

Racial Temporality: Revealing the Collapse of the White Authority in *The Sound and the Fury*

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Abstract

Time in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* is out of joint. The white characters spiral into a temporal chaos that inevitably leads the Compsons to destruction. The focus of time, however, can be expanded to the black characters by merging racial alterity and time into a theory of racial temporality. Racial temporality is a fluid concept that develops from the constant interaction between the alternate temporalities of the white and black characters. This flexible concept challenges racism and reveals the black characters as the actual controllers of time against the fragmented, inflexible, and arbitrary temporality of the whites. The black servants—Versh, T. P., Luster, and Dilsey—maintain the flow of time, while the Compsons lose themselves in their stagnant white temporality. Black temporality and white temporality engage with and deviate from each other, constantly modifying the overarching racial temporality that interconnects the four sections in the novel. In Benjy's section, racial temporality conveys superiority to the black servants—Versh, T. P., and Luster. The three black servants maintain the flow of time within Benjy's chaotic temporality, thereby holding an unconventional superiority over a white character. In Quentin's section, racial temporality exposes Quentin's static white temporality through his interaction with Deacon, eroding the validity of white supremacy. Later in Jason's section, racial temporality proves white supremacy to be an arbitrary construct of race. As the faults emerge, Jason appears threatened as Job's behavior challenges his racial beliefs. The arbitrary impositions further highlight his hypocritical attitude towards white supremacy. In the last section, racial temporality further explores the whites' apprehension towards the declining white-centered social structure through Dilsey's interaction with Miss Quentin. Racial temporality can thus signal social changes, such as the deteriorating black-white division and the blacks' rise to equality. Approaching *The Sound and the Fury* with racial temporality allows further exploration of Faulkner's approach to time, change, and race.

Keywords: Faulkner, Race, Time

1. Body of Paper

Unexpected time shifts between the past and the present mark the instability of temporality in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. The prevalence of such chronological disruption has led various Faulkner critics, such as Jean-Paul Sartre, to ask: "why has Faulkner broken up the time of his story and disarranged the fragments?"¹⁹ Many Faulkner scholars have focused the issue of temporality on the white characters, but exploring temporality through the black characters offers a new perspective on *The Sound and the Fury*.¹⁶ In *The Sound and the Fury*, the black characters' presence centers on time, through which their voices remain unadulterated by white ideology. This particular idea can be referred to as racial temporality, which emerges from the discord between the novel's white and black temporalities that the white and black characters exhibit, respectively. Racial temporality does not necessarily focus on either one, but rather how they challenge each other. Black temporality's flexibility in *The Sound and the Fury* challenges white temporality's rigid stagnancy. This not only weakens white supremacy but also defies the

“sociopsychological myth”¹³ that black inferiority helped the blacks’ adjustment “to modernity.”¹⁴ In *Each Hour Redeem: Time and Justice in African American Literature*, Daylanne K. English condemns such socially imposed perceptions because they reduce black people into a “premodern condition of serfdom,” which consequently reveals the “retrograde state of black civil rights.”¹⁴ Hence, the retrograde perception of social inferiority and modernity becomes a tool of indirect criticism towards racism. Such a view likewise evokes racial temporality, in which the blacks in *The Sound and the Fury*—despite their inferiority in the Compson household—appear more temporally aware. Racial temporality gradually instills a political force into the novel, exposing the white characters’ irrationality and acknowledging the innate equality between the two races.

English claims that the “black people inhabit a distinct temporality.”¹⁴ She explains their flexibility with time, asserting that they occupy “a temporal and aesthetic zone of alterity as well as dominant temporalities.”¹⁴ In other words, black temporality’s significance stems from not only its fluidity, but also its active engagement with and deviation from white temporality. Black temporality also elevates racial temporality into a political and indirect criticism, a phenomenon English identifies as an “African American novelistic tradition.”¹⁴ Faulkner follows a similar representational pattern to that of African American literature in *The Sound and the Fury* by illustrating the blacks outside the dominant temporal frame: the chaotic temporality of the whites.⁴ One of the significant African American literary patterns in the novel is what English terms a “temporal-political dynamic.”¹⁵ It occurs when the past inhabits the present, which morally and politically challenges the slaveholders in the African American tradition.⁵ In *The Sound and the Fury*, the “temporal-political dynamic” challenges the remnant white-superiority (the past) in the post-slavery South (the present) of the post-reconstruction era.⁵ Hence, the dichotomy of temporalities not only traces the pattern of African American literature, but also exercises a political effect on racism. Identifying black temporality with an equal or more emphasis against white temporality has been controversial, which English deems “rightly so.”¹⁵ Highlighting the dominance of black temporality reflects the unconventionality of focusing on the blacks, creating a division between the whites’ and the blacks’ perception of time that reveals the pervading racism within the novel. Despite its seemingly divisive nature, racial temporality nonetheless connects the black and white temporalities, exposing the blacks’ instrumental presence in *The Sound and the Fury*. When these two temporalities merge, the novel’s fragmented time becomes aligned and the present interacts with the past.

