

Cultural significance of ralph, waldo ellison

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Ralph Waldo, Edison Ralph Ellison is a foremost American Like most other black of similar age, cultural concern was always top of his mind. During that time of his birth, racism was a common phenomenon in the United States of America. The situation changed significantly by the time he was an adult, but the firm imprint it left on his mind was all too present to be ignored. He had to find an outlet so as to explain how African American culture had been impacted by the wider American culture as a result of the racism of the past. As a result, racism and race relations in general were the staple topics in all his works.

Ralph Ellison is highly culturally significant for many reasons. Just to mention but a few, he chronicles the history of racism the United States of America in almost all his works. He is also culturally significant because he studies the identity of African Americans, and how it has been outlined and persists to be outlined by their environment. His works on the topics of self reliance can not also be ignored. Lastly, there is the issue of cultural autonomy. He explores the concept of cultural autonomy in a number of his works.

This paper shall seek to establish Ellison as significant in as far as culture is concerned for the reasons established above. They are his exploration of cultural identity, race relations and also cultural autonomy.

To begin with, cultural identity was one of the main issues in most of Ralph Ellison's work. In *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison uses a character that is not recognized, but one who is ignored by people around him. The young man is an African American. His main aim in this novel is to point out the subtle differences that exist between racism in the different parts of the United States.

The South as we learn is less tolerant to people of the black race. Perhaps,
<https://assignbuster.com/cultural-significance-of-ralph-waldo-ellison/>

that is to explain the reasons behind the treatment of the Negro in the predominantly white university where he got a scholarship to study. We witness the humiliation he and other young boys encounter in the hands of the whites as they have to strip and are then blindfolded (Ellison, “ Invisible Man” 120). All along, the white people are in the room enjoying such a ghastly sight. He is eventually expelled from the university and issued with what he presumes to be a letter of recommendation. However, he realizes late that it is letter ordering potential future employees not to employ him. He is at last lucky to secure employment (Ellison, “ Invisible Man” 200). However, disturbing this story is, the fact is that it is not an exemption, but a common happening in the United States of America. People are prevented from discovering their true identity. This is done by ensuring that they are never comfortable in life. They are always on the go, like the main character in this story.

All this humiliation and economic disenfranchisement are portrayed in an extraordinarily poignant tone by the author. He is richly and wildly creative; his scenes ascend and descend with tension. Ellison is; thus, unique and significant in the way that he studies the concept of identity and how society shapes it. He thrives on exposing those minute and “ invisible” details that defy identification by the regular person.

Secondly, he is significant in the way that he studies the idea of cultural autonomy. Shadow and Act is a collection of African American culture. This encompasses the jazz music, literature and even folklore. The title, Shadow and Act, is a reference to the distinction that arises between images of African Americans as portrayed in media and as they exist in real life. The interrelationship between African American culture and the culture of the

<https://assignbuster.com/cultural-significance-of-ralph-waldo-ellison/>

United States as a whole is also under the microscope in this text (Ellison, "Shadow and Act" 50). In addition to that, the difference between the culture of the United States and that of African Americans is also studied.

Thirdly, he explores the concept of cultural autonomy at considerable depth. *Battle Royal* details the struggle that ensues as African American culture tries to break free from the mainstream culture. There are several hurdles to be overcome if the African American is to get full autonomy. The unnamed protagonist in *Battle Royal* wishes to be free from any enslavement, but we realize how this pursuit ends up being futile. It sows discord, causes emotional and at times physical damage to the narrator and the people surrounding him (Ellison, "Battle Royal" 100). In their quest to live aside from the rest of the population, the African Americans are extremely frustrated. They do not get to exist on their own but as an inextricable part of the larger society.

By and large, the works of Ellison like those of other African Americans of the civil rights era shall continue to increase in significance. The more culture changes, the more future generations will be compelled to find out more about their past. When they look at the past, it is the great writings of artists like Ellison that will provide a clear mirror of the past. As a result, they should be at the centre of all literature learning since like old wine; they seem to get better with time.

Works Cited

Ellison, Ralph. "Battle Royal", *Making Literature Matter*. New York. 1953.

Print

Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible man*. New York, NY: Modern Library. 1994. Print

Ellison, Ralph. *Shadow and Act*. New York, NY: Vintage International, 1995.

Print