

“My Living Shall Not Be in Vain”: The Rhetorical Power of Eulogies in the Face of Civil Unrest

Melissa Renee Harris*
Ashley R. Hall⁺

Rhetoric of eulogies traditionally follow an identifiable epideictic or deliberative form. However, the funeral orator may blend both forms as a hybrid rhetoric based on the life, death, and social conditions at the time of the eulogy. This essay provides a rhetorical analysis of the eulogy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. for the young victims of the Sixteenth Street Church Bombing and the eulogy of Barack Obama for Rev. Clementa Pinckney after the massacre at Emanuel AME Church. The authors argue that historically the eulogies for murdered Blacks are socially significant as the rhetor uses purification, association, and unification as rhetorical tools to martyr the decedents and unite the audience in social corrective action. Further, the rhetorical situation is impacted by the need for justification of prematurely and unjustly lost life. There is currently an alarming trend of Blacks being murdered by police and racially charged incidents, often resulting in social upheaval within communities across the country. This analysis provides insight into the resulting eulogies of unjustified Black death and the rhetorical power of the eulogist when addressing communities on the verge of civil unrest.

Keywords: Eulogies, African American rhetoric, Black, hybrid, martyr, justice

Kathleen Jamieson and Karlyn Kohrs Campbell claim that humans need eulogies to express the loss of a fellow community member.¹ In eulogies, there is a space provided to magnify the deceased accomplishments and life. To show respect for the finality of death, humans have created discursive rules that almost prohibit articulating failures, poor choices, and anything that would present the deceased in a negative light. The charge to validate an individual in the face of tragic loss of life becomes greater than death under normal circumstances. Ronald Schleifer states, “The rhetoric of mourning speaks for those who cannot speak for themselves.... the mourners themselves, who, as psychologists tell us, in the shock of bereavement, are bereaved of voice as well as friend.”² The natural shock of death is exacerbated by conditions that are violent and controversial. Eulogy rhetoric is often considered epideictic; however, under certain conditions, their rhetoric may become more deliberative. In situations of turmoil, eulogies can be a call to action

* Melissa Renee Harris is a doctoral student at Howard University in the Communication, Culture, and Media Studies department. Her research interest includes rhetoric, race, and media representations. Her current research focus is “The Talk” that African Americans have with their children about race. The author can be reached by email at Melissa.harris@howard.edu.

⁺ Ashley R. Hall (Ph.D., University of Pittsburgh) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communications at Ithaca College. Her research interests are African American rhetoric, race and gender studies, intersectional rhetorical studies, Black feminist theory, and critical media studies. The author can be reached by email at ahall4@ithaca.edu.

¹ Kathleen H. Jamieson and Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, “Rhetorical Hybrids: Fusion of Generic Elements,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 68 (1982): 146-157.

² Ronald Schleifer, *Rhetoric and Death: The Language of Modernism and Postmodern Discourse Theory* (Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1990), 220.

that blends the genres of both epideictic and deliberative rhetoric.³ Eulogies in the face of civil unrest must not only seek to remember the decedent, but must also comfort the bereaved, address the social violation of the decedent's rights, and engage strategies to remedy or right the wrong of loss of life.

We argue, however, that the Black eulogist has a unique duty and mandate when faced with death resulting from institutionalized practices that are unjust towards a marginalized community. In examining the present rhetorical power of such eulogies, this essay explores the historic rhetorical construction of such funeral orations during social turmoil and social unrest. We ground this in the existing scholarship regarding the rhetoric of eulogies. Moreover, we contextualize it with the contemporary rhetorical situation that defines the rhetoric produced during mourning and illuminate how a eulogy can move between remembrance of the deceased and a rallying cry for action. We contend that this framing makes the deceased a martyr in the face of social unrest simultaneously using three distinct rhetorical strategies; purification, association, and unification.

In this essay, we analyze two separate eulogies. First, we examine the eulogy delivered by Martin Luther King, Jr. for the girls killed in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing in 1963. Second, we examine the eulogy delivered by President Barack Obama for the Rev. Clementa Pinckney after the Emanuel A.M.E. church shooting of 2015. In a sense, King provided the rhetorical blueprint in his eulogy for the martyred children that Obama followed in eulogizing the martyred pastor. King likens the innocent girls to pure vessels of God sent to Earth for a heavenly purpose. Obama borrows a similar refrain in connecting Pinckney's goodwill and benevolence as fulfilling the will of God through the "Good News" and works. King appears to rhetorically move between his persona as an activist preacher to that of a politician, as he delivers a scathing indictment against the social structures and institutions which breed hatred. Similarly, Obama often appears to move from an activist politician to preacher through historical remembrances and scripture, while calling out enduring legacies of racism. First, however, we explore the rhetorical traditions of eulogies.

