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ANNOTATION

This bachelor thesis analyses the position of Afro-Americans in American society since the 1860's up to the 1960's in terms of invisibility. Furthermore, the term invisibility is analysed in the book *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison. At the end of the analysis, the author's solution to the invisibility is explained and compared to the solution of W. E. B. Du Bois.

KEYWORDS

Invisibility, Afro-Americans, American society, Invisible Man, Ralph Ellison

NÁZEV

Neviditelnost člověka ve světě podle Ralpha Ellisona

ANOTACE

Tato bakalářská práce se věnuje analýze pozice Afro-Američanů v Americké společnosti od šedesátých let devatenáctého století po šedesátá léta dvacátého století z pohledu neviditelnosti. Dále se práce zabývá analýzou neviditelnosti v knize *Neviditelný* od Ralpha Ellisona. Na závěr analýza poskytuje autorovo řešení otázky neviditelnosti, které je následně porovnáno s řešením W. E. B. Du Boise.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Neviditelnost, Afro-Američané, americká společnost, Neviditelný, Ralph Ellison

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Introduction

Being invisible might be explained in numerous ways, but this thesis focuses only on one of them, while it focuses on the position of the Afro-Americans in the society of the United States throughout history. Afro-Americans had been oppressed for a long time during the history of the U.S. as well as they had been invisible to society. However, they managed to free themselves and to gain a kind of visibility and a place in American society. This thesis focuses on the process of getting out of the invisibility and on the analysis of what the term “invisibility” means in the book *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison.

Therefore, the thesis is divided into three chapters. Two of the chapters focus on the historical and cultural contexts of the period from the 1860’s to the 1960’s. The first chapter Out of the Darkness focuses on the period of the Civil War and Reconstruction, up to the end of the nineteenth century and shows the changes of the Afro-Americans’ position in the society after the slavery was abolished. The chapter Struggle for Visibility then focuses briefly on the beginning of the twentieth century, then it describes the period of Harlem Renaissance and lastly the period of the 1950’s and the 1960’s. Throughout the second chapter, the thoughts of Afro-Americans about their position in American society in the twentieth century are analysed. The reason for choosing these periods is that they included the main political and social turning points in the Afro-Americans’ lives.

As the previous chapters in the thesis deal with the cultural-historical context of the Afro-Americans’ position in the society, the last chapter Ralph Ellison and the Invisibility of a Man deals with the analysis of the book *Invisible Man* as mentioned above. This book was chosen to be analysed while the story is about the life of an Afro-American man and his position in American society. This analysis also includes the author’s solution to the problem with the invisibility which is later compared with the solution of the sociologist W. E. B. DuBois.

To sum up, the aim of the thesis is to show the changes in the position of Afro-Americans in American society and to analyse the book by Ralph Ellison and his solution to the invisibility.

1 Out of the Darkness

This chapter deals with the blacks and their social position in the USA throughout the period of the 1860's towards the end of the nineteenth century. Although the blacks had been enslaved for a long time, this period of forty years gives an enormous number of crucial events that either improved or worsen the position of the slaves, lately freedmen, in the society. From the perspective of the invisibility it can be said that these events led towards the change of the "total invisibility" meaning that a black person was not considered in the American society as a human but as a property¹ to the state of being at least partly recognized in the white society by being freed and given a few rights.

1.1 The Period of the Civil War (1861 – 1865)

As it is known the Civil War was fought between the Union and the Confederate States in the years 1861-1865. The Confederacy consisted of seven southern states that seceded from the rest of the United States after Abraham Lincoln was elected president in 1860. The reason of this secession was that the Confederacy states feared the abolition of the slavery which was crucial for the southern economy, while there were many cotton plantations and the work on some of the plantations was almost exclusively done by the slaves. The fear of the slave abolition was reasonable while the newly elected president was known for his negative view on slavery.

Before mentioning the actions taken by Lincoln to help the black people by abolishing the slavery and the details of how the enslaved people fought against the slavery on their own during the Civil War, two facts about the American South should be clarified. Firstly, it is not true that on every plantation there were working slaves in the large numbers as well as it is not true that every planter owned slaves. According to Křížová "only one-fifth of the southern plantations employed more than fifty black workers."² Moreover, Franklin mentions that out of eight million whites living in the South in 1860 only 384,884 owned slaves which, means that three-fourths of the whites had no slaves at all.³ Therefore, it is shocking that such a low number

¹ John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, "That Peculiar Institution," in *From slavery to freedom: a history of African Americans*, 7th ed., (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 124

² Markéta Křížová, "6. Devatenácté století – druhá fáze moderního otroctví," in *Otroctví v Novém světě od 15. do 19. století* (Praha: Lidové Noviny 2013), 248. (translated by the author of the thesis)

³ Franklin et al., "That Peculiar Institution," 123.

of slave owners had so great impact in the South and made the slavery a crucial part for the southern economy and policy. Giving reasons for this Franklin says at first that “the great majority of the staple crops were produced on plantation employing slave labour, thus giving the owners an influence out of proportion to their number” and then he mentions the fact that some of the non-slaveholders hoped to become slave owners lately.⁴

Secondly, free blacks were living even in the South before the Civil War, but they did not have many rights and they were excluded from public life. Moreover, there were restrictions for free blacks in finding employment as well as there was a constant threat of being captured and sold as a slave.⁵ Before the Civil War began, some of the southern states managed to enslave the free blacks again.⁶

Moving back to the topic of the abolition of slavery and the fight of the black people against it during the Civil War, the latter is to be mentioned at first. It should be said that even before the slaves were freed by the law, many of them attempted to escape from the South to the North where there was no slavery. These people often used the help of the organisation called the Underground Railroad which was according to Franklin established in the eighteenth century.⁷ Its members were whites as well as blacks from both the North and the South.⁸ However, those slaves who attempted to escape from the South on their own were often caught by the Union troops.

As the war was proceeding, the number of fugitives captured by the Union increased, therefore, the northern government had to quickly decide what to do with them. While the government did very little for the former slaves the northern citizens both black and white took action on their own and established many organisations in 1862 to help the ex-slaves.⁹ Another thing the government had to decide about was whether it should allow the enlistment of the black people to the Union army or not. Since the Civil War began the blacks wished to join the Union army but they were rejected.¹⁰ However, according to Franklin some of them were allowed to join the army in 1862, but this government’s hesitation in “the treatment of runaway slaves ... and their military service had a disquieting effect on their status during the Civil War”

⁴ Franklin et al., “That Peculiar Institution,” 123.

⁵ Křížová, “6. Devatenácté století – druhá fáze moderního otroctví,” 253.

⁶ Franklin et al., “Quasi-Free Blacks,” 154.

⁷ Franklin et al., “Slavery and Intersectional Strife,” 183.

⁸ Franklin et al., “Slavery and Intersectional Strife,” 188.

⁹ Franklin et al., “Civil War,” 201.

¹⁰ Franklin et al., “Civil War,” 199.

and as he further adds due to the government's acting about the blacks the newspapers started its negative propaganda of the blacks causing that the northerners started to be hostile towards them.¹¹

If in 1862 only some of the blacks could join the army as mentioned above, the Emancipation Proclamation allowed each black to fight for the Union on January 1, 1863,¹² which "was an important step toward citizenship and acceptance of blacks by white society."¹³ However, according to Franklin the acknowledgement of being equal to whites and the fear of white masters that the blacks would attack them were part of the southerners' public opinion and the reason why the slaves could not join the Confederacy army. Even though they were allowed to join the army since March 13, 1865, they could not do much for the Confederacy while it had already been losing the war and a month later it surrendered to the Union.¹⁴

To return to the Emancipation Proclamation the most important information is, as Cincotta claims in his book, that it freed all slaves who lived in the southern states fighting against the United States, but it did not influence the slavery in the border states.¹⁵ Moreover, as Franklin mentions a considerable number of blacks in the South heard about being freed a long time after the emancipation had been issued and he adds that their freedom had to be further adjusted while neither the South nor the North guaranteed "political and economic freedom" to blacks.¹⁶

Although the Civil War was over, the struggle of blacks for their freedom was at its beginning. At first, the government tried to help the blacks by approving "the Thirteenth Amendment on January 31, 1865, which prohibited slavery throughout the United States,"¹⁷ and by establishing the Freedmen's Bureau in March 1865 which was supposed to "guide them towards self-support,"¹⁸ but lately its support started to diminish. This is the topic for the following part of the chapter.

¹¹ Franklin et al., "Civil War," 203–204.

¹² Howard Cincotta, "Chapter VI: Sectional Conflict," in *An Outline of American History*, (United States Information Agency, 1994), 167.

¹³ Gary B. Nash, Julie Roy Jeffrey, John R. Howe, Peter J. Frederick, Allen F. Davis, and Allan M. Winkler "The Union Severed," in *The American People: Creating a Nation and a Society*, 2nd ed., (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 336.

¹⁴ Franklin et al., "Civil War," 213–214.

¹⁵ Cincotta, "Chapter VI: Sectional Conflict," 166.

¹⁶ Franklin et al., "Civil War," 208.

¹⁷ James A. Henretta, David Brody, and Lynn Dumenil, "Two Societies at War, 1861–1865," in *America: A Concise History*, 3rd ed., (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006), 437.

¹⁸ Cincotta, "Chapter VI: Sectional Conflict," 170.

