**The White Community in Bob Dylan’s Black Writing—on the Death of Emmett Till**

Yang Yueni1 Zhang Dawei2 Zheng Qi3

*1Changsha Medical and Health Vocational College, 410300, Changsha, China,*

*2Liuyang No.2 Middle School, Changsha, 410300, China*

*3Yanliu Primary School, Jinan, 250014, China*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Accepted** | Abstract  The composition of Bob Dylan’s “The Death of Emmett Till” marked the commencement of his protest songwriting. This genre would subsequently be the subject of criticism from African American scholars. The subject of black writing is the white blood and geopolitical community, the audience is the whites, and the theme is the refutation of white supremacy, as demonstrated through the analysis of the three levels of community in the lyrics. The study demonstrates the profound influence of the white-dominated discourse on minority writing, particularly through the mechanisms of cultural appropriation and white authorship. It is imperative to transcend a self-centered mindset to foster equitable interracial discourse. |
| 29 April 2025 |
| **Keywords** |
| Bob Dylan; community; black writing; *The Death of Emmett Till* |
| **Corresponding Author** |
| Yang Yueni |
| **Copyright 2025 by author(s)**  This work is licensed under the  [CC BY NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)/Volumes/CKC/文档/88x31.png88x31 |
| <https://doi.org/10.70693/itphss.v2i4.465> |

1. **Introduction**

In January 1962, the then-unknown Bob Dylan completed his first protest song, “The Death of Emmett Till,” addressing a significant Civil Rights event (Marqusee, 2003). The song was inspired by the highly contested news and current events surrounding the Emmett Till lynching case. This marked the beginning of Dylan’s journey of writing a series of songs about events related to the Civil Rights Movement (Burger, 2018).

The Death of Emmett Till (hereafter referred to as “The Death of Till”) marked the beginning of a series of songwriting projects centered on events related to the Civil Rights Movement (Marqusee, 2003). At the time, not only did Dylan call it the pinnacle of his songwriting career, but his biographers Howard Sounes (2011) and Mike Marqusee (2003) also affirmed its landmark status. Moreover, the song was unsuccessful, as Kolin (2009), Dylan’s biographer, asserted that it deserved to be one of Dylan’s most famous songs.

However, in April 1962, Dylan began disparaging “The Death of Till” and shelving related releases (Margotin & Jean-Michel, 2015). It was not until 2010 that Dylan officially included “The Death of Till” for publication. As a landmark civil rights song, “The Death of Till” has been controversial, with many scholars and biographers expressing disdain for it. Despite its continued discussion in academic articles, it has been used as a case study of black writers critiquing white writers and white audiences who dominated the black narrative.

“The Death of Till” is widely regarded as the seminal work in Dylan’s protest songwriting career. However, as African American scholars have argued, the song is an example of white writers drawing on the suffering of the black community to appeal to a white audience, insinuating that the white community is complicit in the oppression of the black community (Gonzalez, 2022). This raises the question of how Dylan’s white community usurps the dominance of black writing and what phenomenon it exemplifies. The paper argues that African American scholars criticize his lyrics because his white perspective distorts black narration, a point that will be further explored in Section 5.

This paper will divide the white community into two categories: the racist Southern white community and the neutral Northern white community. It will then explore the white community protagonists in black stories from micro, meso, and macro perspectives. The merits and demerits of ethnic writing will be discussed.

1. **Methodology and Procedures**

This paper is based on a corpus of song lyrics and employs documentary and textual analysis methods to examine the lyrics thematically. By analyzing specific sections of the lyrics, this study utilizes Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar, focusing on the ideational function to explore the representation of individuals within the lyrics. It also examines the interpersonal function of assessing the meaning of discourse in the text. Furthermore, this paper compares and contrasts the writings of Black artists across different lyrics, referencing historical documents. Lastly, it investigates the theme of implied othering concerning the historical context of the civil rights movement.

