



In the Shadow of Invisibility

Ralph Ellison and the Promise of American Democracy

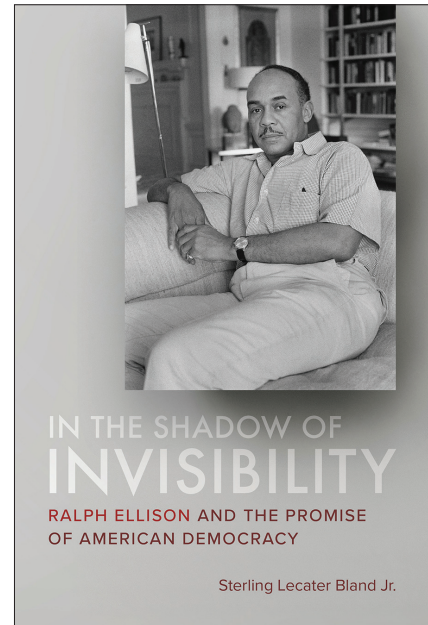
STERLING LECATER BLAND JR.

With *In the Shadow of Invisibility*, Sterling Lecater Bland Jr. offers a long-overdue reconsideration of Ralph Ellison, examining the trajectory of his intellectual thought in relation to its resonances in twenty-first-century American culture. Bland charts Ellison's evolving attitudes on several central topics including democracy, race, identity, social community, place, and political expression. This compelling new exploration of Ellison's legacy stresses the perpetual need to reexamine the intersections of race, literature, and American culture, with particular attention to how the democratic principle has grown increasingly urgent in the nation's ongoing, and often contentious, conversations about race.

Arguing that Ellison saw racial and social identity as being inseparable from the nation's past and its complicated history of racial anxiety, *In the Shadow of Invisibility* traces the growth and transformation of Ellison's ideas across his life and work, from his early apprentice writing that culminated in his groundbreaking first novel, *Invisible Man*, through the posthumous publication of his unfinished second novel, *Three Days before the Shooting* . . . Focused on his mythic vision of the promise of America, this book firmly situates Ellison in the sociopolitical environments from which his ideas arose, with close consideration of his published writings, including his influential essays on literature and jazz, as well as his working notes and correspondence. Bland foregrounds Ellison's thinking on the responsibilities of Black writers to examine democratic ideals, the legacies of slavery and Jim Crow, and the impacts of civil rights movements.

Interweaving biography, history, and literary criticism, and drawing from extensive archival research, *In the Shadow of Invisibility* reveals the extent to which Ellison's work exposes the contradictions inherent in American culture, arguing anew for the importance and immediacy of his writings in the broader context of American intellectual thought.

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DECEMBER 2022

312 pages, 6 x 9, 17 halftones

978-0-8071-7850-8

Hardcover \$39.95, ebook available

Literary Studies / African American Studies

Published with the assistance of the
V. Ray Cardozier Fund

338 JOHNSTON HALL | BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA 70803

225-578-6294 | FAX 225-578-6461 | Orders/Customer Service 800-848-6224 | www.lsupress.org