

## Sheila Smith McKoy

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Pearl Cleage, *Till You Hear From Me* (New York: Random House 2010), 288 pp.

One of the most endearing qualities of Pearl Cleage's novels is her ability to blend the dynamic interactions of popular culture with the intricacies of cultural criticism. And, while her work is certainly focused on the right of women of African descent to be free women—that is, women who are committed to their own spiritual, intellectual, social and sexual wholeness—she provides a framework through which her characters note that this freedom is possible in partnership with those who are not women of African descent. The formula has worked well for her series of novels set in the West End section of Atlanta beginning with the first fully-realized portrait of the West End community, reclaimed from the violence of Black male misogyny in *Some Things I Never Thought I'd Do* (2004). In most of her West End-centered novels, Cleage enables her readers to embrace a re-structured racial narrative as well. In *Till You Hear from Me*, Cleage not only presents the first full-length novel focused on the ascendancy of Barack Obama to the presidency, she also requires that her readers examine the concept of the “the one”—the one Black hero, the lone leader positioned to change the racial world in which we live—that has been so prevalent in African American culture and politics. That she does so in a novel that is rooted in the peculiar racial and ideological alliances that emerged in Obama's America, is a testimony both to Cleage's creative and her political genius.

When Barack Obama was elected to the presidency on November 2, 2008, the racial roots of America's political system were undoubtedly showing. Undeniably, Obama was “the one,” even as many of the fixtures of the African American political arena—as the Jesse Jackson and Jeremiah Wright debacles suggests—were sidelined. The space of “the one” has been integral to African American social and political mobility in American culture. Even the earliest political texts written by writers of African descent suggest that the possibility of freedom rested on the shoulders of “the one” who would be the messiah of racial liberation. Certainly, however, as Cleage asks her readers to note, this focus keeping vigil for the single, charismatic leader of “African America” has had its social and tragic consequences. In *Till You Hear from Me*, Cleage assembles a cast of characters who provide ample evidence of the