

RACE, RACISM AND RACIAL HERITAGE REFLECTED IN BOOKER T. WASHINGTON'S UP FROM SLAVERY AND BARACK OBAMA'S DREAMS FROM MY FATHER: A COMPARISON

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Abstract

Once W. E.B. Du Bois proclaimed that "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line." The time has come to speculate on the issues of racism in specific and race-dimension in general. Though Booker T. Washington and Barack Obama are divided by a time of a century, they show enigmatic similarities in their approach to evaluate race as a parameter to understand the human cosmos. In their autobiographies these two personalities have thrown light on their encounter with the racial consciousness in a nation where race is more than a skin-colour. The present article conducts a comparative study of these two autobiographies from the spectrum of racial facets.

Keywords: - *Racial Consciousness, Racial Apartheid, Racial Genomics, Racial Identity, Racial Inheritance.*

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One of the greatest African American literary luminaries, Du Bois once claimed that "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line." (Sdonline, Web) His rationale behind the said claim is that there is an inherent error in human judgment which prefers the race as a yardstick to measure a human achievement. And literature as an institution has criticized over this fallacy. The works of Booker T. Washington and Obama are the premium examples for that.

In *Dreams From My Father*, Obama unveils his life history, which is engulfed by his first hand experience about racism and chauvinism. He compares his encounter with race as a phenomenon with an ideology and a mechanism. Particularly, he comments on the racism he has experienced in America and Africa. In *Up From Slavery*, Booker T. Washington uncovers the procedure and behavior of racism in mainland America. He shares his encounter with the American consciousness as a slave-born.

In *Dreams From My Father* Obama reveals the existence of racism in main-land America as well as islands of America i.e. Hawaii. He forwards his father's encounter against racism, at the time when Civil Rights Movement was in full swing. (Obama, *Dreams From My Father*, 11) At that time a considerable stratum of the whites believed in the unreasonable Jim Crow moral and legal code. This stratum also kept opinionated in the opposition to African American dignity and survival. (Obama, *Dreams From My Father*, 18)

The then contemporary White supremacists forcefully employ bigotry in schools and other academic educational institutions. Hence, most of the white broods were conditioned to suppose in the white ascendancy. Thus in a nutshell, we can say, from the

very premature time, these kids were taught that the whites are the preferred populace and blacks were by default filthy people.

In this fashion, Obama is revealing how the defected system of racism is isolating millions of blacks from the larger white society. He even questions that how a nation-state which claims liberty, equality and fraternity somehow accepts racism in day-to-day life on day-to-day basis. This frightening and lurid analogy experiences embossed an undeviating scratch on Obama's conscience. In *Dreams From My Father* one of characters penetratingly reviles the racial segregation as following:

It is this world, a world where cruise ships throw away more food in a day than most residents of Port-au-Prince see in a year, where white folks' greed runs a world in need, apartheid in one hemisphere, apathy in another hemisphere... That's the world! On which hope sits!" (Obama, *Dreams From My Father*, 293)

On the other hand, Washington has a different definition for racism and approach for racial amalgamation. He saw racism as an entity which dehumanizes both the parties. He thought that the racism is equally detrimental for whites and blacks equally. He thought the whites have wretched and pitiable stipulations. Another charge of his perspective against racism was that this evil practice has deteriorated the concept of labour. Racism connected labour with a race and degraded the ethics of labour. In this autobiography, Washington avers, "The whole machinery of slavery, was so constructed as to cause labour, as a rule, to be looked upon as a badge of degradation, of inferiority." (Washington, *Up From Slavery*, 9)

Obama's autobiography is a classical example of Bildungsroman-style account of his journey during these dilemmas. (Allen) In this work Obama is revealing his concept of his encounter with the race, racism and racial segregation. Washington on the other hand is trying to redefine the above mentioned concepts and experiences. Both of them are trying their level best to focus on the conflict between social convention of race and individual fight of existentialism.

Both Washington and Obama in their autobiographies have pondered on that fact that how significant it is to live for a recognized life. They asserted that irrespective of race-barriers blacks should strive to be a dimension of the greater American society. According to Obama and Washington it is not about the allotment of full citizenship but its implementation in the grey area of racial genomics and racial identity.

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