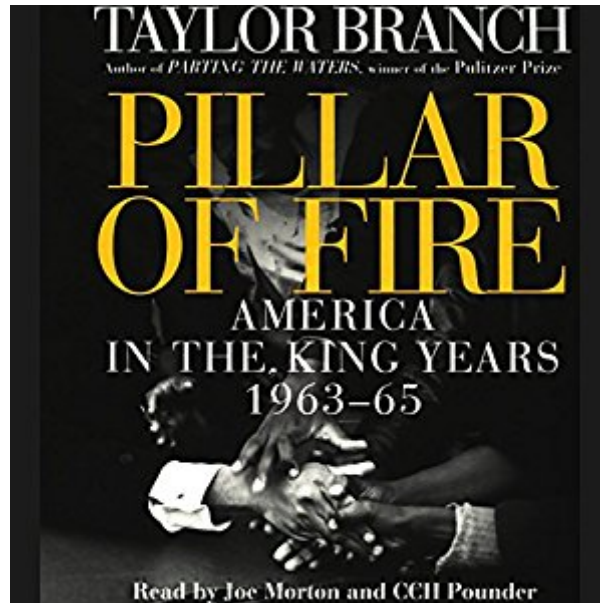


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# Pillar Of Fire: America In The King Years, 1963-65



## Synopsis

In *Pillar of Fire*, the second volume of his *America in the King Years* trilogy, Taylor Branch portrays the civil rights era at its zenith. The first volume, *Parting the Waters*, won the Pulitzer Prize for history. It is a monumental chronicle of a movement that stirred the Southern black churches to challenge the national conscience during the Eisenhower and Kennedy years. In this masterly continuation, Branch recounts the climatic struggles as they commanded the national and international stage. This audio adaptation of *Pillar of Fire* covers the upheavals of the years 1963-65; Dallas, Mississippi Freedom Summer, the far-reaching effects of civil rights legislation, the violent reaction to the end of legalized segregation, Vietnam, Selma. And it provides a frank, revealing portrait of the major players: LBJ, Malcolm X, Bob Moses, Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and others. Participants on both sides stretched themselves and their country to the breaking point over the meaning of simple words: dignity, equal votes, equal souls. Branch brings to bear 15 years of research in a seminal work of history. *Pillar of Fire* captures the intensity of the legendary King years, when the movement broke down walls between races, regions, sexes, and religions, and between America and the larger world: an incandescent chapter in America's distinctive quest for freedom.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

As most other reviewers, I too was eager to get into *Pillar of Fire* after a friend recommended his first book to me, *Parting the Waters*. Although *POF* is an excellent, thoroughly written book by Branch, it just misses the superb quality of *PTW*. What *PTW* gave us about the backgrounds of the

central figures and the story line of key incidents, I felt POF was missing some of that and that Branch just couldn't get himself out of the White House documents. Not that I'm trying to dismiss JFK and LBJ's civil rights commentary as frivolous, but I wanted more of the front line drama out of St. Augustine, Florida, Meridian, Mississippi and other hot spots. The other thing I wish Branch would have included was more about Malcom X's background and how he became a muslim in prison. Aside from my nit-picking, I really enjoyed this book and will definitely read the third installment. Although the White House chapters were a bit too long at times, it was fascinating to learn of Hoover's under-handed tactics to try and quell the movement and hunt out the 'Communists' that influenced MLK. I guess we had our very own NKVD police force right here in America during Hoover's days in power. I had heard inklings of the black-mail suicide tape Hoover sent MLK and was glad Branch gave the full story. Another great aspect of Branch's writings is how he touches on all of the movement groups such as SNCC, CORE, SCLC, etc. Branch gives Bob Moses' actions in Mississippi the credit it deserves whereas so many other writers just seem to gloss over his contributions. Contrary to a few reviewer's complaints, Branch's writing style is NOT hard to follow (even though he jumps around quite a bit) and this is NOT a hard book to read.

Presenting an authentic and comprehensive picture of the mammoth civil rights movement in the United States in the post WWII era is a daunting task, yet noted author and journalist Taylor Branch has succeeded masterfully with this, the second of a planned three-volume history of the struggle of blacks in America to find justice, equality and parity with the mainstream white society. Detailing the final desperate years of the mature and charismatic Rev. Martin Luther King, Branch sets the stage for a wide range of events, personalities, and public issues. This is truly a wonderful read, fascinating, entertaining, and endlessly detailed in its description of people and events, and quite insightful in its chronicling of the fortune of those social forces that created, sustained, and accomplished the single most momentous feat of meaningful social action in our nation's contemporary history. His range of subjects is necessarily wide and deep, and we find coverage of every aspect of the tumultuous struggle as it reaches into the final desperate efforts of the mature Martin Luther King, a man haunted by efforts at blackmail, internal bickering and dissension, and racist hatred as he continues the efforts to rectify the social evils of segregation and works toward greater civil rights and justice under the law. As in the first volume, this work at times borders on becoming a biography of Martin Luther King and his times, yet Branch so extends his coverage of the eddies and currents of the movement itself that it appears to be by far the most comprehensive and fair-minded treatment of the civil rights movement published to date.

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