ETD Archive

2014

Cultural Collision and Consequence: Redefining the Invisible in Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man

Nina Shari Kidd
Cleveland State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/etdarchive

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!

CULTURAL COLLISION AND CONSEQUENCE: REDEFINING THE

INVISIBLE IN RALPH ELLISON'S *INVISIBLE MAN*

NINA SHARI KIDD

Bachelor of Arts in English

Cleveland State University

December 2012

Submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree

MASTERS OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

at

CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2014

We hereby approve this thesis of

Nina S. Kidd

Candidate for the <u>Master of Arts in English</u> degree for the

Department of ENGLISH

and the CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY

College of Graduate Studies by

_____

Thesis Chairperson,
Dr. Adam Sonstegard

_____

Department & Date

_____

Thesis Committee Member, Dr. Frederick J. Karem

_____

Department & Date

_____

Thesis Committee Member, Dr. Rachel Carnell

_____

Department & Date

Student's Date of Defense: April 29, 2014

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my grandmother, Ruth Mae Lanier.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

CULTURAL COLLISION AND CONSEQUENCE: REDEFINING THE

INVISIBLE IN RALPH ELLISON'S *INVISIBLE MAN*

NINA SHARI KIDD

ABSTRACT

Scholars have puzzled over the central refrain of white oppression toward blacks in this novel. This study however, revolves around the treatment of blacks to other blacks in their attempts to further themselves in society. A fundamental source of dissension within the African- American race was intolerance for the differing approaches of schools of thought on advancement posited by various members of the African-American race. This discussion incorporates French theorist Michel Foucault's theory on how internal captivity takes place to examine the possibility that the race suffered at its own hands.

Ellison's novel is not about a black man's story, but the intra-racial nuance helps us to see the larger picture that Ellison envisioned of American solidarity and tolerance for diverse outlooks on life. What he leaves behind is an overwhelming sense of pride if we as Americans are able to transport our sense of tolerance and respect within the individual race and display this tolerance toward all cultures, creating what Ellison envisioned as the complete American experience. Furthermore the novel stimulates a sense of pride and joy in those African-Americans who see themselves in this novel as those who did not and would not betray their fellow race members.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROLOGUE

ELLISON SPEAKS ON *INVISIBLE MAN*

Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man* responds to the multiplicity of inequity and discrimination transgressions that afflicted the African-American race, addressing seminal complications from the era post-civil war up through and inclusive of the decade that *Invisible Man* was written. Although the decades of the 1940's and 1950's have long since elapsed, the novel's open-ended structure permits revisiting the work to appreciate its contributions to the arenas of race, politics, and intellectualism. We should value the novel because it shows a behind-the-scenes depiction of African-Americans and their attempts to interact with one another in these capacities of race, politics, and intellectualism. In selected scenes from the novel there are cultural responses and incongruities within the race that show black on black betrayal and violence in reaction to the externality of the pressure outside of the race.

The storied legacy of African-American culture presents itself in this novel with the issue of identification as crucial in the development of African-Americans as an entity. This matter is so significant because understanding rich historical lessons would help individuals to monitor recidivist tendencies of collective and personal identity misplacement. The lessons of the novel spill over into non-African-American cultures, providing a fertile position for identity as the primary premise of the novel. Critics have naturally focused on white oppression when reading the novel, thus rendering the black on black oppression unexamined. Ellison's presentation can moreover be seen as an invitation to examine the present cultural climate and the culmination of the African-American experiences with an emphasis on appreciating the dynamics of the race's internal shaping.

In speaking of the inspiration for *Invisible Man*, Ellison in his collection of first person essays in *Going to the Territory* explains:

> One afternoon I wrote some words while sitting in an old barn looking out on the mountain; and these words were 'I'm an invisible man.' I didn't know quite what that meant, and I didn't know where the idea came from; but the moment I started to abandon them, I thought; 'Well maybe I should try to discover exactly what it was that lay behind the statement. What type of man would make that type of statement, would conceive of himself in such terms? What lay behind him?' And then after that it was trying to make a meaningful story out of what seemed to be a rather wild notion. ..I wanted to tell a story. I felt that there was a great deal about the nature of American experience which was not understood by most Americans. I felt also that the diversity of the total experience rendered much of it mysterious…I believed that unless we continually explored the network of complex relationships which bind us together, we would continue being the victims of various inadequate conceptions of ourselves, both as individuals and as citizens of a nation of diverse peoples (42).

The strength of scope of Ellison's novel lies in the fact that it is not written as merely a black man's story; rather, as he stated, he was concerned with the American experience in totality and its misconceptions. Consequently, the platform of the nameless narrator allows anyone of any cultural background to place themselves into the experiences of him to see the wholeness of what Ellison envisioned as American, and Americans' response to one another.

Ellison's novel could thus adequately be rendered as a strand of political voice, history, culture, and arts in a determination to "resonate[…] certain abiding, tragic themes of American history with which it is interwoven, and which are causing great turbulence in the social atmosphere" (*Territory* 105).

In his essay "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke" taken from *Shadow and Act*, Ellison speaks of archetypal figures such as the 'trickster' and 'the mask' which are culturally unfettered symbols, yet they function to "veil the humanity of Negroes thus reduc[ing] them to a sign, and to repress the white audience's awareness of its moral identification with its own acts and with the human ambiguities pushed behind the mask" (49). Such ambiguity can be noted in characters that the narrator encounters in the novel *Invisible Man* such as African-American Dr. Bledsoe who is described as " compos[ing] his angry face like a sculptor, making it a bland mask, leaving only the sparkle of his eyes to betray the emotion that [he, the narrator] had seen only a moment before" (100). The ambiguity rests in the fact that as Ellison explained, the mask is a tool that serves to separate whites from their accountability to African-Americans; however, an African-American character such as Bledsoe is described as also donning **"a bland mask."** This detail strengthens the reality that even within the African-American race, there were those who espoused racist ideologies even to the detriment of their fellow members with the mistaken belief that such behavior was indispensable to prospering in a white dominated societal context. The following discussion will explore these intra-racial inconsistencies as persuasive in the narrator's invisibility.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me...That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their *inner* eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality"
Sincerely, The Invisible Man

Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man* became famous at a critical time in

African-American history. Post WWII was a time of increasing economic expansion

which was not shared equitably.   This time period proved to be progressively painful

for African-Americans' culture, additional to their ongoing struggled attempts to

locate themselves within a white-dominated society which appeared to be

perpetually on the receiving end of the benefits of these economic developments.

Notwithstanding the internal strife to find placement within their own people,

identifying a secure identity within the social order became a significant focus for African- Americans. The experiences of Ellison's narrator confirm such frustrations, with the text's inarguable theme of identity within society. As Ellison reflected "[there are] costs for confusing the promises of democracy with the terms governing their attainment" (Ellison, *Territory* 14). The final disillusionment that the narrator suffers is like someone who has immigrated to a new country and the feelings of displacement persist.

While scholars disagree on the novel's primary goal – political, racial, or intellectual, it is indisputable that these elements function together to place an emphasis on the necessity of the African-American people to formulate an identity individually and collectively to make a presentation of themselves within dominant society. Since research surrounding Ellison's *Invisible Man* largely focuses on the narrator's lack of identification in a white dominated society, this discussion will place a focus on defining what is underlining this invisibility that he experiences. Jesse Wolfe, Robert Fleissner, and Scott Selisker craft forceful cases for the influence of White society on the narrator's invisibility; however, their interpretations mask the crucial detail that racism is an attitude that has no specific kinship with any particular race. It is vital to remember what the Invisible Man said in his opening declaration; he does not extend blame to any specific race or culture. Although scholars have argued that the source of the narrator's invisibility is primarily due to white society, the narrator's own experiences and his own words provide evidence that the invisibility is reflective of oppression from members within

his own race.   While Ellison is obviously aware of white oppression, it is not the key focus of the novel. Ellison does not need to, nor was he re-documenting white oppression.

Searching for a definition of the invisibility would allow us to understand of the obstacles that the narrator's character confronts in finding and maintaining a place in society. The narrated character's obstacles though are not limited to his code of conduct in white society. As the plot unfolds, Ellison regularly introduces instances that underscore the weight of the pressure complicating intra-racially complex circumstances that have little to do with external settings of bigotry. Although those scholars lines of inquiry are vital to an understanding of the panoramic scope of discovery of African-American oppression during this time period, an insightful line of inquiry could follow the divisiveness consequential to the complication of intra-racial strife that resulted from the differences in ideals of how African-American's should advance within white society. These differences of approach in progressing in white America were so penetrating that it prevented a unity of thought among the race on how to unite as a people to establish a noticeable collective presence within society to ignite their social and economic elevation. Moreover, these distinctly differing approaches allowed feelings of betrayal to become exerted at other members within the race whenever an approach of progress conflicted with a dominant opinion of the agency that the narrator had been involved with at any given time.

The dissension due to variance of opinion is demonstrated by examples of the secrecy of the union workers at the paint factory and the anti-white reactions of Ras the Exhorter with the Brotherhood organization – to name a few. It is notable that the character of the narrator faced degradation at the hands of his own race. It is hard to ignore the deep sadness that arises as a result of taking a closer look at these scenes that Ellison has developed that are unnoticed because they are not the typical depictions of white and black oppression that scholars comment on. Returning to the narrator's comments regarding his own invisible status will yield insight as to these intra-racial conflicts that he found himself experiencing with fellow African-Americans. The progressive character, now the ripened narrator states: "I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me." He also says, "That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their *inner* eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality" (Ellison, *Invisible* 3). The narrator does not specify that he was referring to white people as those not seeing him with their **"**inner eyes.**"** This further highlights the idea that there is room to believe that blacks also did not see him with their inner eyes. He says "*people* refuse to see [him]." His pronouns of "they," "those," and "their" allow large room to insinuate that members of his own race are not excluded from those that do not figuratively see him. The narrator is not the same person that he was as the main character of the novel. That character does not exist anymore in the sense that his experiences are past, and so are his naïve understandings of his intra-racial cultural oppression. The narrator's invisible status now affords him a keen

retrospective which was not visible to him while he was a tangible physical character enduring his tribulations.