Racial temporality’s interconnecting effect first appears in Benjy’s section, “April Seventh, 1928.” This chapter’s black temporality helps to chronologically capture the objective temporality of *The Sound and the Fury*. In this section, it is difficult to distinguish the temporality in which Benjy speaks because his temporality is radically non-linear due to his mental disorder. The confusion often leads critics to undervalue Benjy’s presence in the novel, such as Jacqui Griffith’s assertion that “Benjy’s past tense narration signals that he need not be considered so much ‘present’ as absent.”¹⁰ Benjy’s puzzling awareness of time contributes to racial temporality by establishing blacks as the controllers of time, inverting the ordinary patterns of temporality. The temporality in “April Seventh, 1928” cannot be maintained without Versh, T.P., and Luster, who mark the three stages of Benjy’s life, respectively. Versh marks Benjy’s early childhood when Uncle Maury still lives: “Uncle Maury said. ‘Wrap him up good, boy, and take him out for a while.’ Uncle Maury went away. Versh went away.”¹⁶ Then T. P. joins the narrative, whose timing indicates Benjy’s adolescent years based on the year of Caddy’s wedding: “‘Me and Benjy going back to the wedding.’ T. P. said.”¹⁶ Lastly, Luster’s presence clearly marks Benjy’s age: “Luster said. ‘Ain’t you something, thirty three years old, going on that way.’”¹⁶ Evidently, the “slices of time” scattered in Benjy’s section become a whole by the three black attendants.⁹ This style of temporal organization questions the stereotypical white superiority, since the blacks’ presence—not that of the whites—maintains the chronological balance in *The Sound and the Fury*.

The repetitive hushing in *The Sound and the Fury* indicates an important aspect of racial temporality. The blacks’ demand to hush not only empowers them, but also exposes the pain of the Compsons and questions the racial hierarchy. In addition to establishing a sense of time in Benjy’s narration, the black servants’ repetition of “hush” demonstrates the inversely transgressive dynamics of racial temporality. This challenges the Old South’s perception of the racial power dynamics, for the majority of hushing targets Benjy—a white character—from the black servants. The blacks’ authoritative direction to hush appears primarily in the sections regarding Dilsey and Benjy. In Benjy’s section alone, the black servants incessantly command—more than 20 times—Benjy to hush: “Hush up that moaning,” “If you don’t hush, you know what I going to do,” “Hush up,” “You all hush, now,” and “Hush,” to mention a few.⁶ Even though the recipients of the hushing do include Caddy and Mrs. Caroline Compson, Benjy is the central subject whom the black servants attempt to hush. Within the larger narrative of the novel, Benjy’s disoriented perception and expression are the first signs of the disintegration of the Compson household. Hence, the prevalent hushing of Benjy—verbalized by black characters—intensifies the problematic state of the Compsons. Versh, T. P., Luster, and Dilsey are the first ones to recognize the crumbling Compson household; perhaps they sense Benjy’s cries as the sign of a dying family. In an attempt to prevent or at least stall the process, the four black servants may be trying to hide the unfortunate reality in their attempts to hush Benjy. “Hush” acts like a repetitive chorus that brings the imminent chaos back to the

stable reality. Every time Benjy is told to hush, the purpose is to stabilize him from crying—or in other words, to bring him back to reality. This representation of racial temporality appears when Luster leads Benjy back to reality after his memory-triggered crying:

I began to cry. “Hush.” Luster said...*I could hear the clock, and I could hear Caddy standing behind me, and I could hear the roof. It’s still raining, Caddy said. I hate rain. I hate everything. And then her head came into my lap and she was crying, holding me, and I began to cry. Then I looked at the fire again and the bright, smooth shapes went again. I could hear the clock and the roof and Caddy...*the fire went away. I began to cry. “What are you howling for now.” Luster said...The fire was there. I hushed.⁶

