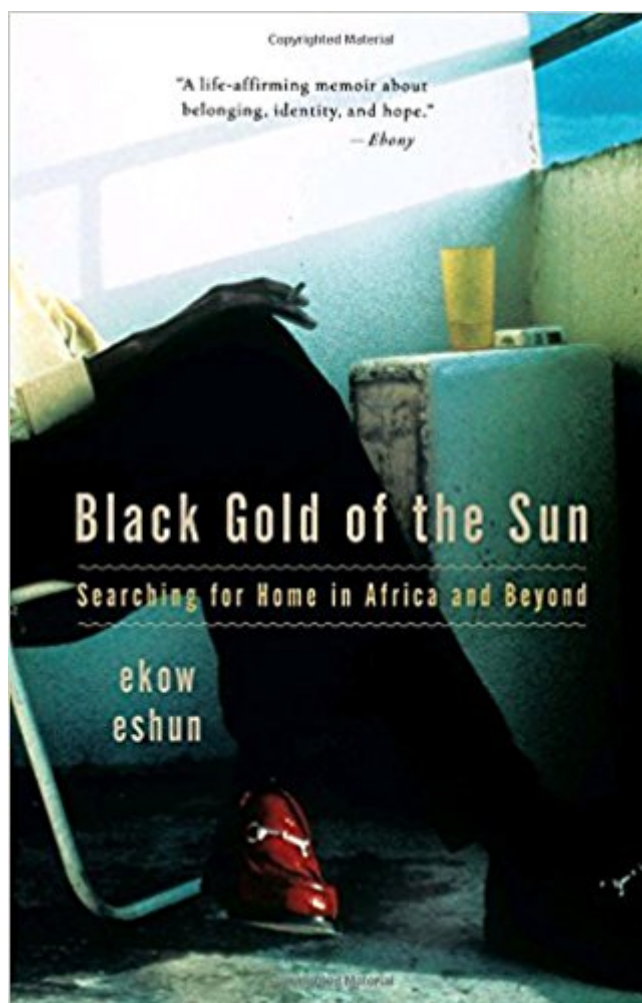


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Black Gold Of The Sun: Searching For Home In Africa And Beyond



Synopsis

At the age of thirty-three, Ekow Eshun—born in London to African-born parents—travels to Ghana in search of his roots. He goes from Accra, Ghana's cosmopolitan capital city, to the storied slave forts of Elmina, and on to the historic warrior kingdom of Asante. During his journey, Eshun uncovers a long-held secret about his lineage that will compel him to question everything he knows about himself and where he comes from. From the London suburbs of his childhood to the twenty-first century African metropolis, Eshun's is a moving chronicle of one man's search for home, and of the pleasures and pitfalls of fashioning an identity in these vibrant contemporary worlds.

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Customer Reviews

Eshun, an African-British author and the artistic director of the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, ventures from his home to Ghana to explore his heritage. By his early 30s, Eshun still cannot adequately answer the question put to him since his school days in Queensbury: "Where are you from?" He has never felt welcome in England, where his father, a Ghanaian government official, moved the family in 1974. Eshun's memoir focuses on his April 2002 trip to Ghana, on the African Gold Coast, so-called because of the vast stores of gold the Europeans extracted. In fact, the author comes to the painful realization that his ancestral country colluded intimately in the African slave trade, and his own ancestors, both the white Dutchman Joseph de Graft and de Graft's mixed-race son, were slave traders. Eshun carries a frozen idea of provincial Ghana from living there briefly in his youth, and his trip proves an awkward, self-scrutinizing attempt at reconciling the reality of the

modern country, built on slavery and scarred by discrepancies in class. Eshun elegantly incorporates stories of previous notable travelers such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Richard Wright—along with an occasional illustration by Ofili. (June) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Eshun, the son of Ghanaian nationals, was born and raised in London after a coup prevented his parents from returning to Ghana. Feeling that something was lacking in an environment he felt was occasionally hostile and often marginalizing, in 2001, at the age of 33, he journeyed home. In this narrative, Eshun searches for his roots and deeply within himself and discovers that estrangement is not restricted to his adopted homeland. For in his ancestral land, he finds family roots on both sides of the slave trade and the presence in Ghana of an apparent universal hip-hop culture that appears transferable to London or New York with all its material superficiality. He draws parallels between his African journey and that of W. E. B. DuBois, Malcolm X, and Richard Wright. Within the contemporary context of the African diaspora, Eshun's work reflects commonalities detected by those who never left Africa as well as the differences recognized by those who have. Vernon Ford Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

