

Races and racism in fiction essay sample

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



Racial and ethnic discrimination have been common in the United States ever since the colonial era and the slave era. White Americans were given exclusive privileges when it comes to education, voting rights and citizenships, while Native Americans, African-Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanic and Latino-Americans suffered exclusion and various forms of racial and ethnical discrimination. Such conditions formally lasted from the 17th century until the 1960s and they are well-documented in various propaganda posters and documentary photographs.

Race is defined as a classification of people according to their physical traits and geographic ancestry but it is not so; It is not so much the biological differences that define racial groups, rather how these groups have been treated throughout the history. In other words, it is socially constructed matter. They aren't based simply on biological traits anymore. Ralph Ellison's "Invisible Man" is a classic novel which was written in the early portion of the 20th century. His ancestry details much hardship and his African-American family had to go through a tremendous amount of obstacles.

This being his first successful work of fiction, it was also a great opportunity for him to express his true feelings about the struggles he had to overcome, as well as the rough times of his past generations. During the time that his work was published, it was a period in American history in which racism and segregation existed. The strength and ambition it took to write such a controversial novel seemed to be an unreachable goal at the time, but Ellison no doubt pursued his passion for literature, no matter the consequences.

In the novel, the narrator describes his invisibility by saying, “ I am invisible ... simply because people refuse to see me. ” Throughout the Prologue, the narrator likens his invisibility to such things as “ the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows. ” He later explains that he is “ neither dead nor in a state of suspended animation,” but rather is “ in a state of hibernation. ” (p. 6). He, while searching for his true identity, frequently encounters different people who each see him differently. “ Who the hell am I? ” is the question that sticks with him as he realizes that nobody, not even he, understands who he really is.

Prologue:

The “ Invisible Man” is about a man that has made himself invisible in order to escape, and can’t go back to normal. He keeps the fact that he is invisible secret. The Invisible Man’s face is covered with rags and his eyes are covered by goggles. A woman named Mrs. Hall was arguing with the Invisible Man. During the argument he removes his goggles, face rags, and fake nose and she notices he is invisible. The Invisible Man gets Mr. Marvel to help him. Mr. Marvel carries the Invisible Man’s notes and the Invisible Man thinks he also has the stolen money. The Invisible Man has stolen things, killed people, and vandalized places.

After being shot, the Invisible Man hide in a house that ends up belonging to an old college friend, Dr. Kemp. While in the house, the Invisible Man fastens Dr. Kemp in his bed. The Invisible Man tells Dr. Kemp that his name is Griffin and reminds him that he is an old friend from the university college and tells him that he is wounded and near death. The Invisible Man is tired and asks

Dr. Kemp to help him and not capture him while he sleeps. Dr. Kemp agrees to help him. When the Invisible Man wakes, he tells Dr. Kemp that he made himself invisible for protection.

While they are talking, the Invisible Man hears something; realizing that Dr. Kemp has betrayed him, he slips away. When Colonel Adye arrives, Kemp tells him to have everyone lock up their food so that the Invisible Man can't regain his strength and he can be hunted down. Kemp also suggests using dogs, as they can track his scent. Finally, the Invisible Man loses his humanity after unlocking the secret of invisibility. Isolated by his new power, he turns to Dr. Kemp and confesses his plans to terrorize his neighborhood. Kemp calls the police, and Invisible Man is killed in the ensuing manhunt.

Critics:

The novel describes a series of incidents that show how racism has warped the American psyche. As a boy, the nameless narrator hears his grandfather say: "Undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction."

Later, the youth sees a social function degenerate into a surrealistic and barbarous paroxysm of racism. Next, the narrator is expelled from a black college and heads north. After a job in a paint factory ends in shock treatment, the narrator heads to the big city and falls in with the Brotherhood, a group of political radicals.

After realizing that the Brotherhood is just as power-hungry and manipulative as the other organizations and institutions that have victimized him, the narrator leaves the Brotherhood. He comes to understand that

racism denies personal identity: As long as he is seen by others as a sample of a group rather than as an individual, he is invisible. The demarcation line between the “two” societies is blurred in his mind for the first time when he hears his grandfather’s deathbed instruction to his father.

Although the old man seemed to be “obedient” and “obsequious” all his life, he tells his son and grandchildren that he was “a traitor all his born days, a spy in the enemy’s country” and advises them to overcome their enemies “with yeses, undermine ‘em with grins, agree ‘em to death and destruction, let ‘em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open.” Later, the narrator witnesses a formal social function that is attended by all “big shots” of the town. The party degenerates into a nightmare of barbarity, vulgarity, and bestial desire. At the battle royal, black students are asked to fight each other for white people’s entertainment.

The black students are forced to watch a naked white woman dance; they are also urged by the audience to pick up coins on electrified rugs (the coins later turn out to be advertisement souvenirs). That night, the narrator dreams of meeting his grandfather, who tells him to read a note in the briefcase. The note says: “To Whom It May Concern: Keep This Nigger-Boy Running.” Likewise, the following episodes discussed in the novel “The invisible Man” help us to understand racism as a devastating force, possessing the power to render black Americans more clearly.

Jack-the-Bear’s “hole”

Jack-the-Bear's "hole" is an apartment of the narrator in a white neighborhood near Harlem. There were lived only "whites." There the narrator steals electricity, thereby remaining invisible to the Power Company, and wires every inch of his walls and ceiling with more than one thousand light bulbs to bathe himself in brilliant light as he seeks knowledge about himself and his race.

State college

"State college" is an unnamed black college in Alabama to which the narrator wins a scholarship. The college is a model community in which "model" black citizens present to white benefactors a whitewashed version of black America—a veil behind which real black life is kept hidden.

The Quarters

"The Quarters" is a poverty-stricken black community near the state college. There one of the college's white founders, Mr. Norton, encounters black poverty in the flesh for the first time. There, Dr. Bledsoe, the president of the college, keeps his white benefactors from seeing the Quarters. Thus, the truth of black life remains hidden behind the veil that is the college.

Golden Day

"Golden Day" is a bar and brothels near the college. It is a microcosm of an insane society built on racism and hypocrisy. The Golden Day and the asylum are, like the Quarters, kept carefully hidden behind the whitewashed veil that is the college, and they, too, represent hidden truths about black

American life and the effects of racism.

Liberty Paint Factory

“ Liberty Paint Factory” is a New York factory in which the narrator gets his first job. There, too, he remains invisible as pro-union workers revile him as a scab and his supervisor, old Lucius Brockway, reviles him first as a spy, then as a union organizer. The enormous factory produces the whitest of white paints by adding a few drops of black pigment to each bucket, suggesting the hidden black foundations (stolen slave labor) underlying much of America’s industry and culture.

Factory Hospital

“ Factory Hospital” is known as a medical facility in which doctors treat the narrator for injuries. He receives in the paint factory explosion. They do not see him as a human being, but as a research subject, so he remains invisible even in the hospital.

Thus, “ The Invisible Man” is undoubtedly melodramatic; but each melodramatic incident represents some aspect of the Negro’s plight in America, or of his response to it. To this extent, Mr. Ellison’s novel is sharp and clear which signifies racism as a devastating force, possessing the power to render black Americans more clearly.

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