CHAPTER - V
REINVENTING IDENTITY

Toni Morrison in her work, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992) asks:

What happens to the whitely imagination of a black author who is at some level always conscious of representing one's own race to, or in spite of, a race of readers that understands itself to be "universal" or race-free? In other words, how is "literary whiteness" and "literary blackness" made, and what is the consequences of that construction? How do embedded assumptions of racial (non-racist) language work in the literary enterprise that hopes and sometimes claims to be "humanistic"? when in a race conscious culture, is that lofty goal appropriated? When not, and why? Living in a nation of people who decided that their world view combine agendas for individual freedom and mechanisms for devastating racial oppression presents a singular landscape for a writer. When this world view is taken seriously as agency, the literature produced within and without it offers an unprecedented opportunity to comprehend the resilience and gravity, the inadequacy and the force to the imaginative act.¹

In view of Morrison's observation, it is understood that a black writer is always conscious of his/her racial identity. This understanding of identity is placed at the trajectory of "individual freedom" and "the mechanism of oppression". The self-consciousness of the writer thus determines his imagination as well as explains his understanding of identity.

Identity is a dynamic concept. The so-called Afro-American identity is embedded primarily in the black experience. In defining blackness, Henry Louis Gates Jr.,² a theorist of black literature underpins
its signifying systems that reside in the black tradition. The language of a black text expresses the distinctive quality of this tradition. It is not only writing, but language, like culture and other factors that contribute to constructing identity. According to him, the most important function of black texts, has been testified in its ability to contain black experience. Gates has a very different approach in which, rather than applying theory to black texts, there is a form of dialectical play between figural, rhetorical criticism and the black figural tradition he calls signifyin(g). The kernel of Gates theory in its most influential form is expressed in his essay “The Blackness of Blackness: A Critique of the Sign and the Signifying Monkey”. It refers both to the Afro-American tradition, with its roots in African folk myths, and contemporary critical theory which has its roots in the linguistic theory of Saussure. Signifyin(g) is a form of critical parody, it has been a part of black vernacular and refers to the verbal skill of parody in reversing and revising another’s language. The figures of the signifyin(g) Monkey can be found in folktales from Africa, the Caribbean, and the Americas. It is a creature which is a “mediator” and these “mediations” are tricks of language in which a story is first heard, then twisted and related to a third party, repeated but with trouble-making differences. Gates suggests that a type of signigyin(g) is characteristic of Afro-American literature. Gates shows how Ralph Ellison’s modernist Invisible Man ‘signifies’ on the title of the two earlier, more naturalistic works by Richard Wright: Black Boy (1945) and Native Son (1940). Wright’s titles suggest a powerful racial identity. Ellison’s title is however ironic and an anxious response to signifying the problematical nature of race and identity.
In the articulations of Morrison and Gates Jr., it is evident that Black identity in America is not simply a racial difference, but also a linguistic difference. Further, identity is not a stamped document, it is constructed variously taking into account psycho-social and economic factors. However, in considering black identity one has to take into account black experience and tradition. Stuart Hall attempts to theorize identity as being formed at the unstable point where the “unspeakable” stories of ‘subjectivity’ meet the narratives of history, of a culture. As Gilroy maintains ‘Black repressive cultures affirm as they protest,’ and protest here could not just include opposition to rejection of the West’s universalizing assumptions, while affirmation could include both the celebration of positive aspects of black life and a commitment to a better future.

The production of identity in the context of *Invisible Man* is directly linked to what Gilroy calls repressive cultures of the black. *Invisible Man* takes a detour in identifying the location of culture in its relation to what Hall underlines as the stories of subjectivity meeting the narrative of history. In confronting the history of subjugation and violence, the protagonist of *Invisible Man* explores his identity in the oral tradition of the Afro-American community and in black music. This process culminates in moving backdoor and re-identifying identity.

This position raises a pertinent question. How can America unite all the factors of differences in a culture so varied and diverse yet attempting to signify unity in diversity? The question is important in reflecting what Emerson wrote to Carlyle in April 1853, that “America is
incomplete”. It has not stopped its restless movements and thus shows no signs of terminating into a white culture or black culture.

John Killens has said, “We are a Southern people, because that is where our people are closest to Africa. But our literature does not show this.” Many critics, social and literary, who associate themselves in some manner with the concept of the Black Aesthetic are Southerners. But few have journeyed back to the South – to the sounds and smells, the folklore and music, the ribald jokes and humane laughter – which as Killens noted, was close to the Africans experience for the symbols and images, the paradigms of history that form the underpinning of a people’s literature.

