

Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man opens with a prologue describing the main character in

time after the beginning of the body of the book. In the prologue, Ellison tells of the main

characters invisibility. It is not a physical invisibility, but rather he is not recognised, and therefore

perceived, by the world at large. This is coupled with the fact that he is constantly trying to be

someone else, other than himself, creates for him a complete loss of identity, and he becomes a

man without a soul.

The story begins with the main character being forced to participate in an archaic and

animalistic free-for-all in order for him to be allowed to give his speech that will determine

whether he will be accepted to the 'college'. He is accepted and goes through two of his years at

the college uneventfully. He is ejected from the school during his junior year when the trustee

who was in his care while visiting the school fell ill and is taken to a local bar to get some

alcohol. He is given seven letters of what he supposes to be recommendations to give to people in

New York. He moves to Harlem and delivers the letters. He finds out that these letters were not

recommendations but rather advisements against hiring him. The seventh receiver of a letter gives him

a job in a paint factory. He does not perform well there and eventually causes his own dismissal by

ignoring his work and getting knocked out by an explosion that is his fault. He joins a black

power group called The Brotherhood and is sent out to spread the word of the group. He meets a

man named Clifton, his first real friend, and Clifton is shot by a police officer. He speaks at

Clifton's funeral and the Brotherhood does not like what he says. He befriends a middle-aged

white woman who flirts with him a good bit. One night while with her he is asked

to come to

Harlem and come a riot that is occering. A rival of the Brotherhood, Ras the Exhorter, sees him

there and and starts chasing him. While in the subway he, quite literally, runs into Mr. Norton,

the trustee from the college that had the fainting spell. When he asks Mr. Norton if he

remembers him Mr. Norton says no. Then he begins lghing hysterically at Mr. Norton. The book

ends with hi realization that he is not his own man and completely invisble to all.