During Benjy’s temporal ellipse, the black attendants do not necessarily attempt to fix the approaching decay of the Compsons; the four black characters rather accept the reality as it is, while controlling the speed of Benjy’s narrative with their commands to hush. The blacks’ influence on a white character evidently reverses the Old South’s conventional racial ideology and discloses the contemporary racial prejudice on the black-white power structure. Most importantly, the black servants’ hushing and constant attending Benjy prove a 33-year-old white man’s helplessness without his black servants, caricaturing the whites’ utter dependence on black servants. A white man’s helplessness and blacks’ control of not only their own but also their white owner’s time, therefore, slowly debunks the Southern “mythic stereotypes” of white supremacy.¹³

Racial temporality especially highlights the whites’ acknowledgment and their intentional dismissal of the blacks’ rise to power. For instance, Jason adheres to his white temporality, failing to embrace the changed racial temporality reflected in Job’s work ethic. At Earl’s store, Jason repeatedly attempts to assert his influence on the premise of race. Jason condescendingly recommends that Job should work for him, a white man: “‘You ought to be working for me,’ I says. ‘Every other no-count nigger in town eats in my kitchen.’”⁶ Then Jason adds: “‘What this country needs is white labor. Let these dam trifling niggers starve for a couple of years.’”⁶ He bitterly recognizes the blacks’ rise to equality and his reference to “years” appears to affirm the imminent end of the divided black-white division.⁶ Nonetheless, Jason’s temporality hinders him from fully accepting the shifting racial temporality, for he still resides in the white superiority ideals of the Old South. He persistently avoids working together with old Job; even when Earl tells him to help Job, Jason goes to the back of the store and joins him to merely read his letter, not to work. Jason suggests that white labor must return, but he withdraws from actively following his words of becoming a part of the white labor force, reinforcing the irony of his comments. When Earl defends Job’s work ethic, Jason again demonstrates hostility: “‘You’d be a good business man if you’d let yourself, Jason...I dont know why you are trying to make me fire you’...‘Where’s Uncle Job?’ ‘Gone to the show, I imagine,’ I says...‘He doesn’t slip off.’ he says. ‘I can depend on him.’ ‘Meaning me by that,’ I says.”⁶ Jason retorts quite defensively—“Meaning me by that”—because Earl’s complimenting Job challenges the stereotypical black-white division and its inherent white supremacy.⁶ In Jason’s hypocritical manner towards labor, racial temporality reveals his stagnant temporality, for he traps himself in the past disappointment of not getting the job that Herbert Head had promised him. Jason still seems to hold a grudge against the idea of work—“‘Have I said a word except I had to go back to work?’ ... ‘and Herbert...after his promise—’ ‘Well, he was probably lying, too’”—and the changing racial temporality exacerbates this resentment.⁶ Such racial tension in the workforce and work ethics reveals the whites’ apprehension about their diminishing “cultural superiority and racial segregation.”¹

In *Mastered by the Clock*, Mark Smith discusses the whites’ using time as a means of controlling and systemizing labor. Smith argues that the antebellum plantation owners would use mechanical time in the forms of clocks and watches to “reassert control over black labor.”²¹ The domination of time recurs; however, their temporal dominance—or white temporality—failed to continue like that of the blacks discussed by English and portrayed in *The Sound and the Fury*. The inherent weakness of the white temporality again rises from the slave owners’ “denial of...the presence of publicly accessible time and increasing shift toward the ownership of private time.”²¹ Similar to the Compson brothers, the southern slave owners also represent the instability of the white authority over the black slaves and servants. Modernity revealed the instability of the white temporality and their arbitrary imposition of linear time. When these plantation owners overlooked—consciously or not—the changing racial temporality, they were simply left with the burden of their legacy, as the history proves.¹ In *The Sound and the Fury*, the whites’ failure to be temporally flexible and to perceive the changing racial dynamics questions the arbitrary white superiority and redefines the racial temporality.