1.2 The Period of the Reconstruction (1865 – 1877)

After the Civil War was over the period of the Reconstruction began in the United States. Although the black people expected that their position in the society would change, the southern states did not want to do any change at all. In Henretta's book, he claims that even the president Andrew Johnson, who was elected after Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, did not do much for the freedmen while the only thing he did after the Civil War was that he insisted on ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment in each southern state. Otherwise, he thought, adds Henretta, "that it was up to the states, not the federal government, to define the civil and political rights of the freedmen."¹⁹

However, Johnson's argument caused the southern states "enacted laws – known as Black Codes – designed to drive the former slaves back to the plantations."²⁰ This outraged both the black people who, therefore, did not feel to be free and the Congress which decided to intervene. It passed the Fourteenth Amendment which stated that:

All persons born or naturalized in the United States ... are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall ... deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person ... the equal protection of the laws.²¹

Nonetheless, the southern states rejected to ratify it. Consequently, the Congress issued the Reconstruction Act of 1867 and according to it the southern state "were divided into five military districts in which martial law was to prevail."²² To join the Union again each state had to create its own new constitution that allowed blacks to vote as well as they had to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment.²³

During the Reconstruction period one more amendment was added to the Constitution to help the freedmen – the Fifteenth Amendment – which gave them the right to vote and forbade "all states to deny the vote to anyone 'on account of race, colour, or previous condition

¹⁹ Henretta et al., "Reconstruction, 1865–1877," 445.

²⁰ Henretta et al., "Reconstruction, 1865–1877," 445.

²¹ Nash et al., "Appendix," 703.

²² Franklin et al., "The Effort to Attain Peace," 226.

²³ Nash et al., "The Union Reconstructed," 354.

of servitude.”²⁴ Even though some politicians warned that the amendment should be modified while in the future it could enable the segregation supporters to apply poll taxes or literacy tests to make the voting more difficult for blacks, it was added to the Constitution in 1870 without adjustment.²⁵ The consequences that were caused by the unchanged Fifteenth Amendment are mentioned in the following part of this chapter on page 15.

Despite the threat of losing the right to vote at any time some of the freedmen became politician, therefore, the Fifteenth Amendment appeared to be well prepared at first. However, many organizations were established by the white southerners to prevent the blacks from taking part in politics as well as from voting and gaining equality. Their aim was to end the Radical Reconstruction and to gain the “absolute control over blacks”²⁶ by any means including violence, therefore, the violence against black became very frequent at that time. According to Franklin the Knights of the White Camelia and the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan were among the most powerful organizations. To them as he continues “depriving blacks of political equality became ... a holy crusade in which a noble end justified any means” and he specifies that these means were for example whipping or even hanging. Furthermore, he adds that the Congress fought against these organisations by passing laws in 1870 and 1871 to suppress them.²⁷ Unfortunately, they were not stopped completely.

As there were many organisations doing harm to the black, there was one organization established by the government to help them as mentioned on page 11 of this thesis – the Freedmen’s Bureau. It had many tasks to do for the freedmen, for example, “establishing schools, supervising contracts between ex-slaves and their employers,”²⁸ or as it is mentioned in Cincotta “to prevent racial discrimination by Southern legislature.”²⁹ However, not everything was designed to help the blacks, while the bureau’s work contracts were rather designed in favour of the whites than in the favour of the blacks.³⁰ It caused that the freedmen were dependent on their former masters again, but some of them either broke the contracts or ran away.³¹

²⁴ Nash et al., “The Union Reconstructed,” 355.

²⁵ Henretta et al., “Reconstruction, 1865–1877,” 456.

²⁶ Franklin et al., “Losing the Peace,” 249.

²⁷ Franklin et al., “Losing the Peace,” 250.

²⁸ Franklin et al., “The Effort to Attain Peace,” 228.

²⁹ Cincotta, “Chapter VI: Sectional Conflict,” 171.

³⁰ Henretta et al., “Reconstruction, 1865–1877,” 448.

³¹ Nash et al., “The Union Reconstructed,” 356–357.

Although the work contracts were a great failure the Freedmen's Bureau was according to Franklin successful in educating blacks.³² There were many whites and blacks working for the bureau as teachers, but in 1870 "the educational work of the bureau stopped."³³ Luckily for the freedmen, the bureau was not the only organisation providing education and other facilities for blacks. While the blacks were used to help themselves even before the Civil War, they established their own schools as well as their own churches that were crucial for the communities of blacks.³⁴ The church was "the first social institution fully controlled by blacks in America"³⁵ and the black ministers were mostly the leaders of the community.³⁶

The self-help was the only thing the blacks could rely on at the end of the Reconstruction while the northerners, as well as the southerners, became more interested in the industry than in the securing the rights of the freedmen.³⁷ Even the newly elected president Rutherford B. Hayes was not willing to help the blacks as he withdrew the remaining troops from the South and "announced his intentions to let the southerners handle race relations themselves."³⁸ The withdrawal of the troops from the South finished the Reconstruction and enabled the South to "rule itself without Northern interference or black influence."³⁹

Obviously, the whole Reconstruction era was not as successful as it should have been, therefore, it is often stated by the historians that it failed in many ways. One of the most needed thing that was not provided to blacks was the economic security that led the freedmen back to their former masters. This submission made it easier for the southerners to restore the white supremacy.⁴⁰ Therefore, the Reconstruction could be summarized as an era that "granted freedom, but not equality,"⁴¹ which the blacks did not gain sooner than in the twentieth century.

³² Franklin et al., "The Effort to Attain Peace," 230.

³³ Franklin et al., "The Effort to Attain Peace," 231.

³⁴ Nash et al., "The Union Reconstructed," 358.

³⁵ Franklin et al., "The Effort to Attain Peace," 232.

³⁶ Nash et al., "The Union Reconstructed," 358.

³⁷ Franklin et al., "Losing the Peace," 253.

³⁸ Nash et al., "The Union Reconstructed," 364.

³⁹ Franklin et al., "Losing the Peace," 254.

⁴⁰ Franklin et al., "The Effort to Attain Peace," 246.

⁴¹ Cincotta, "Chapter VI: Sectional Conflict," 175.

1.3 The period after the Reconstruction (1878 – 1900)

If the Civil War helped the blacks to gain the freedom and the Reconstruction helped them to gain more rights by adding three amendments to the Constitution, the last twenty years of the nineteenth century did almost the exact opposite. It was the period when the whites were not interested in helping the blacks anymore, while they were tired of it and rather took care of themselves. Not only the ordinary people refused to help the blacks, even the government, especially the southern government, did what it could to ignore the needs of blacks. Furthermore, the South began to deprive the blacks of their rights.

However, the great harm was done to blacks by the Supreme Court as well. According to Nash in 1882 it decided that the Fourteenth Amendment did not protect the civil rights of the individuals but of the states and in 1883 it declared the Civil Right Act of 1875 assuring equal rights for blacks in public places unconstitutional. He continues by adding that the court's decision was not enough for the southerners who aimed to abolish the Fifteenth Amendment, so the South would be ruled by the whites only, which would make it impossible for the blacks to become the first-class citizens in the South meaning that the blacks would be left out of the white society. Therefore, they began to prevent the black people from voting, for example by using the literacy tests or poll taxes, but as Nash further adds the grandfather clause was "the most ingenious," while, as its name reveals, the clause declared that only those "whose grandfathers were registered to vote on January 1, 1867, could cast their ballots."⁴² Although the whites did what they could to deprive the blacks of the right to vote as soon as possible, they succeeded in the following century.

Another act that harmed the blacks' position in society was the enforcement of Jim Crow laws. These laws were designed to completely separate the society into whites and blacks while they discriminated blacks in public places. It began with the separation in the trains and schools, but in 1896 the Supreme Court enabled the extension of the laws to other places, for example, libraries, restaurants, hospitals or even toilets,⁴³ as it decided in one case "that 'separate but equal' public accommodation for African Americans ... did not violate their rights."⁴⁴ Nevertheless, it was obvious that the doctrine of "separate but equal" did violate the rights of

⁴² Nash et al., "Rural America in the Industrial Age," 383.

⁴³ Nash et al., "Rural America in the Industrial Age," 383.

⁴⁴ Cincotta, "Chapter VII: Growth and Transformation," 189.

the blacks, but it did not matter to the southerners while it was their aim “to underscore the inferiority of blacks.”⁴⁵

Therefore, some of the blacks moved from the segregated South to the North, but the life there was not live without segregation either. As they tried to find themselves a job they either “occupied the most marginal positions as janitors, servants, porters, and labourers,”⁴⁶ or were refused by the factories, while they had already employed the immigrant workers from Europe.⁴⁷ Their living conditions were closely related to their occupation meaning that the wages were low for blacks, therefore, “many could afford only rented rooms.”⁴⁸ Although they were ignored by the society as well as by the government, some of the blacks managed to “rose into the middle class.”⁴⁹ This was a great success for the blacks in the nineteenth-century society in which according to Cincotta “any area of life that was not segregated by law was segregated by custom and practice.”⁵⁰

The last thing to mention is that the blacks tried to fight against the segregation and other injustice. There were even efforts to establish the “economically viable and politically independent all-black towns,”⁵¹ but these efforts were not successful. Even though many of the blacks were not satisfied with their social position, there were blacks and whites too who supported the doctrine of Booker T. Washington “the most prominent black leader of the late 19th and early 20th century”⁵² of “compromise and accommodation to the dominant white society.”⁵³ However, as he gained prestige among the whites, the number of black supporters decreased.⁵⁴ One of his black opponents was W. E. B. Du Bois who thought that it was necessary to take a “militant action to assure equality.”⁵⁵ It is not obvious whose doctrine was more successful in opposing the segregation while these laws were valid even in “the second half of the 20th century.”⁵⁶

⁴⁵ Henretta et al., “A Maturing Industrial Society, 1877–1914,” 586.

⁴⁶ Nash et al., “The Rise of Smokestack America,” 402.

⁴⁷ Henretta et al., “Capital and Labour in the Age of Enterprise, 1877–1900,” 516.

⁴⁸ Nash et al., “The Rise of Smokestack America,” 398.

⁴⁹ Nash et al., “The Rise of Smokestack America,” 399.

⁵⁰ Cincotta, “Chapter VII: Growth and Transformation,” 189.

⁵¹ Franklin et al., “Philanthropy and Self-Help,” 279.

⁵² Cincotta, “Chapter VII: Growth and Transformation,” 189.