Epideictic and Deliberative Rhetoric

Previous scholarship recognizes that traditional eulogy rhetoric is rooted in the genre of epideictic rhetoric. The audience for epideictic rhetoric is an observer who listens to the speech to provide honor or celebration for the subject of the speech.⁴ Epideictic rhetoric includes speeches that establish value and honor as well as disapproval or dishonor. Pepe claims the epideictic orator has a clear and intended purpose, "Linguistic and rhetorical strategies clearly demonstrate that the speaker represents the community as a spokesperson and is invested by the public with a social mission."⁵ The orator uses the eulogy to lead mourners through their grief and frustration with both loss and the conditions surrounding the loss.

Although it would be easy simply to classify the rhetoric of eulogies as epideictic, such a determination would be inaccurate because of the contextual realities that give rise to the eulogy.

³ Lawrence W. Rosenfield, "Central Park and the Celebration of Civic Virtue," in *American Rhetoric: Context and Criticism*, ed. Thomas W. Benson, 221-266 (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989).

⁴ Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*. Translated by G.A. Kennedy. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

⁵ Cristina Pepe, "Civic Eulogy in Epitaphios of Pericles and Citywide Prayer Service of Rudy Giuliani," *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* 10 (2007): 131-144.

Jamieson and Campbell recognized that the circumstances surrounding the eulogy direct the objectives and constraints of the rhetoric, which can move from epideictic to a deliberative rhetorical approach.⁶ National tragedies are an instance where the constraints of the eulogy may need to take on not just an epideictic tone, addressing the civil contributions and honor of the deceased, but may also suggest a prescribed action by the audience in the wake of the tragedy. Further, David Frank offers, “In psychological terms, then, a national eulogy is the symbolic rite of passage marking the working through and beyond grief suffering.”⁷ In the case of a national loss, the eulogy can acknowledge macro-level of loss and future collective grieving and healing.

Jamieson and Campbell discuss extensively the nature of rhetoric that has a message of comfort and honor, while also functioning as a call to some action.⁸ A “hybrid rhetoric” can emerge in situations where a eulogy requires both epideictic and deliberative action. Frank states, “National traumas require presidents (or on occasion, other public figures like King) to offer a narrative outlining a path through and beyond suffering.”⁹ Cynthia Sheard recognizes a shift in the contemporary conceptualization of epideictic rhetoric.¹⁰ We often conceptualize epideictic rhetoric in the classic terms, as defined by Aristotle, but the influence of culture and the modern conceptualization of rhetoric has augmented long believed and general definitions.

“Hence, we have come to regard epideictic discourse as more spiritual and private than civic and social and to see audience’s role as passive rather than active.”¹¹ If this is the case, civic and social functions are removed from epideictic rhetoric, then there is a need for the hybrid rhetoric of epideictic and deliberative that would seek action through grief instead of passive mourning. Frank expresses that the nucleus of civility can be within epideictic rhetoric and model the democratic process in situations of unrest.¹² “Epideictic discourse should, in turn, produce effective action on the part of the audience.”¹³ The assertion that the type of death and surrounding circumstances determine the genre of eulogistic rhetoric confirms that the situation dictates the course of rhetoric. Lloyd Bitzer claims, “Nor should we assume that a rhetorical address gives existence to the situation; on the contrary, it is the situation which calls the discourse into existence.”¹⁴ Taking the position of Bitzer, it would not be the death of an individual that determines a single type of eulogistic rhetoric; rather, it is the circumstances or situation that produces the exigence and need for the selected rhetoric.¹⁵

The cause of death also produces the constraint surrounding the eulogy.¹⁶ A rhetorician must decide when a eulogy calls for an epideictic, deliberative, or hybrid approach to rhetoric. Jamieson and Campbell argue that the rhetorician and the audience should be able to identify the conditions that would necessitate a hybrid approach to a eulogy.¹⁷ Certain eulogies require a call to action; “In certain settings, the need to reknit the community and to immortalize the deceased coalesce to produce an identifiable subform within the eulogy... it defines policies in the future

⁶ Jamieson and Campbell, “Rhetorical Hybrids.”