A considerable portion of the narrator's past interactions were with African-Americans and by extension their agencies, which Celeste Condit acknowledges were an attempt to "achieve legitimacy in …terms of the dominant ideology…black Americans in the 1960's strove to achieve legitimacy for their struggle for civil rights"; however, each held their own belief of what was required for social and economic uplift of the Negro" (Condit 5).   These separate beliefs caused feelings of betrayal by opposing race members which in turn weakened any hope for solidarity in the supporting of each other's divergent ideals. Thus, although varying opinions of what paths to uplift would look like were anticipated, it is the consequential feelings of betrayal due to these various paths that contributed to the race being ill prepared to handle the pressure exerted on them from white society. Any solid visible premise to proceed upon was not realized for the race, or the narrator. The explicit understanding that scholars have investigated is that the narrator feels invisible because of being overlooked by white mainstream society. While scholars make the case for the externality of the invisibility, this discussion will direct an argument that a definition of the invisibility is enhanced by examining the consequential aspects of pluralistic schools of thought *within* the African-American culture of how to navigate the white world and the fundamental complications resultant of these disparate approaches on the intra-racial tones stirred inside of the race as being causative of invisibility.

The gifted novelist, Ralph Ellison subtly and poignantly displays this intra-racial conflict in four key scenes. In examinations of African-American subtexts such as this, scholars such as Frantz Fanon or Henry Louis Gates readily come to mind, but if we approach the novel applying Michel Foucault's theory of inverse power we can better observe the betrayal and aggression that kept the race captive at their own will. In an excerpt from *Literary Theroy: An Anthology*, Juile Rivkin and Michael Ryan provide us an explanation of Foucault's theory:

> Michel Foucault's major work on the history of power, published in 1975. [This work] portrays power as something dispersed throughout society. In his famous example of the Panopticon, a circular prison that allows for permanent surveillance of prisoners, Foucault suggests that the citizens of Western democracies act as their own jail – keepers. They internalize the social control that monitors society and maintains the disciplined efficiency of the social system. In this work ["Discipline and Punish"] as well, Foucault began to draw attention to the role of the body in social discipline (Rivkin & Ryan 549).

The largest correlations to the physical, internal, and cerebral control aspects of where Foucault's theory can best be observed in particular is in the first scene that we will later discuss. The first scene takes place in the localized context of the college and the narrator's experiences of betrayal and aggression at the hands of an instrumental fellow race member.

The four incidents that foreground invisibility that this paper explores also have an element of accompanied blindness. If we give a closer look at the narrator's definition of invisibility, we can find an explanation for this: for him to say "people refuse to [figuratively] see him [with their] *inner* eyes" introduces the angle that

someone in this equation is figuratively blind. Therefore throughout this discussion, in addition to structuring the case for intra-racial betrayal we will understand how the rhetorical roles of invisibility and blindness function together to strengthen the argument of the internal racial betrayal as collusive in the character's frustrations. It is also important to point out that some episodes do contain a physical element of blindness and invisibility which motion toward a greater symbolic correlation for the character in his situation of being caught in the midst of a contentious battle with members of his race.

Before calling on those scenes I will give attention to the emphasis of scholars' research of the last fifteen years, which is white society. Scholars hedge themselves into the discussion of *Invisible Man* on the given premise that as Wolfe in "Ambivalent Man" states: "When white America refuses to recognize you as a complex human individual – a sin in which… most twentieth – century American literature is implicated and white America has power, its blindness affects you down to the details of your own inner life" (622). Fleissner in "H.G. Wells and Ralph Ellison: Need the Effect of One Invisible Man on Another be *Itself* Invisible"? also attributes the Invisible Man to an "individualist in modern society who has somehow to make his way on his own and is thus made naked, or worse, invisible by racist reactions" (348).   A clarified definition of just what exactly the invisibility itself *is,* is what is here at issue. A mere taking for granted as these scholars have done, that the invisibility is because the invisible man is neglected by white society is a narrow

vision which will not yield room for understanding how African-Americans have been each other's oppressor.

In this same article in which Fleissner attributes the invisibility to external factors, he allows room for the possibility of the inverse being the case. He does this by focusing his attention on the possibility of viewing the novel from a science fiction point of view. Initially this may seem incompatible with the focus of this discussion, yet his arguments center on the influence that the earlier novel written by H.G. Wells *The Invisible Man* had on Ellison's *Invisible Man.* While it seems that the character of Ellison's invisible man is not perceived as having any specific visible color, Wells attributed the lack of flesh and blood underneath his subject's clothing to represent what appeared to be a "hole," – thus the illusion that something "black" was present. It is this perception of emptiness such as revealed under the clothing of Wells invisible man which permits the fueling of the stereotypical theme that African-Americans were considered as empty and categorically classified as nothing. This is helpful in understanding that the invisibility of the characters could become perceived as a lack of intrinsic placement, which in itself has nothing to do with the circumscription of the white social class. Selisker in his article "'Simply by Reacting?' The Sociology of Race and *Invisible Man's* Automata," restates critic Carol Horton in support of what he terms "a corrective to ideologies" as remarking that " 'postwar liberalism contained an internal contradiction that would sabotage its credibility and potential by posing discrimination alone as the main barrier to

national progress" (575).   Yes, as Horton hints at – discrimination alone was not the chief barrier to national progress.

As this discussion unfolds, aside from discrimination, other obstacles to progress of the African-American will become manifest which primarily involved angst within the race attributable to dealings with one another. The narrator's ordeal with the Battle Royal is a perfect reduced paradigm that Ellison uses to present a window into the coarse intra-racial relations. The battle is set up for us in the beginning of the novel when the narrator competes for a scholarship and wins. Within this Battle Royal incident, all elements of invisibility, blindness, and betrayal are present. We note the complexity of self-preservation, anger, jealousy, and violence amongst the African-American contenders. They are doing whatever they need to do to win this battle. This physically abusive framework of the Battle Royal is a metaphor for the figuratively abusive behavior that he would encounter within his race later on in his struggle to steer through society - beginning with the college. And we can use this Battle Royal as a prototype throughout the discussion to make correlations to specific contenders who demonstrate blindness as opposed to invisibility and how these metaphors match up with later incidents in the narrator's experiences with betrayal.

During the Battle Royal scene he describes that his blindfold was so thick and tight. He thus could not see who was hitting him and from which direction. (Ellison, *Invisible* 22). At this point our narrated character is physically blind, but he is invisible to the other opponents, as are all the other contenders that are also wearing blindfolds. This description of thick and tight is also important because it

appropriately depicts the thick and tight temperament in the battle scene and the thick and tight temperament of the culture as the novel progresses. The fact that he is blind to his opponents that are hitting him sets up the framework for his later experiences that just as in the Battle Royal, his inability to see who is attacking him lends to the feelings of disloyalty and betrayal because he is in a sense blindfolded to these opponents . The barbaric, animalistic performance is necessary in order to achieve the financial support of the white benefactors, who are invisible to the contenders because the contenders are blindfolded. It is ironic that here, the white crowd has blindfolded the black contenders, rendering the whites invisible to the blacks, but leaving the blinded blacks visible to the crowd. This can be read rhetorically, even allegorically, for blacks blinded from understanding the intricacies of the wider world, are prompted, therefore, to fight one another in their collective blindness, rather than try to see *inter*-racial relationships instead. The individual contenders blindly pummel one another, hampering one another's interests intra-racially, owing to the blindness imposed upon them *inter*-racially, by whites who are apparently amused to watch them struggle. Of his blindness in the Battle Royal he says:

> A glove smacked against my head, I pivoted, striking out stiffly as someone went past, and felt the jar ripple along the length of my arm to my shoulder. Then it seemed as though all nine boys had turned upon me at once. Blows pounded me from all sides while I struck out as best I could. So many blows landed upon me that I wondered if I were not the only blindfolded fighter in the ring, or if the man called Jackson hadn't succeeded in getting me after all (Ellison, *Invisible* 22).

Here in a small space we can see the archetypal frame for the narrator's impending betrayal at the hands of his own race. The narrator says that he saw that "everyone fought hysterically. Everybody fought everybody else." Very significant also is that

the now un-blindfolded character observed "a boy violently punching the air and [he] heard him scream in pain as he smashed his hand against a ring post" (Ellison, *Invisible* 23). The implication of this boy singlehandedly harming himself gestures toward the material possibility that not only are African-Americans' applicably being portrayed as victims of one another, but also victims of themselves as might happen when as the character - the contender is suffering from lack of recognition of self-imposed blindness. In essence Ellison's invisible man keeps encountering different models of the Battle Royal scene as it affects African-American leadership. As previously stated, the economic and social benefits available to whites were in short number for African-Americans and Ellison's novel is portraying this less than level playing field that Blacks found themselves fighting one another over at that time. In his collection of first person essays in *Going to the Territory*, Ellison remarks that the "American democracy…through wishful schemes…would banish [blacks] from the nation's bloodstream, from its social structure, and from conscience and historical consciousness" (105).

The narrator's experiences within fragmented Black society can be outlined by two overarching schools of thought on how African-Americans best advance themselves during the era of Reconstruction. Traces of the strategies of such African-American leaders and educators as W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington, to name a few, are evident in these divergent schools of thought that the narrator finds himself confronting when he is enduring his experiences in college, later while working at the paint factory, and with the elusive Brotherhood. His entire experiences with the college and later with the paint factory and the hospital

categorically fit the ideals of Washington of following the path of subservience. His

experience with the Brotherhood could be said to follow the more intellectual ideals

posited by Du Bois. These conflicting philosophies only contributed to his

disillusionment and lack of visibility within the culture, and they pose as an example

of the types of differing ideals that gave rise to the sense of betrayal within the race.

It is as though the respective schools were blind to the potential progress that the

opposite school had to offer.

