





The Creation of Nation and Culture:  
Hypotheses on Nationalism and the Work of Ralph Ellison

By  
Carson M. Turner

A thesis presented to the Honors College of Middle Tennessee State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the University Honors College

Fall 2016

The Creation of Nation and Culture:  
Hypotheses on Nationalism and the Work of Ralph Ellison

by  
Carson M. Turner

APPROVED

---

Dr. Andrei Korobkov  
Political Science

---

Dr. Steven Morris  
Political Science

---

Judy Albakry  
University Honors College

---

Dr. John R. Vile  
University Honors College Dean

## Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i> .....	2
<i>Chapter 1: From Fraternity to Activism</i> .....	6
<i>Geography: The First Parameter</i> .....	13
<i>Language and the Keys to Inclusion</i> .....	21
<i>The Church but not God?</i> .....	28
<i>The National Consciousness and the Nationalism Thereof</i> .....	34
<i>Summary</i> .....	39
<i>Chapter 2: From Tuskegee to Harlem</i> .....	43
<i>The Case for Black American National Consciousness</i> .....	44
<i>Ellison and Territory</i> .....	56
<i>Subtleties of Language</i> .....	64
<i>Religious Imagery</i> .....	67
<i>Politics of the Invisible Man</i> .....	75
<i>Conclusion</i> .....	88
<i>Bibliography</i> .....	95

*Abstract:* The nationalist theories of Benedict Anderson, Rogers Brubaker, Hugh Seton-Watson and others suppose that nationalist politics are a response to environmental adversity and that nationalist discourses are subject to construction and negotiation within media such as journalism and literature. This paper 1) Supposes a set of hypotheses on nationalism stemming from the work of Anderson, Seton-Watson, and Brubaker, and 2) Examines the emergence of nationalist discourse and political negotiation in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* as evidence of this process of imagining and directing the nation in the context of the development of civil and legal equality for black Americans.

## Introduction

The political climate in the United States since 2001, most recently manifest in the tumultuousness of the 2016 Presidential Election, has led to a resurgence in discussion regarding the character of the American nation. In particular, the shift in media culture facilitated by increased access to and consumption of independent internet media sources, often not subject to factual or logical scrutiny, has created political environment that is rife with suspicions of corruption and Manichean logic. Voters seem increasingly to voice perspectives that seem untethered to measurable realities and to identify themselves strongly with one side of the political spectrum or the other. The extremes of either side often evoke the security of the nation, either in an existential or characteristic sense, as a means of rallying a constituent base and of simplifying policy issues and positions to binary states: essentially, either a position is for the nation or for its inevitable demise. These suppositions of public media's centrality in directing the political environment beg the question first, of what it is that constitutes the nation that would inspire rhetoric warning of its degradation and of binary positions concerning its preservation, and second, how it is that media sources describe the nation and imply or explicitly offer policy solutions for what could be considered a nationally ideal reality? In short: what is the nation, how do we identify it, and how do we know what is good for it?

This paper seeks to sketch an integrated approach to the study of nationalism and the nation-state, not as an *a priori* entity as is often said to be the case in nationalist discourse itself, but rather as the product of historic circumstance, socio-cultural realities, and a process of negotiation between social elites and community whereby communal

structures are described as being intrinsic to the community itself and immemorial in nature and are through this process made into a kind of socio-political superstructure that is identified as the nation itself. In this view, the nation is not simply the population itself or the grossly simplified explanation as *love of country*, but rather, the nation emerges as the relationship between the population, cultural and political institutions, and the allocation of power. As with the state itself, the nation as an ideological construct is deployed as a way of giving meaning to the lives of the members of a community and of protecting the cultural and political institutions that are portrayed as fundamental to that identity, if not the very existence of the community.

For these negotiations to take place, a common domain needs to be established in which all of the elements of the nationalist discourse can freely interact, so to speak, and be awarded various positions and places of importance within the discourse by social elites, later to be affirmed by the public through the allocation of its political will towards one conception or another. While these processes can take place in part in public forums, an effective and broad scheme of communication is necessary to mobilize entire nations towards condensed or even singular conceptions and causes. Media present in many cases the exact sort of conditions that make nationalist conceptions viable. Indeed, as will be described below, both Hugh Seton-Watson and Benedict Anderson emphasize the importance of the emergence of print capitalism as allowing for the populist movements of nations to take place. While in the modern era, electronic media are certainly reshaping the consumption of information and the political landscape itself, prior to the inception of the internet, the novel and the newspaper were the most viable means for broad,

generic forms of communication as are necessary for nationalist movements. While, as stated above, the newspapers and instantaneous news media certainly play a role in the shaping of day-to-day political rhetoric, the novel has been an historically important item for its ability to create analogous landscapes and characters that produce and reproduce national images and values. In particular, as Benedict Anderson describes in the *Imagined Communities*, the novel has the potential to create generic sociological landscapes and characters that become proxies for a corresponding domain external to the novel.<sup>1</sup> The author creates a space that readers can easily imagine themselves as being a part of and thus merges readers with the narrative, imbuing them with the emotional and intellectual content therein and convey on a personal level a political perspective. Because of its fixity and potential for impact, the novel will be this essay's object of analysis.

In the case of black Americans, the 1950s presented a turning point in what had been a remarkably grim history within the United States. Even after the abolition of slavery, many black people still faced considerable economic, social, and political disenfranchisement. From around 1954 to 1967, a series of court decisions and legislative events changed the prospects for black Americans in the social domain by finally outlawing their intentional exclusion from society. Preceding and facilitating these events was a period of high political mobilization among a generation of black Americans who had never known slavery, who had frequently served their country during the World Wars, and who felt that they were entitled to representations and opportunities equal to those of their white countrymen. In short, black Americans felt themselves a part of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 1983, p. 26-36



nation and therefor entitled to its benefits, but were somewhat paradoxically excluded. Ralph Ellison was actively engaged in negotiating political thought within and surrounding the black community through his work as an author and critic. His novel *Invisible Man* was a winner of the National Book Award and is considered by many to be a central work in the canon of black American literature. It is an interesting piece for observation within this topic because of its simultaneous acceptance of the existence of the nation and rejection of nationalist policy solutions. Ellison at once recognizes the distinct experiences of the black American community and the consequent political implications but rejects both the status quo circa 1952 of an ethnically ranked society and the separatist ambitions of nationalist organizations like the Black Muslims and the Universal Negro Improvement Association. In addition to the above aim of finding an adequate description of the nation and nationalism, this paper will seek to describe the process whereby the nation itself its produced and reproduced within the realm of literature with Ellison's *Invisible Man* as an example and object of analysis, as well as to uncover the ways that an author may suggest political solutions for a community based on its historic and socio-cultural circumstances.

## Chapter 1: From Fraternity to Activism

A level of ambiguity surrounds the concept of “nation” and all of its derivatives. The issues of distinguishing features—such as size, locality, sovereignty and language—that could potentially differentiate nations from other social constructs become immediately problematic upon inspection of what it is that the observer means to identify. In a sense, the nation is a political anomaly, in that the viewer can understand what is referred to by the word but cannot positively distinguish, based on universal criteria, what does and does not fit within the category. Moreover, what definition is put forward is likely to be based on the political experiences and perspectives of the observer, evidence of the nation as an object of political thought more than one of objective reality. More than being a rhetorical hurdle, the ability to either award or deny nation-ness to a particular group is, in the modern era, the ability to legitimize or delegitimize a political cause, making the label inherently polemical. As Benedict Anderson says: “nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time.”<sup>2</sup> Even the purest of attempts to arrive at a core value of the nation as a malleable socio-political phenomenon, a sort of allegory for a contextual and ideal political body, is itself polemical because it debases the claims of nationalists who would like not to see themselves as a participant in not one of a multitude of generic political events of this type, but rather as a member of something pure, historic, and just. With this in mind, it seems prudent to advance with hope not for setting definite parameters for nation-ness, but rather for divulging what can be said to be consistent among nations and nationalist movements

---

<sup>2</sup> Anderson, p. 3

and, more fundamentally, what it is that makes these consistencies valuable and informative in modern political discourses.

Seton-Watson admits at the outset of *Nations and States* that he is “driven to the conclusion that no ‘scientific definition’ of a nation can be devised”<sup>3</sup>. Historically, others have not shared his timidity in making assertions on the matter. For example, he quotes Joseph Stalin who required four characteristics of any population willing itself to nationhood: common language, common territory, common economic life, and common mental make-up.<sup>4</sup> These are not immediately disagreeable criteria, but become suspect when taken in their original context, having been deployed in an effort to discredit the Zionist assertion that the Jewish diaspora constituted a nation itself. Indeed, on consideration one can realize that none of the ambiguity of the nation is mitigated by these criteria, as each could be interpreted to fit the rhetorical, political aims of the observer as an individual. In fact, in many of the cases that the issue was raised during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the author in question sought to defend his own nation while “scientifically” discrediting the other, condescending from behind the guise of social-scientific expertise.<sup>5</sup> Anderson confirms the difficulty that has historically surrounded the topic, calling the nation an elusive item within liberal theory and an “anomaly” for Marxists.<sup>6</sup> Rather than conceding to difficulties, however, Anderson labels nation-ness and nationalism as “cultural artifacts of a particular kind” and encourages the

---

<sup>3</sup> Hugh Seton-Watson, *Nations and States*, 1977, p. 5

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 4

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 4

<sup>6</sup> Anderson, p. 3

reader to study and understand first, what historic concepts resulted in their emergence, and second, how and why it is that their very fluidity allowed these concepts to become “‘modular,’ capable of being transplanted...to a great variety of social terrains, to merge and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations.”<sup>7</sup>

Taking from these conceptions, we can begin to see nation-ness and nationalism as relatively wide-scale strategies of negotiating social organization. Seton-Watson says that “the two most generally sought aims of such movements have been independence...and national unity”.<sup>8</sup> Anderson does offer a definition of the nation, but as an intellectual item in itself and not as a means of determining which groups and movements do or do not constitute such things: “it is an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”<sup>9</sup> It is *imagined* because “most of the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members...yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion”; it is *limited* because it “has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations”; *sovereign* “because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm”; and *imagined as a community* because fraternity and equivalent membership is the defining

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 3-4

<sup>8</sup> Seton-Watson, p.3

<sup>9</sup> Anderson, p. 6

feature of the nationalist concept.<sup>10</sup> A few positive statements can be derived from these assertions:

The ultimate aim of nationalism is to create a plain of at least nominal commonality among a group of people situated together because of historic circumstance. As will be discussed later, most nationalist phenomena arise in reaction to an outside force perceived as a political, assimilationist or even existential threat to the community. In some cases, the community is rallied to preserve an existing political order (as in the case of the “official nationalisms” of the Russian czars) and in others, arguably in most, the community is banded in opposition to its political disenfranchisement (the typical colonial case). By its nature of being reactionary, imagined, and fluid, nationalism, not as a specific set of policy recommendations or cultural items in itself, can be divided into two spheres that continually interact and negotiate while they themselves are being continually renegotiated by members of the community: the *national consciousness* and the *nationalism thereof*.

The national consciousness is the socio-cultural domain within which a person may begin to imagine others as belonging and subsequently still others as being outsiders. It can, and often does, include items such as religious practices and beliefs, languages, historiographic and legal traditions and genetic inheritances, but can also include less notable yet still significant items like dress, etiquette, and culinary tradition.<sup>11</sup> Also crucial

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 6-7

<sup>11</sup> Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, ‘Culinary Nationalism’, *Gastronomica*. “France supplies the most striking example of a ‘culinary country,’ one where cuisine and nation are seen to coincide.” p. 102. The author goes on to describe how cookbooks are essential in establishing cultural norms of cuisine which are then available for reproduction and

to this process of limitation is a geographic domain, outside of which other nations may be allowed to exist in an equivalent manner. A definite territory also serves to act as an object of political will on which the community may exercise its sovereignty and as a cultural item in itself, often producing flora, fauna and geographic features that become closely associated with the population itself (the concept of the “motherland” will be important later). The territory serves as a bed or a point of localization of all that constitutes the nation itself. Finally, a process of negotiation must be established, as Anderson concedes that most individuals of a community are not likely to interact regularly (if at all) with the majority of other members. Here, literature solves some central problems in the construction of nations. It begins within a particular print language, limiting the number of imaginable people who will have access to that particular information as it exists: this concept is intensified by the dual forces of declining linguistic diversity and the emergence of statistics, each beginning around the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>12 13</sup> Second, it circumvents what are otherwise insurmountable boundaries of space and time to create communities that seem both ordered within the particular space of the print language’s occurrence and immemorial, in establishing a lineage of the language (and thus, the community) through the medium of history. Finally, it recursively bounds all of these factors together in a manner that is easily communicable to the reader

---

commentary for others within the community. No doubt, and as we will see later, literature of all stripes plays a crucial role in the definition of the community.

<sup>12</sup> See Anderson on the emergence of print capitalism, pages 37-46.

<sup>13</sup> Michel Foucault discusses the emergence of statistics as the conceptual roots of the individual as a unit within a malleable, finite social space. See his work *Security, Territory, Population*.

who is led in imagining spaces and people intimately tied to their own experiences. As Anderson says, the author is able to create a “world of plurals,” a “sociological landscape of a fixity that fuses the world inside the novel with the world outside.”<sup>14</sup> While certainly not all literature is bound to act explicitly in this way (surely no person in the Anglosphere feels a communal connection to Adams’ *Magrathea*) all literature, from novels to newspapers to political pamphlets, assumes an audience, relays or comments on certain linguistic and sociological norms, and is the product of linguistic, historic, and social inheritance.

The nationalism thereof, then, is the particular nationalist-political discourse of a community’s national consciousness and serves to direct these social forces towards a political end. The possible features of the nation’s political domain are tethered to and emergent from the constellation of cultural items and geo-spatial realities that govern the community’s existence in the first instance. That is to say that a culture with a strong historic emphasis on individuality is not likely to find socialism as an adequate solution to outside political pressures, as a society situated on a homeland with few natural barriers and a number of surrounding competitors is not likely make quick concessions on its security. Or better yet, the French language was never as essential component of Italian nationalist discourse despite the fact that many Italians within the social elite likely spoke some French. Certainly, the directing of discourse is the prerogative of social elites in each case: those among the literate, politically active class who through activism, authorship and personal talents negotiate with the wider community for communal self-conception

---

<sup>14</sup> Anderson, p. 30

and political solutions. However, those elites are limited in the possible perspectives and political solutions that they are able to convince of by what the community itself is able to find familiar and adequate and thus defensible on a visceral level. While it is fair to say that China would not be the same state today without Mao tse-Tung, it is equally fair to say that he was molded by the milieu of early-20<sup>th</sup> century China and given agency by his ability to convince his supporters of the causes of their unfavorable conditions of his knowledge of and ability to attain solutions.

With the principal hypotheses of this paper set, the proceeding sections will examine in turn on three basic domains of influence within the national consciousness: First, of territory as the setting for economic and defensive realities, as emerging from the interaction of internal and external political entities, and as the eventual, ideological bedrock that allows for the development of a corresponding intellectual space to be populated with all that is the nation. Second, of language as a practical barrier of group formation, as a vehicle for cultural consistency, and as the foundation of historic continuity fundamental to nationalist ideology. And third, of public institutions that direct social forces through the formation of communal structures based around commonality and ritual and inform the nation of its ideal character; these include religious, historic, customary, literary, and political institutions. The final section of this chapter will be dedicated to the impact of social and political elites in the construction of nationalist consciousness and political activity. These analyses, taken together, should form a set of strong and fluid hypotheses describing the typical origins, features, and functions of



nations and nationalist movement that will subsequently shed light on the issues of black Americans and the nation addressed in Ellison's novel.

### **Geography: The First Parameter**

Geographic determinism has become a four-letter-word in some circles. However, a broad reading of history seems to tell, though perhaps not universally, that geography is a sort of first among equals as a determining factor in the establishment and coloring of societies, all institutions being subject to the practical limits and obstacles emanating from the earth itself. Take the example successive Muscovy states in which, in response to their being positioned on a vast plain with few forest or rivers, "society had to be militarized and the central power had to be strengthened, more than in the smaller countries with more effective natural barriers."<sup>15</sup> "Geographical situation, military and economic opportunities, gave the peoples of the three regions [of Iberia] different political and social development" and facilitated separatist sentiments that persist today.<sup>16</sup> Before the colonial period, German was likely more widely spoken in geographic terms than was English because the former was centered along trade routes in geographically contiguous Europe and the latter isolated by a body of water.