In the train station scene between Quentin and Deacon, black temporality reveals the faults of white temporality. When Quentin meets Deacon at a train station, he appears to be disturbed by Deacon’s atypical manners as a black person: “From then on until he had you completely subjugated.”⁶ Deacon has acclimated himself to the Northern lifestyle by coping with reality. Even when Quentin calls him, Deacon continues to converse with others while calling

him by the first name: “until at last when he had bled you until you began to learn better he was calling you Quentin or whatever.”⁶ Deacon’s next statement distinctly captures the shift of the racial structure in the South: “I dont mind telling you because you and me’s the same folks, come long and short.”⁶ He shows no signs of inferiority and servility; in fact, he subjects a white man to himself: “he had you completely subjugated” and “he had bled you.”⁶ Such adaptability manifests black temporality’s responsive nature to the changing surroundings and the flow of time. English also states that “time is the measure of change,” emphasizing Deacon’s fluid temporality.⁵ Considering change as the corollary of time, white temporality in *The Sound and the Fury* proves stagnant and circular, not linear and progressive like black temporality. For the white characters, flow of time becomes an illusion. Time essentially stops for the whites, and the realization of it becomes painful as Quentin depicts: “Not to me, anyway. Again. Sadder than was Again.”⁶ Benjy, Quentin, and Jason cannot temporally progress, for their decisions arise from their temporal frames in which they are stuck. The possibility to “get ahead” is nonexistent; their white temporality carries them back to their respective temporal obsession.⁶ As the plot proves, such decisions from their stagnant white temporalities result in more pain and the destruction of the Compson household.

Moreover, Quentin’s stagnant temporality hinders him from accepting the surrounding change, prompting his suicide. The interaction between Quentin and Deacon challenges white superiority. While Deacon has successfully assimilated himself into the flow of time and asserts his power over it, time asserts its power over Quentin. Quentin’s inability to perceive the progression of time defies white superiority, for it marks him temporally inferior to Deacon. This interaction recalls Quentin’s conversation with Shreve in *Absalom, Absalom!*, when he mentions a “day when the South would realise that it was now paying the price for having erected its economic edifice not on the rock of stern morality but on the shifting sands of opportunism and moral brigandage.”⁷ The painful realization of the South’s downfall that his father had forewarned awakens him to the real state of the South and his false sense of morality and temporality. His internal dilemma between conscience and social construct thereby reveals the stagnancy of white temporality and its inevitable connection with black temporality.

Hence, Quentin’s reluctance to comfortably acknowledge the change not only represents the stirring influence of racial temporality but also his own stagnant temporality. This is particularly evident in his conversation with Shreve:

“And while I think about it—” I took the letter from my pocket. “Take this around to my room tomorrow and give it to Shreve. He’ll have something for you. But not till tomorrow, mind.” He took the letter and examined it. “It’s sealed up.” “Yes. And it’s written inside, Not good until tomorrow”...His eyes were soft and irisless and brown, and suddenly I saw Roskus watching me from behind all his whitefolks’ claptrap of uniforms and politics and Harvard manner, diffident, secret, inarticulate and sad...“Not until tomorrow, remember.”⁶

Quentin’s remark on the future in the repetition of “tomorrow” deceives.⁶ As the plot of *The Sound and the Fury* proves, his suicide brings no “tomorrow” and thus no future.⁶ This dialogue, therefore, occurs between a white character—Quentin—without a future and a black character—Deacon—with a future. Quentin’s seeing Roskus in Deacon suggests Deacon’s temporal agility. His demeanor at one point reminds Quentin of a stereotypical southern slave Roskus, whose meekness evokes a sense of familiarity; however, it quickly vanishes when Deacon exudes an aura of self-security: “But Roskus was gone...Once more he was that self...pompous, spurious, not quite gross.”⁶ The way in which Quentin describes Deacon’s demeanor again insinuates his discomfort with the changing social status of the blacks. Although Deacon may appear to be reminiscent to the Old South’s image of the blacks—“Yes, suh, young marster, jes give de old nigger yo room number”—his flexible temporality allows him to promptly return to the present moment in Boston.⁶ Deacon’s racial temporality enables him to adjust to the social change and to “gradually [move] northward.”⁶ Such temporal adaptability presents Deacon with a future; on the contrary, Quentin’s suicide ceases his flow of time. Perhaps his interaction with Deacon reinforces Quentin’s decision to commit suicide, for white temporality collapses as his contemporary perception of the blacks begins to disintegrate. Quentin’s “tomorrow” does not exist because his suicide kills not only himself but also time, reflecting racial temporality’s role in exposing the stereotyped racial dynamic and Quentin’s static temporality.⁶

