Invisible Man from a Historical Perspective

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Purpose of Thesis

Ralph Ellison's novel Invisible Man is considered to be a masterpiece of American literature. The following discussion argues that the intellectual journey of the novel's narrator follows a path similar to that of Western Europe's intellectual history. The discussion presents the narrator's movement from feudalism, to enlightenment, to relativism, and finally into existentialism. The value of this understanding of Invisible Man is that the novel may no longer be viewed as a piece of black fiction, but rather as a piece of classical literature that is not exclusive to a single race or environment.
Scholars have torn Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man* apart from the introduction to the epilogue many times. Each scholar writes his article or book as an accumulation of proof that supports a specific thesis. From the amount of variation in scholarly criticism toward *Invisible Man* the novel's complexity is apparent, but beyond the scholar's criticism concerning *Invisible Man* are lower frequencies. The final lines of the novel mentions these frequencies when the narrator concludes, "Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?" (Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 581). Scholars have toyed with the term "lower frequencies" in various attempts to criticize the novel, such as Gordon O. Taylor's article "Learning to Listen to the Lower Frequencies," in *Approaches to Teaching Ellison's Invisible Man*, where Taylor equates the lower frequencies to the jazz element of Ellison's novel (43-50). Many other scholars have discovered lower frequencies in the often mysterious and mythological characters in *Invisible Man* as suggested by John Cooke in his article "Understanding the Lower Frequencies: Names and the Novel (Approaches to Teaching, 112-18). The lower frequencies however, could be even deeper in the texture of the novel than is obvious.

In the epilogue Ellison's narrator makes the following comments: "Let man keep his many parts and you will have no tyrant states, . . . Must I strive toward colorlessness . . . America is woven of many strands; I would recognize them and let them remain" (Ellison, *IM*, 577). With these quotes the narrator is stating that the people of America are diverse, and that for America to remain strong the people's diversity must remain. The same quotations
also reveal, that despite cultural separations, Americans are a single people and should not be separated by racial lines. The narrator's belief is that there is a racial crisis in America that affects not only the oppressed, but the entire spectrum of people. The final lines written by the narrator state, in a subtle manner, that his story is the story of all the people of America, and perhaps the world. The narrators's life experience is a universal experience involving growing up and the changing thought patterns which occur as one matures. The patterns of thinking that the narrator moves through can be seen as equivalent to the linear progression of Western European intellectual thought in a movement from feudalism, to enlightenment, to relativism, and into existentialism. One may wonder about the practicality of such radical change in a person over a single lifetime, but in "Richard Wright's Blues" Ellison states that in eighty years the black race in America has moved from slavery, which is feudalistic, and into the post-industrial world where the slaves are now simply cogs in a great machine along side their former owners (Ellison, "Richard Wright's Blue's," 80).

As history from a linear perspective must proceed the narrator of *Invisible Man* begins the novel with a feudalistic understanding of society. In evaluating the narrator's standpoint in the first section of the novel one must first understand feudalism from the Western European tradition. From medieval times until the French Revolution of 1789, Europe was a feudal society. Feudalism was marked by the division of society into sections which included the
common, the noble and the clergy. The common and the noble groups were separated by power. The noble ruled the common man and with the common man was never being able to obtain nobility. The clergy, however, was a position obtainable by anyone and relatively unaffected by the power of the nobles. Above these three sections of society an active, ruling God sat and kept rule as a figure of omniscient good. The first section of the narrator's journey depicts a feudalistic world where the black man, as shown by the narrator's family, is the commoner; the noble, as shown in the town leaders, is the white man; and the clergy, represented by Bledsoe, is a mixture of noble and common.

The first section of the narrator's journey explores each of the three feudal classes through the narrator's experience. The first class of feudal society the narrator sees is his family who is representative of the common people. The narrator's grandparents had been slaves until the emancipation of the southern blacks, and had been told that they were equal to the white man "in everything pertaining to the common good" (Ellison, IM, 15), but in the social arena the races were to be separate. The grandparents "believed it. They exhausted in it. They stayed in their place, worked hard, and brought up my father [the narrator's] to do the same" (Ellison, IM, 15-16). On his deathbed, however, the grandfather utters a confession which affects the narrator throughout the novel. The grandfather declares himself "'a traitor . . . a spy in the enemy's country ever since I give up my gun back in the Reconstruction,' " (Ellison, IM, 16) and then
continued with advice, " 'I want you to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open.' " (Ellison, IM, 16). These statements, which the narrator did not at the time understand, made him look at his actions and relations with the noble white man in a new light with constant unconscious questioning as to how, as a black adolescent, he should respond to the noble class.