But land also has symbolic importance, particularly so in the post-Westphalian world. To provide some perspective and context, it would be wise to start before the Westphalian conception and move towards modernity in the relation between geography

---

<sup>15</sup> Seton-Watson, p. 80

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 52

and political power, or more specifically, the single delineated territorial space and the single sovereign authority. Anderson says that pre-Westphalian states “were defined by centers, borders were porous and indistinct, and sovereignties faded imperceptibly into one another.”<sup>17</sup> The political make-up of Europe was dictated by the place of Latin as a “truth language,” being the language of the church and a *lingua franca* among the (mostly) literate dynastic regimes who, through shifting alliances and wars, continually negotiated political boundaries.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, for the majority of Europeans, allegiance to the church was likely more important than political justice. Robert Heilbroner describes feudal society as a system of economic and religious coercion wherein the large majority of Europe’s population was engaged in subsistence trading and farming under the debt and protection of local lords who in turn paid duties to more powerful sovereigns.<sup>19</sup> Essentially, claims to territory were circumstantial, with no concept of any *political* right of the sovereign to a defined territory: only, as it were, a *divine right* and an ability to maintain power through coercion and war. As Derek Croxton points out, the change from this system in which the church was a central authority to one wherein international norms and law dictated that states recognize each other’s sovereignty (defined as an external assumption about authority) was a gradual process that began largely with the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, but was incomplete until sometime later:

“The existence of sovereign states was...not in itself predictable based on the actions of any individual ruler, but a consequence of these actions when

---

<sup>17</sup> Anderson, p. 19

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 12-22.

<sup>19</sup> Robert L. Heilbroner, *The Making of Economic Society*, 1962, p.31-4.

applied across the whole international system. Therefore, rather than being an idea that was historically constructed and then applied, sovereignty emerges as an historic fact that was gradually recognized by statesmen and eventually acknowledged as reality.”<sup>20</sup>

This process of mutual-recognition was assisted and necessitated by a number of factors, the most general being the emergence of the modern state as an effective and centralized bureaucratic engine, as noted by Heilbroner, Foucault, and others.<sup>21</sup> As economic and military capacities grew in tandem with the development of international norms and print capitalism, absolutizing monarchies began to implement strategies of power maximization that involved, among other things, a system of uniform application of authority and force through the deployment of a professional bureaucracy as a means of managing the increasingly complex affairs of the state. In short, each formed a “unified apparatus of power, controlled directly by, and loyal to, the ruler.”<sup>22</sup> Here, Anderson defines and distinguishes what he considers the fundamentally different pilgrimages of the older gentry and the new bureaucrats. For a pre-Westphalian nobility, Christendom was a domain in itself, with Latin, the European Christian tradition, and status uniting a disparate aristocracies bounded by a gradual fade of Europe into north-central Asia the Islamic world. Correspondingly, their pilgrimages, or experiences of greater community, were undertaken to receive blessings from the center of European Christendom upon

---

<sup>20</sup> Derek Croxton, “The Peace of Westphalia of 1648 and the Origins of Sovereignty,” p. 570-1.

<sup>21</sup> Heilbroner, *The Making of Economic Society*; Foucault, *Security Territory, Population*.

<sup>22</sup> Anderson, p. 55

ascension to a position of power. Anderson contrasts these with those by later, secular officials of the state. By the time the absolutizing monarchs began to construct their massive apparatuses, a recruiting pool had emerged in the form of a non-noble, literate class who were not likely to have political designs of their own beyond a desire to earn favor from their employers. The need to establish interchangeability of these functionaries was apparent from the very nature of establishing uniformity and thus manageability, which led to the creation of uniform ranks and positions, establishing a set of common experiences among a new and growing class of civil servants. The principle effect of the construction, standardization, and exercise of these bureaucracies was the gradual solidification of territorial bounds and the acquaintance of the inhabitants therein to the formal systems of control emanating from the state. Over time, this, among other factors to be discussed later, led people to identify themselves not merely as Christians within Christendom or even subjects of a local nobleman, but as citizens within a well-formed and easily identifiable geographic entity defining their linguistic, political, and communal identity.<sup>23</sup> The task of defining and awarding significance to the geographic expanse of the state was then primarily the product of the sovereign's ability to assert and maintain that space.

Beyond the point of conception, the initial production of the territorial unit as legally defined and politically significant, follows the process of distributing political sentiment to the entirety of that territorial entity. That is, the reproduction of the sentiments of belonging and ownership and the tethering of cultural and political weight

---

<sup>23</sup> See Anderson chapters 3 & 4.

to the territory itself. The “printer-journalist” was initially an essentially American phenomenon during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as newspaper and pamphlet production became a quick and common means of day-to-day subsistence income generation for burgeoning printers in the New World.<sup>24</sup> The newspaper is an important item within the development of nationalist discourses because it cements the idea of a territorial unit within the mind of the reader that is significant to his or her identity: even today, from local papers to the New York Times, there is a designated space that the publication takes as its focus, everything else being classified generically either as “national” or as “world” news. Events within the locality are described to the reader as he or she is given assurance that those events are relevant because he or she and a limited number of other citizens are the components of that common spacial-communal domain.<sup>25</sup> The American colonies were not exceptional in their owning their territorial boundaries to the dictates of the then sovereign, but are unique in that the emergence of a national narrative that spoke commonly of the entirety of 13 independent territorial units eventually aided in the emergence of a united republic that would not, necessarily, have otherwise been so. Jack Green notes that by the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century certain colonies had become “pockets of approximate independence” while most enjoyed highly formed and efficient bureaucratic function.<sup>26</sup> No wonder, then, that once the revolutionary dust had settled, much of the conversation surrounding the post-colonial organization of the territories

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p. 61

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 61-3

<sup>26</sup> Jack P. Greene, “An uneasy connection: an analysis of the preconditions of the American Revolution, p. 32

was dominated by desires to maintain that independence. However, through the ability to imagine commonality among the various states, an agreement was eventually reached in the form the 1787 Constitution, which placed ultimate authority in the central government.

Similarly, Michael Skey says that “the nation is consistently defined and inhabited through the management of the physical environment, the consistent patterning of socio-spatial relations and a range of recurring material/symbolic features that often cannot be found in ‘other’ locales.”<sup>27</sup> The territory begins to represent a consistent and even plane of communal classification that serves to “introduce simplicity and order where there is complexity and near random variation.”<sup>28</sup> Further than this, by establishing his or her self as a rightful arbiter of the socio-spatial substance (authorized by official state enfranchisement) the individual begins to dictate claims to the same space. Put simply, the territory becomes a recognized domain for the exercise and preservation of a particular set of ethnic and cultural items, beyond which exist equivalent and equally legitimate cultural domains. However, it is necessary to preclude the understanding that territory and state recognition (in the form of citizenship or the state’s formal blessing for an individual to reside indefinitely within its territory) do not coincide with national identity. As will be discussed in some depth later in this work, black Americans achieved legal citizenship and nominally equal legal status long before they were permitted to enter the national discourse in a similar way. Other mixed-national states have had similar

---

<sup>27</sup> Michael Skey, “Boundaries and Belonging: Dominant ethnicity and the place of the nation in a globalizing world,” p. 106.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p.107.

issues, as in the case of Kurds who, particularly in Turkey, are subject to secondary citizenship and a curbing of ethnic rights, and in some post-Soviet states where, in a great irony, ethnic Russians have become partly economically and politically disenfranchised.<sup>29</sup>

It would be overly simplistic, however, to state that all modern states have their territorial roots in a single politically-determined historic-territorial body. In some cases, the issues of identity and commonality were tantamount to the rhetorical justifications, if not the real political motives, in the imagining and creation of new ethno-states. After a period of some contention for leadership in German-speaking Europe, the Prussian state through war and negotiation managed to consolidate a sizable portion of historic German territory and proclaimed a German Empire following victory in the Franco-Prussian War.<sup>30</sup> The Italian case is similar but distinct in that its leadership was comprised of journalists as well as statesmen.<sup>31</sup> Beginning in 1815, through resistance to occupying French and Austrian forces and diplomacy among the somewhat economically and linguistically diverse provinces of the Italian peninsula, the modern Italian state was mostly united by 1870.<sup>32</sup> Romanian and Greek nationalist had similar but less successful experiences with uniting their perceived homelands under single sovereign states. The justifications in each of these events were political and linguistic: the logic being that because a people were united principally linguistically but also culturally and historically, they deserved to be united within a homeland of their own sort of people, or more to the point, free from rule

---

<sup>29</sup> Rogers Brubaker, "Projects and processes of nationalization in post-Soviet states," p. 169-72

<sup>30</sup> Seton-Watson, p. 97

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. p. 104

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p. 104-07

by a sovereign how did not reflect their own identity. Consolidation was in response to political opportunity in all cases but most acutely in the German case, and in response to feelings of fraternity and dissatisfaction with the present regime(s) certainly in the cases of Italy, Romania, and Greece, but possibly in the case of the German state that were consolidated into the later German Empire. One last notable example is the Zionist cause, in which the need to establish a national homeland was, particularly after 1933, seen as an existential necessity. The first Aliya (or pilgrimage) may have taken place as early as the 1850s, but the movement gathered serious momentum after the pogroms of the 1890s, Theodor Herzl's authorship of *Der Judenstaat* (1896) and the commencement of the World Zionist Organization (1897).

As a quick summation, the conception of territory as the delineated and exclusive domain of a single sovereign entity emerged gradually from the conclusion of the Thirty Years War and the signing of a series of accords that became known as the Peace of Westphalia, beginning a process of establishing international norms and institutions to dictate the interactions of politically sovereign entities. This process was reinforced and made possible by the economic, technological and cultural expansions of the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods, which added new wealth and technologies of communication to the toolboxes of state apparatuses enabling them to create large bureaucracies as tools to enforce political authority over the lower nobility and citizens of well-defined territories. These new bureaucrats, often from non-aristocratic lineage, came to represent a new political force in Europe and its colonies, and would eventually grow to be the political rivals of the old sovereign class. Their political domains were often the



same defined territories in which they had exercised their political pilgrimages: the same spaces that would become many of the modern states recognizable today. While the justifications and circumstances for each case are unique—determination will be discussed later—all experience a sort of territorialization of the national culture: the territory comes to be seen as the bedrock and even source of the nation and culture associated therein.

### **Language and the Keys to Inclusion**

Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) said that “[the nation’s] language is its spirit and its spirit is its language.”<sup>33</sup> He is given credit for laying the foundations of the theories of linguistic determinism and linguistic relativism, which argue respectively that language has a determining effect on culture and that each language has an inherent and set perspective on the world. He and others assumed that without its own language, a nation would be an “absurdity...a contradiction in terms.” Indeed, their core principles were clearly enough stated: “language, blood, and soil.”<sup>34</sup> But why should this be so? What is it about language that awards such strong feelings of oneness to speakers, or conversely, of otherness to non-speakers? Monica Heller says that language is involved in the formation of ethnic identity in two fundamental ways: “First, it constrains access to participation in activities and to formation of social relationships...Second, as children spend more and more time together they share experience, and language is a central

---

<sup>33</sup>Stephen May, *Language and Minority Rights*, 2008, p. 57

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* p. 58

means of making sense out of that shared experience.”<sup>35</sup> Anderson relays the same understanding in more poetic terms:

“What the eye is to the lover—that particular, ordinary eye he or she is born with—language—whatever language history has made his or her mother tongue—is to the patriot. Though that language, encountered at the mother’s knee and parted with only at the grave, pasts are restored, fellowships are imagined, and futures are dreamed.”<sup>36</sup>

It is precisely because language is itself—as a mass of linguistic units embedded within a complex of grammar, idioms, and irregularities—a barrier that it becomes tethered to delineable spaces. Anderson describes in some depth the development of print capitalism and its impact on the political face of Europe. As was discussed in the last chapter, until the advent of first the printing press and later of print-capitalism, Latin united a linguistically diverse noble and clerical class extending across Europe. The explosion of printed materials after 1500 worked in tandem with the already stirring effects of the Reformation (which began the process of removing supreme authority from the church and allowing common people to interpret religious texts in their local vernacular) and the aforementioned processes of bureaucratic centralization (the desired efficiencies of which required interchangeable functionaries and documents and, thus, a standardized language) to create the effect of distilling localized vernacular markets into standardized languages that came to roughly coincide with the state-structures under

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p. 131

<sup>36</sup> Anderson, p. 154

which they grew.<sup>37 38</sup> Evidence of the growing importance of local vernaculars is found in the rapid development of linguistic standards therein around this time. The first alphabetical glossary of the English language was published by Robert Cawdrey in 1604.<sup>39</sup> L'Académie française published its first standardized volume in 1687, the compilation of which began in 1638.<sup>40</sup> Martin' Luther in 1530 bemoaned his lack of a "great stock of words" to employ in his translations, but found solace shortly thereafter when Petrus Dasypodius began modern German lexicography in 1535 by publishing his Latin-German dictionary.<sup>41 42</sup> As noted earlier, the growing body of literate non-nobility and the

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p. 37-8. Anderson cites Febvre and Martin's *The Coming of the Book*, p. 248-49: "As noted, at least 20,000,000 books had already been printed by 1500, signaling the onset of Benjamin's 'age of mechanical reproduction' ...as many as 200,000,000 volumes had been manufactured by 1600".

<sup>38</sup> As with the case of Spanish rule in Iberia, Hapsburg rule over the Balkans and Romania, and Russian rule of various linguistic minorities, this was by no means universally the case. The linguistic homogenizing effects of each state seem to have been contingent on 1) It's level of control over its particular territory, 2) Its ability to keep linguistic minorities under its command long enough for the homogenizing systems to take effect, and 3) The willingness of the state to enforce uniformity to begin with. Switzerland, France, and Russia have, in this regard, historically had very different approaches and successes.

<sup>39</sup> T. Starnes De Witt and Gertrude E. Noyes, *The English Dictionary from Cawdry to Johnson, 1604-1755*, p. xiv. Its full title is: *A table alphabeticall conteyning and teaching the true writing, and understanding of hard vsuall English wordes, borrowed from the Hebrew, Greeke, Latine, and French, &c. With the interpretation thereof by plaine English words, gathered for the benefit & helpe of ladies, gentlewomen, or any other unskilfill persons. Whereby they may the more easilie and better vnderstand many hard English wordes, vvhich they shall heare or read in scriptures, sermons, or elsewhere, and also be made able to vse the same aptly themselues*. A similar, non-alphabetic work had been published a few decades earlier.

<sup>40</sup> See l'Académie française webpage, under *L'institution: L'histoire: Les grandes dates*.

<sup>41</sup> William Jervis Jones, "Lingua Teutonum Victrix? Landmarks in German Lexicography, 1500-1700, p. 134.

<sup>42</sup> Amazingly enough, Martin Luther had finished his translation of the bible by the time Dasypodius' dictionary was published. Surely, he was a man dedicated to his work.

foundations of the modern bureaucratic state made education and the manufacture of works in vernaculars increasingly rewarding.<sup>43</sup>

Language development was particularly important in cases where the ruling class in a space was comprised of non-nationals, leaving the role of nationalist leadership to members of the intellectual professions.<sup>44</sup> In the Czech case, grammarians laid the ground work for a movement that would later be carried to fruition by capitalists and bureaucrats within the German regime, executing a kind of “bourgeois nationalism.”<sup>45</sup> The Romanian case, unique because of its Latin structure and largely Slavic vocabulary, was first taken up by priests within the Uniate church and later by a burgeoning capitalist class.<sup>46</sup> In the Greek case, Adamantios Korais was central in the systematization of the modern Greek literary language, the incorporation therein of both classic and modern vocabulary, the translation of many Enlightenment works into his new written Greek, and in re-introducing ancient Greek literature to its people.<sup>47</sup> In short, it would be difficult to

---

<sup>43</sup> Here, see Seton-Watson on the history of the development of literature in a number of domains. As relevant here: The German case is described between pages 92-3. The French are a particularly interesting case in that Seton-Watson’s asserts that they formed the first constructed European nation. The 1539 Edict of Villers-Cotterets made French the sole official language of the state we recognize today. French literature flourished during the Renaissance and become “the most perfect instrument of human speech and the language of all civilized men for some three hundred years.” p.48. For English, the route to the hegemony of the common language was through the gradual conversion of the nobility away from Norman French, beginning in roughly the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The language was flooded with French vocabulary, in 1362, English became the language of the courts and was thus officially sanctioned by the crown. Middle English had been born. p.28-30.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p. 430

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. p. 431

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. p. 432

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. p.112

understate the importance of Korais in the development of modern Greek. The cause was taken up largely by those outside of the domain of Ottoman control (like Korais himself in Paris) but increasingly by merchants from the Aegean islands who had managed to find wide exposure to capital and ideas.<sup>48</sup> It is important to note that the development of a capitalist class, because of the market's ability to facilitate literacy, individual self-conception and political envy, was equally important to that of developing a national language in most cases.