The whites’ discomfort towards the changing racial dynamic appears again between Miss Quentin and Dilsey. Miss Quentin’s fear, however, does not appear noticeable because she relies on Dilsey whenever Jason threatens her world. Dilsey is the one who fills the maternal space vacated by Mrs. Compson and Caddy—in Dilsey, Quentin seeks maternal care and presence: “Dilsey, I want my mother.”⁶ In this particular scene when Jason verbally intimidates Quentin—“But dont you think you can run it over me...You dam little slut”—Dilsey approaches Quentin to protect and console her.⁶ When Dilsey approaches young Quentin, Quentin does not seem to mind her presence after the request for her mother—or a maternal presence. At first, Quentin keeps Dilsey near her for comfort: “‘Now, now,’ she says. ‘He aint gwine so much as lay his hand on you while Ise here.’”⁶ Quentin, however, suddenly changes her attitude when Dilsey’s hand touches her: “‘You damn old nigger,’ she says. She ran toward the door.”⁶ Quentin’s

abrupt denial of Dilsey's consolation cannot be limited to a simple issue of her ungratefulness or annoyance. Quentin's particular choice of "nigger" implies that her irritation stems from a racial context.⁶ This interaction indicates Quentin's confusion and apprehension towards her unforeseen recognition of Dilsey's equal status despite her race. Hence, even though Quentin seeks Dilsey's emotional care, she rejects Dilsey as her mother figure for being a black woman. The immediate realization of the shifted racial temporality awakens Quentin to reality and makes her fear the decline of the white superiority in the South. By emphasizing Dilsey's race, Quentin seeks to recall white supremacy to arbitrarily build Dilsey's inadequacy as a maternal figure. This logic stems from the history of slavery, in which the whites deemed the divided black-white structure essential for the blacks to "gain maturity," "the essence of humanity," and modernization.⁴ Startled by Dilsey's deviation from the normal social pattern, Quentin quickly detracts her black mammy back to a powerless and suppressed black figure—as a feeble attempt to uphold the system of white superiority on which her temporality still depends. Racial temporality pervades this short interaction between Quentin and Dilsey, thereby revealing the inner apprehension in Quentin—a white character—towards the disintegrating white-dominant social structure of the Old South.

In addition, racial temporality hints at a possible destruction of the unjust racial bias in the South during the time period. Dilsey prominently demonstrates this through her unconventional relationship with time. Her communication with time becomes noteworthy because every single Compson son fails to cope with time and unwittingly lets his "subjective" sense of time to consume the "objective" temporality.²² Before analyzing Dilsey's temporality, it is therefore necessary to evaluate the temporalities of Benjy, Quentin, and Jason to better understand the racial temporality and Dilsey in *The Sound and the Fury*. According to Faulkner, the Compsons' problem stems from "still living in the attitudes of 1859 or '60."¹¹ The Compson household thus fails to appropriately adapt to the flow of time and perceives time arbitrarily, often trapped in stagnant views of time. Benjy remains oblivious to time and fails to distinguish the past and the present. He resorts to crying when his perception of time becomes tangled. Quentin remains disoriented in the past and continuously attempts to defy and free himself from time: "I broke my watch... He said time is dead as long as it is being clicked off by little wheels; only when the clock stops does time come to life."⁶ Greatly obsessed with the past, Quentin cannot accept the changes within the flow of time. His brother Jason is stuck in the present due to his obsession with controlling time; his time does not prompt any change, and he remains in a stagnancy of self-blame and hatred. According to Stacy Burton, the Compson sons' temporalities are incomplete, for they fail to "explore the interrelation of past, present, and future."²² In contrary, Dilsey restlessly lives in her own moment, unrestricted by the dominant white perception of time. Her life is more centered on love for others—the Compsons—and less on herself. The resulting temporal flexibility allows Dilsey to move fluidly between the past and the present. Time does not destroy Dilsey. She accepts time and its infinite, free-flowing nature, and this may be what Faulkner means by endurance. The Compsons' inability to follow such an evident concept makes their temporality finite. Dilsey's temporality, however, even transcends her own temporal framework and discloses the irrationality of white supremacy.