1. **The White Community in The Death of Till**

In contrast to society, community is a more direct, complete, and abstract positive term, signifying “voluntary service” as a complement to official service (Williams, 2016). Miller (2019) defines the traditional community as a collective endeavor based on a “constitution,” the result of a social contract between people, either presently or implicitly, and literature as the imitation, reflection, and reproduction of the community. In contrast to the stable traditional community, the community in modern society is experiencing a crisis of disintegration, dislocation, and incineration (Miller, 2019). He also distinguishes three types of communities: indigenous communities that are isolated from the outside world but closely connected, communities that are manifested by others with little connection to each other, and “plural” communities that are interwoven with multiple communities in a society. The first type of indigenous community is one in which the people are born and raised in a community, limited to a specific geographical and systemic context, isolated from the outside world, and excluded from the “un-home-like.” In this context, the reality between them exists in an idea that transcends time and space. The second kind of useless community consists of “solitaries,” otherness, and the community occurs through the other, revealed by the death of the Other. The third type comprises heterogeneous components of the state apparatus, such as discourse, the Internet, and law (Miller, 2019). In contrast to Miller’s definition, Tönnies (1999) categorizes communities into three distinct types: communities of blood, communities of place, and communities of spirit.

Based on the definitions, this paper divides the community into three levels based on the complementarity of Tönnies’s and Miller’s theories. That’s because the lyrics are about the death of a black Other committed by white criminals whose blood bondage is prominent and who conspired in the lynching tragedy with the unfair legal and judicial system. Therefore, the paper adopts three layers to clarify the white community safeguarded by their blood and geographical connections, as well as the discursive systems unveiled by the death of the black Other Till.

First of all, the micro-level community is based on family and geographic location and constitutes a community service system that supplements the official services, which is consistent with Miller’s categorization of indigenous community and Tönnies’s community of blood. Regardless of geographic or blood relations, these groups do not deviate from the characteristic of “locality.” Rather, they are small, regionally focused entities that prioritize the collective interests of their members. These groups share similar beliefs and convictions, and their members often have a strong sense of belonging and attachment to the group.

Secondly, the meso-level community is related to the identity of individuals and groups and is revealed by the Other as distinct from the Self. Consistent with Miller’s community of solitaries, this macrocosmic community is a complex and heterogeneous “community” of the Self and the Other, underscoring the death and objectification of the Other. Here, the community of “self” interpreted as “other” is better able to recognize the boundaries between itself and other groups, and thus is better able to defend its “self” and interact with the “other.” The community of “others' constitutes a social community.

Lastly, the macro-level community is a complex and heterogeneous “plural” community. Coherent with Miller’s community of discourse and Tönnies’s community of spirit, it highlights the sociopolitical and socio-cultural system critical for the formation of a spiritual community. Here, the community is maintained by a fundamental plural community of political, economic, educational, cultural, and military institutions, based on which the community can be continuously sustained, consolidated, and developed.

**3.1. Micro-communities of blood and geo-communities**

The concept of the community of blood refers to the “interrelationship of unconscious beings” that come into existence in three primary forms: mother and child, husband and wife, and brother and sister. This family unit is predominantly manifested through kinship (Tönnies, 1999). Over time, the community of blood has evolved into a unified geographic community, shaped by geographic coexistence (Tönnies, 1999). As a result, this community further develops into a geo-community, which is primarily manifested through neighborhood relations.

In “The Death of Till,” the white community of blood represents the murderer’s “brothers,” while the geographic community is signified by “laughter in the streets” and “the jury.” Dylan substitutes the terms “someone” and “they” for the white murderers in the second and third stanzas. It is not until the fourth stanza—“The two brothers confessed to killing poor Emmett Till”—that he reveals the true identity of the community of blood. In the first three stanzas, the white community adopts a collective identity of “they” while committing acts of evil, which include “dragging,” “beating,” “violence,” “rolling,” “throwing,” and “confessing to the killing.” This language is employed to elicit sympathy from white listeners.

