

"battle royal" by ralph ellison essay sample



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“ Battle Royal” by Ralph Ellison Essay Sample

In the story “ Battle Royal” by Ralph Ellison, he uses a white, naked, exotic dancer as a big symbol in the story. Tattooed on the girl that the narrator is directing his attention to is an American Flag. The symbol of the American flag on the naked blonde girl relates to the many themes of the story such as the struggle for equality. To understand how the American flag plays its role in the story you have to look at what it represents. First, the public symbol meanings of the American flag being the American dream, freedom, independence, and equality. To the main character, the narrator, those meanings are important to him. In the story the exotic dancer was what the American flag represented.

It is obvious that the Narrator is attracted to the exotic dancer. “[He wanted] to caress her and destroy her, love her and murder her.” The narrator wants what the exotic dancer represents. The Narrator wants to be equal among everybody else, but the white men won’t let him. The white men in the room force the boys to look at the dancer, while others threaten them when they do. It is clear that at the time that this story was written, black men could never show any kind of attraction towards white women. This was an unwritten, but inexcusable law of society with harsh consequences. How that relates to the story is that the group of black boys are not suppose to be attracted to the exotic dancer as they are not suppose to be attracted to the idea of being equal with white people. This is why some of the boys try to hide the fact that they are attracted. Some of them cried, one of them fainted, and another tried to hide the proof of his arousal. They thought that

if they showed that they were attracted to the exotic dancer or what she represents that they would be hurt.

The narrator also has feelings that he wants to "destroy" and "murder" the exotic dancer at the same time. He knows that he can't have the exotic dancer and what she represents. He wants to be equal so badly that he has expresses those kinds of feelings. Also it seems like the narrator is bitter about the whole situation. The white men put this white woman, who symbolizes equality, in front of the narrator like they were flaunting her. The white men tease the narrator by putting something he wants in front of him but they don't let him have what he wants. This is why he feels such hatred for the exotic dancer.

The white people before the fight throw around the exotic dancer. She has no power of what she does. When this happens it reveals to the reader that equality does not choose anything like how the dancer doesn't choose what happens to her. She has no control of where the people throw her, as the narrator has no control to be equal around white people. Also the white people are abusing the girl. This shows how the white people in the story are abusing and manhandling what equality is and what direction it takes.

The title of the story could have come from an obvious event in the story. The event being when the group of black guys got in the boxing ring and had a big "battle", but there is another way the author could have gotten the title. It could have been from the struggle of the narrator to become equal among everybody else and maybe, even to strive in that position. The

narrator doesn't win the battle in the ring but he is one step closer to winning the bigger battle, to become equal.