⁷ David A. Frank, “Facing Moloch: Barak Obama’s National Eulogies and Gun Violence,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 17, no. 4 (2014): 635-678.

⁸ Jamieson and Campbell, “Rhetorical Hybrids.”

⁹ Frank, “Facing Moloch,” 659.

¹⁰ Cynthia M. Sheard, “The Public Value of Epideictic Rhetoric,” *College English* 58, no. 7 (1996): 765-794.

¹¹ Sheard, “The Public Value of Epideictic Rhetoric,” 768.

¹² Frank, “Facing Moloch.”

¹³ Frank, “Facing Moloch,” 671.

¹⁴ Lloyd F. Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1, no. 1 (1968): 1-14.

¹⁵ Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” 2.

¹⁶ Jamieson and Campbell, “Rhetorical Hybrids.”

¹⁷ Jamieson and Campbell, “Rhetorical Hybrids.”

tense and engages in audience appeals for action.”¹⁸ Richard Jensen, Thomas Burkholder, and John Hammerback acknowledge that death in the midst of social injustice has always produced powerful rhetoric that becomes part of the historical legacy of organizations, institutions, and communities.¹⁹ “Some of those killed became martyrs for their cause, not through their own deliberate actions, but rather through the rhetorical actions of the leaders of their various movements.”²⁰ The eulogist has the privilege or the burden of being the spokesperson for the family or community.²¹

Several scholars have noted the important role of the eulogist. Inevitably, the job of the orator is to deliver the last wishes of the deceased and honor them through rhetoric by sharing stories, anecdotes, and displays of culture that link the decedent to the mourners. In epideictic speeches, the figure of the orator grows nearer to that of the educator, transmitting truth and a hopeful message to the audience.²² A eulogist must construct the eulogy with the constraints of epideictic, deliberative or hybrid form in light of the social, cultural, or real-world implications of the death.²³ According to Lawrence Rosenfield, “a paradoxical ingredient pervades the epideictic experience. The reality, as confronted by the human witness, always exhibits an evasive quality; it concurrently invites recognition and veils or conceals itself.”²⁴ The eulogist must uncover the rhetorical truths and confront the constraints that would prevent the proper speech form.

In sum, this research is significant to rhetorical studies as there is importance in analyzing specific rhetoric that emerges after tragic circumstances in a marginalized community. The current political and social climate in the United States is very volatile; many communities live on the pulse of civil unrest as racial tensions have risen to heights reminiscent of the Civil Rights Era. Leaders often carry the responsibility to create responses that can either build cohesion and tolerance or tear a community apart in the face of unrest. This essay seeks to explore how cultural and historical perspectives influence on the rhetoric can either maintain calm or incite a community.

Historical Context of Exemplar Eulogies

We now present two case studies of eulogies given during periods of civil unrest. The first one is by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered on September 18, 1963, at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama.²⁵ The church served as a meeting place for local activists as well as a place where marches commenced and where organizers disseminated information about

¹⁸ Jamieson and Campbell, “Rhetorical Hybrids,” 147.

¹⁹ Richard J. Jensen, Thomas R. Burkholder, and John C. Hammerback, “Martyrs for a Just Cause: Eulogies of Cesar Chavez,” *Western Journal of Communication* 67, no. 4 (2003): 335-356.

²⁰ Jensen, Burkholder, and Hammerback, “Martyrs for a Just Cause,” 336.

²¹ Pepe, “Civic Eulogy in Epitaphios.”

²² Pepe, “Civic Eulogy in Epitaphios.”

²³ Pepe, “Civic Eulogy in Epitaphios.”

²⁴ Rosenfield, “Central Park and the Celebration of Civic Virtue,” 232.

