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# Racism in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*

[1]Ansam Muthanna

***Abstract***

*Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man (1947) is the story of an anonymous, young Black protagonist's geographical and psychological journey to fulfill a desire to become a Black leader and his ultimate failure to do so. Invisible Man is a novel about an anonymous young black male identity. The unnamed African American narrator embarks on a quest for political empowerment and self-fulfillment in the segregated United States in the 20th century. Believing that he can't transcend the normative aspects of the racist screen by which white Americans uniformly apprehend him, the protagonist succumbs to the idea of being an invisible man. Because of his oratory talent, the protagonist gains the opportunity to become a Black leader; in the end, however, he discovers his own invisibility in American society. Secluding himself in the underground, the protagonist narrates how he became aware of his invisibility.*

***Keywords:*** *Ralph Ellison's , Racism*

## Introduction

African-American literature arose the problem of racial discrimination in its philosophical, existential, and epistemological aspects. This period extends with the slave narratives of the 17th century to the current times with all its socio-literary exuberance initiating a cultural and literary transformation in the fabric of American society. A tide of emigration swept from Africa to America during the 17th century with powerful and diverse motivations. The Africans faced the double standards and the legal arbitrariness in the racist society of America, where the economic growth of the fledgling plantation industry depended on the continuation of slavery. The United States of America had liberated itself from British colonial rule through the Declaration of Independence (1776), an Enlightenment document which founded the new nation on the idea of natural human rights. Thomas Jefferson the following famous lines: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" (Jefferson, p.11). Jefferson was a slaveholder and his invocation of all men was not intended to have any bearing on the lives of black slaves., the concept of manhood and the attendant conferral of natural rights were highly restrictive and narrowly defined human subjectivity in terms of the implied racially unmarked white referent despite its promise of universality. At the same time, the exclusivity of the very debate man, manhood, mankind explained its ideological alliance with patriarchal practices. (Ashcroft, p. 47). The Period of Enlightenment didn't illuminate the blackness of women's rights; the debate about manhood was in reality a debate of masculinity, which premised the ideas of citizenship and humanity on the possession of the phallus. The Enlightenment debate upon manhood, implying a racially white and masculine gender reference, reproduced patriarchal privilege by combining the Other race with the Other gender in their united exclusion from the privileged ranks of human subjectivity.

Jefferson's assertion explicates the tight relationship between the construction of racial alterity and the maintenance of politico-economic power informing the racist regimes of slavery and colonialism. Proving black people's Otherness by means of ocularcentric evidence – the different-looking black body – Eurocentric discourse weaved its construction of racial difference around the categories of gender and sexuality to forestall blacks from the rights and privileges reserved to the enlightened white mankind. Historically blackness has

Ansammaster14@yahoo.com[1] *The University of Al-Mustansiriya / College of Arts / Department of English Language and Literature.*

been constructed as overembodied or an corporealized identity confining its bearer to the margialized life of the material body that relegated him to the periphery of the realm of cultural production and political representation (Burgett, p.28).

African American literature starts with narratives by slaves in the pre-revolutionary period based on the abolition of slavery. The era of Civil War until 1919 is called the Reconstruction phase. Migration, segregation, lynching, and the women's suffragette movement influenced its themes. Since the Second World War, African American literature has plunged into modernist high art, postracial identities and black nationalism. In Invisible Man, the philosophy espoused by the Black leadership discourses forms the personality of the protagonist.Passing through the physical and psychological journey to become a Black leader, the protagonist concludes that he is an invisible man because Black leadership discourses "force [their] picture of reality upon [him] and neither [give] a hot in hell for how things looked to [him]". (p.508)

