The Invisible Power: An Analysis of Speech in *Invisible Man*

**Purpose:** To trace the development of the narrator’s identity through his speeches.

**Plan**
1. Introduce the importance of oration in *Invisible Man* and its role in the narrator’s life.
2. Discuss the narrator’s speech at the Battle Royale and his early identity as an Uncle Tom.
3. Analyze the narrator’s first speech with the Brotherhood and the rejection of his old identity.
4. Discuss the narrator’s eulogy at Clifton’s funeral and his disillusionment with the Brotherhood.
5. Discuss the parallel increase in the narrator’s oratorical skills and the development of his own identity.

**Thesis:** The narrator’s development as an orator parallels and facilitates the development of his personal identity.

I. The Power of Speech
   A. In Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, oration is a powerful and omnipresent force in the development of the narrator’s identity.
      1. Dr. Bledsoe, Homer Barbee, Ras the Exhorter, and Brother Jack use rhetoric to exert their influence on the narrator.
      2. The narrator’s own rhetorical skill vastly improves as the novel progresses.
      3. Thesis

II. The narrator’s first speech is, by any measure, a disaster and reflects his naïve perspective and lack of identity.
   A. Failure of speech
      1. Blood in his mouth leads to mumbling and mistakes
      2. Wealthy white men laugh and ignore him
   B. Reflection of Identity
      1. Social equality/responsibility gaffe; Cast down your bucket mentality
      2. Quotation from “Elocution and *Invisible Man*” (Hanson, 89)

III. In his first speech with the Brotherhood, the narrator develops a previously unseen eloquence and an ability to incite the emotions of the mob.
   A. Better speech but still unpolished and untamed
      1. Quotation from page 341.
      2. Brother Jack loves the possibilities and emotional response he elicits.
      3. Other members view the speech as irresponsible and uncontrolled.
   B. Reflection of Identity
      1. The narrator moves on from his earlier acceptance of a subservient role in society and comes to fervently accept the Brotherhood ideology.
      2. Rejects the social norms but fails to gain a truly personal identity

IV. In his final speech of the novel, the eulogy for Tod Clifton, the narrator reveals both his new prowess as an orator and his disillusionment with the Brotherhood.
   A. Development as a speaker
      1. The narrator uses repetition and rhetorical questions to emphasize his point of futility.
2. Quotation from page 455
   B. Development of identity
      1. Disillusionment from the Brotherhood
      2. Understanding of his role

V. Not only does his rhetorical ability reflect the status of his identity, it facilitates the development of that identity.
   A. His speech at the Battle Royale and his attitude in youth allow him to go to college.
   B. His speech at the Brotherhood rally propels him to prominence in the organization.
   C. His eulogy leads to his confrontation with Brother Jack and the ultimate loss of faith.

Try to find a new and enlightening perspective at the end.