

## Beyond Stereotypes: Unmasking Identity In Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man

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### *Abstract*

Stereotypes reinforce racial prejudice and the practice of racial profiling, which unfairly targets people based on their race or ethnicity. The study focuses on the analysis of Ralph Ellison's novel, *Invisible Man* with the objective of de-stereotyping and challenging these racial prejudices about the Black ethnicity. The primary lens used by the researcher to interpret the texts is Critical Race Theory (CRT). The qualitative aspect of this study enables a careful analysis of the chosen textual sections. The study reveals how the protagonist of *Invisible Man* deals with the negative repercussions of becoming invisible as well as the difficulties of surviving in a racist society. The major findings of this research show that Black characters in *Invisible Man* frequently experience marginalization and are subjected to stereotypes. Ellison's work is notable for its efforts to establish Black culture's vital role in the formation of American identity and to reclaim a dignified space for it.

Key words: Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, Ethnicity, Race, Racism, Stereotyping, Critical Race Theory.

### **Introduction**

By exploring into the complex realities of race and racism in America, Ralph Ellison (1914- 1994), well known for his classic novel *Invisible Man* (1953), provided remarkable insights into how African-Americans were regarded and/or treated by the predominately white society. This research analyses shows how

racism and black characters are portrayed in Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man*. In order to understand how racism permeates the texts and how it affects ethnic divisions, this study engages in a thematic exploration of frequently overlooked components of the narratives.

By looking into Ellison's writings, it shows that there is a hierarchical structure in place where African American characters are usually written off and reduced to negative stereotypes. Ralph Ellison masterfully challenged white supremacy through his writing, Ellison's contributions to shattering ingrained prejudices and promoting social justice by examining the ways he addressed the problems faced by African Americans. A thorough thematic analysis of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* focused on racism and stereotyping. This research also highlights Ellison's ongoing attempts to confront white supremacy through his moving narrative, the pervasive impact of racism in American society, the important things about the social and historical context of racism in America and its continuing effects on African Americans through comprehending the complexity of Ellison's narratives.

This research uses a Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens to analyze and challenge the continuation of harmful stereotypes while exploring the topics of racism and stereotyping. By adopting the CRT viewpoint, the study seeks to critically investigate the underlying racial biases and implicit presumptions that might be present in the stories of *Invisible Man* and how racial stereotypes are weaved into the novels' plots and how these depictions may affect readers' perceptions of Black characters and the African-American experience through the use of CRT.

### **Problem Statement**

American society has long been plagued by racial stereotypes, which have had an impact on literature like *Invisible Man*. In order to explore the widespread impact of White Supremacy, Ralph Ellison's work investigates into the complexities of African American experiences and their relationships with White-related issues. The study aims at how Ellison challenges social standards and engages in literary resistance to these stereotypes by criticizing White Supremacy in American society.

### **Objective of the Study**

To explore how everything is related to White or about White in the *Invisible Man*

### **Research Question**

How does Ralph Ellison engage in literary resistance to stereotype and the White Supremacy represented and critiqued in the *Invisible Man*?

### **Research Methodology**

This research is qualitative in nature. This approach is often used to generate new research ideas or to gain insights into a particular topic. Qualitative research is often characterized by its focus on context, subjectivity, and the subjective experiences of participants (Onwuegbuzie, Leech & Collins, 2012).

The researcher followed the method of Textual Analysis in order to find the answers of the research question. Textual analysis is a method of analyzing and interpreting a piece of literature, such as a novel, in order to better understand its meaning and significance. By closely examining and interpreting the text, a reader can gain a more nuanced understanding of the novel and its themes, and can also make connections between the text and larger social or cultural issues.