²⁵ Martin Luther King, Jr., “Eulogy for the Young Victims of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church Bombings,” Speech, Birmingham, Alabama, September 18, 1963, <http://drmartinlutherkingjr.com/birminghamchurchbombingeulogy.htm>.; Barack H. Obama, “Remarks by the President in Eulogy for the Honorable Reverend Clementa Pinckney,” Speech, Charleston, South Carolina, June 26, 2015, The White House. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office>.

activity during the Civil Rights Movement.²⁶ On “Youth Sunday,” September 15, 1963, Ku Klux Klan members detonated a bomb in the basement of the church while over 200 parishioners prepared for Sunday school.²⁷ The blast killed four young girls; Addie Mae Collins, Carol Denise McNair, Cynthia Diane Wesley, and Carole Robertson. King eulogized Collins, McNair, and Wesley.²⁸ Birmingham was already a city divided by racial tension and possible unrest, and the death of the four girls caused an even greater divide in the community and country.²⁹

The second one is President Barack Obama’s eulogy of Clementa C. Pinckney and members of the Charleston Nine on June 26, 2015.³⁰ On June 18, 2015, Dylan Roof entered the Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina.³¹ After sitting through an hour of bible study, Roof opened fire on the parishioners, killing nine people including the pastor, Rev. Clementa Pinckney who was also a state senator.³² Roof later claimed that he, in fact, killed the individuals at Emanuel Church because they were black. The community was grief-stricken as people tried to fathom how a hate crime of such magnitude could occur. Some believed that America had already lived out its most violent and racially divided past, but the Emanuel Church shooting proved that white supremacy still existed in the hearts of some Americans.

The Hybrid and the Martyr

The rhetoric of eulogies after a tragic or controversial situation is never simply epideictic, as there is an awareness that a wrong has transpired that must be made right. There are similarities as well as major distinctions in the eulogies of Martin Luther King Jr. and Barack Obama. Most significant is the function of eulogy as a rallying cry or call to action and justice. Also notable is the hybrid nature of such eulogies, which rely heavily on deliberative rhetoric to remedy the premature cause of death through vindication and actions of the audience. The two distinct genres of epideictic and deliberative rhetoric are identifiable and have two expressed goals with a eulogy under traumatic or controversial circumstances. First, epideictic rhetoric is necessary to immortalize or highlight the civic sacrifices and actions performed by the deceased. The civic or heroic actions make the decedent worthy of honor and accolades in life, but most certainly in death. Secondly, the very things that established honor and praise are the motivation for action to avenge their death. In a hybrid eulogy, epideictic and deliberative rhetoric co-exist with one another.

A paramount feature in hybrid eulogies is making the victim a martyr. The eulogy is then constructed to urge mourners to fulfill the wishes of the deceased through social action. Jensen et al. contend, “Most martyrs do not achieve national or international reputations. Rather, they have a powerful influence within one organization.”³³ Indeed, Collins, McNair, Wesley, and Pinckney may not be household names embedded in the national memory. However, each has a marker of

²⁶ Donald Cochran, “Ghosts of Alabama: The Prosecution of Bobby Frank Cherry for the Bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church,” *Michigan Journal of Race and Law* 12, no. 1 (2006): 1-31.

²⁷ Cochran, “Ghosts of Alabama.”

²⁸ Cochran, “Ghosts of Alabama.”

²⁹ Consequently, Donald Cochran claims that historians believe the church bombing was the catalyst that made white Americans finally understand the plight of Black people in America; Cochran, “Ghosts of Alabama.”

³⁰ Obama, “Remarks by the President in Eulogy for the Honorable Reverend Clementa Pinckney.”

³¹ Tessa Berenson, “Everything We Know about the Charleston Shooting,” *Time Magazine*, June 2015, <http://time.com/3926112/charleston-shooting-latest/>.

³² Berenson, “Everything We Know.”

³³ Jensen, Burkholder, and Hammerback, “Martyrs for a Just Cause,” 352.

remembrance within the fight for civil rights that span American History and its dark past of racial discrimination. The Sixteenth Street Baptist Church Bombing of 1963 and King's impassioned eulogy are infamously connected to the struggle for social justice, and the victims are forever emblazoned in the transcript of America's dark past. All of the victims listed above became martyrs based upon unexpected situations and circumstances surrounding their deaths, "Those individuals came to be perceived as martyrs not through any desire of their own but rather through the rhetorical efforts of other members of their group or movement. In other words, 'accidental martyrs' must be created rhetorically."³⁴ Accidental martyrs would be appropriate categorizations for all four of these victims.