The trajectory of the young protagonist begins with a humiliating and violent experience that initiates him into the inferior place that the white racist society assigns to him (Harris, p.7) When invited to give his graduation speech before the leading white citizens of the city, he is first put through a debasing spectacle, the Battle Royal, which transforms his great success into an object lesson of humiliation (Wright, p.261). Contrary to the integrity with which he imagines himself to be a future Booker T. Washington orating for the upliftment of the black race, he is compelled to take part in a demeaning display designed for the entertainment of the big shots of the city for whom the event constitutes a ritualistic demonstration of their racial superiority. Contrary to the analytical challenge of delivering a speech for which he initially came to the smoker, he finds himself embroiled in an experience that negates his logical capacity, thereby inscribing him into the discourse of corporealized black masculinity, and in particular, sexualised. Against the respetability of pressed uniforms, shoes shined, minds laced up through which IM and the other black college students are drilled to represent and promote the upliftment of the race, the black boys fist fight before the important white men are designed to reinvest the dichotomy between whites as sophisticated, and blacks as primitive. The Battle Royal takes a image of the black boys as brainless, physically powerful brutes who tend to undermine their intellectual ability while literally attempting to knock each other out. As the boys are made to unclothe and put on fighting trunks and boxing gloves, their bare upper bodies touch and shine with anticipatory sweat, suggesting that the spectacle about to start depends on the body's baseness and eroticism. Despite the prefix of corporeality, he continues to identify himself as an intellectual: whereas the other boys are just, tough and apparently without any mental depth, he broods over his speech and the meaning of the deathbed advice of his grandfather that he is to "overcome [the white men in power with yeses, undermine them with grins, agree them to death and destruction … till they vomit or bust wide open" (p.16). Despite his sense of intellectual supremacy, the white people unconditionally crammed them all together into the elevating servants.

The ambitious, young Black protagonist's journey starts with a painful recognition of African Americans role in American society. At the beginning of the novel, he is given a passport to become a Black leader, prompted by his graduation speech at high school, which overlaps Booker T. Washington's compromise speech in Atlanta. When the narrator talks of social equality, instead of social obligation, before the local southern figures of power, the tension unexpectedly heightens. However, he is eventually forced to confess his error, a foretaste of the difficulties he faces as he tries to assume the mantle of a Black leader. Washington's thinking about racial uplifting African Americans was a well-accepted concept of Black leadership in post-reconstruction America as it supported a system that never surpassed White supremacy. By admitting the error of asserting racial equality, the protagonist wins a scholarship to study at a southern Black college, a sphere that fosters future Black leaders.

Ellison's experience at Tuskegee is reflected in his representation of the college. In 1933, Ellison entered Tuskegee Institute, founded by Washington, to study classical music, although he was equally skilled as a jazz trumpeter (Sundquist, p.7). Lawrence Jackson refers to Robert Russa Moton, the college president while Ellison attended, as a monument to the gradualism and accommodation strategies (Jackson, p.101) Jackson is indicative of the Black college executive blind allegiance to the Creator in Invisible Man, with his unswerving trust in the path laid down by the Creator (Ibid). Ellison 's music and literary education at Tuskegee in the early 1930's inspired his assimilation into a white-centric American elitism that eventually contributed to his Black cultural

heritage being denied (Jackson, pp.100-110). The Tuskegee Institute was initially founded as a vocational training institution for African Americans, and Washington insisted that its educational aim was to teach respect for labor to African Americans; to replace stupid drudgery with skilled hands (Jackson, p.34), which supported a White-centered American democracy and its industrialism, implying two contradictory systems, the institution of slavery and racial segregation in the postbellum South and the ideal of Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence, which loudly proclaimed all humans equal .

Tuskegee's purpose lay in producing Black laborers who would contribute to American industrial society, not in the reform of existing racial inequality. In In Invisible Man, the bronze statue of the founder of the college and a kneeling slave represent the statue of Washington on Tuskegee. The vague interpretation of this statue shows the skepticism of the protagonist about the founder of the college: "he is unable to decide whether the veil is really being lifted, or lowered more firmly in place; whether [he is] witnessing a revelation or a more efficient blinding" (p.36). The veil metaphor reflects psychological confining of African Americans to Blackness's illusion of Anglo-Americans. Ellison related that the obsession with Blackness by white Americans obscured Negroes' humanity and thus reduced it to a sign (Shadow, p.49), which led inevitably to their dehumanization.

