

VIEWS & REVIEWS



## Robert Penn Warren and Ralph Ellison

### *A Dialogue*

**I**N 1952, Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man* was published. It is now a classic of our time, and has been translated into seven languages. The title has become a key phrase: the invisible man is the American Negro.

Ralph Ellison is not invisible, and he had done some thirty-eight years of living before the novel appeared; the rich and complex experience of those years underlies, too, his recent collection of essays, *Shadow and Act*. In the preface he says of his struggle to become a writer:

"I found the greatest difficulty for a Negro writer was the problem of revealing what he truly felt, rather than serving up what Negroes were supposed to feel and were encouraged to feel. And linked to

this was the difficulty, based upon our long habit of deception and evasion, of depicting what really happened within our areas of American life, and putting down with honesty and without bowing to ideological expediencies the attitudes and values which give Negro American life its sense of wholeness and which render it bearable and human and, when measured by our own times, desirable."

We all know the difficulty of being honest about our feelings. But Ellison clearly means something more than that ordinary human difficulty—the difficulty of hitting the truth beyond what Negroes, as Negroes, are "supposed to feel," are "encouraged to feel." By whom? By the white world, of course—but also, as

he has added, "by Negro 'spokesmen' and by sociologists, *black* and white." In other words, he is insisting on the difficult obligation of discovering and affirming the self, in the face of pressures from whatever source or side. He has notably succeeded in fulfilling that obligation.

Physically, Ralph Ellison is a man of force and grace, somewhat above medium height, with a well-fleshed figure not yet showing any of the slackness of middle age. He is light brown. His brow slopes back but is finely vaulted, an effect accentuated by the receding hairline. The skin of his face is unmarked by his fifty years, and the whole effect of his smoothly modeled face is one of calmness and control; his gestures have the same control, the same bal-

ance and calmness. The calmness has a history, I should imagine, a history of self-conquest and the hard lessons of sympathy learned through a burgeoning and forgiving imagination. Lurking in the calmness is, too, the impression of the possibility of a sudden nervous striking out, not totally mastered. There are those moments when he seems to withdraw; but the withdrawal is tempered by the flashes of sympathy and by humor, a wry humor sometimes directed at the self.

He speaks slowly, not quite in a drawl, and when he speaks on a matter of some weight he tends to move his head almost imperceptibly from side to side, or even moves his shoulders. He does this as he sits on a couch in his New York study high above the Hudson. I have just read a quotation from W. E. B. Du Bois, the eminent Negro historian, on what he regarded as the split in the psyche of the Negro American, the tension between the western white cultural tradition and "Negro-ness" as racial and cultural identity.

ELLISON: The idea that the Negro psyche is split is not as viable as it seems—although it might have been true of Dr. Du Bois personally. My problem is not whether I will accept or reject American values. It is, rather, how can I get into a position where I can have the maximum influence upon those values. There is also the matter, as you have pointed out, of those American ideals which were so fatefully put down on paper which I want to see made manifest.

WARREN: One sometimes encounters the Negro who says he regrets the possible long-range absorption of the Negro blood, and the possibility of the loss of Negro identity.

ELLISON: That's like wishing your father's father wasn't your grandfather. I don't fear "Negro" blood being absorbed, but I am afraid that the Negro American cultural expression might be absorbed and obliterated through lack of appreciation and through commercialization and banalization.

Anyway, I don't think the problem of blood absorption works so simply. There are principles of selection which have little to do with the status accorded to whiteness, and these assert themselves despite the

absence of outside pressure. On the aesthetic level alone there are certain types you like, certain sensibilities, certain voices—a number of other qualities. Another factor is that Negroes, despite what some of our spokesmen say, do not dislike being Negro—no matter how inconvenient it frequently is. I like being a Negro.

WARREN: Then it's not merely suffering and deprivation, it's a challenge and enrichment?

ELLISON: Yes indeed—these complete the circle and make it human. And as I was telling the kids this morning at Rutgers, I have no desire to escape the struggle, because I'm just too interested in how it's going to work out. I want to help shape events and our general culture, not merely as a semi-outsider but as one who is in a position to have a responsible impact upon the American value system.

WARREN: Some Negroes—some leaders—say that there is no challenge or enrichment in the situation of Negroes. Of course, for them it may be a matter of strategy to insist on the total agony.

