

# Post colonial criticism of battle royal



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

“ All my life I had been looking for something, and everywhere I turned someone tried to tell me what it was (258). ” This quote from the narrator in Ralph Ellison’s *Battle Royal* demonstrates the influence people played in the narrators self image, at times damaging him, at times inspiring him.

Throughout the story the narrator shows himself as someone who struggles with who he is supposed to be according to his family and society. Through the postcolonial lens it is understood that a character’s self image is damaged and they are felt as othered by a dominant cultures.

Ellison’s portrayal of the narrator displays a character that struggles to accept the subservient role that has been placed on him by dominant society. The narrator’s depicts a feeling of being stuck between two cultures. When the grandfather says, “ I have been a traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy’s country,” it plants a seed in the narrator’s mind that haunts him throughout his life (258). When he accomplishes anything in the white man’s society he is stuck between feeling guilty and proud.

He feels as though he does not fit in with his African American community because he is doing everything the dominant society asks of him. At the same time it is clear that he is not part of the dominant society either. With this displacement, Ellison shows the way many African American’s felt during the 1950s. They didn’t know whether to accept the damaged self image that was being forced on them and live a peaceful life, or fight for equality. Due to the narrator’s feeling of being lost, he accepts what he thinks is his best option, that being his place with the dominant culture.

The narrator's distorted view of the way he should live his life blinds him to the humiliation and cruelty he endures in the company of the white citizens. When the boys are forced to watch the women dance, Ellison is illustrating the control the dominant society has over the behavior of the boys. During the time Ellison wrote *Battle Royal* it was practically a crime for an African American male to so much as look in the direction of a white woman. Yet it can be interpreted that these men enjoy the discomfort and humiliation that that nine boys are facing.

This situation shows one of the many ways the boys are made to feel as "others" by the white men. It has been ingrained in their minds that they shouldn't be looking at the woman but the white men are able to look at her as if it were not a big deal. After the woman exits the room the narrator describes, "Some were still crying and in hysteria" which shows the turmoil the boys were put through. Yet, there really wasn't anything the boys could do, just as the narrator says, "There was nothing to do but what we were told" because what the white men said was done, no questions asked (262).

The severity of the narrator's view of himself can be seen when the narrator is finally given the chance to deliver his speech to the men. He describes the trouble he has getting through his speech due to the blood from the cuts in his mouth. This description can be interpreted as the narrator swallowing his dignity to deliver his speech. In his speech he explains that by African Americans being obedient they will succeed and gain the respect of the white society. The fact that he is encouraging subservience to African Americans shows how his perception of society has been poisoned by stereotypes and discrimination.

Throughout the story the narrator is an example of a person that is degraded by society and accepts the unfair treatment because it is the way it has always been. Luckily, in the beginning of the story the narrator says that he was told that he took after his grandfather; it is that similarity that gets him to a place where he can see the injustices he experienced and learn from them. When he is given the scholarship to a black college it is another form of the dominant group keeping him in his place and labeling him as “ other”.

It is basically saying that although he should go to college he is not good enough to go to a white college. Ironically, it is the scholarship that opens the narrator’s eyes to the injustices he was put through. If not for the scholarship, he would not have understood that his grandfather was telling him that by pretending to be submissive he would be opened doors that would contribute in the defeat of the discrimination and racism they faced. He no longer accepts the broken image that society tried to force on him.