The elevation of the black critic and black criticism into acceptance and respectability by the black community is a major achievement, for the job of the critic, as Toni Cade avers, is to call a halt to madness and it is primarily the critics of the Black Aesthetic who have attempted to fulfill this function. They have called a halt to the madness of the 1940’s and 1950’s that propounded the idea that literature could serve as catharsis for whites, that it might produce changes in them that would force them to move towards producing the “great society”. They further rejected the fanatic argument that black men were half-men at best, ersatz-Americans at most, and that via the vehicle of protest literature, a transcendence might occur which would allow them the existence of a whole man. They have also called a halt to the themes of black pity and gratuitous black suffering.
Writing was a vehicle for moving outside the black community and publishing a novel, play or collection of poems, while moving up to a higher status than other blacks, expecting that the writer will be free from white exploitation and oppression. They have called a halt to the madness of those who argued that writing made them less African-American. In the writing itself, they achieved a sort of mutation—"I am a writer, not a Negro writer," and assumed that the value of black literature could be validated only by white critics and a white audience.

Despite the achievements of black writers in the era of the black Aesthetic movement, a major area of the black experience which is fundamentally Southern, was almost totally neglected. It overlooked the type of experience articulated by Richard Wright, the southern experience where Black nationalism flourished. The South where black women still maintain their proud carriage, where young people continue to look with defiance upon the white world, where the ghost of Harriet Tubman and David Walker, Sojourner Truth and Martin Luther King remain omnipresent, constantly reminding the greatness of a race of men and women, who, forced to desert their god and their land, struggled to survive the American diaspora, as a collective people, tracting down the concept of the African diaspora as related to questions of race, culture and politics was also overlooked. In attempting to identify and define the African diaspora we can see a shift in focus that concentrates not so much on essential features common to people of African descent as on the various processes through which communities and individuals identify with one another highlighting the central importance of race—
racial constructs; racial oppression, racial identification and cultural difference in the making and remaking of diaspora.

As initially constructed in the pan-African political ideologies of Delaney, Blyden, Garvey, Du Bois, Padmore and others, the African diaspora was identified with blackness or negroness. It is a phenotypically constructed and ascribed racial identity indicative of sub-Saharan African territorial origin and simultaneously, of biological difference from white skinned populations.

It is important to recognize that from the very beginning the African diaspora as a theoretical project has been political. It was originally constructed in opposition to racist ideologies that depicted blacks in essentialized terms as biologically “negroid”; a people without culture, without significant history or national or territorial connection, having nothing cultural or intellectual to offer to “modernity”. The term itself began to be employed at a particular fertile moment in the civil rights and pan-African movements by intellectuals and activists striving to increase racial consciousness and solidarity. The struggle not only conceptualized racial identity but worked towards uniting Africa and its communities in displacement through a shared African cultural practice and world view. Contemporary constructions of the diaspora retain their political vitality as a response to dominant ideas about Afro-American people which depicts them as nothing more than cultures of poverty and dismissed them as culturally pathological. Even if the body of work on the African diaspora has been characterized as “objective” and “apolitical”, it has emerged from a sustained tradition of oppositional
scholarship and provided the foundations for a cultural-political identity for people of African descent in America.

Despite the undeniable intellectual and political achievements facilitated by this formulation of the diaspora paradigm, there are those working from what can be broadly termed a "post-modern" perspective. Authors such as David Scott, Kwame Appiah and Stuart Hall argue that prominent theories of black cultures and identities rely on forms of racial or cultural essentialism that collude with Western understandings of race, culture and nationalism. They claim, that the "Afrocentric" aspiration to construct an "authentic, natural, and stable rooted" African identity and a racial-self has resulted in an ethnic absolutism that reifies the very categories of racial oppression. They also assert that these notions valorized a male, patriarchal subject and thus exclude many who identify as *black* but do not fit the essentialist criteria, such as women, homosexuals, people of mixed descent. That is why many of these critics have turned to the notion of "hybridity", for resolution to these problems in theorizing the *Black Diaspora*. In fact, *hybridity* along with terms such as *syncretization* and *creolization*, has come to stand for a particular trend in this field, a trend that has been specifically formulated against the ontological essentialism of Afrocentric formulations of the diaspora.