ELLISON: Perhaps I can talk this way because I'm not a leader. But there is a danger in this, nevertheless. The danger lies in overemphasizing the extent to which Negroes are alienated, and in overstressing



the extent to which the racial predicament imposes an agony upon the individual. For the Negro youth this emphasis can become an excuse and a blinder, leading to an avoidance of individual assertion. It can encourage him to ignore his personal talent in favor of reducing himself to a generalized definition of alienation and agony. Thus is accomplished what the entire history of repression and brutalization has failed to do: the individual reduces himself to a cipher. Ironically, some of those who yell loudest about alienation are doing it in some of the most conservative journals and newspapers and are very well paid for so yelling. Yet, obviously, the agony which they display has other than racial sources.

Actually, I doubt the existence of a "total" agony, for where personality is involved two plus two seldom equals four. But I agree that agony and alienation do form a valid source of appeal.

However, there's another aspect of reality which applies: the American Negro has a dual identity, just as most Americans have, and it seems to me ironic that the discipline out of which this present action is being exerted comes from no simple agony—or simple despair—but out of long years of learning how to live under pressure, of learning to deal with provocation and with violence. It issues out of the Negro's necessity of establishing his own value system and his own conception of Negro experience and Negro personality, conceptions which seldom get into the sociology and psychology textbooks.

WARREN: The power of character, of self-control—the qualities that are making this movement effective now—did not come out of blind suffering?

ELLISON: Nor did they come out of self-pity or self-hate—which is a belief shared by many black and white sociologists, journalists, by the Black Muslims and by many white liberals. But even though some of these elements—the Negro being human—are present within the movement, these qualities are no expression of blind suffering or self-hate. For when the world was not looking, when the country was not looking at Negroes, and when we were restrained in certain of our activities by the interpretation of the law of the land, something was present in our lives to sustain us. This is evident when we go back and look at our cultural expression, when we look at the folklore in a truly questioning way, when we scrutinize and listen before passing judgment. Listen to those tales which are told by Negroes among themselves. I'm annoyed whenever I come across a perfectly well-meaning person saying of the present struggle, "Well, the Negro has suddenly discovered courage." Without ever bothering to do more than project his own notions upon Negroes—and not really his own but prefabricated stereotypes—he makes of a slow and arduous development a dramatic event. The

freedom movement, he assumes, exists simply because *he* is looking at it. Thus it becomes an accident or an artistic contrivance, or a conspiracy, instead of the slow development in time, in history, and in group discipline and organizational technique which it actually is.

I shouldn't be annoyed, of course, since Americans know very little of their history and we tend to act as though we believed that by refusing to look at history there'll be no necessity to confront its consequences. And we have so many facile ways of disguising the issues, of rendering them banal.

A few weeks ago I saw a revival of an old Al Jolson movie on television. This was about the time of the summer riots in Harlem, and in



one of the big scenes Jolson appears in blackface singing a refrain which goes, "I don't want to make your laws, I just want to sing my songs and be happy!" Well, whatever the reality of Negro attitudes or whatever the stage of the Negro freedom struggle at the time the picture was originally released, this piece of popular culture tells us more about Jolson, about Hollywood, and about American techniques for converting serious moral issues into sentimental and banal entertainment than about Negroes. Anyone who bothers to consult history would know that not only were Negroes anxious to change the laws but were trying even then to do so.

Viewed from this perspective, America has been terribly damaged by bad art. Perhaps those Negro writers who wish to be praised for shoddy work, and who regard serious literary criticism as a form of racial prejudice, should remember that bad art which toys with serious issues is ultimately destructive and the entertainment which it provides is poisonous, regardless of the racial background of the artist.

WARREN: What do you think of the suggestion that part of the Southern resistance is not based on the question of race as such but on the impulse to maintain identity? A white Southerner feeling that his identity is somehow involved may

feel the need to defend a lot of things in one package as being Southern, and one of those things is segregation. He feels he has to have the whole package to define his culture and his identity. Does that make any sense to you?

ELLISON: It makes a lot of sense to me, because one thing I feel when I look at the Southerner who has these feelings is that he has been imprisoned by them, and that he has been prevented from achieving his individuality, perhaps more than Negroes have. And very often this is a tough one for Northerners to understand—that is, Northern whites, and sometimes even for Northern Negroes.

WARREN: I think that's true—about some of the people I know.