The hallmark example of Dilsey's fluid temporality appears in "April Eight, 1928," when Dilsey starts the morning of the Compson household. As she begins to prepare breakfast, a broken cabinet clock strikes five times, to which Dilsey says without hesitation: "Eight oclock."⁶ Dilsey not only has a correct perception of time but also is not destructed by the notion of time. Her correct perception of time quickly discloses the Compson brothers' dysfunctional temporalities. For Dilsey, time is a continuum that flows from the past, through the present, and to the future. Dilsey's ability to accurately discern time thus depicts the flawed superiority of the whites, who fail to perceive time correctly. The Old South's racist assertion undoubtedly becomes jeopardized, for a black character holds a perception of time superior to that of—not just one—but three white characters. She remains free from personal obsession and limitation of time. Dilsey seems to understand the complexity of time unlike her white counterparts, since time brings order and value to her life. Racial temporality and Dilsey's temporal perception hence revise and stabilize the flow of time within the Compsons' chaotic temporality.

Dilsey continues to play an integral role in depicting the racial temporality in *The Sound and the Fury*. Faulkner portrays Dilsey with various degrees of racial stereotypes and deviations to expose the decline of the Compsons and the irrationality of racism. Dilsey may initially seem like a typical mammy figure, a stereotypical black servant whose life centers on dutifully serving the Compsons, the whites: "She toiled painfully up the steps, shapeless, breathing heavily. 'I'll have de fire gwine in a minute, en de water hot in two mo.'"⁶ Faulkner's stereotypical depiction of Dilsey as a loyal black servant to a white household acts as an indirect critique on the whites' immoral control of the blacks. The social expectation of black subservience forces them to accept the social standards within the white-centered community. Even though Dilsey appears to be "imprisoned in duties dictated by past legacy," she builds her own racial temporality by deviating from the racial convention, while the Compsons fail to preserve their intrinsic morality under the social convention.²⁰ It is important to note that the black-white division does not completely control Dilsey; in fact, calling Dilsey a loyal, trustworthy black servant does not do her justice. Dilsey deserves further attention, for

she also departs from the conventional perception of the blacks and contributes to the racial temporality in *The Sound and the Fury*. Faulkner does not incorporate any legal or tangible limitations that Dilsey faces in the Compson household. Dilsey's apparent state of subordination merely stems from the stereotyped impression of her skin color. The ill-founded basis of white supremacy becomes evident when Dilsey assumes the position of the actual head of the Compson household and plays a pivotal role in holding the white family together. Faulkner also illustrates this notion metaphorically by making Dilsey the one to awaken the sleeping Compson household and to build a fire in the stove: "The day dawned bleak and chill...Dilsey opened the door of the cabin and emerged, needled laterally into her flesh...took a soiled apron down from the wall and put it on and built a fire."⁶ Contrary to Mrs. Compson's destructive influence on her own family—both its physical maintenance (the present) and her children (the future)—Dilsey's motherly presence embodies progressive black temporality and maintains the flow of time in the Compson household.

English notes that the blacks have commonly been depicted in evidently racist ways that enforce their "temporal and social alterity."⁴ *The Sound and the Fury's* racial temporality, however, defies this perception by portraying the black characters as moral and virtuous individuals. This illustration attacks the biased notion of black inferiority in the Old South, highlighting racial temporality's role in exposing the unjust basis of the divided black-white structure. The contrast between the whites' corrupted morality and the blacks' moral virtue challenges the contemporary racial norms of *The Sound and the Fury*. Historically, the implementation of the Jim Crow laws normalized racial segregation and demoralized the blacks solely based on race³—which Jason mirrors: "that's just what I'm thinking of—flesh... When people act like niggers, no matter who they are the only thing to do is treat them like a nigger."⁶ Even though Faulkner uses Jason's voice to portray the contemporary perspective on race division, the same statement—from the perspective of racial temporality—becomes an indirect critique on racism's irrationality. Furthermore, against the predominant white temporality, Dilsey challenges her contemporary racial temporality with not only her relationship with time, but also her moral presence in the Compson household. This particularly applies to Faulkner's depiction of Dilsey, who appears moral, human, and loving than any other whites in *The Sound and the Fury*. The seemingly anachronistic portrayal of virtuous and moral black characters such as Dilsey exposes the ill-nature of the whites' tendency to equate "people" only to themselves while dehumanizing and demoralizing blacks as "niggers," who do not count as "people."³ Ironically, the blacks present the novel with the moral core. The Compsons' collective denial and blindness to their changing racial temporality confine the family to the Southern myths of "white supremacy and Negro inferiority."¹⁴ Bound to the illusion of white privilege, the Compsons gradually descend to their ruin by failing to recognize their inherent sense of morality and their static white temporality.