One of the most interesting sections of Anderson's work is in the second chapter, titled "Apprehensions of Time." This sections explain, in the context of the fragmentation of the religious community and the collapse of the legitimacy of monarchical dynasties, a shifting in the conception of time through this period of drastic political and linguistic change. As a starting point, Anderson explains the European Christian conception of time as "omnitemporal," or understanding that God has preordained all events and as such the horizontal relation of events through time is only partly relevant, with a vertical structure towards the divine explaining the course of historic events. Many people assumed that they must be near the end of time, as the second coming of Christ could not be predicted. These views are evinced further in the religious imagery of the time, which tends to depict historic characters with features and dress contemporary to the artists rendering them.<sup>49</sup> Contrast this with a modern concept of "homogeneous, empty time" filled with a consequentially connected chain of events stretching back to the boundaries of human

---

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. p. 433

<sup>49</sup> Anderson, p. 23-4. The author quotes Bishop Otto of Freising who refers to himself and others as "we who have been placed at the end of time." p. 23.

knowledge and even existence itself. Events within this chain come to correspond exactly to measures of temporal occurrence such as the clock and the calendar, fostering a concept of simultaneity in a different sense.<sup>50</sup> While the subject of temporality may not seem immediately relevant to that of nationalism, Anderson says that “the idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history.”<sup>51</sup>

While the scientific and philosophical advances of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment were likely responsible for this transition in concepts, its application to the issue of the nation emerged primarily in two forms: the newspaper and the modern novel.<sup>52</sup> Each fits a few conceptual criteria: 1) The aforementioned conception of time as homogeneous and empty; 2) The imagining by the author of a particular place and audience in which the work will be read; and 3) The use of a particular language to describe events taking place within a particular space. In the case of the newspaper, the reader can imagine that all other people within this space may be simultaneously reading these same words in this same language and within a certain time-frame relevant to the frequency of publication, and thus, a meaningful sense of community is established: an understanding that the consequences of the events in question affect totally this readership in real time. In the novel, something similar occurs, as the reader may read of the past or the future, but regardless, and even more so in the case of the former, there

---

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. p. 23-4

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. p. 26

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. p. 25

is a continuity established between themselves and those they read of and understand as occupying the same cultural, territorial and, by extension, temporal domains as themselves, as well as a fellow readership in a similar position. Thusly are formed the bases of the modern popular political state.<sup>53</sup>

Frantz Fanon said that “to speak is to exist wholly for the other...To speak means being able to use a certain syntax and possessing the morphology of such and such a language, but it means above all assuming a culture and bearing the weight of a civilization.”<sup>54</sup> To speak another language from that of the motherland is to be ignorant of that nation’s history, its literature, its customs, its traditions, and in many cases its etiquette. Indeed, historic evidence of the centrality of language in basic social functions and legal discourse abounds in the modern era of nationalist states. Rogers Brubaker documented the economic and political disenfranchisement of ethnic Russians in post-Soviet states after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Soon after independence, all of these states had adopted official policies promoting their national languages.<sup>55</sup> Seton-Watson describes the controversy set into motion when the Hapsburg monarchy faced the issue of naming an official language solely for the sake of practicality as well as the complexities of Russification that began under Czar Alexander III, to which language was also central.<sup>56</sup> <sup>57</sup> Michael Rosie collected a set of data that revealed accent alone was a statistically

---

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. p. 25-36

<sup>54</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 1-2

<sup>55</sup> Brubaker, “Projects and processes of nationalization in post-Soviet states” p. 169

<sup>56</sup> Given the expanse of the Hapsburg empire, the issue is dealt with at several points during *Nations and States*, but most notably in the sections on German (p. 91-101) and Hungarian (p. 157-169) nationalisms.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. p. 85-87

significant factor in acceptance into the Scottish national community.<sup>58</sup> In short, as language came to correspond more closely and uniformly with definable territorial spaces, it came also to correspond with particular cultures, to particular literature traditions, to specific economic domains, and even to political discourses. While all things attach themselves ultimately to the national space, the nation's language is the means to access all things within this space. The centrality of language to the nationalist discourses of a particular group seems to depend on context: for the Quebecois, language is central because it distinguishes them from the Anglophone majority. Conversely, in a number of the colonial revolutions, language was not a galvanizing point because it did not distinguish rebels from their colonial oppressors. This is not to say that in the case of the American or even some African colonies that the colonial language did not provide other practical and even cultural functions, as there are obviously now distinct literature styles associated with particular American states, but rather, as Stephen May says: "the language we speak is crucial to our identity *to the degree to which we define ourselves by it.*"<sup>59</sup>

### **The Church but not God?**

In *Grounds for Difference*, Rogers Brubaker offers three alternative modes for framing nationalism and religion as analogous but distinct phenomenon. This sort of comparison is particularly important in light of common yet paradoxical assumptions that nationalism

---

<sup>58</sup> Michael Rosie, "A' the bairns o' Adam?" p. 135

<sup>59</sup> May, author's italics, p. 135



simultaneously *brought about the demise of and embraced* religion and that it arrives at a particular secularism through semi-religious means.<sup>60 61</sup> The first of these analogies is that they may both function as modes of identification:

Ethnicity and nationalism...are ways of identifying oneself and others, of construing sameness and difference, and of situating and placing oneself in relation to others. Understood as perspectives on the world rather than things in the world, they are ways of understanding and identifying oneself, making sense of one's problems and predicaments, identifying one's interests, and orienting one's actions.<sup>62</sup>

Second, both are modes of social organization, "a way of framing, channeling, and organizing social relations...as more or less pervasive axes of social segmentation in heterogeneous societies, even without territorial concentration along religious, ethnic, or national lines."<sup>63</sup> Even territorially intermixed religious and ethnic communities may exist alongside one another in "separate, parallel institutional worlds," with their own domains of education, communication, and entertainment. In this way, religious and ethnic endogamy become of particular importance in replicating divisions between such separate institutions.<sup>64</sup>

Third, they may serve as a way of framing political claims: "The similarities are particularly striking insofar as claims are made for economic resources, political

---

<sup>60</sup> Anderson, p. 22

<sup>61</sup> Brubaker, p. 102

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. p. 104

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. p. 104

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. p. 104-105

representation, symbolic recognition, or cultural reproduction [institutional autonomy].” The religious or ethnic community serves as a self-referencing and self-preserving body within the political sphere that ensures the well-being of its members. As much as a religion *may* prescribe public policy based on exegeses, it always serves to distinguish one group from another in the public domain.<sup>65</sup>

Religion does not hinder nationalism, but often lends to it a structural foundation, an easily distinguished boundary in the form of the limits of the religious community, and often an ontological and ethical starting point necessary for the establishment of a legitimate statecraft. The introduction of movable, mass-produced type changed the Christian world by offering market competition to expensive and often errant manuscripts and by creating the possibility, particularly following the work of Luther and others, of divergence from the central routes of authority that had dominated Europe to that time. Observance of the steady erosion of the authority of the Catholic church from this point is what leads many to conclude that nationalism and religion are antithetically opposed. However, as is explained above, this is a misunderstanding of the way that religious institutions *may direct* political power and of the relation between political power and social institutions generally, of which the Catholic church was only one, albeit massively powerful. The death of linguistic diversity, the fragmentation of the church, and the emergence of a politically and economically powerful non-aristocratic class did not take Europe away from Christ, but gave it alternative channels towards divinity, towards education, and towards power.

---

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. p. 106

Charles Kurzman examines through four case studies what makes religious movements effective in the processes of social movements, explained basically by two variable blocks: *organizational opportunity* and *organizational movement*. He cites Doug McAdam who specified four “operationalizable [*sic*] dimensions of the concept” of organizational opportunity: “(1) relative openness of the institutionalized political system; (2) instability of elite alignments; (3) presence of elite allies; and (4) the state’s reduced capacity or propensity for repression.”<sup>66</sup> The second variable block is organizational movement, defined as “the application of organizational resources—physical, financial, and human—to social movement activities.” Organizational adjustments in this block take place along three axes: the percentage of organizational resources devoted to a case; the particular resources devoted to a cause; and the relationship among leaders in the form of tolerance for intra-institutional diversity of thought.<sup>67</sup> In short, this is a sort of *windows theory* for competing social institutions: how susceptible is the state to instability and revolution and how willing and able is the organization in question to devise and execute a strategy of social revolution?

Take for example the origins of the current Iranian regime. In the decades prior to the Iranian revolution, the Shi’a clergy was anything but revolutionary, its leadership at one point putting Ayatollah Khomeini under house arrest for inciting revolutionary sentiment—this of course before his exile from Iran all together.<sup>68</sup> In response to the

---

<sup>66</sup> Charles Kurzman, “Organizational Opportunity and Social Movement Organization: A Comparative Analysis of Four Religious Movements”, p. 25

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* p. 27

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* p. 36

repression of their political sentiments, Khomeini and his followers built up alternative networks within and below that of the mainstream Shi'a clergy, growing stronger still when leadership among the ulema waned, and eventually amassing enough political and institutional power to take control first the clergy itself and later the state apparatus as the government collapsed. From their new positions of authority, based on institutional capacity and Khomeini's revolutionary credentials, they were able further to consolidate political and clerical authority, purging the government and the ulema of opposition.<sup>69</sup> Thus, the organization that would become the foundation of the Islamist regime was able to take effective command of post-revolutionary Iran in large part because of their establishment of a network of "mosques, meeting halls, prayer meetings," and later, a set of publications, all of which allowed them to organize more effectively and on a wider scale than other potential inheritors of the state.

While the Iranian revolution would seem to be a *most likely* case study in the above hypothesis, Kurzman examines cases from Latin America, Burma, and most relevantly to this work, in the Southern United States, in all of which religious structures played a crucial role in the directing of revolutionary forces.<sup>70</sup> Seton-Watson also affirms the importance of the church as a sort of revolutionary haven in several examples, most notably in the Romanian and Greek independence movements.<sup>71</sup> It is notable that in these examples, church leaders themselves were often not at the forefront of the political

---

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. p. 37-39

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. p. 27-30

<sup>71</sup> See the sections in *Nations and States* on Romania (particularly pages 176-78 and 430) and Greece (particularly pages 112-13).

revolutions, but rather the church provided privileged and protected status for clerics who were first educated by the church and later able to spend time studying independently, contributing to the intellectual wealth of their communities, and often developing political perspectives competing with those of the aristocracy. Again, Martin Luther comes to mind as an example of the impact innovators within religious organizations may have in the wider political culture. Thus, the church does not need to be at the helm of revolution to offer a haven for intellectuals or channels of communication for revolutionaries. Nor would it be wise to discount the importance of religious imagery, language, and sentiment in many revolutions.<sup>72</sup> That is, just as it would be imprudent to suggest that because a political movement uses the resources of the church that it is a religious movement, it would be equally so to say that no religious artefacts would be carried into the political realm by revolutionaries and patriots raised in, educated by, and assisted by the church. Easily identifiable examples, as Anderson notes, most often arise through the artistic media of literature, poetry, and song. Think of the American Pledge of Allegiance, made to a flag representing a state legally distinct from religious influence and yet invoking the blessing of an omniscient creator; of the English national anthem and its frequent calls to the creator to protect the monarch; or of the very character of the State of Israel as a Jewish and Democratic State.<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>72</sup> Anderson, page 147 as a brief example.

<sup>73</sup> The remarkable history of organization among the European Jewish diaspora around the common bond of religious fraternity is deserving of its own space, but provides excellent evidence for the proposed hypothesis. For some commentary on the negotiations around national identity within the early Zionist movement, see Yitzhak Conforti, "Ethnicity and the boundaries in Jewish Nationalism".

A conclusion can be easily drawn: the impact of the religious community in any national movement is contextual, contingent upon its own internal organizational capacities, its willingness or ability to foster revolutionary thought, and the relative power of external organizations. Its presence among the population will determine to what degree its imagery, ethics, and ontology are references during the political mobilization and will determine its ability to unify and distinguish the national body. Thus, nationalist movements as no exception, the effectiveness of political mobilization is determined organizational strength and appeal.

### **The National Consciousness and the Nationalism Thereof**

Nationalism has to this point been described as the interaction among three basic categories of phenomenon within the public-political sphere: the fixation of communal features to a territorial domain, or rather, the *territorialization*, so to speak, of a society and a culture; the creation of various print languages or “unified fields of communication below Latin [in the European case] but above the spoken vernaculars” to use Anderson’s description, or put another way, the death of human linguistic diversity generally and the distillation of broad communities therein; and finally, the use of social organizations, most often in the form of religious institutions, to direct and negotiate the use of resources in pursuit of political goals.<sup>74</sup> These are not necessarily, however, the defining features of nationalism. As noted above, both Anderson and Seton-Watson note the inherent difficulty in establishing any sort of a “checklist.” Anderson’s conception can be roughly

---

<sup>74</sup> Anderson, p. 44

understood as the establishment or reordering of relations among concepts of fraternity, temporality, and power: fraternity meaning the creation of an even plane of equal citizens; temporality meaning first, the recognition of time as homogeneous and empty and second, the imagining of that time as being filled by the national community, extending backwards through a continuous chain of events that culminate in the present; and power as the engineering and realization of a statecraft that seeks to protect the interests of the nation. Rogers Brubaker, however, can be summarized as describing the nation as the relation between state, territoriality, and culture. This conception seems to put the state itself, or rather the organizing elite, at the helm, somewhat in opposition to the more “organic” model of Anderson. Thus, in addition the earlier description of the nation as “inherently limited” and “sovereign,” we can say that it is also a means of ordering space, power, and social structures. Anderson’s and Brubaker’s descriptions are distinct, but none-the-less related and possibly only divergent in their emphasis on one side of causality or another. With this in mind we can see how territory, language, and social structures are not in themselves the distinct markings of nationalist movements, but rather are common means to that end. Each is a practical boundary assisting in the limitation of the group, the establishment of meaningful relations therein, and of the directing of that fraternity as a form of communal will. Indeed, it is often oppression or the perception thereof that inspires the community to band together in an act of reorganization.<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup> In this point is where *Nations and States* is one of if not the most comprehensive and informative works on the subject of nationalism. While Seton-Watson notes that particularly in the French and English cases, national consciousness grew up over the

With that in mind, another division within each of these domains needs to be addressed. This is the division between what can be called the *national consciousness* and the *nationalism thereof*. The term “national consciousness” comes from Seton-Watson who describes it as when a “significant” number of people in a community think of themselves as constituting a nation or when the behavior of that community would indicate that a nation has been formed.<sup>76</sup> There is some obvious ambiguity in this assessment: First, what constitutes a “significant” number? A simple majority of the total community? A simple majority of the politically active segments there-in? Second, how can a community have achieved nationhood without explicitly recognizing itself as having done so? If nation-ness is a private, self-description on the part of a community, how can it be externally imposed? However, none of these ambiguities are inconsistent with the hypotheses considered to this point but are rather only affirmative of the uncertainty concerning the threshold between the nation and other lower-order forms of social

---

course of centuries and somewhat more “naturally” than other, later movements. That is to say, they did not nationalize in response to another self-constructing nationalist movement. Rather, before the linguistic and philosophical shifts of the 16<sup>th</sup> century onward, England had established a sort of proto-nation through the establishment of common legal discourses and certainly also by the hegemony of the Crown (see page 26); France had managed something similar by the historic dominance of the Parisian monarchy and, beginning during the reign of Louis XI, the cultural and political consolidation of the modern French state (see page 46-48. Most later movements—from the Russian “official nationalism” meant to curb political dissent to the colonial brand meant to cast off European oppression—were in response to the political, cultural, and economic disenfranchisement of the imagined community.

<sup>76</sup> Seton-Watson, p. 5



construction as objective phenomenon.<sup>77</sup> This work will make use of a slightly different interpretation of that phrase based on Seton-Watson original description.

To begin with, as noted earlier, the size of the nation is not of immediate concern: both Cherokee and Chinese people can have their nation-ness safely recognized.<sup>78</sup> Second, Seton-Watson's distinction between those actively thinking themselves as constituting a nation and those who are said constitute one in outside observation implies that the nation may exist in two states: mobilized and dormant. The mobilized nation is one that has experienced a political awakening or has come to recognize those aspects of commonality among its constituents and used their agency to put its political will into effect. The dormant nation has the potential, the commonality of constituency, to become politically directed, but has not yet done so. It can, however, be recognized externally as a nation from the perspectives of other peoples who do themselves belong to other nations. So, as ambiguous, unsatisfying, and possibly even incomplete as Seton-Watson's notion of national consciousness is, it fits well within the understanding described to this point. It also implies that the nation is, in the first instance, constituted of those aspects that would make it recognizable either from the inside or the out, making

---

<sup>77</sup> In fact, Tom Nairn refers to nationalism as "the pathology of modern developmental history, as inescapable as 'neurosis' in the individual, with much the same essential ambiguity attaching to it, a similar built-in capacity for descent in to dementia, rooted in the dilemmas of helplessness thrust upon most of the world (the equivalent of infantilism for societies) and largely incurable." Anderson, p. 5

<sup>78</sup> According to the South Carolina's Information Highway, the total population of the Cherokee nation within the United States is around 317,000: <http://www.cherokee.org/AboutTheNation.aspx>. Most estimated put the population of the People's Republic of China around 1.38 billion, not including the population of contested territories nor those of the Chinese diaspora: <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/china-population/>.

political mobilization possible only in the second instance. This, then, is what we can refer to as the national consciousness, or rather, the potential thereof: those features and habits that may lead a community to conceive of itself as a single socio-political body extending through time. These are the “objective” national traits *in-and-of themselves*, so to speak. The mere fact, apart from political, “subjective” interpretation, of common territory, language, religion, historic tradition, etc., as much as it may be perceived to exist.