Neighborhoods first appear in the second stanza, where “laughter in the streets” illustrates the selfishness and indifference of the white community. However, in the vicinity of the barn where Till was killed, instead of white people walking in the early morning hours, some black neighbors are depicted as frightened by the screams. In verses four and five, the jury, comprised of local white men in Tallahatchie County, “acquit” the brother despite his confessed involvement in the killing, allowing him to “go free” and turning the trial into a “joke,” as if no one cared. The narratives of neighborhoods and white communal identities lead to negative outcomes that provoke anger and sympathy from conscientious listeners. In this account, the issue is not that “nobody cared,” but rather that “no white people” cared. This lack of concern stems not only from their knowledge of the outcome but also from Dylan’s misjudgment regarding the impact of the event on the black community. The lynching, which was the first court trial in the South, holds significant historical importance concerning racial discrimination against blacks. However, as a white man, Dylan simplifies the outcome into “nobody cares,” imparting to his audience an affective orientation shaped by the white narrator’s subjective view that failure is nobody’s concern.

In contrast, Till, the black victim, is not portrayed as a subject. The efforts of the criminals who assisted Till during his escape attempt, along with his mother, who called the police to contact the newspaper, and civil rights activist Medgar Evers, who worked to amplify the story, are overshadowed by the “protests chanting for judgment.” Although the term “brothers” refers explicitly to the criminals, it was the black relatives and neighbors who protested vehemently, yet they remain invisible under the dominant narrative of white mainstream writing. The crucial black community becomes an unnoticed aspect of the song. Furthermore, among the black relatives and neighbors, Mamie Till and others had already anticipated the odds of an “acquittal.” However, their fight for justice and their determination to announce the truth to the world empowered the black community to engage in the civil rights movement, marking the first step in protesting against racial injustice. Consequently, Dylan’s perspective as a white artist obscures the more socially significant contributions of the black community, allowing the complicit white community to dominate the narrative and catering to a predetermined, neutral white audience. In 1962, when Dylan was not yet famous and was actively involved in Greenwich Village—the center of the white folk movement—his audience was predominantly composed of white listeners.

**3.2. Mesco-Community as opposed to “otherness”**

The community with the Other occurs through and for the Other (Miller, 2019). This community is revealed through the death of the Other (Miller, 2019). This community is revealed through the death of others and is presented to others. In the song, the white community is united through Till’s death as a group that opposes black protests against lynching and defends white supremacy. Not only that, but Dylan also reveals a potential community of white listeners through Till’s death, categorized as a third community.

Both the white “brothers”, who killed Till, and the “jury”, who acquitted the murderer to uphold white supremacy, were implicitly brought together by the black revolt, and even if they were not related by blood, neighborhood, and racial identity bound them together to They were bound together by neighborhood and racial identity, even if not by blood, to fight against the Negro community. The louder the “protests” from the North, the more intense the resistance of this group, gradually forming a regionalism based on white racial identity and neighborhood as geographic identity.

In addition, the collective identity of “white Mississippi” in the song is invisible, but the victimhood of “black Chicago” is explicitly written. Thus, Dylan defaults to “white” as the dominant identity, and it is the “dark skin” that needs to be emphasized," to communicate with white listeners who sympathize with the fate of black people. For this reason, the righteous “protests” in the fourth verse sound more like warnings from conscientious whites to clean house than like efforts by blacks to fight racism. This rule runs throughout the song and is most evident in the last two stanzas. If the audience is black, there is no need for mobilization; what happened to his compatriots has personally provoked outrage, but for the white audience, it is what happened to Till and the unfairness of the verdict that provokes some sympathy, and the ending mobilizes the white audience to join in the protest. Thus, the “you” and “we” do not belong to the black audience but to a neutral white audience. The third white community is exactly what Dylan is trying to pull away from to deviate from the white community and join the movement of the black community. At the end of the song, the call for “we” to make “our land” great is the slogan of the Northern white community to help the black community correct the wrongdoings of the Southern white community, but the black community is not the owner of the land, nor can it save itself independently, and needs the help of a third white party. It is thus clear that both the murderer in the story and the object of the storytelling are white people and that the blacks are only accompaniments.