The Black president of the college, Dr. Bledsoe, embodies the racial politics in Black higher education. Dr. Bledsoe behaves like a polite servant before White powerful people.He represents Washington, which expanded the Tuskegee network both in political academia and expelled African-American intellectuals who opposed his policies. (Harlan, p.3). He lived in the world with a subordinate attitude which never threatened the existing racial power politics, tells the protagonist, "You're Black and living in the South—did you forget how to lie?" (p.139). He never reveals his true intention. His value lies in his success in a world that rejects his race leading to a skewed self-loathing psychological. Dr. Bledsoe expels the protagonist from college as a punishment for exposing Mr.Norton, a White philanthropist, to the world of neighboring Blacks which he rejects .

The novelist portrays Mr. Norton the typical White Hypocrisy model. Mr. Norton indulges himself in a fantasy of omnipotence in which he can control the destinies of Blacks. In the Sermon of Reverend Homer Barbee, the racial politics surrounding the Black higher education system emerge. Barbee's sermon about the legendary life of the Founder establishes the context in which the central concept of colleges is revived. In his sermon Barbee follows the oral tradition of Black English, incorporating the language of Call / Response and Witness / Testify, which are cultural practices that foster unity and cohesion, establishing a living archive of African American culture (Atkinson, p.23). The Call / Response structure allows preachers to give their audience a space for a collective voice, which provides the potential of self-definition by group articulation (Rice, p.17). Barbee's heroic story of the Founder, however, functions as propaganda that encourages the students to commit their loyalty to Black elitism, not the Black masses. The diligent and self-reliant personality of the Founder is extremely idealized in his sermon, and his death is deified, correlating with the death and revival of Christ .

> The Blacks felt the dark night of slavery settling once more upon them. They smelted that old obscene stink of darkness, that old slavery smell, worse than the rank halitosis of hoary death. . . But think of the Founder's death not as a death, but as a birth. A great seed had been planted. A seed which has continued to put forth its fruit in its season assurely as if the great creator had been resurrected. For in a sense he was, if not in the flesh, in the spirit….and in a sense in the flesh too. For has not your present leader become his (living agent, his physical presence (pp.131-132)

The deified image of the Founder can be defined as what Houston A. Baker calls nostalgia. As Baker believes that Black modernity is figured in the textual and textual interweaving of nostalgia and critical memory. He writes "only a beautiful reasonableness of future expectations can nostalgically write the past" (Baker, p.8) and This optimism contributes to Black conservative modernity 's primary scene without the noise or even the flickering recollection of the Black masses (Baker, p.8), which critical memory presents. Barbee's nostalgic sermon promotes what Baker calls exclusively middle class beautification of history (Ibid). Barbee sows Black conservative propaganda in the students' minds and requires them to emulate Dr. Bledsoe's conformity, saying,

"[Dr. Bledsoe] is a form of greatness worthy of your imitation. I say to you, pattern yourselves upon him" (p.133). "Barbee implants what Angela Davis calls Booker T. Washington syndrome (Davis, p.92) in the students. Reminiscing on her childhood education in the early 1950s South, Davis writes that this syndrome requires excessive effort and sacrifice on the part of African Americans to attain middle-class status, which makes social obstacles gnawing at Black lives invisible as part of the natural order of things, rather than the product of a system of racism (Davis, p.92). This leads to white prejudice against African-American laziness and a racial self-loathing in Blacks because of their oppressed condition.

By exposing the blindness of Barbee, however, Ellison reveals the trick in Barbee's sermon, which relies on what he was witnessing. As Washington dedicated to the Black bourgeoisie and tooka negative view of the leaders of the working class (Harlan, p.10), Barbee's nostalgic past delegates the poor Black neighbors to the invisible sphere. Ellison points to the episode in which the college attempts to remove the white philanthropists from the local peasant, Trueblood's, household, lest the man's incest be exposed to them. The Black College, in Invisible Man, creates a Black leadership policy that is completely separate from the interests of the Black masses .

