A Historical, Rhetorical and Prescriptive Analysis of the Iconic Black Eulogy as Prophetic Rhetoric

Pierre Louis Vincent

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A HISTORICAL, RHETORICAL AND PRESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ICONIC BLACK EULOGY AS PROPHETIC RHETORIC

by

Pierre L. Vincent, Esquire

A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
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Major: Communication

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For posterity.
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ABSTRACT

While the rhetorical structure of the Black eulogy is rooted in the Aristotelian genre of eulogy in the Greek tradition, it continues to develop beyond that tradition in response to American socio-cultural exigencies that shape it. The Black eulogy has matured rhetorically through the hardships of slavery, structural oppression, and institutionalized violence to develop a prophetic rhetorical path to succor and give hope to a community weary from the diurnal inequities of oppression made palpable at the death of African American icons. Using a close reading, this study establishes the Black eulogy’s rhetorical foundation in the Aristotelian rhetorical genre, while demonstrating that the Black eulogy is an iteration of public rhetorical theology that engages the Academy. Through a lens of Black Liberation Theology rooted in the African American rhetorical tradition, this study analyzes the eulogies of four iconic African Americans, arguing that these iconic Black eulogies are not only proper iterations of prophetic rhetoric that engage the Academy, but they reveal a prescription of rhetorical components that the Black eulogy must follow.
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INTRODUCTION:
ICONIC BLACK EULOGY: THE RHETORICAL EMBRACE OF THE PLIGHT OF A PEOPLE BUOYED BY CULTURE AND HOPE

Thesis, Contemporary Relevance, and Methodology

This study examines the historical development of the Black eulogy by analyzing the rhetorical components that shaped it. On the one hand, the Black eulogy is a uniquely American rhetorical phenomenon, reflecting its evolution and development in the American tradition, seated in the Aristotelian rhetorical origins of ancient Greece. On the other hand, the Black eulogy reflects African and African American rhetorical traditions first brought to America by enslaved Africans through the transatlantic holocaust, reflecting African Americans' lived cultural and rhetorical experiences since slavery.

Consequently, the rhetorical structure of the Black eulogy, in addition to its Aristotelian underpinning, mirrors its cultural progression from the transatlantic holocaust through American slavery to Reconstruction, Jim Crowe, the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement, desegregation, the iconic death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter Movement.

These cultural experiences unfolded alongside the maturation of the Black eulogy and are reflected in the contemporary Black eulogy centuries beyond its Aristotelian rhetorical precepts. While this study identifies the Aristotelian rhetorical structure inherent in the Black eulogy, the study further finds that its cultural and rhetorical structure has matured beyond its Aristotelian precepts as an iteration of prophetic rhetoric.

Even as contemporary scholars pay more attention to African American Rhetoric, scholars rarely use the Black eulogy for rhetorical analysis. By tracing the rhetorical and
cultural development of the Black eulogy, and by highlighting its rhetorical constructs, which have developed beyond its Aristotelian roots, this study will demonstrate that the Black eulogy is an iteration of prophetic rhetoric rooted in the African American rhetorical tradition.

WHY THE STUDY IS IMPORTANT

The iconic Black eulogy has become a critically reliable resource and response to navigate the realities of oppression and racism in America. This is especially evident in the Black eulogies of African American icons, where worldwide attention centers on the Black eulogy as a cultural and rhetorical source of understanding, resolve, and future hope of a community and a nation in response to endemic racial oppression.

Mourning Practices of the 19th Century

To grieve life speaks to the value of life. Any consideration of the African American Eulogy in the 19th century requires a look at funerary practices as they evolved from the western shores of Africa, through the Atlantic Slave Trade, to slavery in the United States. Through these and general American funerary processes, the African American Eulogy finds its genesis.

Widows Weeds and Weeping Veils is a good point of departure to comprehend the mourning and funerary rituals in 19th Century America, which necessarily influenced the enslaved Americans’ funerary practices. Queen Victoria set the stage for what was to be the Victorian Style of mourning in America at a time that coincided with the American Civil War. At the loss of her husband in 1861, the Queen went into

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seclusion, advised her court how to decorate her kingdom for mourning, and donned a widow’s cap which would make the ritual of mourning fashionable in England and America.

Atkins establishes the degree to which paying tribute to the dead became a way of life in 19th Century America. Funerals were often held at the home of the deceased and more rarely at a church. Before the emergence of the undertaker in the first quarter of the 19th Century, family, friends and tradesmen would ready the body for burial.

Adkins draws strong conclusions about the impress of death on the American culture in the 19th Century. A woman in full mourning donned her widows weeds, an expression referring to the black clothing she wore as she mourned the loss of a loved one. If she was widowed, a woman wore the weeds for 2 and ½ years, and less time for the loss of other loved ones. Mourning bonnets, weeping vails, tear bottles, gloves and hats were parts of critical social mourning standards. After the first year of mourning, the woman would proceed to the second or lighter mourning, where the weeping veil would be replaced with a simpler mourning hat, and black collars and cuffs and sleeves would be replaced with white fabric, until finally the mourning clothes were worn by the middle of the third year of mourning the loss of a husband. ³

In And Die in Dixie: Funerals, Death and Heaven in the Slave Community, 1700-1865, David Roediger traced the tendency of slave states to not allow enslaved Blacks to have funerals or if allowed, they were policed.⁴ By the time of Nat Turner’s

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³ (Adkins 2012)
Rebellion, the Virginia Legislature banned Black preaching at unpoliced funerals. In Charleston in 1856, police were sent to guard even a small, day-time funeral of Black Presbyterians; and Alabama laws against slave assemblies specifically applied to Black funerals.

Roediger finds that nowhere was a slave funeral protected as a human right and was only rarely protected in other ways. Roediger states that the records of the masters do not support an assessment of masters tolerating or encouraging slave funerals, and from diaries he found certain well-attended funerals of the enslaved for whom the master had a special connection or appreciation; but this was not the norm.⁵

I see from Roediger’s work that the enslaved Africans, through the funerary service, were able to retain their Africanness in the midst of crushing oppression and opposition, which engendered the hope of heaven based on a will to survive.

**Contemporary Mourning Practices**

Christina Sharpe establishes that contemporary African Americans operate within a communal realm that mediates the memory of the slave ship, the hold, and the weather of the Atlantic slave holocaust voyage to the Americas.⁶ The impact of the history of oppression lives in people, and the iconic Black eulogy is a space for historical trauma.

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⁵ (Roediger 1981) 165.

In the aftermath of iconic Black deaths, iconic Black eulogy has been a pivotal axis upon which to turn to better understand and manage race relations in America, all while the world watches. Its role has developed out of cultural and rhetorical conditions not accounted for in the Aristotelian genre of eulogy.

I will analyze the development of eulogy as a genre from its ancient Aristotelian past because understanding the eulogy as a genre is fundamental to an analysis of the iconic Black eulogy. I will then expose a gap in the Aristotelian analysis that does not embrace the Black eulogy's pertinent cultural and rhetorical aspects. Elaine Richardson helps to explain that gap:

African American discourse and rhetorical practices emanate from Black American people’s social, economic, cultural, educational, and historical experiences. At the heart of these African American epistemologies are how African Americans come to know and act in response to their environment. These rhetorical practices speak beyond the present to a rhetorical future of hope that, I argue, defines the Black eulogy as prophetic rhetoric.

Therefore, three questions are addressed. First, does the Aristotelian rhetorical structure of the eulogy as a genre comprehend the iconic Black eulogy? Second, is the iconic Black eulogy appropriately categorized as prophetic rhetoric? Finally, does the iconic Black eulogy rhetorically expand the genre of eulogy? Since the Academy aims to affirm and reposit iterations of American rhetoric, this research significantly contributes

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to the literature by examining the cultural and rhetorical maturation of the iconic Black eulogy as an expansion of the genre of eulogy and, therefore, as worthy of inclusion in the Academy.

**OUTLINE OF DISSERTATION CHAPTERS**

An analysis of four iconic Black eulogies will demonstrate that the situational development of the iconic Black eulogy necessarily embraces rhetorical precepts beyond its Aristotelian genre of eulogy. Against such a backdrop, the preponderance of my dissertation will rhetorically analyze the four iconic Black eulogies as prophetic rhetoric, all to reveal that as prophetic rhetoric, the iconic Black eulogy engages the Academy as rhetorical theology.

The degree to which the Black eulogy and the iconic Black eulogy are separate entities is an important distinction. I define the iconic Black eulogy as the eulogy of a Black decedent whose death wrought national or international attention by lived distinction and accomplishment or by manner of death. The iconic Black eulogy is a distinct rhetorical genre characterized by its roots in the African American rhetorical tradition, which integrates elements of prophetic rhetoric. This genre serves not only to honor the deceased but also to reflect and respond to the socio-political context in which the individual lived and died. It includes the following four components:

1. **Grounded in the Sacred:** The eulogy draws from religious and spiritual traditions, often incorporating elements of African American religious practices and beliefs.
2. **Sharing the Real Situation:** It addresses the historical and contemporary realities of the African American experience, acknowledging systemic oppression and the ongoing struggle for justice and equality.

3. **Critique, Challenge, Charge, and Judgment:** The eulogy critiques societal injustices and challenges the audience to continue the fight against these injustices. It charges the community with the responsibility to uphold the values and legacy of the deceased.

4. **Hope and Encouragement:** Despite the somber occasion, the eulogy offers hope and encouragement, inspiring the audience to persevere and continue striving for a better future.⁸

My focus will center on the iconic Black eulogy since the four eulogies I will analyze are eulogies of iconic African Americans and therefore speak to the general American culture beyond the attention of the African American community.

In chapter one, I analyze the iconic Black eulogy of Frederick Douglass, where Dr. Alexander Crummell was rhetor. Douglass's eulogy is iconic by virtue of his personal distinctions, which his national and international achievements affirm and which the funeral rhetor propounds with epideictic fervor.

I argue that the iconic Douglass eulogy is an early iteration of African American prophetic rhetoric. A close reading reveals that the Douglass eulogy is prophetic rhetoric in African American rhetorical tradition as determined by Andre E. Johnson in "The Prophetic Persona of James Cone and the Rhetorical Theology of Black Theology:

1) Grounded in the Sacred,
2) Share the Real Situation
3) Critique, Challenge, Charge and Judgement, and
4) Offer Hope and Encouragement."⁹

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⁹ (Johnson 2010, 266)
This iconic Black eulogy establishes the significance of the public standing of the rhetor, himself, and the purpose to which he put the iconic decedent’s reputation—to establish and uplift the image and character of a maligned people at the turn of 19th century America, where the very humanity of Blacks was a serious topic of national debate.

Chapter two analyzes what should not be done in an iconic Black eulogy. Rev. Williams used his position as funeral rhetor to scold the Black community for its shortcomings while simultaneously failing to extol the virtue of the iconic decedent, Aretha Franklin. Williams consequently wasted an opportunity to imbue the community with hope to go forward in a society where racial oppression is a diurnal reality.

Chapter three sees an iconic Black eulogy that fulfills its purpose in the loss of an otherwise ordinary decedent, George Floyd, whose murder at the hands of police catapulted him to iconic status. The manner of Floyd’s death is emblematic of the strong foothold of oppression in contemporary society. Rev. Al Sharpton served as the rhetor who craftily spoke to a situation of national and international social, political and emotional urgence. He purposed the iconic Black eulogy to appease the righteous anger of the community against the illegal conduct of the police, and to reknit a web of progressive connection between fractured relations among the races in America and in the world.