From the scene involving his common family the narrator moves into an experience with the nobles of the feudal South by way of an invitation to deliver his high school commencement speech in front of the town's prominent white men. The occasion for his speech is a "smoker" where many of the town's most respected white men are prepared not for a serious speech by a high school student, but rather to be entertained by the lower classes -- namely a young woman and a group of black boys which includes the narrator. During what the reader sees of the smoker, the nobles behave as if they are outside of the laws of man. The blind-folded melee which puts the common black adolescents into a fight against one another brings the nobles to a frenzy in which phrases such as, " 'Let me at those black sonsabitches . . . I want to get at that ginger-colored nigger. Tear him limb from limb.' " (Ellison, IM, 21), were yelled at the participants. After the battle and another involuntary act of entertainment by the black youth, the narrator, bleeding from the mouth, delivers his speech. The speech ends up being added entertainment as the audience constantly interrupts and
the narrator has to avoid choking on the blood flowing down his throat from the fight. Throughout the smoker the black youth are seen as frivolous entertainment and are doing a service for their white masters as good peasants should. Having performed so admirably each receives a reward for their efforts. The narrator receives the largest reward for his speech in which he preached that blacks should stay in their place of common peasantry, despite his growing disbelief in the statement. The prize for the narrator is a scholarship to a black college where he can continue in his leadership of the common community in conjunction with the white noble's wishes and under the direction of feudalism's third section the clergy.

At the point of entering college the narrator is becoming disillusioned with the feudal system of society in which he has matured, however, on entering college the young man begins to see the section of feudal society which any man can aspire to and gain a certain level of respect and power -- the clergy. Remembering his first day at the college the narrator mentions a statue on the college grounds. The statue is of a black member of the clergy known as the Founder, and the narrator comments,

the college Founder . . . his hands outstretched in the breath taking gesture of lifting a veil that flutters in hard, metallic folds above the face of a kneeling slave; and I am standing puzzled, unable to decide whether the veil is really being lifted, or lowered more firmly into place; whether I am witnessing
a revelation or a more efficient blinding (IM, 36).

The action of the novel to this quotation has been the growing discontent of the narrator in the white dominated society, but in these college days the narrator finds role models by whom he can pattern himself and fit into the feudal society in which he lives.

The most important role model the narrator aspires to imitate is the school's president Dr. Bledsoe. Bledsoe is a black member of the clergy who has risen to his position of power from the lowest levels of common society. Bledsoe is presented to the reader as a man who has "achieved power and authority; had, while black and wrinkle-headed, made himself of more importance in the world than most Southern white men." (Ellison, IM, 101). The narrator perceives the president as a leader of the common race who has undeniable authority in the ranks of the nobles. Initially Bledsoe represents an attainable rank of power to the narrator, but as the narrator's contact with Bledsoe increases he receives clues to the nature of the truth by which the clergy lives. Bledsoe states, "'We take these white folks where we want them to go, we show them what we want them to see.'" (Ellison, IM, 102), and with quotes such as this he reveals the clergy's reliance upon the noble's good will for the clergy's preservation.

Through the first section of Invisible Man the young narrator is moved through each section of feudal society. He sees elements of each class that are wrong and cannot be ignored. In the common class of his family the narrator's grandfather describes his life as traitorous and treacherous. The noble class of society is
represented by the white males dominating and using the commoners of society. The nobles watch the boys fight amongst themselves and at college even Mr. Norton listens intently as Jim Trueblood tells of his incestuous relations with his daughter. Through these experiences the narrator perceives how corrupt the noble class is, and how without reason, other than the ability to do so, they oppress the common class. Finally, the narrator meets the clergy of society in Dr. Bledsoe. The narrator respects Bledsoe and aspires to a similar position in life, but again a corruptibility is seen in a formally respectable level of society. Bledsoe must control the noble class in order to maintain the backing he requires to continue in his position of power. After encountering the clergy of the feudal system the narrator is forced into a revolution toward the next stage in his historical progression that is the Enlightenment.