The second portion then is the “nationalism thereof,” the state of mobilization, or the particular nationalist political conclusion reached through negotiation within a community. The term is not found in any of the literature cited to this point. It describes the interaction between the national consciousness (as described above) and political elites who direct these social forces by making reference to those potential points of unity among the nation itself in an effort to attain political goals. It is important to note that these political goals are themselves the negotiated wills of these controlling elites (in the non-conspiratorial sense) and not the inevitable products of the nation itself. For example, some might argue that Chinese civilization has always been inclined towards authoritarianism, and while it is not this paper’s aim to make any assertions nor refutations concerning that position, it is arguable that the People’s Republic of China would not have come into being had it not been for first, the particular political climate of that time and second, the leadership of Mao Tse-Tung.<sup>79</sup> Or had it not been for the

---

<sup>79</sup> For an excellent biography on the late statesman, see Dick Wilson’s *The People’s Emperor Mao*, 1979.

centralizing policies of the French Crown beginning in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, is it not reasonable to assume that the modern French language and state would not have taken their present form?<sup>80</sup> Had L'Académie française not managed to attain hegemony in French lexicology, is it possible that multiple "Frenches" could have surfaced in the same sense that there are multiple "Spanishes" in Iberia? Here again, Seton-Watson's work is of immense value as it tracks the interactions of political and social elites as the crafters of nationalist movements.

### **Summary**

We have, then, an admittedly concise but hopefully effective conception of nationalism from a social-scientific perspective. Anderson says that the nation became possible as a construct following the erosion of the impact of three cultural conceptions: 1) That particular "truth-languages" like Latin and Arabic offered privileged access to ontological truth; 2) That society was naturally centered around high political centers in the form of monarchs and high clergy; and 3) A "conception of temporality in which cosmology and history were indistinguishable, the origins of the world and of men essentially identical."<sup>81</sup> The new, popular community is inherently bounded by geography, over the gradient of which human linguistic, cultural, and ethnic diversity take place. It is not that any of these categories are irredeemable within the nationalist context, but that a defined space must be created in order to fulfill the group forming

---

<sup>80</sup> Seton-Watson, p. 47.

<sup>81</sup> Anderson, p. 36

*modus operandi* of the nationalist endeavor. This delineation is usually accomplished by either a conception of where a population—distinguished by some central feature such as language or distinct culture—is localized or by the state’s assertion of sovereignty within defined borders. Language provides the community with a semi-exclusive means of communication, accessible only by those trained from birth or who have chosen to dedicate a considerable amount of time to study. Through literature and newspapers, language re-affirms the legitimacy of territorial, ethnic, and cultural boundaries and allows the nation a window into the history of its language and thus of itself. Social organizations, most typically in the form of religious institutions, serve to direct social resources towards political means but also to distribute institutional artefacts throughout the community that later serve as cultural items of reference, in the case of religions, loaning imagery and ethics to the nation. These features, in their “object selves,” are later directed by social and political elites who negotiate and implement political aims, ideally in the service of the nation itself. Finally, as Ted Robert Gurr says: “communal and national identities become more salient in response to external challenges, whereas they weaken when the utilities of integration into larger communities increase.”<sup>82</sup> Thus, nationalist consciousness is mobilized as a response to some real or perceived external adversity.

As stated above, that process of negotiation is the central concern of this work. It is not often so (if ever) that a single, charismatic leader arises in a political vacuum to direct the will of an ailing society. The typical direction of politics rather seems to be an

---

<sup>82</sup> Ted Robert Gurr, “Why Minorities Rebel: A Global Analyses of Communal Mobilization and Conflict since 1945, p. 162

often ugly battle for status among elites that necessitates the accumulation of communal support: even dictators need functionaries. And as noted above, it seems apparent that these processes of negotiation take place largely within the newspaper and the novel: in a sense, newspapers and novels are technologies of national construction.

An adequate approach to the study of nationalist discourse negotiation within newspapers would be beyond the practical limits of this work: the rigors of developing a quantitative model of discourse analysis alone would constitute months of work for an undergraduate, to say nothing of developing the above hypotheses of nationalism and combing the material itself.<sup>83</sup> The novel, however, presents a much more manageable and definite object of examination. As print, it can more effectively traverse the national-level bounds of space and time than an individual. It may select a setting with which certain readers may feel attached and understand as being foreign to others. It may use certain colloquialisms that define further the group boundaries within a macro-language itself. It may call on imagery or allusions specific to a group's beliefs or history. It may lead the reader to imagine the characters therein as representations of his or herself, as surrogates for his or her family or community: in short, the novel has the potential, in its access to creative license and emotional matter, to comment on or even construct the nation, and thus, to make compelling suggestions as to its character or even desires. As the novel is a standard commodity, the reader understands that others within his or her community may read this same material in this exact manner, and thus, the novel in the

---

<sup>83</sup> For a rewarding if incendiary work on the media culture and the inescapability of bias, see Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent*, 1988.

second instance becomes a piece itself within that community that may be later invoked as the community comments on itself. This gives literature a very powerful position in regard to the nation. As will hopefully be shown in the next chapter, Ralph Ellison seems to have created a work of just this magnitude in *Invisible Man*, a novel that comments extensively on the private and political lives of black Americans and seeks to reconstruct and negotiate the political discourses in motion at the time of its writing, quite significantly just before the outset of the Civil Rights Movement.

## Chapter 2: From Tuskegee to Harlem

The intention of this work is not to show how effective a particular piece of literature is in negotiating a nationalist discourse, but rather to show in what ways literature can lead the reader to imagine the national community and then to accept a particular political conclusion as a result of that conceptualization. Ellison's *Invisible Man* is an excellent object of study in this regard for two reasons: The first is the peculiar place of black Americans in the general political and cultural milieu of the United States at the time that the novel was written and published. The second is that *Invisible Man* deals directly with both the subjects of the common experiences of the black community—represented through those of an un-named protagonist—and with the political circumstances thereof, played out in the observations and conclusions that the protagonist draws as he navigates the tumultuous landscapes of black education, employment, and politics. The narrator traverses and references defined geographic spaces, uses and describes a particular English vernacular, and makes reference to religious imagery, historic events and social realities that define what, in the author's vision, it was to be black in America at that time. Not only this, but the narrator deals directly with characters who serve as obvious surrogates for historic leaders in the black American community—namely, Ras the Destroyer as a proxy for Marcus Garvey and the ambiguous Founder for Booker T. Washington. Thus, Ellison seeks not only to construct the black community as a setting for fiction, but includes relevant points and figures within existing political discourse in order to substantiate conclusions on the future of black politics and community, offering a most likely case scenario for the hypothesis that

elites use literature as a means of imagining communities and negotiating political aims. In Anderson's terms, Ellison and others create "causal progression...from the 'interior' time of the novel to the 'exterior' time of the reader's everyday life [giving a] hypnotic confirmation of the solidarity of a single community."<sup>84</sup>

The following sections will serve to substantiate these assertions. First, they will deal with the objective, measurable reality faced by the black American community before around 1965. For the sake of brevity, it will discuss major legislative and judicial events concerning the rights of black Americans and a limited number of statistically measurable markers of inclusion within the broader society. Second, they will examine the constructed community within Ellison's work and compare it to that evinced by relevant legal events, statistics, and academic study. Third, they will discuss the political aims of Ellison's work, which will emerge by comparing the rhetoric of the novel to the political realities that the author evokes. These successive analyses and comparisons should lead to substantial evidence, in light of the above hypotheses of nationalism, of the potential of literature as a technology of nationalist negotiation and an introductory, if admittedly rudimentary, model of analysis into such literary constructions.

### **The Case for Black American National Consciousness**

The old adage of the American Melting Pot is still used to convey a national self-conception of the United States as a mass of immigrants. As Morison and others say, "all had to uproot themselves from Old World homes, break away from familiar folkways, and

---

<sup>84</sup> Anderson, p. 27



adjust themselves to a new environment and new institutions in a New World.”<sup>85</sup> Many did just that during the decades after the Civil War: Between 1901-10 alone, 8,795,386 people were legally admitted into the United States, 44.6% of whom came from Northern and Western Europe (the vast majority from Ireland and England, many more from Scandinavia and Germany) and 51.9% from Southern and Eastern Europe (mostly from Italy, Poland, and the Ukraine). In total, between 1861-1930, just under 32.7 million people were legally admitted into the United States from Europe and Russia.<sup>86</sup> That is approximately 103% of the total U.S. population of 1860.<sup>87</sup> The Act to Prohibit the Importation of Slaves was passed on 2 March, 1807 and went into effect on 1 January, 1808, the earliest date permissible under the Constitution.<sup>88</sup> Immigration from Africa between this date and 1950 seems to have been marginal. In 1950, the total population had risen to 150,216,110, roughly 10% (15,026,675) of which were “Negro” and 0.47% (711,070) were “Other races.”<sup>89</sup>

What existed then was an ethnically diverse United States, though still overwhelmingly populated by people identifying as white. Within that block of some 89% of the population were a number of ethnicities and nationalities, evidence of which can be seen above. Particularly for the non-English speaking segments, what could be

---

<sup>85</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, Henry Steele Commager, & William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Growth of the American Republic, Volume II*, 1980, p. 103.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* p. 107-08.

<sup>87</sup> 1860 United States Census, p. iv.

<sup>88</sup> “An Act to Prohibit the Importation of Slaves into any Port or Place Within the Jurisdiction of the United States, from After the First Day of January, in the Year of our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and Eight”, United States Congress, passed 2 March, 1807.

<sup>89</sup> 1950 United States Census, p. 1-172

considered an easy transition into American society was not the norm, but formal means of discrimination appear to have been limited to special circumstances, and where existent, directed primarily at black Americans.<sup>90</sup> It is possible that the viciousness of these policies were in proportion, so to speak, to the size of the black population and that should some other ethnic group have been present in similar numbers that more formal, pronounced, and widespread discrimination would have taken place.<sup>91</sup> The fact does stand, however, that black Americans faced the most widespread, institutionalized, and brutal forms of discrimination. While the Civil Rights Act of 1875 took measures to ensure the fair treatment of black Americans, the Supreme Court ruled in 1883 that Congress had no power under the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to regulate citizens' prejudiced behavior, and in 1896, the *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling opened the South for Jim Crow laws that would encourage harsh segregationist practices for decades.<sup>92</sup> The 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution prohibited the barring of citizens from exercising voting rights on the basis of race, and yet literacy tests and poll taxes persisted until the passage of the 24<sup>th</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup> Engerman and Sokoloff note that at least in regard to voting restriction, a good measure of a group's standing in society, literacy tests were enacted in different regions as a means of disenfranchising regional target groups, namely black Americans in the South, Chinese immigrants in the West, and non-Anglophone and illiterate European immigrants in at least Connecticut and Massachusetts; "The Evolution of Suffrage Institutions in the New World, p. 907.

<sup>91</sup> As one example, "An Act to Execute Certain Treaty Stipulations Relating to Chinese," commonly known as the Chinese Exclusion Act, passed on 6 May 1882, was but a piece of the historic discrimination that East Asian people faced, particularly in the Western states and territories. It made the harboring of Chinese laborers a misdemeanor and made citizenship inaccessible. In at least some unfortunate circumstances, a person did not have to be a Chinese national to be denied citizenship under the law, as described in Kathryn Schulz's report on the life of Zarif Khan, a.k.a. "Hot Tamale Louie".

<sup>92</sup> Morgan J. Kousser, "Jim Crow Laws," p. 470

Amendment just under 94 years later.<sup>93 94</sup> A string of Supreme Court Cases culminating in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954, 1955) were responsible for gradually eroding boundaries between “separate but equal” institutions for black and white Americans, but the practice was not formally done away with until the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.<sup>95</sup>

As noted above by Brubaker, endogamy is a strong indicator of the level of openness between social groups. Particularly when anti-miscegenation laws are enacted, the dominant ethnic group can be said to have institutionalized the exclusion of other ethnicities from full interaction in society. All but 12 states at one time had such laws, eight of which had repealed them before 1900, 14 repealed after 1900 but before *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), and 16 states maintained their laws until the 1967 ruling that nationally legalized interracial marriage.<sup>96 97</sup> Fryer notes that as of 1960, only around 0.05% of white Americans were married to someone of another race. Even by the year 2000, the rate had only climbed to around 0.4%.<sup>98</sup>

---

<sup>93</sup> 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment ratified on 3 February, 1870; 24<sup>th</sup> Amendment 23 January, 1964.

<sup>94</sup> Engerman and Sokoloff, p. 907

<sup>95</sup> “Civil Rights Act”, approved 2 July, 1964

<sup>96</sup> *Loving v. Virginia*, decided 12 June, 1967. Ruled that the prevention of marriages based solely on the basis of racial classification was in violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

<sup>97</sup> Roland G. Fryer Jr., “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner? Trends in Interracial Marriage Over the 20<sup>th</sup> Century”, p. 74. Not surprisingly, some of the states featured in this last category were Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* p. 76-78. Specifically, 0.1% of white men and 0.2% of white women had married a black partner by the year 2000.

Level of housing integration is another strong measure of inclusion in society, the supposition being that ethnic groups who live near each other can better imagine themselves as part of the same community. In 1900, most black people lived in a state that was at least one-third black and, according to the Index of Dissimilarity, nearly 70% would have needed to shift their county of residence to achieve even racial distribution.<sup>99</sup> An index above 60% is thought to represent “extremely high segregation.”<sup>100</sup> As of 1950, about 51% of black Americans lived in just eight states: South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, and New York, making up on average around 28% of each state’s total population (but as much 38.8% in the case of South Carolina and 45.3% in the case of Mississippi). Between 9-10% lived in either New York or Chicago alone.<sup>101</sup> Estimates for the year 1990 range from around 70% index dissimilarity to 76%, and for the year 2000 stand around 66%.<sup>102</sup> The metropolitan areas present the worst-case scenario in regard to segregation. As of 1990, major cities maintained dissimilarities of up to 88%.<sup>103</sup> As evinced above, housing segregation remained a problem even after the 1967 Civil Rights Act prohibited housing discrimination based on race, but

---

<sup>99</sup> Douglass S. Massey, “Residential Segregation and Neighborhood Conditions in U.S. Metropolitan Areas”, p. 393

<sup>100</sup> David R. Williams & Chiquita Collins, “Racial Residential Segregation: A Fundamental Cause of Racial Disparities in Health”, p. 405

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. p. 138-39. However, it should be noted here that on these pages, populations are listed by city in “total” and “non-white” columns, meaning that black Americans are grouped with those of other ethnicities. However, based on the data from page 1-106, it is safe to assume that most of these people are black. This considered, the figure above is likely closer to the lower figure than the higher.

<sup>102</sup> Williams and Collins offer the higher figure for the year 1990 in this case; Massey the lower for 1990 and the figure for the year 2000.

<sup>103</sup> Massey, p. 397

was, as could be expected, much more pronounced before that time. Albert A. Simkus finds in a study charting changes in occupational and racial segregation between 1950-1970 that race was dramatically more strongly correlated with segregation than occupation.<sup>104</sup> It should be noted here that white discrimination is not the only cause for the concentration of black people in certain areas, especially in the case of metropolitan areas, and that people seem generally to enjoy being around people who they see as being like themselves. While the culture of segregation and economic suppression that gave rise to these communal clusters should not be disguised in any way, what makes a community is not only proximity, but also fraternity and commonality of experience. The important thing in any scenario is how individuals and communities are shaped by these external factors.

Regarding a particular black American vernacular, Sekimoto and Brown cite John L. Austin who theorized:

the performativity of linguistic utterances...function as a form of action rather than simply describing or making statement about reality. In this view, speaking is a social act through which we accomplish certain material, relational, and political effects and consequences...The act of speaking is a form of stylized repetition of social acts.<sup>105</sup>

---

<sup>104</sup> Albert A. Simkus, "Residential Segregation by Occupation and Race in Ten Urbanized Areas, 1950-1970," p. 87

<sup>105</sup> Sachi Sekimoto & Christopher Brown, "A Phenomenology of the Racialized Tongue: Embodiment, Language, and the Bodies that Speak", p. 101.