At times the implicit tone of the naïve character left him questioning how

something so superficial as skin color could dictate personal choice and in turn incur

the penalty of being labeled disloyal when that personal choice differed from that of

the established agency. This concern manifested itself quite literally as the narrator

stirred the paint at the factory. The mystique of the ten black chemical drops into the

paint causing its "optic white" splendor left the narrator astonished. These

ambivalent approaches to African-American progress inevitably rendered the

narrator lacking recognition within the agencies he attached himself to. Lack of

recognition was evident for instance when he was working with the Brotherhood; he

was stripped of voice by being forbidden to create his own speeches. In effect he

became their puppet. It is important to identify the approaches belonging to these

primary schools of thought.   Indications of intellectualism, existentialism, politics,

subservience, and even violence can be seen in these separate models for

advancement in the text. Though distinct, it was not unusual for some or all of these

categories to enmesh in Ellison's novel.

Washington's model and DuBois's model are examples of the kinds of approaches that African-Americans could not agree upon to follow - which in turn prompted virulent disagreements and betrayals within the race. Advocates of each were blind to the likely benefits and struggles of the opposing model.

CHAPTER II

IMAGES OF SUBSERVIENCE

Although no longer enslaved, colonialist ideals colored the opinions that

Booker T. Washington felt of how Blacks would be best benefitted. His religious

and subservient tone appealed to whites, scholar Jeremy Wells explains this, in that

he "stressed the spiritual value of manual labor, spread[ing] the gospel of industrial

education throughout the South, [and] elsewhere in the United States" (Wells 54).

Washington would present himself and his people as "apostles and educators…their

divine mission to uplift the black population that had emerged from slavery unfit for

participation in a democratic society, a population that they routinely characterized

as 'heathen' rather than uneducated or impoverished" (Wells 55). Washington's

subservient behavior and the fact that his *Tuskegee Institute* was primarily funded by

liberal whites caused him at times to be labeled an "Uncle Tom" which is a derisive

term for a black person who fawned to whites. Washington's purpose in utilizing

this method was to enable the advancement of African-Americans in the Jim Crow

South.

Dickson Bruce Jr. best sums up the duplicity of Washington in his article

"Booker T. Washington's *The Man farthest Down and the Transformation of Race,*"

and it is in this summation that we cannot help but perceive the character of Dr.

Bledsoe - president of the college - portrayed within these behaviors that Washington

espoused. Bruce observes:

> But Washington had always been a baffling character. Often he displayed the
> most egregious sycophancy toward white Americans, flattering them,
> assuring the world of their virtue, and championing a program for racial
> progress that posed no real challenge to segregation and white supremacy. At
> the same time, there was much in Washington's words and his behavior to
> suggest a man for whom such sycophancy was a pose, adopted to protect his
> vulnerable position as black educator in the South and black leader in
> America. Most notable, of course, was his vocal accommodationism, hiding
> secret but now well-documented efforts to work against the very Jim Crow
> policies with which he had apparently made his peace. Wearing 'the mask,'
> as his contemporary Paul Laurence Dunbar classically described it,
> Washington was a man who knew how to survive in a hostile white world,
> saying what he knew that white world wanted to hear, trying, like the
> trickster John, to prevent that world from closing off what few possibilities
> there were for effective action and achievement (para.6)

Bledsoe behaves according to Washington's model and this is apparent in the

conversation that Bledsoe had with the narrator just prior to expelling him from the

school for an incident that occurred with Mr. Norton, the white trustee of the school:

> Negros don't control this school or much of anything else…I's big and black
> and I say 'Yes, suh' as loudly as any burrhead when it's convenient, but I'm
> still the king down here. I don't care how much it appears otherwise. Power
> doesn't have to show off. Power is confident, self-assuring, self-starting and
> self-stopping, self-warming, and self-justifying…The only ones I even

pretend to please are *big* white folk, and even those I control more than they control me (Ellison, *Invisible* 140).

The narrator's grandfather had given him similar advice saying: "overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins…until they vomit or bust wide open" (Ellison, *Invisible* 16). Dr. Bledsoe's behavior as a sycophant towards philanthropic school trustee Mr. Norton has strong similarities in Washington's philosophies of how Blacks should behave toward liberal whites who were in a position to help them get what they wanted. In taking a look at the scene just preceding Dr. Bledsoe going in to meet with an injured Mr. Norton, we have an opportunity to see the donning of the figurative mask. The narrator even alludes to Dr. Bledsoe "compos[ing] his angry face like a sculptor, making it a bland mask leaving only the sparkle of his eyes to betray the emotion that [he the character] had seen only a moment before" (100). It is behind this mask that Bledsoe could now attend to Mr. Norton, obsequiously stepping away from his tone as school president to say: "I've been worried about you, sir." Mid-statement Bledsoe notices Norton's injured head and the text states that he "rushed forward" and he cried, "a strange grandmotherly concern in his voice" (101). Bledsoe was "outraged" and demanded to have the doctor come in immediately. Norton refers to his injury as a "mere scratch;" however, Bledsoe much exaggerates his reaction: "'Mr. Norton, Mister Norton! I'm so sorry,' he crooned" (101). The usage of the verb croon is essential because crooning in its basic definition is rendered as singing. This emphasizes the depth to which Bledsoe ingratiates himself to Mr. Norton. Additionally, Bledsoe promises Mr. Norton that the boy would be "severely disciplined" for his actions. Bledsoe is not only angry

with the character because Mr. Norton was injured while in his care, but he is also

infuriated upon learning that he took Mr. Norton to meet John Trueblood, who is

inarguably representative of the most reprehensible class of African-Americans and

also is known in the community for having gotten his wife and daughter pregnant.

   This encounter with Norton, Trueblood, and Bledsoe forcefully depicts the

degree to which the character is caught between the intra-racial incongruities. This

scene is crucial in that it establishes the callous nature of Bledsoe and represents the

portion of those African- Americans who felt that a factor in success was to betray

their fellow race members if necessary. Strong parallels to the initial Battle Royal

incident can be seen here with Bledsoe and the narrator. While stepping in the ring

to fight the battle, and while feeling the blindfold "pressed into place…even then

[he] had been going over [his] speech" (Ellison, *Invisible* 21). Although he was

physically in the ring, it is as though he was literally blind to the violence about to

take place surrounding him. The only thing on the narrator's mind was his speech.

He also states that he felt he had *suddenly* found himself in a "dark room filled with

poisonous cottonmouths" (Ellison, *Invisible* 21). Much can be gleaned from this

statement because it alerts the reader to the narrator's abrupt awareness of his

dangerous surroundings. A cottonmouth is a snake and this is a fitting description of

Bledsoe. Up until a certain point, the narrator was blind to the fact that Bledsoe was

a poisonous snake. Here he is trying to get his education at the college, just like in

the Battle Royal. He is just trying to get his speech correctly formulated and

suddenly he is physically blindfolded and has to fight. This metaphor emphasizes

his moments at college when he is merely trying to get his education and then he suddenly realizes that he is in another type of battle ring with Bledsoe the snake.

He has been blindsided and betrayed by Bledsoe because Bledsoe believes that in order to remain in Mr. Norton's affections, he must severely chastise him. This belief however, clashes with the reality of how Mr. Norton handled his visit with Trueblood. What I mean is that it is interesting that both Trueblood and Bledsoe earned sympathies from Mr. Norton as evidenced by him responding to both statuses of Black men with financial rewards, so we are left to wonder – if betrayal was actually necessary to get ahead. This is another example of the narrator being suspended between others of his own race. In spite of Bledsoe's low estimation of Trueblood, Mr. Norton still gives him money to buy gifts for the children – something that Bledsoe would never do for those whom in his estimation were lower race members. It is reasonable to say that Bledsoe would also encounter a feeling of jealousy that such a person as Trueblood who lived in a "slum" would also be a recipient of the goodwill of Whites (Ellison, *Invisible* 136.) Such a reality perhaps came as an assault on the character of Bledsoe who felt that he had created a fool-proof system in ingratiating Blacks to the mercies of powerful Whites.

Bledsoe's reaction to Trueblood motions to a thought-provoking line of inquiry regarding the jealousy within the race as a result of the feeling of favoritism displayed to certain African-Americans from Whites.

Bleeding With Power

   The power that rested in Bledsoe's hands was also owing to the space of the physical school institution itself. There are similarities between the structural format of the school and Foucault's theory of power as he defines in "Discipline and Punish" whereby the captive is held down at their own will. Here Ellison's description of the narrator's college environment resembles Foucault's description of the annular shaped Panopticon prison institution without wires, fences, or gates. The college is quite literally a prison. The Foucouldian Panopticon has a surveillance tower whereby the jail-keeper can see any prisoner at any time. This tower having "venetian blinds on the windows" prevented the prisoners from seeing into the tower to see if a guard was present, thus the prisoners could not know when exactly they were being viewed (Foucault 555). It was the belief, however, that they were constantly being watched that caused the prisoner to exert power over their own selves to behave as their own "jail-keeper" – as though they were being watched. In this example of mutual self-repression, the prisoner was doing the oppressor's work for them. In this self-to-self relationship, the prisoner was not only captive but also captor. It is important that the "power should be visible and unverifiable." Visible in the sense that "the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon." The power is unverifiable in the sense that "the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at at any moment" (Foucault 555). This arrangement allows the prisoner to "become the principle of his own subjection" (Foucault 556). Additionally this permits the

theory's "internalization" requirement of the "role of the body" to be present in the social control that monitors society" (Foucault 549).

On a broader scale the college the narrator attended fits this description of an institution of captivity similar to the annular shape of the Panopticon that Foucault describes. The threat of discipline was encircling, and there were no figurative corners for the character to conceal himself. Much like the prison, Ellison describes the school as not having any physical restrictions which kept the students within the confines of the building: "Down the sloping lawn below me the male students moved toward their dormitories, seeming far away" (*Invisible* 134) This is a word picture that paints an image of liberty and independence although just like the Panopticon, the students can never avoid close scrutiny.

The "tall outline of the central tower" that Foucault designates, was for the character the imposing dread that such a figure as Bledsoe's persona evokes. The tower being described in theory as an "outline" is appropriate here, because with an outline, the entire essence of the structure is not seen, only its essential framework. Figuratively, the character does not have to behold the thickness of Dr. Bledsoe either to recognize the immense overweening control that rest in Bledsoe's hands.