The works of Ralph Ellison represents a middle ground between the ontological essentialism of Afrocentricism and the anti-essentialism of diaspora as hybridity. In his elaboration of what we can refer to as anti-anti-essentialist perspective on these issues, he addresses the question of unity and commonality of the African diaspora, not only as a
political and theoretical problem but also as a social, economical, cultural and racial problem of the individual, rather than as an ontological given rooted in a presumed racial essence or mythological origin. For Ellison, diaspora refers to the historical stay of his people in America through the old story of enslavement, the creation of different black cultures in the new world, and the contemporary effort to imagine a shared sense of peoplehood in confrontation with persistent systems of racialized terror.

Consequently, reinvention is central to Ellison’s aesthetic. One of the problems he recognizes in the Black Aesthetic is the absence of opportunity for reinvention. His sense of the Black Arts Movement includes artists like Imani, who duplicates existing forms rather than recreates them. Ellison sees reinvention as central to the experience of African Americans. It is a premise for artistic creation and a survival technique.

That is why, in the epilogue to *Invisible Man* the narrator speaks of the “heart of darkness” of the South and he also speaks of his own “disembodied voice”. It is obvious throughout the novel that Ellison is extremely concerned with desegregation and has been very angered by Southern congressmen. He has also been concerned for others, for example, middle class white students. He says: “we shouldn’t overstress Negro alienation and agony because not only the black man but the white American too has a dual identity”.\(^6\) Ellison has objected to *Invisible Man* being called an autobiographical novel, and his objection is valid, in that the novel contains not only incidents from real life but Ellison’s dream life, his visions and his intellectual judgement, and thus the book is
synthetic. Ellison himself, like the protagonist of his novel, remains whole and optimistic, a man calm in the face of human dilemma. A central metaphor in the novel concerns the blindness of the invisible man to his many experiences for he must come to terms and understand the culmination and summary of the experiences narrated in the novel. In elaborating this theme, Ellison emphasized the practical. Even though the Invisible Man learns and studies, yet he was not impressed by the sheer fact of learning because he had seen that learning could exist without being useful and that in itself it did not anger mental superiority. But Ellison rescues his protagonist through narrative openness. The mythic quest becomes a journey backward, hitting the open road and coming home to one’s own people. The Invisible Man goes through the process of initiation only to prepare himself for reinventing his identity as a black man having learnt his lessons about black cultural life.

The identity the invisible man discovers is camouflage in invisibility that tells us about his world, his complex feelings and thoughts. Here, in capsule form are his insights into his position as a black man in a racist society, an American pitted against the history of the world. His insights are genuine and profound because they were painfully gathered from his own experiences – experiences he barely escapes at times. The novel narrates those experiences, while the prologue and epilogue give us his conclusions and philosophy. It is important to look at the prologue and epilogue together because essentially they tell so the same thing, for both are logs made on a journey, and these two records are progress of the journey of the Invisible
Man’s life. Ellison says in the prologue “the end is in the beginning”. And the last words of the novel before the epilogue repeat the same; “the end was in the beginning”. This is true not only for the meaning of the book, but of the form also. The end and the beginning, epilogue and prologue, are one, in both sections. Ellison talks of his hibernation in a hole. This hole symbolically represents the hole he has always been in – a hole which he did not recognize. He says he has to be literally clubbed into the cellar before he saw the real condition of his life. Interestingly enough, in both sections he talks either of spring or coming out of his hole, for Ellison sees life’s cyclic aspect and knows that after winter hibernation comes spring and renewal. So he seems to have a circular view of life. The circular view of life is one big round, and the invisible man was engulfed in it in order to comprehend the meaning of his being. For a while, he seems to be loosing focus on his own self because of the darkness within and around, but eventually he was able to come out of it in search of his identity, being able to identify himself with the society, the culture that surrounded him. We look at this circular view as the cyclic fount of the seasons, even though Ellison focused attention on only two of them.

Although Ellison seems to have a circular view of life, he says at one point that history is a boomerang, emphasizing the violent condition of the cycle, rather than the rebirth. Part of Ellison’s vision of the boomerang includes his insight into the shifting nature not only of winter and spring, death and birth, but also of evil and good, and honesty and dishonesty. As an invisible black man the values that might appear
obvious to others, to the protagonist seems to be confusing. This confusion leads to a soul sickness, something Ellison talks of both at the beginning and at the end of the book. But this soul-sickness is not fatal for Ellison. He says in the prologue, “all sickness is not unto death, neither is invisibility”. His desire to be fit and strong is primarily an individualistic impulse. He recounts nearly killing a man, who saw him only as the phantom “nigger”, a vision of a racist mind-set. But learning that he is invisible gives him a kind of power over those who do not see him. This understanding gives him an identity — an identity, others probably do not have. With this identity he can defeat his soul sickness and assert that life is to be lived. Thus the narrator not only begins to live his life, but he also begins to write it down. And as a writer and a sensitive artist, he is aware that there is an area where “a man’s feelings are more rational than his mind”. So he writes down his story, not as a mental exercise, but as an affirmation of his deepest felt experiences. Writing has a positive value for him. But he goes even further in the epilogue when he says that an invisible man is also a responsible person.