### **Textual analysis of the novel *Invisible Man***

*Invisible Man* stages a series of expulsions from conventional sites of entrance into twentieth-century American civil society. Living in exile beneath the street, the nameless narrator recounts how he was expelled from college, abandoned from the Liberty Paints factory, and cast aside by the Brotherhood before dropping from the radar of social life altogether to “take up residence underground” (p. 571). *Invisible Man* is a novel of transition. Its expansive scope and scale spanning the horizons of the American century and, from the present vantage of spectacular American decline, offers a prescient glance at contemporary forms of anti-blackness.

“One night I accidentally bumped into a man ...his breath hot in my face as he struggled” (p. 04)

An instance of racial micro-aggression is depicted in the passage's occurrence. The protagonist is called a disparaging name, which is an example of a covert, commonplace act of racism that expresses negative stereotypes about the protagonist's ethnicity. CRT focuses on identifying and examining these micro-aggressions and how they affect people from racial minority groups. The tall blonde man's statement illustrates the idea of white racial framing, in which people from dominant racial groups

may believe their conduct to be justifiable and respond defensively when questioned by someone from a racial minority. The man's arrogance and profanity reveal a sense of privilege and entitlement rooted in the racial power dynamics in society. CRT is aware of how racial stereotypes might influence how people perceive danger and hostility. Because of his racial identity, the protagonist may have been more aware of the possible harm than usual, which may have caused him to demand an apology right away. The protagonist's choice to confront the man depicts the psychological toll that being racially marginalized has had on him, with fear and rage playing a part in his reaction. As racialized experiences can result in a variety of emotions and coping techniques, CRT investigates the emotional aspects of racism.

Whiteness, as it gives advantages to White, is mainly about the superiority of White toward other races. Garner (2007) states that whiteness as terror and supremacy is about a structure of domination in terms of the power of naming, defining, decision making, and the use of physical and symbolic violence. The next evidence shows how the presence of whiteness can bring terror to Black through the use of physical and symbolic violence. One night The Narrator took a walk, and he accidentally bumped into a white man. He experienced an unpleasant reaction as the white man reacted rudely to him.

The Narrator clearly describes how the man he bumped into look like. He is a tall blonde man and with blue eyes. The interesting point of this literary depiction is about how the white man reacts toward The Narrator; in this case, the white man reacts rudely. From the reaction of the white man, it can be seen how the physical and symbolic violence of whiteness works. The presence of whiteness gives privilege to White, which gives them advantages in their presence in society. The evidence shows how one's state of mind plays an essential role in the presence of whiteness. The Narrator himself directly describes the physical appearance of the man, and from his descriptions, it can be pictured that the man is a white man based on his physical appearance. In this case, the state of mind of The Narrator shows how he personally sees the white man; he sees the white man through his physical appearance. Because the narrator is Black, the white man could not see his dark face in darkness and they bumped into each other. The white man calls him insulting name, he knew that it was the mistake of Black, of his Black color. The white man utilizes his white superiority and insults the Black narrator. The narrator has been

stereotyped, because dark color people cannot be seen in the darkness. The Narrator seems a criminal in dark. Blacks have continually been portrayed as criminals throughout American history (Russell, 2002). Although Black people are frequently represented as being physically threatening (Chiricos & Eschholz, 2002). According to one survey, White people are more prone to perceive Black people as violent, drug users, and criminals than any other racial or ethnic group (Sigelman, Tuch & Martin, 1996). Other studies confirm similar findings, showing that most people believe that Black people are responsible for violent street crime (Hawkins, 1999).

The face serves as the body's most obvious point of perception, communication, and expression. It is not merely a synecdoche for the body. Invisible Man's perception of the portraits lined up on the walls of an office in which he seeks employment, can be seen as the connotations of faces framed by masculinity's implicit racial hierarchies, even though the face might not be the first physical characteristic that comes to mind when considering the physical signs of black masculinity. If it is reflected back just a little bit to the picture of Willie Horton's face, a series of visual cues that support the idea that black men are sexually dangerous are visible: mug shots, identity photos, physiognomic comparison studies, and wanted posters (Lamm, 2003)

“I am an Invisible Man .... physical eyes upon reality” (p. 03)