**3.3. Macro-plural communities**

A plural community is a collection of many communities in society; “discourses, mechanisms, architectural forms, normative decisions, laws, administrative measures, and moral assertions” are all constituents of a plural community, which progressively form social clusters and maintain the transportation of the state apparatus (Miller, 2019). White supremacy and lynching as components of racism are plural communities that shape American society.

In the second section of the song, “justification” is the culture of lynching in white supremacist societies in the South, which allowed whites to commit atrocities against blacks with the absurdity of “not remembering what it was”. One of the factors that shaped and reinforced the culture of lynching was the jury that insisted on the “innocence” of criminals in the face of “protests”. But the culture of lynching was not only influenced by juries and courts but was shaped by the media, education, the law, the political system, economic relations, and other factors that made ordinary white people the executioners of black people. Not only that, but extreme white supremacists imbued with the plural community formed the Ku Klux Klan, which specialized in the capital punishment of blacks in defense of so-called white female chastity and white male authority.

It is worth noting that the song’s account of racism only deals with the bad behavior of whites, warnings to fellow neutral whites, and what happens to blacks, but not the black resistance behind it, and the “protests” in the fourth stanza are also insignificant in the unbalanced narrative.

**4. Community and Black Writing**

**4.1. The white community**

The white community has benefited from a series of enablers based on the interests of white supremacy in U.S. society. These include political associations defending the interests of the dominant group, cultural practices guarding political associations formed based on “whiteness,” cultural practices investing in the “whiteness” of European pioneers, social structures, and systemic racism rooted in social democracy. The actors include political coalitions that defend the interests of dominant groups, cultural practices that guard political coalitions formed based on “whiteness” identities, possessive investment in the whiteness of European pioneers, social structures, and systemic racism rooted in social democracy (Lipsitz, 1999). These factors enable white communities to enjoy “white privilege” under their “whiteness.” Although “white privilege” is not as offensive to people of color as overt racism and white supremacy, most white communities are unaware of the privileged status they enjoy as a result of hegemonic structures, practices, and ideologies. Consequently, they do not recognize the existence of social privilege. Furthermore, the mindset of white people, whether conscious or unconscious, to ignore the social privilege that comes with skin color can lead to white groups attacking factors that threaten social status to maintain the status quo. This can be exemplified by opposing affirmative action and fighting for full equality of opportunity in educational resources. This perpetuates the harm to non-white groups (Pulido, 2000).

In addition to the political advantages enjoyed by the white community, they also had access to more educational resources, job opportunities, and higher pay as a result of their privilege. The legal privileges and economic disparities that existed between the white and black communities led to the segregation of these communities geographically. Before and during the Civil Rights Movement, whites enjoyed numerous privileges, particularly in terms of geography. This is evidenced by the fact that whites relocated from heavily polluted industrial areas during the historical suburbanization and decentralization. In contrast, Latinos and blacks were forced to endure the detrimental effects of downtown incinerators, hazardous waste, and factories (Pulido, 2000). Those who reside in suburban areas are more likely to qualify for home loans and exclusive access to unionized healthcare than those who settle in inner cities. They are also less vulnerable to urban renewal, environmental pollution, and high ground-rent fees (Lipsitz, 1999). However, the white community denies racial privilege, attributing political, economic, social, educational, and cultural preferences to family values, patriarchal attitudes, foresight, and other factors. In contrast, minorities experience unemployment, reside in substandard housing, earn less, and have lower educational attainment. This phenomenon and geographic segregation are often demonized as racial differences (Lipsitz, 1999). As the white community became geographically concentrated, the disparity in economic and political status resulting from racial segregation grew.