However, he faces the problem of playing socially responsible role, for he is not like his grandparents, who believed implicitly in the Emersonian ideal of the part being connected to the whole, or the fingers of the hand being separate but equal. For the Invisible Man the ideal is not just something out there for him to grab, because even though the ideal may run true theoretically, yet its practical dimensions are lost when it is evaluated against the experiences that the Invisible Man encountered as a black man. So he laughs in his encounter with Mr. Norton reminding
him "I’m your destiny". Ellison’s dilemma and encounter with the absurd is that he believes in the Emersonian ideal yet knows well that it is just not true.

What is more interesting for the Invisible Man is that, in trying to bridge the cultural gap, he also comes face to face with the problem of the generation gap with his father and grandfather. His dilemma arises from misunderstanding a seasoned advice offered by his grandfather; “Son after I’m gone, I want you to keep up the good fight.... Live with your head in the lion’s mouth. I want you to overcome ‘em with yesses, undermine ‘em with grins, agree ‘em to death and destruction”.

This Afro-centric folk wisdom is neither a “riddle” nor a delightfully ambitious joke, but a cruel and cryptic curse. Far from being a “parody of itself” the old man’s utterance is a serious piece of advice calculated to enlighten others while confounding his family. That the protagonist’s father misunderstands the advice and rushes his children from the room, warning them “emphatically” to forget the incident, underscores, ironically, the cultural distance between the sententious old man and his prosaic son, between the old Negro of the Reconstruction and the New Negro of the post-Reconstruction era.

Unlike the protagonist’s father, whose sight is linear and fixed, the grandfather possesses a mobile, multidimensional insight. He does not see the choice before him in terms of absolute either-or’s-either life or death, suffering or bliss, utter resignation or brutal resistance. For he has somehow managed to reconcile “Being” with “not Being”. Instead of a clear cut situation in which life is either war or peace, he has been able to
live in peace even while fighting his own battles. Where his son would probably value bliss above pain, the old man sees an alchemical value in pain. To content with pain, he believes in strengthening one's sinews and in one's survival skills. The grandfather believes in surviving the day, to keep on fighting the battle not having an open confrontation with a powerful enemy, but defeating him in his own game.

*Invisible Man* foregrounds the theorization of diaspora as a problem of politics and identity. In order to make this point clear, it is useful to distinguish two interpretations of *diaspora*; as a conceptual tool or referential term denoting a specific group of people, and, as a term to denote a certain kind of identity formation, the feeling of belongingness to a community that transcends national boundaries. In practice the two come together, for the very development of diaspora as a conceptual tool has been part and parcel of a political project whose objective is the creation of solidarity. It is true that race is a social construct, it is also a social fact whose effects are undeniably real. An analysis of who belongs to the African diaspora cannot ignore race, but must investigate processes of identity formation, analyzing forms of racialized classification and subordination as well as the creative efforts of people living through such systems to formulate and reevaluate their own sense of the self.

Like any sense of peoplehood, the identity of the Invisible Man is formed and transformed in relation to other identity constructions. He confronts a mine of racial ideologies that differentiate between people on the basis of phenotype and ascribed them to particular, often pejorative, biological and cultural qualities. While these ideologies vary over time
and place, they resonate with previous meanings and transcend the Invisible Man as an individual. This does not imply that the identity of the Invisible Man is derived from dominant racial constructs, but that it necessarily engages him in the effort to imagine a sense of peoplehood.

