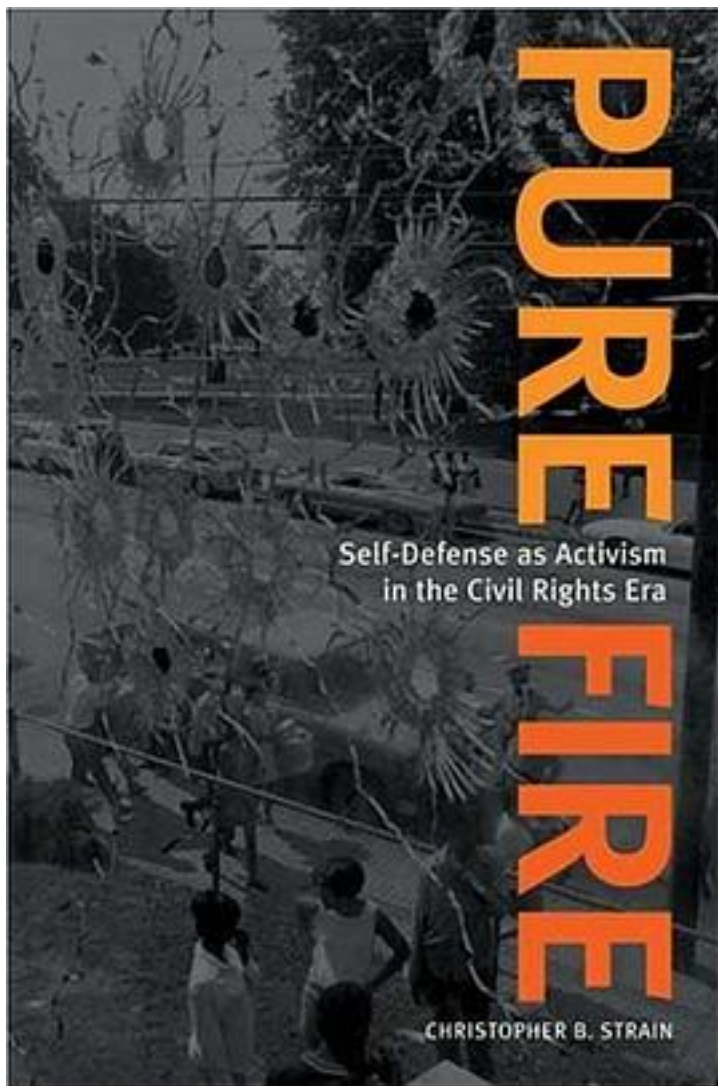


Pure Fire



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"Pure Fire" is a history of self-defense as it was debated and practiced during the civil rights era of the 1950s and 1960s. Moving beyond the realm of organized protests and demonstrations, Christopher B. Strain reframes self-defense as a daily concern for many African Americans as they faced the continual menace of white aggression. In such circumstances, deciding to defend oneself and one's family was to assert a long-denied right and, consequently, to adopt a liberating new attitude. To grasp the subtleties of this activist approach to self-defense in the struggle for black equality, Strain says we must break down the dichotomies of the movement constructed by journalists, scholars, and even activists: a pre-1965 era versus a post-1965 era, nonviolence versus violence, integration versus segregation, Martin Luther King Jr. versus Malcolm X. These and other oversimplifications have led to a blurring of distinctions between the violence of racial animosity and the necessary force of self-defense, and to the misinterpretation of nonviolence as passivity. "Pure Fire" looks anew at such familiar figures as Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, and Huey Newton, as well as issues and events including gun ownership, the Watts riot of 1965 in Los Angeles, and the rise of the Black Panther Party. It also profiles Robert F. Williams of North Carolina, Charles Sims of the Louisiana-based Deacons for Defense and Justice, and other outspoken black advocates of armed self-defense. This provocative new study reveals how self-defense underpinned notions of personhood, black advancement, citizenship, and "Americanness," holding deep implications for civil rights, civil liberties, and human rights.

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