King of the Bingo Game, by Ralph Ellison

In A Nutshell
Ralph Ellison is one of the best-known African-American writers, famous for his apolitical approach to the black experience in America. Although he was originally a music major in college, he received widespread critical acclaim later on in life for his novel Invisible Man, published in its entirety in 1952.

"King of the Bingo Game" was published in 1944, and it was the last piece Ellison published before releasing Invisible Man. The story focuses on a southern black man attempting to win a bingo game in order to save the woman he loves. Scholars have said that "King of the Bingo Game" marks Ellison's artistic maturity, and typically view the story as a study for Invisible Man. "King of the Bingo Game" bears many of the same hallmarks as Ellison's later novel: a nameless, southern black protagonist, surrealist touches, and similar character arcs. You should Shmoop Invisible Man if you want to learn more about Ellison's novel.

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Big Picture Study Questions
1. What might "King of the Bingo Game" look like as a full-length novel? Why might Ellison have chosen to use the short story form instead?

2. Is "King of the Bingo Game" applicable to types of oppression other than racism?

3. Do you understand the story as being ultimately optimistic or pessimistic? What makes you think so?

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