The authors describe in fascinating detail how language is as much a physical product, relying on body language and linguistic mechanics, as it is a product of syntax, lexicon, and sound: “BEV [Black English Vernacular] maintains micro-linguistic patterns combining elements of rhythm, resonance, phonation, vocal quality, and pitch that could not be easily duplicated.”<sup>106</sup> They reference a number of authors who have studied the intricacies of BEV—including Gwendolyn Brooks, Maya Angelou, and Alice Walker—and hint at the origins of the vernacular in the speech of slaves attempting to decipher the languages of their captors.<sup>107</sup> The authors’ descriptions of linguistic communities and of code-switching based on environment imply that BEV, indeed all localized irregularities of language, result from the sociological and political aspects of language and are, in the case of black Americans, maintained as a result of social and spacial segregation and as a means of conveying communal identity and environmental awareness.<sup>108</sup>

The Linguistic Study of American says that term “Ebonics” was coined by a group of black scholars in 1973 as a means to avoid the somewhat crass term then in use, “Nonstandard Negro English.” Serious study only began in the 1960s, but the dialect did not receive wide attention outside of the linguistic community until the “Ebonics controversy” of 1996, wherein the Oakland (CA) School Board acknowledged BAV as the primary language of the majority of its students and attempted to adjust its curriculum appropriately. BEV includes its own lexicon, often assigning new meaning to words from standard English; its own phonetics, marked most notably by the omission or

---

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.* p. 113

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.* p. 112-13

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.* p. 112 & 116-18

transformation of consonants and the elongation of vowels; and a distinctive and consistent grammar, most notably featuring the omission of third person be-verbs (reminiscent of Semitic languages) and the “invariant be,” which refers to actions that occur regularly and not only once. The LSA says that the origins of the dialect are some matter of controversy. The orthodox position seems to be that it is simply a non-standard English dialect, but some scholars contest that its similarity to West African and Caribbean English dialects point to its roots in West African languages and the linguistic melting pot that was the American colonial period in the Caribbean. The organization includes on its website list of scholarly works on the linguistic intricacies of BEV.<sup>109</sup>

This brings us to the matter of social institutions like religion. Pew Research Center said that as of 2009, 75% of all Americans identified as Christians, a combined 68% of which were either “Evangelical Protestant,” “mainline Protestant,” or Catholic. Conversely, 83% of black Americans identified as Christians and were significantly less likely to identify as either of the previous three categories. Rather, 59% attended “historically black Protestant churches.” Black Americans are also more likely to attend service regularly, pray daily, and to claim absolute certainty regarding the existence of God.<sup>110</sup> The important thing to note here would be the durability that these distinctions have had over time. Pew identifies historically black churches as those affiliated with groups like the National Baptist Convention (NBC) the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC). As the name of the Pew category implies, these institutions have been in

---

<sup>109</sup> Linguistic Society of America, “What is Ebonics? (African American English)”

<sup>110</sup> Pew Research Center, “A Religious Portrait of African Americans”, 2009

operation for some time: The NBC met for the first time in 1880.<sup>111</sup> The AMEC was formed around 1787 for the precise reason that black worshipers were being denied space in white churches.<sup>112</sup> The Association of Religion Data Archives does offer some insights as to the history of membership in particular religious institutions in the United States in the form of the Census of Religious Bodies reports commissioned by the USCB, but much of the data is ambiguous and coded and thus difficult to meaningfully interpret, and as the website says, the reports are censuses of religious organizations, not of individuals. Thus, no data accounting for religious practice by ethnicity seems to exist.<sup>113</sup> An extensive search may turn up either the codes for interpreting the 207 religious organizations coded in the report or for an independent survey of black religious practices over time.<sup>114</sup> However, it seems reasonable for the purposes of this paper to assume that the cases of the NBC and AMEC as well as the segregationist practices in place in other social institutions until around 1964 would indicate that black Americans would necessarily have formed their own religious institutions and thus, over time, would have developed institutionally distinct practices and perspectives. Evidence of this persists in the Pew study, the tradition of gospel music, and the tradition of black oration, abundant in popular culture and discussed by Ellison himself.<sup>115</sup>

---

<sup>111</sup> National Baptist Convention, "History of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.", <http://www.nationalbaptist.com/about-us/our-history/index.html>.

<sup>112</sup> African Methodist Episcopal Church, "Our History", <https://www.ame-church.com/our-church/our-history/>.

<sup>113</sup> The Association of Religion Data Archives, "U.S. Church Membership Data", <http://www.thearda.com/Archive/ChState.asp>.

<sup>114</sup> The Bureau of the Censuses, "Churches and Church Membership in the United States, 1952 (States)

<sup>115</sup> Examples to be discussed in the following sections.



Thus, without descending too deeply, we are given a rough picture of the status of black Americans in the United States until around 1965. Even to the year 2000, black-white marriage has stayed remarkably low, indicating that there is still some degree of cultural separation or even group pressure not to mix, although doing so is perfectly legally permissible. Black Americans were formally discouraged from voting until the abolition poll taxes and literacy tests. They were kept in separate housing and educational institutions, often broadly inferior to white accommodations, until the various steps of intervention of the federal government in the 1950's and 60's. This secondary legal status can be safely assumed to reflect the general prejudice of large portions of American society, particularly in the Southern states with large black populations. In the context of other nationalist movements, the question arises of whether these issues and these statuses constituted a national consciousness among black Americans with the potential for mobilization into a black American nationalist movement. Seton-Watson believes that the issue is not entirely resolvable, but finds a compromise in finding that "blacks would come to be accepted, and to regard themselves, as Americans, and at the same time would belong to a system of cultural institutions of their own."<sup>116</sup> But it would seem that this assessment, in tandem with Seton-Watson's above description of national consciousness, might be seen as implying that by the very nature of recognizing that black Americans have their own separate institutions and that they, at least at one time, constituted among themselves what could have been considered at a minimum a community with national consciousness. This seems to have been the case for Marcus

---

<sup>116</sup> Seton-Watson, p. 366

Garvey, who advocated a Pan-African nationalism and whose Universal Negro Improvement Association, founded in 1914, claimed 4,000,000 American members (though it was likely only a few hundred thousand).<sup>117</sup> The Black Muslims are another example, founded in Detroit in 1930 by W.D. Fard. The group eventually expanded and gave audience to a brilliant orator from Nebraska named Malcom Little, later to be known as Malcom X. They advocated an anti-consumerist and anti-Semitic philosophy and designed towards the establishment of up to five black states within the Union.<sup>118</sup> This is to say nothing of the Southern Leadership Council, who under the guidance of the great Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. led numerous and impactful protests against the injustices being faced by the black community at that time.

Ted Robert Gurr says that identities can be considered “politically salient”—that is, capable of affecting change—if they meet two criteria: 1) the group collectively suffers, or benefits from, systematic discriminatory treatment vis-à-vis other groups in a state; and/or 2) the group is the focus of political mobilization and action in defense or promotion of its self-defined interests.”<sup>119</sup> As of 1950, the black American community seems to fit both of these criteria. However, some interesting conclusions emerge from Gurr’s data set and others. For example, in his comparison of politically active minority groups between 1970-1989, in accounting for a number of factors, he finds that in the 1970s economic disenfranchisement was significantly more strongly correlated with mobilization than was measured group cohesion, implying that perceived and real

---

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. p. 361

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. p. 363

<sup>119</sup> Gurr, p. 163

discrimination are more powerful forces than communal spirit itself.<sup>120</sup> Demographic stress—in the form of high birth rates, poor public health, and relative land scarcity—was also a stronger predictor of mobilized protest than were markers of group identity.<sup>121</sup> Fearon and Laitin offer an interesting data set that reaches a number of relevant conclusions: First, that ethnically diverse societies, after controlling for per capita income, are not significantly more prone to civil conflict than more homogeneous societies. Second, violent insurgencies are more likely in states offering conditions conducive to such movements—in the form of a weak government, rough and inaccessible terrain, government corruption, and weak or ineffective policies—even when ethnic or social conflicts are not strong. Third, that ethnic differentials do tend to become inflamed in the face of ethnically motivated or correlated economic and political barriers.<sup>122</sup> This, in addition to Gurr’s conclusions that stable democracies foster group dispute in the form of protest as opposed to open conflict, gives more general, international context to the history and likelihood of black mobilization in the United States. It suggests that while group markers such as language, locality, and culture are important for setting the parameters for political mobilization once underway—or indeed for the implementation of discriminatory policies or practices to begin with—relative political and economic lack of opportunity are most often the driving factors in mobilization, while the state institution under which grievances emerge determine the nature of the opposition. Thus, while political and economic disenfranchisement was likely to create grounds for the

---

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.* p. 180

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.* p. 179

<sup>122</sup> James D. Fearon & Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War”, p. 75, 79-82, & 78.

mobilization of the black community, the strength of the courts and openness of American democracy kept ethnic conflict from devolving into something even more ugly.

### **Ellison and Territory**

The idea of black spaces within American society is central to the plot of *Invisible Man* and to the reality that it seeks to emulate and comment upon. In the prologue, Ellison describes some of the ironic circumstance under which a large portion of the book was written. He was for some time patronized by a white family and given use of their apartment as a studio and at least on one occasion openly mocked by white residents of the neighborhood. In acknowledging the strangeness of his circumstance, Ellison says:

Nor was I unappreciative of the hilarious inversion of what is usually a racially restricted social mobility that took me on daily journeys from a Negro neighborhood, wherein strangers questioned my moral character on nothing more substantial than our common color and my vague deviation from accepted norms, to find sanctuary in a predominately white environment wherein the same color and vagueness of role rendered me anonymous, and hence beyond public concern.<sup>123</sup>

Thus, the novel grew out of the contradictions of space and persona that accompanied race at the time of authorship. In the first chapter, there is some hint at this as the narrator enters the infamous “battle royal” scene to serve as entertainment for the local white leadership before being made to recite a speech he had given at his high school

---

<sup>123</sup> Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 1980, p. xi

graduation and ultimately accept a prize in the form of a scholarship to the “state college for Negroes.” Leaving the stage of his high school graduation, where he is a promising and articulate academic, the narrator enters the main ballroom of the local hotel, filled with the aristocracy in their formal wear, where he is stripped and made to box blindfolded with his classmates, to scramble on the floor for electrified money, and is mocked by a drunk and jeering crowd.<sup>124</sup> They continue to berate him as he makes his speech, being made to retract a call for equality and reminded that “you’ve got to know your place at all times.”<sup>125</sup> The narrator, upon entering this foreign space, has been debased as an individual, deprived of intrinsic value and talents, and subjected to the bullying of the power structure.

Chapters 2-7 provide some of the best examples of Ellison’s’ defined territory. In Chapters 2&3, the narrator is given the privilege to drive Mr. Norton, a surrogate for the white power structure.<sup>126</sup> The campus, a thinly veiled reference to the Tuskegee Institute and shown throughout the book to be an artificial construction of what people like Norton want to see of the black community, is described by Norton himself as having been the product his own work: “I came here years ago, when all your beautiful campus was barren ground. There were no trees, no flowers, no fertile farmland.”<sup>127</sup> At Norton’s suggestion, the two exit their tour of the campus and drive out into the surrounding country side. Eventually, they find a row of cabins belonging to local sharecroppers. There, the two

---

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. p. 17-29

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. p. 30-31

<sup>126</sup> As described on page 37, Norton is “forty years a bearer of the white man’s burden, and for sixty a symbol of the Great Traditions.”

<sup>127</sup> Ibid. p. 38

interact with one Jim Trueblood, whose “name was never mentioned above a whisper” back at the college.<sup>128</sup> While this interaction is certainly worth—and certainly has received—its fair share of literary criticism, what is important for now is the geography of ethnicity evinced therein. Jim, along with his family and neighbors, comprise a community of sharecroppers, products of the Reconstruction era. The narrator and Norton affirm this in their description of the cabins:

“It appears quite old.”

“It is, sir. That one and the other two like it were built during slavery times.”

“You don’t say! I would never have believed that they were so enduring. Since slavery times!”<sup>129</sup>

The scene, along with some other details about Trueblood’s character and financial prospects, show the “endurance” of black economic subjugation in much of the South as well as the rootedness of much of black culture in the experience of slavery. Jim recalls a sort of pilgrimage he had taken from the farm to Mobile in his younger days, a time in his life that he recalls quite fondly while making allusions to jazz, watermelon, women, and “boss quail” as an allegory for the duties of manhood and leadership.<sup>130</sup> He later compares an adversity to a man in Birmingham who entered a shoot-out with local police.<sup>131</sup>

---

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.* p. 46

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.* p. 47

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.* p. 56

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.* p. 60

The conversation with Trueblood leaves Norton feeling drained for a number of reasons and the benefactor demands, before passing out, that he be taken to find whiskey. The narrator concludes that the only place where drinks might be available on a Sunday would be at the Golden Day, a local bar and brothel for the black community that had also at various times served as a church, a bank, a restaurant, a “fancy gambling house,” and possibly a jailhouse.<sup>132</sup> Its patrons are not sharecroppers but “doctors, lawyers, teachers, Civil Service workers...several cooks, a preacher, a politician, and an artist. One very nutty one had been a psychiatrist.” The narrator admits that many of these professions he had aspired to himself at various points but was now confounded by these people who seemed to him to be engaged in some kind of strange game with the university “whose goal was laughter and whose rules and subtleties I could never grasp.”<sup>133</sup> Norton’s experiences here, as with those at Trueblood’s cabin, leave him shaken at the reality of black life outside of the college. As with Trueblood, the college has made vain attempts at reforming the Golden Day: “The school had tried to make the Golden Day respectable, but the white folks had a hand in it somehow and they got nowhere.”<sup>134</sup>

Upon returning to the college, the students are called to the chapel to worship in the presence of the visiting patrons. A noticeable change in mood takes place as they pass through their verdant campus towards what is normally a place of spiritual fulfillment:

...and we moving not in the mood of worship but of judgement...and we drifting forward with rigid motions, limbs stiff and voices now silent, as though on

---

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.* p. 80

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.* p. 74

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.* p. 73

exhibit even in the dark, and the moon a white man's bloodshot eye...Around me the students move with faces frozen in solemn masks, and I seem to hear already the voices mechanically raised in the songs the visitors loved...Loved as the defeated come to love the symbols of their conquerors...And here, sitting rigid, I remember the evenings spent before the sweeping platform in awe and in pleasure, and in pleasure of the awe...<sup>135</sup>

Here, the dominance of white perception and power are shown as even the most sacred and safe of the students' environments can be repossessed by merely the presence of the donors. Dr. Bledsoe, the head of the college, acts as a mediator between those on the stage and the student body, able to dress just modestly enough as not to risk intimidating his white guests but sharply enough to indicate status, and also to make physical and familiar contact with the white guests, exercising a kind of "powerful magic" that makes the narrator shudder.<sup>136</sup> He is busy in the process of carefully constructing an image of the black community—or rather, of the college over which he has domain—for his guests in the effort to establish an image of blackness generally, wisdom which Ellison questions throughout the book in his critiques of the Founder's, and subsequently Bledsoe's, philosophy.

It is ultimately this philosophy that results in the narrator's expulsion from the college. He is called to Bledsoe's at the conclusion of service to answer for his having taken Mr. Norton outside of the college grounds, a veritable act of treason for the impression it

---

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* p. 109-11

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.* p. 114-16



had given an important white person of black people. As an act of redemption, Bledsoe offers the narrator a summer in New York where he might work to earn tuition for his senior year and return in the fall. He writes the narrator a number of letters to present to associates there, as the narrator understands, to find reputable work. Thus, within a few hours, the narrator is off on his way to New York. On the bus he encounters one of the men from the Golden Day and engages in a conversation. This man— “the Vet” as he’s identified in the novel—tells the narrator that “When I was your age it was Chicago. Now all he little black boys run away to New York...I can see you after you’ve lived in Harlem for three months. Your speech will change...you might even meet a few white folks.”<sup>137</sup> Once in New York, the narrator describes: “I had never seen so many black people against a background of brick buildings...not even on trips I had made with the debating team to New Orleans, Dallas, or Birmingham.”<sup>138</sup>

After unsuccessful attempts at employment and some excellent plot development, the narrator ends up in the care of a Harlemitte woman who goes by the name of Miss Mary. She represents a sincerity of intentions and communal spirit to the narrator, reminding him at one point that “It’s you young folks what’s going to make the changes...it’s the ones from the South that’s got to do it, them what known the fire and ain’t forget how it burns. Up here too many forgits. They finds a place for theyselves and forgits the ones on the bottom.”<sup>139</sup> In this way, she not only affirms the narrator’s destiny

---

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.* p. 152

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.* p. 159

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.* p. 255

to be a guiding spirit in the black community, but also further affirms the geographic elements of the community itself.