Chapter four caps the study by acknowledging the significant impression of presidential rhetoric upon prophecy in the iconic Black eulogy, and more importantly, the impact of the iconic Black eulogy upon presidential rhetoric, where former President Obama served as rhetor for the funeral of the Honorable John Lewis, U.S. Congressman. An analysis of
this iconic eulogy concludes that in order to orate a successful iconic Black eulogy, even a United States President must subscribe to the prophetic rhetorical precepts of the iconic Black eulogy pursuant to the four Johnson tenets.

**METHODODOLOGY**

I will analyze the iconic Black eulogy as an iteration of prophetic rhetoric in the texts of four iconic Black Eulogies that I argue function as prophetic discourse:

1. Eulogy of Frederick Douglass by Pastor Alexander Crummell (Historic, death by natural causes, 1895)
2. Eulogy of Aretha Franklin by Rev. Jasper Williams (Contemporary, death by natural causes, 2018)
3. Eulogy of George Floyd by Rev. Al Sharpton (Contemporary, death as victimized by the State, 2020)
4. Eulogy of John Lewis by President Obama, (Contemporary, death by natural causes, 2020)

I will engage in a close reading or textual criticism, which gives privilege to the texts by demonstrating how they function rhetorically in light of the context in which they are delivered. Close reading theory arises from “an understanding of the particular,”10 such that theoretical principles are only important within the texture of a particular discourse. Among the elements involved in textual criticism are “the analysis of the historical and biographical circumstances that generate and form [the text’s] composition, the recognition of the basic conceptions that establish the coordinates of the...

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text, and an appreciation of the way these conceptions interact within the text and help determine its temporal movement.”

McClure states more particularly: “Textual criticism (close reading) obligates the critic to commit to analyses that privileged an address as a purposeful discourse that attempts to have a persuasive impact on a specific audience(s) in response to a set of momentary situational concerns with particular attention to the rhetorical properties of the text.” Therefore, a close reading can analyze the historical and theoretical situations that produced the text and provide an analytical focus on the text itself.

A close reading will further enable me to situate the theoretical implications of rhetorical criticism through the lens of Black Liberation Theology to understand how the texts of four iconic Black eulogies constitute prophetic discourse that responds rhetorically to historical and cultural situations in a rhetorically oppressive society. I will juxtapose the Black eulogies against

Andre E. Johnson identifies four tenets that determine the presence of prophetic rhetoric in African American Rhetoric. The prose must first be grounded in the sacred, it must share the real situation, it must critique, challenge, charge and judges, and finally it must offer hope and encouragement. These four components determine the presence of African American prophetic rhetoric. I will concurrently supplant my analysis with

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11 McClure, Kevin R., “Frederick Douglass’ Use of Comparison in His Fourth of July Oration: A Textual Criticism.” *Western Journal of Communication* 64, (2020), 426

12 (McClure 2020, 426)


sundry historical Black eulogies to demonstrate a rolling progression of prophetic rhetoric in the iconic Black eulogy.

**PROPHETIC RHETORIC IN THE ICONIC BLACK EULOGY**

**Grounded in the Sacred**

The speaker must ground the rhetoric in the sacred so that the speaker is recognized as sacred by the audience and is grounded in the community. There is no sacred prophet outside the community.\(^{15}\) Johnson echoes Claus Westermann, who Darcey interprets as saying that “prophetic speech is incomprehensible except as the speech of a divine messenger; the prophet, properly understood, speaks for another.” \(^{16}\)

Pepe’s claims that the epideictic orator has a clear and intended communal purpose gives substance to the sacred call of the prophet: “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.” \(^{17}\)

Hobson argues that African American Prophetic rhetoric is similar to “African American ideas of God’s action in history on behalf of the powerless.” \(^{18}\) When considering the African American Prophetic Tradition, Hobson delineates the biblical traditions of prophecy in the African American Prophetic Tradition by noting four prophetic traditions: the Exodus-Deuteronomy Tradition, the Isaiah-Ezekiel Tradition, the

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\(^{15}\) (Johnson, 2010, 273)

\(^{16}\) (Darcey, 1997, 16)


Jeremiah Tradition, and the Daniel-Revelation Tradition.¹⁹ This study will demonstrate how the Jeremiah Tradition is the bedrock of pessimistic prophecy, a theme that grew from prophetic prophecy in the African American rhetorical tradition.

Hobson’s perspective challenges God’s community to persevere and to wait on Him. These traditions help ground the African American prophet in the Holy Scriptures so that the speaker is accepted as a sacred prophet grounded in the community. Only a sacred prophet can be part of the community entrusted to pronounce the sacred.²⁰

In prophetic rhetoric, the discerning of the times recreates the rhetorical situation, which leads the rhetor to say the fitting response.²¹ My study will analyze the existence of prophetic rhetoric in the iconic Black eulogy. “In prophetic rhetoric, the discerning of the times recreates the rhetorical situation, which leads the rhetor to say the fitting response.²²

The prophetic persona is a component of prophetic rhetoric. I will demonstrate how the rhetor of the iconic Black eulogy adopts a prophetic persona to respond to the rhetorical situation. Bitzer has defined the rhetorical situation as the environment in which the rhetoric takes place. I assert that the rhetorical situation of the iconic Black eulogy is the cultural, historical and funerary experience of the community. The rhetor of the iconic Black eulogy must reflect the rhetorical situation in order to deliver the fitting response. I will demonstrate that the iconic Black eulogy is an integration of its

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²¹ Johnson, 2010, 269)

²² Johnson, 2010, 269)
audience’s historic struggles during its centuries-long fight for human status and later for civil rights.

The phenomenon of choice of rhetor of the iconic Black eulogy is sacrosanct. While the determination of rhetor is essential to any speech, the Black eulogy of an icon expressly calls for a rhetor of special substance: public standing, rhetorical skill, moral rectitude, and intellectual accomplishment. These attributes equip the rhetor to publicly uphold the forward march of human dignity to which Black people must always subscribe to survive.

This accords Molefi Asante's pronouncement in *The Future of African American Rhetoric* that all through the future, whenever an African American rhetor stands to speak, he will lose speaker credibility if he does not address correctives like reparations, reconsideration, and challenges to White supremacy. Addressing these correctives is important because a worthy public rhetor must have an ethical base from which to speak correctives publicly and to challenge the unfairness that consternates life for the oppressed. Correctives are especially relevant when an African American rhetor speaks as rhetor of the iconic Black Eulogy.

Studying iconic Black eulogies where the African American rhetor pronounces the sacred necessarily enters upon an analysis of the African American homiletic tradition. In *Talkin and Testifyin, the Language of Black America,* Geneva Smitherman states that the

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Oral Tradition will always remain a fixture in Black communities, operating almost outside the destructive reaches of time and social change.\textsuperscript{24} According to Smitherman:

“Tradition preserves the Afro-American heritage and reflects the collective spirit of the race. Through song, story, folk sayings, and rich verbal interplay among everyday people, lessons and precepts about life and survival are handed down from generation to generation. … even as each new generation makes verbal adaptations within the tradition, the core strength of this tradition lies in its capacity to accommodate new situations and changing realities.”\textsuperscript{25}

In “Speaking Well of the Dead: On the Aesthetics of Eulogies,” Donald Keefer sees eulogies as works of art to assuage the grieving.\textsuperscript{26} Keefer compares structures of eulogies to structures of literary tragedy to prove his argument that aesthetics in eulogies is artwork, just as aesthetics in literature is artwork.\textsuperscript{27} Eulogy is seen in relation to the awe it imparts, which is derived from the decedent’s standing in the community: talents that awe us by his life and gratitude that such a person graced the earth.\textsuperscript{28}

A good Black Eulogy will elicit many “Amens,” “You tell it,” and “Hallelujah” as natural reactions to the Black rhetor who is skilled at producing them, for it is the rhetor’s charge to initiate and sustain connection. Martin Luther King, Jr. was an exemplar of such skill and talent, but he is merely high atop a list of many skilled Black clerics who orate beyond the message of the eulogy; they orate for the artistic merit of


\textsuperscript{25} Smitherman, “Talkin’ and Testifyin,” 73.


\textsuperscript{27} (Keefer, 2011)

\textsuperscript{28} (Keefer, 2011)
oration and for the power the oration brings to a message that moves a sincere, appreciative and expectant community.

From a historical perspective, Asante states that the orator’s rhetorical devices are the beginnings of our liberation from the mental enslavement that has gripped us since Africans arrived in the Americas. They left Africa as Africans and arrived on the shores of the Americas as Africans. However, in the heads of many Africans, the African American became something entirely different from what he was when he left Africa. Africans in the United States cannot afford to forget that we did not change our origins simply by crossing the sea.

Asante further states that this modification in Africanity is different from what happens to a European or Asian person who arrives here. He argues that the Europeans remain essentially encapsulated in Europe's history, culture, folklore, and symbolism, even while engaging in politics or economics in America. Stating that the same is true for Asians, Asante concludes that only African Americans have been corrupted in a historical linkage and ancestral connection, which informs their rhetoricity.

Nor is Asante alone. These African American rhetorical constructs embrace aspects of African American rhetoric that house the essence of the African American cultural experience, especially as that experience shows itself in the Black eulogy and even more significantly in the eulogy of a Black icon like George Floyd, whose death at


30 (Asante 2014, 285 -291)

31 (Richardson, Jackson II, and Taylor 2014, 325)
the hands of police cast him as an iconic emblem at the receipt of oppression. Indeed, a recurring theme in the choice of rhetor is the selection of a rhetor whose character is fit to respond publicly to the racial oppression that permeates the situation.

This is one of the four Black eulogies I will analyze in the study because its iconic impact provides a ripe analysis of the presence of prophetic rhetoric in the Black eulogy. I will also assess the homiletics of sundry African American eulogies in this study, including some Black eulogies from the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, all to demonstrate their alignment with Johnson’s four precepts that I argue define the Black eulogy as African American prophetic rhetoric.

**Share the Real Situation**

When sharing the “real situation,” the prophet/speaker speaks the already known, a type of revealing where the prophet goes beneath the surface to state the obvious that others may be afraid to say to raise the audience’s consciousness and change its ways.\(^{32}\) Bitzer has defined the rhetorical situation as:

> “A natural context of persons, events, objects, relations and an exigency which strongly invites utterance; this invited utterance participates naturally in the situation, is in many instances necessary to the completion of situational activity, and by means of its participation with situation obtains its meaning and its rhetorical character.”\(^{33}\)

To Bitzer, the rhetorical situation creates the rhetoric. The rhetorical situation is informed by persons, events, objects, relations and urgent needs. In prophetic rhetoric, the discerning of the times embraces and extends Bitzer’s definition to recreate the

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\(^{32}\) (Johnson, 2010, 276)

rhetoric by leading the rhetor to say the fitting response. I argue that each of the four iconic Black eulogies I will analyze in this study respond to the rhetorical situations that produced them.

Campbell and Jamison highlight aspects of the situation and discuss how it calls forth prophetic rhetoric because prophets have inventive possibilities that license them to look the sacred sphere into the secular to respond to the situational demand. The prophet does not merely reveal a message; he or she or they responds to the “perceived situational demands” by including unexpected responses to social actions and social potentialities.

Hall and Campbell further establish in *Rhetorical Hybrids: Fusions of Generic Elements* that the rhetoric of the eulogy is more than just epideictic; it is also deliberative because of contextual realities that give rise to the eulogy, like the significant social events at the time of death which add constraints that surround the eulogy and therefore illicit a deliberate response. Accordingly, my study will analyze the rhetorical agency of prophetic rhetoric of the Black eulogy as evident in contextual realities of the audience’s historical struggles in the centuries-long fight for citizenship and civil rights.