Baker's concept of nostalgia leads to discourse on Ras's Black nationalism and ideology. Ras emerges with his oratory as a rival of the protagonist, who becomes the Brotherhood 's representative, a racially integrated, secret political society. Ras' character overlaps that of the charismatic, Jamaican-born political leader Marcus Garvey, who founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), an organization that launched the return to Africa movement in the 1920s. Garvey saw African Americans cultural identity essentially as African and advocated the Black separatist philosophy of Africa for the Africans. Like Garvey, Ras romanticizes Africa as African American root, saying, "Brothers are the same color; how the hell you call these White men brother? . . . We sons of Mama Africa, you done forgot? You Black, BLACK! . . .You African. AFRICAN" (pp.370-371)! As he claims his Africaness in "the costume of an Abyssinian chieftain" (p.556), Ras upholds Africa as the utopia that unites all Blacks." His nostalgic view of Africa, however, denies the harsh history of Blacks in America, and Ras' ideology correlates with the politics of Black elitism in this respect. The difference is that Ras sees the possibility of Black leadership in returning to Africa, while Black elites are pursuing their success in a White America.

The Brotherhood's dogmatic belief in the scientific approach to human history and society also indicates what Baker calls nostalgia. The involvement of the protagonist in the Brotherhood represents the involvement of Black political leaders in the Communist Party in the 1930s and 1940s, putting their trust in the only overwhelmingly White group prepared to fight for racial equality (Sundquist, p.193). Like the elitism of the Black college and the Afrocentrism of Ras, the science of the Brotherhood as an ideology causes the rupture in Harlem between the protagonist and the Black masses because it ignores the elements which shape their daily lives and interests. The reverence of the Brotherhood for Marx's scientific philosophy marginalizes the lives of the Black masses that do not fit into their research, and excuses victimizing individuals for the purposes of the organization. As Brother Jack put it to the protagonist, "We are forced to think of the organization at the expense of our personal feelings. The Brotherhood is bigger than all of us" (p.405).

Although the text of *Invisible Man* is haunted by the exclusive nostalgia of Black elitism, Ellison reiteratively interpolates the Black folks sphere as its counterpart. Voices of nameless Blacks reveal what James A. Snead calls cut, a rupture in the linear smoothness of discourses on Black leadership. Black culture, in the cut, constructs its coverage of accidents, almost as if to control their unpredictability. This magic of cutting tries to confront accidents and ruptures not by covering them but by making room for them within the system itself. (Snead, pp.69-70). The cut in Black culture reveals the bounds of linear progression, which Reverend Barbee's sermon, Ras's agitation, and the Brotherhood's ideology represent. For example, The Golden Day blackguard bar emerges as a cut in the Black Leadership discourse. An insane alumnus, a former doctor, criticizes the hypocrisy of the college there, confessing that his education did not give him dignity as a human being. The voices of the Golden Day function as an admonition to the protagonist, revealing the cut of Black leadership's progressive ideology. During his trip to New York following his expulsion from college, a "former soldier" advises the protagonist to see the world with his own eyes, not with the eyes of others: "Be your own father, young man. And remember, the world is possibility if only you'll discover it" (p.156).

In addition to the voices from the Golden Day, Ellison uses music as the cut, which reveals African-American wisdom in surviving hardships. In Living with Music, Ellison defines blues music as follows.

> The blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness [emphasis added], to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism. As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically
>
> (P. 103)

Ellison says that the blues functions as a tool for transcending hardships by accepting them as they are. Trueblood's narrative shows his interpretation of blues very clearly. The blues leads to a decision by Trueblood to live with the sin of his incest. Ellison dares to give up his omnipotent narrative and allows arration of his life story by a minor character like Trueblood. In this scene, Ellison creates a space for the nameless Black masses the Trueblood represents, exposing the cut as a breakdown in Black leadership's linearly progressive ideology. The blues of Trueblood overlaps Ellison's view of the blues as an African-American survival symbol. The blues at once express both the agony of life and the possibility of conquering it through sheer toughness of spirit. They provide no solution, offer no scapegoat but the self (Shadow and Act, 94). Trueblood's narrative shows Black people's protagonist historical survival against a binary value standard between good and evil that he later acquires at the end of the novel .

