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## APPENDICES

### **Synopsis of Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison**

The narrator of the story, who remains unnamed throughout the book, is shown in a depressed state in the prologue. He claims to be an invisible man and has taken to hiding underground while consuming electricity from the city of New York in the numerous light bulbs he has hung in his den. His journey to this position will be the subject of the novel.

The narrator overhears his dying grandfather's final words as a young child, and those words stay with him throughout high school. When he is asked to deliver his college oration to the most esteemed white men in the community, he is struck with this idea. He is ushered into the battle royal with the other boys hired for the evening's entertainment at the posh ballroom where he attends the event. The boys are first brought into the room where the naked woman is dancing. The boys are then placed in a boxing ring while wearing blindfolds. Only the narrator and Tatlock, the largest boy, are left after several fights, and they are instructed to engage in combat with one another for a prize.

The boys must reach for gold coins on a rug that turns out to be electrified in order to move on to the next stage. Finally given permission to deliver his oration, the narrator also receives a scholarship to a prestigious black university. He first experiences the disillusionment he will experience at the end of college. As he recalls the occasion when he was given the honor of chauffeuring an elderly, white trustee named Mr. Norton around the campus, the memory causes him pain. The journey initially goes without incident, but the narrator is taken aback by Mr. Norton's inquiries. Every college student, in Norton's eyes, is a part of his destiny. He also welcomes the opportunity to visit different areas of the nearby town. By accident, the narrator leads

Norton to a poor neighborhood of black sharecroppers. There, Norton becomes intrigued by Jim Trueblood, a disgraced local who is said to have impregnated both his wife and daughter. Trueblood goes into great detail about the dream that drove him to engage in incest and led to his wife attempting to kill him. In order to find whisky to revive him after this episode, the narrator takes Norton to the Golden Day brothel. Unfortunately, a group of mentally ill patrons pushes back against their host, putting Norton and the narrator in the middle of the altercation.

After losing consciousness, Norton is brought back to life by a former physician who informs him of the narrator's invisibility. When the doctor, who believes the narrator is insane, and the patient eventually return to the college, the narrator is disciplined for how he treated Mr. Norton. Dr. Bledsoe, the college president, says in the narrator's account that he ought to have only shown the trustee what the college would have wanted him to see. The promise that he can return as a paying student in the fall causes the narrator to be expelled from school and sent to New York with seven sealed letters to wealthy employers. Despite being in disbelief, the narrator chooses to seize the chance to work for a prominent figure in New York City.

He is confused but thrilled when he arrives in Harlem. The following morning, he departs to begin distributing his letters after renting a room at the Men's House in Harlem. Although he can only give the letters to secretaries and is told the employers will contact him, the process goes smoothly. After waiting for a response and growing suspicious of the secretaries, the narrator withholds the final letter and requests a meeting with Mr. Emerson, his employer, so that he may deliver it to him in person. However, the narrator must again step in as Mr. Emerson's son steals the letter from him in the office and tries to dissuade him from going back to the college or talking to his father. Finally, the son shows the narrator the letter from Dr. Bledsoe which the narrator

had been told not to look at. Reading what is written horrifies the narrator. In a letter to the employers, Bledsoe states clearly that the narrator will never be permitted to return to the school and asks them to take steps to ensure in the interim that he will not be permitted to do so as a paying student. The narrator leaves the office feeling defeated, humiliated, and extremely irate. In order to have time to prepare for his planned retaliation against Dr. Bledsoe, he chooses to accept a job at a paint factory.

During the one extended day he spends working at the paint factory, the concept of retribution becomes muddled. He is put on the job right away with very little direction and the directive not to ask questions by his stern and demanding boss, Mr. Kimbro. The narrator is fired from that job and given to another boss, Mr. Brockway, who serves as sort of the engineer, after he mixes the wrong ingredient into the paint out of fear of asking Kimbro. Brockway is quite irritated with the narrator and asks him numerous questions about his past because he believes the narrator is trying to take his job. Up until the narrator returns after getting his lunch, they get along well enough. In the changing rooms when he explains this to Brockway, who is furious at him for belonging to a union and attacking him, the narrator is met with resistance. The narrator pushes back Mr. Brockway after feeling the tension inside him snap. The tanks burst from the pressure and the narrator is covered in white paint and knocked unconscious because they failed to pay attention to the gauges in the room.

