



Racial Discrimination In Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*

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Abstract

Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* uses racial discrimination as an effectual tool to criticize society, strictures as well as identity politics in the United States of America. Ellison reveals the absurdities of racial dynamics and the struggle of the unnamed narrator for individuality through the novel on the contemporary issues. Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* raises voice against social, political and racial structures in the contemporary America through the protagonist's journey of self-discovery and his encounters with various social institutions like a Black Nationalist group, corporate system that exploits racial identity. The author highlights the absurdities and contradictions inherent in systemic and deliberate racism and the marginalization of African Americans. Ellison also reveals the dehumanizing effects of societal expectations and stereotypes as well as the ways in which identity is manipulated by external forces. By blending elements of existentialism, social critique and mockery, Ellison's work not only mocks the ideologies that perpetuate racial injustice but also invites readers to question the very nature of visibility, identity and power in an oppressive society. This abstract aims to examine how *Invisible Man* operates as both a vehicle for resistance and a mode of revealing deeper truths about American identity and race relations.

Research Methodology:

The present research paper follows analytical and interpretive methods of research.

Objective:

- Racial discrimination as an effectual tool to criticize society
- Explores various aspects of American society and race relations.
- To understand journey of self-discovery and his encounters with various social institutions like a

Black Nationalist group

Research Tool:

Library Database

Key words: Race, Discrimination, Identity, Invisibility, Oppressive, Brotherhood, Existence
Etc

Racial Discrimination in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*:

Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* explores various aspects of American society and race relations. The present paper strives to highlight the aspects where racial discrimination plays a significant role. Ellison exposes and criticizes racial stereotypes placed in African Americans. It can be observed that the author also employs Black protagonist who has been utilized as a phallus image by the whites. For instance, the character of the protagonist, who remains nameless throughout the novel, is often treated as an embodiment of racial stereotypes rather than as an individual. It reveals how the society dehumanizes Black individuals by reducing them to simplistic and negative images. For example, "Ellison's contention that we Americans need this highly charged comic process sometimes even when it means putting up with offensive racial stereotypes" (P. 124, O Meally). In the novel, the protagonist encounters a symbolic Sambo doll which is a symbol of the racist imagery and stereotypes that are prevalent in American culture. The doll represents the commodification and trivialization of Black identity, reducing complex human experiences to mere objects of ridicule or exploitation. The protagonist is coerced into participating in a humiliating act involving a Sambo doll, a racist caricature of Black people. This incident is a depiction of how the protagonist's identity and dignity are exploited for entertainment and profit of the white superiority. It underscores the absurdity of reducing complex human beings to demeaning stereotypes. For example, "Shake it up! Shake it up!

He's Sambo, the dancing doll, ladies and gentlemen. Shake him, stretch him by the neck and set him down, -- He'll do the rest. Yes!" (P. 334, Ellison).

The graduation scene at the beginning of the novel in which the protagonist is forced to give a humiliating speech and then to participate in a "battle royal" (P. 14) is a harsh criticism of the way institutions that are supposed to uplift Blacks but they often degrade and exploit them due their race. The present scene mocks the hollow promises of educational and social advancement offered to Black individuals within a racially oppressive system. The graduation symbolizes calculated defamation of every black by the whites. It shows prejudiced views of whites.

As a matter of fact, "The Liberty Paints Factory" (P, 149, Ellison) is another incident in which the factory produces white paint. It highlights the absurd lengths to which society goes to maintain racial purity and dominance of the white supremacists. It symbolizes the broader social pressures to conform to white ideals and suppress Black identity. Consequently, the unnamed protagonist gets fired from the job because he drops a black spot a drum of white. Symbolically, the novel mocks at the views of cultural monopoly and monotony in American society. Thus, Ellison's novel not only

criticizes these social and institutional issues but also provokes deeper reflection of racial and social dynamics that shape individual identity and experience. Through present novel, Ellison invites readers to question and confront the often unexamined racial prejudices and power structures in American society. The novel also focuses biased views against Blacks through the incident of grandfather's legacy (P. 302, Ellison). The protagonist's grandfather's advice to "keep up the good fight" (P. 13, Ellison) secretly undermining the system which is portrayed on racial ground. This advice is meant to be a survival tactic in a society that oppresses Black individuals. Ellison uses this to condemn the expectations of a system that is inherently unjust.

