

## Text Analysis

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### *A Song for Coretta*

Pearl Cleage

#### I. About Pearl Cleage

##### a. *Excerpted from www.pearlcleage.net*

Pearl Cleage is an Atlanta based writer whose work has won commercial acceptance and critical praise in several genres. An award winning playwright whose **Flyin' West** was the most produced new play in the country in 1994, Pearl is also a best selling author whose first novel, **What Looks Like Crazy On An Ordinary Day**, was an *Oprah Book Club* pick and spent nine weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list. Her subsequent novels have been consistent best sellers and perennial book club favorites. **I Wish I Had A Red Dress**, her second novel, won multiple book club awards in 2001. **Some Things I Never Thought I'd Do**, was a "Good Morning America!" book club pick in 2003, and *Babylon Sisters* made the *ESSENCE Magazine* best seller list in 2005. Her most recent novel, **Baby Brother's Blues**, was the first pick of the new *ESSENCE Book Club* and an *NAACP Image Award* winner for fiction in 2007. In the March 2007 issue of *ESSENCE*, Pearl had two books on the best seller list, **Baby Brother's Blues** and **We Speak Your Names**, a poetic celebration commissioned by Oprah Winfrey and co-authored with her husband, writer Zaron W. Burnett, Jr. The poem was also an *NAACP Image Award* nominee in 2007. Pearl was a popular columnist with *The Atlanta Tribune* for ten years and has contributed as a free lance writer to *ESSENCE*, *Ms.*, *Rap Pages*, *VIBE* and *Ebony*. Her recent play, **A Song for Coretta**, played to sold out audiences during its Atlanta premiere in February of 2007 and will be produced at Atlanta's Seven Stages Theatre in February of 2008 in preparation for a national tour.

Pearl's work occupies a unique niche in contemporary African American fiction. **Her characters are as complex and multi-faceted** as her readers lives and their balancing of work, love and family (not necessarily in that order!) ring true to those who eagerly await each novel. She balances issues as challenging as AIDS, domestic violence and urban blight, **but the distinguishing features of her books are her optimism, her commitment to positive change and transformation**, and her unwavering faith in the possibility and power of romantic love. The creation of good, believable, desirable men -- as well as the women who love them! -- is a hallmark of Pearl's fiction and her readers are quick to mention their fondness for Eddie Jefferson, the dread locked hero of **What Looks Like Crazy On An Ordinary Day**, Nate Anderson, the weight lifting high school principal

in **I Wish I Had a Red Dress**, Burghardt Johnson, the globetrotting journalist in **Babylon Sisters**, or their all time favorite, the mysterious Blue Hamilton, a former R&B singer turned neighborhood godfather, who is at the center of both **Baby Brother's Blues** and **Some Things I Never Thought I'd Do**, where his character is first introduced. This character, with his amazing blue eyes and remembrance of past lives, not only keeps the peace, but falls deeply in love and isn't afraid to show it. His relationship with Regina Burns is at the heart of both books and has made him one of Pearl's most popular characters.

Pearl is married to Zaron W. Burnett, Jr., with whom she frequently collaborates. She has one daughter, Deignan, and two grandchildren, Chloe and Michael.

## II. About Coretta Scott King

a. *Excerpted from Wikipedia.com*

b. **Coretta Scott King** (April 27, 1927 – January 30, 2006) was an American author and activist, and widow of Martin Luther King, Jr. Alongside her husband, Coretta Scott King helped lead the African-American Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. Scott King's most prominent role may have been in the years after her husband's 1968 assassination; following Dr. King's death, Mrs. King was responsible for finding a new leader of the civil rights movement; when Josephine Baker and others turned down the leadership position, Mrs. King took on the mantle of leadership herself, remaining an important voice in American politics until her death in 2006.

Coretta Scott King played an extremely important role in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Martin wrote of her that, "I am indebted to my wife Coretta, without whose love, sacrifices, and loyalty neither life nor work would bring fulfillment. She has given me words of consolation when I needed them and a well-ordered home where Christian love is a reality." However, Martin and Coretta did conflict over her public role in the movement. Martin wanted Coretta to focus on raising their four children, while Coretta wanted to take a more public leadership role.

Scott King took part in the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955 and took an active role in advocating for civil rights legislation. Most prominently, perhaps, she worked hard to pass the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

Not long after her husband's death, Coretta approached the African-American entertainer and activist Josephine Baker to take her husband's place as leader of The Civil Rights Movement. After many days of thinking it over Baker declined, stating that her twelve adopted children (known as the "rainbow tribe") were "... *too young to lose their mother.*"[5]

Coretta Scott King decided to take the helm of the movement herself after her husband's assassination in 1968, although she broadened

her focus to include women's rights, GLBT rights, economic issues, world peace, and various other leftist causes. As early as December 1968, she called for women to "unite and form a solid block of women power to fight the three great evils of racism, poverty and war," during a Solidarity Day speech.[6]

As leader of the movement, Scott King founded the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta, Georgia. She served as the center's president and CEO from its inception until she passed the reigns of leadership to son Dexter Scott King.

