

# The New Criterion

## Features

December 2008

## The achievement of Ralph Ellison

by [James Tuttleton](#)

On the career of Ralph Ellison and *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison* edited by John F. Callahan.

*For by a trick of fate (our racial problems notwithstanding) the human imagination is integrative—and the same is true of the centrifugal force that inspires the democratic process. And while fiction is but a form of symbolic action, a mere game of “as if,” therein lies its true function and its potential for effecting change. For at its most serious, just as is true of politics at its best, it is a thrust toward a human ideal. And it approaches that ideal by a subtle process of negating the world of things as given in favor of a complex of man-made positives.*

—Ralph Ellison, *Introduction to Invisible Man*”

*Although Ralph Ellison (1914–1994) died last year and is now personally lost to us, he has perhaps never been more visible to those with an eye for di ...*

James Tuttleton

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This article originally appeared in *The New Criterion*, Volume 27 December 2008, on page 5

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