Alienation in Ralph Ellison's Short Stories

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Abstract

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This study looks at the way Ralph Ellison, an African American writer, depicts the Blacks' lives in the American society in some of his short stories through examining the kinds of alienation they experience.

Focus is made on three kinds of alienation: social alienation, cultural alienation, and psychological alienation. The study also shows that although the dilemma of alienation influences modern man in general due to external factors, the Blacks in America feel a special kind of alienation due to racial discrimination against them.

The protagonists in Ellison's short stories feel alienated socially because there are restrictions and chains which prevent them to be members in their society; they are excluded from social institutions. Also racism affects the Blacks' culture, and more importantly, the young Blacks who become estranged from their own roots
and history which are distorted by the White authority. The consequences of social and cultural alienation are psychological alienation. It means that the person becomes a stranger even to his true self.

However, Ellison does not call for protest against the Whites, like other Black writers; instead, he calls for solidarity among Blacks and Whites. But that does not mean the problem of alienation is solved.