ELLISON: Yes, it is very difficult to get that across, and I wish it could be spelled out. I wish that we could break this thing down so that it could be seen that desegregation isn't going to stop people from being Southern, that freedom for Negroes isn't going to destroy the main current of that way of life; which becomes, like most ways of life when we *talk* about them, more real on the level of myth, memory, and dream than on the level of actuality anyway. The climate will remain the same, and that has a lot to do with it; the heroes of Southern history will remain, and so on. The economy will probably expand and a hell of a lot of energy which has gone into



keeping the Negro "in his place" will be released for more creative pursuits. And the dictionary will become more accurate, the language a bit purified, and the singing in the schools will sound better.

I suspect that what is valuable and worth preserving in the white Southern way of life is not exclusively dependent upon the existence of segregation. Besides, from what I have seen of the South, as a musician and as a waiter and so on, some of the people who are most afraid of Negroes invading them will never be bothered because their way of life is structured in a manner which isn't particularly attractive to Negroes.

WARREN: There's an interlocking structure, I sometimes think, sup-

ported by just one thing—segregation.

ELLISON: Yes, and their fear is so unreal, actually, when you can see the whole political structure being changed anyway. And when the political structure changes and desegregation is achieved, it will be easily seen where Negroes were stopped by the law and where they would have stopped anyway, because of income and by their own preference—a matter of taste. There is, after all, a tiny bit of Negro truth in the story Southern whites love to tell, to the effect that if a white man could be a Negro on Saturday night he'd never wish to be white again.

That bit of consolation aside, however, I don't think it sufficiently appreciated that over and over



again Negroes of certain backgrounds take on aristocratic values. They are rural and Southern and not drawn to business because business was not part of the general pattern. This is one reason—over and beyond the realities of discrimination by banks, suppliers, poor training opportunities, and even individual lack of initiative—that we've developed no powerful middle-class. Here again a cultural factor cuts across the racial and political appearance of things. Southern whites were also slow to take to business.

WARREN: That's been one of the things that has been commented on by observers from the eighteenth century on.

ELLISON: But over and over again, my intellectual friends—they have no conception of this. They can't understand—I mean, it appears ludicrous to them when I say that so-and-so is aristocratic in his image of himself and in the values which he has taken over from the white South. Nevertheless it's true, and some of the biggest snobs that you could run into are poor Negroes—well, they might not be poor actually, they might be living very well—but there are just certain things, certain codes, certain values which they express and they will die by them. And there's quite a lot of that.

WARREN: In Washington I was

talking to a student in the Howard University Law School—she's been through the demonstrations, she's been in jail. She said, "I'm optimistic about the way things may go here in the South—about getting a human settlement after the troubles are over." I asked, "Why?" She said, "Well, because we have been on the land together. We have a common history which is some basis for communication, for living together afterwards."

ELLISON: Well, it is true that when you share a common background, you don't have to spell out so many things, even though you might be fighting over recognizing the common identity, and I think that that's part of the South's struggle. For instance, it's just very hard for Governor Wallace to recognize that he has got to share not only the background but the power of looking after the state of Alabama with Negroes who probably know as much about it as he does. Now, here in New York I know many, many people with many, many backgrounds, and very often people who think that they know me as an individual reveal that they have no sense of the experience behind me—the extent of it and the complexity of it. What they have instead is good will and a passion for abstraction.

WARREN: That's a human problem, of course, all the way. But it can be special in a case like this, I presume.

ELLISON: It can be special because suddenly something comes up and I realize, "Well, my gosh, all the pieces aren't here." That is, I've won my individuality in relation to those friends at the cost of that great part of me which is really representative of a group experience. I'm sometimes viewed as "different" or a "special instance," when in fact I'm special only to the extent that I'm a fairly conscious example and in some ways a lucky instance of the general run of American Negroes.

WARREN: I encounter the same thing, I suppose, in a way. I have been congratulated by well-meaning friends who say, "It's so nice to meet a reconstructed Southerner." I don't feel reconstructed, you see. And I don't feel liberal. I feel logical. And

I resent the word—I resent the word "reconstructed."

ELLISON: It's like this notion of the culturally deprived child—one of those phrases which I don't like. I have taught white middle-class young people who are what I would call "culturally deprived." They are culturally deprived because they are not oriented within the society in such a way that they are prepared to deal with its problems.