There are more similarities to be found in Foucault's theory of inverse power and the emotional state of the character. These similarities can be seen in the intervening moments that the character waited to have his meeting with Dr. Bledsoe

subsequent to his accident with Mr. Norton of which was previously discussed. This meeting with Bledsoe was painfully delayed by a vesper service during which a Reverend Homer A. Barbee gave a deliberate speech further underscoring the prestige of the college and the mission of the original founder. This annular shape lends the ability for all prisoners to be visible at any given time. The character felt as though he were visible at all times even when he was not directly being viewed: "I seemed to feel his eyes resting upon my face as he swept the section in which I sat" (Ellison, *Invisible* 113). The scene reaches a crucial pivot when the character "become[s] the principle of his own subjection:" (Foucault 556) Though emotionally overwhelmed he resists his desire to "rush from the building… [he] sat stiff and erect supported by the hard bench, relying upon it as a form of hope." Furthermore he would have considered physically leaving the service as "an act of treason" (132). Here we see the "role of the [character's] body in social discipline" (Foucault 549). The scene concludes with the character being "[unable to] look at Dr. Bledsoe" (Ellison, *Invisible* 132). Very much like the prisoners being unable to behold their captors for the construction of the tower and its venetian blinds, it was as though the narrator had been incapable of seeing his captor as if he had suffered from a self-imposed blindness - although Bledsoe was standing in sight of him. Here we see the completion of this aspect of the theory demonstrated. The hyper-visibility that the Panopticon imposes assists in the character's feelings of physical invisibility because his privacy is literally invisible to him. Additionally, since he does not know whether he is being watched at any particular time, he further loses control over his

own movements which may or may not be being physically observed. It is invisible

to the character whether or not he is visible to the governing agency.

Foucault's theory of power does not conclude with the dispersion of the

power remaining merely physical which allows for the captive to double as their own

captor; however, he also introduces an intellectual strategy. Power relations that are

suspended by knowledge are ostensibly the most effective manipulations of control.

> We should admit that power produces knowledge…that power and
> knowledge directly imply one another…that there is no power relation
> without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any
> knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power
> relations. These power- knowledge relations are to be analyzed …the subject
> who knows, the objects to be known and the modalities of knowledge must
> be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power-
> knowledge and their historical transformations (550).

Bledsoe utilizes his powerfully spatial latitude which accords his position as

president of the college as he chooses – to the betrayal, detriment, and ruin of the

narrator. Instead of Bledsoe using his superior position that so few Blacks could

boast of at that time, he used his status as a weapon to destroy fellow race members

who he perceived as a threat.

Suggestions of Socioeconomic Subtext

As we proceed in this discussion, it is at this moment that I will point out that

although at times in the narrator's experiences there are hints of socio-economic

disparities within the race, there is no significant enough basis to attribute the

internal conflict to the economic disparities within the race. Actually it would be

trite to make such a suggestion seeing as though the individuals that Bledsoe contended with, for an example, posed no economic threat to him – such as Trueblood and the narrator. Such a suggestion would further insinuate that if all members of the race were on the same socio-economic class then there would be no fighting amongst them. Well, the narrator's later experiences at the paint factory disprove this because despite the fact that all the workers were collecting a paycheck, there were still those who were not satisfied and consequently found something to fight about. Returning to Bledsoe to echo this point, his rivals of less financial status were not the ones picking fights with him, rather, Bledsoe was the instigator of contention with the less financially privileged Blacks. He apparently possessed all the fruitages that a Black could want, yet he was the source of the rivalry – not the less economically fortunate African-Americans. Moreover, such a suggestion of socio-economic causes as the foundational source of internal strife would conflict with the Battle Royal paradigm that we are tracing throughout this discussion. The contenders in the Battle Royal were all leveled. They all entered the ring blind-folded with no clothing beyond their undergarments. As the Battle Royal suggests, an equivalent opponent is someone who has no more or less tools than the rival. Highlighting the socio-economic drives would indeed however bear a fruitful discussion, but for another line of inquiry which is outside the scope of this discussion.

Bledsoe was not interested in helping his fellowman; he sought to do whatever he thought he needed to do to remain on top, and for him this included

actions of betrayal. However, even though Bledsoe's power was formidable the inverse power that Foucault discusses is inescapable, because despite his position at the college, his manipulative maneuvers and bogus reference letters in behalf of the character, he himself is being watched. Yes, he too is nothing more than an affluent Black man who managed to get a bit more rope within the prefabricated confines of the white world.   This scenario stresses the fact that even for Bledsoe, he is in the same Panopticon that the narrator is inside of. Bledsoe's prominence and money do not equal power in the white world. He will never be in a position to overcome the reality that he is a black man living at the mercy of the white world that has furnished him his privileged position - hence his panicked reaction to the mishap with white Mr. Norton.

Cognitive Captivity

Although Foucault's analysis refers to confinement in a prison where the captive is their own captor, it also includes similarly non-physically captive experiences where the captive is psychologically, mentally, or emotionally cramped at his own will, effecting what is referred to as "inverse power" such as the trauma the narrator faced in his relationship with Bledsoe.   In successive jagged stages in the character's life, this cerebral aspect of the inverse confinement that Foucault acknowledges is perceived in the character's thought processes.

These captive thoughts are evident upon his exit from his physical encounter with Bledsoe, leaving the audience uncertain as to the health of the character's

figurative eyesight, as it appears that he cannot discern all of the devastation that

Bledsoe has caused him. He enters a drugstore to eat breakfast. While eating

breakfast he ruminates on Dr. Bledsoe and Bledsoe's standing within the white

community. His thoughts further direct him away from examining the disloyal

influences within his race as exhibited by Bledsoe, but instead his thoughts reflect

his focus on the white society's pressure and what it takes to conform to what he

believes Whites would want to see in a Black leader. As he stirs his coffee he

wonders if when Dr. Bledsoe visits New York he stays at "an expensive white hotel,

go[es] [to] parties with trustees" (175). He further imagines how he himself can

emulate an air of mystique like Bledsoe so that when he returned to college he would

be "a little different, especially if [he] wanted to play a leading role." He further

states: "It made the folks talk about you, try to figure you out" (175).   Instead of

seeing the hazard in men like Bledsoe, he instead wants to be like him. It is as if the

narrated character cannot see that he bled so much at the hands of Bledsoe.

Bledsoe, like Trueblood, both have blood on their hands because of the

oppression of their own race members and in Trueblood's case, that of his family. Is

Ellison suggesting that Trueblood's actions are worse than Bledsoe, insofar as his

name is prefixed with True? Ellison may be pointing out that there are worse things

for a black than to behave as Bledsoe behaved. Another interpretation could suggest

that there are far worse things than to be Black and have no money, it is far worse to

be guilty of rape and harming one's family. The interpretation is implicit that

family, and things that money cannot buy are the truly consequential things.

Regardless to social status, it is well within the reach of anyone to behave kindly, in

and outside of the family. The narrator's encounters have illustrated the emptiness of betrayal, isolation, and suffering as an outsider.

The effects of Dr. Bledsoe's disloyalty and betrayal follow the character as he lucklessly transitions through society after having been expelled from college. He is not aware of the content of the reference letters; therefore, the betrayal continues. He takes a job at a paint company as a last resort after learning the truth about the awful letters of reference that Dr. Bledsoe had written, which were all addressed to trustees of the college. The final letter was addressed to Mr. Emerson, also a trustee of the college. Upon locating Mr. Emerson's office the character is greeted by Mr. Emerson's son to whom he hands over the final reference letter. The character does not know that he is speaking with Mr. Emerson's son. It is in this meeting with young Emerson as he is referred to in the text that the character learns of the damaging details of all those letters Dr. Bledsoe had written. At Emerson's son's advice, the character never meets Mr. Emerson senior. Mr. Emerson's son is outraged and promises to help him find a job. He knows of a possible job at an outfit called *Liberty Paints* that he encourages the character to pursue. The character is instead angry and vengeful because of what is contained in the letters – yet the effects of Bledsoe's betrayal settles in and he realizes that he still needs a job and that he can no longer count on Bledsoe to be true to his promise to help him in his career endeavors. Thus, without any recourse, he decides to call the paint company and he is instructed to report to work the following morning.

He leaves the meeting with Emerson feeling devastated over the betrayal. His description of his ride down the elevator underlines his mental captivity and

29

defeat: "The elevator dropped me like a shot and I went out and walked along the street." He feels the impending doom as he says, "I stopped before a gray wall where high above me the headstones of a church graveyard arose like the tops of buildings" (189). This position of him having to look upward to see the headstones is an appropriate representation of his emotions because at this point he feels lower than death. The distance between him and the headstones is so vast that he states that it as though they are the "tops of buildings." This correlation that he makes to death is fitting because death represents the epitome of invisibility and non-existence. Another way of reading this passage could be that the betrayal so severely impacted the narrator that he felt that death, at that particular moment, would have represented an improvement to his captive situation – as indicated by the position of the headstones being at the top.

Upon reporting to work the following day he encounters the huge electric sign of the paint company itself: "Keep America Pure with Liberty Paints" (Ellison, *Invisible* 192). There exists a subtle irony here in the fact that as a result of the meeting with young Emerson, the character has been liberated from Dr. Bledsoe and his ill intentions with the letters. The mystery has disappeared because the deceit that he began to suspect about Bledsoe was confirmed. Bledsoe's disloyal behavior is no longer invisible to the narrator. However, the illumination of a sign about "pur[ity] and liberty," only for the character to later learn that the company's classic "optic white" paint is created by mixing of ten drops of a black unidentified chemical in the paint contributes to this impression of opaqueness. With this image, Ellison is gesturing toward the reality that the physical value of these ten black drops is being

whitewashed by the company, but additionally, Ellison is pointing out that whites

would much rather keep the value of blacks' contributions to society hidden.