In the sermon, Blackness is defined as both presence and absence. Blackness can efface African-American existence with its most Blackness, and at the same time it makes them conspicuous with its extreme Blackness, just like the protagonist's black skin in the extreme light around the walls of the underground. The inscrutableness and confusion of the sermon itself conjure the old former slave woman's voice of trombone timbre. She confesses conflicted emotions to her master, who raped her, about bearing his children and because I loved my sons I learned to love their father though I hated him too. The voices from the cut represent the historical ambiguity that has haunted African-American identity politics. Amiri Baraka states that foreignness of African culture (Baraka, p.7) in antebellum America brought about serious self-alienation to American-born" Blacks and adds, "The only way of life these children knew was the accursed thing they had been born into" (Baraka, p.13). This state allows for the appearance of their personalities, and the resulting narrative confusion combines with the protagonist's awareness of his own invisibility.

After his blind journey during which he denied his cultural roots, "the *Invisible Man* speaking in the prologue and epilogue has wholeheartedly embraced his African American heritage. Identifying himself as Jack-the-Bear, a trickster figure in the African American folk tradition (Sundquist 121), and listening to how Louis Armstrong makes poetry out of being invisible, he describes his own invisibility in terms of an improvised jazz riff on Armstrong's music": "Invisibility … gives one a slightly different sense of time, you're never quite on the beat. Sometimes you're ahead and sometimes behind…. That's what you hear vaguely in Louis music" (Ibid.) In his introduction to Shadow and Act, Ralph Ellison describes – with regard to jazz – the power of black cultural expression to overcome the constraints of race .

The capacity of Folklore to produce a feeling of homeliness in the alienating and hostile white world is a central theme in Ellison 's novel. Not only does the vernacular character per se, Jim Trueblood, walk his yard with a simplicity that betrays a deep sense of being at home in the world, but the protagonist also finds comfort from his haunted non-identity meander through the affirmative power of folk culture. After his release from hospital, he roams Harlem's streets and has no friends and desires none. He believes in nothing nihilistically and still hasn't figured out who he is and what it all means.His sense of alienation from the white world becomes even greater when he walks down a street with racist icons in the shop window. His lack of identity and homeliness is cured when he meets an old man who sells baked Carlina yams from an odd-looking wagon. In a Proustian moment of involuntary memory, the yams' smell carries IM back to his youth's days, summoning the forgotten memories at the root of his alienations .

Through the African American soul food, IM remembers the sensation of belonging and of having a home from his childhood days in the South when he was not worrying about who saw him or about what was proper, but when he wholeheartedly just loved his culture. Degustation of the yams allows him to re-connect with a community and identify with African American everyday life's collective experience, remedying his loneliness and anonymity. Like Trueblood's account of bygone times, His memories are saturated with sensual and synaesthetic impressions that squeeze the sweet pulp out of the soft peel through which he evokes the delight and splendor of folk culture. Inspired by his memories, he is overcome with a sudden hunger, a clear sign of vitality against the general feeling of sickness that plagues his body – and eats a yam. Not only is he overcome with a surge of homesickness so strong that he can hardly manage to keep his control, but equally by an intense feeling of freedom—simply because I was eating while walking along the street. Similar to the jazz artist who humanizes reality and dominates the world in spite of oppression and socio-economic poverty, IM appropriates and reclaims the alienating Harlem street as a place of African American cultural inscription by means of walking and eating his yam in public. In comparison to Jim Trueblood 's emergence to consciousness after singing himself some blues . Divorcing himself from the restrictive models of a proper black identity. He resolves that, "I am what I am!" (p.266), and enthusiastically relishes the taste of the yams, placing them playfully at the very heart of his identity.