In a plant factory, surrounded by doctors who discuss lobotomies and tests they wouldn't perform on a white Harvard student, he drifts in and out of consciousness for what feels like days. He is asked his name at one point while desperately clinging to consciousness, but he is unable to recall it. Finally, he freed from the tubes and equipment, the doctors tell him that he has been saved, though he never really understands from what. Before he can depart, he is taken to the hospital director, who

informs him that he can no longer work at the plant but will be paid well. He stumbles back toward the Men's House while still feeling disoriented, and Mary Rambo, a powerful and maternal woman, relieves him along the way. The narrator reluctantly consents to let her take him home so he can rest and get his spirits back up. She provides food for him and a place for him to stay before he goes back to the Men's House. After his hospital stay, he made his way back home in a demeaning. The narrator spends some time living quietly with Mary after receiving enough compensation to cover their rent. When winter arrives in New York, the narrator grows restless and begins to wander the streets while harboring continued resentment for Bledsoe. After eating street-sold southern yams to rediscover his sense of self, he is drawn to an eviction where an elderly black couple is being thrown out into the cold. Around the helpless couple, who scream and protest the injustice, a crowd has gathered. After the couple is denied the opportunity to enter their home and pray, the narrator is so moved by the scene of dispossession that he starts speaking to the crowd.

While his emotions are at odds, he stands in front of the group, bringing order to their chaos. When the crowd storms the house, the narrator flees to avoid being pursued by the police. Brother Jack is the man's name, and he congratulates the narrator on his stirring speech. Making use of his ability to speak, he offers him a position with the Brotherhood. After rejecting the offer, the narrator later kicks himself for not asking for more information about the position because he owes Mary so much money. In an effort to repay Mary, he chooses to accept the job, but he must stop living with her.

The next day, the narrator departs from Mary's home. The following morning, he discovers an offensive piggy bank in his room that is shaped like a black man with exaggerated features. He accidentally breaks it and tries to get rid of it but is unsuccessful. He is then given a new name, a new apartment, and sent to Brother

Hambro for training. After finishing his training, the Brothers summon him to Harlem, where they show him the office where he will work and introduce him to the handsome youth leader Brother Clifton and Brother Tarp. He quickly gets used to his new job and enjoys being able to motivate those around him. When he and Clifton run into Ras the Exhorter, he accuses them of betraying their African heritage and competes with them for the community's support. Until the narrator leads them away, the two groups engage in combat. Until he receives a foreboding note cautioning him to move slowly and carefully, the narrator continues to feel powerful and secure in his position. He asks Brother Tarp if he has any enemies because he is alarmed. In addition to giving him a broken link that he has prevented from leaving a chain gang after 19 years, Tarp reassures him and opens up to him. On the day of the mysterious note, Brother Wrestrum pays a visit as well. He raises the narrator's suspicions because he comes off as meddling. His criticism of Tarp's chain link's inherently symbolic message overshadows his suggestion for a Brotherhood symbol. After attempting to get them to speak with Clifton, the narrator agrees to be interviewed by a Harlem publication.

Weeks later, the Brotherhood committee summons the narrator to an emergency meeting where he is accused by Wrestrum of trying to undermine and control the Brotherhood, accusing it of being the target of an unidentified plot, and providing evidence from the article the narrator was interviewed for. The narrator relocates to the city center to discuss the Woman Question until the accusations are proven false. He encounters a married woman who seduces him despite his frustration with the action. The relationship continues even though he does not see her again because he is afraid that the Brotherhood will learn about it and use it against him. He is soon called to another urgent meeting, which informs him of Clifton's disappearance and allows him to return to Harlem. When he goes back to his old job, he discovers that a lot has changed

in the short time he was away. The loss of both Tarp and Brother Maceo has significantly dampened the district's spirit because many residents believe that the Brotherhood betrayed them. He intends to rekindle the neighborhood spirit on his own after realizing he is no longer part of the Brotherhood network. By chance, he encounters Clifton further uptown, where he is now hawking dancing paper Sambo dolls on the streets. The narrator watches the performance and the ensuing police chase, which results in Clifton's needless death, disgusted and intrigued.

He makes the decision to hold a funeral in the hopes of rallying the Harlem neighborhood around a sort of hero who has died. Despite being successful, the Brotherhood is incensed and meets him in his office, where Jack angrily admits that he was not hired to think. They instruct him to stay in the district and send him to Hambro so he can learn about the new, less strident program.

The narrator, who has been profoundly altered by Clifton's fate and the recent events, is furious with the Brotherhood and takes a walk around the neighborhood to reflect. He observes that Clifton's shooting has caused a lot more commotion in the neighborhood than he had anticipated, and Ras entices him to explain the Brotherhood's meager response to the murder. He defends their position and then moves away to buy a disguise so he will not be harmed by any of Ras's men. Surprisingly, people start to approach him and call him Rinehart because he is wearing a wide hat and dark green glasses. Ras is able to miss him, but Rinehart, lovers, and zoot-suiters never fail to notice him. He returns to a bar he frequently visited, where he is once again mistaken for Rinehart and nearly drawn into a fight with Brother Maceo. Later, the narrator discovers a church where Rinehart serves as a reverend on the way to Hambro's. The narrator is deeply disturbed by Hambro's multiple identities and obvious manipulation of people's faith, and he arrives at Hambro even more pessimistic than when he left the



Brotherhood. Hambro makes vain attempts to convert him to the new program by outlining the technical details. The narrator believes he has at last understood how the Brotherhood and numerous other organizations in his life have deceived and misled their supporters. He has made up his mind to attack the Brotherhood from within, and he intends to "yes" the white men to death.

