

“In Search of Sun”: Self-Fashioning in the Autobiographies of Langston Hughes and Barack Obama

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Autobiography is a genre that foregrounds the way that literary forms construct subjectivity. This paper analyzes and compares the autobiographies of Langston Hughes and Barack Obama. Langston Hughes' *The Big Sea* (1940) and *I Wonder as I Wander* (1956) recount his experiences in Harlem and abroad, focusing on the twenties and thirties. Barack Obama's *Dreams from My Father* (2004) written over a decade before he became president, recounts his younger life leading up to his admission to Harvard Law School. The central concern of this comparative study is to examine the degree to which ideology imposes structures of meaning on the private self as it is articulated for public consumption. In particular, this paper compares the autobiographies of Hughes and Obama in terms of their fraught relationships with their respective fathers (both symbolic and literal), the significance of travel and the meaning of homeland, and their formulations of authenticity as they negotiate the racial stereotypes of their times. These comparative points will lead to some concluding claims about the persevering exigency of creating a coherent life-story, even in an age when the academic humanities suspiciously deconstruct such endeavors.