The young narrator's step from feudal modes of thought into enlightened modes of thought begins, as it must with a revolution. The revolution coincides with the narrator's movement from the South into the northern city of New York. As is necessary to end the feudal pattern, the class structure of society must change. In New York the narrator enters into this change. New York presents a fusion between the noble class of whites and the common class of blacks with the element of clergy being removed from society. Compression of the noble and common classes in the city is evident when in a subway car the young narrator is crushed into such close proximity with a white woman that he writes, "I kept expecting her
to scream." (Ellison, IM, 158) because he was black and was touching her. Again after the subway ride, the narrator has "the shock of seeing a black policeman directing traffic -- and there were white drivers in the traffic who obeyed his signal." (Ellison, IM, 159). The incidents of touching a white woman and white people obeying a black traffic cop could not occur in the feudal south. The narrator's perception of the noble and common classes has thus been eliminated in any practical sense, but the clergy's role in society is still in question to the young man. The narrator holds seven letters from Dr. Bledsoe which maintain his faith in the clergy. Only one letter, however, receives any form of response, and until that letter is responded to, the narrator continues losing faith in Bledsoe. A man named Emerson gives the only reply to the narrator's letter.

Emerson's response, however, only leads the narrator to complete his revolution into Enlightenment. Once inside Emerson's office the narrator's view of is still high and the clergy still seems to maintain a hold on the feudal niche it occupies. Emerson ruins the hold of the clergy by letting the narrator read the letter Bledsoe had written on his behalf. The letter states a complete separation, which Bledsoe has ordained, of the narrator from his former institution, and by that from the clergy. In a mythical restatement of the letter's contents the narrator recites, "'The Robin bearing this letter is a former student. Please hope him to death and keep him running.'" (Ellison, IM, 194), and with these simple words the narrator completes his revolution into
enlightenment. The clergy is gone as the one remaining hold of feudalism upon him proves to be a betrayal, and so the narrator must move on and discover the enlightened world in which he must survive.

Now a full fledged enlightened thinker in New York City, the narrator must learn how an enlightened society operates. Employment at Liberty Paints is his opportunity to learn how to live in an enlightened environment. At the paint company the narrator learns that in the enlightened world the black and white races need each other in order to survive, and that, like feudalism, a class structure of oppressor and oppressed exists. The initial part of the narrator's experience in the paint factory involves the results of mixing a small amount of black into a mass of white. The narrator is assigned to a job where he is to put ten drops of a graduate into a bucket of white paint in order to make the white whiter. Ironically, the graduate to be mixed is pure black. The product of mixing pure black with white is a pure white paint "'that'll cover just about anything.'" and, "is heading for a national monument!'" (Ellison, IM, 202). From this job the narrator perceives that without the black aspect white is not as full, nor as complete as it can be. The enlightened perspective that all society is dependant on the mixture of the former noble and common classes without the burden of another class.

In the paint factory there are levels of commands that function somewhat like the three classes, and thereby control all power except for the power that is in the numbers of the oppressed,
but the two levels of society within the factory are not defined by race. In the high class of the paint factory rest the owner, Mr. MacDuffy who hires people, and the black man with power, Lucius Brockway. Mister Brockway, as he prefers to be addressed, maintains his position of authority in the paint factory's infrastructure by way of an exclusive knowledge of his job which involves making the base of the paints. Brockway has held a position at the paint factory from the time the foundries were laid, and he even helped lay the pipes he now controls. In regard to the quality of paint produced by Liberty Paints, Brockway is indispensable. The man even states that when he threatened to retire only the owner of the company could convince him to stay (Ellison, JM, 215). The narrator can only see the position Brockway holds as impressive and desirable. However, Brockway recognizes the narrator's possible aspiration to his engineering position and decides the time has come for the narrator to move on and Brockway attempts to kill the narrator.