CHAPTER III

A PORTRAIT OF PURITY

Further captivity and betrayal await the character as he becomes acquainted with fellow paint factory workers. As he comes to learn, it is not just the ten drops of black chemical that he must watch out for. The workers at the paint factory are in a sense metaphorical of these black chemical drops - as the black workforce is indispensable to the function of the company. Given that these secretive black chemical drops are indispensable to the creation of this optic white paint, the hidden message to the narrator seems to be that true purity and liberty is not purely white in the first place but has an unacknowledged black admixture. It is difficult to ignore the significance of the numeral ten and its corollary to what W.E.B. Du Bois describes as the talented tenth. Ross Posnock has disclosed the core of Dubois's

talented tenth ideology in his article "How It Feels to be a Problem: Du Bois, Fanon,

and the 'Impossible Life' of the Black Intellectual:

> In his 1898 Fisk University commencement address Du Bois praised colleges for providing 'a glimpse of the higher life, the broader possibilities of humanity.' He warned that a democracy without the college bred would lack 'yeast,' an image James repeats in calling the college bred 'the yeast-cake for democracy's dough' ("SV," p. 1247). Like any race, 'the Negro race…is going to be saved by its exceptional men' declares DuBois in 1903, and he calls for a black 'aristocracy of talent and character' ("TT," pp,842, 847). This talented tenth emerged as a critical mass of trained professionals and business men, including creative intellectuals – 'leaders of thought and missionaries of culture – as well as doctors, lawyers, merchants, realtors, farmers, and, above all, 'teachers, and …teachers of teachers.' All of them together embody 'the promise of black men' that will inspire those in the masses 'worth the saving' ("TT," pp. 861, 852, 847) (Posnock 332).

Du Bois's approach to the problem of racism was to attack it with intellectualism,

unlike his counterpart Booker T. Washington. Despite the differences in the two

opposing methods, work, sacrifice, and service are commonalities of both

approaches. Du Bois believed that "to make a name in science, to make a name in

art [would] thus raise [his] race" so he therefore set out to make an impact through

the tool of education (Rampersad 51). A few different inferences can be drawn from

the fact that the ten drops stirred into the paint to create the optic white were of an

unidentified black chemical. But first, the satiric effect must be noted. It is indeed

laughable that a paint that is so white would have as its core ingredient a black

substance. Once stirred, the black drops are invisible. Ellison is in a very implicit

way calling attention to the fact that without the Black community the White

community would not be able to function in this hegemonic structure that they so

much enjoy the fruits of. Ellison remarks in his essay "What America Would be Like

Without Blacks" that "no one …seems ever to have considered what the nation would have become had Africans *not* been brought to the New World, and had their descendants not played such a complex and confounding role in the creation of American history and culture" (Ellison, *Territory* 107). The lack of identity of the black chemical in the paint mixture is also essential because if for a moment we apply it to the one-drop rule it would make it difficult to actually identify who qualifies as Black by legal definition. Also the term 'optic' takes us back to the moral of a story that is all about appearances. As long as it looks white, as the trite remark states: "then it is alright." Many African-American people who could pass as white did so. African-Americans who could and did pass for white to settle and begin new lives in the North were mixed right into the surrounding culture of white society. Just like the paint, there was no hint of the societal ingredients. Optically, they were white, and many of them now took advantage of ways to extend their hand to their African –American heritage while being immersed in white society and enjoying its privileges – no one the wiser – definitely not the whites.

Another look at this passage involving the character's work at the factory indicates the types of edifices that this optic white paint was used to paint; these were schools, buildings, and governmental structures that were painted with this optic white. The narrator even wonders "if the same Liberty paint was used on the campus" (Ellison, Invisible 196). Du Bois believed that intellectualism was the answer; along with intellectualism comes mental elevation from captivity of which such freedom poses an incredible avenue to agency and advancement. So it is fitting that the paint is depicted as adorning these types of intellectual structures. A more

implicit rendering of the message is that soon enough Blacks would be performing in

all sectors of society from educational to governmental if they availed themselves of

the angle of education to uplift themselves.   However they must be aware of the

strife this would cause among those from within the race who advocated

Washington's strategy instead. If this is the same paint on the narrator's former

school, it would be an irony that the paint is used on a campus from which the

narrator was in essence liberated from a dominating African-American president.

Also, this could suggest that blackness is everywhere in America in spite of claims to

white purity. In more basic terms, paint is a covering and its symbolism speaks to

the superficiality of individuals who have caused the narrator to be in this situation.

The character's supervisor - Kimbro, remarks upon the narrator's successful mixing

of the paint: "That's it, as white as George Washington's Sunday-go-to-meetin' wig

and as sound as the all-mighty dollar"…That's paint that'll cover just about

anything" (Ellison, *Invisible* 197).   The comparison of the first president of the

United States George Washington with a paint that was created with black

ingredients is an irony which further emphasizes the struggles the invisible man

faces that are attributable to his own race. Kimbro continues, "White! It's the purest

white that can be found. Nobody makes a paint any whiter. This batch right here is

heading for a national monument" (Ellison, *Invisible* 197). The irony persists with

this "pure white" paint that contains drops of black chemicals being used to cover a

symbol of white authority - a national monument. The reality of the ubiquity of

blackness is strengthened by Ellison's explanation of the contribution of African-

Americans' to the English language:

> [English] is a language that began by merging the sounds of many tongues, brought together in the struggle of diverse regions. And whether it is admitted or not, much of the sound of that language is derived from the timbre of the African voice and the listening habits of the African ear. So there is a *de'z* and *do'z* of slave speech sounding beneath our most polished Harvard accents, and if there is such a thing as a Yale accent, there is a Negro wail in it – doubtlessly introduced there by Old Yalie John C. Calhoun, who probably got it from his mammy (Ellison, *Territory* 109).

Ellison's fervor is palpable in his remarks about the unacknowledged influences of African-Americans. Since language is the medium by which all cultures, disciplines, races, communicate and progress in society, this fact makes African's contribution to society doubly significant in solidifying the detail that blackness is everywhere that language is. As Ellison stated, were it not for Africans' contributions, even Yale graduate, eighteenth century politician, seventh Vice resident of the United States, and slavery supporter John Calhoun would not have known how to catch words that he did not learn from his mammy. The paint that is used to cover all types of edifices is metaphorical of the numerous spaces where the core of black involvement in society is intertwined.

The character runs into a snag when he has to refill the dropper with black chemical and Kimbro does not specify which of the containers in the tank room contains the miraculous black chemical. The character laments "It's just like Kimbro not to tell me…you can't trust any of them…" (198). This response demonstrates that the maturing character has become hypersensitive to betrayal, even being prepared to believe that Kimbro is duplicitous. It is as though he is figuratively at the same point he was at when he removed his blindfold while fighting in the Battle

Royal and he was able to see "fighting from group to group." He recognizes that the fighting amongst them causes them to have to behave as "cautious crabs crouching to protect their mid-sections" (23). He is becoming aware of these betrayals and the consequential suffering of internalized oppression that he endures. In the tank room the character has a choice of two black substances to select to mix the paint recipe. He locates seven containers, five of which have a clear liquid; however, "the last two both contained something black like the dope, but with different codes" (199). The character chose from the two black substances what he thought was correct, but he chose the wrong one and it brought adverse consequences for the paint: "Instead of the smooth, hard surface of the first, they were covered with a sticky goo through which [he] could see the grain of the wood." Kimbro yelled: "You took the wrong tank" (Ellison, *Invisible* 199). The two different options of black chemical in the tank room could be seen as a metaphor for him having to decide which of the schools of thought he would follow as an African-American. At this moment we can take stock of a larger theme that becomes visible if we pull together this alternate reading of black on black violence combined with the traditional theme of white oppression towards blacks. What we now have is Ellison's picture of the profound sense of isolation that the African-American people suffered. When someone shows us something that is sad like this, we may not want to look at it. We would rather just ignore it or make it go away by just mixing it in as best we can under a larger pattern that will hide it –like the paint recipe. Of his masterpiece, Ellison remarks:

> I felt that there was a great deal about the nature of American experience
> which was not understood by most Americans. I felt also that the diversity of
> the total experience rendered much of it mysterious. And I felt that because
> so much of it which appeared unrelated was actually most intimately

intertwined, it needed exploring. In fact I believe that unless we continually explored the network of complex relationships which bind us together, we would continue being the victims of various inadequate conceptions of ourselves, both as individuals and as citizens of a nation of diverse peoples (*Territory* 42).

If we dwell on the narrator's experience at the paint factory a bit further, we will see that paradoxically, the paint company itself could also stand as a symbol of those black drops. As previously hinted at in this discussion, the paint company though owned by Whites, is governed primarily by African-Americans who of the two schools of thought, fit into Booker T. Washington's paradigm of "good Negroes" who do manual work for the master with no threat to the white dominant framework. Moreover, the larger white society would not be able to function without the labor of the paint factory - no different than the paint would reach its "optic white" status without the ten black drops. The passage emphasizes this point when the character's new supervisor Lucius Brockway brags to the character of his value to the company and he makes it clear that "he learned [all he knows] without all that education" (Ellison, *Invisible* 210). Brockway tells the narrated character of a time when he suffered from pneumonia and he states that as a result of his being sick, a new "so-called engineer" was brought in, but "everything was going bad" because of the inexperience of the new employee, who by the way was an Italian man.   Brockway says that "word got to me that they done put that fellow in my place and when I got well I wouldn't come back. Here I been with' em so long and loyal and everything." In a cunning maneuver Brockway "just sent 'em word that Lucius Brockway was retiring"! Brockway's manipulative response worked because it elicited the reply that Brockway desired:

Next thing you know here come the Old Man. He so old hisself his chauffeur has to help him up them steep stairs at my place. Come in a –puffing and a – blowing, says, 'Lucius, what's this I hear 'bout you retiring?' 'Well, Sir…I been pretty sick…kinder getting along in my years, as you well know, and I hear that this Italian fellow you got in my place is doing so good I thought I'd might as well take it easy round the house.' Why, you'd a-thought I'd done cursed him or something. 'What kind of talk is that… taking it easy round the house when we need you at the plant…that fellow out at the plane don't know a thing or two about furnaces. I'm so worried about what he's going to do, that he's liable to blow up the plant…He can't do your job…he don't have the touch…we haven't put out a first-class batch of paint since you been gone (Ellison, *Invisible* 211).

