Name of Student

Name of Professor

Name of Class

Day Month Year

Battle Royal

"Battle Royal," is the short story published initially in Horizon in 1947 under the main title "Invisible Man." Later it became the Chapter 1 of Ralph Ellison’s only novel published in 1952. The title comes from the first line of the story “But first I had to discover that I was an invisible man” (Ellison). The short story "Battle Royal," provides a captivating window into the factors that contributed to the formation of an invisible man, considered as one of the best novels of all the times. Furthermore, the novel is considered as one of the great works of expanding literature of black movement during the twentieth century.

The “Battle Royal” is considered as one of the most memorable and pivotal scenes in the novel. Ellison wants to represent how black men feel and operate in white supremacy. At first, the narrator tells his grandfather’s disgust towards his own actions. He strongly felt that he was a traitor to black American’s. The grandfather of the narrator advised him to agree and accept the oppression and death rather than fighting or speaking against the mistreatment and repression. Then the narrator shares his story when he delivered the speech at graduation. The speech was so successful that the narrator got invited to deliver it to a large audience. This event leads the narrator to take part in the "battle royal." The battle royal is that the narrator along with his classmates is pushed in the boxing ring to beat each other fiercely. The story is all about that he is blindfolded and is thrown into a boxing ring for the amusement for a group of tuxedo-clad white men (“(PDF) " Battle Royal "”). After the event, the boys are lead to a rug to collect their reward which is few dollar bills. The boys rushed to get the reward and find out that the rug is an electric field and they are forced by white men onto it. The narrator is also beaten and bloodied and then invited to deliver the speech that he delivered at his graduation, to white men regarding the education of African American.

The white men who are drunk laughs at the speech and he mistakenly states social equality as social responsibility. White men sarcastically demand an explanation of his misconception making the narrator admit that he has made a mistake. Then, impressed from his speech, white men awards the narrator with the scholarship at college. That night he sees his grandfather in his dream laughing in his ears as he read the document on which it is mentioned: "To whom it may concern" (Ellison). This confirms his grandfather’s advice.

The main theme of the story is Racism portraying that the black men are invisible in front of white men and in a society dominated by white men, personal accomplishment are nothing for a black person (Jacob). Blacks suffer from physical and mental health disorder due to discrimination and depression (“Depression And African Americans”). There are different underlying themes in the story as it acts as the thematic motor and sets most of the story of the novel. Another important theme in the story is the ‘coming of age.' Another theme that he discusses is social Darwinism, a concept which metaphorically encourages the individuals to fight to finish to get rewards and take advantage of their fellow members. The first paragraph of the story sets the theme “But first I had to discover that I am an invisible man” (Ellison). Invisible man defines many African American responses towards politics and racism. This statement shows that despite his accomplishments and being a very good narrator, he remains invisible for the white men.

During the entire story, the theme of coming of age is depicted as the narrator becomes increasingly aware of how his race has effects on people’s view about him. An African American learns from the experiential and pedagogical education in the 1920s and '30s. Despite being a young and intelligent man, the narrator is viewed differently due to the color of his skin. Throughout the evening he experiences one after the other degrading and then realizes what others expect of him. Over the time he understands what he is considered in the eyes of ‘superior’ white men. As the story begins, the narrator is thankfully anticipating of the speech he will have to deliver. At this time he is too small to understand his true status in the eyes of society or particularly white men. He has to deliver the speech in front of people who are that are political and religious leaders. He thinks that he will be recognized for his abilities and his accomplishments and assumes that he has a dignified position in the society. After arriving in the the meeting, he realizes that he is part of Battle. "I suspected that fighting a battle royal might detract from the dignity of my speech" (Ellison). Later as the time passes, he learns that self-esteem is the last thing the white men are interested in considering.