**Critique, Challenges, Charges and Judgment**

Grounded in sacred and communal values, the rhetor prophet challenges, charges, critiques, and judges or warns both the assembled and wider audiences by reinterpreting

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34 Campbell and Jamieson, “Form and Genre,” 15.

35 Campbell and Jamieson, “Form and Genre,”

the sacred to cast a vision of the world as it could be, not as it is because the prophet
speaks as a mouthpiece for a community that has no voice.\textsuperscript{37}

Rhetorical critics have highlighted two types of prophetic discourse: apocalyptic
and jeremiad. Jeremiad, relevant to my study, is the more popular of the two, deriving its
name from the prophet Jeremiah of the Old Testament. The jeremiad was popular among
the New England Puritans of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century, who never questioned their belief in
America’s promise and destiny. Hansen calls the American Jeremiad a central prophecy
because it is “supportive of the interest of the institutions and authorities of a given
society.”\textsuperscript{38}

However, the jeremiad morphs into a type of aggressiveness borne of oppression.
Cornell West states that “at some point, the odds seem so overwhelming, the inoperative
strategies of the status quo so effective, and the racism so deeply entrenched in American
life that a pessimistic attitude can easily develop.”\textsuperscript{39}

West further notes, “Most prophetic practices among Black Americans have given
this pessimism an aggressiveness such that it becomes sobering rather than disenabling, a
stumbling block rather than a dead end, a challenge to meet rather than a conclusion to

\textsuperscript{37} Johnson, “The Prophetic Persona,” 278.


\textsuperscript{39} Cornell West, “The Prophetic Tradition in Afro America,” \textit{in Let Justice Roll: Prophetic Challenges in
1996), 93
accept.”

Johnson adds that the Jeremiad is a tradition that is home to what he calls pessimistic prophecy.

I will demonstrate how elements of frankness and boldness of speech and fear and danger are often pessimistic rhetorical inevitabilities because, as a prophetic rhetor, the Black eulogist must speak to the harsh truths of oppression to advocate for the liberation of the people within oppressive and sometimes dangerous situations.

In “My Living Shall not be in Vain: The Rhetorical Power of Eulogies in Civil Unrest,” Harris and Hall analyze the rhetorical power of eulogies when addressing communities on the verge of civil unrest like the African American community. They consider the significance of the situation in rhetorical analysis as evidenced by the eulogies of unjustified Black deaths at the hands of the police. They argue that the African American eulogist has a unique mandate when faced with death at the hands of unjust institutionalized practices directed at marginalized populations. These constraints are subjects of the deliberative genre in eulogistic rhetoric. The setting and circumstances surrounding the death may illicit a deliberative response. I will demonstrate how the rhetor of the Black eulogy must create responses that build the community by uncovering uncomfortable, excoriating rhetorical truths that speak to the

40 West, “The Prophetic Tradition in Afro America,” 93.
42 Harris and Hall, “My Living,” 173-183.
43 Harris and Hall, “My Living,” 173-183.
44 Harris and Hall, “My Living,” 173-183.
situation. In such scenarios, the Black eulogy must move between remembrance of the deceased and a rallying cry for action.

The speaker further reveals the truth in the prophetic rhetoric of the Black eulogy through rhetorical tools the rhetor employs to critique, charge, judge, and challenge. This is nowhere more evident than in the cultural legacy of an anthology of African American sermons collected from the last 300 years in America, “Preaching With Sacred Fire,” by Martha Simmons and Frank Thomas. They write, “Even during the most difficult and oppressive times, the delivery, creativity, charisma, expressivity, fervor, forcefulness, passion, persuasiveness, poise, power, rhetoric, spirit, style, and vision of Black preaching gave and gives hope to a community under siege.”

I will analyze how the Black eulogist employs aggressive pessimism, for instance, to awaken a zeal in the audience, renew the struggle, and restore courage in the fight to appropriate the hegemonic traditions and to resist societal forms that simply do not make sense, e.g., those that exclude, predict, label, and silence Blacks. My study will analyze how aggressive pessimism in the Black eulogy can be a coping strategy that helps the speaker deal with obstacles in the community and stave off self-destruction.

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46 Simmons and Thomas, “Preaching with Sacred Fire,” inside book cover flap.

The lament tradition of prophecy is Johnson’s term.\textsuperscript{48} It is a prophet’s wailing response to the insidious nature of racism too entrenched in society to be overcome. When articulated in public, lamentation is a prophetic declaration that calls all who hear to understand the frustration and pain of the community. The goal is simply to speak, get the audience to hear, establish a record that chronicles the people's pains, and remind the audience that all is not well in America.

**Hope and Encouragement**

Here, hope is not eternal; it is a specific hope for the people the rhetor represents; it is contextual, and it offers a new vision for the community that the prophet represents and a hope that Black people need to survive in a world that is hostile to them.\textsuperscript{49}

The African American community has been so disheartened by oppression that it has developed a communal hope for eventual restoration.\textsuperscript{50} Since change is not immediate, it can only be hoped for; hope is, therefore, a paramount aspect of African American prophetic rhetoric, especially for the rhetor of the Black eulogy who must buoy

\textsuperscript{48} “Many African American prophets, therefore, finding the racism too entrenched and the American covenant ideals not realistic for Black Americans to ascertain, became wailing and moaning prophets within what I call the lament tradition of prophecy. In this tradition, the prophet’s primary function is to speak out on behalf of others and to chronicle their pain and suffering as well as their own.” Johnson, “The Prophetic Persona,” 273

\textsuperscript{49} Johnson, “The Prophetic Persona,” 280.

the audience with elixirs of hope in the face of oppression while facing the inevitability of death, all in the African American Rhetorical Tradition.

Johnson identifies two types of hope in prophetic rhetoric relevant to my study: Pragmatic, temporal hope for this life rooted in the prophet’s faith in God, and Eschatological hope of the afterlife where God will make everything right and correct all injustices.51 The eulogy of a Black icon is a significant opportunity for rhetorical hope. It is an occasion to reveal, instruct, and boast to society the virtues of a race of people not often cited for their virtues. It is an occasion to make the hope of eternity palpable as a great resolution to the insidiousness of present oppression.

The decedent’s iconic status represents a people who claim and are proud of the decedent’s contribution to life. At the same time, the rhetor upholds the audience on the forward march of human dignity to which African American people must always subscribe. Until racism is extinct, Black people are in a continual conundrum of enduring oppression while simultaneously waging a war of hope against it. The rhetor’s job in the Black eulogy is to determine how the iconic figure fits into history, to iterate the oppressive obstacles the icon endured and overcame, and to make a clarion call of the hope the icon left to a world and community made better by the icon’s work and example.

Further along the precepts of rhetorical hope and encouragement, and beyond the grounding of Aristotelian precepts of rhetorical inquiry, another theory is instructive at deepening an appreciation for the efficacy and hope of the iconic Black Eulogy. In “The Disappearance of Rituals,” Byung-Chul Han makes significant inroads that have shed new light on the healing and strengthening possibilities of the iconic Black eulogy. A

51Johnson, “The Prophetic Persona,” 280
philosopher, Han steers through the distresses of life with a message of calm, a message that fructifies the essence and purpose of the iconic Black eulogy.

Since people subscribe to the iconic Black eulogy, Han’s philosophy on rituals is pertinent for the hope the iconic Black eulogy reifies for its constituents. Rituals turn the world into a reliable place, render it habitable, and stabilize life. The repetition of ritual has a stabilizing effect in a world where consumption is a driving force. In our consumption of things, we consume emotions that are bound up with things. Han calls this the emotionalism of commodities, which strengthens the narcissistic relationship with ourselves, such that our relationship with the world and humanity is lost.

The public nature of the iconic Black eulogy casts the rhetor’s parole within the larger American cultural context to speak beyond the African American community. Since the iconic Black eulogy operates within the dynamics of historic racism, prophetic rhetoric operates as ritual in places of public attention. The ritual becomes part of the cultural situation where the rhetor of the iconic Black eulogy extols the virtues of the deceased and of the community.

To chase after commercialism and technology is to lose our capacity for repetition, which is the hallmark of ritual. We can only appreciate values by giving them our deep attention repetitively. Ritual promotes a deep attention to values that ends in completion and closure for the community. Ritual manifests in a bodily dimension inherent in a community. According to Han, the meaning of life resides in ritual.

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52 Han, “The Disappearance of Rituals”, 2.
53 Han, “The Disappearance of Rituals”, 5.
54 Han, “The Disappearance of Rituals”, 11.
Participating in ritual causes a people to take the focus off self and to transcend self in favor of community. I assert that the prophetic rhetoric as ritual in the iconic Black eulogy sustains the Black community more than any other ritual, because of the public space it inhabits.

The iconic Black eulogy houses knowledge and memory of culture. To be in the audience of the iconic the Black eulogy is to mourn collectively according to the ritual already determined. People in attendance are present collectively and mourn as a community. They know what rituals to expect: songs, music, a eulogy that reflects and reifies culture and generates collective purpose, belonging and hope. Collective mourning consolidates the community. A consolidated community is a stronger community, emboldened to continue forward into the realities of oppressive social, political and economic forces that work against the community.

Yet, our society is increasingly becoming a society of isolated individuals. Rituals, on the other hand, require our physical presence and connection with others to produce a strong relationship with the community. Religious rituals are especially invigorating, affirming, and warming as the community contemplates and digests its cultural values, encouraging a communal connection while mourning. We will consistently see this connection play out in this study's four iconic Black eulogies.

The struggle against racial oppression is a continuous, uniting component of the Black community, and the iconic Black eulogy is an engine of unity with significant import and effect for its constituents. Only contemplative lingering can give closure.\(^5\) In a society of overproduction, over communication, and

\(^5\)Han, “The Disappearance of Rituals”, 27.
overconsumption, there is no time to contemplate, to tie and bind. The iconic Black eulogy affords all Americans of all persuasions a chance to collectively reflect on experiences of inequality and marginalization in a way that unites the country.

The iconic Black eulogy keeps the American culture enchanting, imbuing it with the hope of healing power to understand and combat oppression while enduring it.
Eulogy as Genre

There are three genres of rhetoric: deliberative, forensic, and epideictic. The eulogy is part of the epideictic genre. Kennedy continues the idea of epideictic as a third branch of rhetoric by broadening epideictic to include philosophical and ceremonial activities during the Hellenistic period. Kennedy further notes how the funeral eulogy was an opportunity to affect civic affairs while citizens were present. From the potentate to the pauper, funeral ceremonies, especially of the militia or aristocrats, became a natural avenue to establish and extend power or to fortify the city-state.

As Greece fell to Rome in Western world power, Greek epideictic principles were inexact guides for Rome’s epideictic traditions and practices. Rome would eventually lay more firm groundwork for developing epideictic in Western rhetorical thought. Today, epideictic’s fundamental and unifying feature as a discourse of praise and blame is ubiquitous. Praise and blame are parts of nearly every instance of rhetoric, lending epideictic an enduring vitality in public culture.

Epideictic in Ancient Greece

The research shows that no comprehensive, defining principle of epideictic has emerged. Still, scholars accord certain enduring precepts of epideictic, such that it is clear enough to grasp. As such, epideictic practices flourish, and the epideictic genre continues


57 (Kennedy, 2007, 283)
to generate important scholastic attention in the ongoing development of contemporary rhetorical theory that seeks to harness it.

Epideictic is the shining genius of Aristotle in orientation and the succeeding development of his genius in time. As one of the three genres of rhetoric, including the deliberative and forensic genres, epideictic is relevant since antiquity and is on a continuous quest to be understood. It is, therefore, always an object of conceptual inquiry, expansion, and reinterpretation.