⁵³ Nash et al., “Rural America in the Industrial Age,” 472.

⁵⁴ Franklin et al., “Philanthropy and Self-Help,” 274.

⁵⁵ Nash et al., “Rural America in the Industrial Age,” 472.

⁵⁶ Cincotta, “Chapter VII: Growth and Transformation,” 189.

The two last decades of the nineteenth century were undoubtedly difficult for the blacks while most of their newly gained rights were quickly taken away from them or at least restricted. They had to wait for a long time to gain their rights back and to gain equality, but the way towards gaining both the rights and equality is the topic for the following chapter.

To conclude the chapter, these forty years included many crucial moments that changed the lives of thousands of blacks, most importantly they gained freedom and were no longer considered as a property as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Despite these two facts, they could not be fully satisfied while the society still refused to accept them as equal, instead, the whites thought of them as of the inferior race. Although the blacks tried to change this perception they did not succeed and at the end of the nineteenth century, their position was nearly the same as it was during the antebellum era. The blacks' condition is well described by Du Bois when he says that the Negro:

was a caged human being ... An inferiority complex dominated him. He did not believe himself a man like other men. ... The Negro as a group gradually lost his manners, his courtesy, his light-hearted kindliness. Large number sank into apathy and fatalism! There was no chance for the black man; there was no chance in striving; ambition was not for Negroes.⁵⁷

However, this was to be changed during the twentieth century and is to be discussed in the following chapter.

⁵⁷ William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, "Back Toward Slavery," in *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935), 701.

2 Struggle for Visibility

The second chapter of this thesis focuses on the position of the black people in society throughout the beginning of the twentieth century up to the 1960's. Even though the blacks had already been free men they still had to fight with the American government and with the white society to gain more rights and equality. Since not each of the struggle against inequality helped the blacks to improve their position in society, they kept on struggling until they gained what they were fighting for. In terms of the invisibility, it can be said that throughout the sixty years of the twentieth century they had to fight for their visibility in society.

Before moving to the most important events of the twentieth century for the black people, the Harlem Renaissance and the Civil Rights Movement, a few information about the beginning of the century dealing with the position of the blacks in the American society should be mentioned. The first crucial fact is that the black people had almost no rights at all while they were taken away from the freedmen as mentioned in the previous chapter. Moreover, they had to face the lynching by whites even in the twentieth century in both the North and the South. Therefore, the black people rioted against it, but the situation got even worse and Franklin compares the fights against blacks to terrorism.⁵⁸

Another important fact is that the problems with housing and employment became even worse at the beginning of the twentieth century than they were in the previous century, mostly because of the segregation. However, there were attempts to improve the living conditions and to decrease the segregation in the housing and in the employment. These attempts for change were mostly organised by the National League on Urban Condition among Negroes, which helped the newly arrived blacks to find a job as well as it gave them the advice on the life in the city. The National Urban League was not the only helpful organization while there were many others and among those widely known were Young Men's Christian Organisation or Young Women's Christian Organisation, for example.⁵⁹

Speaking about organisations taking care of the black people, the most important of all was the NAACP – National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, demanding recognition and desegregation for the black people in the American society. One of the organisation's most famous member was W. E. B. Du Bois. Before he joined the NAACP, he

⁵⁸ Franklin et al., "The Colour Line," 312–313.

⁵⁹ Franklin et al., "The Colour Line," 321.

was a member of the Niagara Movement and being the leader of the movement Du Bois organized meetings where he criticised the segregated society. During one of the meetings he did not only criticise the society, but he also explained what the movement protested against saying:

Discrimination in travel and public accommodation has so spread that some of our weaker brethren are actually afraid to thunder against color discrimination as such and are simply whispering for ordinary decencies. Against this Niagara Movement eternally protests. ... We claim for ourselves every single right that belongs to a freeborn American, political, civil, and social; and until we get these rights we will never cease to protest and assail the ears of America.⁶⁰

After he and other members of the Niagara Movement joined the NAACP, whose members were of both races, he was in charge of its magazine *The Crisis*,⁶¹ but that did not mean Du Bois was a member of minor importance. While his Niagara Movement challenged the doctrine of Booker T. Washington, which is obvious, especially in the first two sentences of the quotation above, the black people, as well as the black activist, praised more the doctrine of Du Bois.⁶² Both doctrines are mentioned on page 16. It made him the new leader of blacks and assured him a great number of readers he could address through the magazine.

The last but not least important fact is that the black people took part in the World War I, but after they returned to the United States, they wanted to gain the democracy and freedom for which they were fighting during the war in Europe.⁶³ Unfortunately, their demand was denied by both the government and society. Even before the war began the presidents William Howard Taft and Woodrow Wilson said publically that it was not their intention to improve the black people's position in the society by increasing their equality.⁶⁴ Therefore, blacks could not expect the government to help them. To mention the society's attitude towards black people, the Ku Klux Klan rose again in 1915. This time it did not threaten the black people only, but all foreign-born people considered as undesirables.⁶⁵ The fact of being denied democracy and

⁶⁰ W. E. B. Du Bois, "The New Century," in *ABC of Color* (Berlin: Seven Seas Book, 1963), 31.

⁶¹ Franklin et al., "The Colour Line," 319.

⁶² Henretta et al., "A Maturing Industrial Society, 1877–1914," 606.

⁶³ Franklin et al., "Democracy Escapes," 346.

⁶⁴ Henretta et al., "A Maturing Industrial Society, 1877–1914," 605.

⁶⁵ Franklin et al., "Democracy Escapes," 347–348.

freedom was criticised in the magazine *The Crisis* by W. E. B. Du Bois as well as the whole attitude of America towards the black people.⁶⁶

After being rejected by the whole society again the only thing the blacks could do was to help themselves which they did during the following years. The way they improved their position and gained their visibility is the topic for the following parts of this chapter.

2.1 1920's and 1930's

To analyse the improvement of the black people's position in American society in the 1920's it is crucial to mention the thought that described their contemporary situation. At the turn of the century, the new way in which the blacks thought about themselves in the white American society was called by W. E. B. Du Bois double consciousness. It was a term he firstly used in his book *The Souls of Black Folk* published in 1903 to describe that the blacks were not thinking about themselves as they were, but they kept on measuring themselves in the perspective of the white people. In the book he says:

[T]he Negro is a sort of seventh son, born in a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, – an America, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.⁶⁷

Obviously, the blacks thought and felt that they were not part of the American society and this not-belonging to the country and society they lived in made them thinking about their self-determination. They tried to figure out who they actually were throughout the whole sixty years which are to be covered in this thesis, thus, the terms double consciousness and self-determination will be used frequently in the following lines.

⁶⁶ W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Crisis: The Awakening Years 1919–1934," 107–109.

⁶⁷ W. E. B. Du Bois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," in *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover Publication, Inc., 1994), 2.

The first sign of the self-determination of the black people in the 1920's came through the music, especially jazz. Even though it originated at the beginning of the twentieth century, in the 1920's jazz became a part of the American popular culture, therefore the era of jazz is called the Jazz Age. To return to the self-determination of the black people – jazz is an invention of the black people only. Through it, they could express themselves and their anger.⁶⁸ The fact that the white population of America fancied it despite the expression of the blacks' anger and that it shaped the American culture encouraged the blacks to continue in finding themselves through the culture.

Another self-determination came through the literature in the 1920's when the black people – ordinary people or even intellectuals – moved in great numbers to New York, mostly to the part of the city named Harlem. Thus, the movement of the black authors was called the Harlem Renaissance. However, it should not be omitted that the Harlem Renaissance was not only about the writers but also about the musicians, sculptors or painters, who will not be mentioned in this thesis.

The first thing to mention about the movement is that the black people had already felt that the attitude of a black person was changing so the concept of the New Negro came into existence. Many of the intellectuals and writers tried to describe the New Negro, but the best-known description was given by the writer Alain Locke in his book *The New Negro* published in 1925. Before giving the description of the New Negro, the so-called Old Negro should be mentioned first. Alain Locke said about the Old Negro:

[F]or generations in the mind of America the Negro has been more of a formula than a human being – a something to be argued about, condemned or defended, to be “kept down,” or “in his place,” or “held up,” to be worried with or worried over, harassed or patronized, a social bogey or social burden. The thinking Negro even has been induced to share this same general attitude, to focus his attention on controversial issues, to see himself in the distorted perspective of a social problem. His shadow, so to speak, has been more real to him than his personality. ... [H]e has had to subscribe to the traditional positions from which his case has been viewed. Little true social or self-understanding has or could come from such a situation.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Henretta et al., “Modern Times: The 1920s,” 705.

⁶⁹ Alain Locke, “The New Negro,” in *Cultural Contexts for Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man*, ed. Eric J. Sundquist (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1995), 161.

Therefore, the Old Negro might be understood as a person who was oppressed and had no chance to do anything to integrate himself into society. On the other hand, the New Negro's thinking about his position in society changed according to Locke to this:

[The Negro praises] the belief in the efficacy of collective effort, in race-cooperation. This deep feeling of race is at present the mainspring of Negro life. It seems to be the outcome of the reaction to proscription and prejudice; an attempt, fairly successful on the whole, to convert a defensive into an offensive position, a handicap into an incentive. It is radical in tone, but not in purpose and only the most stupid forms of opposition, misunderstanding, or persecution could make it otherwise.⁷⁰

Apparently, the black people were determined to change their position in the American society so they began to build their self-consciousness as a whole race. To this Locke further adds that the black person “now becomes a conscious contributor and lays aside the status of a beneficiary and ward for that of collaborator and participant in the American civilization.”⁷¹ Thus the writers of the Harlem Renaissance believed that they were building “a bridge across the chasm between the races”⁷² through publishing their novels or poems. Even other blacks thought the writers and other artists “would be the agency to bring the races together over the fissures of ignorance, suspicion, and fear.”⁷³

Such a belief in the black writers was caused by the overall perception of achievement among blacks. While there were not many black people who were able to become famous or at least a bit known in the predominantly white society, the blacks according to Huggins considered anyone who was a writer, singer, or intellectual as “a source of race pride and an argument against continued discrimination.” Then he continues by mentioning that these people as well as doctors, actors, and teachers also showed through their achievements to other blacks that it was possible for anyone to achieve a better position in the American society.⁷⁴

As the writers were acknowledged with this fact, they tried to help their race with the self-determination. However, according to Huggins, the minority of blacks was not the only

⁷⁰ Locke, “The New Negro,” 167.

