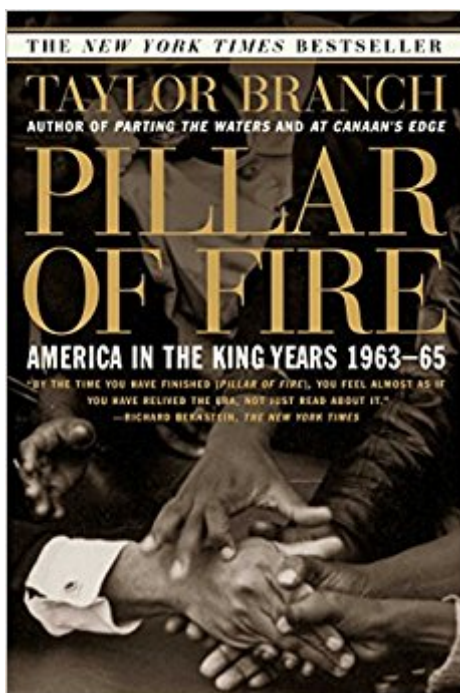


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# Pillar Of Fire : America In The King Years 1963-65



## Synopsis

From Pulitzer Prize-winning author Taylor Branch, the second part of his epic trilogy on the American Civil Rights Movement. In the second volume of his three-part history, a monumental trilogy that began with *Parting the Waters*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award, Taylor Branch portrays the Civil Rights Movement at its zenith, recounting the climactic struggles as they commanded the national stage.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

*Pillar of Fire* is the second volume of Taylor Branch's magisterial three-volume history of America during the life of the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. Branch's thesis, as he explains in the introduction, is that "King's life is the best and most important metaphor for American history in the watershed postwar years," but this is not just a biography. Instead it is a work of history, with King at its focal point. The tumultuous years that Branch covers saw the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, the beginnings of American disillusionment with the war in Vietnam, and, of course, the civil rights movement that King led, a movement that transformed America as the nation finally tried to live up to the ideals on which it was founded. Timeline of a Trilogy Taylor Branch's America in the King Years series is both a biography of Martin Luther King and a history of his age. No timeline can do justice to its wide cast of characters and its intricate web of incident, but here are some of the highlights, which might be useful as a scorecard to the trilogy's nearly 3,000 pages. King

The King Years      Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63      May: At age 25, King gives his first sermon as pastor-designate of Montgomery's Dexter Avenue Baptist Church.

1954 May: French surrender to Viet Minh at Dien Bien Phu. Unanimous Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board outlaws segregated public education. December: Rosa Parks is arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a public bus, leading to the Montgomery bus boycott, which King is drafted to lead.

1955      October: King spends his first night in jail, following his participation in an Atlanta sit-in. 1960 February: Four students attempting to integrate a Greensboro, North Carolina, lunch counter spark a national sit-in movement. April: The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee is founded. November: Election of President John F. Kennedy      May: The Freedom Rides begin, drawing violent responses as they challenge segregation throughout the South. King supports the riders during an overnight siege in Montgomery.

1961 July: SNCC worker Bob Moses arrives for his first summer of voter registration in rural Mississippi. August: East German soldiers seal off West Berlin behind the Berlin Wall.      March: J. Edgar Hoover authorizes the bugging of Stanley Levinson, King's closest white advisor. 1962 September: James Meredith integrates the University of Mississippi under massive federal protection.      April: King, imprisoned for demonstrating in Birmingham, writes the "Letter from Birmingham Jail." May: Images of police violence against marching children in Birmingham rivet the country. August: King delivers his "I Have a Dream" speech before hundreds of thousands at the March on Washington. September: The Ku Klux Klan bombing of Birmingham's 16th Street Baptist Church kills four young girls.

1963 June: Mississippi NAACP leader Medgar Evers assassinated. November: President Kennedy assassinated.

Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-65      November: Lyndon Johnson, in his first speech before Congress as president, promises to push through Kennedy's proposed civil rights bill.      March: King meets Malcolm X for the only time during Senate filibuster of civil rights legislation. June: King joins St. Augustine, Florida, movement after months of protests and Klan violence. October: King awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and campaigns for Johnson's reelection. November: Hoover calls King "the most notorious liar in the country" and the FBI sends King an anonymous "suicide package" containing scandalous surveillance tapes.