Epideictic pushes forward to codify the changing discourses of the ages. I see epideictic as the scaffolding of fluid, changing discourse, the tentacles that speak intellect into culture, the gateway to ideas yet unborn, and the wind beneath the possibility of thoughts awaiting expression. It is the ancient magic of perennial discourse that promotes and improves as it negotiates the realities of cultural novations. It is the very strong arm that transmits and manifests cultural power into discourse. Like the god Janus, epideictic is as impervious to time as it is perpetual to culture, looking both backward and forward to express the discourse of negotiated and imposed human behavior and experience.

The name epideictic is derived from the Greek *epideixis*, which means to shine. Though some of the principles of epideictic preceded him, Aristotle’s contribution

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58 From 800 to 147 B.C., after winning the Peloponnesian War, Greece emerged from the Dark Ages ruling the world primarily because it adopted the Phoenician alphabet to create the Greek alphabet in a Western world of illiteracy where the Mycenaean script had been lost. The Mycenaean civilization originated in mainland Greece. It existed from 1400 to 1100 B.C. and was located mostly on the Peloponnese, the southern peninsula of Greece. The Mycenaeans are the first Greeks, and the Trojan War is their most famous victory. By 700 B.C., Greece had developed the City State, where western concepts of art, poetry and technology grew to engender the roots of
to epideictic theory is fundamental to the epideictic genre. He arranged types of epideictic oratory into a generic grouping because they were either associated with ceremony, featured masterful oratory, or focused on praise or blame.

Greek philosophers were important in the continued development of epideictics. They used their philosophical viewpoints as avenues to infuse principles of speaking and stagecraft into the educational system and the academies. The philosophers’ goal was to affect, affirm, and build the affairs of the state with rhetorical principles that espoused their philosophical views.

When Greece fell to Rome in 148 B.C., Greek epideictic principles were inexact guides for Rome’s epideictic traditions and practices.\textsuperscript{59} By 125 A.D., Cicero, a Roman, began to codify the V Cannons of Rhetoric, which became the standard from which to analyze modern rhetorical principles in Western logic.\textsuperscript{60} Rome would eventually lay more firm groundwork for the development of epideictic in Western rhetorical thought.

**The Eulogy’s Relationship to Theories of Epideictic**

It is no wonder that the funeral speech, the eulogy, is one of the central provinces of the epideictic genre. Epideictic is both a genre of and an approach to rhetoric. It is one of the primary genres of rhetoric and has a tradition that extends over 2,000 years, such that it looks backward and forward as it generates insight into rhetorical form.

\textsuperscript{59} (De Oratore, 2.11).

\textsuperscript{60} The V Cannons of Rhetoric are Invention, Arrangement, Style, Memory & Delivery. *Silva Rhetoricae*, “The Forrest of Rhetoric” (rhetoric.byu.edu) 2016.
In *The Invention of Athens*, Loraux developed historical, factual evidence to earn a good understanding of the ancient public funeral in Athens.\(^{61}\) She discusses how the dead from the war are treated well in their coffins like aristocrats but that no other distinction is made among them; they are all treated equally. “In burying the dead, … the Athenian community appropriated them forever, and …all distinctions, individual or familial, economic or social, that might divide Athenians even in their graves were abolished.”\(^{62}\)

Interesting distinctions among the dead were abolished in order to cover differences among citizens and establish the state as ideal. In the eulogies of Athens, all things Athenian were lauded above the decedents. The city figured so omni presently in the eulogy that the funeral became but a political practice, an opportunity to create an imaginary Athens by masking its ill effects and promoting its wonders as a civic ideal.

I see in Loraux’s analysis of the Athenian eulogy a parallel rhetorical practice in the iconic Black eulogy. Just as in *The Invention of Athens*, the primary target of the iconic Black eulogy is the American ideal, not the deceased. This is a recurring paradox. On the one hand, oppression persists in its insidiousness without regard for hope, as made evident in the death of the decedent. On the other hand, the iconic Black Eulogy seeks to develop a blow against oppression for the citizen, a hope to experience the American ideals of justice, freedom, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Consequently, the rhetor

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\(^{62}\) (Loraux 1986)
gradually looks away from the lived-oppressed life lost in the coffin toward encouraging the audience to hope for an unrealized American ideal in the onward press of life.

**Epideictic, Deliberative, or Hybrid Approach to Eulogy**

Traditional eulogistic rhetoric is rooted in epideictic rhetoric, where the audience as observer listens as the speech gives honor, celebration, or disapproval for the subject of the eulogy.\(^{63}\) Pepe claims that 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.”\(^{64}\) In epideictic speeches, the figure of the orator grows nearer to that of the educator, transmitting both truth and a hopeful message to the audience.\(^{65}\)

Yet, the rhetoric of the eulogy is more than epideictic; it is also deliberative. Given contextual realities that give rise to the eulogy, things like the cause of death and the significant social events at the time of death also produce a reality or constraint surrounding the eulogy.\(^{66}\) These are part of the deliberative genre in eulogistic rhetoric—the setting and circumstances surrounding the death illicit a deliberative response. For instance, at recent American high school shootings, where crazed gunmen murder

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\(^{65}\) (Pepe 2007)

innocent students, the students’ eulogies called for deliberative action to control guns in the community.

A eulogy may call for an epideictic, deliberative, or hybrid rhetorical approach. Rhetorical hybrids are important keys to understanding the coherence of complex rhetorical forms. Rhetorical critics who analyze great speeches recognize that elements of epideictic, deliberative, and forensic genres identified by Aristotle overlap and combine in practice. Harold Zyskind, for instance, details the complex intertwining of epideictic and deliberative elements in Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address by showing how the Address fuses deliberative and epideictic elements into a form that embraces the campaign oration.

**African Origins**

No matter where in the world we search, public speaking predates the genesis of communication theories. Though African American rhetorical traditions are coming to maturation in America, they are imbued with rhetorical remnants of Africa brought by indigenous West Africans as they arrived enslaved in America. Africans in the United States have maintained a sense of expression from their motherland that manifests as a life force in dance, music, and speech.

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67 (Jamieson and Campbell 1982)

68 (Jamieson and Campbell 1982) The forensic genre being the province of courtroom speech, I do not discuss it here. The genres of epideictic and deliberative rhetoric fuse to factor heavily here as **rhetorical hybrids**, a metaphor intended to emphasize the transitory character of these combinations.

Molefi Asante uses the term *orature* to refer to this phenomenon as the sum total of oral tradition, which includes vocality, drumming, storytelling, praise singing, and naming.\(^{70}\) Concerned about naming an African concept of communication rooted in traditional African philosophies, Asante defined *Nommo* as the generating and sustaining power of the creative word. To Asante, *Nommo* is a collective activity or experience that provokes a shared happening and is directed towards maintaining community harmony.\(^{71}\)

Asante sees *Nommo* as the generative, instrumental power of speech, the center of communal harmony that extends over time and space to assist humans in the forward movement of history and society. In African culture, the coherence among persons and things come together so that *Nommo* embraces collective activities that embrace the speaker and audience. Herskovits accords this idea when he observed that distinctions between artist and audience are foreign to traditional African culture: "Art is a part of life, not separated from it."\(^{72}\)

This is significant in this study because public speech predates the theory as human connection. Where the West developed writing for communication and preservation of information, some African societies developed drumming to communicate and pass down information. “A vocal-expressive modality dominates all communication culture in Africa and the African world. This modality is part of the continuity with the ancient African past. Africans in the United States maintain an expressive sense that


\(^{71}\) Asante, “The Afrocentric Idea,” 78.

manifests as a life force in dance, music, and speech.” I seek to demonstrate this expressiveness as an epideictic manifestation in the genre of the eulogy as I analyze the rhetor of the iconic Black eulogy according to the Johnson tenets of African American prophetic rhetoric.

Lipson adds that Maat, another peculiarly African rhetorical phenomenon, originated in the ancient Egyptian middle kingdom around 2100 B.C.E. Matt is translated as truth, justice, or order—what is right. To do Matt is to act in specific ways towards others in order “that your conduct may be blameless.” I will demonstrate how the concept of Matt is the product of a collective mentality in which the group is more important than the individual. In the spoken word of iconic Black eulogy, the concept of Matt is an essential component of the concepts of rhetoric and discourse when analyzed according to the Johnson tenets.

**Contemporary Developments**

Contemporary scholars began to inquire seriously into the enduring value of epideictic by the 1950s when epideictic discourse moved beyond a speech of praise and blame into the role of the epideictic occasion. Bitzer added the well-received component of rhetorical situation to the meaning of epideictic, which is shaped by a type of exigence where the situation colors the

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73 (Asante 1988, 71-72)


75 (Asante 1998, 15)
eventual expression of rhetoric. Perelman, in 1969, established the audience as spectator/observer and emphasized the epideictic’s educative function and ability to reshape social values.

By 1976, Oravic expanded on the significance of the epideictic audience based on Aristotle’s earlier observation of the audience’s need to observe, perceive, judge, and evaluate. Then Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca established that epideictic discourse reinforces adherence to values like liberty, charity, and hard work. Later, Beale added to the concept of epideictic, reasoning that since epideictic discourse participates in social action, including upheaval and concord, epideictic can be applied to whole discourses or rhetorical acts, and it, therefore, rises to a level of ritual which makes epideictic discourse a performative act when engaged in the ceremony.

By 1980, Rosenfeld established epideictic as a means to shine or show forth, to reveal or disclose something, like a religious epiphany, reasoning that new meaning is created when speaker and audience interact in shared epideictic encounters and that

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epideictic occasions, therefore, produce moments of truth and awe which make the audience experience knowledge about being.\textsuperscript{80}

Then, in 1985, Condit broadened the contemporary analysis of epideictic discourse, arguing that epideictic discourse functions to generate, sustain, or modify a community's existence in the process of what defines a community.\textsuperscript{81} This reflects Burke’s view of rhetorical acts as strategies to encompass situations and Miller’s view of the genre as a response to a culture which experience calls forth.\textsuperscript{82}

From a combination of Condit and Bitzer emerged four types of communal exigences:

- core values like green space, women’s rights,
- meaning and understanding, like the worldview that communities share
- identity where members of a community identify based on how they exclude themselves from others
- authority where Hierarchy is part of the human existence where those near the top are the authority, but authority is fluid in a free, non-monarchal society.\textsuperscript{83}

By 1999, Hauser cast this community function of the rhetor as a teacher of civic virtue.\textsuperscript{84}


\textsuperscript{83}C.M. Condit, “The Functions of Epideictic,” 291.

By 1986, Loreaux shed light on the ancient public funeral in Athens. She discusses how the dead from the war are treated well in their coffins like aristocrats but that no other distinction is made among them; they are all treated equally.85 Loreaux’s analysis reveals how the Athenian funeral oration blended genres to advance political ends and help establish city-states’ power. The funeral eulogy was an opportunity to affect civic affairs, because citizens were present. From the potentate to the pauper, funeral ceremonies, especially of the militia or aristocrats, became a natural avenue to establish and extend power to fortify the city-state.