The theme of invisibility as a metaphor for the marginalization and erasure suffered by Black people in a racially unjust society is reflected in the protagonist's declaration, “I am an Invisible Man”, which mirrors the concept of invisibility. In order to avoid overlooking or disregarding the experiences and viewpoints of racial minorities, CRT investigates how mainstream narratives and institutions make them invisible. In order to dispel racial preconceptions, the main character asserts that he is not a ‘spook’ or a Hollywood parody. This is in line with CRT's emphasis on combating damaging stereotypes and racial essentialism while promoting a more nuanced and complex view of racial identity. The narrator introduces the idea of invisibility, visibility, and identity. The protagonist's statement that they are “looking through their physical eyes upon reality” suggests that one's race might affect how they see the world. CRT emphasizes how race affects power dynamics, opportunities, and social relationships through influencing how social reality is constructed. The narrator

states that he is invisible because those around him, choose not to acknowledge his existence because of color. In the context of the novel, the narrator is not only referring to the whites, but also to some of the blacks as well. The narrator is invisible to people such as Mr. Norton, Dr. Bledsoe, Lucius Brockway, and Brother Jack. The narrator concludes that he is invisible because these people, do not want to see who he really is, but just who they want him to be. These people only see the narrator through their own perception, and never took in the idea to see the real nature of him. Even the narrator is invisible to his own Ethnic people around him who are also Black, but those Black are working for the white class and are enjoying some privileges over the other Black like the narrator. They are like puppets in the hands of white.

The presence of whiteness in society constructs a central point; in other words, everything is related to White or about White. As Garner (2007) states that white is the point from which judgments are made, for example; if white is normality then the Black is an abnormality, if white is beauty then the Black is ugliness, if white is civilized then the Black is barbaric and uncivilized. The idea of White as the point from judgments are made, create the idea that the Blacks needs qualifications and need to pass the qualifications if they want to be recognized in the society. In other words, the presence of whiteness defines the identities of the Black. Whiteness is invisible to White because they think that whatever happens to them is what happens to everyone else; whiteness is visible to others because whiteness defines their identities. The Narrator himself feels the presence of whiteness and aware that whiteness defines his identity, of who he is. The Narrator introduces himself with a detailed description. It is interesting how The Narrator introduces himself. The Narrator begins with the main point of his identity, that he is an Invisible Man. The Narrator's invisibility is not physical invisibility but social invisibility.

The Narrator emphasizes that the cause of his invisibility comes from his society and not come from himself. This evidence proves that whiteness defines the Black identities; in this case, the identity of The Narrator as the Invisible Man is constructed because the society refuses to see his presence. This invisible presence is defined by the whites and he is considered as Other. It also proves that whiteness also defines what a human is, and to be a human need to pass the qualification of whiteness. In other words, everything else except white is acknowledged as deviant.

The idea of the qualification constructs the power relation of White over Black; if white is human, black as the binary opposite is deviant. Because they accept the stereotypes that the dominant society has ascribed to them, the majority of African Americans struggle with identity loss. Many black children experience negative cultural stereotypes from an early age, which frequently results in bad racial identities. The media frequently portrays African Americans, especially men, as criminals, drug addicts, illiterate, and jobless (Czarnecki, 2020).

One of the key tenets of CRT is that racism is ordinary and pervasive. The ordinariness of racism means that all those who hold power or privilege (Rocco & Gallagher, 2004) are racists and do not acknowledge their views or actions as racist but normal, typical and part of the status quo. The status quo is reinforced by the interest convergence of white elites materially and working class people psychically (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001) who work together by consensus to maintain the status quo. Interest convergence maintains that Whites are only willing to change the power differential when there is a clear benefit to the interests of Whites.