⁷¹ Locke, “The New Negro,” 171.

⁷² Nathan Irving Huggins, “Introduction,” in *Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 5.

⁷³ Huggins, “Introduction,” 5.

⁷⁴ Huggins, “Introduction,” 6.

minority struggling for its place and self-determination in the American society, while each felt that the American dream of being included in the culture was not fulfilled. Still, the black minority was the only minority without history and country. To specify it, other minorities had a country with a rich history and culture they could return to at any time, but the blacks had no place to return to neither the ancestors to ask about their place of origin or about the past of their folk before coming to the United States. Therefore, the difference between the other minorities and the black minority was as Huggins specifies that most of the minorities were the aliens in the American culture whereas the black minority was alienated in the American culture.⁷⁵ Further, he says that being an alien means “being a stranger to something which is your becoming” and being alienated means to be “native to something of which you are not a part.”⁷⁶ Thus, it was almost impossible for black writers to change the position of the black race in society.

Despite being alienated in their own country, the blacks tried hard to become its part. The opinion that they belong to the American society and should not be excluded from it was expressed in the poem *I, too* by Langston Hughes, one of the greatest poets of the Harlem Renaissance.

I, too sing America. / I am the darker brother. / They send me to eat in the kitchen
/ When company comes, / But I laugh, / And eat well, / and grow strong. /
Tomorrow, / I'll be at the table / When company comes. / Nobody'll dare / Say to
me, / “Eat in the kitchen,” / Then. / Besides, / They'll see how beautiful I am / And
be ashamed – / I, too, am America.⁷⁷

Although the poem describes the era before the emancipation of the slaves, it could be applied on the 1920's as well, while it covers the topic of segregation which was still enforced by the Jim Crow laws in 1920's as well as the topic of the hope of becoming equal to whites which had not been fulfilled even sixty years after the emancipation.

Returning to how the Harlem writers helped the black race with the self-determination and visibility, Langston Hughes's works might be further used to describe it. In his book *Weary Blues* (1926) he mixed poems with music,⁷⁸ especially blues, therefore it might be understood

⁷⁵ Huggins, “Art: The Black Identity,” 137–139.

⁷⁶ Huggins, “Art: The Black Identity,” 139.

⁷⁷ Langston Hughes, *Poems*, ed. David Roessel (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 35.

⁷⁸ Huggins, “Art: The Ethnic Province,” 223.

as a piece of work containing something which was considered as a white man's art and something that was created by a black man. This mixture of cultures in one book was successful within both of them, but it was not his only work that appealed to whites as well as to blacks.⁷⁹ Thus, it might be concluded that Langston Hughes was indeed building the bridge among the chasm between the two races as mentioned on page 22, but neither he nor other black writers of the Harlem Renaissance actually succeeded in it.

The thing these writers did was that they undoubtedly helped their race to determine itself, but they were not able to connect the blacks with the whites. As the era of depression began at the end of the 1920's the Harlem Renaissance was over while the white audience was no more interested in supporting the black culture and its writers.⁸⁰ Though it seemed that the black authors could decide on their own about the topic of their works, the opposite was true. Huggins mentions in his book that the white people were the judges who measured the success of the black authors no matter what they did during the Harlem Renaissance.⁸¹ This fact recalls the topic of double consciousness by Du Bois, mentioned on page 20, expressing that the blacks were always measured by the white society and not by the whole society or by their own measures.

The bitterness and disappointment of the writers and of the rest of the blacks that they were still dependent on the white men, who kept on exploiting them, was expressed in the poem *Note on Commercial Theatre* by Langston Hughes:

You've taken my blues and gone – / You sing 'em on Broadway / And you sing 'em in Hollywood Bowl, / And you mixed 'em up with symphonies / And you fixed' em / So they don't sound like me. / Yep, you done taken my blues and gone. / You also take my spirituals and gone. / You put me in *Macbeth* and *Carmen Jones* / And all kinds of *Swing Mikados* / And in everything but what's about me – / But someday somebody'll / Stand up and talk about me, / And write about me – / Black and beautiful – / And sing about me, / And put on plays about me! / I reckon it'll be / Me myself! / Yes, it'll be me.⁸²

⁷⁹ Huggins, "Art: The Ethnic Province," 227.

⁸⁰ Henretta et al., "Modern Times: The 1920s," 718.

⁸¹ Huggins, "Epilogue," 306–307.

⁸² Langston Hughes, *Poems*, ed. David Roessel (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 104.

The end of the poem reveals that the black people realized it would be only them on whom they could rely on if they wanted to change their current position in American society.

While some of the blacks believed that the Harlem's writers and intellectuals would help the black race to gain its visibility in the American society, other blacks believed in Marcus Garvey and his return of the black people to Africa. He claimed that black people should be proud of their race and free of the white men's power which was possible only in Africa.⁸³ Therefore, following the self-help philosophy of Booker T. Washington as Nash claims Garvey established the Universal Negro Improvement Association and began his project Black Star Line, which was a steamship company. His followers supported him by investing their money into his project. However, the company Black Star Line collapsed and lately the leader of the black pride movement was imprisoned and then deported. As Nash adds: "Despite Garvey's failures, he convinced thousands of American blacks that they could join together and accomplish something and that they should feel pride in their heritage and their future."⁸⁴

Returning to the heritage of the blacks, W. E. B. Du Bois expressed one more thought that was part of his double consciousness explanation and is as well as related to the previously mentioned heritage. He said that the black people could not give up their African heritage and that the society should understand that the blacks were trying to live as both the Negroes and the Americans. Du Bois added that they could not give up either of their two selves while the blacks believed that the two selves, the two societies living in America could teach one another and that the white Americans and Afro-Americans should live together as one.⁸⁵

Mentioning what the blacks believed in, it must be added that after the Harlem Renaissance was over without gaining much visibility for the blacks, Marcus Garvey was deported, the equality was nowhere as well as the living conditions had not changed, and many of blacks were unemployed some of the black people turned to the Nation of Islam to seek the relief from the overwhelming pessimism. This religious group also known as Black Muslims offered to its believers the feeling of belonging to a community of people who shared the same troubles within the American society. Moreover, its aim was to separate itself from the community of the whites. Therefore, the Black Muslims ran their own bakeries, restaurants, and many other facilities. As Franklin adds this religious group was also engaged in politics

⁸³ Franklin et al., "Democracy Escapes," 357–358.

⁸⁴ Nash et al., "Affluence and Anxiety," 509–510.

⁸⁵ W. E. B. Du Bois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," 2–3.

and could be considered as well as the social movement.⁸⁶ This is to be further discussed in the following part of the chapter.

Though the black people were still hoping for the change to come very soon, it did not happen and the 1930's were not more positive than the 1920's. However, one positive thing was that the union movement Congress of Industrial Organizations allowed the blacks to join it as its intention was to improve the working conditions for everyone including the minorities.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, it did not change much for the black workers while they were discriminated even after joining the union. Moreover, president Franklin Delano Roosevelt refused to sign an antilynching bill and a bill abolishing poll taxes.⁸⁸ Thus, it was obvious that neither the government nor the American society would change their attitude towards the black people which kept them frustrated without a chance for any change. The continuing frustration had an impact even on the black intellectuals. As Nash claims in 1934 W. E. B. Du Bois became disillusioned that the blacks could integrate into the white society and he left the NAACP. Consequently, he "joined the Communist Party and moved to Ghana."⁸⁹ Lastly, in 1935 the frustration among blacks and the economic exploitation of the blacks triggered the race riot in Harlem.⁹⁰

The fact the black people tried to gain their visibility in the American society through culture and this attempt failed, moreover, that they were still discriminated and refused by the society left them depressed and frustrated. Even taking part in the World War II did not change anything for the blacks, while the black soldiers were discriminated as well as in the World War I. Therefore, they felt it was the highest time for gaining their equality which led to the Civil Rights Movement covered in the following part.

⁸⁶ Franklin et al., "The American Dilemma," 424.

⁸⁷ Henretta et al., "The New Deal, 1933–1939," 766.

⁸⁸ Nash et al., "The Great Depression and the New Deal," 536.

⁸⁹ Nash et al., "The Great Depression and the New Deal," 536.

⁹⁰ Henretta et al., "The Great Depression," 736.

2.2 1950's and 1960's

The 1950's and 1960's brought the most important changes in the lives of black people. During these years they won their visibility in the American society, but firstly the years of the 1940's are to be briefly described. As World War II continued in the 1940's the problems with segregation in housing, employment and even in the army continued as well. Therefore, the blacks started to organize the March on Washington in 1941 led by A. Philip Randolph to strike against the discrimination in the employment especially in the defence industries. However, the government felt that it would have been embarrassing if there had been marches for freedom in the United States while the American army fought in Europe for others to help them gain their freedom. Thus, it decided to negotiate with the leader of the march. Together they found a solution that the march would be called off and the government would issue the Executive Order 8802 banning the discrimination in the defence industries. Moreover, the Fair Employment Practices Commission known as FEPC was established to solve any complaint about the discrimination. Unfortunately, the number of complaints was so high that the FEPC was not able to solve each of them.⁹¹

Although the black soldiers were complaining about the segregation in the army throughout World War II, the president Harry S. Truman abolished it by another executive order in 1948.⁹² Other actions taken by the black people to fight the segregation took place in the following decades and there is no doubt in saying that they were ready to fight while they had already had to fight for the freedom of other minorities during the war in Europe.