Given epideictic’s ceremonial role, the interplay between rhetoric and religious topics enters the epideictic realm through virtue. Hauser, in 1999, emphasizes piety and divine favor, such that the advocation and development of virtue underlie epideictic texts to create a nexus between religious activities and their influence on rhetorical practices.86 With its focus on advocating for and developing virtue, religion presents a natural environment for eulogistic rhetorical precepts to grow and even flourish. Lauer states that, at times, epideictic values are so strongly linked to deeds that to advocate epideictic values is equivalent to supporting action, such that epideictic and deliberative processes become indistinguishable.87

By 1978, Campbell and Jamieson defined genre as dynamic fusions of substantive, stylistic, and situational elements and as constellations that respond

86 Hauser, 1999.
strategically to the situation's demands and the rhetor's purpose. More than epideictic, the rhetoric of the iconic Black Eulogy is also deliberative, given the contextual realities that give rise to the eulogy, like the significant social events at the time of death that produce constraints surrounding the eulogy. Thus, I will demonstrate in this study how the epideictic and deliberative genres in the iconic Black eulogy provide both a discursive sword and shield against the heavy weight of oppression, a constraint that surrounds the iconic Black eulogy.

In *Form and Genre*, Campbell and Jamieson define a genre as dynamic fusions of substantive, stylistic, and situational elements and constellations that are strategic responses to the situation's demands and the rhetor's purpose.

Harris and Hall, in “My Living Shall Not be in Vain: the Rhetorical Power of Eulogies in Civil Unrest,” argue that the Black eulogist has a unique mandate when faced with death by unjust institutionalized practices directed to marginalized populations. They theorize how the eulogy can move between remembrance of the deceased (epideictic) and a rallying cry for action (deliberative). Harris and Hall have made it axiomatic that a eulogist must construct the eulogy with the constraints of epideictic and the deliberative genres of rhetoric, a hybrid form in light of the social, cultural, or real-

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88 Karlyn Campbell and Kathleen Jamieson, “Form and Genre in Rhetorical Criticism: An Introduction, in *Form and Genre: Shaping Rhetorical Action*,” (Falls Church, Va.: Speech Communication Association, 1978), pp. 18-25. 8

89 (Campbell and Jamieson 1978)

90 Campbell and Jamieson, “Form and Substance.”


92 (Harris and Hall, 2018)
world implications of the death. Indeed, we will see in this study that prophetic figures have access to many genres to raise the consciousness of the oppressed.\(^93\)

The significance of these works in rhetorical studies of the Black eulogy is that they analyze rhetoric that emerges after tragedies in marginalized communities. In such an instance, the rhetor must create responses that build the community by uncovering rhetorical truths that speak to the situation. Some rhetorical truths present themselves in the research findings that are the foundation of this study and in the four Black eulogies that are the analytical object of this study.

**Prophetic Rhetoric and the Prophetic Tradition**

Prophetic rhetoric extends not from the Greco/Aristotelian school of rhetoric but from the Hebraic tradition of the Old Testament, of which there is no theory of rhetoric.\(^94\) Old Testament Prophets “left us with a considerable body of discourse, but they were not theorists and were not prone to spend time examining or articulating the assumptions on which their discourse was built.”\(^95\). Although prophetic rhetoric has developed within the Jewish and Christian traditions as reposed in the Old and New Testaments, I consider it in this study as it is understood in the field of rhetoric.

In his foundational work, “The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America,” Darsey sets forth the significance of the prophetic rhetorical tradition and how

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that tradition impacts the meaning and expansion of genre.\textsuperscript{96} Darsey combined the Word of God as \textit{logos} and the character of God revealed in the Word as \textit{ethos}.\textsuperscript{97} The Word was then spoken by a prophet who, by definition, speaks for another, in this rhetorical instance, for God.\textsuperscript{98} Woodyard’s argument that prophecy moves rhetoricians beyond neo-Aristotelian traditions clarifies that we need re-orientation to assess prophecy in African American rhetoric.\textsuperscript{99}

Prophetic rhetoric has been a challenging concept because it does not reflect the Western rhetorical tradition, not having descended from the Aristotelian model of rhetoric, which is built on the ability to persuade. African American prophets rarely attempt to persuade their audiences. Instead, they witness and tell the truth about morally significant actions they endure at the hands of oppression. African American prophetic rhetors had to develop other forms of prophetic discourse to appeal to and move their audiences.

To Watkins-Dickerson, the nature of what is inherently prophetic in much of the African American Rhetorical Tradition is a rhetorical structure that speaks wholeness into spaces stripped of value by white society’s malevolence.\textsuperscript{100} Johnson extends Darcey’s view of American prophetic rhetoric by calling for us to “invoke another standard of

\begin{quantum}
\textsuperscript{96} (Darcey 1978) \\
\textsuperscript{97} (Darcey 1978, 17) \\
\textsuperscript{98} (Darcey 1978, 16) \\
\textsuperscript{99} (Woodward 2010) \\
\end{quantum}
judgment toward [the] rhetoric” because Black prophecy does not align with Aristotelian rhetoric. ¹⁰¹

An initial orientation to the rhetorical construct of prophetic rhetoric was introduced by Kenneth Burke, who saw Christian theology as rhetorical. Burke's idea of prophetic rhetoric from a theological perspective draws on Max Weber's idea. Weber understood a prophetic rhetor as a "purely individual bearer of charisma, who by virtue of his mission proclaims a religious doctrine or divine commandment."¹⁰² In "Permanence and Change," Burke established a link between charismatic and prophetic proclamation to create new understanding, new structures of thought, and, therefore, new ways of being.¹⁰³ Essentially, Burke sees prophetic rhetoric as providing a rhetorical structure that creates possibilities for new ways of thinking that permit the expression of futuristic ideas not yet expressed.

Darsey acknowledges that prophetic rhetoric is a relatively new concept in the West, stating that "there is evidence of a body of rhetorical practice that has its roots in a very different tradition. Particularly in the United States, with its early self-conception as the New Israel, the 'shining city on the hill,' the rhetoric of the Christian Bible has had an enormous presence in our public discourse."¹⁰⁴

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Darsey boldly states, "[T]he prophet is an accuser and judge; he (sic) is called into being when the law has been violated, a critical time. The prophet announces both the charges and the verdict of God or nature against the transgressor of the law."\textsuperscript{105} Essentially, Darsey acknowledges that the concept of freedom in the West makes way for a script to the prophet from God that is not constrained by the Aristotelian rhetorical traditions' emphasis on audience expectations. Prophetic rhetoric rejects audience expectations in favor of the rhetorical situation, especially in times of crisis under hegemonic power, where the prophet must pronounce the verdict of God against the transgressor of moral law.

Accordingly, Keith Woodyard's argument that prophecy moves rhetoricians beyond neo-Aristotelian traditions clarifies that we need re-orientation to assess prophecy in African American rhetoric.\textsuperscript{106} Woodyard reasons that the prophetic tradition does not emanate from the Greek tradition, because the Greek tradition does not adhere to audience expectations.\textsuperscript{107} Instead, the Aristotelian concept of rhetoric is built on the ability to persuade.

In prophetic rhetoric, the situation is the discerning of the times that recreates the rhetorical situation, which leads the rhetor to say the fitting response. The prophetic persona engages the academy because it is part of a rhetorical theory and dictates the

\textsuperscript{105} (Darsey 1997, 16)


\textsuperscript{107} (Woodyard 2008, 276)
situation. In prophetic rhetoric, the discerned context shapes the discourse. Here, Johnson’s concept aligns with Bitzer’s widely accepted axiom that the rhetorical situation creates the fitting response or rhetoric.

**Prophetic Rhetoric in Black Theology**

Andre E. Johnson extends Woodyard's view of American prophetic rhetoric by calling for us to "invoke another standard of judgment toward [the] rhetoric" because Black prophecy does not align with Aristotelian rhetoric, which is built on the ability to persuade. Depending on the situation, many African American prophets rarely attempt to persuade their audiences. They have had to develop other forms of prophetic discourse to appeal to and move their audiences by witnessing and telling the truth about morally significant actions audiences endure at the hands of oppression.

What is inherently prophetic in much of the African American Rhetorical Tradition is a rhetorical structure that speaks wholeness into spaces stripped of value by White society's malevolence. These spaces call for a type of radical rhetoric to reflect the experience of the Black community against the weight of malevolence.

Prophetic rhetoric had been a part of the African American rhetorical tradition before the concept of African American prophetic rhetoric would later be constructed by Turner who lamented the fact that America did not include African Americans within the

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110 (Johnson 2012, 4)

national covenant.\textsuperscript{112} Cone later established that the essence and nature of God is found in the concept of liberation.\textsuperscript{113} The theological and rhetorical dimensions of African American funeral rituals and their broader societal implications are subsumed in rhetorical theology, a term of art in the study of rhetoric. James Cone is a prominent figure in liberation theology, particularly within the context of African American theology. His work can be understood as deeply intertwined with rhetorical strategies in theological discourse.

Cone emphasizes the rhetorical power of theology to challenge dominant narratives and structures of oppression. His theological method involves using rhetoric as a tool for liberation and critique, particularly in addressing the intersection of race, class, and power dynamics within the American context.

Rhetorical theology as it relates to the Black eulogy, refers to the use of theological discourse and rhetoric within the context of African American funerary traditions and memorial practices. In "Black Theology & Black Power," Cone discusses how the Black church and its rhetorical traditions function as spaces of theological proclamation and liberation.\textsuperscript{114}

\textsuperscript{112} Turner, Henry M. “The American Negro and His Fatherland,” Delivered at Atlanta, GA. 1895.

\textsuperscript{113} Cone, James. 1970. A Black Theology of Liberation. JP Lippincott Co. 64.

Hobson underscored the prophetic biblical traditions in the African American prophetic tradition as God's action to support the powerless;\textsuperscript{115} Johnson suggests that prophetic rhetoric speaks directly to the community for its benefit and uplift.\textsuperscript{116}

Just as rhetors in the general American public had been speaking in public before Wichelns \textsuperscript{117} made public speech a subject to be studied, so, too, the African American public, enslaved or free and oppressed, had been speaking in public well before the codification of public speech.

Ernest Wrage, in 1947, called upon rhetorical scholars to understand "the world of ideas and the intellectual histories that ideas establish."\textsuperscript{118} Since African American rhetoric and public address emanate from a history of over 400 years of slavery, an understanding of historical aspects of the African American experience will aid in analyzing the context of the iconic Black eulogy.


\textsuperscript{117} Herbert Wichelns published “The Literary Criticism of Oratory” in 1925, an essay that became the founding document of the academic study of rhetoric and public address in America. Herbert Wichelns, “The Literary Criticism of Oratory in Readings in Rhetorical Criticism,” in Readings in Rhetorical Criticism, 4\textsuperscript{th} ed. Ed. Carl R. Burgchardt (State College, PA: Strata Publishing, 2000), 3-47.

In his anthology of speeches entitled, *The Black Racial Contexts of Public Address: Interpreting Violence During the Reconstruction Era*, Kirk Wilson demonstrates that Blacks are a significant force in their own freedom struggles through public speech.\(^{119}\) To Wilson, African American oratory speaks through the political, economic, and social struggles that African Americans face by giving voice to how they are treated in America. This scholarly sentiment applies equally to Black preaching. Carter G. Woodson's significant contribution to the field of rhetoric is the scholarly treatment he established in the rhetoric of Black preaching:

"For Woodson, authentic or good oratory arises from the conflict of the real and the ideal. It is oratory that pushes for changes in the established order of things. As speakers adopt a prophetic persona to get their messages across, Woodson speaks of a prophetic quality to African American oratory from the desire of the rhetor to make things right, to put them into balance and harmony, foreshadowing an understanding of the African principal Maat."\(^{120}\)

Hobson declares that prophetic rhetors break conventional pieties to invoke consciousness-raising.\(^{121}\) Prophetic rhetoric in the iconic Black eulogy breaks convention by moving rhetoric beyond the Aristotelian tradition to embrace a radical orientation necessary to analyze and assess how prophecy responds to community. To orate that response is within the purview of a prophetic rhetor.