The owner of the paint factory summed it up best when he said: "we haven't put out a first-class batch of paint since you been gone." This declaration can be taken literally or figuratively. Either way, it underpins the fact that the Black factory workers are indeed representative of those ten black chemicals that are so vital in the production of this paint. Without black Brockway, the paint is bad. Without the ten black drops, the paint is bad. An Italian worker being hired as an unsuitable replacement for a black worker stresses the crucial value of the key ingredients to the paint factory's paint recipe. Moreover, Ellison uses the paint factory as a powerful metaphor to attest to this fact. This paint that has adorned national and political monuments has as it nucleus ten black drops. The hiring of the Italian worker by the owner of the paint company is an enormous display of ingratitude for the contributions of blacks to the success of his company. The majority of what Americans' consider as success as defined by white society in the arenas of political, educational, and artistic innovation largely owes itself to the contributions of the labors of African-American people.

An Attempt at Fellowship

Upon the character discovering that he had left his lunch in the locker room, he has an up close reminder of being an outsider in his own race. When he returned to the locker room to get his lunch he happened to walk in on some workers who had formed a union because they wanted to "improve the condition of the workers" (217). What some readers may overlook as just another continuation of a sustaining theme of blacks collectively fighting to determine how to get more out of their white employers, it is actually a scene that illustrates the hostility and prejudice that the narrator faced which served to add to his feelings of isolation. The character even remarks of the violence and angry outburst when he entered the locker room and he was referred to by the other black factory workers as a "fink," indicating that they suspected him of being a traitor or an informant, they questioned his loyalties. "The room roared. Biting anger grew inside me. So I was not so highly developed as they! Were they all Ph. D.'s"? They did not even know who he was, yet they distrusted him: "Who sent this fink into the meeting, brother chairman …Ask him that"! (Ellison, *Invisible* 215). Here Ellison employs a subtle irony in the use of the locker room to depict this conflict. A locker room is an intimate setting where typically all the team members gather for such activities ranging from executing strategies to improving morale among the team. This is the only section in the novel where there is such a setting that camaraderie could comfortably take place, and even in this appropriate setting, no such harmony exists. This is a very explicit signal to the narrator that he was not part of the team. This scene is pivotal because it stands

in between him and the accident that he suffered that eventually led to his dual

mental and physically excruciating confinement in the hospital.

What the audience is told of the accident could be read by some as

incompetence on the part of the narrator, but the detail remains that although the

character had chosen the wrong chemical to mix into the paint, it is regrettable that

the supervisor Kimbro made himself inaccessible to helping the character properly

select the chemical and ultimately failed to protect him. This lack of support from

Kimbro led to his being transferred to the department within the factory where he

suffered the injury. Up until this point we have seen how time after time these

betrayals have been instrumental in the narrator's revolving misfortunes.

Hospital Corners

This accident at the paint factory leaves him with a feeling that he "had lost

irrevocably an important victory" (Ellison, *Invisible* 225). Although a vague

description of the accident is explained, it seems that while in the process of fainting

or losing consciousness he strikes his head, accompanied by a large substance that

fell upon him. (Ellison, *Invisible* 225). He awakens in a hospital to a medical staff

and a doctor with a "bright third eye" giving him something to swallow. He cannot

remember his name when asked by the medical staff. The physical restraint along

with the complication of not recalling his name would confound his awareness of

mental liberty – here he is simultaneously mentally and physically captive. He

describes the pain from being "pounded between crushing electrical pressures;

pumped between live electrodes." He discovers that his head is "encircled by a piece of cold metal like the iron cap worn by the occupant of an electric chair" (Ellison, *Invisible* 227). He then realizes that he is confined inside of a "glass and nickel box" (Ellison, *Invisible* 228). These constant electrical experiences one after the other all have the same thing in common that they cause great pain and they further alienate him from society. His analogy of the electric chair serves to reinforce the fact that his character feels powerless over his increasing isolated existence.

The atmosphere within the hospital room reaches an uncomfortable climax when the hospital staff begin asking his name again, as they had when he first arrived at the hospital. This is significant because his inability to tell them who he is, in a way, keeps him trapped of his own accord because he cannot be released without providing his name. Not knowing his name or being able to provide even his mother's name lends to his sense of captivity. His inability to recall his mother is weighty in that the mother is the originator of life and existence. In essence, his not being able to call upon his mother indicates the depth of his captivity - without the mother he cannot free himself. Not recalling his name keeps him captive, in the same manner that his powerlessness to recognize his presence within his own culture also keeps him captive. This becomes more of an identity crisis as the staff continues to ask more questions in search of his identity: "Where were you born"? The inquiry takes a terrible racist turn with them beginning to ask questions such as: "Who was brer rabbit"? The staff is annoyed at his lack of identity recognition. The doctor's "eyes blaze[d] with annoyance." It is interesting to note that although the narrator did not know who he was, he knew who he was not. This is exemplified by

his statement that "the slate was filled with meaningless names" (Ellison, *Invisible* 236). None of the names were his. They did not care who he was but *he* cared who he was. He cared so much about his identity that he did not answer to any of those other names – even if it meant he would be granted exit. At this point he was left alone in the machine and the key to getting out of the machine was him knowing his name, further underlining his role in his own domination. There was no room for movement inside this machine which could itself be seen as a prison confinement, an extension of the boundaries of white society. Not knowing his identity only causes him to be further trapped inside of the boundaries that are already in place. He recognizes his hand in the matter: "It was exhausting, for no matter what the scheme I conceived, there was one constant flaw – myself. There was no getting around it. I could no more escape than I could think of my identity…When I discover who I am, I'll be free" (Ellison, *Invisible* 237). Yes the captivity and powerlessness are internally driven.

He is released after a "tall austere-looking man in a white coat" discovers the name of the character on his chart (Ellison, *Invisible* 240). His release from the machine in the hospital has strong similarities to that of the birth of a baby. It is as though he has been reborn; part of his release includes the severing of a cord that had been attached to a node that was fixed to his belly. The description of the severing of the cord is similar to the cutting of an umbilical cord of a newborn infant. Following his release he is told that he cannot return to work and is required to sign release papers which release the factory from liability. Upon his return of the forms he is assured he would receive a check. He leaves but feels as though he is in the

grip of an "alien personality." This is pivotal because he no longer feels afraid of anyone at all. "I was no longer afraid. Not of important men, not of trustees and such; for knowing now that there was nothing which I could expect from them, there was no reason to be afraid." Upon this rebirth he felt light-headed with ears ringing (Ellison, *Invisible* 244). He was also told by someone identified as the director that he had been through a "severe experience" and that he was not ready for the "rigors of industry" and that he was not "prepared for work under…industrial conditions" (Ellison, *Invisible* 241).

So here we have completed examining aspects of the narrator's experience with Washington's version of what equated to uplift for Blacks – which did not necessarily include socioeconomic advancement. The narrator's experiences confirm that his encounters with fellow race members were instrumental in his isolation. The narrator's involvement with these subservient ideals has not brought him any nearer at all to individual autonomy. In these instances the narrator has faced betrayal at every turn. Equally important is that in certain situations such as at the paint factory, we have a representation of all workers on equal socio-economic ground, yet the disloyalty amongst them continues. This was an overwhelmingly adequate example of how Ellison demonstrates that socioeconomic disparities do not always have to be the stock, representative depicted cause of intra-racial ills. Rather, the workers at the factory were divided over philosophies of progress.

CHAPTER IV

THE BROTHERHOOD AND INTELLECTUALISM

When the narrator decides to join the Brotherhood, he is perhaps imagining that he is now aligning himself with an organization that will work to surpass these barriers of discrimination, isolation, and betrayal that he has confronted with the previous groups he was associated with. Regrettably, here again he succumbs to captivity, and yet again betrayal. Additionally, he is exploited for his speaking ability. The character's exposure to the Brotherhood initially occurs when he gives a speech as a result of witnessing what appeared to be an unjust eviction of an elderly African-American couple from their apartment. His intellectual speaking ability caught the attention of the Brotherhood, for which he in turn became recruited into the organization (Ellison, *Invisible* 261). The narrator remarks: "It was after all, a job that promised to exercise my talent for public speaking" (Ellison, *Invisible* 291).

Upon his recruitment he was furnished with a weak model of identity with a name handed to him on a slip of paper. The name is known to him but undisclosed to Ellison's reader: "This is your new identity," Brother Jack said….Inside I found a name written on a slip of paper." Along with this new identity he was given a sum of money that would pay for his back rent and a new wardrobe (303). Furthermore Brother Jack orders him to move from his living quarters to a new location where he cannot be recognized (301). It is important that we take note of the figurative invisibility that is at work in the narrator here; by this time, the narrator should be in a position to draw correlations with his previous confining environments to where he is presently. It is also somewhat disturbing that although his post with the Brotherhood is a paying position, he was given an excessive sum of money up front to care for his living expenses, wardrobe, and rent. In essence the narrator cannot see that he has been bought. He has given them leverage that he is not in a position to repossess. He is now owned and is nothing more than a piece of real estate to them. Even though the Brotherhood has the premise of advancing toward addressing social ailments, the narrator fails to see that there is still a price to be paid for entry into this type of sphere. The new clothes and the extra amenities came at a value that he was not prepared to pay. Moreover, this new organization headed by Brother Jack demands that he gives up his identity and take on a new name and sever his ties with his family and friends. Being that he never enjoyed recognition – thus rendering him figuratively invisible to others, it is actually an irony that he is required to relinquish his present form of invisibility to adopt a new form of

invisibility where he is being provided with a version of presence that differs from his own.