The white community also gained cultural discourse as a result of its political and economic discourse, making it challenging for American literature to escape the label of Anglo-Saxon culture (Sundquist, 1998). Although white culture borrowed black satire and dialect and labeled it “whiteness,” it was not until the 1990s that critics began to question this. Not only did Irish, Mexican, and other white minorities who supported the dominant cultural system of racial oppression and class privilege in the U.S. assimilate into “whiteness” to increase the cultural persuasiveness of “whiteness,” but even white women were assimilated into “whiteness” in response to their position. Indeed, even white women have taken the position of enjoying the benefits of “whiteness,” and the community has expanded. The white community insisted on the concept of “whiteness” in literature yet simultaneously devalued “blackness” in culture (Fishkin, 1995). Furthermore, behaviors that deviate from the norms of “whiteness” and white supremacy are perceived as aberrations from the dominant culture.

In the lyrics, this white community is strengthened within and outside the Emmett Till Lynching case: the Northern American whites expel the Southern American whites from orthodox Anglo-Saxon whites by assigning the slavery and racism to the latter. The dominant culture in the United States views the South as “racist, violent, poor, intolerant, and hostile” and the dichotomous North as “enlightened, peaceful, prosperous, tolerant, and urbanized,” in essence a process of spatially divorcing the South from the construction of a national identity (Jansson, 2003). In doing so, the Northern American whites purify whiteness as Americanness through denouncing the Southern American whites who exert the most severe racism and slavery.

**4.2. Black writing**

The majority of research on minority writing is focused on studies of “community, ethnicity, identity, disease, trauma, and war” related to a single work. There are numerous types of minority writing, among which the types of trauma writing of minorities in the United States are categorized into nine categories: history, race, cultural identity, religion, war, politics, family ethics, social integration, and illness. In conjunction with the historical study of trauma writing, the research path of historical retrospection, reducing history, articulating history, and constructing a historical perspective is beneficial in exploring the black writing in “The Death of Till”. This paper argues that Dylan’s “The Death of Till” also follows this path in writing about the events of the Civil Rights Movement.

In the process of writing about minorities in mainstream representations, the physical characteristics of human groups are linked to cultural attachments, creating a set of racial differences standardized by the dominant culture. Racial identity and gender traits reinforce a set of race-related stereotypes in cultural perceptions that equate minorities and mainstream groups with savage-civilized, servant-master, and femininity-masculinity. Under the influence of dominant representations, ethnic minorities can only reasonably and effectively put forward their claims to cultural identity and racial identity through “counter-representation” in their writing. In this process, the subordinate or marginalized group has to adopt non-conventional mainstream representations to dissolve or replace its image in the dominant representational system; for example, black people in the United States write black stories in “unorthodox” English. The dominant class or marginalized group has to adopt “unorthodox” representations to dissolve or replace its image in the dominant representational system. Specifically, Gilroy reconciles his black and European identity with “double-consciousness,” negotiating their blackness with a broader white-paramount socio-cultural context (Evans, 2009).

However, it is difficult for Dylan to escape the influence of the dominant culture, and when writing about the white and black communities, he is unable to get rid of the inherent stereotypes and cannot restore the historical story of the predominantly black people.

**4.3. White Community in Black Writing**

Before the Civil War, slaves were inside and outside the white community (Miller, 2019). After that, they were acculturated by whites and became part of the dominant white discourse. Meanwhile, explicit white dominance disappeared, but whites were still inside and outside the black community, holding the interpretive dominance of black stories and becoming implicitly dominant.

That’s what happens in Dylan’s lyrics: because blacks are often recorded by white people in history, they need salvation from whites. Thus, this form of black writing is more well-received: the victim, black Till, appears in the song, but the “protests” disappear, including Till’s blood relatives, neighbors, and fellow blacks standing in opposition to the racist southern whites. Dylan, on the other hand, performs the white narrator, with “I” as the observer, criticizing white Southerners and calling on the white community in the North to join “I” in rescuing the black victims. Not only are blacks and whites in the South in an antagonistic relationship, but whites in the North are also the antagonists of whites in the South, standing on the sidelines to help blacks. Blacks cannot save themselves in the white narrator’s perspective because the jury is in cahoots with the murderer, so the trial is judged by the white narrator as “nobody cares.”