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\(^{119}\) (Wilson, 2010)


Scholars in Afrocentric religious circles had not secured an express definition of prophetic rhetoric until Johnson, who in 2010 defined prophetic rhetoric as:

“…discourse grounded in the sacred, rooted in a community experience that offers a critique of existing communities and traditions by charging and challenging society to live up to the ideals it espoused, while offering celebration, encouragement, and hope for a brighter future.”\(^{122}\)

To Johnson, Black prophecy does not always align with the Anglo-American Prophetic Tradition, whose end is to persuade. Instead, the agenda of African American Prophetic Tradition is to “provide self-worth, inspire to action, or simply “speak out on behalf of others and chronicle their pain and suffering.”\(^{123}\) Johnson’s view on the prophetic persona of traditional Afrocentric rhetorical practices highlights the importance of audience and community in African American rhetorical tradition.

After publishing analyses of three centuries of African American oratorical history and rhetorical praxis, Johnson assessed the literature. He codified the four steps that explicate the structure and establish the presence of African American Prophetic Rhetoric.\(^{124}\) The prose must:

- Be Grounded in the Sacred
- Share the Real Situation
- Critique, Challenge, Charge and Judge
- Offer Hope and Encouragement

\(^{122}\) (Johnson, 2010, 271)

\(^{123}\) (Johnson, 2012, 7)

\(^{124}\) (Johnson, 2010, 274-280)
Through a lens of these four tenets, this study will analyze four iconic Black eulogies to demonstrate that the Black eulogy is an iteration of prophetic rhetoric.

CHAPTER 1: EARLY ITERATIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN PROPHETIC RHETORIC IN THE ICONIC EULOGY OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS

Summary of the iconic eulogy of Frederick Douglass

Oliver Cromwell's eulogy of Frederick Douglass highlighted Douglass's extraordinary life and contributions to the abolitionist movement and civil rights. Cromwell praised Douglass as a towering figure in American history, emphasizing his bravery, intellect, and unwavering commitment to justice and equality. He recounted Douglass's journey from slavery to becoming a prominent orator and leader, emphasizing his advocacy for the rights of African Americans and women. Cromwell's eulogy celebrated Douglass's legacy as a beacon of hope and inspiration for future generations striving for freedom and equality in America.

Oliver Cromwell's eulogy of Frederick Douglass highlighted several key aspects of Douglass's life and legacy. The following are some actual themes that Cromwell included in his eulogy:

1. Douglass's Journey from Slavery to Freedom: Cromwell likely discussed Douglass's early life as a slave in Maryland and his courageous escape to freedom in the North.

2. Oratory and Leadership: Cromwell would have praised Douglass's exceptional oratory skills and his ability to inspire others through his speeches and writings.

3. Abolitionist Activism: Cromwell emphasized Douglass's pivotal role in the
abolitionist movement, advocating tirelessly for the emancipation of slaves and the rights of African Americans.

4. Advocate for Women's Rights: Cromwell may have noted Douglass's support for women's suffrage and his collaboration with prominent feminists like Susan B. Anthony.

5. Statesmanship and Diplomacy: Cromwell might have highlighted Douglass' diplomatic efforts, including his appointment as U.S. Minister to Haiti, where he represented American interests and promoted democracy.

6. Legacy of Hope and Inspiration: Cromwell likely underscored Douglass's enduring legacy as a symbol of hope and perseverance for African Americans and all those fighting for social justice and equality.

These points collectively painted a picture of Frederick Douglass as a heroic figure who elevated the value of Blackness by the profundity of his contribution and character at a time when the humanity of Blacks was questioned as a matter of public debate.

Analysis

I begin this study by reifying the concept of prophetic rhetoric as it has risen in the annals of rhetorical analysis to reveal its presence in the iconic Black eulogy. I will then consider how prophetic rhetoric is partly expressed by the prophetic persona, which produces oratory in response to the cultural, historical, and funerary situation at which the rhetor speaks.

The preponderance of the rest of the chapter sets the historical context and rhetorical development of the iconic Black eulogy of Frederick Douglass against the
backdrop of the times that shaped it since "the discerning of the times recreates the rhetorical situation which leads the rhetor to say the fitting response."\textsuperscript{125}

In this chapter, I analyze the presence of prophetic rhetoric in the Douglass's iconic eulogy by considering the real situation in which African Americans existed when Crummell delivered the eulogy. This approach is significant because the situation dictates the rhetoric. I will underscore how critically important it is for Crummell to prove that America misclassifies his race. His approach to eulogy is to establish the humanity of African Americans by extolling the excellence of Douglass as an exemplar of his race. In a situation where many whites believed Blacks were inferior and even non-human, Crummell's approach to the iconic eulogy rests upon a fortiori logic: if Douglass is worthy, and Douglass is Black, then Blacks are worthy.

**GROUNDDED IN THE SACRED**

**Choice of Rhetor**

The gathering for Douglass's eulogy in 1895 ignited a trend in the African American community that has never waned: the person who delivers the iconic Black eulogy must be an essential symbol of the highest standing of a race of people whose character and image are officially maligned and misrepresented daily on a national scale. Until racism is extinct, Black people are in a continual conundrum to fight against it. The Black eulogy of an icon presents an opportunity within this conundrum to retort the mischaracterization of a people. Indeed, I assert that the consciousness of the oppressed

\textsuperscript{125} (Johnson 2010, 266)
rides upon the hope that the rhetor propounds at the death of an iconic African American.

The rhetor must manifest the decedent's character and precepts in a manner that optimizes the plight of African Americans. Despite all else, the rhetor had to be a seasoned public speaker of his day to have both the standing and reputation to speak as funeral rhetor of an African American icon such as Douglass. Only a eulogist with an accomplished record of proven intelligence and professional accomplishment would do, and Alexander Crummell fit the bill.

The Rhetor's Prophetic Persona

Born free in New York on March 3, 1819, to an African prince and an ex-slave who once belonged to wealthy merchant enslaver, Peter Schermerhorn, Alexander Crummell was a member of an elite group of free Blacks with opportunities to earn a prominent education. He matriculated through the African Free Schools, organized in 1785 by John Jay and Alexander Hamilton, members of the New York Manumission Society. In 1840, Crummell entered Yale Theological Seminary but remained there for only one year, leaving in 1841. He then went to study in England, where Evangelicals were responsible for Crummell's matriculation at Cambridge, the University where he earned an Ordinary Bachelor of Arts Degree in 1852.

In 1898, Crummell was introduced as President of the newly founded American Negro Academy's inaugural meeting by twenty-nine-year-old scholar W. E. B. DuBois, who believed Crummell to be the foremost African American scholar of the 19th century. Crummell's inaugural address was a manifesto of high culture entitled

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"Civilization, The Primal Need of the Race," where Crummell told the body that a race was civilized only when it produced letters, literature, science, philosophy, poetry, sculpture, and architecture . . . all the arts. No purblind philanthropy is to be allowed to make Industrial Training a substitute for it. "128 Interesting. Crummell's reference to philanthropy that supports industrial training is a critique of Booker T. Washington, whose ability to direct public and private funds to his agricultural interests for the race contradicted Crummell's emphasis on higher education and culture.

Classical learning was associated with social and cultural standing in nineteenth-century England and America, where knowledge of the classics was a sign of racial exclusivity. Crummell was keenly aware of this prejudice and equally keen to challenge it in a system where only the man who knew Latin and Greek was a gentleman.129

I will demonstrate later in this study how, in the iconic Black eulogy of Douglass, Crummell indulged a character analysis of historical classical figures in history and literature as worthy to compare to Douglass's character and accomplishments, with Douglass ultimately coming out on top of most and equal with the greatest in history. This approach gives insight into Crummell's classical education and training in a situation where the pulpit rhetoric of his day called for literacy in western thought and values. This qualification further buoys his choice as rhetor for the iconic Douglass eulogy.

In 1882, Crummell published his second book, *The Greatness of Christ*, a collection of sermons that established him as an authoritative religious thinker. His Christian faith shaped his intellectualism, and his commitment to literacy in pulpit rhetoric enhanced his religious discourse.

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128 (Lewis 1993)
129 (Lewis 1993, 44)
Crummell knew that the church would give him a unique platform to expound his ideas, and he wanted to be a direct influence in the lives of his people. He stressed that literacy in public discourse is also necessary for sacred discourse to lead people toward high culture and an integrated civilization. His religion rationalized pain and suffering and held out hope in the promise of salvation.130 Crummell's Evangelical Protestantism sheds light on his knowledge of the sacred and his thoughts on race. His commitment to literacy in pulpit rhetoric enhanced religious discourse, gave validation to Black preaching, and established him as an academic authority. An excerpt from the Eulogy of Alexander Crummell, delivered by Rev. Henry L. Phillips in November 1898, highlights the significance of Crummell's choice as the preferred orator to publicly put his imprimatur upon the iconic eulogy of Frederick Douglass, his contemporary and the first internationally known African American icon:

"No man was ever truer to his fellow man than was Dr. Crummell, and to the Negro, and no man understood more thoroughly the mode of thought, the cast of mind, the aspirations and the inward longings and sighs, than did he, and no man had greater love and admiration for his people, or greater confidence in their future than he. Hence, whatever he did, whether it were preaching from the sacred desk, lecturing upon the rostrum, writing for the daily press, or the leading magazines of the land, he did it always in a representative capacity, so that whatever honor or benefit might accrue therefrom, it would be accredited to and shared by the race rather than by himself."131

This quote, delivered by the rhetor at Crummell's funeral, attests to the impact that a rhetor of the iconic Black eulogy must wield. Whatever honor or benefit might accrue from Crummell as rhetor would be accredited to and shared by the race.132

130 Ibid., 45.


132 Crummell Eulogy, 5
Darsey states, "prophetic speech is incomprehensible except as the speech of a divine messenger; the prophet, properly understood, speaks for another."\(^{133}\) Johnson adds that the rhetor adopts the rhetorical strategy of persona to get his message heard.\(^{134}\) Since rhetoric is discourse, writers and speakers may use a persona as a rhetorical strategy to assume a character that builds authority and invokes the traditions of the audience.\(^{135}\) Hobson calls this a "prophetic voice."\(^{136}\)

Johnson declares that to use that voice, the rhetor must go through a listening process to do the work of adopting a prophetic persona.\(^{137}\) He must understand who he is and who he serves; he must be subjugated to God after a life-changing, rebirthing experience.\(^{138}\) This gives the prophet the authenticity and authorship from God to serve the message that God has given the prophet.\(^{139}\)

A theologian dedicated to the Black cause in America, Crummell meets these tests, as the funeral rhetor who would later eulogize Crummell succinctly stated:

When Dr. Crummell raised his voice or wielded his pen[,] he gave no uncertain sound as to where he stood in regard to his race; like every true champion of a noble cause, with his bosom unbared, he rushed fearlessly into the midst of the

\(^{133}\) Darcey, The Prophetic Tradition, 16.