“A small dry mustached man in the front row blared out, “Say that slowly, son!” ... “All right, now, go on with your speech.” (p. 31)

The tone-policing and micro-aggression of the little dry-mustachioed man's demands that the protagonist ‘say that slowly’ and ‘know his place at all times’ are indicative of. In order to conform into the majority cultural standards, racial minorities are frequently required to modify their speech and behavior. This practice feeds into power dynamics and racial inequality. The man's patronizing tone and claim of dominance over the protagonist draw attention to the persistence of racial subordination. CRT emphasizes how racial minorities are frequently treated as inferiors and are under the supervision and control of people in positions of authority. The man's sense of superiority and his insistence that the woman ‘know your place’ are examples of white normativity, in which non-white perspectives are viewed as secondary or inferior and dominant cultural norms and values are prioritized. CRT promotes awareness of this normativity and its effects on disadvantaged groups.

Whiteness embeds its values in society; the values that are embedded transform into norms and cultural capital. Garner (2007) states that whiteness takes its position in society as the

polar opposite of non-whiteness. Whiteness as polar opposite applies such as whiteness without Blackness. In other words, white against everything that does not suit their values. The novel *Invisible Man* shows how the value of whiteness exists in society through the common sense and the politics of White, and white as the point that is being mimicked by the non-white. The conversation happened when The Narrator slipped the word equality instead of responsibility in his speech after the battle royal.

It is interesting how the crowd ignore him while he delivers his speech, but then pay attention to him when he slips the word equality. One of the White questions what The Narrator means by equality, and it can be implied that there is no equality between White and Black, and the white man confirms the idea of whiteness as the polar opposite of non-whiteness. It means that when there is equality between White and Black, it will destroy the value of whiteness since if whiteness exists, then Blackness is not. Whiteness is recognized with the sense of Blackness, there is whiteness because of Blackness. If they become one, the white would lose the value of the whiteness, the white would never want to hear a word of 'equality' from a Black. Blacks can use the word responsibility but not the equality. Whites may not believe in the equality of Blacks and whites. They always have been stereotypes for their Blackness. Blackness for whites means something negative and if they talk about equality then negative stereotypes cannot be attached to whiteness. Additionally, recent research has revealed that black characters are stereotyped as being more morally bankrupt than white characters (Monk-Turner et al., 2010)

Africans were enslaved during the colonial era, which led to the development of stereotypes about African Americans and their culture in American society. The continuing racism and prejudice experienced by African Americans in the United States is largely to blame for these stereotypes (Scott & Rodriguez, 2015).

Omi and Winant (1994) view race as a social construct, though not one that is merely an ideological illusion that influences other forms of social stratification. Race has a long, salient, and pervasive history that is significant to all social relations.

For the white, the black is inborn inferior to them and should always call them master. They warn the narrator to act in right direction, and he obeys them unquestioningly. This insulting thing does not inspire his recognition of shame and self-esteem;



instead, he is overjoyed and grateful to get the final reward-the university scholarship.

“I passed on to a window .... Be outstanding in your social set.” (p. 262)

The passage draws attention to racial beauty ideals that support the notion that those with lighter complexion are superior and more desirable. CRT investigates how white normativity has historically affected beauty standards, frequently marginalizing and undervaluing non-white features. The advertisement claims that ‘whitening black skin’ is possible reflects the internalized racism that certain members of racial minority groups experience. CRT explores how racial injustice in the past and present might cause people to internalize unfavorable racial stereotypes, which can affect how they view themselves and their own racial identity. The ad's assertion that having a ‘whiter complexion’ can result in ‘greater happiness’ and higher social standing exposes the commodification of race. CRT investigates how corporations take advantage of people's racial and aesthetic fears to profit by fostering and maintaining racial hierarchies. Another value that is known as the value of whiteness is about the concept of beauty, which means white is the definition of beauty.

