



## The Corps d'Afrique: Louisiana's Black Regiment



### Cast:

Narrator 1

Narrator 2

Dr. Martin Delany

John- free black

Henry- free black

Patrick- free black

Charles Dyer- friend of Delany's

President Abraham Lincoln

Rev. Henry Garnet- friend of Delany's

### Setting:

African Americans have served in their country's military during numerous engagements, but many of their early efforts have been written in the sidelines of history. One such group is the Corps d'Afrique, a regiment of lighter-skinned blacks that fought in the Civil War. These men were a part of the Louisiana Native Guards and enjoyed life as free blacks in the south. When the Civil War threatened to tear apart their lives, many took up arms to fight. These men were unusual applicants for the military because many were educated and held professional careers. Nevertheless, these men were an important part of the Civil War.



**Scene 1**

**Narrator 1-** The Corps d’Afrique was not composed of the men most people consider typical southern blacks. Throughout history, southern blacks usually are thought to be either slaves or very poor free men.

**Narrator 2-** In fact, there were some men who were making a place for themselves in society-- they owned property and worked in professional careers.

**Narrator 1-** In fact, by 1860, the men who would be in the Corps d’Afrique had accumulated more than two million dollars worth of land.

**Narrator 2-** One of the men most known for his efforts in the Corps d’Afrique was Dr. Martin Delany, a Harvard-educated doctor.

**John-** So, Dr. Delany, why have you called us here today?

**Dr. Delany-** As you gentlemen know, a Civil War is upon us. I’ve brought you together because I believe we are all upstanding men of the South and are important members of our society.

**Henry-** Absolutely. And we’ve worked hard to get there. I went to William and Mary to study to be a dentist; and I know some of the other men here are silversmiths, painters, bricklayers, architects, carpenters, plasterers, and more.

**John-** I’m a cigar maker!

**Patrick-** And I’m a tailor. All of these are important jobs.

**Dr. Delany-** Which is exactly why it’s important we secure our jobs and other interests in our society. It’s being threatened by Civil War, and I’m worried we will lose everything we’ve for which we have worked.

**Henry-** I agree. I’m worried I’ll lose my property because of this war.

**Patrick-** And I’m afraid my business will suffer.

**Dr. Delany-** And I’m here to offer you gentlemen a proposition. I have been petitioning President Lincoln to allow us to form a special regiment in the Union army.

**John-** What made you want to do this?

**Dr. Delany-** Well, I wanted to make sure African Americans had their role in the war; it was just a matter of how to allow us to enter into service. I became obsessed with finding a way to enter the service and wanted recognition of our race to be able to do so. We deserve just as much a role in our nation’s history as do the white men and the slaves.

**Patrick-** Absolutely. Especially if it’s our interests at stake as well. So, how did you approach President Lincoln?

**Dr. Delany-** I applied to him for a special regiment, a Corps d’Afrique, which would be separate from the white division of the army.



**Henry-** Why separate?

**Dr. Delany-** I believe in being proud of our race and giving ourselves a chance to make a name for our race. I also wanted to design uniforms that would mimic the dress of the Zouaves d’Afrique to show our origin and heritage.

**John-** I believe that is a great idea.

**Henry-** So what did President Lincoln say?

**Dr. Delany-** At first I received no response to my application. But a few months ago, my close friend Charles Dyer wrote to President Lincoln on my behalf, and my request has been granted.

**Patrick-** So, how do we sign up?

**Dr. Delany-** I have been put in charge of organizing a unit of African-American men who wish to fight proudly for their cultural heritage as well as for their interests in the United States.

**John-** I believe that is all of us. We all have interests here we want to protect-- family, economic, and cultural.

**Dr. Delany-** Which is precisely why I have called you all here today. New Orleans has fallen, and we now have our chance to unite under the Old Flag and join the Union Army.

**Henry-** There Will be only African Americans in our regiment?

**Dr. Delany-** Absolutely.

**Patrick-** Where will we be stationed? What will we do?

**Dr. Delany-** We will have a number of jobs to complete, which may include guarding prisoners, building fortifications, and contributing to the war effort in any way the Union may need us. We most likely will =be stationed nearby in Port Hudson, Mansura, and Mobile.

**John-** By doing this are you hoping to achieve equality with whites?

**Patrick-** What do you mean? No matter how hard we work; we are always a threat to them. We will never achieve equality.

**Dr. Delany-** I am asking to have a place in the war effort that is uniquely our own -- to celebrate our heritage and to make a name for ourselves.