I give this book a 4 star because I felt I gained something by reading it. Though I am an African American, I could really relate to most of his experiences, except being isolated from my culture. I smiled to myself when a character called African American tourists "ugly people" or something to that affect. The character laments about our superiority complex when in Ghana and claiming to be more African than the African, yet we behave like ugly Americans when we don't get 1st world service. There is much truth to that. However, from personal experiences, the service and the attitudes of the Africans can be really awful when they are dealing with other black people. It sometimes appears they resent our presence. Yet when an Oyinbo or Burenyi comes around they grovel and fawn like toothy hyenas and step on your head to service them with a smile. I guess it is that inferiority complex and viewing whites as superior to them. This is just my opinion. Please no hate notes. I was also amused about the author's experience in visiting an African Christian church. Those are some scary places. I have attended a few just for curiosity. What an incredible scam and the believers are very cult like. But most importantly, this book speaks to belonging and knowing where you came from. I have had such experiences in Africa. However, I was never one of those

seeking to find "home." I have always been pretty confident that I am a woman of African descent, an amalgamation of various ethnic Africans, born and raised in the US. What I discovered most about my travels to the African continent is that I am an American. There is no one more American than the African Americans. The "Big Man" phenomenon is so accurate. African societies are very caste oriented, and everyone has a desperate need to feel superior and look down their noses at others. Many of them have this over inflated sense of self. Ekow's description of the bank manager screaming at him like a child because he came into the bank out of the rain is accurate. The bank manager's response when he realized that the author had a non-Ghanaian accent that he back downed and groveled, realizing that this must be his superior, simply because he is a westerner. I have had this experience too. It is very strange and disturbing. Ekow spoke of W.E. DuBois's theory of "double consciousness" of being born into a white world. Yes, all people of African descent have this gift of double consciousness. It is a survival technique when born in the west. It allows us to maneuver in our intimate world and with those outside of that world. I can't recall the author's name, but she referred to it as switching. We have double faces. We wear the mask as Paul Lawrence Dunbar alluded to. It is a permanent part of our wardrobe. We take it off and put it back on when the need arises. Ekow went to Ghana to find out where he is from. However, I am not sure of what his conclusion was. He had some serious emotional issues about his identity. In Ghana he also is an outsider with another aspect of the double consciousness. His roots are in the soil of Ghana, yet his heart and mind is in Britain, the west. He is only a generation removed, yet he feels alienated in Britain and Ghana. Imagine people of African descent who are generations removed from Africa. The question is can you ever go back "home" as they say? I say home is where your heart is and the people you love and the society you relate to and feel most comfortable. Can you go and visit and experience the land of the ancestors? Absolutely! Some of us can even pick up our western lives and go and live there. Why not? The Europeans and Asians are living there. I believe that this book is a good read for anyone of African descent, and those who want to know what it is like to go to an African country and realize you are a foreigner. However, I am a foreigner among familiar looking faces, faces of people that I know and family members. I don't mind being a foreigner. Because a native can go a little way up the road in his country and be considered a foreigner. I could relate much to many of Ekow's experiences.

Moving, clear-eyed account of the dislocation a privileged yet bereft young African man encounters upon his return to Ghana after being raised abroad. Who is he if he can't claim to be home anywhere? Told with a wry humor and deep compassion, his journey made me want to learn more

about today's Ghana and that unique group who are the children of the modern diaspora. Add this book to the shelf of new voices coming from west Africa.

Ekow Eshun embarks upon an enlightening search for his identity and true heritage in *Black Gold Of The Sun, Searching For Home in Africa and Beyond*. Revealing a rich history between Africa and Europe and the practice of slave trading. Exposing some truths about his ancestors that will instead produce more questions for him to ponder. Eshun was born in London to parents from Ghana. His father was once a Ghanaian Diplomat who migrated with his family to make a life in London. Eshun along with his parents and siblings returned to live in Ghana for three years and eventually made London their permanent home in 1974. Eshun begins his journey to Ghana with the anticipation of being able to connect with his roots and find the answers to questions that have gone unanswered for far too long. As he begins his quest he revisits relatives and memories from his childhood. Memories of a past that was filled with racial connotations that he intentionally wanted to forget; yet had to relive in order to find solace. In the end he comes to the realization that returning to his homeland will not provide the closure he hoped for but is the catalyst to helping him achieve the freedom and knowledge to fully understand that his past does not determine his destination in life. This first time author does a commendable job depicting his memoir with great fluency. Ekow Eshun vividly chronicles his personal journey taking readers along on this courageous passage to belonging.

Ekow Eshun's *Black Gold of the Sun* is a spellbinding account of his search for himself. Enchanting and enlightening, tender and vibrant are the images he creates as he shares what is discovered during his journeys. What is so remarkable about this book is how one can almost imagine traveling along with Ekow. British born, of Ghanaian parents, more often than not, this young man was asked where he was really from. Questions, questions always questions. Yet, none are as pressing as the ones he asks himself. From the time that his plane lands in Ghana, this saga kept me glued to its pages. I felt as if I was traveling with the author from London to Ghana, from Ghana to London. Ekow searches for his past as he searches for himself and finds out more about his heritage than he bargained for. The climax of this search is well worth the read. As he discovers his family, past and present, he finds his own self worth. A compelling, skilled author, Ekow Eshun's story should be grasped by any and all who seek to listen and learn. He is allowing all who would like to travel with him just for a while and enjoy the wonder of *Black Gold of the Sun*. *Armchair Interviews* says: Allow yourself to be the author's traveling companion.

What does home mean for immigrants? What does home mean for black people in a white world? What pushes Black Gold of the Sun beyond the level of travel literature and memoir is his cultural criticisms of the meaning of British blackness, especially British Africanness contrasted with British West Indianness and African-Americanness. The sounds of his childhood were American, and African American. Eshun was the son of Ghanaian diplomats, but most African Americans are the descendents of West African slaves. Still, it is the African Americans who managed to create a critical consciousness of blackness in England.

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