Fanon (1967) states that whiteness affects the psychological of the Blacks, and it leads them to mimic whiteness. Where they mimic whites, adopt their culture, language, but they are never approved by whites. The evidence confirmed that being white is being beautiful, and being black is the opposite. The value of being white is beautiful is embedded in society as the evidence shows that having whiter complexion can bring happiness and being outstanding in the social set. It can be implied that The Narrator does pay attention to physical appearance, as same as when he describes the white man that he bumped. The idea of constructing previously uncreated features of the black male face suggests an understanding of the flesh and physical characteristics that are malleable and open to remaking, resisting efforts to confine representations of black masculinity to mythic roles that conceal the numerous and unanticipated possibilities of their appearance (Lamm, 2003).

The portrayal of blackface when people darken their skin with shoe polish, greasepaint or burnt cork and paint on enlarged lips and other exaggerated features is steeped in centuries of racism. It peaked in popularity during an era in the United States when demands for civil rights by recently emancipated slaves

triggered racial hostility. And today, because of blackface's historic use to denigrate people of African descent, its continued use is still considered racist (Schulman, 2018).

"I was sent here by ... You, a northern white man!" (p. 189)

The difficulty the protagonist has in seeing his friend and the attempt to have him drop out of college illustrate the problem of racial discrimination in educational institutions. CRT investigates how racial stereotypes and biases can affect opportunities for racial minorities in academic environments as well as decision-making processes. Racial micro-aggressions and gas lighting can be noticed in the man's refusal to let the protagonist visit his friend and his attempt to have him drop out of college. CRT stresses the need of identifying and combating these subtle but harmful behaviors that have the potential to reinforce racial marginalization and psychological suffering. It is possible that racialized perceptions and stereotypes had an impact on the man's unwillingness to let the protagonist visit his friend and his attempt to have him drop out of college. CRT investigates how these biases can influence communication and judgement. The emotional toll of racism and racial prejudice is reflected in the protagonist's response, as evidenced by his dissatisfaction and inquiries. CRT investigates how members of racial minority groups are psychologically affected by their racial experiences.

The presence of whiteness in society is structured and in the form of hierarchies. It means that white is at the top of the hierarchy, and the Black is the subordinate. The interesting part about the hierarchy of whiteness is that not every white is considered as white; some of the white is considered as less white as shown Invisible Man. The use of the term Poor White by the white Southern elite was to distance themselves from elements of society they viewed as undesirable, lesser or antisocial. It denoted a separation, reflective of a social hierarchy, with poor used to demonstrate a low position, while white was used to subjugate rather than to classify. Author Wayne Flynt in his book, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites* (2004), argues that one difficulty in defining poor whites stems from the diverse ways in which the phrase has been used. It has been applied to economic and social classes as well to cultural and ethical values. While other regions of the United States have white people who are poor, this does not have the same meaning as the Poor White in the South. In context, the Poor White refers to a distinct sociocultural group, with members who belong to families with a history of multi-

generational poverty and cultural divergence. The evidence shows that the Northern and the Southern White are different. White privilege refers to the economic, political, cultural, and psychological advantages of Whiteness. Deflection, discomfort, and denial of such advantages have been called white fragility, considered by some to be widespread. White poverty is multidimensional, too, with economic, cultural, psychological, and symbolic facets. Politicians, the press, and the public have long ignored it; poor White people may hide it too, for it is a source of shame and stigma (Sayer, 2005).

“Y’all’s the ones. You ... it’s you young ones what has to remember and take the lead.” (p. 255)

The notion of ‘young ones’ leading the charge in the struggle for advancement echoes CRT’s intergenerational activism theory. It recognizes the significance of transferring information, experiences, and lessons from prior efforts to enable future generations to carry on the campaign for racial equality and social justice. The exhortation to ‘move us all on up a little higher’ highlights the importance of race awareness and group action. For marginalized groups to experience genuine transformation and upward mobility, individuals and communities must be conscious of racial injustices and imbalances, according to CRT.

