

Abstract

In the introduction to Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance, Barack Obama describes his book as "a boy's search for his father, and through that search a workable meaning for his life as a black American." Although Obama begins by searching for his father, he concludes by discovering a definition for himself the identification black American. In this brief description, Obama encapsulates the whole of his narrative and the startling metaphoric journey of the text: how Obama will come to supplant his own father and ultimately become the object of his search. He responds to the absence of his father by gaining such insight into himself and his family as to obviate the wisdom a paternal figure might bestow. In this paper, I trace the development of Obama's relationship to the paternal as a literary trope throughout Dreams From My Father, arguing that he fashions a father in his own image; his representation of Barack Senior and his grandfather, Onyango, ultimately reflect the man he already is.