

Summer assignment: AP US History

Invisible Man, Ralph Ellison

Directions: Please answer the following questions in one or two sentences for **Part I** and one or two paragraphs for **Part II**, on a separate sheet(s) of paper. You may type or write your responses. They are designed to assess your comprehension of the novel and to introduce you to historical information that will help you place the novel in its historical context. This assignment is due on the first day of school.

Part I

1. What is the significance of the Founder's posture in his statue on campus?
2. Why have white people lavished help upon Trueblood since his disgrace, when they ignored him before his crime?
3. Why doesn't Dr. Bledsoe give the narrator a second chance at the college?
4. Why does the narrator refuse grits and pork chops at the breakfast counter?
5. Why does young Mr. Emerson show Invisible Man the contents of the letter? Why does Invisible Man mistrust his offers of friendship?
6. What is the motto of the Liberty Paint Company? What is their method of keeping paint pure white? In what way does the ethos of the company resemble that of the American Republic?
7. Why is Lucius Brockway against unionization?
8. Is Brockway being used by the white bosses, or is he taking advantage of his position and knowledge to use others?
9. Ellison gives a detailed catalogue of the belongings of the elderly evicted couple. What do these individual items signify?
10. What is the significance of Mary's cast-iron bank? Why is it appropriate that the narrator is unable to rid himself of it? Is it significant that the people who won't let him discard it are themselves black?
11. Why does Brother Tarp choose the narrator to be the recipient of his leg chain?
12. Is Invisible Man's rage at Clifton's Sambo doll more than just racial? Does he see it as specifically mocking **him**?

*****Summer Assignment is continued on page 2**

13. In what way is the riot at the end of the book reminiscent of the battle royal at the beginning?
14. What has accounted for the change in Mr. Norton's manner when he meets the narrator at the end of the book?
15. What was Jack's reason for writing the anonymous letter?

Part II

Chose **ONE** of the following questions:

1. Research the history of African-Americans from the period of Reconstruction following the Civil War through World War II, paying special attention to segregation ("Jim Crow") laws and to the legal gains made by African-Americans during the Forties. Would a young black intellectual in 1950 feel only disgust for his world, or would he see cause for hope in the future?
2. The late 1940s saw an improvement in the rights and respect accorded black Americans, thanks largely to the important role they played in World War II. What were the principles for which the Allies fought in World War II? Why did that war specifically cause white Americans to rethink their own values and racial policies?