In analyzing the eulogies presented by King and Obama, we discover three methods are used by each orator to establish the victim(s) status as a martyr— purification, association, and unification. Jensen et al. state "In sum, rhetorical efforts to create martyrs fulfill the definition/understanding and shaping/reshaping of community expectations for contemporary epideictic address by merging the elements of traditional eulogies with strategies designed to cast the deceased in the role of martyr."³⁵ We contend that the nexus of the power of the hybrid rhetoric is found in the necessary processes of presenting the deceased as a martyr. However, this is not necessarily true of all eulogies but is inherent to these exemplars and eulogies in the face of civil unrest.

Purification

First, purification is the processes of making the deceased appear innocent and almost defenseless. Purification for murdered Black children is essential, as they are regarded as criminal from birth, a trait passed on by the mother genetically. If Black children are in fact innocent and guiltless, an act against Black children is a crime against humanity that requires some deliberative action. Talking about Black children, especially Black female children, as innocent calls out the white supremacist culture that is causing the civil unrest as King does. The process of presenting the purity of Collins, McNair, and Wesley was not difficult for King. With vivid and eloquent language, King claims, "These children-unoffending, innocent, and beautiful – were victims of one of the most vicious and tragic crimes ever perpetrated against humanity." Additionally, King established the girls' purity by identifying them as children who had not yet lived to offend or have malice in their hearts.

Purification for Rev. Pinckney is achieved by Obama through establishing the pastor's goodwill to all humankind. Obama says, "What a good man....And then to lose him at forty-one, slain in the sanctuary with eight wonderful members of his flock, each at different stages in life but bound together by a common commitment to God."³⁶ Also, Obama acknowledges that as a young teen of 13 years, Pinckney felt the call of God on his life to be a preacher and with a pure heart wanted to bring the good news to others. This led Pinckney to help others enact and portray that commitment to God. In essence, the purity of Pinckney's heart and actions establish his purity or his martyrdom. Celebrating the purity of Black people serves as an impetus to empower and mobilize the community to address the gratuitous violence affecting Black people. Establishing the purity of the deceased by the orator makes the injustice of the death personal, which leads to association.

³⁴ Jensen, Burkholder, and Hammerback, "Martyrs for a Just Cause," 337.

³⁵ Jensen, Burkholder, and Hammerback, "Martyrs for a Just Cause," 337.

³⁶ Obama, "Remarks by the President in Eulogy for the Honorable Reverend Clementa Pinckney," para. 13-14.

Association

Second, speakers rhetorically establish martyrs through association within the group, institution, or community. The goal here is to make the deceased “one of ours” in an attempt to encourage the group to esteem the deceased more highly, highlighting the profound sense of communal loss through their unjust murder. Building an association and relationship with the deceased is important, as Jensen et al., claim, “such troubling events can also threaten the cohesiveness or stability of the social group, epideictic speakers also attempt to shape a renewed sense of community in which listeners can share.” Also, King says, “They are martyred heroines of a holy crusade for freedom and human dignity. And so this afternoon in a real sense they have something to say to each of us in their death.” Anyone affected by the journey for justice, regardless of color, is associated rhetorically with the girls’ life, but now, most importantly, their death.

Obama establishes Pinckney’s association to all Americans, including his church family and Charleston community through Pinckney’s position as a state senator. Obama says, “As a senator, he represented a sprawling swath of the Lowcountry. A place that has long been neglected in America.... A place that needed somebody like Clem.” Obama, like King, uses association to expound on the profound loss felt by the entire community which will suffer as a result of prematurely losing the deceased. He further highlights that the experience of witnessing and living through Black mutilation and death is shared by the whole Black community. Therefore, the civil unrest highlighted by King and Obama speaks to the shared experience in ways that resonate with audiences. Thus, association establishes that not only has a family lost a member, but the community has lost one of its very own. From here, the orator now unifies the audience in a corrective course of action through resistance, revolt, and possibly revolution.

Unification

Third, after the speaker has rhetorically rendered the deceased as pure, and the audience finds an association, unification within the group and vindication of the death is possible. At this point, the audience moves from envisioning the deceased as an individual in death to identifying that now one of “us” is dead. With the victim now seen as a martyr we connect to, “we” carry the weight of vindication. “Because the deliberative subform risks dividing the community that the eulogy must reknit, there is little likelihood that calls for action will be controversial or that they will contradict the presumed wishes of the deceased.”³⁷ King stays true to a non-violent course of action and uses the eulogy to call for continued and more decisive action, “Their death says to us that we must work passionately and unrelentingly for the realization of the American dream.” Here, King reiterates the importance of collaborative discourse and action to unify against the systemic mistreatment of Black people in the U.S.

