

PARTING THE WATERS: America in the King Years 1954-63 by Taylor Branch. Simon & Schuster. 1988. 1064 pp. \$24.95.

FREEDOM SUMMER by Doug McAdam. Oxford, 1988. 333 pp. \$24.95

Although an artfully shaped biography of Martin Luther King, Jr., would in itself be a signal accomplishment—and enough to distinguish it from David Garrow's earlier, prize-winning chronicle of King's career (*Bearing the Cross*, 1986)—Branch has done much more: He has given us the first history of the American civil rights movement worthy of its subject. Right from the opening chapter, a survey of black church politics in Reconstruction Montgomery and a brief account of the life of the great black Baptist leader, Vernon Johns (1892-1965), Branch pulls back history's veil, revealing the thousands of individuals whose actions, sometimes heroic, sometimes selfish, sometimes inadvertently helpful, make up what seem to be the inevitable march of events. What the Whig historians called Progress is arrested in specific places and moments of time—a bus-station melee in Birmingham, Alabama, an explosive con-



frontation on the campus of Ole Miss, a phone conversation between President John Kennedy and one of his federal agents in the field—in which outcomes were anything but certain. King emerges as no saint; we see, instead, a man who made himself strong and galvanized a movement despite his weaknesses. The brothers Kennedy come across as ambivalent allies of the civil rights struggle, and J. Edgar Hoover

plays what was surely his worst hour on the American political stage.

If the first volume of Branch's history takes on the big story, McAdam focusses on one small but significant chapter. "It was the longest nightmare I ever had: three months—June, July, and August of 1964," recalls one of the thousand volunteers (mostly white college students from the North) who headed to Mississippi that "Freedom Summer." Registering black voters and working in "Freedom Schools," these idealistic men and women encountered the same discrimination and violence that Mississippi blacks had long endured. The experience profoundly disturbed their faith in freedom, opportunity, and protection under American law. More important, notes McAdam, a University of Arizona sociologist, their involvement that summer determined many of the volunteers' lifelong commitment to reform. In the late 1960s, as militant blacks took over the civil rights movement, white volunteers found themselves without standing in the struggle that had changed their lives; but most found the idea of reentering mainstream society unpalatable. Many shifted their zeal to new causes—peace, feminism, and the environment. In doing so, McAdam concludes, "they remained faithful to the political vision that drew them to Mississippi nearly a quarter of a century ago."

A HISTORY OF ISLAMIC SOCIETIES by Ira M. Lapidus. Cambridge, 1988. 1002 pp. \$42.50

If *A History of Christian Societies* were to appear in, say, Cairo, lumping together Christ's Middle East, Loyola's Spain, Russia of the Old Believers, and Jimmy Swaggart's fundamentalist South, it would be described as superficial. It would also mirror the way Islam is routinely treated in the West. No one should know this better than Lapidus, a University of California historian and author of *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages* (1967). Yet he himself has taken on the whole of Islamic history, carving it up, like Caesar's Gaul, into three parts: the origins from the seventh to 13th centuries; the spread of the Islamic order from the 10th to 19th centuries; the 19th- and 20th-century