Brockway's attempt to murder the narrator is the point where the narrator's enlightened stage begins to move toward the revolution needed to enter the third stage in the linear progression of history. Prior to moving into relativism, the narrator's view of an enlightened world must end. The revolution that moves the enlightened narrator toward a position of being a relative narrator occurs around the events involving an elderly black couple's eviction from their apartment. During the scene the controlling class of the enlightenment is using their power against
the lower classes who cannot react in order to prevent the eviction. The crowd witnessing the eviction understands the problem as stated by a slender man, "'There's plenty of nerve... All they need is a leader.'" (Ellison, IM, 268), but no one will step forward. Noticing the need of his people the narrator attempts to become the needed leader in protest and presents a passionate oratory reminding the oppressed of their past and of their history of being "law-abiding" and "slow-to-anger" (Ellison, IM, 275). In a revolutionary response a voice responds, "'Yeah, but we mad now'" (Ellison, IM, 275). The scene continues in a violent back and forth rapport between the narrator and crowd until the unorganized crowd becomes a mob and moves to action by repossessing the old folks apartment for a prayer meeting. The scene represents the underside of the enlightenment as well as the weak point of enlightened society that calls for revolution. The weak point is the mass of slow-to-anger people beginning the revolution without any organizational control. In losing control of the crowd the narrator notices the danger of revolution without organization and speaks the words, "'Let's organize.'" (Ellison, IM, 276) which are representative of the need to reorganize society through revolution. The necessary revolution in the narrator's perception of society is relativistic, where by all men are equal in respect to their natural rights, and without discrimination regarding physical or territorial differences.

A character by the name of Brother Jack and the organization he represents seem to offer the narrator an easy path into
relativism. Jack even announce the narrator's passage from enlightenment into relativism when in the first meeting between the two Jack states, "'You're not like them... Otherwise you'd never had made that speech. Perhaps you were, but that's all past, dead'" (Ellison, IM, 291). In saying "them," Jack refers to the people at the eviction who are still in an enlightened society, and the revolution into relativism is only the narrator's transition unlike the previous movement from feudalism to enlightenment.

The revolutionary movement for the narrator is achieved by Jack's political organization named the Brotherhood, and the narrator's orientation to Jack's organization is an awkward point in his movement into relativism. The narrator hears an unusually feudalistic phrase that Jack has made at some previous time which states, "'[black] leaders are made, not born. Then they are destroyed.'" (Ellison, IM, 302), and later another member of the Brotherhood questions whether the narrator "'should be a little blacker'" (Ellison, IM, 303). These statements are clues to the nature of the Brotherhood's actual intent that are made from a controlling people's perspective who are dominating a lower group's actions. The narrator, however, obviously does not miss these clues to the Brotherhood's nature, but rather gets caught up in the arguments of their ideology. He even goes as far as to question the difference between the clergy of the feudal system and the Brotherhood. The feel of organization is what eventually brings him into the Brotherhood. In comparing the people he knew in his enlightened period with the people in the Brotherhood the narrator
notices that in the Brotherhood they spoke "in terms of 'we,' but it was a bigger different 'we' " (Ellison, IM, 316). The "we" the Brotherhood speaks in is a hermaphroditic, unified, and relativistic "we." When a brother speaks of "we" he means all brothers without discrimination as to position or property. The Brotherhood's "we," to the narrator, can be identified with the social views of relativism he holds.

The narrator's next move is into the area of working within the relativistic society in the position of a leader within the Brotherhood's Harlem district. Harlem, from the narrator's standpoint, is in the same enlightened mode it was in when he arrived. The narrator is led to understand that the Brotherhood's goal in the district is to lead Harlem through a revolution, similar to his own, and into a relativistic society. Ras the Exhorter and the Brotherhood's actual intent complicate and change the narrator's movement toward the goal. Ras is an orator much like the narrator, but Ras is looking for a racial revolution. Ras speaks not of a relative society of united races striving toward a goal of common good when he pleads to the narrator and Todd Clifton:

[white men] betray you and you betray the black people. They tricking you, mahn. Let them fight amongst themselves. Let 'em kill off one another. We organize -- organization is good --but we organize black. BLACK! (Ellison, IM, 373).

The exhorter speaks in favor of overturning Harlem's enlightened society and putting the black people in the seats of power and the
white people in the menial positions. In a Harlem full of black people dispossessed of their dreams, and lives, Ras presents hope, and at the same time understands the true objective of the Brotherhood. The narrator perceives Ras' argument for a black revolution as misguided, and thus uses the preorganized condition of the Brotherhood he begins a campaign toward relativism that puts the Brotherhood in the position of authority in the community. The Brotherhood begins providing jobs for the entire community, and the narrator places Harlem in the Brotherhood's control. The narrator envisions himself as a creator of the world's future where all races can stand together as a Brotherhood poster demonstrates with people of every color standing together under a caption reading, "After the Struggle: The Rainbow of America's Future" (Ellison, IM, 385).