Obama suggests a much different implementation of unification in the form of removing the Confederate flag that remained in State building in South Carolina. To unify the community, Obama suggests:

Removing the flag from the state's capital would not be an act of political correctness... It would be one step in an honest accounting of America's history: a modest and meaningful balm for so many unhealed wounds.³⁸

³⁷ Jensen, Burkholder, and Hammerback, “Martyrs for a Just Cause,” 148.

³⁸ Obama, “Remarks by the President in Eulogy for the Honorable Reverend Clementa Pinckney,” para. 30.

Obama's approach of removing the flag further complicates unification as some audience members regard the Confederate flag as a symbol of pride although it is also widely regarded as a remembrance of hate, death, and white supremacy.

The most important reason for making martyrs of the deceased in the face of social injustice is that it gives the community cause, purpose, and a direction for their shared anger. According to Jamieson and Campbell, the next step that a community takes after a tragic loss is often outlined in the eulogy.³⁹ Condit claims, "audiences actively seek and invite speech that performs this epideictic function when some event, person, group, the object is confusing or troubling."⁴⁰ King was often accused of being too ambivalent in the face of Black death; however, he makes a distinctive call to action by shaming Blacks and Whites who have sat on the sidelines and watched others march.⁴¹ In an effort to ease the troubled minds and hearts of not just Charleston, but the entire country, Obama suggests the country transcend beyond just talk and move to action. "Every time something like this happens, somebody says we have to have a conversation about race. We talk a lot about race. There's no shortcut. And we don't need more talk."

The conditions surrounding the eulogies delivered by King and Obama presented a situation that requires a certain type of rhetorical action. Drawing from Bitzer's pragmatic understanding of rhetoric as a means to produce action and change, we argue that the rhetorical situation of each eulogy dictates the type of rhetoric the speaker would use.⁴² Both eulogies utilize elements of epideictic and deliberative genre, creating the generic hybrid. The situation demands that the eulogist address the audience in a certain matter. Bitzer states, "the verbal demands imposed by this situation are clearly as functional and necessary as the physical response."⁴³ The situations of social justice violations provide a situation for rhetoric requiring social action.⁴⁴

Eulogists may find the context of their oration not simply based on a current situation, but multiple pre-determinate situations contribute to the present rhetoric. The rhetorical situation of King is the murder of children who should have been seen pure and unattached to any evil or guile. Until the church bombing children were usually off limits and inhabited places of worship had not been specific targets. The church bombing that caused the death of the most innocent required a certain deliberative approach. King says, "The spilled blood of these innocent girls may cause the whole citizenry of Birmingham to transform the negative extremes of a dark past...Indeed this tragic event may cause the white South to come to terms with its conscience." Perhaps the lack of retribution or justice for the spilled blood of the four little girls helped construct the rhetorical situation that Obama was presented in the eulogy of Rev. Pinckney.

Over fifty years after the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing Dylan Roof cited the same racial and murderous ideas inspired by the killers in those crimes as the motivation in his killing spree at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina. For Obama, not to address the

³⁹ Jamieson and Campbell, "Rhetorical Hybrids."

⁴⁰ Celeste M. Condit, "The Functions of Epideictic: The Boston Massacre Orations as Exemplar," *Communication Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (1985): 288.

⁴¹ King; Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York, Grove Press, 1965).

⁴² Bitzer argues, "In order to clarify rhetoric-as-essentially-related-to-situation, we should acknowledge a viewpoint that is commonplace but fundamental: a work of rhetoric is pragmatic, it comes into existence for the sake of something beyond itself; it functions ultimately to produce action or change in the word; it preforms some task." Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation."

⁴³ Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," 5.

⁴⁴ Bitzer claims, "Rhetorical works belong to the class of things which obtain their character from the circumstances or the historic context in which they occur. A rhetorical work is analogous to moral action rather than to a tree"; Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," 3.

rhetorical situation in the way that he did would have been deemed inappropriate. Obama claims, "Once the eulogies have been delivered, once the TV cameras move on, to go back to business as usual -- that's what we so often do to avoid uncomfortable truths about the prejudice that still infects our society." Through acknowledging prior history, Obama is following the path of historical, rhetorical situation.