She published her memoirs, *My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr.*, in 1969. Coretta Scott King was also under surveillance by the Federal Bureau of Investigation from 1968 until 1972. Her husband's activities had been monitored during his lifetime. Documents obtained by a Houston, Texas television station show that the FBI worried that King would "tie the anti-Vietnam movement to the civil rights movement." [7] A spokesman for the King family said that they were aware of the surveillance, but had not realized how extensive it was.

After her husband was assassinated on April 4, 1968, she began attending a commemorative service at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta to mark her husband's birth every January 15 and fought for years to make it a national holiday. Murray M. Silver, Esq., Atlanta Attorney, made the Appeal at the Services on 1/14/1979. Coretta Scott King later confirmed that it was the "...best, most productive appeal ever..." King was finally successful in this in 1986, when Martin Luther King, Jr. Day was made a federal holiday.

The current and most living former U.S. Presidents and their wives attended, excepting the Ford family, which was absent due to illness, and Barbara Bush, who had a previous engagement. Numerous other political and prominent civil rights leaders, including Barack Obama [1], attended the televised service.

### III. About Coretta's Funeral

- a. Over 14,000 people gathered for King's eight-hour funeral at the New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Lithonia, Georgia on February 7, 2006 where daughter Bernice King, who is an elder at the church, eulogized her mother. The megachurch, whose sanctuary seats 10,000, was better able to handle the expected massive crowds than Ebenezer Baptist Church, of which King was a member since the early 1960s and which was the site of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s funeral in 1968.
- b. King's body also lay at historic Ebenezer Baptist Church, the church where her husband had been pastor.

### IV. About Ebenezer Baptist Church

- a. *Excerpted from Wikipedia.com*  
Ebenezer Baptist Church is a Gothic revival-style building located within the National Historic Site. In 1922, the congregation moved

into this church on Auburn Avenue. Martin Luther King Sr. became pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in 1931, succeeding his father-in-law, A.D. Williams. Martin Jr., his eldest son, grew up attending services at Ebenezer, and succeeded his father and maternal grandfather as pastor in 1960. He remained in that position until his death in 1968.

Ebenezer was headquarters for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference where Martin worked as a civil rights leader. Many of the Civil Rights Movement's mass meetings, rallies and strategy sessions were held in this historic sanctuary and fellowship hall. A number of Martin's great sermons were given at the church; "The American Dream" (July 4, 1965), "The Drum Major Instinct" (February 4, 1968), and "Unfulfilled Dreams" (March 3, 1968).[4]

As a final farewell to his spiritual home, Dr. King, Jr.'s funeral was held in the church.[5]

The Baptist congregation moved to a new sanctuary across the street, the historic Ebenezer Baptist Church is open to the public for self-guided tours, and used occasionally for special services.

In 2001, thanks to a Save America's Treasures Grant and the contributions of many individuals and corporations, the National Park Service began the restoration. "Phase I" included design and installation of major systems including, electrical, heating and air conditioning, and fire suppression. Structural repairs were made to the roof system and the historic exterior Ebenezer sign was repaired and lit for the first time since 1990. A chair lift was installed to provide accessibility to the sanctuary. The funding for "Phase I" involved a private and public partnership and cost \$1,885,000. "Phase II" of the project will restore the appearance of the sanctuary and fellowship hall to the 1960-1968 period when Dr. King served as co-pastor with his father. Special work items include preservation of stain glass windows; restoration/replication of furnishings; repair of balcony structural system; rehabilitation of restrooms; abatement of asbestos-containing flooring; treatment of termite infestation/damage; installation of a lightning protection system; improvement of site drainage; and restoration of a sidewalk, baptistery, and pipe organ and its antiphonal.

On September 10, 2007 Ebenezer was closed for at least a year to begin its "Phase II" Restoration Project. "Phase II", an approximately \$4 million, federally funded project will focus on the church's historical architecture and cosmetic design. It will include a combination of restoration and preservation treatments. When "Phase II" is completed visitors will be able to fully experience the church that supported the family, spiritual and cultural development of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. from the early age of five, when he was baptized there, to his last days of thirty nine years on April 9, 1968.[6]

V. About SuperDome

a. *Excerpted from Wikipedia.com*

b. The Louisiana Superdome was used as a "shelter of last resort" for those in New Orleans unable to evacuate from Hurricane Katrina when it struck in late August 2005.