It seems that the character cannot recognize that although he has a prominent position of spokesman with a name, his contributions are still concealed because all of his actions are dictated by Brother Jack. It is interesting to mention that the character feels that this is just a job that promised to exercise his talent for public speaking, yet he failed to see that once he became part of the organization, it was no longer his own speaking ability; his speaking ability now belonged to the Brotherhood because they have renamed him and they thus own him and his clothes. It may seem like an inconsequential matter that Brother Jack gave him money to buy clothes, but clothes further define personality and clothing selection demonstrates how the world perceives the person wearing a particular garment. However, the narrator cannot recognize all of these implications; he is pleased with his new post: "The new suit imparted newness to me. It was the clothes and the new name and the circumstances. It was newness too subtle to put into thought, but it was there. I was becoming someone else…The moment I walked out upon the platform and opened my mouth I'd be someone else. Not just a nobody" (Ellison, *Invisible* 328). This is an example of the failure of the office of intellectualism. He is not using his intellect to his advantage in discerning these recurrent patterns of identity crisis. After the character finishes this speech at a rally of which the audience was indignant over such things as economics and politics, he is chastised for his passionate speech. "In my opinion, Brother Jack said, the speech was wild, hysterical, politically irresponsible and dangerous…we must strive to reach the people through their

47

intelligence." Another brother agreed with Brother Jack saying that the speech was "the antithesis of the scientific approach" (Ellison, *Invisible* 342). To the Brotherhood, intelligence and intellectualism equate with a structured, controlled, **"**scientific approach**"** to these political issues that they are confronting. Emotion such as the narrator has, is despised for being what they refer to as unscientific. Brother Jack decides to send the narrator for training to engage a more "scientific" mode of expression. This training is to include "a period of intense study and indoctrination under the guidance of Brother Hambro." The aforementioned situation highlights the point that when the narrator traded his lack of identity for their version of identity, he lost his freedom to give speeches using his own words.

When the narrator joined the Brotherhood, he became no different than Brother Tod Clifton's uncontrolled Sambo Doll that relied on the nudging of whoever was in control of it. The fact that the doll was a toy is significant because a toy is used at the whim of whomever it belongs to, for whatever pleasure or entertainment is derived. The doll sings a song that stresses this point:

> Shake it up! Shake it up!
> He's Sambo, the dancing doll, ladies and gentleman.
> Shake him, stretch him by the neck and set him down,
> -He'll do the rest. Yes! (Ellison, *Invisible* 421).

Upon closer examination, the speeches that the narrator is required to deliver demonstrate his treatment as a puppet by the Brotherhood – like the Sambo doll, in that he was severely scripted in whatever he spoke about to the community. Scholar Danielle Allen weighs in on the effect of the Brotherhood in: "Ralph Ellison on the Tragicomedy of Citizenship." She directs us to the politically elusive role of the

Brotherhood organization. Allen takes a firm stance against what she feels to be a very nonspecific political instrument. Her observation revolves around her belief that "no single policy issue can in any way be said to orient or shape the movement of the novel." (Allen 56). Allen is correct in her description of the brotherhood as "shadowy." Indeed it is elusive and oftentimes the narrator finds himself in a car with the other members and he has no idea where they are going, or he is called at the last minute to a meeting that he has no knowledge of the particulars of the agenda. He is at all times expected to show up and tag along without bringing with him his opinion or voice – no different from the function of a puppet. It would appear that the Brotherhood functions in reaction to the community events that it deems to be culturally disenfranchising, much like the original incident with the elderly African - American couple being evicted from their apartment. The speeches typically arrive in response to a community incident(s). It is as Allen says "strangers with nothing but common citizenship to tie them together …to decide together and then act" (Allen 57).

In every characteristic, the Brotherhood is all at once a religion in the sense that its members are wholly devoted and idolize its mission. Also it is extremely common in many religious settings to refer to members as "brother" or "sister." However, the Brotherhood does not embrace him with such warm tender affiliations that are associated with faith and religious communities. Furthermore, the Brotherhood wishes to provide charity to the community. The narrator even attempts to gather together influential community and political leaders to support him in trying to put an end to unfair evictions. The Brotherhood also had various office

locations where differing issues where handled. This is emphasized when the narrator was accused of selfishly doing an interview about the Brotherhood at the expense of no recognition for the Brotherhood. Although these allegations were false and he had indeed tried to avoid the interview, he was nonetheless accused and punished. They felt that his interview was an act of betrayal to *them*. His punishment consisted of being reassigned to what could be described as a lesser one of the Brotherhood's territories. He was reassigned to "lecture downtown on the Woman Question" (Ellison, *Invisible* 397). His relegation to women's issues is a fitting metaphor for how they now feel about his voice. Women's attempts for equality have long been documented, thus his working with women is now a larger message to how they regard him as inferior, and with him physically out of the way in another office downtown, he is literally invisible to what they deem their larger issues of community involvement.   Brother Jack even reminds the narrator following the murder of brother Clifton that "[he was] not hired to think" (Ellison, *Invisible* 458).

Subsequently, the narrator inquires what he should do in the event that he has an idea. He was told in response that "we furnish all ideas…you say nothing unless it is passed by the committee" (459).   This command was to remain in force even if the narrator had a solution and the committee was wrong about any matter. The irony exists in the reality that Brother Jack does not recognize that his treatment of the narrator corresponds to his conducting of him as though he is a prisoner. Brother Jack is exacting control of the narrator's mental processes. In fact, the entire time

the narrator is affiliated with the Brotherhood, he is in an intellectual confinement where independent thoughts and actions are perceived as a threat. Clifton, and other personalities such as Ras the Exhorter, who rejected the ideals of the Brotherhood and created his own outline of a Brotherhood, are examples of those who broke with the dominating ideology and became outcasts. Ras frequently, violently opposed the narrator and the Brotherhood. His ideologies according to the Brotherhood were viewed as "unscientific" and instead demanded the demise of White supremacy. His violent approach placed him at odds with the Brotherhood. He rejected integration and promoted Black separatism. He was not interested in winning the support of whites. In contrast, as has been discussed, the Brotherhood consisted of white members also.

Here we can directly see a parallel of differences of approaches within the community in an effort to reach the same goal. Being that the Brotherhood was not opposed to whites; Ras felt that the Brotherhood was a betrayal to the Black community and he eagerly looked for occasions to inspire riots. We can effortlessly see the uneasiness that develops in a character such as the narrator who may fear constructing his own identity for risk of agitating the more dominant culture who are opposed to, and fail to see the value of having something such as a difference of opinion.

We cannot conclude a discussion of the internal oppression amongst blacks as depicted in the novel without also addressing Ellison's vision of the American experience in its entirety as depicted by the implications of the Brotherhood also

consisting of white members who had diverse approaches to the same problem of racism and discrimination of blacks. What we are left with is this echo of the remoteness between the cultures as representative of the narrator's experiences.

In response to an interviewer's question: "Who speaks for the Negro"?: Ellison's reply indicated that not only did he feel that blacks suffered culturally , but that many of his white students were also culturally deprived (*Territory* 298):

> [Whites] were culturally deprived because while they might have understood many things intellectually, they were emotionally unprepared to deal with [blacks]. But the Negro was being prepared emotionally, whether intellectually or not, from the moment he was placed in the crib….White people can get terribly disturbed at the idea that Negroes are not simply being restricted from many areas of our national life, but that they are also judging certain aspects of our culture and rejecting their values. That's where assumptions of white superiority, conscious or unconscious, make for blindness and naiveté. For in fact we've rejected many of their values from the days before there were Jim Crow laws.
> Only a narrowly sociological explanation of society could lead to the belief that we Negroes are what we are simply because whites would refuse us the right of choice through racial discrimination. Frequently Negroes are able to pay for commodities available in stores, but we reject them as a matter of taste – not economics. There is no *de facto* Jim Crow in many areas…but we don't frequent them, not because we think we won't be welcome – indeed, many Negroes go to places precisely because they are unfairly and illegally rejected – but because they simply don't interest us. All this *we* know to be true. Negro Americans had to learn to live under pressure – otherwise we'd have been wiped out (Ellison, Territory 298).

Ellison emphasizes that whites do not see that blacks are vital to the underpinnings of their society. White society has benefited from the sacrifices and contributions of blacks while ignoring the influence of blacks on humanity as a whole. Ellison would like some recognition of the indispensability of blacks' and their substantial participation in all areas of the white world as demonstrated by the various types of edifices that the paint from the paint factory was used to embellish. He is astonished

at how much white society refuses to see the critical value of the black drops which

are metaphorical of the African-American culture. In essence the paint is only

optically white *because* of the black drops. If it were not for black people, white

society as they know it would not exist.

CHAPTER V

COLOR BLINDNESS & SEEING DIFFERENT ROUTES TO THE SAME PURPOSE

Ralph Ellison wrote his novel *Invisible Man* at a critical time in American history. The country was recuperating from such massive catastrophic events as the Civil War (1861-1865) WWI (1914-1918) and WWII (1939-1945). Such catastrophic world events exerted pressure on all American peoples; moreover, this crucial time exposed peoples' loyalties to one another and this time period tested the strength of each person's individual values of affiliation to his fellowman. Ellison's novel uniquely traces the social, economic, and political struggles of African-Americans at this time as they toil to liberate themselves from the horrors of the aftermaths of slavery and the Civil War. Ellison marks their struggles while using white society as the backdrop.

This discussion began with an investigation toward finding what the narrator's feelings of invisibility derived from. Scholars pointed the cause of his feelings to the direction of being mistreated by white society while the narrator's own words indicated otherwise. We observed that his feelings of invisibility were most acute while he was the character who would later develop into the shrewd narrator – able to now see previously concealed characteristics of intra-racial spite that were contributory to his self-defined invisibility. It is ironic that now that he is invisible, he can see everything he missed about his own race while he was a character going through his persecutions.

The narrator faced inaccessibility to his race in his experiences with the college and the paint factory; however, Ellison has also shown his audience the compounded isolation that results from that type of intra-racial isolation by combining that with the larger context of white oppression, to show us the very same inaccessibility with the Brotherhood – an organization that consisted of white members also.

Ellison never gave his audience a prescriptive on how to approach the novel. While Ellison addresses an audience of competing racial and socioeconomic interests, the fact that he did not provide a guideline for understanding these competing interests that are presented in the novel arouses curiosity as to how the traditional reading of the novel of white oppression towards blacks became the most examined interpretation of the novel. The Invisible Man's comments which are prefaced at the outset leave no ambiguity that there is capacity to look inside of his own race. Although history documents mistreatment of Blacks at the hands of

Whites, Ellison's unique intra-racial approach to the novel prevents the culture from constantly blaming whites for the troubles that they experience. The enemy is not a specific person but rather an attitude that contains no loyalty clause to any specific race, culture, or creed. Traces of this attitude are still prevalent in society and if care is not taken, Ellison is warning that his audience could mistakenly adopt the same racist attitudes which have been primarily attributed to those with white skin, while Blacks could become tempted to unknowingly recline under the alleged safety of the collective torment of their race - pointing fingers at Whites.