When considering the rhetorical situation, we would like to consider the goal of a eulogy in the time of possible social upheaval.⁴⁵ Eulogies constructed in the face of turmoil or social injustice transform the traditional epideictic tone of ceremonial funeral speeches. We argue that any funeral oration, in the face of social injustice, is always a hybrid based on the rhetorical situation. The question is, "What would happen without the deliberative action in such a eulogy?" To answer this question, we turn to history, which offers a pretty good glimpse of the way leaders, activists, and eulogists must respond to these tragedies. The rhetor initiates the call for action, peace, civil disobedience, or civility.⁴⁶

While being mindful of the historical contexts of each eulogy, we would like to examine how each eulogy functioned as both epideictic and deliberative. During the King eulogy, non-violence and civil disobedience were the most widely accepted method by Black people on a macro level to address racism and segregation. However, all did not ascribe to Dr. King's approach to segregation and Jim Crow. As a result, King does not eulogize victim Carole Robertson, as her family did not want her to become a poster child of sorts. Therefore, King fulfilled the epideictic function of eulogy. By speaking of the selfless sacrifice of life made by the girls in the bombing, and the fact that they were fulfilling their "Christian duty" and the time of their demise, they were due much honor.

Additionally, King honors the families of the victims and their sacrifice. King highlights the loss of four innocent and guiltless little Black girls as Obama honors Pinckney's wife, children, church, and constituents. Recognition of the pure and honorable roles that the victims played in the lives of others facilitates the feeling of goodwill that others feel toward them. The deliberative function of each of these eulogies establishes that a wrong has occurred. Essentially, the eulogist asserts, if not and but for the actions of another, the deceased would still be alive. King's speech occupies a particular time in history where justice for Black people was a hard-fought process. Protests, marches, and sit-ins were indicative of social action. However, Obama came in a time after the forms of social justice enacted by King had been deemed successful in obtaining rights and due process for Black Americans.

King's eulogy is historically important because it provides a glimpse of the social constraints which necessitated martyring Black death as a means of bringing humanity to the Black body. In the time of King, Blacks were struggling socially, politically, and economically while being the denied basic tangible rights and the most basic intangible right, to be treated as human beings. Whites were complicit with Black suffering, but as a master orator King abhors the death of the most vulnerable members of any society, its children. The social structure of the country was unstable as Black responses to mistreatment ranged from King's nonviolent approach to increasing militant responses within the Black community. King successfully martyred the girls through

⁴⁵ Jamieson and Campbell are important here as they suggest that, "In certain settings, the need to reknit the community and immortalize the deceased coalesce to produce an identifiable subform within eulogy that an Aristotelian would recognize as deliberative; it defines policies in future tense and engages the audience in appeals for action." Jamieson and Campbell, "Rhetorical Hybrids," 148.

⁴⁶ Frank expresses that the nucleus of civility can be within epideictic rhetoric and model the democratic process in situations of unrest. Frank claims, "Epideictic discourse should, in turn, produce effective action on the part of the audience." Frank, "Facing Moloch," 671.

purification, association, and unification. With an angry and fed up community behind him, the loss was personal and deeply felt, echoing his cries for change in the system that would allow White men to murder children in the holiest of places.

Further, analyzing Obama's eulogy alongside King's one may understand that the social constraints of 1963 are 2015 significantly similar as social, political, and economic challenges still plague the Black community. During the mythologized post-racial period of American history, Obama was confronted with the same situation as King, Blacks being murdered at an alarming rate and racist ideology shattering the sanctity of the church. The premeditation and deliberateness of the murder of Pinckney and the parishioners, caused Obama to employ similar rhetorical strategies of King within his eulogy of Pinckney; martyring the deceased pastor through purification, association, and unification.