Dylan is not alone in this white-perspective adaptation of the Till lynching song; American comedian Dave Chappelle’s song “Emmett Till” unfolds from a black perspective, also narratively and then lyrically. The difference, however, is that his narrative is no longer confined to the victimization and the trial but includes Till’s pre-departure, the whistling fiasco, Till’s murder, and the unjust trial. In the second section, before the murder, Till and his cousins are “playing” rather than “molesting” each other, and in the third section, Till’s injuries are told in full: “Beaten and bruised and bloated. It’s a horrible thing to see,” and Till’s mother’s heroic feat is the climax of the fourth verse: “Leaving my son’s casket open ...... The world needs to see / What they did to my boy.” The lyrics praise the mother’s open-casket photo published in the Jet as “If our civil rights movement is a car, then this boy’s body is premium gasoline.” On the contrary, for whites, the male murderer flickers through the kill-him clause, leaving only a rebuttal of the white woman’s lying in the whistling fiasco: “This woman lied, and that lie led to a murder.”

This shows that different ethnic communities have different approaches to the narrative of black writing. From the white Dylan’s point of view, calmly recounting the murder, emphasizing the unfairness of the trial, and speaking straight from the heart can best galvanize his compatriots against lynchings to bring about systems, laws, and reforms, and praising the blacks for their efforts behind the scenes instead weakens the listener’s dissatisfaction and makes it difficult to mobilize everyone’s forces for reform. From Dylan’s point of view, what happens to the “other” black community can help the “self” white community change race relations as represented by lynching, so victimizing and marginalizing blacks is more practical than praising their courage. From the black perspective, the fact that everyone’s child could be Till and that even with the education of Till’s mother and the patronage of his cousins, the child could still meet with misfortune, was even more provocative of black resentment. At the time, blacks were also generally disenchanted with trials, and the “acquittal” of criminals was a logical outcome in the eyes of civil rights activists and, therefore, not a narrative priority. Thirdly, Till’s mother’s feat in the civil rights movement also defended the interests of the black community, and her spirit could encourage black people to continue to protest against social injustice, so it is important to emphasize that the “opening of the casket” has a special meaning of “enlightenment” for the black community.

Black writing is supposed to narrate the stories and encounters of the black community from the black perspective and to change, overthrow, and cover the existing plural community with its own “counter-representation,” but the white perspective from Dylan emphasizes white behaviors to arouse the sympathy of other whites. Dylan’s black writing is influenced by the mainstream discourse, which obscures the black community in terms of actors, audiences, and themes, and instead tells the story of how white people should reform the wrongdoing of the white community.

The root of the problem, combined with the historical background of the time, was the environment in the early stage of Dylan’s creation prevailing in the Greenwich Village folk circle. Back then, on the one hand, the music audience was mainly white groups, which meant that if the story was centered on black people’s self-help and civil rights action, which ignored the mass white audiences of the Village, the lyrics would be difficult to prevail. On the other hand, emphasizing the heroic deeds of black people did not help to inspire sympathy for the civil rights movement; it was more powerful to emphasize the “abominations,” “hatreds,” and “horrors” of the white community. Finally, given the white minority ethnic identities of Greenwich Village folk singers such as Dylan and Joan Baez, the song’s “white community” represents not all white people but rather the White Anglo-Saxon Protestants of the South. The song divides whites into three groups: white minorities, white Anglo-Saxons of the North, and white Anglo-Saxons of the South, and the former two are morally judged against the latter in the song’s gladiatorial arena based on blackness: the white community of the song works in tandem to criminalize, convict, and exonerate itself, forming a closed, xenophobic, and aggressive community, whereas the rest of the whites are the moral beneficiaries, becoming the standard-bearers of benchmarks of mainstream American values, creating a dichotomy of white South-white North, narrowness-openness, racism-racial equality. For this reason, Dylan’s work has been criticized by African American scholars in the 21st century for being the opposite of what white people write about black people, for being “self-interested” in helping black people’s moral reckoning, and for narrating black people’s contributions only to a point. However, it is worth recognizing that in a situation where blacks were generally limited in education, the Ku Klux Klan was prevalent, the civil rights movement was in the ascendant, and racism was still deeply entrenched, “The Death of Till” embodied Dylan’s spirit of opposing racism, protesting against social inequality, and sympathizing with the oppressed, and it also served as a foundation for his later improvement of civil rights songwriting.

