

Best Books on the Black American Freedom Struggle of the 1950s and 1960s



By David J. Garrow

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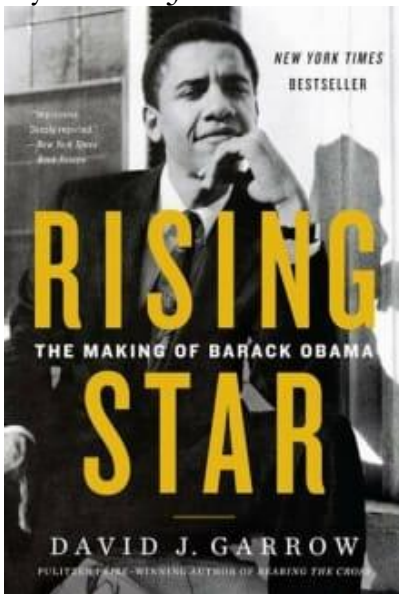
Who am I?

I'm a legal historian, best-known for *Bearing the Cross*, my Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Martin Luther King, Jr., but I've also written the standard history of *Roe v. Wade* (*Liberty and Sexuality*) as well as books on the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (*Protest at Selma*) and the FBI's pursuit of Dr. King (*The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.*). I've been a top advisor for both the landmark PBS documentary series *Eyes on the Prize* and for the Library of America's two-volume *Reporting Civil Rights*. More recently I've been featured in both the Academy Award-shortlisted documentary film *MLK/FBI* (Hulu) and in the Emmy Award-nominated documentary series *Who Killed Malcolm X?* (Netflix)

I wrote...

Rising Star: The Making of Barack Obama

By David J. Garrow



What is my book about?

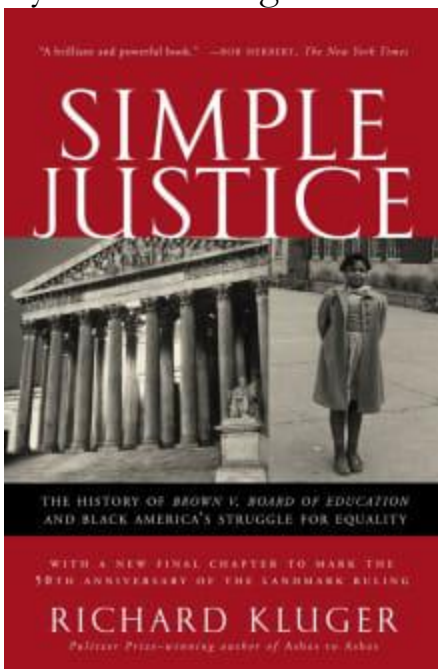
When Barack Obama won his first presidential primary in early 2008, I knew next to nothing about him and began reading his 1995 memoir, *Dreams From My Father*. Frustrated by Obama's use of pseudonyms for most of his acquaintances, and by the incurious profiles of him that journalistic outlets were offering up, I began what would become nine years of work researching Obama's life from his childhood in Hawaii

through his formative political years in Illinois politics and his break-through election to the U. S. Senate in 2004. I conducted more than 1,000 personal interviews for *Rising Star*, and Obama himself read most of the book in typescript in tandem with over eight hours of White House conversations between the two of us about it. Named by the *Washington Post* as one of the Ten Best Books of 2017, *Rising Star* made both the *New York Times* and *Publishers Weekly* bestseller lists, and will likely remain the definitive account of Obama's pre-presidential life.

The Books I Picked & Why

Simple Justice: The History of Brown V. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality

By Richard Kluger

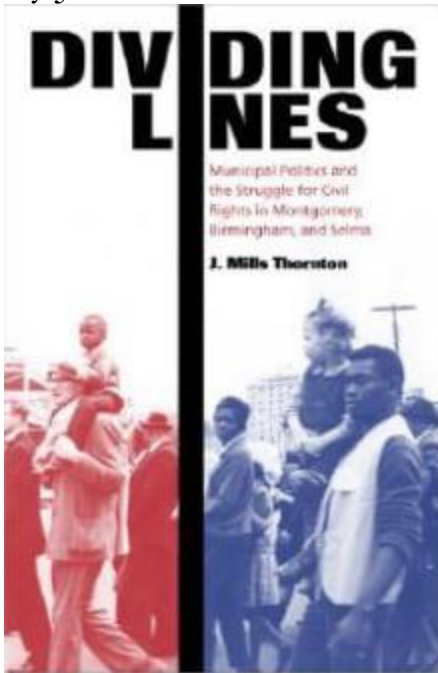


Why this book?

The U. S. Supreme Court's unanimous 1954 ruling striking down racially segregated schooling kick-started the emerging Black freedom struggle across the U. S. South. *Brown* was actually five cases combined, from different locales, and Kluger's masterful research richly and memorably details their roots in Black communities such as Clarendon County SC. NAACP litigators like Thurgood Marshall play major roles, but Kluger devotes great attention to how newly-arrived Chief Justice Earl Warren managed to unite his fellow justices behind a bombshell, landmark ruling. Constitutionally mandated desegregation would be no panacea for Black students and teachers, however, as David Cecelski's valuable *Along Freedom Road* reports from Hyde County, NC.