In Ellison encouraging his audience to consider the limitations imposed on everyone, he raises the detail that none of us are as free as we think we are. An American reader regardless of ethnicity is subject to the same pressures of the narrator by society. He is not the only one who has been involved in situations with colleges, hospitals, philanthropists, and prejudicial colleagues. Ralph Ellison has written the novel as an invitation for his audience to answer the question of what they would do if faced with the nameless character's same set of circumstances. Americans are constantly bombarded with unfamiliar or uncomfortable situations of choosing whether or not to express a racist or a tolerant perspective on what may seem to be a radical ideal or an unpopular approach to an uncommon phenomenon. Or the uneasiness we feel could be toward a new person that is from a very different background. Marjorie Pryse asks: "To what extent does the reader become the protagonist; to what extent does he share the narrator's invisibility? (Pryse 1). This could very simply be another person's story. The audience is able to insert

themselves into the emotions that gave rise to the narrator's feelings of invisibility and determine for themselves if the narrator's responsive actions were plausible.

Although the novel is a work of fiction, the presentation of a nameless character allows the audience to fill in the blank with their own name to participate in an authentic subjective experience. Ellison has presented the attitude of racism as an obstacle to identity. It does not matter where this racist attitude is found, as the narrator's experiences attest to the fact that he was faced with racism right where he should have been able to feel most comfortable. Whenever a category such as race is cast, automatically there are those who will fall to the outside of the labeled category. Ellison has shown the struggle of the outsiders within their corresponding African-American groups to present themselves with an accounting of their ideals. An implicit message is asking what would happen if racial distinctions were collapsible. The problem here in the narrator's case is that everyone within the race who believes that they have arrived at a solution for the problem of oppression of white society feels that anyone who chooses a different approach is disloyal to the race. Hence in attempting to extricate themselves from one constraining role, others become manifest, which prove to be just as self-captivating as the other solutions.

If it can be believed that the most important thing is to be aware of individual reactions to the literature, then it is important that an audience is able to picture themselves inside the narrative. This approach allows persons to see alternative choices had they been faced with the same dilemmas as the narrator. Understanding human nature would be considered to be more substantive than the issue of color. Of simulating another's pain scholar Jane Heal explains:

> I know that it is not really me who has just been abused, so when I simulate the abused person, my reactions occur 'off-line,' triggered by my *imagining* being that person. We use our own person, with its hidden biological and psychological complexity, as a model for human beings. I cannot assume I share with the other person *all* [their] dispositions, but only those that make us both human…I incorporate into the imaginative act relevant 'beliefs' and personality features which I happen to know [they] posses[s], though I may not (Taylor 274).

Indeed using simulation helps to address the problem of verification. Understanding why race differences exist helps societies examine the rationale of relying upon a set of arbitrary man-made requirements for identity.

Mr. Norton and young Mr. Emerson can be seen as examples of individuals who attempted to meet the demands that the attitude of racism placed upon the narrated character. They both intervened philanthropically. Their assessment of the character's plight and the collective situation of African-Americans led them to believe that the circumstances of African-Americans could be helped by providing materially; however, this solution only served to increase the gap between the cultures, in that it solidified the scarcity of resources of the black community – especially since such giving engendered a complex of superiority in the giver. This is underscored by the narrator's Battle Royale fight in the very beginning of the novel when after winning the fight the benefactors got very impassioned when they thought they heard him utter ideas about social equality in his speech. Roberta Gibboney put it succinctly, "it becomes apparent that the better world envisioned by the protagonist is not the same as the one anticipated by his 'benefactors,' who feel that 'better' should be based on humility, not social equality" (187). Moreover,

simply because someone helps financially does not mean that they actually can see the problem.

Mr. Norton saw and did not see. He saw the plight of the African-American people; however, he misinterpreted the solution as being primarily financial – thus his response was met through his excessive acts of philanthropy. His acts of philanthropy only in turn served to expand the rupture between the two cultures as it nourished a greater sense of superiority over the recipient of these philanthropic acts. He saw enough to be a trustee but he later had no individual recollection of the narrator when he was later spotted in the street. Despite the unforgettable experience that the narrator and Mr. Norton had shared together, the narrator as being a unique individual did not resonate with Norton – else he would have remembered him. Even when he gave the incestuous Jim Trueblood a one-hundred dollar bill so that he could "buy toys for the children," Norton is described as "look[ing] with unseeing eyes," and "star[ing]…blankly" (Ellison, *Invisible* 68). Conversely, the son of trustee Mr. Emerson was emotionally moved to help the narrator by informing him about the irreverent reference letters from Dr. Bledsoe. Young Emerson was outraged even saying that "'Dr. Bledsoe…ought to be horsewhipped"! (Ellison, Invisible 186). This emotional outcry was very different than the impetus of Mr. Norton and the typical benefactors who acted out of duty – the "white man's burden." Emerson extended himself beyond necessity and further assisted the narrator in finding a job.

If distinctions were invisible, race would not be an obstacle to identity; it is not hazardous to say that persons would be more visible to themselves and their search for identity would bear more fruit without the prying eyes of a racist society.

Learning hidden self-reactions to racism are valuable and only possible by placing oneself in the situation of the protagonist. Ellison's novel permits this very idea to take place by allowing participants to see their reactions and responsibilities. It is doubtful that the narrator's response to hide underground can be dismissed as deviant or somehow pathological- given his experiences of suffering the effects of racism at the hand of whom he least suspected – his own brother.

We have completed the journey of the narrator's ordeals with an understanding that the ordeals he faced are colorblind; furthermore, the ordeals did not owe themselves exclusively to socioeconomic disparities, or a particular white skin color. The tropes of invisibility and visibility themselves are not as significant as the narrator facing betrayal at the hands of his race coupled with his inability to discern these instances of betrayal. Yet the tropes of visibility and invisibility augment our understanding of the role of the attitudes that he found himself up against such as when he learned of the reference letters that Bledsoe had sabotaged.

Ideally an audience would not just dismiss the intra-racial problems under the rug of socioeconomic peril to assume that if more funds were available, no fighting would exist – hence, Mr. Norton's response to merely continuing to give financially. The narrator's experiences solidify that more funds do not equal less fighting. Such a reading is indolent. It was the *ideas* of how to go about getting more things that

caused the fighting – not the things in themselves – because they did not have possession of those material things yet. They could not even agree on how to *get* them – let alone fight over invisible toys they do not yet have. An agreement on how to first obtain these possessions would be first in order to then have the luxury of fighting over the spoil. It is the lack of respected acknowledgment of these competing *beliefs* on the part of fellow race members that Condit mentions early on in this discussion, which is the fundamental source of the intra-racial strife. Ellison's novel has reinforced the fact that race obsession can exert itself anywhere.

WORKS CITED

Allen Danielle. "Ralph Ellison On The Tragi-Comedy Of Citzenship." *Ralph Ellison and the Raft of Hope: A Political Companion to Invisible Man*. 37-57. Lexington, KY: UP of Kentucky, 2004. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 27 Mar. 2013.

Bruce, Dickson D., Jr. "Booker T. Washington's The Man Farthest Down And The Transformation Of Race." *Mississippi Quarterly: The Journal Of Southern Culture* 48.2 (1995): 239-253. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 25 Oct. 2013.

Ellison, Ralph. *Going to the Territory*. New York: Random House. 1986. Print.

Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man*. New York: Random House. 1972. Print.

Ellison, Ralph. *Shadow and Act*. New York: Randon House. 1953. Print.

Fleissner, Robert F. "H. G. Wells And Ralph Ellison: Need The Effect Of One Invisible Man On Another Be Itself Invisible?." *Extrapolation: A Journal Of Science Fiction And Fantasy* 33.4 (1992): 346-350. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 27 Mar. 2013

Foucault, Michel. "Discipline and Punish" *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. 2004. Eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing 2004. 549 – 566. Print.

Gibboney, Roberta K. "Philanthropy In Invisible Man." *Melus* 22.3 (1997): 183-194. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 4 Nov. 2013.

Lucaites, John Louis, and Celeste Michelle Condit. "Reconstructing <Equality>: Culturetypal And Counter-Cultural Rhetorics In The Martyred Black Vision."*Communication Monographs* 57.1 (1990): 5-24. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 26 Oct. 2013.

Posnock, Ross. "How It Feels To Be A Problem: Du Bois, Fanon, And The
        'Impossible Life' Of The Black Intellectual." *Critical Inquiry* 23.2 (1997):
        323-349. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 26 Oct. 2013.

Pryse, Marjorie. "Ralph Ellison's Heroic Fugitive." *American Literature: A Journal
        Of Literary History, Criticism, And Bibliography* 46.1 (1974): 1-15. *MLA
        International Bibliography*. Web. 27 Mar.   2013.

Rampersad, Arnold. "W. E. B. Du Bois As A Man Of Literature." *American
        Literature: A Journal Of Literary History, Criticism, And Bibliography* 51.1
        (1979): 50-68. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 26 Oct. 2013.

Rivkin, Julie and Ryan, Michael. Introduction. "Discipline and Punish" *Literary
        Theory: An Anthology*. Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing 2004. 549. Print.

Selisker, Scott. "'Simply By Reacting?': The Sociology Of Race And Invisible Man's
        Automata." *American Literature: A Journal Of Literary History, Criticism,
        And Bibliography* 83.3 (2011): 571-596. *MLA International Bibliography*.
        Web. 26 Oct. 2013.

Taylor, Paul A. "Sympathy And Insight In Aristotle's Poetics." *Journal Of Aesthetics
        And Art Criticism* 66. (2008): 265-280. *MLA International Bibliography*.
        Web. 28 Oct. 2013.

Wells, Jeremy. "Up From Savagery: Booker T. Washington And The Civilizing
        Mission." *Southern Quarterly: A Journal Of The Arts In The South* 42.1
        (2003): 53-74. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 26 Oct. 2013.

Wolfe Jesse. "'Ambivalent Man': Ellison's Rejection Of Communism." *African
        American Review* 34.4 (2000): 621-637. *MLA International Bibliography*.
        Web. 27 Mar. 2013.