The self-conscious narrator speaking out of his black hole manipulates and appropriates the meaning received with which the dominant order cements his racial inferiority-starting with his own name. The invisible man rejects the suffocating cultural labels: Sambo, Nigger, and Black Bruiser, instead he prefers his own name. Since Adam's branding of the animals, the topos of naming is connoted with the prerogative of claiming dominion over the world (D. Gibson, p.98). Slave owners used to change systematically the names of their new slaves in order to subdue them (Patterson, p.54). Conversely, the process of self-naming is a genuine expression of autonomy through which many freedmen asserted their liberty from their former masters, or recreated themselves as the personas they wished to be. By assigning a new name to IM, and thereby depriving it of its old identiy the Brotherhood subjects it to a slave-like non-identity that seeks to strip it of its power. IM is swift to understand that its new identity overshadows its old self. Given that to be named means to be the narrated, not the narrator (Benston, p.160), IM must free itself of the old documents which stipulate its heteronomous identities / names. Only when he has semphatically unnamed himself by burning the contents of his briefcase does IM place himself beyond representation, beyond the archival language of history, denying the applicability of the tropical function of his unfolding experience .

Throughout the novel, the protagonist is suspended in a dilemma between the sphere of Black leadership and that of the Black masses. The narrative of the Protagonist reflects typical Black elitism until he is expelled from college. He believes in the concept of systematic development of African Americans based on assimilation into White society, and has no respect for the weak neighboring Blacks. He is embarrassed at the novel's opening by the earthy harmonies of the local spiritual peasants, which reminds him of his family in the South. His psychology is degraded racially, pushing him into a state of self-alienation .

In New York, the protagonist first encounters Ras cursing Whites on the street. When the protagonist begins to understand that Blacks are allowed to express themselves in public, the protagonist indulges himself in the fantasy of becoming an orator. His migration to New York enables him to consider this possibility, and his desire stems from anger over Dr. Bledsoe's betrayal. The protagonist's desire to become an orator initially points to a wish to seek revenge against the hypocritical Black elitism that Dr. Bledsoe's merciless treatment embodies. Despite his social success as chairman of a Black college, Dr. Bledsoe continues the unfulfilled expectations implicit in Whites' historic rejection of Blacks. However, even with his vehement fury at the insidious betrayal of Dr. Bledsoe, the protagonist is haunted by the contradictory voices echoing in the prolog the ambiguous Black narratives. Throughout the pre-Civil Rights era, social mobility of African Americans was accomplished at the cost of their racial self-denial and eventual self-alienation. Confronted with the deceit of Dr. Bledsoe, who manipulated individuals for the profit of an institution that dominates White supremacy politics, the naïve confidence of the protagonist in Black leadership crumbles. Initially his drive for speech stems from anger that he can not control his own life, which inevitably leads to his sympathy for the oppressed Blacks. As he perceives the connection between his fury and his desire to publicly proclaim himself, he meets

an old Black couple who have been heartlessly evicted from their apartment. The protagonist begins to speak impulsively on the street, feeling sympathy for them, claiming that the tragedy of the old couple is a prime example of African Americans, victimization, citing itself as another example .

> Look at them, they look like my mama and my papa and my grandma and grandpa, and I look like you and you look like me. . . What's happened to them? They're our people, your people and mine, your parents and mine. What's happened to them. (p.278)