WARREN: It's a different kind of cultural deprivation, isn't it? And actually a more radical one.

ELLISON: That's right, but they don't even realize it. Those people can be much more troubled than the child who lives in the slum and knows how to exist in the slum.

WARREN: It's more mysterious, what's happening to him—the middle-class child?

ELLISON: Yes, it's quite mysterious, because he has everything, all of the



opportunities, but he can make nothing of the society or of his obligations. And often he has no clear idea of his own goals. He can't see how to remedy his situation and he doesn't know to what extent he has given up his past. He thinks he has a history, but every time you really talk to him seriously you discover that, well, it's kind of floating out there. There's a distance between the parent and the child—the parents might have had it, they might have had it in the old country, they might have had it from the farm, and so on, but something happens with the young ones.

WARREN: Do you think there's a real crisis of values in the American middle class, then?

ELLISON: I think there's a terrific crisis, and one of the events by which the middle class is being tested, and one of the forms in which the crisis expresses itself, is the necessity of dealing with the Negro freedom movement.

WARREN: Is this why there are some young white people who move into it—because it is their personal salvation to find a cause to identify with, something outside themselves, outside the flatness of their middle-class American spiritual ghetto?

Several people, including a civil-rights militant like Robert Moses of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, have remarked on the resistance of Negroes there to white well-wishers, or even courageous fellow workers. Some whites, to compensate for some deficiency they feel, try to absorb arbitrarily the Negro culture, Negro speech, Negro musical terms, Negro musical tastes—move in and grab, as it were, the other man's soul.

ELLISON: Yes, and the resentment has existed for a long time now. But what is new today is that it is being stated, articulated. It is important to recognize, however, that the resentment arises not from simple jealousy over others admiring certain aspects of our life style and expression and seeking to share them. All too often that idiom, that style, that expressiveness for which we've suffered and struggled, and which is a product of our effort to make meaning of our experience, is taken over by those who would distort it and reduce it to banality. This happened with jazz.

But another aspect of Negro resentment arises because, again all too often, whites approach us with an unconscious assumption of racial superiority. And this leads to the naïve and implicitly arrogant assumption that a characteristic cultural expression can simply be picked up and appropriated, without bothering to learn its subtleties, its inner



complexity, or its human cost, its source in tradition, its idiomatic allusiveness, its rooting in the density of lived life. It's like Christopher Newman in James's *The American* going over and trying to move into French society and finding a dense complexity of values and attitudes.

WARREN: Let's turn to something else. Here in the midst of what has been an expanding economy you have a contracting economy for the unprepared, for the Negro.

ELLISON: That's the paradox. And this particularly explains something new which has come into the picture, that is, a determination by the

Negro no longer to be the scapegoat, no longer to pay, to be sacrificed to the inadequacies of other Americans. We want to socialize the costs. A cost has been exacted in terms of character, in terms of courage and determination, and in terms of self-knowledge and self-discovery. Worse, it has led to social, economic, political, and intellectual disadvantages, and to a contempt even for our lives.

Negroes are now forcing the confrontation between the nation's conduct and its ideal, and they are most



American in that they are doing so. Other Americans are going to have to do the same thing. We've had the luxury of evading moral necessities from the Reconstruction on. Much of the moral looseness from which we suffered can be dated back to that period. We're slowly learning that wealth does us little good, that something more is needed. We're in trouble simply because we've compromised so damned much with events and with ourselves. Something is wrong and it isn't the presence of Negroes. It isn't even the presence of the civil-rights problem, although this is an aspect of it.

WARREN: I agree with you immediately that that is not the central fact. But it flows into an American national situation and aggravates it.

ELLISON: The national values have become so confused that you can't even depend upon your writers for some sense of the realism of character. There is a basic strength in this country, but so much of it is being sapped away and no one seems to be too much interested in it.

WARREN: Even in the face of some of the evidence, we have to assume there's a basic strength in the country—assume that much or give up. But as one of the factors in that basic strength, I've heard you talk about the Negro's ability to master psychological pressures, about how this was developed in the course of his history, about—

ELLISON: —about the old necessity of having to stay alive during periods when violence was loose in the

land and when many were being casually killed. Violence has been so ever-present and so often unleashed through incidents of such pettiness and capriciousness that for us personal courage had either to take another form or be negated, to become meaningless.

