

# Battle royal's: ideological power of white supremacy

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Ralph Ellison's "Battle Royal": Analyzing its demonstration of the ideological power of white supremacy. Ellison began his novel, "Invisible Man" in 1945 and it was published in 1952. Although slavery had been abolished for about eighty years, the laws and the justice system did not protect African Americans from the indignity of segregation and racism at the hand of white people. There was still lynching and the senseless mistreatment and even murders of African Americans by whites. In "Battle Royal," Ralph Ellison displays the behaviors African Americans had to adopt, that was considered "desirable" to white people, to survive. But, these behaviors were also seen as a betrayal to the black race. In the story, Ellison uses imagery and a sort of twisted metaphor to demonstrate the ideological power of white supremacy that he himself had to endure. He begins with the recollection of the narrator's grandfather's mystifying last words, where he describes himself as a "traitor" and a "spy," even though the narrator describes him as a "quiet old man who never made any trouble" (Charters 126). The grandfather believed that the way he behaved, which the narrator described as "desirable conduct," were acts of "treachery" (Charters 126). His acts of "treachery" were showing humility and respectfulness towards white people by degrading himself and his people and conforming to the ideologies of the white people, as a survival tactic. But in doing this he was betraying his people by allowing white people to degrade him and his entire race. By using the young African American men as entertainment for the evening at the ballroom, the narrator shows the lack of respect the white people had for black people. Putting the young black boys in the presence of the stripper then threatening them if they look and threatening them if they didn't,

making them fight each other, making them embarrass themselves for a few measly coins, all shows how little the white people thought of African Americans. As a race, they were merely to serve and entertain white people. Thus, we see the owner-slave mentality maintained so long by the whites after the abolition of slavery. In the end, when the narrator is reciting his speech, his white audience barely pays any attention to him, except to taunt him. Since the speech was after the battle royal, the narrator was badly bruised and bleeding. Then when he had to give his speech, he swallows his blood, which can be seen as him swallowing his pride. The white men belittled him to the very end, then rewards him with the leather brief case. He goes home and proudly shows off his prize, but what did he have to sacrifice to gain his prize? He succumbs to what the white man called "desirable conduct" and what his grandfather called "treachery." He had to swallow his pride and perform tricks like a dog to his entertain the white men for that reward. Was the leather brief case really worth being humiliated, beaten and disparaged for? His what the grandfather told him not to allow the white man to have this power over him because he may not be able hold his head up. Allowing the white men to mistreat made him the "traitor." At the end, when the narrator describes his dream, the endless envelopes he had to open, represents the years struggle and degradation that the African Americans had to endure. Then, the short message on the piece of paper in the last envelope that read, "To Whom It May Concern, Keep This Nigger-Boy Running." It meant to keep him down, that he may never rise up if he continues to be the "traitor" he is. He needs to think for himself and

challenge the white people and not think that if he does not do as they wish, he will never be better than he is now.