Moving further to the 1950's the segregation started to decrease a bit in the housing and in the employment, even the capital city of the United States Washington, DC moved towards the desegregation of the public places, for example, hotels, theatres or playgrounds.⁹³ A great achievement was the desegregation of the public schools in 1954 thanks to the Supreme Court which decided in one case that the "separate but equal" doctrine could not be applied in the public schools anymore.⁹⁴ All these desegregation acts were, however, not in favour of the

⁹¹ Henretta et al., "The World at War, 1939–1945," 790–791.

⁹² Henretta et al., "Cold War America, 1945–1960," 840.

⁹³ Franklin et al., "African Americans in the Cold War Era," 463–464.

⁹⁴ Nash et al., "Postwar Growth and Social Change," 608.

southerners who did not want the black people to gain the same equality as whites. Thus, they returned to the violence including murdering to maintain the segregation.⁹⁵

Nevertheless, another important desegregation act followed. The bus-boycott began in 1955 when the black people refused to travel by segregated buses. The spokesman of the protest became a minister of the Baptist Church Martin Luther King, Jr. who is to be further mentioned in the following lines of the thesis focusing on the 1960's. Then, after the bus-boycott, the Supreme Court decided that the segregation in the bus system was unconstitutional.⁹⁶ Consequently, even the government decided to move towards the desegregation. As the blacks still had difficulties with voting, while there were poll taxes or literacy tests violating the Fifteenth Amendment, the Civil Rights Act of 1957 abandoned all these obstructions. Moreover, the Civil Rights Commission was established to investigate the violation of the act. This was an important act while the government passed the first bill securing the civil rights after 82 years.⁹⁷ Obviously, the situation was finally going to change for the blacks.

Therefore, they kept on fighting for equality in the American society even in 1960 when the peaceful protest of young blacks who demanded to be served in segregated places such as restaurants or hotels began. The sit-ins were supported even by the white people who also showed their disagreement with segregation and discrimination.⁹⁸ However, the greatest action against segregation in the public places as well as in the employment of the 1960's was the march on Washington in 1963 where the blacks, as well as whites, joined together again. Many black activists gave their speech in front of 200,000 people, but the most memorable speech was given by Martin Luther King who expressed his dream that the black and white people would join together and create one inseparable nation. Nevertheless, the march did not bring any immediate change. The government took action one year later as it passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which outlawed the Jim Crow laws of segregation in the public accommodations and in the employment.⁹⁹

Another act known as the Voting Act of 1965 passed as a response to the later march led by Martin Luther King in Selma, Alabama in 1965 which demanded the equal right to vote. Although the bill to secure the voting rights to the blacks had already passed in 1957, it was

⁹⁵ Franklin et al., "African Americans in the Cold War Era," 468–469.

⁹⁶ Cincotta, "Chapter XI: Postwar America," 300–301.

⁹⁷ Nash et al., "Postwar Growth and Social Change," 610.

⁹⁸ Franklin et al., "The Black Revolution," 495.

⁹⁹ Nash et al., "The Struggle for Social Reform," 641–642.

frequently violated in the South. Thus, the government passed the new voting act to abandon the literacy tests and other methods used in the South to discourage black people from voting.¹⁰⁰

Even though it seemed the blacks' equality was increasing, they felt they were not equal to the whites. It left many blacks frustrated and some of them even called for militant action as they thought the King's peaceful protest was ineffective, hence the members of groups supporting separatism were increasing. One of these groups was the Nation of Islam, firstly mentioned on page 25. Its speaker was Malcolm X who was also an opponent to King. Another similar organization was the Black Panthers. Also, the blacks called themselves Afro-Americans and refused to be referred to as Negroes while they associated the term with the era of slavery.¹⁰¹ Moreover, the Black Muslims' speaker Malcolm X and the Black Panthers differed not only from King but also from each other at least in some aspects.

Firstly, Martin Luther King was the supporter of the peaceful protest, because he praised the teaching of Mohandas Gandhi who used non-violence protest together with his supporters to free India from the British occupation.¹⁰² Gandhi's teaching had a great impact on King who never opposed his idol's teaching throughout his whole fight for equality. On the contrary, Malcolm X praised the philosophy of militant protest as well as of the separatism. However, his teaching was not his own, while the Black Muslims adopted the philosophy of Marcus Garvey who was the supporter of separatism and self-help as mentioned on page 25. Moreover, Malcolm X left the Nation of Islam in 1964 and adopted a new agenda which was not as radical as the previous one.¹⁰³ Lastly, the Black Panthers were also opposing King's teaching, but they arose from the movement of Black Power which praised the philosophy of Malcolm X as well as the philosophy of many other social movements. Thus, they were using guns to protect themselves and their community from the police brutality.¹⁰⁴

Though the black people struggled a lot for their visibility during the 1950's and the 1960's they gained only a part of it. For the complete visibility in American society, they had to wait until the 1980's when there were black millionaires, sportsmen, or astronauts.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Henretta et al., "The Affluent Society, 1945–1965," 874.

¹⁰¹ Henretta et al., "War Abroad and at Home: The Vietnam Era, 1961–1975," 895.

¹⁰² Alan C. McLean, "Learning," in *Martin Luther King* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 15.

¹⁰³ Henretta et al., "War Abroad and at Home: The Vietnam Era, 1961–1975," 895.

¹⁰⁴ "54i. Black Power," U.S. History, accessed June 10, 2019, <http://www.ushistory.org/us/54i.asp>.

¹⁰⁵ Franklin et al., "The Black Revolution," 531.

3 Ralph Ellison and the Invisibility of a Man

The whole thesis has been focusing on the invisibility of the Afro-Americans in the American society through historical and cultural context, but the last chapter of the thesis focuses on the invisibility of the main character in the book *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison and analyses Ellison's solution of the black man's problem with invisibility which is then compared with the solution of W. E. B. Du Bois.

To begin with the analysis of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* published in 1952 it should be mentioned the analysis focuses on the process of the main character's realization that he is invisible in the American society meaning that he was excluded from the beginning of the story from the society because of his race – he is an Afro-American. Therefore, the book is analysed chronologically chapter by chapter, but some of them might be shortened to show only the development of his awareness that there is something wrong happening within the society. Beginning with the Prologue, the main character, who is also the narrator of the story living in a basement, tries to explain his invisibility to the reader, while he already knows about it as the story begins where it end. He starts saying "I am an invisible man. ... I am invisible, understand, because people refused to see me."¹⁰⁶ Then he continues the explanation of his feelings, while he doubts he exists, thus, sometimes he bumps into people. Lately, the narrator says he uses the electricity and does not pay for it, which is his protest against the discriminating and exploiting society. Mentioning he used to think he was visible, the main character compares himself to a bear retiring to his hole and waiting for the spring to come. This means he knows that one day he will leave the basement and live within the society again, but for now he does not want to. Lastly, the invisible man blames the society for his condition of invisibility and warns the society that: "Someday that kind of foolishness will cause us tragic trouble."¹⁰⁷ The reader might be a bit confused after reading the prologue, but the main information to remember is that he is aware of the problem of racism in the American society and that also other Americans should be aware of it too, while it is a great problem requiring solution as the excluded people might start rioting against it and that could cause a tragedy. Indeed, the history proved that the dissatisfaction with exploitation and discrimination of the black people leads to riots or protests as mentioned on pages 26 and 28.

¹⁰⁶ Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 3.

¹⁰⁷ Ellison, 12.

The first chapter of the *Invisible Man* describes the first experience of the main character with discrimination as the “battle royal” is mentioned. Before that, he says he was naïve during the time he thought he was visible while he let other people tell him who he was and failed to recognize he was the only one who could answer the question. The narrator concludes his thought saying: “But first I had to discover that I am an invisible man!”¹⁰⁸ Obviously, he could not determine himself unless he realized the truth that he must ask nobody else but him. The struggle for self-determination was common among the Afro-Americans as they had to deal with the double-consciousness – being both the Negro and the American but not just one of these options as mentioned on page 20. The story continues as the narrator says what his grandfather said to his father before he died:

Son, after I’m gone I want you to keep up a good fight. I never told you, but our life is a war and I have been a traitor all my born days. ... Live with your head in the lion’s mouth. I want you to overcome ‘em with yeses, undermine ‘em with grins, agree ‘em to death and destruction ...¹⁰⁹

The grandfather instructed the father of the invisible man that he should fight against the white people, but in this part of the book, the narrator does not know what the message of the grandfather’s words was. Moving on to the “battle royal” the protagonist thought he was to give a speech in front of white men, but first, he had to fight with his schoolmates for their entertainment. However, he did not realize that the fighting was only for the entertainment of the white people while he believed they cared about him and his speech and that one day he might be another Booker T. Washington – important to both blacks and whites. Before mentioning the explanation of the fight by Ralph Ellison in his essays, it must be specified that the hero comes from the South. Moving on, the author said: “This is a vital part of behaviour pattern in the South, which both Negroes and whites ... accept.”¹¹⁰ Thinking about it, the South discriminated and humiliated the black people throughout history as mentioned in the previous chapters, therefore the invisible man did not assume that there was something wrong in the whole act. Thus it might be said that he was blind to what was actually happening. Lastly, as he gives a speech he says “social equality” instead of “social responsibility” and one of the

¹⁰⁸ Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 13.

¹⁰⁹ Ellison, 13.

¹¹⁰ Ralph Ellison, “The Art of Fiction: An Interview,” in *Shadow and Act* (New York: Signet, 1966), 175.

white men says: “We mean to do right by you, but you’ve got to know your place at all time.”¹¹¹
This also reveals the submissive role the black people played in the South.

