

# [***Book Review: A coming-of-age story of a young Black man who works for an Obama-adjacent candidate***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BHT-8MJ1-JC5B-G1T0-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Vinson Cunningham, theater critic for the New Yorker, makes a cheeky move with his debut novel, “Great Expectations.” He borrows the title of Charles Dickens’ masterpiece to tell a different sort of coming-of-age story. His is about a young Black man, David, who goes to work for the first presidential campaign of an unnamed U.S. senator trying to become the nation’s first African American chief executive.

Loosely based on his own life — Cunningham worked on Barack Obama’s 2008 campaign and later, as a staff assistant in the White House — the novel lacks the twisty plot and unforgettable characters of its namesake. However, Cunningham-as-David is an astute observer of the role that money plays in U.S. ***politics*** and the seductive allure of access to powerful and charismatic political leaders like Obama.

In this novel he explores the racial and religious dimensions of both the candidate and his campaign, recognizing at the start “that Black-pulpit touch” when the senator announced his bid for the nation’s highest office in front of the Illinois statehouse on a frigid, sunny day in early 2007. I “felt almost flattered by the feeling — new to me — of being pandered to so directly by someone who so nakedly wanted something in return,” thinks David, who grew up in a Pentecostal church.

We meet him soon after he has flunked out of college and returned home to New York to live with his mother and help care for the child he fathered with a woman referred to only as “the dancer.” To make ends meet, he starts to tutor the son of a glamorous Black investment banker and early patron of the junior senator. Her role as a major fundraiser, and her improbable affair with David, allow Cunningham to explore the chicanery of campaign finance.

With cameos of real-life celebrities including Cornel West, Henry Louis Gates Jr. and the late André Leon Talley, as well as scenes set in Oak Bluffs on Martha’s Vineyard, the redoubt of the Black bourgeoisie, this book is sure to be catnip to those who believed in that hopey changey thing of long ago.

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