

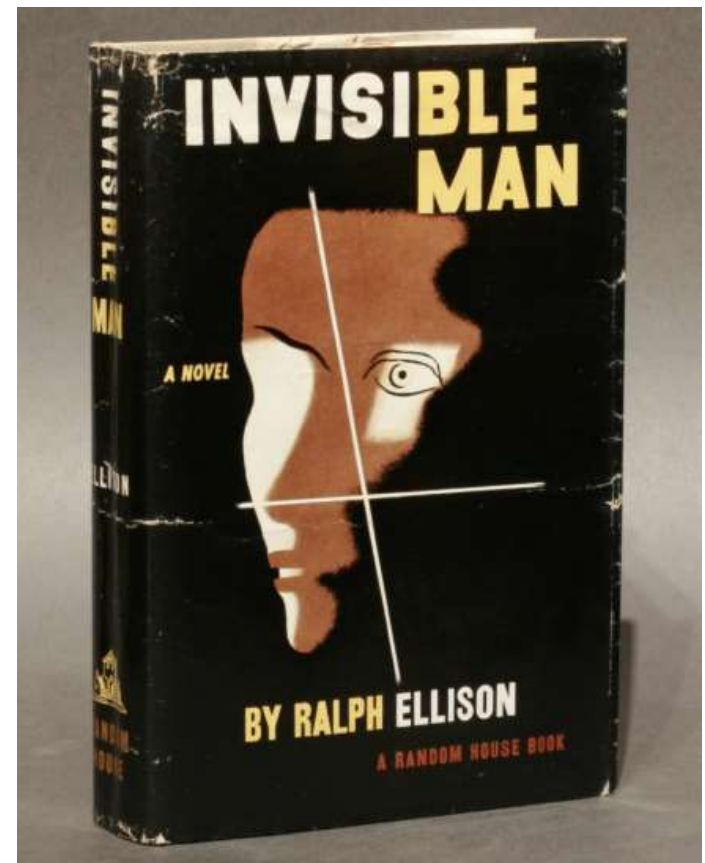
# **Affirming the Principle: Ralph Ellison's Critique of Traditional African-American Political Thought**

**Lianna Martin**



# Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*

- Was published in 1952
- Tracks the life of an unnamed narrator
- Is a work of fiction, but also establishes a sophisticated political theory



# Booker T. Washington



- ▶ Washington advocated industrial training for African-Americans
- ▶ Ellison addresses Washington in his infamous “battle royal” scene
- ▶ In this scene, Ellison parodies Washington’s Atlanta Exposition Address of 1895

# W.E.B Du Bois

- Established his theories for black equality in *The Souls of Black Folk* and *Darkwater*
- Advocated an assertion of rights through intelligent and rational thought
- Ellison critiqued Du Bois' theories of:
  - African community
  - The Veil
  - "Two-ness"



# Ellison's Political Theory

- Ellison used his critique of other thinkers to establish his own political theory
- Ellison articulates his theory in the novel's epilogue
- Ellison argues for individual African-American self-realization that will lead to an affirmation of American democratic principles and motivate individuals to meaningful action.

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