Sybil is the woman he chooses because she is weak and married to a prominent brother, but she shocks him by asking him to rape her. She tries to come along, but when he is summoned uptown to Harlem for a crisis, he escapes the predicament. The narrator gets caught up in a riot, comes dangerously close to getting shot, and helps set an apartment building on fire. Ras's desire to have the narrator hanged brings the riot to its conclusion as he enters the scene on a black horse while wearing a chieftain's garb. As the narrator flees Ras' thugs, he stumbles into a manhole and discovers that he will have to spend some time living underground. The Epilogue is his resolution to reemerge into the world of social responsibility.

Source:

Summary Invisible Man novel by Ralph Ellison, Encyclopedia Britannica

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Invisible-Man>

## **Biography of Ralph Ellison**

In Oklahoma City, Ralph Ellison was born on March 1st, 1914. His mother was a domestic helper who also volunteered for the neighborhood Socialist Party, and his father worked in construction. When Ellison was three years old, his construction foreman father Lewis Alfred Ellison passed away on the job. Young Ellison became fascinated by jazz music, and he made friends with several of the players in a local band named Walter Page's Blue Devils. He moved from Oklahoma in 1933 to start his music studies at the Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama. Booker T. Washington, one of the most significant black educators in American history, founded the institution, which is now known as Tuskegee University, in 1881. It quickly rose to prominence as one of the country's most significant Afro-American universities.

By his third year, Ellison departed Tuskegee due to financial difficulties. Ellison came to Harlem, New York in 1936 with the hopes of being able to go back to school after being introduced to Augusta Savage, a black sculptor in the neighborhood who loved his work. Ellison spent the majority of the rest of his life in New York. The vigor and reputation for freedom and energy that New York had was one of its attractions. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Harlem was a remarkably active cultural hub, and Ellison loved living there. Richard Wright, whose writing would have a significant impact on Ellison. His first book review, titled "Creative and Cultural Lag," was published in *New Challenge*.

Although Ellison achieved some success in writing, it was still very difficult to find work and money during the Great Depression. Between 1937 and his 1944 he published more than 20 of his book reviews. His reviews were often touched upon by criticism of the lack of a "conscious protagonist" to grasp the text's political significance. of Ellison's faith later led to a break with his beloved mentor, Richard Wright. Ellison

criticized the character of Thomas in Wright's masterpiece *Native Son* Bigger. Nonetheless, the time Ellison spent writing reviews was a very growing time for him. In short stories like "Slick Gonna Learn," "The Birthmark," "King of the Bingo Game," and "Flying Home," he first published them. Ellison had the opportunity to start *Invisible Man* and edit *Negro Quarterly* during the early years of the war. He also joins the Merchant Marine, leaving behind leftist politics and their champion, Wright, and many of his stories take on a more distinctly wartime flavor. He weds Fanny McConnell in 1946.

By the end of World War II, he had mastered the art of incorporating the likes of Twain, Faulkner, Dostoevsky, and Hemingway into his writing, elevating the caliber of his writing to masterful proportions. His own voice began to speak out loudly, and he published "*Invisible Man*" in 1952. The years that come after this outstanding work are not as productive.

Some claim that after the release of *Invisible Man*, Ellison practically disappeared himself. Ellison admitted that another book was in the works in case the first one did not do well at the time of publication because he was unsure of its reception. This book was never required to demonstrate Ellison's talent, and the only other one he ever wrote was still unfinished when he passed away, in part because a fire in 1967 destroyed over 300 pages of an earlier draft.

Nevertheless, Ellison was visible in a few arenas across the nation for a long time between 1952 and 1994.

"*Shadow and Act*" and "*Going to the Territory*," two highly regarded books of essays, were published by him. Throughout the second half of his life, Ellison won numerous accolades for both his masterpiece, *Invisible Man*, and his overall career. The National Book Award, the Russwurm Award, and the selection to the American

Academy of Arts and Letters are some of these accolades. Last but not least, Ellison spent a lot of time lecturing at various universities. At New York University, he was appointed Albert Schweitzer Professor of Humanities in 1970. On April 16, 1994, Ralph Ellison passed away from pancreatic cancer.

Source:

Biography Ralph Ellison, Encyclopedia Britannica  
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ralph-Ellison>