individual acts of defiance, such as lying in front of police cars or blocking rush-hour traffic with his car, were designed to call attention to the unresolved issues of the civil rights movement and to other problems in the larger community.

Both Lipsitz's long interviews with Perry and his careful checking of the accuracy of Perry's autobiographical details has resulted in another way of presenting a grassroots account of the struggle for social justice. Lipsitz's insistence upon placing Ivory Perry in the context of some European intellectual mode, that is, as an "organic intellectual," left Perry void of the "dream," and this separates him from the mainstream of civil rights protesters. While he made a path for others, he chose not to travel it himself. Because persons like Ivory Perry do not write their own stories but collaborate with professionals to produce "as told to" biographies, this type of book is the next best thing to an autobiography. Here is the well-presented story of an individual whose work made a difference for many but who gained little personally. I hope other historians will join Professor Lipsitz's quest and record details of other, similar lives "in the struggle."

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C. Alvin Hughes


The first volume of Taylor Branch's projected two-volume narrative is an extraordinary achievement. A deserving co-winner of the Pulitzer Prize in history in 1989, Parting the Waters is a rewarding reading experience and a major contribution to the literature of the modern black freedom struggle. Branch's comprehensive account synthesizes divergent streams of historical research. Focusing on Martin Luther King, Jr., but filled with vivid miniatures of many other activists, it builds upon the best previous biographies of King, assessments of the Kennedy administration's civil rights policies, and studies of the African-American freedom movement during what Branch subversively designates as America's "King years." No previous work has revealed so clearly the contrast between, on the one hand, the worldview of activists transformed by their experiences in the expanding southern struggle and, on the other hand, that of national liberal leaders, who consistently misunderstood the political implications of mass black activism, seeing it merely as a bothersome and potentially dangerous manifestation of discontent rather than as an effort to achieve constantly redefined racial aspirations.

The most original contribution of Branch's book is its sensitive treatment of the black Baptist church, which served as a vital institutional base for King and other civil rights leaders but which also remained divided by class and ideological differences. Branch provocatively begins his narrative with a moving portrayal of Vernon Johns, King's brilliant, eccentric predecessor at Montgomery's Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, who was a determined advocate of racial equality and economic cooperatives as well as a testy critic of middle-class pretentiousness. Although Branch overemphasizes Johns's
eccentricities, this prologue suggests the pioneering role of a group of black preachers and academic theologians—Mordecai Johnson, Howard Thurman, and George Kelsey were others—who prepared the way for King by forging an independent black tradition of Christian social criticism. Going beyond studies that simplistically note the importance of black churches as institutional bases for black protest movements, Branch reveals the complexity and diversity of black religious life in his account of King’s often bitter, unsuccessful struggle against fundamentalist leaders of the National Baptist Convention who strongly opposed his fusion of Christian and political values.

There is less original material in Branch’s detailed description of the Kennedy administration’s ambivalent relationship with the black struggle. Incorporating previous research by others, such as David J. Garrow—The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.: From ‘Solo’ to Memphis (New York, 1981) and Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (New York, 1986)—Branch documents the Kennedy administration’s acquiescence in repression by southern authorities and covert surveillance by the FBI. He disparages John Kennedy’s tepid, belated support for substantial civil rights reform. He portrays Harris Wofford, the King associate and advocate of Gandhian nonviolence who was nominally Kennedy’s civil rights advisor, as a person ridiculed or ignored by those who had the president’s confidence. Similarly, John Doar, one of the few U. S. Justice Department officials who understood embattled civil rights workers in the Deep South, had less influence on civil rights policies than did Byron R. White and Burke Marshall, both of whom had little sympathy for black activism. In explaining White’s support for Burke Marshall as his candidate to direct the Justice Department’s civil rights efforts, Branch sardonically defines the limitations of mainstream liberalism in the early 1960s: “Marshall . . . [had never] shown any interest in race issues. To Byron White, it was precisely his lack of expertise in the substance of civil rights that recommended Marshall to head the Civil Rights Division. In no other legal field was ignorance a qualification, but the race issue was so controversial that any history of personal interest was tantamount to a political statement” (p. 388). The black struggle ultimately prodded Kennedy into becoming an advocate of civil rights legislation, but Branch concludes that, after his death, Kennedy “gained credit for much of the purpose that King’s movement had forced upon him in life” (p. 918).

To note errors of omission in a massive work that still awaits its concluding volume is perhaps premature but nevertheless necessary, unless readers conclude that the definitive work has been written in a field that remains pregnant with possibilities. Although Branch acknowledges the courage of outspoken black dissenters during the Cold War era, he provides little insight into the intellectual ferment that characterized the black activist community of the early 1960s and that set the stage for the later black consciousness movements. In addition, Branch devotes insufficient attention to the women activists who played such major roles in the black struggle, rarely providing them with the amount of background information that brings to life Branch’s leading male subjects. For all its many virtues as social history, Parting
The Waters is nevertheless a work that does not fully depict the many dimensions of sustained grassroots movements that transformed black political life in many localities and that constantly pushed against the ideological and tactical limits imposed by national civil rights leaders.

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CLAYBORNE CARSON


A monograph with Martin Luther King, Jr., at its center rather than a King biography, this small volume examines the martyred black leader's role as primary shaper and principal "drum major" of nonviolent direct-action civil rights protest. The author both assesses King's contribution to the freedom struggle and traces the development of nonviolent protest from Montgomery (1955) to Chicago (1968) and Memphis (1968). His book contains eight chronologically arranged chapters, two previously published "interlude" essays (i.e., exegeses on the Birmingham jail letter and "The Paradox of Nonviolence"), a brief epilogue, and virtually no surprises. Employing Richard Gregg's apt phrase, Colaiaco describes direct action as "moral . . . jiu-jitsu" (p. 138), as a militant strategy of carefully orchestrated conflict and disruption designed to expose the injustice and violence of white supremacy, to garner media attention and broad public sympathy, and to force the intervention and active engagement of a reluctant federal government. He agrees with August Meier's assessment of King as a "'conservative militant'" (p. 89), a shrewd and practical field commander capable of compromise and acts of great courage who lost the support of northern white liberals and moderates only when his crusade shifted from civil to economic rights, from de jure racism to peace, housing, jobs, and health care. Although apparently sympathetic to the "Christian democratic socialist" agenda King articulated after 1966, Colaiaco accepts the prevailing scholarly consensus that, in the last phase of his protest leadership, King understood neither the limits of nonviolence direct action in an urban setting nor the differences between northern and southern black communities.

This book is based entirely on printed and (save for the published writings of King, James Farmer, Cleveland Sellers, and others) secondary sources. That problem leads quite logically to another: like all too many other King-centered studies, it seems likely to contribute to what Clayborne Carson calls "the King myth," the widespread and unfortunate popular notion that King was not only the preeminent civil rights leader but the "inventor"/instigator of the freedom struggle. Colaiaco knows better; in his introduction he observes "that King's fame was created by the movement," that "local activists . . . were instrumental" (p. 1) in the movement's origins and successes. But because Colaiaco has not used local sources and other manuscript materials he cannot adequately explore the nonviolent struggle at the community level or the ways in which the man was inspired and transformed by the movement's grassroots. Few southern blacks may have known of Gandhi, and fewer still could have pronounced satyagraha. But they knew Jesus, they