Another incident of his life in which he along with other teenagers are forced to see the white naked women and threatened if they will look away. The narrator describes that he felt that the blast of cold air chilled him, but he could not move since they were just behind his back. This reveals the extremely hazardous time for those black teenagers because they are set up to violate one of the most serious taboos, being sexually attracted to white women, in the racist society. Later the black adolescents are forced to fight with each other, and they have to fight the way that white audience wants. The audience shouts that they want to kill one black using other. They hear things like "I want to get at that ginger-colored nigger" (Ellison), which shows that it was okay for that educated white men to kill the black men. Even the opponent of the black narrator was behaving exactly hat the white expected of him. The final insult of black was witnessed by the narrator when white tossing fake coins on the electrified mat so that they can enjoy the sight of black boys going behind those fake coins. Here coins are used as a metaphor. This point of time became the moment of realization in the narrator's life that he is the puppet in hand of white men. Here the author employs the use of symbolism, the statue's speedy swallowing of coins reflects the black youth behavior in "battle royal," as they climbed to grab the coins on that electrified mat reinforcing the white stereotypes of blacks as humble and submissive.

The character of the narrator is developed to depict the theme of coming to age as he develops and understands the reality of black men in the hands of white men. His life experiences like the few mentioned above teach him his worth and value in the eyes of others. This is the turning point in the story where the narrator has come of age, or it can be said that come of race (Avery). However, there is one more incident left which teaches him the true worth of black men in the society of white men. The point when he delivers the speech and in that speech mentions the equality of races; the white men react negatively. Their reply to that speech clearly makes the narrator understand that equality is not the right goal. Instead, the right goal is to realize one's position in society and in the case of black this position is not equal. At this moment, the narrator realizes what his grandfather used to say, “Keep this nigger boy running” (Ellison).

Another widely discussed theme in the story is that personal accomplishments are nothing if you are a black person. This is the life story of the narrator that racism is something that trumps personal accomplishments. The narrator of the story is smart than all the white people in the room, but white men keep on staring at him, and all they see is black. At school, he is recognized for his brilliant writing abilities, and he is a valedictorian, but none of his abilities matter in white men eyes. His pride and dignity are snatched from along with his accomplishments, and white men degrade him. At the Battle Royal, the narrator analyzes his true place in the eyes of white men and the real value of his accomplishments. In the beginning, he is typical naïf who thinks that the power of his speech lead to the delivery of the speech in front of leaders but after delivering the speech he realizes the true value of his speech when he saw the white men talking and laughing. They were listening to the speech as "deaf with cotton in dirty ears." When he was stopped at the word, social equality he was told that he “you’ve got to know your place at all time," and then he found his true place when he ended up with the speech and opened the enveloped awarded to him in his dream. He realized that they did not think any more of him but just black. The Battle Royal was a clear example of his position in white men eyes.

Another underlying theme in the story is Social Darwinism, a concept that metaphorically encourages the individuals to fight to finish to get rewards and to survive. In the Battle Royal, the narrator along with his fellow mates are encouraged to fight and kill each other. Here the author uses term blindfold, which metaphorically symbolizes the way in which black men fight for their survival and recognition from white. Their desperation is vividly recreated when they stumble to collect the coins on the electrified mat. Tatlock who suffers from internal racism and is taught by white men that the narrator is going to have his resources beat the narrator and he needs to fight with him. The author makes use of blindness, the symbolic term used to describe the situation of discriminated black men in society. They do not see the situation and remain unable to understand the true face of white men. To them, their condition is quite natural. In addition, he also uses animal imagery to describe the condition of black men fighting when he says that black men fighting in battle royal herded into the elevator (German). This shows they were treated like animals and they fought each other for resources.

The short story "Battle Royal" is a clear depiction of how blacks were treated in the white supremacy. The story shares a number of themes, but the most prominent one is racism and discrimination which the narrator learns as he comes of age. In addition, under this racism, the personal accomplishments of blacks weigh nothing in front of the color of their skin. The story also shares the theme of social Darwinism that how black fight in the Battle Royal as an outcome of white supremacy and tricks to get amusements from their suffering. To take blacks out of white power and get them their rights number of civil rights activists appeared and fought for social justice leaving positive impacts on black’s lives (“Leaders of the Civil Rights Movement | Explore Black History | PBS”).

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