From this point in the novel, much of the territorial stage is set. In Chapter 13 the narrator is finally introduced to the Brotherhood, an organization with Marxist-styled rhetoric, and is offered a job as a community speaker, something that he quickly proves himself to have a talent for. He establishes himself in and eventually becomes within his organization the department head of Harlem, a local celebrity of sorts, famous for his abilities of rhetoric and his connectedness with the community. The narrator spends some time downtown because of disagreements within the Brotherhood, but every serious plot development occurs in Harlem, including the death of Tod Clifton, the narrator's unintentional imitation of the shape-shifting Rinehart, and the various confrontations with Ras the Exhorter/Destroyer, modeled on Marcus Garvey. In little less than half the book, then, Ellison manages to set the stage for his comments on black space in America. Though nearly six-hundred pages, Ellison paints from numerous angles the complexities of division in space, most often evinced in black character's aversion to even close proximity with white people, and an exhaustive examination is not necessary here. The important thing to note are: 1) The conjuring of particular places that the narrator or other black characters visit or live as significant places within the narrative of the black community, places like Dallas, New Orleans, Birmingham, Chicago, and New York. Not coincidentally, these places coincide with the data of concentration of black Americans along the so-described "Black Belt" of the Southern U.S. and in Northern and Mid-Western cities like New York and Chicago. This space can be understood in relation to

Anderson's conception of the "secular pilgrimages" of large-state functionaries.<sup>140</sup> More importantly, as the demographic data above shows, Ellison's conception of space is in keeping with the experiences of many black Americans. Indeed, it would only make sense for any author wishing to make a political statement to begin his or her examination in a reality comparable to that of the reader he or she imagines taking part in his or her work.

2) The black spaces described, corresponding to a particular territorial domain, are both "thick" and generic. Spaces are "thick" because they are pervasively and not merely incidentally black spaces. Majority black neighborhoods are not so because of coincidence, but because historic and social circumstances are grouped them there. The sharecropper's cabins are the remnants of the pre-war era; the Golden Day is an asylum for black professionals who are yet unrecognized for their talents excluded from society because of their race; the college is all black because the students are not allowed into other schools; the narrator is made the Brotherhood's organizational head of Harlem because they need a black person to connect with the majority black Harlem. These spaces are generic because they are not made to represent common black experiences. Neither the college, nor the Founder, nor even the narrator himself are never named. While it is apparent from context that the college is the Tuskegee Institute of Alabama founded by Booker T. Washington and others, the decision to keep these institutions unnamed represents a desire by Ellison to have the reader apply these generic experiences to his or her own life. Ellison crafts Anderson's "world of plurals": a black

---

<sup>140</sup> Anderson, p. 53-64

college, a small southern town, an apartment in Harlem, as set of experiences relatable to only one group within American society at that time.

### **Subtleties of Language**

Black English Vernacular has been widely identified among linguists as a distinct dialect within American English.<sup>141</sup> With the above listed evidence of the linguistic distinctiveness and regularity of BEV in mind, this section will only serve to find evidence of this dialect in *Invisible Man* and of the emergence of the significance of language in the formation of communal identity.

The first example of the BEV is found on page 9 as the author descends into a pot and jazz-induced dream. The narrator hears a preacher and a congregation calling back and forth. They continually refer to each other as “brother” and substitute “Lawd” for Lord, in keeping with both institutional Christian imagery and the vowel transformations discussed by the LSA.<sup>142</sup> Later in the dream, the narrator encounters a woman and her sons, born of a slave master, who speak in a similar manner: “Naw son, it’s in loving. I loved him and give him the poison and he withered away like a frost-bit apple. Them boys woulda tore him to pieces with they homemade knives.” And: “Askin’ her them questions, that’s how. Git outa here and stay, and next time you got questions like that, ask yourself!”<sup>143</sup>

---

<sup>141</sup> As early as 1973, the TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) Quarterly was publishing material on how specifically to approach teaching Standard American English to speakers of BEV. See Carol Reed in the bibliography.

<sup>142</sup> Ellison, p. 9-10

<sup>143</sup> Ibid. p. 11-12

Characters like Jim Trueblood and Miss Mary offer abundant examples, particularly in Trueblood's narrative between pages 51-68 and in the narrator's conversations with Mary, beginning in Chapter 12. Other examples are found in the engineer Lucius Brockway (beginning on page 207), the un-named stranger from Chapter 9 (beginning on page 173), and the various residents of Harlem, particularly those with whom the narrator interacts when disguised as Rinehart (beginning on page 483 and particularly on page 490). The case of Ras—the best examples for whom can be found in Chapters 17 and 24—is notable, but distinct, as it is implied that Ras was born outside of the United States.

The interactions of Bledsoe, the narrator, and white characters are significant in another respect. The narrator is invited to the battle royal and given his scholarship in the first place because of his ability to articulate himself in standard English. Part of what distinguishes the students and faculty of the college from the sharecroppers and patients at the Golden Day is speech, as BEV is never used at the college, implying that it is inconsistent with Bledsoe's ideal of the way that black people should be seen. The exchange between Bledsoe and the narrator in Chapter 6 is revealing, as when he says: "Nigger, this isn't the time to lie. I'm no white man. Tell me the truth!"<sup>144</sup> That word is used in the pejorative sense in only a few cases and the narrator is notably taken aback by the sharpness of Bledsoe's tone. The other portion worth noting is when Bledsoe presses the narrator for information on the Vet from the Golden Day:

"Was he northern or southern?"

---

<sup>144</sup> Ibid. p. 139

“I don’t know, sir.”

“College for Negroes! ...Did he *talk* northern or southern?”

“He talked like a white man, except that his voice sounded southern, like one of ours...”<sup>145</sup>

Bledsoe uses pejorative language to assert a power usually reserved to white men over the narrator. Within the context of the novel, it is indicative of Bledsoe’s complicity in the white power structure and overall indifference towards the betterment of the black community, but from a nationalist, linguistic perspective, it is evidence of the significance of code-switching in language and the ability to speak from different cultural perspectives. Concerning the Vet, his accent could be indicative of his origins and thus his political aims. Bledsoe ultimately has him deported, so to speak, along with the narrator. The Brotherhood is similarly assertive with their insistence on the narrator’s use of their literature as the basis of his oration, altering his language as a means of altering his identity.<sup>146</sup> Indeed, the narrator’s failure to do so absolutely is a point of controversy from the beginning of his membership, as when some members protest his rhetoric after his first speech and in the Brotherhood’s interrogation of the narrator regarding a magazine article that was allegedly self-serving.<sup>147</sup>

Finally, a degree of switching comes as the narrator dons the disguise of Rinehart. The examples are few, but notable, as on pages 485 and 488 where the narrator openly

---

<sup>145</sup> Ibid. p. 140

<sup>146</sup> Ibid. The narrator is literally given a new name on page 309. He receives his Brotherhood literature at the end of Chapter 15 in preparation for his first speech as a member of the Brotherhood.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid. p. 348-52; p. 398-406.

questions, "Why am I talking like this?". Equally interesting is the way that other characters speak differently to the narrator because of his disguise, as he describes on page 486: "For there had been recognition of a kind in his voice but not for me. He never called me 'pops' or 'poppa-stopper.'"

These examples provide evidence within *Invisible Man* for the use of language as a technology for cultural positioning, group forming, and power assertion. A number of the black characters regularly use BEV, shown to be a unique dialect within American English, notably never used in the novel by a white character. Characters such as those in the Barrelhouse even make adjustments in lexicon and tone depending on whom they speak to within the black community. In the cases of Bledsoe and the Brotherhood, language is used as a means of suppressing black identity: in the first case as a means of redirecting, manipulating, and enabling the white power structure, and in the latter, of flattening individual and cultural experience to a bland construct of Marxist thought. Thus, a kind of linguistic-intellectual space is created.

### **Religious Imagery**

The Christian tradition of the black American community emerges in Ellison's work in a number of ways, most notably in comparisons of the Founder and Dr. Bledsoe to Christ; in the style of oration that emerged from distinctly black religious institutions used by the narrator and other characters in various contexts; and in the centrality of the church in perpetuating what the author considers to be blindness among the black community.

While driving Mr. Norton back from the Golden Day, whose patients present some of the most searing critiques of the college's philosophy, the narrator tells the reader that "I believed in the principles of the Founder with all my heart and soul" and that he would spend his life "shunning all but the straight and narrow path that [Norton] and the Founder had stretched before [him]".<sup>148</sup> As on page 107, Mr. Norton himself is on several occasions compared to St. Nicholas. The point is made rather directly beginning on page 118 as the (blind) Reverend Homer B. Barbee stands before a congregation and tells the story of the Founder (Booker T. Washington): "into this land came a humble prophet, lowly like the humble carpenter of Nazareth...[as] a mere babe, he lay nine days in a deathlike coma and then suddenly and miraculously recovered. You might say that it was as though he had risen from the dead or been reborn." We are told that Washington went "instinctively to the Holy Bible with its great wisdom for his first knowledge" after learning to read.<sup>149</sup> He is a "black Aristotle, moving slowly, with sweet patience, with a patience not of a mere man, but of God-inspired faith...Rendering unto Caesar that which was Caesar's." He is also compared to Moses, leading a persecuted people across a sea (in this case, a metaphorical one).<sup>150</sup> As the reverend gives his account, audience members shout in response, "My God, yes!" as though even this detailing of a man's life were part of a gospel all its own.<sup>151</sup> Even the end of the Founder's life, so told by Barbee, includes a somewhat melodramatic coincidence of the North Star being blotted from the sky and of

---

<sup>148</sup> Ibid. p. 99

<sup>149</sup> Ibid. p. 119

<sup>150</sup> Ibid. p. 120

<sup>151</sup> Ibid. p. 122



a deathbed transition of leadership from the Founder to Dr. Bledsoe, as Christ to Peter.<sup>152</sup> The scenes of his funeral and mourning are like that of the passing of an icon or indeed a prophet, seemingly to build on the cult of personality that Washington maintains in Ellison's rendering of the college. However, Barbee says that the loss was "a birth. A great seed had been planted", asking: "For has not your present leader become his living agent, his physical presence?"<sup>153</sup> This sermon has an incredible effect on the narrator, as when he confesses "old Barbee had made me both feel my guilt and accept it. For although I had not intended it, any act that endangered the continuity of the dream was an act of treason."<sup>154</sup> Recall that this "treason" was the narrator's unwitting exposure of Mr. Norton to the black community outside of the college.

Examples of a particular style of oration originating in the black Christian community are introduced first in the context of church services and are later brought outward into the political realm as having influenced a uniquely black style of rhetoric. The first example appears in the Prologue as the narrator dreams while listening to Louis Armstrong. In this dream the narrator hears someone speaking out to a congregation in a call-and-response style reminiscent of black Southern Christian tradition. Transformations like that of the word "Lord" to "Lawd" and use of the word "ain't" make further allusions to BEV as described above and used within the novel.<sup>155</sup> Again, on page 113, the narrator, in response to his frustrations regarding the college and its donors,

---

<sup>152</sup> Ibid. p. 127-9

<sup>153</sup> Ibid. p. 132

<sup>154</sup> Ibid. p. 134

<sup>155</sup> Ibid. p. 9-10

breaks into an imitative aside that he himself describes as “the curve of a preacher’s rhythm I heard long ago in a Baptist church, stripped now of its imagery.” This rhythm accompanies Christian imagery such as the “puritan benches” of the congregation’s young women and the “Jordan’s water” of the examples set by elder members. The Reverend Barbee continues this style as on page 126, including interjections and clapping in his “sermon.” A final example is the speech that the narrator offers at Clifton’s funeral. He begins, after “There’s Many a Thousand Gone” has been played, by asking the crowd, “do you except to see some magic, the dead rise up and walk again?” and by denying the possibility that he could be the figure the crowd asks him to be: “There’ll be no miracles and there’s no one here to preach a sermon.”<sup>156</sup> He asks rhetorically why the crowd does not disperse on this hot day when “the saxophones will be mellow at the Savoy...and there’ll be sermons in two hundred churches in the cool of the evening.”<sup>157</sup> He calls the audience to “Listen to me standing up on this so-called mountain!”<sup>158</sup> The narrator uses mostly standard English, but makes continual references to the particular cultural traits of the crowd and to Christian imagery. On page 457, he admits to himself that he cannot maintain his promises, first to the Brotherhood to keep his speeches political, and second to the crowd, that there is no one there to offer a sermon, as the narrator does offer a sort of communal sermon on the significance of Clifton’s passing.

Even the institution of the church itself ultimately plays a role in maintaining the degradation of the black community. As described above, the student march towards the

---

<sup>156</sup> Ibid. p. 454-55

<sup>157</sup> Ibid. p. 456-57

<sup>158</sup> Ibid. p. 457

college chapel was made a solemn affair because of the visiting donors: whereas normally the chapel is a place where these students can find spiritual fulfillment, it has been made a stage for the performance of roles: “Here upon this stage the black rite of Horatio Alger was performed to God’s own acting script, with the millionaires come down to portray themselves...Not the wafer and the wine, but the flesh and the blood.”<sup>159</sup> Most of Chapter five consists of the sermon that the Reverend Barbee offers to the student body and visiting donors. While, as noted above, religious imagery is certainly evoked, and the sermon itself is followed by hymns and prayer, Barbee does not actually speak on doctrine or ethics, but rather depicts the life of the Founder in somewhat epic terms, alluding to his similarities with Christ, his cult of personality institutionalized within the college, and the near mythical circumstances of his death and parting words. It becomes apparent at the end of Chapter 5 and through Chapter 6 that Barbee’s sermon and indeed many things concerning the college and its president’s actions are the components within an elaborate scheme to maintain and manipulate the status quo power paradigm. Homer Barbee, as his name might forebode, is revealed to be blind, and Dr. Bledsoe informs the narrator that the gravity of his crime is not in having put Mr. Norton potentially in danger, but rather in having cracked the façade that the college was employed to maintain.

Finally, while disguised as Rinehart, the narrator asks if his perception of the world through Rinehart’s characteristic sunglasses is accurate to his own perception, citing I Corinthians 13:9-13:<sup>160</sup>

---

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.* p. 111

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.* p. 491

For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now, we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these *is* charity.<sup>161</sup>

This section is particularly poignant for the comparison it draws between the character's development and that of Paul's conception of knowing the divine. By donning this costume, the narrator is made openly to wonder what it is that makes him an individual: "If dark glasses and a white hat could blot out my identity so quickly, who actually was who?"<sup>162</sup> The issue of identity and Rinehart becomes particularly salient when the reader learns on page 495 that in addition to being a criminal of various stripes, Rinehart is also the Reverend at a local branch of a national Way Station and a self-described "*Spiritual Technologist*." In short, Rinehart has devised a way to be both "rind and heart," to be "Rine the runner and Rine the gambler and Rine the briber and Rine the lover and Rinehart the Reverend." In his anonymity, Rinehart has attained a fluidity that makes him un-knowable, as when the narrator thinks to himself: "Perhaps the truth was always a lie."<sup>163</sup> Regarding his Way Station, the narrator's perspectives (Rinehart's own) of the lights in green tint, of the salesmanship of the pamphlets advertising the

---

<sup>161</sup> The Word Study Bible: The Holy Bible, Authorized King James Version, p. 1031

<sup>162</sup> Ellison, p. 493

<sup>163</sup> Ibid. p. 498

establishment, and of reports of sales of prior sermons, allow him to see that the church is in this case a means of profiting from the status quo, but also, as Paul sees only part of the divine by looking through a glass, darkly, so the narrator sees through Rinehart's glasses the imperceptibility of the individual when reduced to his or her social roles. Without delving just yet into the particulars of Ellison's thoughts on this concept, it is important to see the church as familiar among the intended readership and as an institutionalized set of powers and images that may be evoked and deployed, with the appropriate manipulations, to serve political ends.

Other notable instances of religious imagery occur in the character of Miss Mary, who takes in the narrator after his traumatic "rebirth" in the factory hospital, when he begins his development as an agent employed against the white power structure.<sup>164</sup> The second, a more significant event, is an eviction that the narrator encounters in Harlem after rooming with Miss Mary. He and others stand in observation as an elderly black couple's possessions are slowly moved onto the sidewalk by a white crew, when finally, they are moved to action when the elderly woman's Bible is brought out among a group of articles.: "'Take your hands off my Bible!' And the crowd surged forward... 'They can come in your home and do what they want to you... But this here's the last straw. They ain't going to bother with my Bible!'"<sup>165</sup> The woman tries to push past the movers so that she can have a final prayer in her home.<sup>166</sup> The narrator uses the fervor stirring in the observing crowd to finally take a position of leadership, even evoking the image of the

---

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.* p. 251-53

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.* p. 269-70

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.* p. 273-74

Founder back in Alabama, and pleading with the authorities for compromise around this most relatable artefact within the community: “How about it, Mr. Law? Do we get our fifteen minutes worth of Jesus? You got the world, can we have our Jesus?”<sup>167</sup> In this way, the narrator is made the capable leader that he becomes through the availability of religious figures, metaphors, and community.

