeed a magnificent life, as Du Bois rightly observed. With the
possible exception of Frederick Douglass, and some would, with justification,
contest this exception, no other nineteenth-century Black leader contributed
and sacrificed as much for his race. Whatever Delany accomplished, it was ren-
dered as labor of love in the service of “God and humanity” (the phrase with
which he ended several of his correspondence). Regardless of whether or not he
received compensation, and in most situations, he did not, Delany comported
himself with grace and humility. From the time he left his parents in Cham-
bersburg in 1831 through his early start in Pittsburgh to his collaboration with
Douglass, down to his emigration and Civil War and Reconstruction endeavors,
Delany blazed a trail of selfless service and sacrifices. In the process, he espoused
certain ideas, made choices and decisions; and formed alliances that were contro-
versial, provocative, perhaps even counterintuitive, prompting some to question
his motivation. Yet, it would be difficult to deny Delany’s immense contribu-
tions. This book is about probing and understanding the intellectual and philo-
sophical reasoning infusing those decisions, choices, and alliances.