White superiority does not defeat Dilsey. The impression of inferiority or weakness, if any, stems from the racially defined social structure of the time period. Rather than becoming absorbed into the social and temporal structures, Dilsey absorbs them. In other words, Dilsey notices her contemporary racial temporality, in which the white authority presides unquestioned and remains normal despite the rising power of the blacks. At the same time, however, Dilsey does not identify herself as racially inferior to the Compsons. She occupies a temporal space of her own, creating and strengthening black temporality, forging a confluence of both temporalities without losing her own stream of racial temporality. She exists in the same time period with the Compsons, yet she experiences a temporal multi-consciousness that becomes an indirect criticism towards the whites' flawed perception of the racial dynamic. One of the notable representations of Dilsey's racial temporality appears in Benjy's section, when Caddy arbitrarily changes his name: "*His name is Benjy now, Caddy said. How come it is, Dilsey said...Name ain't going to help him. Hurt him, neither...My name been Dilsey since fore I could remember and it be Dilsey when they's long forgot me.*"⁶ While Caddy hastily tries to change Benjy's name without much thought, Dilsey emphasizes the genuine value of living, claiming that name is merely a superficial aspect of life. This dialogue outwardly reverses the novel's contemporary ideologies on race and morality, placing Dilsey in a moralizing position: "*How will they know it's Dilsey, when it's long forgot, Dilsey, Caddy said. It'll be in the Book, honey, Dilsey said. Writ out.*"⁶ In addition to her references to the Bible, Dilsey frequently demonstrates her religiously centered life: "You'll know in the Lawd's own time," "Oh, Lawd," and "Tell um de good Lawd dont keer whether he bright er not. Dont nobody but white trash keer dat."⁶ These examples illustrate that Dilsey's transcendent racial temporality progresses on biblical temporality, which incorporates a period before creation when time was absent. Dilsey's reliance on the Bible—whose verses center on an "atemporal text-progression"—emphasizes her superior sense of time to that of the whites.¹⁵ Dilsey's black temporality is multi-layered and atemporal: multi-layered for reaching beyond the mere limits of the past, present, and future within her temporality, and atemporal for highlighting a sense of universality in her perception of time. Therefore, accompanying Dilsey's virtuous disposition and her unique dynamic with the white characters, her transcendent racial temporality hints at the inherent equality among all humans regardless of race.

In "April Eighth, 1928," racial temporality indicates a gradual collapse of the white authority. When Dilsey returns to the kitchen, she says: "Ise seed de first en de last...I seed de first en de last."⁶ This enigmatic contemplation reflects Dilsey's formulating black temporality in her own communication with time. Particularly in this scene, the

past—“de first”—present, and future—“de last”—are synchronized in Dilsey’s temporality.⁶ The biblical connotation embedded in “I seed de beginnin, en now I sees de endin” elevates Dilsey to not only a witness but also a protector of the Compsons’ fragmented morality.⁶ Furthermore, Dilsey sings a hymn in a noteworthy way: “She sang the first two lines over and over to the complete tune.”⁶ Her repetitive singing towards a completion in a harmonic tune conveys a hopeful image, an organized ending for a new future. Dilsey exemplifies the last possibility of salvaging the Compson name from a complete destruction. She imbues a sense of promise into black temporality within *The Sound and the Fury* and allows racial temporality to mark the progressing social shift.

Racial temporality has revealed the faults of the Old South’s divided black-white structure. The flow of time must now continue, transitioning the Old South into a system of racial equality. Dilsey’s “timeless” temporality, therefore, evokes an optimistic future in which the black people can create an order of equality.¹⁷ Racial temporality consequently allows the readers to capture and define the ideas of white temporality and black temporality. As the novel’s white characters such as Benjy, Quentin, and Jason demonstrate, white temporality is fragmented, inflexible, and arbitrary. At the same time, the black characters such as Dilsey, the three black attendants, and Deacon manifest an intricate, stable, and coherent temporality. The latter often surpasses the boundaries of the past, present, and future, contributing to racial temporality’s transcendent nature. By embodying both white and black temporalities, racial temporality thus allows the readers to identify the innate tension between the two races and the decline of white dominance.

