

# WASHINGTON COLLEGE

## CITATION

### Taylor Branch

For almost a quarter of a century, Taylor Branch devoted his life to writing one of the greatest chapters of the American story: the moral and political struggle that, more than a century after Emancipation, finally secured full citizenship for the descendants of slaves. In the majestic narrative of Civil Rights, he found echoes of the Biblical Exodus, that other saga of a nation redeemed after long years in the wilderness.

A son of the South, Mr. Branch grew up following the Civil Rights movement on television and witnessing its reverberations in his native Georgia. After graduating from the University of North Carolina in 1968, he worked on voter-registration drives in African-American communities. A diary that he kept during this time developed into a magazine article for the *Washington Monthly* and launched his career as a writer.

Mr. Branch's trilogy *America in the King Years: 1954-1968*, is a monumental work in every sense, drawing on more than two decades of intensive research and covering more than 3,000 pages. Its first volume, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-63*, appeared in 1988 and was awarded both the Pulitzer Prize for History and the National Book Critics Circle Award for General Non-fiction. The second volume, *Pillar of Fire*, was published in 1998, and the third, *At Canaan's Edge*, in 2006. Together, they are widely considered one of the most important works of American history of the past generation.

Although the trilogy is much more than simply a biography of Dr. King, the great leader stands at its heart: striving for justice against all odds, challenging the conscience of his nation, and giving voice to words that would echo down through history. In Mr. Branch's eloquent telling, it becomes clear that although visionary men and women cannot make history alone, they can serve as lodestars for the forces of historic change, and as symbols and spokesmen for the hopes of an entire generation. The three books comprise an unforgettable portrait of leadership within a democratic society – both its triumphs and its failures. Mr. Branch's narrative makes clear that Dr. King deserves a place in the pantheon of American icons alongside George Washington and Abraham Lincoln.

In addition to several book prizes, including the 2006 National Book Award in history, Mr. Branch received a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship in 1991 and the National Humanities Medal in 1999. A longtime Maryland resident, he has also been a longtime friend of Washington College. In recognition of his exemplary achievement in making history through the writing of history, Washington College is pleased to confer on Taylor Branch the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters.

Baird Tipson  
President  
February 22, 2008

# B I O G R A P H Y

Taylor Branch

TAYLOR BRANCH, Pulitzer Prize-winning author, is a nationally renowned authority on the American Civil Rights movement. His trilogy of books, *America in the King Years*, 1954-1968, is one of the most important works of American history of the past generation. It is a monumental work in every sense, drawing on almost 25 years of intensive research and covering more than 3,000 pages. The final volume, *At Canaan's Edge*, appeared to great acclaim in 2006. *America in the King Years* "is not a biography of Dr. King," wrote Anthony Lewis in *The New York Times*. "It is a picture of the country and the times as he intersected with them.... It is a thrilling book, marvelous in both its breadth and its detail. There is drama in every paragraph." The New York Review of Books called the series nothing less than "an American *Iliad*."

The first volume in the King trilogy, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-63*, appeared in 1988 and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for History and the National Book Critics Circle Award for General Nonfiction. Mr. Branch received a five-year MacArthur Foundation Fellowship (also known as a "genius grant") in 1991 and the National Humanities Medal in 1999.