**Henry-** When will we begin?

**Dr. Delany-** Our first regiment will organize at Camp Parapet, Louisiana, on April 28. In August and September we will organize three more regiments, so please spread the word and get as many new recruits as you can.

**Patrick-** Will we all work and fight together?



**Dr. Delany-** Some regiments will be sent to Texas, and others will stay near New Orleans; but we will go wherever we are needed.

**John-** Sign me up! I'm ready to fight for my place in society and let those whites know we deserve a place in the United States.

**Henry-** This is a chance for us to show them we are capable members of society!

**Narrator 1-** In April of 1863, the first regiment of the Corps d'Afrique was organized due to Dr. Delany's appeal to President Lincoln.

**Narrator 2-** Between then and February of 1864, five regiments of the Corps d'Afrique were formed.

**Narrator 1-** These men were not typical soldiers because they were well-educated, professional men.

**Narrator 2-** Their pride in their heritage shown in their efforts during the Civil War; they fought valiantly for the Union cause.

## Scene 2

**Narrator 1-** Although Dr. Delany and his corps fought valiantly, it wasn't until February of 1865 that Delany finally had the chance to meet President Lincoln.

**Narrator 2-** Before this meeting, Delany worked hard as the organizer of the Corps d'Afrique.

**President Lincoln-** Dr. Martin Delany, I'm so glad we could finally meet. Welcome to Washington!

**Dr. Delany-** Mr. President, thank you for inviting me! It is a great honor finally to meet you after all our correspondence.

**Lincoln-** I have brought you here, along with your friends, Reverend Henry Highland Garnet and Mr. Charles V. Dyer, two upstanding men of our society, for an important reason.

**Rev. Garnet-** Thank you for including us, Mr. President.

**Mr. Dyer-** Yes, it is an honor to be here.

**Lincoln-** I wanted you men to be here since you are such good friends of Dr. Delany and have spoken on his behalf many times. Today is a special day for Dr. Delany.

**Dr. Delany-** I'm not quite sure I follow.

**Lincoln-** For the past few years you have taken the Corps d'Afrique from its conception to what it is today. It is five regiments strong and has contributed to numerous war efforts. It has been instrumental in our campaigns.

**Dr. Delany-** I only wanted to highlight that African Americans can be proud of their heritage and fight for their interests. I also hoped we might be recognized as a race worthy of being more than just servants.



**Lincoln-** And I believe you have done so.

**Rev. Garnet-** Dr. Delany, why did you seek to appeal to President Lincoln about this?

**Dr. Delany-** I have always been a supporter of President Lincoln. I know he is a strong proponent of black emigration and colonization. I had once hoped this would be possible, but with the start of the Civil War, I turned my attention to domestic issues and the recruitment of black soldiers.

**Mr. Dyer-** I have heard you had done a fine job with that. You have gotten much support from the African-American community as well as other white men.

**Lincoln-** For your efforts, I have commended you to the Secretary of War for an army commission.

**Dr. Delany-** I am speechless.

**Lincoln-** You will be commissioned as an officer, and you will be the highest-ranking black commissioned officer in the Civil War.

**Dr. Delany-** I am truly honored. Thank you!

**Narrator 1-** Dr. Delany earned a high-ranking position in the United States Army, something which was rare and even controversial at this time.

**Narrator 2-** His vision to design the Corps d'Afrique as a show of pride in his race finally was realized.



**Epilogue:**

The Corps d’Afrique was a unique regiment of men. These well-educated, professional, and free blacks fought to protect their interests and to secure their place in the social system. Organized by Dr. Martin Delany, these men fought bravely for the Union, providing much needed support for the Union Army. When they were first organized, thirty-three black officers and seven hundred thirty-one black enlisted men made up the corps. The men often hoped their efforts would earn them the opportunity to be treated as equals in a free society. However, due to the unstable social situation following the Civil War, many of the men found equality was far from a reality.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Who organized the Corps d’Afrique?
2. Who were their uniforms designed to mimic?
3. Were there any white soldiers in the Corps d’Afrique?
4. What types of men were in the Corps d’Afrique?
5. Who received the highest commissioned position in the army for a black man?



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### Discussion Questions: (with answers)

1. Who organized the Corps d'Afrique?  
a) Dr. Martin Delany
2. Who were their uniforms designed to mimic?  
a) Zouaves d'Afrique
3. Were there any white soldiers in the Corps d'Afrique?  
a) no
4. What type of men was in the Corps d'Afrique?  
a) free blacks, educated, professionals
5. Who received the highest commissioned position in the army for a black man?  
a) Dr. Martin Delany