

Title: Invisibility & The Raft of Hope: A 75th-Anniversary Reflection on Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*¹

Publisher: University of Oklahoma Press

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Call for Submissions:

The editors invite proposals for an edited collection commemorating the 75th anniversary of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1952), one of the most influential and enduring works of American literature. First published in April 1952, *Invisible Man* quickly emerged as one of the most influential American novels of the 20th century. The novel spent 16 weeks on the bestseller list and in 1953, earned both the Russwurm Award and the U.S. National Book Award for Fiction, making Ralph Ellison the first African American recipient of this honor. Over the decades, *Invisible Man*’s stature has only grown. A national committee of critics named it the most significant American novel published since World War II, the Modern Library ranked it among the 100 best English-language novels of the 20th century, and *Time* included it on its list of the 100 best English-language novels published between 1923 and 2005. Today, *Invisible Man* remains one of the most frequently taught novels in American high schools and university classrooms, showing its endurance not only as a literary masterpiece but as a sustained meditation on race, identity, power, and the unfinished project of American democracy.

In *Invisible Man*, Ellison explores invisibility as a profound social and political condition—one in which Black Americans are unseen, misrecognized, or reduced to stereotypes, thereby obstructing authentic identity formation and full democratic participation. Through the narrator’s journey—from institutional promises of uplift and inclusion to an underground, light-filled refuge—Ellison exposes systemic racism, political betrayal, and the masks demanded by American society. While the novel’s scenes are fictionalized, some are deeply informed by Ellison’s lived experiences, including those shaped by his upbringing in Oklahoma. Equally real is the cultural and political intervention that Ellison sought to make through this work. Reflecting on the power of literature, Ellison famously suggested that novels serve as “a raft of hope, perception, and entertainment that might help keep us afloat as we tried to negotiate the snags and whirlpools that mark our nation’s vacillating course toward and away from the democratic ideal.”

¹ Alternate Titles: 1) *Invisibility & the Raft of Hope: Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man at 75*; 2) *75 Years of Invisibility: An Anniversary Reflection of Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man & Hope for American Democracy*; 3) *Lighting the Underground: An Anniversary Reflection of Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man and Invisibility* 4) *The Work of Invisibility: Meditations of Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man and Hope for American Democracy*

This 75th-anniversary volume reflects on Ellison's mediations by fostering interdisciplinary dialogue and creative engagement. Drawing from, but not limited to, such fields as literary studies, political theory, law, history, sociology, psychology, visual arts, and social activism, the collection seeks to make visible the political, ethical, and aesthetic dimensions of *Invisible Man*, the enduring social phenomenon of invisibility. In addition to scholarly examinations, the volume warmly welcomes creative contributions, including artwork, photography, poetry, and reflective or personal essays that engage the theme of invisibility in historical or contemporary contexts. Proposals may also examine, extend, or reimagine the conversations that Ellison initiated around ambition, disillusionment, hope, power, identity, prejudice, and democracy. Particular attention will be given to explorations of invisibility in the present moment, including its manifestations across race, class, gender, region, and political life. *The editors especially encourage Oklahomans to participate by sharing scholarly, personal, or creative responses that resonate with Ellison's legacy and with the lived experiences of invisibility in Oklahoma today.*

Suggested Themes:

Proposals may engage, but are not limited to, the following themes and approaches:

History, Memory, and Place

- *Invisible Man* in historical context (Jim Crow, Cold War America)
- Memory, erasure, and historical consciousness
- Oklahoma, place, and regional invisibility

Race, Identity, and Social Formation

- Racialized invisibility, hypervisibility, and stereotype
- Masking, performance, and identity formation
- Intersectional experiences of invisibility

Democracy, Citizenship, and Power

- Invisibility and American democracy; recognition and belonging
- Protest, resistance, and political betrayal
- Law, rights, and the limits of liberal inclusion

Contemporary Resonances

- Invisibility in the 21st century
- Policing, surveillance, and political spectacle
- Digital culture, social media, and new modes of visibility

Pedagogy and Public Humanities

- Teaching *Invisible Man* across educational contexts
- Canon formation, curriculum, and literary visibility

- Public humanities and community engagement

Speculation, Futures, and Afrofuturism

- Afrofuturism, technology, and speculative futures
- Futurity, time, and prophetic imagination
- Hope, survival, and radical possibility

Proposal Submission Guidelines

- Submit a 400-word proposal/abstract outlining the focus, methodology, or creative approach, and significance of the proposed contribution in relation to the volume's theme. All submissions must be original, unpublished work not under consideration by another publisher.
- Creative contributors should describe the medium, conceptual framework, and intended form, and explain how the work engages with invisibility.
- Final scholarly chapters are expected to be approximately 5,000–8,000 words.
- Include a 150-word biographical statement and a selected CV/resume (maximum 2 pages) highlighting relevant experience or expertise.
- Send proposals and inquiries to Quraysh Ali Lansana (Applied Associate Professor of English & Creative Writing, University of Tulsa), qal0815@utulsa.edu.
- Proposal deadline: **June 15, 2026.**