It is interesting about the transition of place in the story, especially which is experienced by The Narrator. The Narrator is a Southern Black man moves to the North. It is known that society in the North is different compared to the South. The difference is in terms of racist acts. For Black, moving from the South to the North is considered as the road to freedom; the South rigidly segregates Black from White, while in the North is divided into predominantly society. Based on The Narrator statement, it can be seen that he emphasizes northern white man as a northern white man is whiter than the Southern white man. Mary’s statement about the Southern Black shows what she is thinking about her race and the Northern people. Based on the finding, it portrays that contingent plays an essential point in defining race. Mary says that the Black from the South should lift their race a little higher. In the novel, it is known that the Black from the South experience more racist acts rather than those who are in the North.

In Ellison’s prose and interviews, he suggests that African American folklore, myth, and rituals do not exist in a vacuum, separated from the wider American society, black and white cultures are entwined and inseparable. The African American

experience is a fundamental part of America and the West in general, and it is as rich a body of experience as one would find anywhere. It can be viewed it narrowly as something exotic, folksy or low-down, or it may identify ourselves with it and recognize it as an important segment of the larger selves with it and recognize it as an important segment of the larger American experience not lying at the bottom of it, but intertwined, diffused in its very texture (Collected Essays, 1964).

In *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison recognizes violence towards African Americans in the early to mid-twentieth century, particularly in the Southern United States, as a brutal tradition. Ellison refers to the Battle Royal passage of *Invisible Man* and claims that this scene portrays a vital part of behavior pattern in the South, which both Negroes and whites thoughtlessly accept. It is a ritual in preservation of caste lines, a keeping of taboo to appease the gods and ward off bad luck. It is also the initiation ritual to which all greenhorns are subjected the patterns were already there in society (Collected Essays, 1964). In other words, Ellison merges modern American behavioral patterns with what he sees as traditional, Manichean beliefs regarding the motifs of black and white throughout Western literature and culture: good and evil, enlightenment and ignorance, pure and polluted, virtue and sin, and so on. Furthermore, Ellison shows that cultural patterns, folklore, and myth all arise from repeated human action, and appropriates and synthesizes these forms within *Invisible Man* through his appropriation of the Western canon to construct his narrative.

Throughout the novel, the narrator constantly tries to find the true definition of his grandfather's last words, which has ultimately become a burden and a curse for him. The narrator faces the question of racism through the experiences of racism of others. In the beginning of the novel, the narrator's perception towards his own race is rather simple. Even in his speech at the Battle Royal, he speaks of social responsibility and not of social equality. At this point, the young narrator believes that the blacks should cooperate with the whites that are in power. However, throughout the course of the novel, the narrator experiences racism, and meet racist such as Mr. Norton, who look down to the poor blacks, Dr. Bledsoe, and Lucius Brockway, both whom are traitors to their own race. Both Dr. Bledsoe and Lucius Brockway are men that act servile and submissive in front of the white to

keep their positions and enjoy Whiteman privileges over the Blacks, they are known as Race Traitors.

As the narrator experiences more hardships, his perception grew more complex. Many of the experiences the narrator encounters offer new ideas and insight to his overall perception. For example, when Ras the Exhorter tells the narrator that working with the whites is incorrect, the narrator gave thought into it. Another example is when the narrator decides to overwhelm the Brotherhood with yesses, but only came to find out that he might have misinterpreted his grandfather's words.

"I am not ashamed .... ashamed of myself for having at one time been ashamed." (p. 02)

The remembrance of the protagonist's grandparents' slavery underlines the agony that slavery's legacy has caused African Americans throughout history. CRT investigates the effects historical injustices and institutional racism may have on people from disadvantaged groups' sense of self and racial identity. Internalized racism is illustrated by the phrase 'I am only ashamed of myself for having once been ashamed'. CRT explores the internalization of unfavorable racial stereotypes and attitudes about one's own racial identity by members of marginalized racial groups, which can result in feelings of guilt or inadequacy. The connection of race and personal identity is mentioned in the passage. CRT investigates how a person's experiences and viewpoints are influenced by the intersections of their racial identification with other facets of their identity, such as gender, class, and nationality.

