



Barack Obama and the Rhetoric of Hope

Mark S. Ferrara

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The historical and literary antecedents of the President's campaign rhetoric can be traced to the utopian traditions of the Western world. The "rhetoric of hope" is a form of political discourse characterized by a forward-looking vision of social progress brought about by collective effort and adherence to shared values (including discipline, temperance, a strong work ethic, self-reliance and service to the community).

By combining his own personal story (as the biracial son of a white mother from Kansas and a black father from Kenya) with national mythologies like the American Dream, Obama creates a persona that embodies the moral values and cultural myths of his implied audience. In doing so, he draws upon the Classical world, Judeo-Christianity, the European Enlightenment, the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights, the presidencies of Jefferson, Lincoln, and FDR, slave narratives, the Black church, the civil rights movement and even popular culture.

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