The narrator's almost complete success in bringing the people of Harlem into the Brotherhood is not completely advantageous in his view of the equality of men within the Brotherhood. While inching Harlem toward revolution, the narrator receives a mysterious warning from an anonymous brother that states, "this is a white man's world." (Ellison, IM, 383). The letter marks the beginning of the narrator's discontents with the structure of relativism within the Brotherhood. No longer is every man equal, because there are those brothers whom in Brother Westrum's words, "use it [brotherhood] for their own ends" (Ellison, IM, 393). Westrum is one of the oppurtunists. Out of no apparent motivation, except for jealousy at the narrators progress in Harlem, Westrum
brings false charges against the narrator of being "a pure dee opportunist" (Ellison, IM, 400), and claims that the narrator "wants to be a dictator" (Ellison, IM, 401). The Brotherhood committee supports Westrum's charges and moves the narrator downtown to speak on "The Woman's Question." The importance of the committee's meeting to the narrator's relative view can be seen in their almost instant acceptance of Westrum's claims. When asked for proof Westrum displays a magazine article in which the narrator was interviewed and thereby had no control over what was printed. In fact, Westrum gives no actual proof to the supposedly scientific minds of the Brotherhood, and his charges stand. There is no relative thought in the Brotherhood's committee; they play the good ole' boy game and let Westrum's absurd charges stand in complete ignorance of the facts.

Eventually the narrator is moved back into the Harlem district "to regain our [the Brotherhood's] strength in the community." (Ellison, IM, 421). The move back to Harlem begins the narrator's revolution against relativism. The revolution against relativism is triggered by the narrator's realization that the Brotherhood's power structure is not based upon equality. A committee controls all of the functions of the Brotherhood, and is willing to sacrifice some members in order to accomplish ambiguous directives. On returning to Harlem the narrator realizes that once he left the district "the Brotherhood had stopped its work" (Ellison, IM, 426), and that before his return Brother Todd Clifton had disappeared. The narrator finds Clifton on a street corner
selling dancing, paper dolls. Prior to the Brotherhood's withdrawal from Harlem, Clifton was powerful and active in the organization. He believed that the Brotherhood was striving to make all men equal, but when the Brotherhood stopped their campaigns in Harlem, Clifton did not revolt and move into the next historical stage. Instead, Clifton fell outside of history as if he had never been a part of it. To the narrator Clifton had represented a force in the Brotherhood equal, if not greater, than his own; a force which was channeled toward making all men equal through the Brotherhood. Clifton's fall outside of history stuns the narrator to the point that he can no longer act. The narrator watches helplessly as Clifton is shot by a white policeman, and can do nothing. Clifton's movement outside of history also moved him outside of the narrator's reach. The next jolt to the narrator's views of the Brotherhood's workings comes when he is no longer invited to strategy meetings, and must, on his own responsibility, organize a funeral for Clifton in a last desperate attempt to reestablish the strength of the Brotherhood within Harlem. The funeral is also an attempt to gain a response from the Brotherhood's central committee as to whether or not they still support his relativistic views. The committee does respond. The response breaks the narrator's illusions of the Brotherhood belief in equality. The committee mocks his personal responsibility when the narrator first mentions the term by replying, "Where did you get it brother? . . . This is outstanding, where did you get it?" (Ellison, IM, 463). Later in the response from the committee, they tell the narrator, "You
were not hired to think.' " (Ellison, IM, 469). The meeting between the narrator and the committee continues in heated argument until the committee believes that the narrator will follow orders. The narrator, however, has changed as he states, "I would never be the same. Never. After tonight I wouldn't even look the same, or feel the same." (Ellison, IM, 478). The world is no longer relative. The narrator no longer knows how to view the world, and thus begins his journey toward his last historical stage which is existentialism.