This speech is as a turning point in the story. The protagonist is recruited as a member of the Brotherhood and given the opportunity to become a Black spokesman. As the protagonist fulfills his obligation to spread the ideology of the Brotherhood, he is awakened to his new identity as a leader of the Black masses and confesses his personal gratification with impulsiveness. Public applause allows him the opportunity to assert humanity. The protagonist then decided to be successful as a Black leader. But the Brotherhood doesn't give the protagonist the chance to get intimate with the Black masses. The perspective is now dominated by the scientific philosophy of the company, though entirely foreign to him. Furthermore, his friend, Tod Clifton, confesses his intention to fall outside of the Brotherhood 's past. Clifton appears as a vendor selling paper Sambo dolls shortly after leaving the Brotherhood, which are the primary expression of Black stereotypes. The laughing, dancing doll with no strings ominously symbolizes the role of the protagonist within Black leadership politics, Black college and Brotherhood. Although he struggles to get his status as a Black leader, the politics of both organizations have exploited his will as an individual. The protagonist fails to see that Black leadership is under White control when he believes that the Brotherhood is the only place Blacks could make themselves known and avoid being empty Sambo dolls. The absence of Dr. Bledsoe's expression corresponds to the mask-like face of Sambo, which tacitly follows the dehumanizing norm that defines Blackness as blankness. Clifton's mimicry of Black leadership leads to the violence of police murdering him. Witnessing the death of Clifton, the protagonist first reconsidered the authenticity of the history of the Brotherhood, which he had firmly believed in. The narrator understands that the philosophy of the Brotherhood does not understand that the entire universe and current history are merely documents written for the benefit of those with influence. The tragic death of Clifton appears as the cutting off of the linear development in the history of the Brotherhood. The protagonist then, from the cut, first recognizes the existence of the nameless Black masses. A languishing blues being played on the street represents their lives removed from Black leadership politics, and the protagonist wonders if people outside of history can be saviors, true leaders and bearers of something valuable. At Clifton's funeral, the languish blues as the voice of the Black community culminates in the spiritual of a nameless old man. His album discusses the dignity of the Black people, which was fostered during their long history in America .

The old man's spiritual reveals what Ellison calls Negro American consciousness (Shadow and Act, p.124). Like the blues of Trueblood the spiritual accepts African Americans' living conditions beyond their tragic socio-scientific interpretations. The voice of the old man emerges from deep within a collective racial memory, and its timbre adds new meaning to the song's familiar words. His improvisation ritually gives space to the death of Clifton in a comprehensive racial memory that has been missing from history. The timbre of the old man de-authorizes logo-centricity, which in such a small philosophy, like the science of the Brotherhood, diminishes multi-layered Black voices. The spiritual leads the protagonist to find a voice to recount the life and death of Clifton. His funeral speech is based on what Baker describes as vital memory that explains the community interested politics of Black publicity (Baker, p.8). The protagonist reiterates how Clifton's life should be recorded in history to reveal his invisibility in White America .

By refusing to romanticize Clifton's death, the protagonist's speech makes a striking contrast to Barbee's nostalgia of the Founder's linear progression as a Black leader. He clearly exposes the way Blacks were portrayed as a ethnic group in the official history by repeating a monolithic representation of the death of Clifton. Against the Western model of linear progression, the funeral speech of the protagonist takes the form of what Snead calls the repetitive view of the Black culture history. Black culture highlights the observance of such repetition, often in homage to an original generative instance or act (Snead, p.68). He explains the

repetition in Black cultural performances. At Clifton's funeral, the protagonist abandons the discourses of linear progression that prompt a specific ideology. In his repetitive speech, he relies on the things that is there to pick up (Snead, p.70), which lead to the race's collective memory about which the old man sings. His anti-nostalgic narrative on Clifton exposes historical invisibility of African Americans to the public eye. The protagonist refers to a play on words, Nigger / Trigger, to explain the meaningless death of Clifton and leads his audience to realize that the racist word Nigger could possibly cause Blacks to die when combined with the nonsensical whites joke. The unsentimental narration of the narrator represents a desperate effort to establish a space to position Clifton as the cutting edge of official history. Disclosure of the invisibility of Clifton results in a massive racial uprising in Harlem denoting the Black masses act of inscribing his death into their past as well as revolt against their invisibility in White-centered America. The protagonist falls through a manhole, in the chaos of the war, which literally symbolizes his step outside of history. He burns all the documents that he has always carried in the underground, as the given identifications of his life. As a consequence, when the protagonist falls into the manhole — human society's split, and his utter seclusion—he first finds the voice to claim himself an Invisible Man .

