

Book Review: "Things I should have told my daughter"

Written by Kam Williams

"In addition to being one of the most popular living playwrights in America, Pearl Cleage is a best-selling author with an Oprah Book Club pick and multiple awards to her credit... In this deeply personal work, Cleage takes readers back to the 1970s and '80s, retracing her struggles to hone her craft amidst personal and professional tumult...

Lies, Lessons and Love Affairs charts not only the political fights, but also the pull she began to feel to focus on her own passions, including writing... as she grappled with ideas of feminism and self-fulfillment.

In the tradition of greats like Susan Sontag, Joan Didion, and Nora Ephron, Cleage's self-portrait raises women's confessional writing to the level of great literature... This fascinating memoir follows her journey from a columnist for a local weekly to a playwright and Hollywood scriptwriter whose circle came to include luminaries like Richard Pryor, Avery Brooks, Phylicia Rashad, Shirley Franklin, and Jesse Jackson."

-- Excerpted from Book Jacket

Pearl Cleage is the daughter of Reverend Albert Cleage (1911-2000), the legendary Detroit cleric and founder of the Shrine of the Black Madonna. The author of such groundbreaking books as "The Black Messiah" (1968) and "Black Christian Nationalism: New Directions for the Black Church" (1970), he also spearheaded a seminal movement to reposition Jesus Christ as a darker-skinned man of African descent.

Given the times and her charismatic father's prominence, it only makes sense that Pearl would develop an interest in the Civil Rights Movement during her formative years. In fact, she would become fascinated with the tactics and philosophy of progressive student organizations like SNCC and SDS.

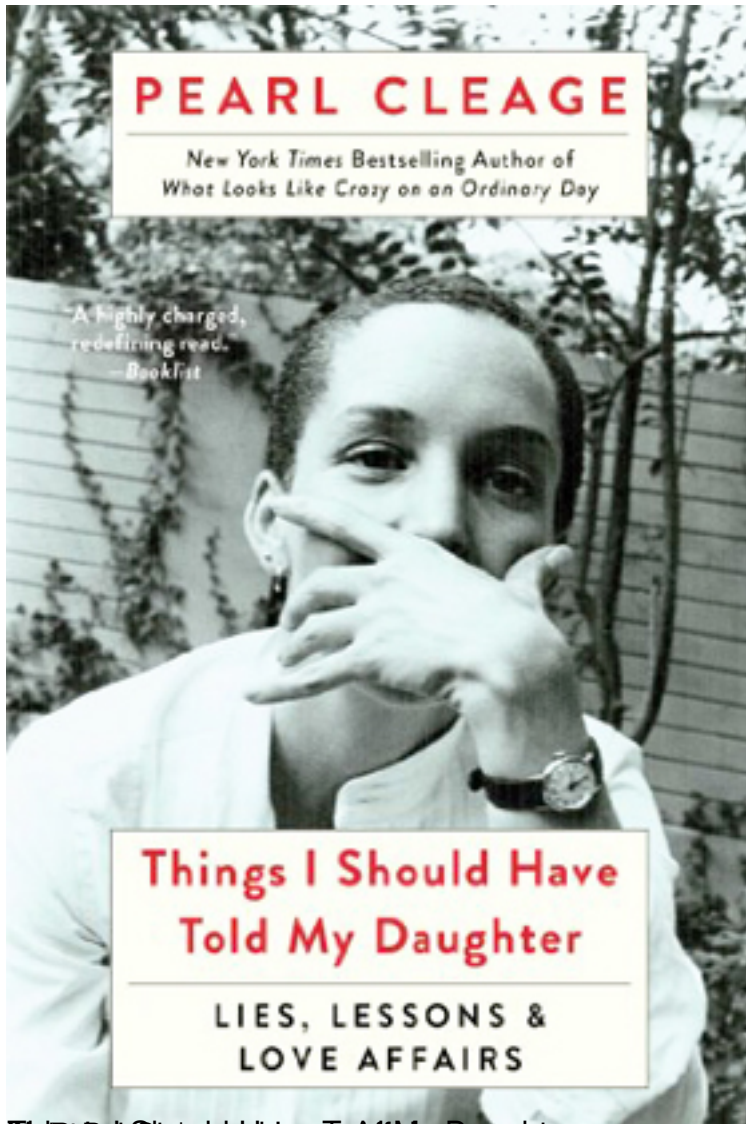
We are now privy to this because, beginning in 1970, Pearl kept a detailed diary of her intimate insights about her day-to-day life. And like a lot of sisters, she had her concerns about the patriarchal attitudes of leaders which left females feeling marginalized.

For example, on March 27, 1970, she mused, "What a revolution. Stokely [Carmichael] said the place of the woman in the revolution should be prone." So, it is no surprise that Pearl, would eventually tire of such sexist subjugation, and reject being relegated to second-class status in favor of a path of self-fulfillment. Her ensuing transformation into a feminist writer juggling marriage and motherhood is the subject of "Things I Should Have Told My Daughter: Lies, Lessons and Love Affairs". The memoir is essentially a series of refreshingly-frank journal entries recorded by the author between 1970 and 1988, covering periods of both quiet reflection and tremendous upheaval in what's been a very eventful life thus far.

A revealing peek into the ever-evolving soul of an African-American literary icon.

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