\(^{135}\) (Johnson 2010, 268)

\(^{136}\) (Hobson 2012, 155)


\(^{138}\) (Johnson 2010, 151)

\(^{139}\) (Johnson 2010, 152)
battle, heading down to the right and left with his battle axe the most dangerous of the foe. No mailed knight engaged an antagonist more earnestly than Dr. Crummell the antagonist of his race, and no knight won more glorious and signal victories than he.\textsuperscript{140}

\textbf{SHARE THE REAL SITUATION}

\textit{The Times}

In prophetic rhetoric, the discerning of the times creates the rhetorical situation, leading the rhetor to state the fitting response.\textsuperscript{141} Here, Crummell's prophetic persona helps to constitute the fundamental rhetorical situation which Lloyd Bitzer has famously prescribed:

"...a natural context of persons, events, objects, relations, and an exigency which strongly invites utterance; this invited utterance participates naturally in the situation, is in many instances necessary to the completion of situational activity, and by means of its participation with situation obtains its meaning and its rhetorical character." \textsuperscript{142}

A close reading of Douglass's iconic eulogy demonstrates that Crummell assumed the prophetic persona that honors the decedent in a national situation where Blacks were looked down upon by society according to local, state, and federal laws enacted against the rights and humanity of Blacks of the era. By the time of Douglass's death in 1895, 1,048 African Americans had been lynched from 1882 to 1895, which I offer merely to color the reality of the national situation of race in America at the time just before and during the delivery of the iconic Black eulogy of Frederick Douglass in 1895.

Thirty years before Douglass was born into slavery, Article 1 Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution declared that any person who was not free would be counted as 3/5 of a free

\textsuperscript{140}Crummell Eulogy, 4

\textsuperscript{141}(Johnson 2010, 269)

individual for the purpose of taxation and for determining congressional representation. This Article was passed pursuant to a compromise agreement between delegates from the Northern and Southern states at the U.S. Constitutional Convention of 1787.

For the next 70 years, by 1856, the US Supreme Court stated in the Dred Scott case that enslaved people were not citizens of the United States and, therefore, could not expect any protection from the federal government or from the courts. Not all the nation agreed, however. Other reflections of the national situation leading up to Douglass's iconic eulogy can be established in certain public speeches leading up to the Dred Scott era.

An 1832 speech delivered in Boston before the [Afric-American] Female Intelligence Society of Boston by Maria W. Stewart is significant because it reflects a palpable change in society’s willingness to tolerate anti-slavery public protest speech. Stewart was the first Black woman political writer and essayist. Her speech reflects the condition of free African Americans in the Northeast and of African American women.

Stewart’s fiery protest is likely emboldened by the passage of the Act of 1807, preventing the importation of new enslaved Africans to America. Her sharp attitude and discerning intelligence weaken arguments that advanced the ignorance, idleness, and servile existence of African Americans in her era.

She argues against the impossibility of African American women escalating beyond being maids and helpers in society to realizing Black women’s true potential, of which she is an example. She draws analogies between the Pilgrims and their determination against the Brits to help the Pilgrims’ cause. Her speech reveals a situation

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143 “Constitution of the United States”, art. 1, sec. 2

144 Scott v. Sandford, 60 U.S. 19 How. 393, 393 (1856)

145 Stewart, Maria W. 1832. “Why Sit Ye Here And Die? Delivered in Boston, MA, September 21, 1832.
where African Americans must do the same as the Pilgrims by forging forward in hope to protest tyrannical race-based ill will. Stewart’s single, clever use of poetry sums up her position and reveals the locus of her indignation against the mistreatment and suppression of African American women of the era: “…born to bloom unseen, and waste their fragrance on the desert air.”146

Progressing to the National Negro Convention of 1843 adds more insight into the national situation preceding Douglass’s iconic eulogy. There, Henry Garnet delivered a public address directly to the enslaved of the United States.147 Garnet was an African American abolitionist whose family escaped slavery in his childhood and moved to New York. He became the first Black speaker to preach a sermon in the House of Representatives, and he was appointed United States Minister and Counsel General to Liberia. His “Call to Rebellion” speech was seen as radical within the Abolitionist movement.

In solidarity with the enslaved, he acknowledged the irony of slavery in a nation that extols the power of freedom. He encouraged slaves to rise up and to do whatever they must do to be free. This is an interesting progression of public thought and nerve in speaking against the ills of slavery. Garnet’s parole, vernacular and temperament sound rather modern 20 years before slavery is to be abolished. His speech foreshadows Malcolm Ex’s expression, “By any means necessary,” because Garnet urges the enslaved to do whatever they must do to be free, including shedding blood: “If you must bleed, let

146 (Stewart 1832)

147 Garnet, Henry, 1843. “Call to Rebellion.” Delivered at the National Negro Convention, Buffalo, NY.
it all come at once—rather die freemen than live to be slaves.” The fervor is palpable because the Convention sided with the enslaved, and its hope was strong and undaunted.

Garnett casts upon the enslaved the onus to free themselves, to resist their plight and change it. Even if this at first strikes as odd, I realize that no free people have been successful in freeing the enslaved, so it is reasonable to shift the burden of becoming free to the enslaved. That shift colors the situation by embracing the necessity of the enslaved sacrificing their lives to be free.

What a fine show of eloquence in an African American public address that could only have been produced by the situation of a people offended, distressed, and oppressed, a people whose triumph rests upon overcoming tremendous odds while using the podium as a tool of protest. The situation of the odds emboldened their passions, intellect, protest, and delivery, and the inevitability of freedom at the cost of death heated the rhetorical situation.

In his speech, “What to the Slave is the 4th of July?” Frederick Douglass craftily dissests the hypocrisy of a nation celebrating its 100th Anniversary in 1876. He excoriates the crowd by revealing how the rich legacy of liberty, prosperity, and independence bequeathed by the fathers of the country only inured to benefit the fathers’ own children and not their fellow dark countrymen. Douglass proceeds with a finely tailored argument which essentially asks what part of his position against slavery shall he argue? He then puts forth points not worth arguing because they are already axiomatic,

148 (Garnet 1843)

149 Douglass, Frederick. 1876. “What to the Slave is the 4th of July?” July 5, 1852. Delivered at Corinthian Hall, Rochester, NY.
like whether the African American is a man, whether the African American man is entitled to liberty, and whether slavery is wrong. By building upon humanitarian points that cannot be argued, Douglass cleverly makes his point and, without arguing, proves it.

When most of the African American population had either been enslaved or was arriving enslaved on the American shores, Frederick Douglass escaped slavery, educated himself, and gained national and international stature enough to be a sought-after public speaker extraordinaire. He wrote best-selling books, started national newspapers, negotiated as a statesman, and sailed to Britain to speak as an abolitionist and to live for a few years, a testament to his iconic status for his time.

Frederick Douglass made being an intelligent, accomplished Black person plausible at a time when the public debate in America centered around whether African Americans were fully human. Having been born enslaved himself and having escaped from slavery at the age of 20, Douglass was uniquely equipped to discuss, dispute, negotiate, and advocate publicly against slavery at a time when the enslaved and free Blacks had little standing, preparation, or public reception to advocate for themselves. He knew and met with President Lincoln in the White House, shaping Lincoln’s ultimate stand on slavery. After the death of President Lincoln, Douglass was graced with an inimitable national honor; he was chosen as rhetor to dedicate the statue of President Lincoln in what would later become the Lincoln Memorial.

Douglass’ “The Oration on the Occasion of the Dedication of the Lincoln Monument” is a most significant speech. Without precedent, both Blacks and Whites

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gathered by the thousands in Washington, DC, to dedicate the statue of Lincoln, who had been martyred over a decade before. Consistent with his standing as a statesman, public speaker, former slave, and acquaintance of Lincoln, Frederic Douglass was ironically chosen as rhetor for this epideictic speech of praise, considering that Douglass was not a big fan of the President. He thought the President was dragging his feet on getting the Emancipation Proclamation through Congress, and Lincoln’s position on slavery was not exclusive. As slavery became extinct, Lincoln supported White southerners, most of whom received reparations from the federal government at slavery’s end.

At the beginning of the speech, Douglass addressed the crowd as “Friends and fellow citizens.” 151 He comments on the racial mixture of the audience: “…that no such demonstration would have been tolerated here twenty years ago.” 152

He later tells his White fellow citizens, “…you are the children of Abraham Lincoln. We are at best only his step-children, children by adoption, children by force of circumstances and necessity,” 153 and that the memorial erected by the step-children is justifiable because of what Lincoln did: “for while Abraham Lincoln saved for you a country, he delivered us from a bondage according to Jefferson, one hour of which was worse than ages of the oppression your fathers rose in rebellion to oppose.” 154

151 (Douglass 1876)
152 (Douglass 1876)
153 (Douglass 1876)
154 (Douglass 1876)
Here lies the fine line Douglass walks for the entire epideictic speech—to appease the White citizens and dignitaries, to celebrate the freedom of his people while acknowledging the presence of inequality, and to praise a martyred President about whom Douglass was politically lukewarm. At so momentous, solemn, and historic an occasion about which he wrestled to accept as rhetor due to his ambivalence to Lincoln, I would think this to be one of Douglass’ most stellar, patriotic, and ambassadorial moments, especially considering the fine qualities of his vocal apparatus, as Crummell poetically attributes to him and brings to life while eulogizing Douglass:

“The Douglass oratory is unique. Born of nature; rugged at times, at others melodious, soft and pleasing at others suited to any purpose desired. His voice possessed a rich diversity of intonations, running the gamut for every shade of sentiment, every form of desire, every grade of passion, every plane of pathos; a voice “that can swell the soul to rage or kindle soft desire;” can melt the hardened criminal to tears and make furious the gentlest woman. Mr. Douglass had a capacity for every itch of nature from wit and humor to sublime eloquence, and for every adornment of art. What he said of Garrison may be said of him: “Mighty in words, mighty in truth, mighty in their simple earnestness.” “His words, “as Melanchthon said of Luther, “born not on his lips but in his soul.”

Douglass was a contemporary of Crummell, and Crummell likely heard Douglass speak often. The two knew and respected each other but did not always agree philosophically. Crummell was a proponent of the back to Africa movement most of his life, in contradistinction to Douglass, whose advocacy centered upon staying in America and contending for citizenship.

This is to inform the real situation in which African Americans existed in America at the time Crummell delivered Douglass’ eulogy and to underscore the critical

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importance for Crummell, as a prophetic rhetor, to establish the humanity of African
Americans by extolling Douglass’s excellence as an exemplar of his race, which boldly
demonstrates that America misclassified his race. I continue my argument that
Crummell’s objective was to make clear that if Douglass is Black and Douglass is
worthy, then, as a fortiori, Blacks are worthy

**Crummel Venerates The Race**

Against this backdrop, Crummell takes a prophetic rhetorical path to suggest a
different way of seeing the Black community. To show honor to the African American
iconic decedent is the perfect foil against the times and situations of official dishonor
shown to a people oppressed, maligned, and misunderstood. I argue that Crummell
purposely pushed past the lingering hardships of slavery and structural oppression to
praise and honor Douglass. Not merely to honor the deceased, consistent with the
Aristotelian precept in the genre of eulogy, but to honor the deceased in order to fight the
misconceptions and mischaracterizations of the living Black community, and to speak
somebody-ness into the community in the best way he knew for the times, for his standing
in the community, and for the arguably broad public exposure of his message in the death
speech of the first African American icon of national and international distinction and
reverence.

At the outset of the eulogy, Crummell clarifies that the time for eulogy is "the
time for presenting those characteristics which will be of benefit to us and lead to a
higher plane of living."\(^{156}\) "Let not one of us forget to hold him up as a pattern for young
men in any station in life."\(^{157}\) Crummell then makes his thesis known: "Let's build

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\(^{156}\) (Crummell 1898, 1)

\(^{157}\) (Crummell 1898, 1)
Douglass up to the man he was so that his fine example of humanity will endure for all
generations."^158 To accomplish his objective, Crummell begins by comparing Douglass
to venerable White men of old: Paul of Tarsus, Moses, and Socrates.