Just like Jim Trueblood who contests the meaning of his incest by means of his story, the *Invisible Man* crafts a counter-narrative to the dominant fiction of the castrated and subdued black male, recreating himself as a racially authentic and wholly virile figure speaking back from the racial margins (Kim, p.38). According to vernacular theories of African American interpretation, the authenticity and agency of the racial and masculine subject emerges from its embrace of vernacular forms of cultural expression (Ibid, p.37), on the one hand, and from its resilient determination to seize authorial control over the received meaning of the cultural hegemony, on the other.

The white men's lack of civilization becomes even more evident during the boxing episode, when the prospect of watching black bodies in pain equally arouses repressed primal impulses in the white men. One called Jackson is so worked up at the mere sight of watching the pain sensation that he can scarcely be stopped from doing the battering himself. This scene is highly dramatic, while it is told from the blindfolded IM's point of view, which naively explains the voices and sounds he can hear. Jackson goes so berserk that he is not held back by another man, and desperately calls for assistance. Then IM overhears how a fight takes place before somebody starts the war until Jackson kills himself a coon. Of course, IM 's apparently objective observations, feigning innocence and naivety, are highly evaluative and aim to dismantle the white men 's moral double standards and their baseness hidden under their mask of civility. Whereas the witnessing IM is exposed to the white supremacists' humiliating and cruel schemes, the intelligent narrator expresses his subjectivity and autonomy by signifying to the reader that white males are the genuinely dehumanized people. Like the vernacular hero and trickster Trueblood, IM overthrows the authority of those people who mislead him by claiming authoritative control of his narrative (Smith, p.116). Having redefined appropriated the events he was forced to undergo, *The Invisible Man* from the prologue and epilogue uses his literary talent to subvert his subordinate relation to figures of authority and to expand the overly restrictive conceptions of identity that others impose on him .

## Conclusion

*Invisible Man* is an emphatic interrogation and critique of the long-standing myths and stereotypes which have subtended black masculinity since the age of Enlightenment. During his journey, IM is constantly met with the demeaning preconceptions of white black males – ranging from the phallic black rapist to the effeminate Uncle Tom; from the happy entertainer to the bestial brute; from the genuflecting orator to the glamorous Oriental – who rehearse dominance and gratification scenarios profoundly rooted in the past of slavery and colonialism. Speaking from the hole, an out-of-time, out-of-space place, Ellison's nameless

protagonist is a mouthpiece for all black males faced with the historical plight of being imprisoned within the narrow confines of racial/racist stereotypeRejecting the naturalistic credo that people were merely pawns caught in a deterministic universe (Lane, p.65), however, Ellison has set fire to his "protagonist" icons of his symbolic and psychological enslavement, thereby signaling his refusal to continue to carry the false ascriptions and identities that the larger society has placed upon him.

sHaving lightened his way out of the darkness, IM gains the vision and freedom necessary to start creating its own reality as a complex human being (Lane, p. 65). Like Jim Trueblood who reclaims the sovereignty of interpretation by narrating his incest experience, IM equally resorts to narration in order to relinquish the truths generated by the dominant social order (Smith, p.110). Speaking from the periphery of society, IM expresses its agency by signifying and 'redefining the meaning obtained from the middle, thus establishing a counter-discourse contesting the prevailing fact and the fretwork of assumptions that supports it (Gates, p.238). Through his ironic self-authentication as an Invisible Man, IM emphatically deconstructs the notion of racial essentialism, projecting himself as literally beyond the categories of race and gender. His chosen status as an Invisible Man not only debunks the ocular-centered conception of the idea of race, but also undermines the panoptic control structure in which whites have traditionally exerted their power over blacks.

Through destabilizing the signs of gender and food, Invisible Man makes an significant contribution to the black manhood debate as it provides critical exposure to the fact that identities are cultural buildings subject to constant renegotiation. The optimistic and comic tone with which Ellison's vernacular hero manipulates his reality in order to assert his individuality against the destructive impact of race certainly was a positive vantage point for many black males to embark on the way towards the Obama generation .

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