Obama's Rhetorical Situation Born Five Decades Prior

Obama approached both the epideictic and deliberative portions of Pinckney's eulogy quite differently than King. Obama has the rhetorical burden of identifying that America found itself in the same rhetorical situation as it had 50 years prior. Obama had to address individuals who have experienced the world during King and may have possibly taken part in civil actions that preceded or followed the prior eulogy. Additionally, and possibly most difficult, for Obama is relating to those who had only heard or read about the prior atrocities, history has repeated yet again, with a combination of the two previous circumstances. First, the shooting had been committed by another hateful white man. Second, the murders happened in a sacred place of worship. Both the black body and place of worship had been desecrated yet again. Obama had the complicated task of relating to the audience that the lives of Collins, McNair, Wesley and now Pinckney were not in vain, although the anger and frustration feel the same. Obama paints Pinckney as a family man, as we well as a civil and spiritual servant, fulfilling the epideictic functions of a eulogy.

Unlike King, who was a leader of a social movement within a marginalized group, Obama is the leader of the free world, which includes the marginalized as well as others. The community for King included mainly the marginalized and their supporters. The audience for Obama was much more complex, as there is a presumption that the situation back in 1963 was much different, but the nature of the Emanuel AME church shooting proved otherwise. King had a duty to create their eulogies out of the marginalized positions in society, where Obama crafted his eulogy in spite of his position within a marginalized group. There is a distinct difference in the responsibilities and potential ramifications within each context. The anger, frustration, and action that King expressed came from their own lived mistreatment in America. Consequently, Obama presented Pinckney's eulogy in the light of institutional oppression and overt racism against Black Americans that he had experienced as a black man with the murders of the church members and their pastor representing the underlying hate that still existed. Similar, King had addressed the current state of Black affairs in America as did Obama.

The deliberative portion of Obama is not based on shaming or revenge. The deliberative message in Obama that emerges is for all people to recognize the history and engrained ideologies of hate that continue to grow in our culture. Obama has a responsibility to identify the same previous social injustices that constrained King. In his 30-minute remarks, Obama said the following:

We do not know whether the killer of Reverend Pinckney and eight others knew all of this history. But he surely sensed the meaning of his violent act. It was an act that drew on a long history of bombs

and arson and shots fired at churches, not random, but as a means of control, a way to terrorize and oppress.⁴⁷

This comment further highlights how eulogists use purification of Black victims as Obama indirectly connects the purity of Pinckney's murder while doing the work of the Lord, to the girls' murder in the church bombing. Also, Obama made sure to name all nine victims of the shooting in the last portion of the speech. That he chose to include the fallen in the eulogy for their pastor to show the magnitude of how many lives were lost, thus exhibiting the functions of both association and unification in the hybrid eulogy. Almost instinctively, the audience feels a kinship with the orator and the decedents. King rhetorically made the victims members of the Black community, and Obama used rhetoric to make the nine victims of the church shooting belong to all Americans.

Conclusion

Currently, there is an alarming trend in the unjust killing of unarmed Black Americans, which is cause for an increased number of orators to assume the role of eulogist, subsequently thrusting them into the spotlight as not only the voice of the deceased but the outraged community. The task of eulogizing these victims necessitates pleas of resistance to hegemony and the normalization of Black death while calling the community to action. Often, to mitigate the egregiousness of the murder, victims are criminalized in death as a means of mitigating the loss of life. Further, this adds to the role of the eulogist, to rhetorically reclaim the humanity of the deceased through martyrdom, specifically using what we have identified as purification, association, and unification.

Both King and Obama provide a rhetorical framework for eulogist tasked with delivering these unenviable eulogies. Eulogists may use these eulogies as examples of addressing socially significant and racializes issues which may lead to civil unrest. Both of these eulogies analyzed in this essay uses epideictic and deliberative methods of rhetoric to create a hybrid genre. By establishing why the deceased is worthy of honor, more importantly, martyrdom, the deliberative element of the eulogy is a call to action.

In conclusion, not only is the eulogist tasked with creating value for the life of the decedent, but more importantly, for an entire people. With each new case of Black death that clutters the front pages of newspapers and leading news stories around the country like Sandra Bland, Mya Hall, and Michael Brown, so does the burden of the eulogist, whether a preacher or social activist. As the chants "Black Lives Matter" and "Say Her Name" echo in the streets of American cities and circulates as hashtags on social media, the eulogist rhetorically must answer and foster the cries for justice, by establishing that the decedent's life and subsequent death were not in vain.

⁴⁷ Obama, "Remarks by the President in Eulogy for the Honorable Reverend Clementa Pinckney," para. 21.