In the sermon to the congregation at the college chapel, the Reverend Barbee speaks extensively on the accomplishments and nobility of the great Founder: “Ah, yes, those indescribably glorious days, in which the Founder was building the dream not only here in this then barren valley, but hither and yonder throughout the land, instilling the dream in the hearts of the people. Erecting the scaffolding of a nation.”<sup>168</sup> This is one of the few times in the novel that the black community is referred to explicitly as a distinct nation, and not insignificantly, it is only said to be so by the Reverend Barbee at the invitation of Dr. Bledsoe and the donors, and by Ras the Exhorter/Destroyer, the in-work surrogate for Marcus Garvey, the famous black nationalist. This conception of the American black community is given religious color not only by its explicit comparisons of the leadership to the messiah himself, but more subtly in its being contextualized in the style and environment of Christian convention. The speech follows the singing of hymns, the gathering of the study body within the chapel, and is delivered in a uniquely religious tone. Near the end of the novel, Rinehart is able to add complexity to his character and portfolio of deceit by working as a *Spiritual Technologist*—not an unintentional

---

<sup>167</sup> Ibid. p. 276-79

<sup>168</sup> Ibid. p. 124

continuation of the novel's motif of the mechanization of individuals in society. Thus, the church, in each instance that it appears, is not only a place of spiritual fulfillment, though we know this to be the case from other evidence within the novel, such as the narrator's reminiscing outside of the college chapel and the Harlem crowd's resistance to evictions. Rather, the church is used as a point of entry for those with economic and/or political designs. Because of its centrality, its universality, its weight within the black community, it can be employed to serve the means of nationalists and criminals alike: a simple evocation of symbols, contextualization within a religious environment, the appeal to authority, and the promise of something better to come that is not yet available. This conceptualization of possibility of employment of religion as an organizing apparatus is very much in keeping with the above described concepts of nationalist and political mobilization. Indeed, for Ellison's political statements to have traction with his intended audience, his work would need to be consistent with an imaginable reality.

### **The Politics of the Invisible Man**

All of this begs a final question: Why? What end would any of this serve? The short answer: the interlinking of a community's specific language, space, religion, and any number of other indicators excluded here for the sake of brevity, serve to be amalgamated within a sort of ideological superstructure. That is, it is not simply the Ellison or any other author describes the culture and common experiences of a people and presents these items within a framework (in this case, the novel) enabling the imagining of a finite communal set corresponding to those items, but rather that the author,

through creative affect and ideological coherence rallies these items and the corresponding community within a political discourse for the purpose of coming to a particular conclusion based on those items and circumstances. Michel Foucault famously proposed a method of historiography in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* that can be roughly described as an extraction from discourse of the relation between variables at four levels of analysis: the object, the concept, the hypothesis, and the strategy.<sup>169</sup> In a sense, any community-specific political discourse can be understood, if only analogously, as a kind of historiography within this paradigm of analysis. In this case, the objects are cultural items like the singular linguistic proclivities of BEV (“Lawd” and the “invariant be”) and the knocking bones of the evicted couple; the concepts, the relations between particular objects, are the composition of BEV itself and of the black Christian tradition; the hypotheses are the relations between concepts, such as the idea that BEV and traditionally black Baptist churches are the signifying items within a large socio-cultural body of constituents spread across the United States and emanating from the Caribbean, Africa, and European capitalistic human trafficking; and finally, the strategy or theory is the particular deployment of all of these things as a statement made upon a communal reality: a single conclusion reached by the identification, conceptualization, and reconceptualization of every item at each level within the strategy. Each point continually interacts every other point within that structure and the entirety of the entity fulfills a particular desired conclusion of the author. It is the particular product of an explicitly

---

<sup>169</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 1972. These terms are somewhat fluid in Foucault’s work and thus do not correspond exactly to the terminology used by the author. Their significance, however, is the same.



constructed discourse and one of a constellation of possible conclusions within that domain. The strategy is explicit because it decides not only at what level of analysis each item is to be placed, but also because it decides—from within the domain of socio-cultural phenomenon from which political narratives emerge—which items to include and which to exclude. For example, because the ultimate goal of this work is a statement on a political reality and not one on instrumentation, the evicted couple's knocking bones can be understood as an *object*, a base level discursive item that can later, within the context of the wider discourse, be determined as common to other couples with similar experiences but is not otherwise significant in itself. In a hypothetical discourse on instrumentation, the bones may be considered to exist at the second level of analysis as the intersection between the objects of “things made to percuss” and “bone as a percussive material”. More to the point, the novel at no point discusses the positions of or cultural items relevant to Native Americans, east Asian immigrants, east European immigrants as other disenfranchised groups within society. The decision to include or exclude some item is a matter of the knowledge of the author, his suppositions about the knowledge of the community, and his suppositions about the relevance of that item to the selected discourse. For example, Crispus Attucks, a freed slave widely considered to have been the first person to be killed in the American Revolutionary War, is not mentioned at any point in the novel, but allusions to black folk tales and songs appear at several points.<sup>170</sup> *Invisible Man*, as would any other work, creates a reality specific to the author's vision as a means of commenting on the corresponding reality of the reader.

---

<sup>170</sup> See pages 173-77, 193, 234-35, and 241-42 as some examples.

Ellison creates a “world of plurals,” easily transferable to the reader’s reality and evincing a particular and limited vision of that reality. This is how literature becomes an agent of nationalist politics.

However, in the case of Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, the purpose is not to persuade the reader of nationalist politics as they may be somewhat traditionally understood, that being the prescription of a movement towards ultimate national autonomy or the unification of the nation, but rather to conceptualize of the individual as emerging from what may be considered the nation but not being tethered to its prescriptions. *Invisible Man* is not a nationalist work, but a critique of nationalist politics within the accepted realm of the nation. That is, Ellison does not deny the existence of this community, and in fact does much work to evince its distinctiveness, but rather suggests that the nation is comprised of individuals who may correspond to the nation, but ought not to be subject to its “flattening” effects, and that the political aims of the nation should be neither the simultaneous maintenance and subversion of the existing white power structure (as are the policies of the Founder and Dr. Bledsoe) nor the radical, nationalist separatism (as that of Ras the Destroyer/Exhorter), but a third option of emphasis of the individual within the community thus open to an array of possibilities of self-definition.

This critique requires that nationalism be conceptualized as a homogenizing deontological construct: a set of suppositions about the community and of prescriptions for identity and action in the face of adversity. If the evocation or construction of the nation is always in reaction to an outside force, then its emergence creates social pressures to consolidate within the accepted bounds of the nation as a means of

preserving that community. Nationalisms are inherently communitarian, sacrificing the mobility of the individual for the betterment of the community of the whole. They may call on the aspiration of national autonomy as a means of attaining the security or liberty of the nation, but it is, to use Isaiah Berlin's term, a *positive liberty*: the national is free to be whatever he or she chooses within the parameters set by the nation itself. This homogenizing pressure has to be given agency through social institutions like religious organizations, the state, even political parties, and can appear in any number of aspects from language to religion to ethnicity and in any range of intensities, from the somewhat benevolent privileging of a national language to the darkest corners of history in the forms of genocides.

In *Invisible Man*, the narrator, and by proxy the imagined black American national, faces homogenizing pressure from number of groups. Through their fictional construction Ellison offers a sketch of the social-political potentials of the black community at that time and a critique of the flattening effects of each proxy perspective. The first and most prominent is that the Founder, manifest in the actions and culture of the college, of the Reverend Barbee, of the white donors and towns people, and of Dr. Bledsoe. Their philosophy is one that encourages the servility of the black population, telling them to cast down their buckets where they are, to work patiently within the bounds of the status quo and to wait for the wider society to accept them as equal. In the first chapter, the narrator is invited to give a speech at a gathering of local leaders. His invitation involves his being humiliated by being presented with a white woman as an obvious representation of an unattainable equability, made to fight his black classmates as a

means of debasing his humanity, and finally allowed to speak with the understanding that he is still only a form of entertainment of the crowd and subject to their sensitivities.<sup>171</sup> Likewise, Dr. Bledsoe expels the narrator from the college not for dishonesty, but in fact for honesty, for showing Mr. Norton segments of the local black community outside of the ideological domain of the college: Jim Trueblood as a poor man whom the white community would like to reduce to a single heinous act, but who is in reality a committed and conscientious family man, and in the patients at the Golden Day, who the college paints as immoral and corrupt, but are actually victims of the madness of their exclusion from respectability despite being mostly of the professional class. Indeed, even “the Vet” himself, the best example as a medical specialist of some esteem, is left to the conclusion that “my work could bring me no dignity.”<sup>172</sup> He, along with the narrator, is outcast by Bledsoe for contradicting the national narrative. Bledsoe employs a deliberate and intricate apparatus of propaganda to perpetuate his philosophy, found most apparently in the sermon delivered by the Reverend Barbee who offers a mythological telling of the lives of Bledsoe and the Founder, but also in the common imagery of the campus, as in the statue of the founder lifting the blindfold of a kneeling slave. Ellison’s critique of this kind “official nationalism” comes in the narrator’s final confrontation with Bledsoe in his

---

<sup>171</sup> Ibid. Chapter 1 begins on page 15; the white woman, appearing nude with an American flag tattooed over her groin, appears on page 19; the fighting begins on page 22; on page 31, during his speech, the narrator mentions “social equality” and the room dies from its carnival mood to sudden silence as the audience scrutinizes him: “You sure that about ‘equality’ was a mistake?”

<sup>172</sup> Ibid. p. 92. Beginning on page 90, the reader learns some background information on this character who has had a successful medical career abroad, but was reduced to the Golden Day upon returning to the South.

office, in which he confesses that the college is merely a means to maintain his own power at the expense of the black community: the danger of the narrator and those outside the college stems precisely from their existence outside of his carefully constructed narrative.<sup>173</sup>

A number of other artefacts within this vein emerge, not always the products of Bledsoe or the college, that keep the narrator in a state of denying his individuality as a way of fulfilling the role expected of him by the college. Upon meeting the stranger from Chapter 9 who speaks in riddles and references to music and folk tales, the narrator nervously denies any knowledge of what the man is trying to tell him.<sup>174</sup> Later, the counterman at a diner offers him a special of pork chops, grits, eggs, biscuits and coffee, which the narrator refuses on the grounds that he feels he has been racially profiled. He finds that he is mistaken when a white man is offered the same special.<sup>175</sup> In Chapter 13, food becomes a point of identity politics again as the narrator allows himself to enjoy a baked sweet potato in public and thinks to himself of the absurdity of the stigma surrounding foods associated with the black community.<sup>176</sup> In chapter 15, the narrator awakes to find a cast-iron Sambo doll in his room. He tries several times to destroy or abandon this item, indicative of stereotypes he is still subject to, but at each occasion he is prevented from doing so.<sup>177</sup> It is not until the close of the novel when the narrator

---

<sup>173</sup> Ibid. p. 143: "I didn't make it, and I know that I can't change it. But I've made my place in it and I'll have every Negro in the country hanging on tree limbs by morning if it means staying where I am."

<sup>174</sup> Ibid. p. 172-77

<sup>175</sup> Ibid. p. 178

<sup>176</sup> Ibid. p. 264-65

<sup>177</sup> Ibid. p. 119-30

begins to burn the contents of his brief case, including his high school diploma, letters from Bledsoe, and the page from which he received his Brotherhood name, that he is set free from the his old constraints of identity.<sup>178</sup>

The Brotherhood, whose communist inclinations are evinced by their “scientific” approach to history and their insistence on suppressing difference among their followers, provide an alternative for the narrator after his figurative rebirth in chapter 11, but also work to suppress his individuality and mold him to become a means to their political goals. This begins with his first introductions to the Brotherhood, when one member wonders aloud if “he should be a little blacker,” when the narrator is given a new (still undisclosed) name for the sake of the organization, and when a man is ejected from the party because of some admittedly insensitive behavior for which the narrator is held partly responsible, in that his difference was the cause of it having been brought out.<sup>179</sup> The narrator is given a job by the Brotherhood as an orator with the intention of finding a broader base among the black community of New York, but even after rallying a crowd during his first speech with the organization, he is criticized for being unscientific and appealing to people’s emotions: in short, he is suspect because he remains outside of the institutional norms.<sup>180</sup> In chapter 18, the narrator receives a letter warning him to “*not go too fast. Keep working for the people but remember that you are one of us and do not forget if you get too big they will cut you down...you know that this is a white man’s world.*”<sup>181</sup> During a later

---

<sup>178</sup> Ibid. p. 567-68

<sup>179</sup> Ibid. p. 303; 309;

<sup>180</sup> Ibid. p. 348-52.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid. p. 383, author’s italics.

encounter, one of the Brothers ask the narrator to put away a personal item on the grounds that he didn't think that differences ought to be "dramatized".<sup>182</sup> The Brother warns of the virtue of digging out personal qualities not fitting the principles of the Brotherhood, foreshadowing the narrators later reprimanding for being a "petty individualist" and his being moved to a new office downtown, away from his successes in Harlem.<sup>183</sup> The narrator is reprimanded a second time following Clifton's funeral for again being outside of the prescribed rhetoric and again highlighting difference. Brother Jack insists that the committee knows best the political needs of the people of Harlem and insists that the narrator conform: "Discipline requires sacrifice. Yes, and blindness."<sup>184</sup> The Brotherhood ultimately abandons the borough all together, opportunistically allowing the conditions to develop conducive to the race riot that takes place in the final chapters. Thus, the Brotherhood seeks to flatten the narrator by enforcing an ideology that all people are fundamentally the same and by denying him the opportunity to speak as an individual. Their paternalism extends to the people of Harlem as well, as their dedication to their science of history takes their ability to see the world clearly.

The narrator's first encounter with Ras the Exhorter/Destroyer takes place on page 159 and is not worth detailing, but his second, beginning on page 368, quickly devolves into violence and a telling exchange between the two. Ras questions why the narrator would bother to associate with white people who will inevitably betray him, and why it is that smart black youth like he and Clifton cannot see that the only bonds of

---

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.* p. 392

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.* p. 401

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.* p. 475

kinship are racial: "Brothers are the same color; how the hell you call these white men *brother*? ...Come in with us, mahn [sic]. We build a glorious movement of black people. *Black People!*"<sup>185</sup> He repeatedly asks the narrator and Clifton why they treat him as though he's crazy and finally concedes that the two are beyond reason. The exchange implies that Ras does deeply feel a connection to other black people because of their blackness, and this passion brings him to tears as he tries to reason with the two. However, his passion for their well-being is accompanied by a singular conception of how that well-being can be attained. Namely, with the absolute separation of black and white people. During their final encounter during the riot, Ras takes his persona to an extreme, appearing "dressed in the costume of an Abyssinian chieftain; a fur cap upon his head, his arm bearing a shield, a cape made of the skin of some wild animal around his shoulders. A figure more out of a dream than out of Harlem."<sup>186</sup> As the narrator explains how the riot had been a manipulation of the Brotherhood contingent upon Ras's destructiveness, Ras orders his followers to hang the narrator, who escapes by launching Ras's own spear through his mouth, silencing him forever. The narrator finally realizes that he has "no longer to run for or from the Jacks...and the Bledsoes and Nortons, but only from their confusion, impatience, and refusal to recognize the beautiful absurdity of their American identity and mine."<sup>187</sup> Thus, the pursuit of the narrator is not a strong definition of blackness, but the acceptance of himself as an individual into American society. To the

---

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.* p. 371

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.* p. 556

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.* p. 559



narrator, his blackness is neither his defining feature nor something that can be suppressed by political rhetoric.

On page 354, on the Brotherhood's criticisms of his first public address, the narrator recalls something a literature professor had said at the college, most likely concerning Stephen Daedalus from James Joyce's *Ulysses* but nonetheless relevant to this topic: "Stephen's problem, like ours, was not actually one of creating the uncreated conscience of his race, but of creating the *uncreated features of his face*. Our task is that of making ourselves individuals. The conscience of a race is the gift of its individuals who see, evaluate, record...We create the race by creating ourselves and then to our great astonishment we will have created something far more important: We will have created a culture. Why waste time creating conscience for something that doesn't exist? For, you see, blood and skin do not think!" After his final dismissal, he realizes that no organization he had yet encountered sincerely aimed to help black community: "Yes! YES! That was all anyone wanted of us, that we should be heard and not seen, and then heard only in one big optimistic chorus of *yassuh, yassuh, yassuh!*"<sup>188</sup> By stepping outside of any rank or limit, any established classification, the narrator has opened an infinite array of possibilities for himself. By rejected the homogenizing effects of the college, the Brotherhood, and of Ras's nationalism, he has found a reconciliation between his individual self and his commitment to his community: "Now I know men are different and

---

<sup>188</sup> Ibid. p. 512

that all life is divided and that only in division is there true health...Life is to be lived, not controlled.”<sup>189</sup>

In the final line of the Epilogue, the narrator asks: “Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?”<sup>190</sup> Thus, there is a sort of irony in Ellison’s conception: he imagines the community as being so, offers its description as bounded and observable, and advocates that the individual transcend this structure, that its constituents emerge from it but not allow themselves to be constrained by it. The narrator floats from a number of political superstructures—discursive strategies—imbedded within the novel itself, each with their own conception of what blackness is and should be: the self-centered and conciliatory yet subversive meanness of Dr. Bledsoe, excluding those who are inconvenient to his narrative; the generic worker’s image of the Brotherhood, wherein the literal destruction of Harlem is acceptable if it brings politically advantageous circumstances; and the radical hatred of Ras, who sees racial and social divisions as durable and inevitable, calling for the violent purging of white people from black spaces and the consolidation of the community under the banner of an identity emphasizing only what is African in black America. In the narrator’s generic, unstated identity, there is an ability of the reader not only to identify the environment that Ellison describes as his or her own, but to actually place his or her self in the position of the narrator, to float between these discourses, and to find a solution in Ellison’s own vision in simultaneously

---

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.* p. 576-77

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.* p. 581

acknowledging the utility and durability of the community, but conceiving of it as a mass of distinct and irreducible individuals.