On this note, it can be pointed out that white identities are also constructed in relation to other group identities, even if “white” people have acquired differential power to create and disseminate racial constructions. In attempting to discern how black people construct their own identities, Ellison’s *Invisible Man* serves as an inspiration by providing fresh insight into the processes of travel, communication and cultural exchange, while creating forms of community and raising consciousness that subvert the norms of race, nation and capitalism. In his polemic against Afro-centrism, Ellison did not fail to explore the power of the imaginings of Africa held within various constructions of diasporic identity. If diasporic identity is created and recreated through different routes, it is also imagined on roots. Africa serves as the key symbol for the particularity of black identities. In his search for identity, the *Invisible Man*, in the presence of Bledsoe, moves from rage to confusion to utter helplessness because he cannot connect together the remarks that Bledsoe makes. In the Founder’s story, even in the manner in which he questioned his young masters to teach them to “reason”, we see that the underlying emphasis of Negro learning is to make him function in a subterranean manner in the white man’s world without even asserting his own basic end – individuality. It is ironic that the visionary Reverend Barbee cannot realize that the original dream of the Founder is
being subtly perverted by Dr. Bledsoe. In a return to the original image of
the novel, it is revealed that Barbee is unable to see this because he is
both literally and figuratively blind. As the Invisible Man walks to
Bledsoe’s office, he smells fresh bread baking, which gives him a sense
of identity, since bread is the stuff of life. Little emphasis is given to food
in the novel until much later when the Invisible Man is just discovering
his true identity and he stands on the street corner eating fresh baked
yams bought from a street vendor. Here the smell of bread gives him
pleasure in life and a sense of joy – a joy soon to be ruined by Bledsoe.

Bledsoe’s general view of life is expressed in his comment,
“You’re black and living in the South – did you forget how to lie?”
This again suggests Bledsoe’s understanding that the Negro can only
succeed by being a hypocritical liar. He refuses to accept the white
person except as someone to deceive. Bledsoe’s first premise is that he
knows what the white man wants, and his assumptions is that the white
man wants to be lied to. In other words, Bledsoe hates the white man and
just uses him to gain power. He has not yet gained insight to evaluate
Bledsoe and the betrayal, instead sees himself as a sacrifice for the
college. If he did not accept the fact that he has to be sacrificed, then he
would have to admit that his grandfather’s remarks made sense. Since the
young protagonist cannot yet accept the absurdity of life, as pronounced
by his grandfather, he sees the necessity of his own punishment. The only
other alternative was to accept the world of Trueblood and the Golden
Day, which represent a type of madness and chaos. This is the end of yet
another stage in the Invisible Man’s development and the beginning of a
longer journey toward discovering his identity as he leaves the campus with the seven impressive letters which are not letters of recommendation, but actually letters of betrayal.

When the Invisible Man meets the insane Vet in the bus, he associates his expulsion with the episode of the Golden Day. He is at first afraid of the Vet, but then he remembers that the Vet is violent only in his speech. His encounter in Harlem with Ras the Exhorter, who is about to start a riot with his violent speech, also reveals the power of words to the protagonist, who soon will use his own power with words to become a member of the Brotherhood. Besides discussing the idea of freedom, suggesting the importance of being invisible, and giving the protagonist some good advise, the Vet also correlates the black man’s struggle with the white man, mankind’s struggle with the authority of God and fate, implying that mankind is in a constant struggle against some force which he cannot distinguish. In actuality, the Vet has given the protagonist some good insights, but the young man, being still blindfolded, does not regard this advice because he considers that the Vet is “a mad man”.

It is perhaps symbolic of what is happening to the protagonist’s life, when he arrives at his new apartment. He places his brief case with the broken image on the table. This broken image symbolizes the broken pattern of his life and his failure to live up to his own dreams. It also symbolizes an attempt to break with the past, for he is no longer the subservient “Sambo” type. His task now is to discover his true identity.
The Invisible Man's association with, and initiation into, the Brotherhood is, in one sense, the beginning of a new life for him represented by his new clothes, his new apartment, his new name and his new position. One is reminded of the black man's plight upon reaching America, when he was divested of his own religion and culture. Embedded in all of this newness is the concept that the Invisible Man is developing an entirely new system of values and a new personality. Having a new name and new personality, he longs to become someone whom people will recognize and respect. He becomes an effective leader because he combines ideology, inspiration, theory and action. He can get the community leaders to support him on the eviction issue in spite of the fact that the leaders are against the Brotherhood. He organizes the People's Hot Foot Squad — a jazzy drill squad — and is the leader of successful parades which bring out the Harlem citizens. He works very hard at his job and believes that he is a soldier in the organization. He puts himself under the strict discipline of the party and believes that he has freedom of action within this discipline. These are days of certainty for the Invisible Man.