Often the individual's personal courage had to be held in check, since not only could his exaction of personal satisfaction from a white man lead to the destruction of other innocent Negroes, but his self-evaluation could be called into question by the smallest things and the most inconsequential gesture could become imbued with power over life or death.

This has certainly been part of my own experience. There have been situations where in facing hostile whites I had to determine not what *they* thought was at issue—because, in any case, they were bent upon violence—but what *I* wanted it to be. "This guy wants me to fight, most likely he wants an excuse to kill me—what do I have to gain? And am I going to let *him* impose his values upon my life?"

WARREN: To let him determine your worth to you, is that it?

ELLISON: Yes. Even if I couldn't love my would-be provocateur, as Dr. King advises, I could dismiss him as childish, and perhaps even forgive him. This, even though at the time I ached to meet him on neutral ground and on equal terms.

One thing that some Northern Negroes overlook is that Southern Negroes learned about violence in a



very tough school. They have known for a long time that they can take a lot of head-whipping and survive and go on working toward their own goals. We learned about forbearance and forgiveness in that same school—and about hope too. So today we sacrifice, as we sacrificed yesterday, the pleasure of personal retaliation in the interest of the common good. And where violence was once a casual matter, it has now become a matter of national political signifi-

cance. Some Northerners regard the necessary psychological complexity of Southern Negroes as intolerable, but I'm afraid that they would impose a psychological norm upon Negro life which is not only inadequate to deal with its complexity but implicitly negative.

WARREN: Let's go back to what you said a moment ago about the basic heroism involved in the Negro struggle.



ELLISON: Yes, I'm referring to the basic, implicit heroism of people who must live within a society without recognition or real status, but who are involved in the ideals of that society and who are trying to make their way, trying to determine their true position and their rightful position within it. Such people learn more about the real nature of that society, more about the true character of its values, than those who can afford to take their own place in society for granted. They might not be able to spell it out philosophically, but they *act* it out. And as against the white man's indictments of the conduct, folkways, and values which express their sense of social reality, the Negroes' actions say: "But you are being dishonest. You know that our view of things is true. We live and act out the truth of American reality, while to the extent that you refuse to take those aspects of reality, these inconsistencies, into consideration, you do not live the truth."

Such a position raises a people above a simple position of social and political inferiority, and it imposes upon them the necessity of understanding the other man. And, while still pressing for their freedom, they have the obligation to themselves of giving up some of their need for revenge. There are no abstract rules. And although the human goal of a higher humanity is the same for all, each group must play the cards as history deals them. This requires understanding.

WARREN: Understanding themselves too?

ELLISON: Understanding them-

talking to a student in the Howard University Law School—she's been through the demonstrations, she's been in jail. She said, "I'm optimistic about the way things may go here in the South—about getting a human settlement after the troubles are over." I asked, "Why?" She said, "Well, because we have been on the land together. We have a common history which is some basis for communication, for living together afterwards."

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cance. Some Northerners regard the necessary psychological complexity of Southern Negroes as intolerable, but I'm afraid that they would impose a psychological norm upon Negro life which is not only inadequate to deal with its complexity but implicitly negative.

WARREN: Let's go back to what you said a moment ago about the basic heroism involved in the Negro struggle.



ELLISON: Yes, I'm referring to the basic, implicit heroism of people who must live within a society without recognition or real status, but who are involved in the ideals of that society and who are trying to make their way, trying to determine their true position and their rightful position within it. Such people learn more about the real nature of that society, more about the true character of its values, than those who can afford to take their own place in society for granted. They might not be able to spell it out philosophically, but they *act* it out. And as against the white man's indictments of the conduct, folkways, and values which express their sense of social reality, the Negroes' actions say: "But you are being dishonest. You know that our view of things is true. We live and act out the truth of American reality, while to the extent that you refuse to take those aspects of reality, these inconsistencies, into consideration, you do not live the truth."

Such a position raises a people above a simple position of social and political inferiority, and it imposes upon them the necessity of understanding the other man. And, while still pressing for their freedom, they have the obligation to themselves of giving up some of their need for revenge. There are no abstract rules. And although the human goal of a higher humanity is the same for all, each group must play the cards as history deals them. This requires understanding.

WARREN: Understanding themselves too?