This was the third time the dome had been used as a shelter; it was previously used in 1998 during Hurricane Georges and in 2004 during Hurricane Ivan. During Georges, the Superdome had no problems related to the weather, but the evacuees stole furniture and damaged property that resulted in thousands of dollars in losses, and there were difficulties supplying the more than 14,000 people living temporarily in the dome with necessities. About a thousand special-needs patients were housed there when Ivan hit the area.

Despite these previous periods of emergency use, as Katrina approached the city, officials had still not stockpiled enough generator fuel, food, and other supplies to handle the needs of the thousands of people seeking refuge there. According to an article in *Time*, "Over the years city officials have stressed that they didn't want to make it too comfortable at the Superdome since it was safer to leave the city altogether. 'It's not a hotel,' the director of emergency preparedness for St. Tammany Parish told the Times-Picayune in 1999." [1]

Approximately 9,000 residents and 550 National Guardsmen rode out the night in the Superdome as Katrina came ashore. Maj. Gen. Bennett C. Landreneau, Adjutant General for the Louisiana National Guard, said that the number of people taking shelter in the Superdome rose to around 15,000 to 20,000 as search and rescue teams brought more people to the Superdome from areas hit hard by the flooding. During Katrina, officials set up security checkpoints, and confiscated alcohol, weapons, and illicit drugs from those seeking refuge in the building.[2]

The Superdome was built to withstand most catastrophes; the roof was ostensibly estimated to be able to withstand winds with speeds of up to 200 mph (320 km/h); flood waters could still possibly reach the second level 20 feet (6.1 m) from the ground, making the structure an unreliable shelter in severe rain and wind. When looking into the origins of this 200 mph (320 km/h) wind security in the Superdome, CNN reported that no engineering study had ever been completed on the amount of wind the structure can withstand; the building's engineering study was underway as Hurricane Katrina approached and was put on hold. It was used as an emergency shelter although it was neither designed nor tested for the task. However, the damage to the roof was not catastrophic, with just two relatively small holes and the ripping off of most of the easily replaceable white rubber membrane on the outer layer.

On August 29, 2005, at about 9:00 AM EDT, reports from inside the Superdome were that part of the roof was "peeling off," daylight could

be seen from inside the dome, and rain was pouring in. The Associated Press stated there were two holes, "each about 15 to 20 feet (6.1 m) long and 4 to 5 feet (1.5 m) wide," and that water was making its way in at elevator shafts and other small openings.[3]

That same morning of August 29, during an interview on ABC news, Governor Kathleen Blanco called the Superdome shelter strategy an "experiment," when asked if it could hold the storm or the flood.[*citation needed*]

Despite the planned use of the Superdome as an evacuation center, government officials at the local, state and federal level came under criticism for poor planning and preparation. On August 28, the Louisiana National Guard delivered three truckloads of water and seven truckloads of MREs (meals ready to eat), enough to supply 15,000 people for three days. There was no water purification equipment on site, no chemical toilets, no antibiotics and no anti-diarrheals stored for a crisis. There were no designated medical staff at work in the evacuation center. There was no established sick bay within the Superdome, and there were very few cots available that hadn't been brought in by evacuees. The mayor of New Orleans had, in fact, stated that as a "refuge of last resort," only limited food, water, and supplies would be provided. Residents who evacuated to the Superdome were warned to bring their own supplies.

When the flooding began on August 30, the Superdome began to slowly fill with water, though it remained confined to the field level.

Later that day, Governor Blanco ordered New Orleans completely evacuated.[2] On August 31, it was announced that the Superdome refugees would move to the Reliant Astrodome in Houston, Texas.

With no power and no water, sanitary conditions within the Superdome had rapidly deteriorated.[4] As of August 31, there had been three deaths in the Superdome: two elderly medical patients and a man who is believed to have committed suicide by jumping from the upper level seats. There were also unconfirmed reports of rape, vandalism, violent assaults, crack dealing/drug abuse, and gang activity inside the Superdome. On September 11, New Orleans Police Superintendent Eddie Compass reported there were "no confirmed reports of any type of sexual assault." [5]

National Guardsmen accompanied by buses (475 total) and supply trucks arrived at the Superdome on September 1. The buses were sent to pick up the evacuees from the Superdome and the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, where more than 20,000 people had been crowded in similarly poor living conditions. 13,000 evacuees were taken to the Reliant Astrodome in Houston. By September 4, the last large group of refugees in the Superdome had been evacuated.

On September 6, speculation arose that the Louisiana Superdome could have to be demolished. "[6]