The final phase of the narrator's world view that the reader sees is existentialism. To understand the final leap of the narrator one must first have a broad definition of "the existential attitude" (Solomon, ix). "The existential attitude begins with a disoriented individual facing a confused world that he cannot accept." (Solomon, ix), and the narrator is in this position after the Brotherhood's committee meeting. He has moved through three major intellectual environments in the estimated twenty-five years of his life, and none have satisfied him. The narrator is now moving toward the self discovery that is existentialism. He is becoming aware of his existence through his invisibility. Symbollic of the move toward self discovery is the narrator's purchase of dark sunglasses and a wide brimmed felt hat at which the narrator remarks, "I should be seen even in a snowstorm -- only they's think I was someone else." (Ellison, IM, 484). The narrator even states, "I had switched from the arrogant absurdity of Norton and Emerson to that of Jack and the Brotherhood and it all came out
the same -- except I now recognized my invisibility." (Ellison, IM, 508), and with this statement the narrator realizes that his movement through history has been an individual movement. The society around him does not change, but he must change. He will have no responsibility except that of his own belief; he will work for his people no matter the cost, but he will be not be responsible. Instead the narrator will be invisible. The Brotherhood and any other ruling power would never see him as he attempted to destroy them. The conscious resolution by the narrator to destroy the Brotherhood stems from his misunderstanding of his grandfather's advice on how to treat the white man, and the narrator's attempt fails.

The result of the narrator's "yessing" and "grinning" in keeping the Brotherhood happy is a major race riot in Harlem that the narrator joins. Throughout his involvement in the riot the narrator is invisible and dragged along by the currents of violence in the district. He flows with the people anonymously until he meets Ras. Ras is vicious and he believes the revolution is the one he envisioned of the oppressed becoming the oppressors. Upon seeing Ras, the narrator has realization of knowing now who I was and where I was and knowing that I had no longer to run from the Jacks and the Emerson's and the Bledsoes and the Nortons, but only from their confusion, impatience, and refusal to recognize the beautiful absurdity of their American identity and mine. (Ellison, IM, 559).
The narrator takes another step toward the existential attitude by his realization that the nature of truth in people is their individualism and through their individualism the diversity of society. The final step the narrator's move into an existential attitude is the symbolic burning of his past. He burns the papers he has accumulated throughout the stages of his development in a coal bin which represents his past in order to be able to find his way out of the bin and into the future. He begins with his high-school diploma, then Clifton's doll, his Brotherhood name, and finally the anonymous letter. Thus the narrator closes the past where he had no identity, and moves into a future where he knows who he is and can function in that position.

The epilogue of *Invisible Man* connects with the prologue of the novel by the narrator's position in the existential attitude. The prologue introduces the story as a narration told from a distance of time in a young black man's life. The prologue provides insight into the narrator's existential attitude. The narrator states that, "Light confirms my reality, gives birth to my form." (Ellison, IM, 6). Without light the narrator would not have reality or form, and therefore would not exist. The meat, however, of existential attitude of the narrator lies in the epilogue. The epilogue discusses some of the truths about reality that the narrator has discovered throughout his life. He states, "I have never been more loved and appreciated than when I tried to 'justify' and affirm someone's mistaken beliefs" (Ellison, IM, 573). With this quotation the narrator reveals the reality that
people in general lack. The people he refers to would rather hear their own beliefs upheld than risk learning the truth about their beliefs, and so lack a link to the world of reality. Also in the epilogue, the narrator attempts to explain his grandgather's deathbed advice. The explanation is important, because it links mankind in a principle of thought as the narrator states, "Weren't we part of them as well as apart from them and subject to die when they died?" (Ellison, IM, 575). The narrator realizes through his trial and error life that America is a unit of people who are Americans. Americans are no longer a complete people when there are separations along racial or social lines, and the nation limps along incomplete and waiting to be healed by revolution whereby truth is revealed on a national level and all men lose their prejudice in order to exist together in peace.

The narrator of Invisible Man recounts his journey through life in the novel. As he writes his story several revolutions can be seen, and each revolution moves the narrator a step closer to identifying himself and his place in society. The steps, as defined above, begin in feudalism, and progress through enlightenment, and relativism until they conclude in existentialism. This theory is based upon the narrator's final words to the reader, "Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?" (Ellison, IM, 581). The lower frequencies are the base of humanity, and so on these lower frequencies the narrator speaks for all Western culture. All Western society is in some stage of the narrator's journey. Many societies are stuck on
the edge of revolution, many others have ignored linear history and been forced to detour some of the narrator's phases. In fewer words the narrator's journey is a common experience of the Western man which the Negro people had to progress through quickly in order to ever achieve social equality. In presenting the aspect of linear Western European history in Invisible Man many of the novel's spectacular and revolutionary aspects have been ignored. Perhaps, however, understanding the universality of the Invisible Man's experience will open new doors in the interpretation of Ellison's masterpiece of American literature.
Works Cited