As the story continues the invisible man studies at university for the black people, but lately he is expelled. One day he drives a car to show the white university co-founder Norton the surroundings of the university, but he takes him to the place where the black people live in poor conditions and then to a place where the veterans of the World War I entertain themselves – Golden Day. Showing such places to a white man is a reason of his expulsion from the university. In these chapters concerning the university studies the true relationship of the black people and the white southerners is revealed, but the narrator still refuses to admit there is something wrong happening in the relationship of the blacks and the whites, meaning that whites do not care about blacks and that it is not their intention to change their attitude towards blacks. That the southerners were not willing to accept the black people as a part of the society was also explained in both of the previous chapters. Returning to the story, the narrator and Norton meet a black veteran who was disillusioned with American society when he returned from Europe back to the United States. After his return, the veteran was denied his freedom and equality for which he had fought during the war. This was a great disappointment for many of the former black soldiers as mentioned on page 19. However, the protagonist does not understand what the veteran is talking about. Therefore, the veteran shouts at Norton:

You see, ... he has eyes and ears ... , but he fails to understand the simple fact of life. ... He registers with senses but short-circuits his brain. Nothing has meaning. He takes it in but doesn't digest it. Already he is ... a walking zombie! Already he is learned to repress not only his emotions but his humanity. He's invisible, a walking personification of the Negative, the most perfect achievement of your dreams, sir! The mechanical man!¹¹²

Obviously, the veteran wants Norton to realize what the white people cause to black people – they suppress the blacks’ personalities and make them blind to see the real world full of discrimination. It might be explained by another Ellison’s essay that the blacks were saved in the South as long as they suppressed their individuality while opposing the whites or showing their dissatisfaction with the oppression led to the lynching of the whole group even if the dissatisfaction was expressed by one of the blacks only. Therefore, the suppression of the

¹¹¹ Ellison, *Invisible man*, 25.

¹¹² Ellison, 72.

individuality could save not only one person but the whole group, moreover, it helped the whites to prevent the blacks from trying to gain social and human equality.¹¹³ Mentioning this, it is obvious that the southerners did what they could to keep the black people “at their place” as one of the white men told to the protagonist during the “battle royal.” Continuing his speech, the veteran says that Norton with his power is a God for the narrator and that he makes the protagonist believe that “white is right.”¹¹⁴ His statement again refers to the whites’ superiority to the blacks in the South. The act ends with Norton and the invisible man leaving the place where they met the veteran. Norton is furious with the veteran, but instead of opposing him he says that the veteran is insane. Probably he did not want to oppose the veteran in front of the main character of the story while he did not want the protagonist to realize the veteran was right, which could threaten Norton’s superiority to the narrator. However, Norton did not have to be afraid of losing his superiority while the hero begs Norton for his forgiveness. Moreover, he thinks to himself that he is willing to serve to Norton if it would help him to avoid expulsion from the university. This fact proves how much the invisible man was blinded by the white men.

Even though he begged for Norton’s forgiveness, the university president Bledsoe believes he must be punished. Then, there is an act showing the relations of Bledsoe and the white men, while he shouts at the narrator that the black people show to white men only those things they want the whites to see as both characters are on their way to meet Norton. Before they enter his room, Bledsoe suddenly changes his attitude and the tone of his voice. Then it is obvious to the hero that Bledsoe pretends his submission to the co-founder, but he does not know why. However, as the story continues, the invisible man is for a while aware of the fact that it is the white men who rule the society and that the blacks are submitted to them. Nevertheless, he denies it again as well as the thoughts that the grandfather might have been right when he said that the blacks have to fight the whites. Furthermore, he accepts the expulsion as a punishment for endangering the black community and the goodwill of the white men who kindly allows the black people to educate themselves, which is the only success they could reach in the South. Thus, it might be said that the South treated the black people as the Old Negro who had to be patronised or kept in his place as described on page 21.

Being still naïve to accept reality, the narrator travels to New York – Harlem – to find himself a job. In the bus he meets the veteran again who moves to Washington D. C. During

¹¹³ Ellison, “Richard Wright’s Blues,” 100.

¹¹⁴ Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 73.

the travel the veteran implies that the reason why both of the men are moving from the South is that it was arranged by the white people and by Bledsoe in a revenge for taking Norton to Golden Day and for the way the veteran talked to Norton. Before the veteran gets off the bus he gives the invisible man and advice:

Now is time for offering fatherly advice, ... but I'll have to spare you that – since I guess I'm nobody's father except my own. Perhaps that's the advice to give you: Be your own father, young man. ... [L]eave the Mr. Nortons alone, and if you don't know what I mean, think about it.¹¹⁵

This advice reveals that the veteran wants the protagonist to realize that the hero himself is the only one he can rely on as well as he is the only one who can tell him what he should or should not do, which leads again to the problem with self-determination and double consciousness described on page 20.

Arriving in New York, he soon realized there was something happening with the white people's attitude towards him: "... here they all seemed impersonal; and yet when most impersonal they startled me by being polite, by begging my pardon after brushing against me in a crowd. Still I felt that even when they were polite they hardly saw me, ..." ¹¹⁶ For now, he does not care about it that much, but later in the story, he realizes what is the cause of the whites' attitude towards blacks. While he keeps on hoping that he will earn money to be able to pay the tuition and return to university, he is searching for a job having seven letters from Bledsoe to help him to find it. The hero does not know what is written in the letters as he blindly follows Bledsoe's instruction that he should not open them. However, none of the letters helps him to find a job. Moreover, as he meets Emerson, who is one of the university patrons' son, he finally sees the truth, because Emerson lets him read the letter Bledsoe gave him. Then, he realizes what has been happening all the time that he was blinded by the white man and the university. After that, he starts to question himself about his existence and gets enormously angry at Bledsoe, Norton, and even at Emerson who opened his eyes but destroyed his hopes and dreams.

From now on, the invisible man knows for sure that he does not want to be a part of that untruthful life in the South anymore. However, when he finds himself a job, he is exploited by

¹¹⁵ Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 120.

¹¹⁶ Ellison, 129.

a white co-worker who makes him redundant as soon as the narrator finishes his task. Being exploited was, unfortunately, part of the black people's life as mentioned in the second chapter. Especially the factories treated blacks unfairly as they either refused to hire the black people or let them work under unequal conditions, which is mentioned in the first chapter as well as in the second chapter. Returning to the story, the invisible man is then shifted to another sector of the same factory, but he is injured during the work.

The following chapter is crucial for the story while he tries to determine himself on his own for the first time as he wakes up in a hospital. He realizes that if he determines who he is he will be free. This might be closely related to double-consciousness – if he realizes who he is or accepts who he is, he might get rid of the double-consciousness and be free in American society. However, he cannot remember even his name unless the doctor in the hospital tells him. Thus the self-determination is postponed to the following chapters. Nevertheless, he realizes that something has changed inside him – he “was no longer afraid. Not of important men, not of trustees and such; for knowing there was nothing which I could expect from them, there was no reason to be afraid. ... I went on.”¹¹⁷ This means he got rid of the southerner attitude that the black people had to fear the white men who were superior to them.

Not being blind anymore the narrator noticed he feels to be alienated when he meets other black people from the South in the Men's House where he has been living since he came to Harlem. The invisible man mentions that he cannot live in their world where they believe in freedom within segregation anymore. The world of the southerner's blacks is described as the doctrine of Booker T. Washington which is mentioned on page 16. Also, the feeling of being alienated has already been mentioned in the thesis – on page 23 – as it was a common thing among the black people while they were native to something of which they were not part. Even though in the second chapter it was mentioned in relation to the whole American society, here it might be applied as well because the hero is “native” to the southern attitude, but he does not feel to be part of it. Moreover, he feels the hostility of the southerner blacks as they realize he “betrayed” them by refusing the “native” attitude.

In the following chapter, the narrator sees a sign in a window saying: “Win greater happiness with whiter complexion. Be outstanding in your social set.”¹¹⁸ This sign is connected with the quote “white is right” mentioned previously in the book and it means that only being

¹¹⁷ Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 189.

¹¹⁸ Ellison, 199.

a white man guarantees happiness to the person. Therefore, the narrator is upset after reading the sign, but lately, as he buys himself a yam, he calms himself. Moreover, the food helps him to determine himself as a black man who is proud of being a black man. Also, he feels to be free to do what he wants to do and tells himself that he will not do what others want him to do anymore. Obviously, he completely got rid of the southern attitude that a black man should be ashamed of being black and that he has to obey the white people's orders.

However, the new self-confident and freedom does not last for long while he becomes a member of an organization called Brotherhood which pretends to oppose discrimination and he starts to obey its rules and does only things the organization wants him to do. Therefore, it might be said that the invisible man was blinded again. The period of Brotherhood's membership begins in chapter fourteen and it takes nine chapters to the narrator to realize he was blinded by whites again.

Firstly, as the protagonist joins the organisation and meets the members of the Brotherhood, they tell him that his role in the organisation is to be a speaker for Harlem. Then, they give him an envelope with his new identity, thus, he has to abandon his name and his previous identity. As their meeting continues, one of the members asks him to sing claiming that blacks can sing well. This one of the first racial biased comment toward him from any member of the Brotherhood. Before falling asleep he thinks about Jack – the leader of the Brotherhood – and asks himself whether there is any difference between Jack and the white trustees he met at the university. Obviously, he doubts whether it was the right choice to join the organisation or not, because he fears to be exploited by whites again.

Once he accepted his new identity he tried to suppress his previous identity and forget his past, but as he is supposed to give his first speech for the Brotherhood he has a feeling that he does not belong to the group. After he finishes his speech, the other members criticised him that most of the speech was in contradiction to their ideology. Lately, as the narrator learns the ideology he speaks with Jack who tells him that he should: "Say what the people want to hear, but say it in such a way that they'll do what we wish."¹¹⁹ Apparently, Jack wants him to manipulate with the people, but he does not realize it. Becoming a chief spokesman in Harlem he meets his new co-workers and listens to their suggestion for what they should do to impress the people in Harlem. One of the suggestion is that they should be like Marcus Garvey, whose ideology was described on page 25 of the thesis, but the suggestion is refused.

¹¹⁹ Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 271.