However, his encounter with Ras the Exhorter is unsettling. The latter has the tremendous ability to move people, has "a blood for blood" philosophy and as Todd Clifton says about Ras the Exhorter, "sometimes a man has to plunge outside history". This is in contrast to the Brotherhood philosophy which tries to combine science and history. The Brotherhood supposedly has a philosophy of non-violence, while Ras the Exhorter and his followers, consciously have a violent separatist
philosophy. The chapter ends with a significant encounter with the Exhorder. At this juncture, not only has Todd Clifton questions about the party, but the Invisible Man is also having problems with establishing his own identity in terms of the Brotherhood. Therefore, Ras the Exhorder's harangue about the black man's place in the world upsets Clifton and the Invisible Man. Now that the invisible man recognizes how absurd it is to think that if a man is called a name, that man becomes what he is called. Thus by recognizing that absurdity, the invisible man knows he is still searching for his identity.

The death of Todd Clifton and the events following it are among the central events of the novel. This incident helps removing one of the blindfolds of the Invisible Man, for it clearly shows the division among the black community. The Invisible Man on his return to Harlem senses an alienation from his own people and this estrangement is closely related to the disappearance of Tod Clifton. Returning to Harlem is like returning to a city of the dead, and the Invisible Man struggles to bring some life back into the Harlem Brotherhood.

It is never clarified in the novel how Tod Clifton left the Brotherhood and why. Once having left, he decides to do something as degrading as selling paper sambos. There is an indication that Todd Clifton left because the Invisible Man has disappeared, an implication which causes the Invisible Man to feel responsible for the death of Todd Clifton. He is the person whom the Invisible Man most resembles in the novel and through their friendship, the protagonist has achieved some degree of identity. In Clifton's death, this identity is again lost. He feels
disillusioned and considers that Todd Clifton has stepped outside of history. The implication is that the Brotherhood is like the "establishment" and that Todd Clifton as a Negro realized he was not a part of the Brotherhood therefore as a Negro and as an individual, he is outside of history. Thus the selling of the dolls is a type of public parodying of the position of the Negro, especially since the dolls are like jumping-jacks performing a sort of obscene dance, which aligns them as symbols with the degrading Battle Royal rug scene in which the Invisible Man participated. With Clifton's death, the Invisible Man intellectually rejects a part of the Brotherhood. He sees that history is not like the Marxian view - a logical working out of certain laws of science - instead history consists of blind chances where there is much gambling and luck. This idea is expressed by the insane Vet in the Golden Day, who had maintained that history was like roulette, with white on top now but black soon to be on top. The Invisible Man now adopts this view of history and believes that great men are merely accidents in history. Having reached this conclusion, he sees a black nun and a white nun on the sub-way and concludes that the crosses which the two nuns wear must be of different weights because for the black man the cross is always heavier.

Although he decides to use Clifton's death to get members back into the Brotherhood, at his funeral for he evaluates his own past, his stay at the college, and his earlier home life. Thus he is no longer the mechanical doll performing for the Brotherhood - now he is searching for some private answer outside the propaganda lunched by the Brotherhood. Therefore, the song at the funeral touches something that is
deeper than protest and profound than religion – it releases his suppressed anger.

Despite his assertion of primordial claims and a recognized history of the indigenous people, the protagonist of *Invisible Man* emphasizes the blackness or African components of his identity. While stressing the fact that the Invisible Man was forced by necessity to adopt indigenous language and material practices, Ellison highlights the African origin of the protagonist’s religion, music and dance, and claims that he occupies a unique status as a New World Black. We can see that Ellison has framed an acceptable account of the culture and history of the protagonist, within the context of the African diaspora.

Houston Baker in *Long Black Song* maintains:

>> The question of the black man’s humanity recedes with the acknowledgement of his culture: passive, bestial victims and sambo personalities are not generally what one has in mind when he speaks of culture as a whole way of life. The goal of an investigation of black American culture is to discover what type of man the black American is and what values and experiences he has articulated that might be useful in one’s attempt to make sense of the world.13

This statement points at the heart of the black aesthetic, for it demands that the black artists help make sense out of the world, help achieve a sense of morality, not out of the values of the Euro-Americans, but out of their culture and history. To accomplish this does not mean that one must find irrelevant and invalid every artifact of the Western world. It suggests that the offerings of the West must be scrutinized in
light of the question, "Is it good for black people?" We know, for example, that the Viet Kong did not return captured machine guns because they bore the label "made in America", instead, they utilized them in their struggle to overcome the Americans.

It is to such a world that the author of *Invisible Man* draws our attention, a world of diversity and change, where men and women, seen in the context of historical perspective, are paradigms of courage, endurance, grace and beauty. To this world people must as did the Invisible Man return.
REFERENCES:

8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., p. 13.
11. Ibid., p. 143.
12. Ibid.

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