1964 January: Johnson announces his "War on Poverty." March: Malcolm X leaves the Nation of Islam following conflict with its leader, Elijah Muhammad. June: Hundreds of volunteers arrive in the South for SNCC's Freedom Summer, three of whom are soon murdered in Philadelphia, Mississippi. July: Johnson signs Civil Rights Act outlawing discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. August: Congress passes Gulf of Tonkin resolution authorizing military force in Vietnam. Democratic National Convention rebuffs the request by the Mississippi Freedom

Democratic Party to be seated in favor of all-white state delegation. November: Johnson wins a landslide reelection. January: King's first visit to Selma, Alabama, where mass meetings and demonstrations will build through the winter. 1965 February: Malcolm X speaks in Selma in support of movement, three weeks before his assassination in New York by Nation of Islam members. At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-68 March: Voting rights movement in Selma peaks with "Bloody Sunday" police attacks and, two weeks later, a successful march of thousands to Montgomery. August: King rebuffed by Los Angeles officials when he attempts to advocate reforms after the Watts riots. March: First U.S. combat troops arrive in South Vietnam. Johnson's "We Shall Overcome" speech makes his most direct embrace of the civil rights movement. May: Vietnam "teach-in" protest in Berkeley attracts 30,000. June: Influential federal Moynihan Report describes the "pathologies" of black family structure. August: Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act. Five days later, the Watts riots begin in Los Angeles. January: King moves his family into a Chicago slum apartment to mark his first sustained movement in a Northern city. June: King and Stokely Carmichael continue James Meredith's March Against Fear after Meredith is shot and wounded. Carmichael gives his first "black power" speech. July: King's marches for fair housing in Chicago face bombs, bricks, and "white power" shouts. 1966 February: Operation Rolling Thunder, massive U.S. bombing of North Vietnam, begins. May: Stokely Carmichael wins the presidency of SNCC and quickly turns the organization away from nonviolence. October: National Organization for Women founded, modeled after black civil rights groups. April: King's speech against the Vietnam War at New York's Riverside Church raises a storm of criticism. December: King announces plans for major campaign against poverty in Washington, D.C., for 1968. 1967 May: Huey Newton leads Black Panthers in armed demonstration in California state assembly. June: Johnson nominates former NAACP lawyer Thurgood Marshall to the Supreme Court. July: Riots in Newark and Detroit. October: Massive mobilization against the Vietnam War in Washington, D.C. March: King joins strike of Memphis sanitation workers. April: King gives his "Mountaintop" speech in Memphis. A day later, he is assassinated at the Lorraine Motel. 1968 January: In Tet Offensive, Communist guerillas stage a surprise coordinated attack across South Vietnam. March: Johnson cites divisions in the country over the war for his decision not to seek reelection in 1968.

Following *Parting the Waters* (LJ 1/89), his magnificent Pulitzer Prize-winning history of the Civil Rights years 1954-63, Branch's second volume of a projected trilogy takes the story through the heady years that saw the Southern Freedom Rides, Congressional battles over the Civil Rights acts, the March on Washington, the Birmingham bombing, and the assassinations of John Kennedy,

Medgar Evers, and Malcolm X. Once more, Branch's national epic is knit together by the charismatic figure of Dr. King. We only think we know this story, which in Branch's masterly version seems freshened and newly impressive, told without cant or cliché. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

"Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-65" is the second volume of Taylor Branch's magisterial three-volume biography of Martin Luther King, Jr. First published in 1998, this masterful book picks up the story of King and the American civil rights movement right where "Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963" - the first volume of this trilogy - leaves off. By 1963, America is a nation in growing turmoil. Segregation of the races is still the law of the Deep South, and an unwritten code in much of the rest of the country. African Americans are deprived of basic rights in all aspects of their lives. They can't vote, and they are denied access to equal opportunities for employment, education, housing, economic advancement and the use of public facilities. There is a rising tide of discontent among African Americans; they are becoming less willing to remain silent in their demands for equality, and more willing to fight... During the two-year period covered in "Pillar of Fire," some of the most important battles for equal rights are fought at Birmingham, Alabama; Greenwood, Mississippi; St. Augustine, Florida; and other places throughout the United States. Branch points out that by this time, Martin Luther King, Jr. has become the de facto leader of America's civil rights movement. Although he holds no "official" leadership position, he is, in effect, the voice and face of equal rights for all people of color. This is mainly due to his courage in speaking out, his commitment to non-violent confrontation to achieve equal rights, and his willingness to endure physical dangers and hardships along with those who march for freedom and equality. In "Pillar of Fire," Martin Luther King, Jr. is once again presented as the flawed but noble hero at the center of the epic battle for civil rights. Like its predecessor, "Parting the Waters," this book is a fabulously written, highly detailed account of a man and an era. It's a perfect combination of a brilliant biography and a penetrating study of one of the most disturbing but important periods of twentieth century American history. Most highly recommended.

The second volume of Taylor Branch's towering trilogy about Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights movement covers so many momentous events, such as the assassinations of John Kennedy and Malcolm X, the Mississippi Freedom Summer, King's Nobel Prize, and America's entry into Vietnam, that it is difficult to believe that it spans a mere two years that also witnessed the exodus of black America from the Republican party to the

Democratic. King's commitment to nonviolence in the face of overwhelming provocation is stunning. Branch often embeds events in an avalanche of detail about day-to-day goings-on that can be somewhat deadening but serves to make the point that there was no inevitability to the ultimate triumph of King. Throughout his career, he was beset by criticism, rivalry, and divisiveness from both within and without his ranks. The forces arrayed against him were formidable. This book is one more argument toward solidifying J. Edgar Hoover's status as one of the great villains of modern American history, with his underhanded and unconstitutional persecution and surveillance of King, even, at one point, sinking to the depths of having evidence of his infidelities sent to him along with a message urging him to commit suicide. Lyndon Johnson emerges as a pivotal figure, ever mindful of political reality but favorable toward black suffrage in a way that Kennedy wasn't. Writing in the early days of the Trump administration, I am reminded by this book that the most worrisome terrorists are the homegrown variety and encouraged by the precedent of citizens standing up to corrupt power and prevailing.

This book serves to remind me that our Founding Fathers thought they were doing the right thing for this country by pushing the slave issue off into the future to be addressed at another time. It reveals they were not infallible. I recommend reading the other two books of this trilogy as well. This book also reminds me that Martin Luther King Jr. was a giant among men. Taylor Branch does an excellent job of showing what the movement was like as well as the bitter times it lived through. MLK was a man, no question about it, but what a brilliant, courageous man he was! The movement featured a number of heroes and heroines but MLK stands out as uniquely qualified to speak for all the people, black and white. Now read *Slavery by Another Name* and a book by Lillian Smith, *Killers of the Dream*.

Magnificent.

Taylor Branch writes the story of the Civil Rights Movement both from an event perspective and from the perspective of the major people who participated in this movement. The book contains significant text which reads easy. The book can be read in large chunks or in smaller pieces without losing the vitality of what is being communicated. I learned a great deal about our country's history and enjoyed the experience. The book is a great stimulus for discussions about today's racial challenges.

I had very enjoyed the first book of this three-part trilogy. However, what made it compelling fell flat with this second book. It was tedious in detail and quite pedantic. For some reason, it just didn't have the impact that the first one did. I'm not sure if I'll read, let alone buy, the 3rd one. Maybe borrow it from the library one day. To be fair though, the two books have given me great insight into the civil rights movement and the roots of its rise. I lived through it but did not fully understand the many factors that went into the process and how there are still repercussions to this day.

Love it. A lot of information I didn't know. Thank you for the enlightenment!

The story of a time when people of good will came together for a short period and passed laws that promised a real America in America. No single person made it all happen. Both political parties voted for it. A crack of light in a dark room for a short time. Read this book to your children so they can finally understand how good America can be and how far we have yet to go.

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