Moving on, the invisible man and Clifton meet Ras the Exhorter who does not understand why they side with the white people. Then, Ras tries to warn them against the whites: “They get what they want, they turn against you. Where is your black intelligence?”¹²⁰ This refers to the exploitation of the black people by whites again, however, the hero does not listen to him, but Clifton admits to the narrator that sometimes he thinks Ras might be right. This proves that the protagonist is completely blind again. Moreover, he believes that everything is great and that there is nothing that could go wrong unless he receives an anonymous letter. It reminds him that he is a part of the organisation and that he should work for the goodness of the organisation and not for his own good as well as he should not go too fast. Then it continues saying: “You are from the South and you know that this is a white man’s world. ... They do not want you to go too fast and will cut you down if you do. Be smart...”¹²¹ Wrestrum also warns the invisible man that some of the brothers, as the members are called among themselves, are racist and that they do not want to work with the black people. Therefore, he should be aware of what he is doing as well as he should remind himself that the organization is working as a group, not as individuals.

Since he received the letter the hero is increasingly aware of the tension between the black and white members of the organisation. After he is accused of being an opportunist who disobeys the ideology of brotherhood, he is removed from the position in Harlem to another part of New York to lecture on the woman question. Even though he knows the accusation was unfair, he still tries to convince himself that nothing wrong is happening in the Brotherhood. Soon after his removal he is ordered to return to Harlem. However, this time he suspects the Brotherhood hides from him that something is not in order as he discovers that the organisation received new orders to switch from the local issues to national and international issues without letting him know about it. Moreover, he discovers that many of his co-workers from Harlem were discharged and that the public opinion about the Brotherhood has rapidly changed to worse. Consequently, the narrator realizes he never investigated whether his work brought any change in Harlem or not as he now perceives that it did not.

Giving a speech at Clifton’s funeral the invisible man believes that he attracted the attention of Harlem again, but it does not seem to be in favour of the Brotherhood. As he attends the meeting, the members shout at him that he should have waited for the instruction to tell him what he should do. During the dispute between the members, the authoritativeness and the racial

¹²⁰ Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 283.

¹²¹ Ellison, 289.

intolerance are very well obvious. One important fact about the black people's life is revealed here as Jack asks the hero why so many blacks appeared at the funeral and he replies: "Because we gave them the opportunity to express their feelings to affirm themselves."¹²² This is related to the fact that the blacks were segregated in American society for too long as might be found in the previous chapters and that they needed someone to make the white people listen to them. That the Brotherhood knows nothing about the black people is also proved as Jack denies that the protagonist knows how it feels to be isolated while he has never been imprisoned. However, the isolation is almost synonymous with segregation for the blacks, therefore, Jack was wrong. At the end of the dispute, the narrator slowly realizes that the other members do not see him.

To continue, the hero accidentally finds out about a man named Rinehart who is involved in many activities and who adopted different personality for each of them. That there is an opportunity in Harlem to have as many personalities as a person wants is a fact the narrator does not want to believe. However, he realizes that the northern cities provide the people with anonymity, whereas in the South the people know each other well, which is the reason why it is possible in here. Lately, as brother Hambro tells him that he and his co-workers in Harlem will be sacrificed while the directives of the Brotherhood has changed, he gets angry and tells Hambro: "Everywhere I've turned somebody has wanted to sacrifice me for my good—only they were the ones who benefited."¹²³ Then, the narrator finally sees the truth that it does not matter what he did, he is invisible to society which keeps on exploiting him. Not only him but his whole race. Consequently, he begins to accept his memories and his experiences while he understands that they define him, which means that his self-determination was completed. He also sees that the whites are all the same – they exploit the blacks and when they do not need the blacks anymore they abandon them. Suddenly, he understands the meaning of the words his grandfather said before he died and the protagonist decides to try how it works.

While getting used to his new identity and examining his grandfather's attitude towards whites, the riot in Harlem outbreaks. The riot might be based on the real riot which took place in Harlem in 1935 mentioned on page 26. As he tries to get to the Brotherhood's headquarters he realizes that he is taking part in the riot and that he feels happy that the black people organised themselves and decided to express their anger to the white people. However, he realizes that it was an intention of the whites to let the blacks riot while he sees the black people are either fighting against each other or with armoured whites. The hero tries to explain it to Ras the

¹²² Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 354.

¹²³ Ellison, 381–382.

Destroyer – he radicalized himself and changed his name – but he does not care about what the invisible man says as he intends to kill him. Therefore, the protagonist runs away from him but he falls into the hole which is, as he discovers, a basement. There he finds out that it was brother Jack who sent him the anonymous letter and he gets angry, but then he falls asleep and thinks about what has happened to him so far as well as he analyses his role in the society.

To sum up, the book *Invisible Man* gives an insight into the life of the Afro-American in American society. It reveals that they are invisible to society while the people refuse to accept them as equal American citizens. Thus, it is almost impossible for Afro-Americans to determine themselves since they are alienated from society. The discrimination is an enormous problem in American society which is apparent throughout its history and might be found in the previous chapters of the thesis. Still, according to this book, Ellison saw the solution to the invisibility in self-determination, which enables the black people to be visible at least to themselves and later, as the protagonist claimed that “even an invisible man has a socially responsible role to play,”¹²⁴ they should try to be visible to other people in the society by becoming its part even if it failed. The most important thing is not to give up trying to be a part of the American society.

Dealing with the topic of discrimination, the book was both praised and criticised. The best-known critic of Ralph Ellison’s work was Irving Howe, whose opinion was affirmative, although he thought of some facts to be disputable. Firstly, he criticised Ellison that the book had been written in the first person while he found it hard to distinguish between the narrator’s experience and the author’s personal experience. Secondly, Howe did not assume the Communist Party to be as cynical as in the book. He believed that such a description “undermines the intention behind it, making the Stalinists seem not the danger they are but mere clowns.”¹²⁵ Lastly, the critic doubted that the “infinite possibilities” allows one to determine himself while he believed that for the self-determination it is necessary to “stumble over social fences that do not allow one ‘infinite possibilities.’”¹²⁶

While the topic of discrimination was used quite often among the writers, Ralph Ellison was not the only author dealing with the position of a black man in American society. Another work with a similar topic was *Ragtime* (1975) by Edgar Lawrence Doctorow, which plot is a

¹²⁴ Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 439.

¹²⁵ “Irving Howe, Review of: Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*,” The Center for Programs in Contemporary Writing, accessed June 15, 2019, <https://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/50s/howe-on-ellison.html>.

¹²⁶ “Irving Howe, Review of: Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*.”

bit different from the *Invisible Man* as it displays many stories that are interwoven. However, the most relevant story, for now, is one of the black musician Coalhouse Walker, who tries to live in the southern white society as if he were equal with the whites. While working as the musician he earns a sufficient amount of money to buy himself a car and to pay the wedding for himself and his girlfriend Sarah, who recently gave birth to their child. Nevertheless, the jealous white firemen damage Walker's car. He wants them to repair it, but they refuse to do it so he tries to look for help at the police station. Unfortunately, the police refuse to take legal action because he is a black man and they send him home. Walker refuses to reconcile to the denial of being treated equally as the whites and keeps on searching for the just resolution. Meanwhile, Sarah dies after being attacked while trying to help her future husband. Then, as he realized the legal system would not help him, Walker decides to solve the problem on his own by killing the firemen hoping that the councilmen would finally meet his demand of the justice resolution, but nothing happened. Therefore, he and his friends occupy the library and threaten with the detonation of the dynamite inside the library. The police then try to negotiate with him and even Booker T Washington appears in the library to talk to Walker. Washington tells him that he should subordinate to whites, repair the car on his own, and stop ruining Washington's work. However, Walker refuses and is killed at the end of the story.¹²⁷

To compare the stories of *Ragtime* and *Invisible Man*, it might be said that Walker tried to fight the invisibility or the inequality in the society as the Invisible Man did, but Walker was more radical in demanding the equal treatment. Moreover, the character of Booker T. Washington is displayed in both of the works, however, in *Ragtime* he appears personally whereas *Invisible Man* mentions his doctrine during the protagonist's university studies and during the time he refuses the southern blacks' attitude. While in *Ragtime* Washington opposes Walker's right for equal treatment in the American society, in *Invisible Man* his doctrine is criticised. Therefore, in both stories, Booker T. Washington might be perceived negatively. The last thing to compare is the ending. As Walker is killed at the end of the story, the Invisible Man lives in the basement waiting for the right time for his revival to come.

Concluding the chapter, Ellison's solution to the invisibility should be compared to the solution of W. E. B. Du Bois. To remind, Du Bois was an Afro-American sociologist who kept on criticising the American society for segregating the black people. Also, he was the one to describe the term double-consciousness – a black person measures himself with the white

¹²⁷ Edgar Lawrence Doctorow, *Ragtime*, [Movie] Directed by Miloš Forman. (USA, 1981).

people, which leads to the condition when he is not able to define himself as either a black person or an American. The problem with self-determination is shown in the *Invisible Man* as well when the protagonist tries to find his place in the society, but he realises there is no place for him nor a role he could play in the society. Therefore, as mentioned on page 39, I assume that Ellison's solution to the invisibility is that firstly the black people have to determine themselves – they have to realize who they are and abandon the double consciousness – which enables them to be visible at least to themselves. Then, they should try to take part in the American society and they should not give up trying even if they did not succeed during the first attempt.

Comparing Ralph Ellison with W. E. B. Du Bois, he seemed to be inspired by Du Bois, as he believed in “cultural dualism of the black and white America”¹²⁸ like Du Bois. Even though the sociologist stopped to believe that the Afro-Americans have any chance to gain their freedom and their position in the society for a while,¹²⁹ a few years later Du Bois called for “the restoration of democracy in the United States”¹³⁰ via his essay as the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments were still disobeyed in the 1950's whereas Ellison expressed his opinion on the American “democracy” via his book.

