

THE LEGACY OF INHERITANCE AND HERITAGE ECHOED IN
BOOKER T WASHINGTON'S UP FROM SLAVERY AND BARACK
OBAMA'S DREAMS FROM MY FATHER: A BRIEF COMPARISON

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...
*"People say you're born innocent, but it's not true.
You inherit all kinds of things that you can do nothing about.
You inherit your identity, your history, like a birthmark that
you can't wash off. ... We are born with our heads turned back,
but my mother says we have to face into the future now. You
have to earn your own innocence, she says. You have to grow up
and become innocent."*^[1]

— *Hugo Hamilton, The Sailor in the Wardrobe*

Heritage is perhaps the most important treasure that any culture could possess and boast of. The wealth of heritage is undoubtedly the warehouse of potentials of a race, culture or even a nation. Unfortunately this hypothesis was rarely applied to the Non-European milieu and discourse especially by Euro-centric discourse framers. This jaundiced view has also underestimated the African American triumphs and achievements. This is really a scar on the face of intelligentsia of our time.

For a quite fair long time, the white supremacists robustly believed and propagated that African Americans are ethically unsophisticated, socially primitive and politically uncultured. Therefore, they don't accede to any kind of tradition. In short, they are brutes in the disguise of humans with no recognizable cultural values, ethical ideals and moral doctrines. This unfair view has populated the outlook to evaluate a great civilization.

In spite of these negative evaluations and feedbacks many Black writers, politicians and philosophers tried to oppose this doctrine of white supremacy in their discourses. Two tall figures of African American milieu Booker T. Washington and Obama are not exception to that. Both of them in their monumental autobiographies tried to invalidate the very crux of the myth of white supremacy.

Both of these social and literary figures proclaim the sagacity of heritage as a critical and crucial part of social existence, cultural subsistence and political survival. They are of the opinion that a race and a group devoid of the pertinent understanding and comprehension of its tradition and inheritance would fail fight against the challenge of the prospect.

Both these authors directed the African Americans to know their prosperous and prolific history of struggle, resistance and survival. According to Washington, the greatest tradition would be able to stretch out a helping hand towards the needy and less fortunate. In his autobiography, *Up From Slavery*, Washington proclaims, “*I pity the man, black or white, who has never experienced the joy and satisfaction that come to one by reason of an effort to assist in making someone else more useful and more happy.*”^[2]

Washington though didn't know his family history as he was born a slave and hence his knowledge about ancestral record is out of question. He declares that African Americans have one of the most magnificent cultures of the globe. Therefore they must consider themselves as the splendid successors of the Great Black Culture. In this way, the black youth will be able to demolish their inferiority complex in relation to their account of repression and negligence.

On the other hand, Obama's search for bequest is much more existential one. As a keen black young man he always found himself to be a stranger among his own fellow citizens. In his masterpiece *Dreams From My Father*, Barack Obama adores the gospels of his complex, intricate and at some extent mystic tradition of inheritance. In his autobiography he unearths this impasse about his conception and understanding of his Greater Heritage.

Unlike Washington young Obama was afraid of the fact that he represents a complex roots from different backgrounds stretching from one continent to other. He thought he is bound to remain a stranger in the much larger society. Hence he is destined to be neither part of white civilization, not the black the social order. For this identity crisis he points out towards his multifarious and compound biracial background. In *Dreams from My Father* he laments-

The constant, crippling fear that I didn't belong somehow, that unless I dodged and hid and pretended to be something I wasn't I would forever remain an outsider, with the rest of the world, black and white, always standing in judgment.”^[3]

Unlike Washington, Obama articulates that the individual bequest and a shared heritage are two sides of the same coin. He further clarifies that with no milestone campaigns like Antislavery Campaign and the Civil Rights Movement he would not have understood his concealed and furtive legacy of heritage. Civil Rights Movement is one of milestones in human history as it bestowed the essential political rights by destroying the super-structure of “Separate but Equal” policy.^[4] In spite of these differences, Washington and Obama in their respective autobiographies, glorify the foundation of their heritage at their best.

References:-

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3. Obama, Barack. *Dreams From My Father*. Chicago: Canongate Books, 2004, P. 111
4. "Civil Rights Movement." Edited by History.com Staff, History.com, A&E Television Networks, Nov. 2009, www.history.com/topics/black-history/civil-rights-movement. (Accessed on 21 November 2017, 06pm)

