

Brady Gibson

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Professor Ikard

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## Analytical Essay 2 – Harlem is Nowhere

Many factors present in early 20<sup>th</sup> century America can be accredited for the poor augur of the negro psyche. Amongst these factors, Ralph Ellison’s use of language repeatedly describes the concept of absence as scornful to the mental health of negroes. The analysis of this essay is held on a posture and uses assumptions that reflect this statement. For functionality purposes, let “(x)” serve as the entity absent for the specific context in which it is used. In the following essay, I will explore the text in which Ralph Ellison depicts absence as the entity that most greatly exacerbated the negro psyche.

One commonality amongst African American literature is the emphasis placed on laws and conditions present that decimated the negro state of mind. Contrarily, Ralph Ellison begins his approach by directly detailing how absence in two particular contexts affected African American sanctuary. By describing participation in the main institutional life as a prerogative of the non-colored folk, Ellison derives the effects of this cause; the absence of an alliance with the institution forced the presence of unease, garnered by the threat of potential chaos. Secondly, the absence of negro participation in American nationalism led to a deepened sense of hopelessness and neglected individuality. Both instances demonstrate absence as causation and entail negative effects on negro mental health, but conversely, in many instances, Ellison inadvertently describes the concept of absence. It is those instances I choose to engage with next.

Ellison opined, “In the North, he surrenders and does not replace certain important supports to his personality.”<sup>1</sup> The deliberate employment of the word surrender and the phrase “does not replace” jibes with the condition that absence as a concept affected the negroes.

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<sup>1</sup> Ellison, R. (2011). *The collected essays of Ralph Ellison*: . Modern Library, p323

Furthermore, he asserts the word surrender once again in stating, “He surrenders the protection of his peasant cynicism”<sup>2</sup> thereby prompting inquiry into how the absence of peasant cynicism diverges to the loss of a protective psychological framework. Reiterating the notion that the absence of (x`) bears great effect on the development of African American psychology.

Last and most apparently, the title of this work, “Harlem is Nowhere”, further explained as an exploration of the locution “oh man I’m nowhere”, commonly used by negroes to symbolize their emotional state as having no place in society, further exacerbated by their lack of proper guidance and government assistance. This title describes the absence of a meaningful negro presence in a society in which they were present. This text works to demonstrate an enduring theme, the absence of (x`) demonstrating great impact on the negro psyche. It is within these subtle nuances and deliberate literary choices that we unveil the lasting effect of Ellison's narrative, amplifying our understanding of the profound complexities within the African American experience.

In sum, the textual analysis conducted in this essay underscores a singular and resounding consensus: the absence of (x), as meticulously alluded to by Ralph Ellison, stands as a cornerstone in the deterioration of the African American psyche during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ellison's eloquent exploration of absence as a pervasive force holds great significance as his interpretation can be applied contemporarily. Enriching our understanding of the problems depicted by “*Harlem is Nowhere*” may evince potential remedies for the men’s mental health crisis of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as depression and suicide rates reach all-time highs.

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<sup>2</sup> Ellison, R. (2011). *The collected essays of Ralph Ellison*: . Modern Library, p323