## Conclusion

Preceding almost every nationalizing project described in *Nations and States*, Seton-Watson describes an effort by intellectuals to standardize the national language and to canonize national literature within that language. In some cases, like English and German, the standardization of language preceded the explicit definition of the nation, emerging more from market and communication necessities than of political design. In later responsive cases, like that of Romanian and Greek, intellectuals worked to cement language as a means of creating solidarity and commonality. Anderson Brubaker describes in a section of *Imagined Communities* unfortunately somewhat neglected here the ways that censuses and maps shaped communal understandings of the boundaries and make-up of the community therein. “European-style maps worked on the basis of a totalizing classification,” he writes, citing examples of how even Siam, which was never formally colonized, managed to form hardened borders between 1850 and 1910 because of the totalizing effects of colonial territorialization that were taking place in neighboring areas.<sup>191</sup> The census later served as an official form of documentation and account of the traits of an area defined by these political borders delineating areas often without any strong geography-based logic—that is, borders are often independent of geographic reasoning, the expectation being the case of strongly divisive features such as high mountain ranges and bodies of water. As Marxist-communist states began to rise during the First World War, and increasingly as they became perceived as geopolitically and even existentially threatening, Americans heard increasingly of the Godless communists, who

---

<sup>191</sup> Anderson, p. 171-73

had in many cases rejected institutional religion as a bourgeois apparatus. This division in religious concept became a salient marker of the divergent economic, social, and political interests between the two major-power spheres. Recently, as the perceived threat of extremist Islamic violence looms in the minds of many Americans, some have questioned the ability of Muslims to integrate into a political system based on a Christian tradition of ethics.

What seems to emerge is a conception of nationalism not as an ideology in-and-of itself, although there are some consistent markers. The national consciousness emerges as the community in question is made to imagine the extent of its commonality: the map delineates a space within which the community resides; the language provides a common code and symbolic index for communication within the finite linguistic community and only therein; religious, historic, ethical, cultural, and political institutions provide a common set of rituals and suppositions for the community to share in, a sort of gestural and intellectual linguistics, as incomplete is the analogy may be. The nation does not emerge of its own will, but rather does so through what is available to the community. The nationalist discourse takes a sort of *path of least resistance*, so as to be accessible to an appropriately broad constituency. The nation becomes synonymous with the institutions of territory, religion, and language precisely because they provide the framework for its emergence and is distinguished by its being the only such construct that fits precisely within these boundaries. Thus, the nation is predicated on a conception of belonging and otherness. *Nationalism*, then, or more precisely the *nationalism thereof* (in reference to a particular national consciousness) is the politicization of that consciousness

and of those institutional structures making the nation itself imaginable. This politicization must be in reaction to some real or perceived pressure in order to create salience among the constituency: it may be external, in the case of suppression at the hand of a rival ethnic group or state, or internal, as in the form demographic pressures or general poverty that necessitate the careful allocation of resources in society. In that negotiation for policy solutions, the nation itself becomes institutionalized, creating the sort of socio-political superstructures that we recognize as nationalist movements. Thus, *nationalism* cannot be said to be an ideology in-and-of itself because it does not produce consistent cultural traits or policy prescriptions. What is consistent, what makes nationalist movements recognizable as a single type, is the emphasis on the community, the nation, as the locus of political power, hence, its inherently communitarian nature. At a minimum, the nation as a political force demands the institutionalized differentiation between the national and the other: in the case of the nation-state, the citizen and the foreigner, typically based on a matter of birth-place, but certainly subject to often arbitrary distinctions that humanity has historically imagined. However, the nation can, typically in proportion to perceived existential threat, demand conformity along a gradient of difference, creating a unique set of *negative liberties* for the individual to accept as a consequence of enjoying the benefits of citizenship. Moreover, the nation must employ nationalizing agents, often in the form of language laws, national anthems, censorship, and public education, in order to create an intellectual space that reproduces the nation itself and creates a domain of *positive liberty* within the citizen who is

subsequently less able to imagine and thus less willing to participate in other forms of self-conception and other ways of being.

In short, the incredibly complex mechanisms of socialization, in the various forms of the politicization of the national consciousness, in order to be effective, need to be omnipresent. Thus, the state, as a single, recognizable and ideally sovereign entity is effective in institutionalizing the nation because of its ability to recognize the traits that make the nation imaginable, creating a sort of recursive body of production and reproduction within various public apparatuses. On a much smaller scale, the newspaper does similar work with its ability to inform a readership of the events within a defined space and to legitimize that space; to give perspective on events that coincide with and lend authority to cultural norms of perspective in the forms of language, ideology and ethics; and to create an intellectual space in which the readers can imagine the entirety of the readership simultaneously receiving and perceiving this same information in a similar way. Finally, the novel this work with an added degree of complexity: its ability to imagine, to fictionalize and thus to renegotiate the boundaries of the intellectual space of the community give it an agency distinct from that of news media. It need not concentrate on current events but is free to play within the temporal space of the nation, legitimizing its historic continuity. It may create archetypes of space and character that the national can recognize as being ideal and events that comment on the condition of the community, affirm morals and norms, and suggest new political and cultural paths. In short, it is an effective technology of nationalist construction because of its ability to describe reality and convince of possible, alternative realities.

This paper suggests that this is precisely what Ralph Ellison has done in *Invisible Man*. A survey of the history of the legal statuses and demographics of black people in the United States paints a picture of a people isolated and demoted within society to a second-class citizenship. During the period of slave trade in the United States, the commodification of humans led to assumptions that black people were of some type inherently and irredeemably inferior to Europeans. The atrocities committed by a slave-owning society needed lasting justifications for its actions, often coming in religious and “scientific” packages. Thus, even as federal law opened citizenship and democratic participation to black men, institutional practices like poll taxes and literacy tests, as well as outright acts of intimidation, kept the black population effectively disenfranchised for some time. This, of course, in addition to the extreme economic and social disparities allowed to exist until the promulgation of legislation resulting from the Civil Rights Movement. Beginning with writers like Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglass and W. E. B. DuBois and burgeoning during the Harlem Renaissance, the black American community found its voice in literature. Organizations like the NAACP, Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association, and the Black Muslims gave political organization to a generation that had never known slavery and was unwilling to remain in economic and political despair. A series of Supreme Court Decisions culminating in the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling gave the community hope that through the use of courts and political mobilization, equality could be attained.

At this crucial moment, just two years before the *Brown* ruling and three years before the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Ellison published this work on the political life of



the black community. While the work criticizes rather strongly three of the existing discourses within black politics—the Washington school of submission and economic improvement, the communist solution of a generic worker’s revolution, and the nationalist solution of black separation—he does not deny the nation as a valuable and living entity. Rather, through continual reference to and application of the community’s language, religious customs, territorial expanse, and cultural and political experiences, he affirms it quite strongly. In this way, while Ellison’s politics fail to become homogenizing and to create deontological notions of the supremacy of the community to the individual, he tells the reader quite plainly that “We create the race by creating ourselves and then to our great astonishment we will have created something far more important: We will have created a culture.”<sup>192</sup>

Ellison’s work is one example of the ways that an author can create intellectual space to produce and reproduce the nation itself. This work was intended to create a limited example of the ways that a theory of nationalism can be refined by creating a methodology of relation between the historic analyses as found in Seton-Watson, the philosophic suppositions of Anderson, and of a general strategy of analysis and literary criticism that can extract meaning and context from works of literature and journalism. Because nationalisms are popular movements, it is neither sufficient to study political events and the movement of political capital nor to map the emergence of public thought. Rather, integrated and refined models of analysis must be created in order to understand the intricacies of such movements. The study of nations and nationalist discourses has

---

<sup>192</sup> Ellison, p. 354

the potential to inform scholars on the subtler nature of politics in the modern era and potentially to explain the power dynamics of sub-state actors who have become increasingly prevalent in modern politics. The realist supposition that the state is a source of power in-and-of itself is an outdated notion and does not sufficiently explain a modern shifting of political power. Rather, a constructivist tracing of this power through institutions of social organization may offer a nuanced understanding of the public and power in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Bibliography

- African Methodist Episcopal Church. 2014. *Our History*. African Methodist Episcopal Church. Accessed October 16, 2016. <https://www.ame-church.com/our-church/our-history/>.
- Anderson, Benedict. 1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York, New York: Verso.
- Brubaker, Rogers. 2015. *Grounds for Difference*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Brubaker, Rogers. 2015. "Nationalizing states revisited: projects and processes of nationalization in post-Soviet states." In *Nationalism, Ethnicity and Boundaries*, edited by Jennifer Jackson and Lina Molokotos-Leiderman, 165-191. New York, New York: Routledge.
- Conforti, Yitzhak. 2015. "Ethnicity and boundaries in Jewish nationalism." In *Nationalism, Ethnicity and Boundaries*, edited by Jennifer Jackson and Lina Molokotos-Leiderman, 142-161. New York, New York: Routledge.
- Croxtan, Derek. 1999. "The Peace of Westphalia of 1648 and the Origins of Sovereignty." *The International History Review* (Routledge) 21 (3): 569-591.
- Ellison, Ralph. 1980. *Invisible Man*. New York, New York: Vintage Books, Random House Inc.
- Engerman, Stanley L., and Kenneth L. Sokoloff. 2005. "The Evolution of Suffrage Institutions in the New World." *The Journal of Economic History* 65 (4): 891-921.
- Fanon, Frantz. 2008. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Richard Philcox. New York, New York: Grove Press.
- Fearon, James D., and David D. Laitin. 2003. "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War." *American Political Science Review* (Stanford University Press) 97 (1): 75-90.
- Ferguson, Priscilla Parkhurst. 2010. "Culinary Nationalism." *Gastronomica* (University of California Press) 10 (1): 102-109.
- Foucault, Michel. 1972. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York, New York: Harper Colophon Books.
- Fryer Jr., Roland J. 2007. "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner? Trends in Interracial Marriage Over the 20th Century." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 21 (2): 71-90.
- Greene, Jack P. 1973. "An uneasy connection: an analysis of the preconditions of the American Revolution." In *Essays on the American Revolution*, 32-80.
- Gurr, Ted Robert. 1993. "Why Minorities Rebel: A Global Analysis of Communal Mobilization and Conflict Since 1945." *International Political Science Review* (Sage Publications Ltd.) 12 (2): 161-201.
- Harrison House. 1994. "The Word Study Bible: the Holy Bible, Authorized King James Version." Tulsa, Oklahoma: Harrison House.
- Heilbroner, Robert L. 1962. *The Making of Economic Society*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc.
- Jones, William Jervis. 1991. "Lingua Teutonum Victrix? Landmarks in German Lexicography, 1500-1700." *Histoire Épistémologie Langage* 13 (2): 131-152.

- Kousser, Morgan J. 2003. "Jim Crow Laws." In *Dictionary of American History 4*, by Morgan J. Kousser, 479-480.
- Kurzman, Charles. 1998. "Organizational Opportunity and Social Movement Mobilization: A Comparative Analysis of Four Religious Movements." *Mobilization* 3 (1): 23-49.
- L'Académie française. n.d. *Les grandes dates*. L'Académie française. Accessed October 3, 2016. <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/linstitution-lhistoire/les-grandes-dates>.
- Linguistic Society of America. 2012. *What is Ebonics? (African American English)*. Linguistic Society of America. Accessed October 16, 2016. <http://www.linguisticsociety.org/content/what-ebonics-african-american-english>.
- Massey, Douglass S. 2001. *Residential Segregation and Neighborhood Conditions in U.S. Metropolitan Areas*. Vol. 1, in *America Becoming: Racial Trends and their Consequences*, edited by Neil J. Smelser, William Julius Wilson and Faith Mitchell. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.
- May, Stephen. 2008. *Language and Minority Rights: Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Politics of Language*. New York, New York: Routledge.
- Morison, Samuel Eliot, Henry Steele Commager, and William E. Leuchtenburg. 1980. *The Growth of the American Republic*. Vol. 2. New York, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Pew Research Center. 2009. *A Religious Portrait of African Americans*. Poll, Polling and Analysis, Pew Research Center.
- Reed, Carol E. 1973. "Adapting TESL Approaches to the Teaching of Written Standard English as a Second Dialect to Speakers of American Black English Vernacular." *TESOL Quarterly* (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) 7 (3): 289-308.
- Rosie, Michael. 2015. "A' the bairns o' Adam? The ethnic boundaries of Scottish national identity." In *Nationalism, Ethnicity and Boundaries*, edited by Jennifer Jackson and Lina Molokotos-Leiderman, 124-141. New York, New York: Routledge.
- Schulz, Kathryn. 2016. *Citizen Khan*. *The New Yorker*. June 6 & 13. Accessed October 12, 2016. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/06/06/zarif-khans-tamales-and-the-muslims-of-sheridan-wyoming>.
- Sekimoto, Sachi, and Christopher Brown. 2016. "A Phenomenology of the Racialized Tongue: Embodiment, Language, and Bodies that Speak." *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research* 101-122.
- Seton-Watson, Hugh. 1977. *Nations and States*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.
- Simkus, Albert A. 1978. "Residential Segregation by Occupation and Race in Ten Urbanized Areas, 1950-1970." *American Sociological Review* (American Sociological Association) 43 (1): 81-93.
- Skey, Michael. 2015. "Boundaries and belonging: dominant ethnicity and the place of the nation in a globalizing world." In *Nationalism Ethnicity and Boundaries*, edited by Jennifer Jackson and Lina Molokotos-Leiderman, 103-123. New York, New York: Routledge.

- The Association of Religion Data Archives. n.d. *U.S. Church Membership Data*. The Association of Religion Data Archives. Accessed October 16, 2016. <http://www.thearda.com/Archive/ChState.asp>.
- The Cherokee Nation. 2016. *About the Nation*. The Cherokee Nation. Accessed October 11, 2016. <http://www.cherokee.org/AboutTheNation.aspx>.
- The National Baptist Convention. 2016. *History of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.* The National Baptist Convention. Accessed October 16, 2016. <http://www.nationalbaptist.com/about-us/our-history/index.html>.
- United States Census Bureau. 1950. *Census of Population: Vollume II Part I*. Census, Department of the Census, United States Department of the Interior, Washington: Washington Print Company.
- United States Census Bureau. 1860. *Population of the United States in 1860*. Census, Bureau of the Census, Department of the Interior, Washington: United States Government Printing Office.
- United States Census of Religious Bodies. 1952. *Churches and Church Membership in the United States, 1952 (States)*. Census, The United States Census Bureau, The United States Census Bureau, Washington: Government Printing Office.
- United States Congress. 2008. "An Act to Execute Certain Treaty Stipulations Relating to Chinese." *The Avalon Project, Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy*. Lillian Goldman Law Library. Accessed October 12, 2016. [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/chinese\\_exclusion\\_act.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/chinese_exclusion_act.asp).
- . 2008. "An Act to Prohibit the Importation of Slaves into any Port or Place Within the Jurisdiction of the United States, From and After the First Day of January, in the Year of our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and Eight." *The Avalon Project, Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy*. Lillian Goldman Law Library. Accessed October 12, 2016. [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/sl004.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/sl004.asp).
- . 2008. *Civil Rights Act*. Lillian Goldman Law Library. Accessed October 12, 2016. [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/civil\\_rights\\_1964.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/civil_rights_1964.asp).
- United States Supreme Court. n.d. *Loving v. Virginia 1967*. Cornell University Law School. Accessed October 12, 2016. <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/388/1#writing-ZS>.
- Williams, David R., and Chiquita Collins. 2001. "Racial Residential Segregation: A Fundamental Cause of Disparities in Health." *Public Health Reports* 116: 404-416.
- Witt, T. Starnes De, and Gertrude E. Noyes. 1991. *The English Dictionary from Cawdrey to Johnson, 1604-1755*. Vol. 57. John Benjamins Publishing.
- Worldometers. 2016. *China Population*. October 11. Accessed October 11, 2016. <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/china-population/>.