ELLISON: Understanding them-

selves—yes—in terms of their own lived definition of value, and of understanding themselves in relationship to other Americans. This places a big moral strain upon the individual, and it requires self-confidence, self-consciousness, self-mastery, insight, and compassion. In the broader sense it requires an alertness to human complexity. Nevertheless, isn't this what civilization is all about? And isn't this what tragedy has always sought to teach us?

At any rate, this too has been part of the American Negro experience, and I believe that one of the important clues to the meaning of that experience lies in the idea, the *ideal* of sacrifice. Hannah Arendt's failure to grasp the importance of this ideal among Southern Negroes caused her to fly way off into left field in her "Reflections on Little Rock," in *Dissent* magazine, in which she charged Negro parents with exploiting their children during the struggle to integrate the schools. But she has absolutely no conception of what goes on in the minds of Negro parents when they send their kids through those lines of hostile people. Yet they are aware of the overtones of a rite of initiation which such events actually constitute for the child, a confrontation of the terrors of social life with all the mysteries stripped away. And in the outlook of many of these parents (who wish that the problem didn't exist), the child is expected to face the terror and contain his fear and anger *precisely* because he is a Negro American. Thus he's required to master the inner tensions created by his racial situation—and if he gets hurt, then his is one more sacrifice. It is a harsh requirement, but if he fails this basic test his life will be even harsher.



WARREN: Many Southerners have been imprisoned by a loyalty to being Southern. Now, there's a remark often made about Negroes, that they are frequently imprisoned—or the genius of the Negro is imprisoned—

in the race problem. I am concerned with a kind of parallelism here between these two things.

ELLISON: Well, I think that the parallel is very real. We're often so imprisoned in the problem that we don't stop to analyze our assets, and our leaders are often so preoccupied with an effort to interpret Negro life in terms which sociology has laid down that they not only fail to question the validity of such limited and limiting terms, but they seem unaware that there are any others. One reason seems to be that they exclude themselves from the limitations of such definitions.

WARREN: Let's go back more specifically to the notion that both the white and Negro Southerner are imprisoned in a situation.

ELLISON: Now, we know that there is an area in Southern experience wherein Negroes and whites achieve



a sort of human communication—and even social intercourse—which is not always possible in the North. I mean that there is an implacably human side to race relationships. But at certain moments a reality which is political and social and ideological asserts itself, and the human relationship breaks up and both groups of people fall into their abstract roles. Thus a great loss of human energy goes into maintaining our stylized identities. In fact, much of the energy of the imagination—much of the *psychic* energy of the South, among both whites and blacks, has gone, I think, into this particular negative art form. If I may speak of it in such terms.

WARREN: Just from the strain of maintaining this stance?

ELLISON: I think so. Because in the end, when the barriers are down, there are human assertions to be made, whatever one's race, in terms of one's own taste and one's own affirmations of one's own self, one's own way and the sense of life of one's own group. But this makes a big problem for Negroes because there's always the dominance of white standards—which we influence and

partially share—imposed upon us. Nevertheless, there is much about Negro life which Negroes like, just as we like certain kinds of food. One of our problems is going to be that of affirming those things which we love about Negro life when there is no longer pressure upon us from outside. Then the time will come when our old ways of life will say, "Well, all right, you're no longer kept within a Jim Crow community, what are you going to do about your life now? Do you think there is going to be a way of enjoying yourself which is absolutely better, more human than what you've known?" You see, it's a question of recognizing the human core, the universality of our experience.

It is one of my greatest privileges as an American, as a human being living in this particular time, to be able to project myself into various backgrounds, into various cultural patterns, *not* because I want to cease being a Negro, or because I think that these are automatically better ways of realizing oneself, but because it is one of the great glories of being an American. You can be somebody else while still being yourself, and you don't have to take an ocean voyage to do it.

WARREN: I know some people, Ralph, white people and Negroes, who would say that what you are saying is an apology for a segregated society. I know it's not.

ELLISON: There's no real answer to such a charge, but I did leave the South in 1936. My writing speaks for



itself. I've never pretended for one minute that the injustices and limitations of Negro life do not exist. On the other hand, I think it's important to recognize that Negroes have achieved a very rich humanity despite these restrictive conditions. I wish to be free not so that I can be less Negro American but so that I can make the term mean something even richer. Now, if I can't recognize this or if recognizing this makes me an Uncle Tom, then heaven help us all.