Dividing Lines: Municipal Politics and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Montgomery, Birmingham, and Selma

By J. Mills Thornton

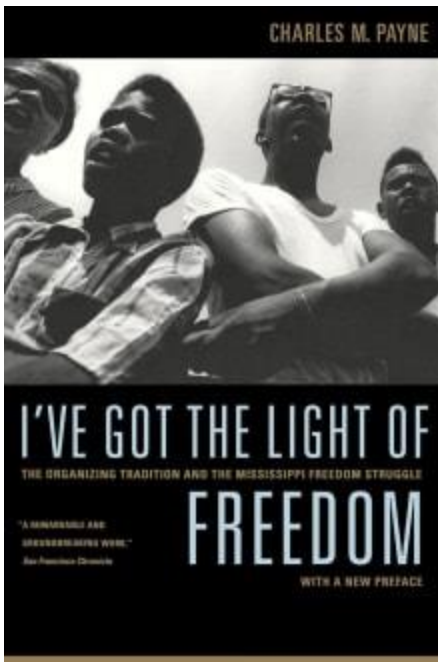


Why this book?

Black southern mass action against segregation commenced in Montgomery, AL with the 1955-56 bus boycott that catapulted Martin Luther King, Jr., to national fame, then finally broke through U. S. presidential ambivalence with the 1963 protests in Birmingham that were met with heavily-photographed police violence, and culminated with the 1965 Selma marches that led to the enactment of the Voting Rights Act. These three Alabama cities represent the cornerstones of that dramatic 1955-1965 decade, and Thornton's magisterial account of those movements' local roots make it perhaps *the* most interpretively significant work of civil rights history ever written. A very close second is Adam Fairclough's *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972*.

I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle

By Charles M. Payne

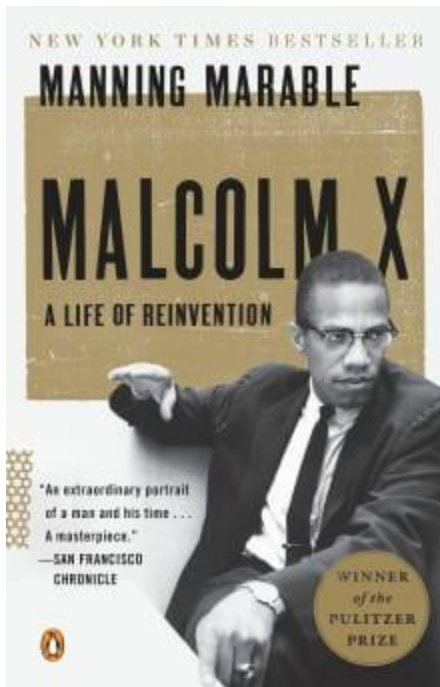


Why this book?

Outside cities like that famous Alabama trio, most of the civil rights movement's actual work took place in rural counties and small towns where combatting segregation could be even more dangerous than in Birmingham. Leading that charge was SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and Mississippi was the centerpiece of SNCC's courageous local organizing. Charles Payne powerfully and poignantly captures the beauty and the perils of that work while also painfully reporting how in subsequent decades memories of that bravery too quickly faded. Clayborne Carson's *In Struggle* remains the best organizational history of SNCC, and Francoise N. Hamlin's *Crossroads at Clarksdale* is like Payne's great book a valuable chronicle of Black courage and commitment in the Mississippi Delta.

Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention

By Manning Marable

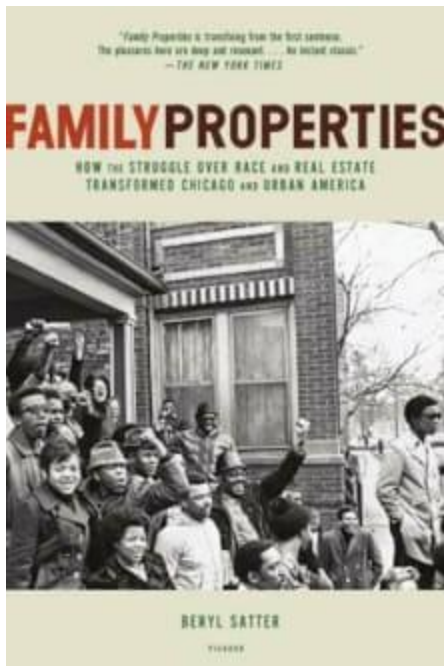


Why this book?

The Black freedom struggle of the 1960s was by no means limited to the South, and up until his tragic assassination in early 1965, no one better captured the often bitter anger of Black Americans trapped in exploitative Northern ghettos than the eloquent Malcolm X. An ex-con who rose to prominence in the sect-like Nation of Islam (NOI), Malcolm broke from the Nation's limiting strictures in early 1964 and blossomed as a powerful advocate of human equality, Black freedom, and a true Islamic faith before NOI gunmen ended his incredibly promising life at the tragically early age of 39. Manning Marable's Pulitzer Prize-winning biography offers unvarnished assessments and acute interpretive judgments while powerfully capturing Malcolm's ability to grow and reinvent himself multiple times.

Family Properties: How the Struggle Over Race and Real Estate Transformed Chicago and Urban America

By Beryl Satter



Why this book?

Purposefully racist policies in major Northern cities often focused on the financial exploitation of upwardly-aspiring African Americans, with government-endorsed predatory lending practices impoverishing—and often leaving homeless—thousands of Black home-buying families. “Redlining” may be a familiar word, but the actual mechanisms of financial discrimination require a penetrating, clear-eyed examination, and Beryl Satter’s powerful account of how last-resort ‘contract buying’ left newly-arrived Black residents in the West Side Chicago neighborhood of Lawndale vulnerable to being fleeced by racist manipulators is one of the most important books ever written about the Black freedom struggle in the north.