The central metaphor of invisibility is an example of racial discrimination. The narrator's literal invisibility serves as a powerful critique of how society ignores or fails to see the individual humanity of Black people. It lies in how this "invisibility" reflects the real-world marginalization faced by Black individuals and the absurd lengths to which people go to avoid acknowledging their presence and identity. His invisibility has been defined at the beginning of the novel by the protagonist himself. For example, "I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids -- and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible; understand, simply because people refuse to see me" (P.3, Ellison).

It can be observed that Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* signifies the portrayal of women that can be seen as part of a larger commentary on the complexities of race, identity and societal expectations. Satire on women is very significant. It reflects the way women particularly Black women are marginalized, objectified and reduced to symbols within the protagonist's journey of self-discovery and invisibility.

Race related issues can be seen through his encounter with white women. The women who appear in the protagonist's life are frequently viewed through the eyes of male fantasy and idealization. For example, character of "Sybil" (P. 399, Ellison) the white woman narrates an encounter in the novel. She is a stereotype of the sexually liberated, yet emotionally shallow women who seek out Black men as medium of rebellion or titillation. She is presented as a figure that reduces the protagonist to an object of her amusement, both sexually and intellectually. Her presence critiques the ways in which women are seen as trophies or markers of status for Black men. Black women characters like "Mary Rambo" (P. 195, Ellison) offer a maternal, nurturing presence for the narrator. Mary is primarily defined by her relationship to the protagonist rather than as an individual. While Mary provides comfort and stability, she is also a part of a larger, satirical criticism of the ways in which Black women's contributions are often reduced to background roles that support male characters' journeys, without ever raising their own voice.

The most significant point in Ellison's depiction of women is how their voices are either silenced or drowned out by the male characters' struggles for identity and agency. The women like Mary Rambo in the novel rarely speak for themselves. They exist in the background, often silenced by the overpowering force of the male characters' journeys toward self-actualization. Ellison critiques this silence through the lens of

both race and gender. He turns readers' attention to the fact that Black women are doubly invisible, as both women and as Black people.

It can be observed that the theme of racial discrimination in the novel intends to specify a black person's journey from "invisibility to identity" (06, Tiwari). The unnamed narrator represents Black youth in America. It is also a story of a way in which a black youth gets exploited politically, socially, economically and sexually only due to his race. The most significant example of racial discrimination in the novel is the letter written to a factory owner which forwards the message to "keep a nigger boy running" (26, Ellison). In the same way, a narrator dreams of "an official envelop" (27, Ellison) is an example of deep conspiracy against the Blacks. The author wants to suggest that the white supremacists in America neither provide jobs nor education to the Blacks. Envelop also signifies a conspiracy against the Blacks.

As a matter of fact, the image of envelop appears in several literary works authored by Black writers. For example, a poem by Langston Hughes in which the speaker receives an enclosed envelop by the God. The image of an enclosed envelop also appears in Ellison's novel. It is observed that in both of the cases the envelop stands for treachery and betrayal of a Black person. Almost all the black authors note their observation that a black person gets betrayed and mistreated only because of his race. In every case, the reason of discrimination is color of skin and his race.

The present novel is also known as a revolt against the established and Eurocentric norms of writing a novel. Generally, novels start with a topic sentence and end with a full stop but the present novel start with a personal experience of the narrator and end with a question mark. It clearly signifies that he questions racial and all kinds of discrimination in America.

Conclusion:

It can be concluded that title of the novel is self-explanatory. The central idea of the novel is invisibility of a Black youth amid the white supremacist America. The novel tries to highlight and criticize the ideology which believes that Blacks are last to be hired and first to be fired. The novel also raises a voice against exploitation of the Blacks by the Whites. Issues of identity crisis are caused by racial discrimination in America. Thus, it can be concluded that the present novel Invisible Man strongly criticizes racial discrimination in America.

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