**5. Cultural appropriation and white authorship**

As section 4 suggests, Dylan’s black writing is whiteness-oriented, self-centered, and blackness-tooled. This type of black writing involves cultural appropriation from Afro-Americans and white authorships.

Appropriation was conceptualized to describe the malposition of subjects and objects in postmodern art (Yousefi, 2023). Here, the paper holds that the subject position of blackness is copied, occupied, and replaced by whiteness, and hence blackness is switched to the object position, passive to be interpreted by white artists, writers, and directors. The subject position of black art and other cultural representations is ensured when blackness is “exoticized and fetishized” by whites, identified as the otherness through white hegemony and discourse (Johnson, 2003). To be specific, by using “black images and people in expressive prose,” nonblack writers acclaim African American presence as theirs and divide parts of it as blackness (Harris & Morrison, 1993). By appropriation of blacks, black writing from a white perspective constructs the “history and context for whites” and presumes the “historyness and context-lessness for blacks” (Morrison, 1992).

Despite the commercial considerations of Dylan in harvesting a reputation as a civil rights safeguarder, the lyrics present the black victim and white criminals in a way that enables the audience to sympathize with blacks effectively. The lyrics, however, objectify the blacks as the passive others to be saved by whites (especially the Northern white audiences). Black activism history, such as that of Medgar Evers and Till’s relatives, is neglected and depicted in a history-less narration. Therefore, the blank history and pending ending reinvented in the lyrics invite the Northern whites to reconstruct and reorganize, making the latter the Messiah and representatives of the ongoing Civil Rights Movement. The paper argues that Dylan’s early black writing is a form of cultural appropriation, gazing at the victims and landscaping the maltreated body of blacks, guised by its seemingly good-will intention. That explains why Afro-American critics feel uneasy about the lyrics: the black history is rewritten and reconstructed by a white-dominated narrator; the “camera” focuses on the victim rather than the abuser, objectifying blacks; the black body is a landscape to be gazed at rather than the evil white bodies.

**6. Conclusion**

At the micro level, white Southerners reinforce white supremacy in the South through the bonds of blood and place, which Dylan criticizes but ultimately celebrates in the song. This celebration, however, comes at the expense of the black victim, Till, and the broader black community, which denies its presence. In the lyrics, the jury and the murderer unite to defend Southern racism through unfair sentences. At the macro level, Dylan opposes Southern racism and the Ku Klux Klan and calls on his fellow white Northerners to oppose racial inequality. However, Dylan’s audience is predominantly white Northerners, who are encouraged to engage in white-on-white conflicts that ignore the agency of Blacks.

Even though such unfair sentences do not exist in 21st-century America, and the anti-lynching bill has been passed, the white community continues to dominate American society by oppressing minorities. The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 has led to the perception that racism and white supremacy are historical issues that no longer exist in the present. Young whites tend to blame the social injustices experienced by blacks on the distant past of slavery while failing to acknowledge the current privileges that the white community receives through the system. Those with a “liberal individualist” mindset perceive themselves as victims of compensatory systems such as affirmative action, yet simultaneously fail to advocate for the rights of minorities while asserting the “natural” privileges of whiteness in society and culture (Lipsitz, 1999).