The narrator recounts that freed slaves were told they were free in all ways, although this clearly was not true. Socially, after freedom from slavery, Black people were still kept very separate from the rest of society. Sadly, the narrator's grandparents bought into the promise of true freedom wholesale. Because the novel is a bildungsroman, this quote in the beginning of the book foreshadows the time period and tells the story of the time when the narrator has been ashamed of his southern roots. This quote also focusses on the theme of race and racism and how the Sambo doll come to represents him in the novel. The Sambo doll is made in the image of the Sambo slave, who, according to white stereotype, acts lazy yet obsequious. Moreover, as a dancing doll, it represents the negative stereotype of the black entertainer who laughs and sings for whites. While the coin bank illustrates the power of stereotype to follow a person in his or her every

movement, the Sambo doll illustrates stereotype's power to control a person's movement altogether.

Stereotype and prejudice, like the invisible strings by which the doll is made to move, often determine and manipulate the range of action of which a person is capable. Sambo dolls and stereotypes dehumanize people of color solely from degrading them. Sambo dolls are dolls that are created from butter from off the ground to show that blacks are unsanitary animalistic people. His black identity is what staggered him to find his true individual identity. Ultimately, the narrator realizes that the racism of others has only created an image of what others want to see of him, and not what he wants to see of himself. This is when the narrator truly realizes that he only holds an identity that others gave him, and not an identity that he creates for himself. The narrator as a man comes to terms with the bloody battle royal and his speech before the crowd of drunken white men.

The fight and its setting embody racism because it pits Black children against each other purely for the entertainment of the racist audience. The narrator recalls this pivotal incident from his youth and relates its details without shame. The narrator also relates the anecdote about his grandfather's dying words that admitted he considered himself a traitor, words that caused the narrator immediate alarm and long-standing discomfort. The narrator's grandfather introduces a further element of moral and emotional ambiguity to the novel, contributing to the mode of questioning that dominates it.

While the grandfather confesses that he deems himself a traitor for his policy of meekness in the face of the South's enduring racist structure, the reader never learns whom the grandfather feels he has betrayed: himself, his family, his ancestors, future generations, or perhaps his race as a whole. While this moral ambiguity arises from the grandfather's refusal to elaborate, another ambiguity arises out of his direct instructions. For in the interest of his family's self-protection, he advises them to maintain two identities: on the outside they should embody the stereotypical good slaves, behaving just as their former masters' wish; on the inside, however, they should retain their bitterness and resentment against this imposed false identity. By following this model, the grandfather's descendants can refuse internally to accept second-class status, protect their own self-respect, and avoid betraying themselves or each other.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Ralph Ellison's masterful portrayal of racial tension in *Invisible Man* is a stark and unflinching exploration of the gritty and brutal realities of racism. Through his hyperbolic yet all-too-realistic narrative, Ellison delves into the themes of blindness, invisibility, and the complex constructs of race. As Joseph Millichap insightfully observes, Ellison recognized the white establishment's power in defining blackness, compelling individual African Americans to forge their own identities within the intricate black/white continuum, both visually and linguistically. Ellison's work becomes an eloquent testament to the perseverance and resilience of individuals striving to define themselves amidst the stifling constraints of racial stereotypes and societal prejudices. His unapologetic examination of racism forces readers to confront the pervasive impact of these stereotypes, highlighting their insidious effects on both the oppressors and the oppressed. Through the lens of his protagonist's journey, Ellison compellingly demonstrates how racism's dehumanizing grip distorts perceptions and fosters an environment where true identity becomes elusive. In essence, Ellison's exploration of racism in "Invisible Man" not only serves as a poignant critique of a deeply flawed society but also underscores the urgent need to dismantle the harmful constructs of race that perpetuate injustice. His novel stands as a timeless reminder that breaking free from the cycle of racial stereotyping requires a collective acknowledgment of our shared humanity and a commitment to dismantling the divisive narratives that continue to plague our world.

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