Even though the Compsons are breaking down, that does not suggest their complete destruction. Based on Dilsey’s viewpoint, the family’s chaos is simply a part of the continuum of time that holds its own significance. Faulkner emphasizes the divided black-white structure only to merge it with racial temporality. In fact, Faulkner risked public condemnation for challenging race and racism in the South in both private and public settings.¹³ In addition to his reputation, the underlying anti-racism approach appears notable in *The Sound and the Fury*’s controversially non-chronological sequence. It is important to recognize that Faulkner’s “structural use of time”—especially his usage of the disjointed temporality—could “always be rearranged.”²⁰ Faulkner nonetheless connects the narratives in the following order: “April Seventh, 1928,” “June Second, 1910,” “April Sixth, 1928,” and “April Eighth, 1928.”⁶ Evidently, fragmented time prevails not only within each character’s narrative, but also throughout the book as a whole. The literary design of *The Sound and the Fury*, on a larger scope, embodies the theory of racial temporality. The novel begins with Benjy’s “mental atrophy” that symbolizes the chaotic and absent temporality, progresses through Quentin’s obsession with the past, Jason’s futile attempt to control the present, and ends with a focus on Dilsey—a black character—as the healer of the Compsons’ temporal chaos.¹⁸ In other words, the plot actually follows a chronological order by moving from the temporal absence, past, present, and to future and temporal transcendence. The titular disorganization creates a platform for racial temporality to connect the narratives together for accentuating both the new historical and social direction and to contribute to the wholeness of *The Sound and the Fury*. Similarly, Dilsey’s words in the last chapter further strengthen the idea: “I seed de beginning, en now I sees the endin.”⁶ Once the “grotesquely shaped” narratives of the whites have passed by, Dilsey—a black character—brings the whites’ muddled temporality to a closure.¹² Dilsey’s voice becomes more salient, as if Faulkner intended to dismiss the white speakers one by one. Faulkner’s ending with a Dilsey-centered narrative, hence, emphasizes how the blacks’ presence and racial temporality signal a sense of completion and an imminent shift in the racial dynamics—symbolized by a broken flower that Dilsey gives to Benjy: “‘Hush, Benjy. Hush, now.’ But he wouldn’t hush... He came back with a single narcissus. ‘Dat un broke.’ Dilsey said. ‘Whyn’t you git him a good un?’... Ben’s voice roared and roared... The broken flower drooped over Ben’s fist and his eyes were empty and blue and serene again.”⁶ These final words of *The Sound and the Fury* give life to Faulkner’s “they endured” in his Compson Appendix.⁸ The two words attest the black temporality’s untroubled, persevering presence after the chaotic decay of the Compsons and their flawed white temporality.

The interplay of black and white temporalities constructs and enriches the racial temporality in *The Sound and the Fury*, gradually exposing the flawed, lingering black-white division in the South. The idea of racial temporality maintains the flow of time within the chaotic temporality of the Compson household, even suggesting a hopeful future. Although replete with psychologically and temporally disorientated whites, fragmented memories, unstable time, and collapsing racial division, *The Sound and the Fury* emanates a sense of hope with its black characters. Racial temporality confronts the irrationality of the racially disciplined society within the novel, and the constant engagement between the black and white temporalities shows that the destruction of the Compsons arises from the whites’ loss of time. The contrast between the two temporalities bolsters the blacks’ role in maintaining and manifesting temporal flexibility and morality, by which the black voices consummate the novel. Such moral and temporal superiority of the black characters advance the gradual invalidation of the contemporary racial division. From Versh to Dilsey, the idea of racial temporality pervades the novel, introducing a racial dynamic that will bring the South to “its ordered place.”⁶

Faulkner’s black servants in *The Sound and the Fury* do not appear derided, contrary to the stereotyped misconception of the blacks. The presence of the blacks in the novel promotes a racial balance in which the whites

and the blacks constantly formulate racial temporality within the novel. In contrast to the passivity of time, the intercommunication between racial temporality and its contributors expand the power of time in *The Sound and the Fury*. Always present, racial temporality becomes morphed by the interplay between the white and black temporalities. It signals a new wave of social change and exposes the irrationality of racism. Without declaring the blacks superior to the whites, racial temporality neutrally and gradually divulges the absurdity of racism and demonstrates its cost through the Compsons' descent to chaos. Identifying racial temporality facilitates understanding racism and discrimination within *The Sound and the Fury*. The prevalent theme of time—both its presence and absence—allows racial temporality to become a new methodology in interpreting the novel. *The Sound and the Fury* will never be reducible to one meaning, and racial temporality proves the infinite possibilities in appreciating Faulkner's black voice, time, and change.

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