This article posits that the white community benefited from the political, economic, and social advantages afforded by skin color in American society while largely controlling the historical narrative and marginalizing the agency and interests of Black Americans. In addition, although the Black cultural movement that emerged after the Civil Rights Movement has fostered a sense of self-identity among Black people, including Black culture in mainstream culture requires an accommodating attitude from those in charge of the mainstream discourse. Otherwise, Black people will continue to be colonized by culture. Therefore, the White community should understand, reflect on, and rectify its current privileged identity and seek a more equal and inclusive social environment. Blacks and ethnic minorities must recognize the spiritual colonization that is perpetuated by the mainstream discourse and utilize “anti-representational” ethnic writing as a means of self-expression and the pursuit of interests.

**Announcement**

The content of all publications is made up of the assertions, opinions, and information supplied by the individual author(s) and contributor(s).

**Acknowledgments**

The authors are grateful for the efforts of the reviews from the journal.

**Funding**

None.

**References**

Burger, J, & Dylan, B. (2018). Dylan on Dylan: Interviews and Encounters. Chicago: Chicago Review Press.

Evans, L. (2009). The Black Atlantic: Exploring Gilroy’s legacy. Atlantic Studies, 6(2), 255–268. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14788810902981308>

Fishkin, S. (1995). Interrogating, “Whiteness, Complicating Blackness: Remapping American Culture”. American Quarterly. 47(3): 443-445.https://doi.org/10.2307/2713296

Gonzalez, A. (2022). A white librettist wrote an opera about Emmett Till – and some critics are calling for its cancellation [EB/OL]. (2022-5-5)[2022-9-28].https://theconversation.com/a-white-librettist-wrote-an-opera-about-emmett-till-and-some-critics-are-calling-for-its-cancellation-181459..

Harris, T., & Morrison, T. (1993). Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination. American Literature, 65(1), 187. https://doi.org/10.2307/2928119

Jansson, D. R. (2003). American National Identity and the Progress of the New South in National Geographic Magazine. Geographical Review, 93(3), 350–369. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1931-0846.2003.tb00037.x

Johnson, P. (2003). Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity. London: Duke U P.

Kolin, P. (2009). Haunting America: Emmett Till in Music and Song. Southern Cultures, 15(3): 119. https://doi.org/10.1353/scu.0.0072

Lipsitz, G. (1999). The Possesive Investment in Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy and the “White” problem in American Studies. American Quarterly. 47(3): 369-387. https://doi.org/10.2307/2713291

Margotin, P, & Jean-Michel, G. (2015). Bob Dylan: All the Songs - the Story Behind Every Track. New York: Black Dog & Leventhal.

Marqusee, M. (2003). Wicked Messenger: Bob Dylan and the 1960s; Chimes of Freedom. New York: Seven Stories Press.

Miller, J. (2019). The Conflagration of Community: Fiction before and after Auschwitz. Chen Xu, trans. Nanjing: Nanjing University Press.

Morrison, T. (1992). Playing In The Dark Whiteness and the Literary Imagination. New York: Vintage Books.

Pulido, L. (2014). Rethinking Environmental Racism: White Privilege and Urban Development in Southern California (2000). In The People, Place, and Space Reader (pp. 334-339). Routledge.

Sounes, H. (2011). Down the Highway: The Life of Bob Dylan. New York: Grove Press / Atlantic Monthly Press.

Sundquist, E. (1998). To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature. Cambridge: Belknap Press.

Tönnies, F. (1999). Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundbegriffe der reinenSoziologie. Lin Rongyuan, trans. Beijing: The Commercial Press.

Williams, R. (2016). Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture. Liu Jianji, trans. Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 2016.

Yousefi, H. (2023). The Race for Appropriation: Blackness, Authorship, and Ligon on Mapplethorpe. October, 183, 50–74. https://doi.org/10.1162/octo\_a\_00476