Not to give up proved to be a reasonable solution to invisibility as the black people kept on struggling for their visibility within the American society and they succeeded in the 1980's as mentioned on page 29. Unfortunately, none of these men lived long enough to see as Barack Obama became the first Afro-American president in the history of the United States in 2008. This was a historical event Ellison hoped to happen one day.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Josef Jařab, “Ralph Ellison – Neviditelný – Lidská neviditelnost amerického černocho,” in *Po cestách z neviditelnosti: eseje o afroamerické literaturě a kultuře* (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého, 2016), 218.

¹²⁹ Taylor Branch, “Rockefeller and Ebenezer,” in *Parting the Waters: America in the King years 1954-63* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 51.

¹³⁰ W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Cold War,” 206.

¹³¹ Ellison, “Some Questions and Some Answers,” 263.

4 Conclusion

The invisibility is a term that was analysed throughout the whole thesis. It was analysed in the first and in the second chapter in a historical and cultural context related to the position of Afro-Americans in American society. In the last chapter, the invisibility was analysed in the book *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison.

As the first chapter revealed, the Afro-Americans were invisible even after the abolition of slavery in 1863. Their invisibility continued during the Reconstruction era up to the end of the nineteenth century. Although they were not slaves anymore, the American government, as well as the society, oppressed the Afro-Americans even in the twentieth century. However, in the 1920's the Afro-Americans started to demand their visibility and tried to determine themselves within the society via the Harlem Renaissance. Moreover, in the 1950's the Afro-Americans began to protest against their invisibility requiring equal position in the society. Refusing to give up, they kept on struggling in the 1960's and succeeded a few years later.

The analysis of the *Invisible Man* then continued in defining what the term invisibility stands for. Also, the information from the previous chapters was identified in the story, for example, the term double-consciousness as the protagonist did not know who he was, while he believed he belonged to the American society, but he discovered that all his life he had been wrong. Revealing the word invisibility is a synonym to discrimination, Ellison's solution is then analysed and compared to the solution of W. E. B. Du Bois. Based on the analysis of book and essays of the writer and on the analysis of essays by Du Bois, it was found out that the Afro-American men shared a similar opinion about the solution to invisibility, while both of them believed that it was crucial for the Afro-Americans to define themselves within the society as well as not to surrender the struggle for equality.

5 Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá postavením Afro-Američanů v americké společnosti od šedesátých let devatenáctého století po šedesátá léta dvacátého století z pohledu neviditelnost. Tato práce též analyzuje knihu *Neviditelný* od Ralphi Ellisona a zkoumá, jak je pojem „neviditelnost“ vysvětlen právě ve zmíněné knize. Dále práce zmiňuje, jaké řešení otázky neviditelnosti navrhuje autor knihy, které je následně porovnáno s řešením sociologa W. E. B. Du Boise.

První kapitola proto začíná svou analýzu postavení Afro-Američanů v americké společnosti v době Občanské války, kdy ještě byli Afro-Američané otroky. V průběhu této války získali otroci svobodu, ale ne práva a rovnost ve společnosti. Tento problém přetrvával i v období Rekonstrukce, kdy bílí občané na Jihu stále utlačovali černý lid, protože je považovali za podřadné. Útlak jižanské společnosti byl patrný i na přelomu století, kdy navíc Afro-Američané přišli o naprostou většinu svých práv a téměř i o svou svobodu. Z pohledu neviditelnosti je proto patrné, že Afro-Američané byli v americké společnosti neviditelní, i když malá změna v tomto směru nastala, protože již nebyli otroky, ale svobodnými lidmi, nicméně jejich pravomoci byli značně omezené. Druhá kapitola poté pokračuje s analýzou společenského postavení Afro-Američanů. Nejprve stručně zmiňuje události ze začátku dvacátého století, které ovlivňovali životy nejen bílých Američanů, ale i Afro-Američanů. Tato kapitola například uvádí, že bojů v Evropě za první světové války se zúčastnili právě i Afro-Američané společně s bílými Američany ačkoliv bojovali v rasově oddělených jednotkách. Po návratu do Spojených států však Afro-Američané doufali, že získají svobodu a rovnost v americké společnosti, nicméně opak byl pravdou.

Po stručném popisu dějin začátku dvacátého století se práce zaměřuje na dvacátá a třicátá léta stejného století, kterým je věnována celá podkapitola, a na takzvanou Harlemskou renesanci. Tato podkapitola nejprve popisuje myšlenku dvojitého uvědomění W. E. B. Du Boise, které definuje rozpoložení osobnosti Afro-Američanů rozdělené na černošskou a americkou osobnost. Poté se přesouvá k samotné Harlemské renesanci, jejíž součástí byli nejen spisovatelé, ale i muzikanti, malíři či sochaři. Nicméně v této práci je Harlemská renesance zaměřena pouze na spisovatele. Prvním z nich je Alain Locke a jeho koncept nového černocho, kdy je tento nový černocho porovnán s konceptem starého černocho. Výsledkem je, že tento nový černocho je odhodlán stát se součástí americké společnosti a nezůstat mimo hlavní dění, jako tomu bylo u konceptu starého černocho, který byl utlačován, a jeho sebevědomí téměř

neexistovalo. Dále podkapitola zmiňuje vývoj Afro-Amerického sebeurčení, které bylo spojeno například s jazzem, což je hudební žánr stvořený výhradně Afro-Američany. Následně je zmíněno, že pro Afro-Američany byl jakýkoliv úspěch, například, že nějaký Afro-Američan proslavil jako spisovatel či, že se ze souseda stal právník, důvodem k radosti, protože možností jakkoliv zlepšit své postavení ve společnosti nebylo mnoho a každý tento úspěch pro ně znamenal naději, že jednou třeba i oni sami dosáhnou nějakého úspěchu. Bohužel, co se týče změn a úspěchů, které si černošští lidé slibovali od Harlemské renesance, nebylo jich mnoho a dá se konstatovat, že do určité míry Harlemská renesance zklamala. Hlavním důvodem tohoto zklamání je, že ačkoliv se ve společnosti začali objevovat spisovatelé Afro-Amerického původu, nebylo jich mnoho a ti, které společnost objevila, byli finančně i jinak závislí na vlivných bílých Američanech.

Druhá podkapitola druhé kapitoly se poté posouvá do padesátých a šedesátých let dvacátého století a taktéž analyzuje společenské postavení Afro-Američanů v Americe. V této části práce je zmíněno, že po letech segregace se konečně začíná situace pro Afro-Američany zlepšit. Jednou z hlavních příčin změny byl Martin Luther King, Jr. a jeho mírumilovný způsob protestu. Dokázal zorganizovat například bojkot autobusové dopravy v jednom americkém městě, kdy společnost provozující autobusovou dopravu oddělovala Afro-Američany a bílé Američany. Po tomto bojkotu, kdy Afro-Američané odmítli cestovat oddělenými autobusy, společnost zkrachovala, což donutilo americkou vládu začít přemýšlet nad změnou legislativy. Vrcholem dění šedesátých let byl Pochod na Washington, po kterém vláda schválila důležité zákony pro ochranu občanských práv Afro-Američanů. V závěru této podkapitoly se nachází srovnání významných osobností a organizací spojených s děním v padesátých a šedesátých letech dvacátého století. Mezi nimi jsou již zmíněný Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X a Strana černých panterů. Poslední informací zmíněnou v této podkapitole je, že ačkoliv Afro-Američané bojovali za svou viditelnost v šedesátých letech dvacátého století, dosáhli ji až o několik let později.

Třetí a zároveň poslední kapitola bakalářské práce se zabývá analýzou knihy *Neviditelný*. V této části práce je zmíněno, jak je pojem neviditelnost vnímán v průběhu děje knihy a jak se předešlé kapitoly promítly v ději. Hlavním zaměřením analýzy je to jak si hlavní postava, která je zároveň vypravěčem, postupně uvědomuje, že je vlastně neviditelná pro své okolí, o kterém si myslí, že je jeho součástí. Již v úvodu analýzy je zmíněno, že pojem neviditelnost je v knize vnímán jako diskriminace, ostatně jako v předešlých kapitolách této práce. Kniha je analyzována postupně po kapitolách a některé z kapitol jsou zúženy pouze na

vývoj protagonistova povědomí o své neviditelnosti, o tom, že je diskriminován, kvůli svému Afro-Americkému původu. Po analýze knihy je shrnuta hlavní myšlenka díla včetně toho, jaké řešení neviditelnosti navrhuje autor. Následuje krátká zmínka kritiky Irvinga Howe a poté srovnání knihy *Neviditelný* s dílem Edgara Lawrence Doctorowa *Ragtime*. Po srovnání těchto děl kapitola pokračuje porovnáním řešení neviditelnosti Ellisona s řešením W. E. B. Du Boise. Toto srovnání bylo uskutečněno na základě Ellisonovy knihy a jeho sbírky esejů a na základě esejů W. E. B. Du Boise. Závěrem tohoto porovnání je, že Ellison byl ovlivněn názorem Du Boise, neboť východiskem podle Ellisona je, že nejprve je nezbytné sebeurčení – uvědomění si kdo jsem čímž se zbaví dvojitého uvědomění – což člověka dovede k tomu, že začne být viditelný alespoň sám sobě. Až poté by se měl pokoušet o to, stát se součástí společnosti a o získání viditelnosti. Nicméně je důležité vytrvat a nevzdat se, když tento pokus nevyjde hned na poprvé. K podobnému řešení, že se Afro-Američané nemají vzdávat a že by se měli pokoušet o získání viditelnosti třeba i opakovaně došel i W. E. B. Du Bois ačkoliv on sám na chvíli svůj boj vzdal, ale dokázal najít odhodlání a bojoval dál. V úplném závěru kapitoly je zmíněno, že Ellison doufal, že jednou se Afro-Američan stane prezidentem. Tím se stal v roce 2008 Barack Obama. Bohužel, Ralph Ellison se toho okamžiku nedočkal.

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