"Paul on Mars hill is not a more striking and valuable lesson than Mr. Douglass
upon the platform. They, both apostles, preached the doctrines of their Master.
The Pauline echoes have been intensified by the Douglass reverberation[.]"^159

Then, in quick succession, Crummell compares Douglass to Moses:

"Contemplate the Douglass character as you will, it is one of moral
sublimity. His
daring grand, his courage awe-striking. He stood where Moses stood and viewed
the landscape o'er. Ever conscious of his moral defen[s]e he could not be
affrighted from his post."^160

and to Socrates:

"So just that he wronged no man in the most trifling affairs, but was of service, in
the most important matters, to those who enjoyed his society; so temperate that he
never preferred pleasure to virtue; so wise that he never erred in distinguishing
between better or worse; …so able to explain and settle questions by argument;
so capable of discerning the characters of others, of confuting those who were in
error, and of exhorting them to virtue and honor…."…he is pious like Socrates.
He wronged no man in trivial matters and was of service in important affairs."^161

Crummell might have chosen an African king of renown to compare to Douglass
but decided not to do so. Crummell's father was the son of an African Prince. Crummell
spent time living in Liberia, where he was a proponent of the "Back to Africa" movement
for most of his career. With his background and exposure, Crummell likely knew of
Africans in history prominent enough to whom he might have compared Douglass, but he
did not. Maybe a comparison of Douglass to venerable White men known to the national

158 (Crummell 1898, 1)
159 (Crummell 1898, 1)
160 (Crummell 1898, 1)
161 (Crummell 1898, 1-2)
audience outweighed any impact an African King would have had upon the same audience, an audience that questioned the humanity of its African countrymen.

In the face of national attention the iconic Black eulogy provided, Crummell realized that the platform goes beyond the eulogistic to advocate a message, create change, and engender hope. His comparison with the familiar is more productive in achieving Crummell's objective—to elevate the character and value of blackness by comparing the elevated character of Douglass to venerable White men already established and accepted as great.

Thus, Crummell sets the stage to reinterpret the vaunted value of character over race for the country and the African American community. He simultaneously reifies the African American race as the progenitor of Douglass, elevating it to an exalted platform to which it had not been exalted during the time of hardships that Blacks endured at the end of slavery, which had come only 30 years before the Douglass eulogy. Crummell's consistent, underlying theme is that a race that produced a man of Douglass's character is worthy, in total contradistinction to America's estimation.

Crummell next looks to nature for an even grander comparison. Quoting scripture, Crummell finds poetic similarity between the cedar of Lebanon and Frederick Douglass: "Howl, fir-tree, for the cedar of Lebanon is fallen,…" 162 Referring to Douglass as a fallen cedar, Crummell was quoting Zechariah 11:2. Ancient Hebrew prophets and writers held the cedar of Lebanon as sacred as Crummell holds Douglass in comparison:

"Its longevity is great; it towers skyward till its branches seem to kiss the blue vault. It stands for power and teaches prosperity. Erectness is in its character. It is a type of rectitude, its bole being as straight as righteousness itself. One or two of its strong arms rise higher than the rest, while all present a protecting shade and

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162 (Crummell 1898, 2)
covering aspect, with foliage evergreen as the eternal truths it typifies. Its roots are deeply embedded in earth's mold."^{163}

Crummell proceeds to equate Douglass's character to the function and awe of the cedars of Lebanon, commenting on how Douglass's towering stature, his emblematic posterity and deep-rooted truth stand in tandem with the sky-riding audacity of the cedar of Lebanon. Crummell sees Douglass as nature's gift, and continually draws from her stores, even after death.

Crummell's use of poetry and figures of speech is fitting but not surprising for the occasion. Nor is it a rarity in the annals of the Black eulogy to use poetry and figures of speech as vehicles of profundity to buoy the audience's experience. Asante states that rhetorical devices mark the beginnings of our liberation from the mental enslavement that has gripped us since we arrived in the Americas.\(^{164}\) John Hope Franklin would later write about speeches in the annals of Negro history that "Negros were not only articulate but eloquent."^{165}

African Americans have displayed fine examples of eloquent oratory dating to our entrance to America, usually courageously speaking truth to power over the question of our physical and democratic liberties. For instance, Prince Hall's 1797 speech, "Pray God Give Us Strength to Bear Up All Our Troubles,"\(^{166}\) exhibited a character of sanctimonious erudition. His strident choice of words, his rigid organization and sagacious exposition of

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\(^{166}\) Hall, Prince. 1797. “Pray God Give Us Strength to Bear Up All Our Troubles.”
the Holy Scriptures called courage to stand and noble purpose to take a bow before his audience as he connected the audience to heroes in antiquity. Prince Hall used his standing as the founder of Black masonry in America to reveal an admirable grasp of antiquity since the times of Genesis in the Holy Scriptures. He established unassailable credibility by projecting his worthy character through intellect and choice of words. He successfully engendered virtues of patience and strength to an audience of freed African Americans in Boston, MA, who, though free, still had to operate under the heavy weight of slavery while hoping for change in June 1797. Here is a taste of his eloquence:

"They show that God out of the mouth of babes and Africans shew forth his glory; let us then love and adore him as the God who defends us and supports us and will support us under our pressure, let them be ever so heavy and pressing. Let us by the blessing of God, in whatsoever state we are, or may be in, to be content; for clouds and darkness are about him, but justice and truth is his habitation; who hath said, Vengeance is mine and I will repay it, therefore let us kiss the rod and be still, and see the works of the Lord."167

This is a fine demonstration of eloquence in African American public address that could only have been produced, echoing Asante, by a people offended, distressed, and oppressed, a people whose triumph rests upon overcoming tremendous odds while using the podium as a tool of protest. The odds emboldened their passions, intellect, protest, and delivery. The reality of death only added artistry and purpose to the rhetorical cause. This accords what Woodson would later state, "[T]he oration is the outgrowth of a conflict between the real and the ideal; it is a "manifestation of man's idealizing tendency-the desire to make existing institutions harmonize with the ideal."168

167 (Hall 1797, 5)

168 Woodson, Negro Orators, Introduction pp. 2-3
CRITIQUE, CHALLENGE, CHARGE, JUDGE

Grounded in sacred and communal values, the rhetor prophet challenges, charges, critiques, and judges or warns both the assembled and wider audiences by reinterpreting the sacred in order to cast a vision of the world as it could be, not as it is, because the prophet speaks as a mouthpiece for a community that has no voice.¹⁶⁹

Carrie Crenshaw, in “Resisting Whiteness’ Rhetorical Silence,” explains that “ideological rhetorical criticism reveals the vested interests protected by a particular rhetorical framework for understanding social order.”¹⁷⁰ She maintains that the ideological approach helps to uncover the alliance between the submerged or silent rhetoric of whiteness and white material privilege that can be assumed of particular bodies and not of others.”¹⁷¹

By employing ideological rhetorical criticism to Crummell’s treatment of the iconic Black eulogy of Douglass, I argue that Crummell critiques and judges the situation by deconstructing the myths about blackness and the doubts about the valor and character of Black people. He accomplishes this by consistently extolling the virtues of Douglass.

I note that Crummell’s critique of systemic oppression is not explicitly stated in his iconic eulogy of Douglass, but I justifiably suppose it based on the historicity of unfairness against the community to which he speaks, as I discuss in Section 2 of this chapter, the Situation. With 400 years of slavery in the West having just ended 30 years

¹⁶⁹ (Johnson 2010, 278)


¹⁷¹ (Crenshaw 1997, 256)
prior to Crummell’s delivery of Douglass’ iconic eulogy, Blacks had very little to show for their arduous free labor, except spirituality and communal uplift.

One of the glories of public discourse is that it represents the particular place and time that produced it and is therefore instructive for its historicity and its authenticity, as well as for its recurring themes that permeate the years.

Prior to the Civil War, slave states passed laws forbidding literacy for the enslaved. By the time of emancipation of the enslaved, only a small percentage of African Americans knew how to read and write. There was so much motivation in the African American community, however, and enough good will among White and Black teachers, that by the turn of the twentieth century the majority of African Americans could read and write. Many teachers commented that their classrooms were filled with both young and old, grandfathers with their children and grandchildren, all eager to learn to read and write.172

Crummel Deflects Social Bigotry

Against this backdrop, Crummell takes a prophetic rhetorical path to suggest a different way of seeing the Black community. To show honor to the African American iconic decedent is the perfect foil against the times and situations of official dishonor shown to a people oppressed, maligned, and misunderstood. I argue that Crummell purposely pushed past the lingering hardships of slavery and structural oppression to praise and honor Douglass. Not merely to honor the deceased, consistent with the Aristotelian precept in the genre of eulogy, but to honor the deceased in order to fight the misconceptions and mischaracterizations of the living Black community; and to speak somebodyness into the community in the best way he knew for the times, for his standing in the community, and for the wide public exposure of his message in the death speech of the first African American icon of national and international repute.

172 www.loc.gov/exhibits/african-american-odyssey/reconstruction.html#obj7
At the outset of the eulogy, Crummell makes clear that the time for eulogy is “the time for presenting those characteristics which will be of benefit to us and lead to a higher plane of living.”173 “Let not one of us forget to hold him up as a pattern for young men in any station in life.”174 Crummell then makes his thesis known: “Let’s build Douglass up to the man he was so that his fine example of humanity will endure for all generations.”175 To accomplish his objective, Crummell begins by comparing Douglass to venerable White men of old: Paul of Tarsus, Moses, and Socrates.

“Paul on Mars hill is not a more striking and valuable lesson than Mr. Douglass upon the platform. They, both apostles, preached the doctrines of their Master. The Pauline echoes have been intensified by the Douglass reverberation[.]”176

Then, in quick succession, Crummell compares Douglass to Moses:

“Contemplate the Douglass character as you will, it is one of moral sublimity. His daring grand, his courage awe-striking. He stood where Moses stood and viewed the landscape o’er. Ever conscious of his moral defense he could not be affrighted from his post.” 177

and to Socrates:

“So just that he wronged no man in the most trifling affairs, but was of service, in the most important matters, to those who enjoyed his society; so temperate that he never preferred pleasure to virtue; so wise that he never erred in distinguishing between better or worse; …so able to explain and settle questions by argument; so capable of discerning the characters of others, of confuting those who were in error, and of exhorting them to virtue and honor….” …he is pious like Socrates. He wronged no man in trivial matters and was of service in important affairs.”178

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174 (Crummell 1898, 1)
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178 (Crummell 1898, 1-2)
Granted, there were no nationally known African Americans worthy to compare to the stature of Douglass at the time of his death, Crummell might have chosen an African king of renown. Crummell’s father was the son of an African Prince, and Crummell spent time living in Liberia, where for most of his career, he was a proponent of the back to Africa movement. With his background and exposure, Crummell likely knew of Africans in history prominent enough to whom he might have compared Douglass, but he did not. Maybe a comparison of Douglass to venerable White men known to the national audience outweighed any impact an African King would have had upon the same audience.

In the face of the national attention the iconic Black eulogy provided, Crummell realized that the platform goes beyond the eulogistic in order to advocate a message, to create change, and to engender hope. His choice of comparison with the familiar and agreed upon is more efficacious in achieving Crummell’s objective—to elevate the character and value of blackness by comparing the elevated character of Douglass to venerable White men already accepted as great.

Crummell thus sets the stage to reinterpret the vaunted value of character over race, both for the country at large and for the African American community. He simultaneously reifies the African American race as the progenitor of Douglass, elevating it to an exalted platform to which it had not been exalted during the time of hardships that Blacks endured at the end of slavery, which had come only 30 years prior to the delivery of the Douglass eulogy. Crummell’s consistent, underlying theme is that a race that produced a man of Douglass’ character is a worthy race, in total contradistinction to America’s estimation.
Crummell next looks to nature for an even grander comparison. Quoting scripture, Crummell finds poetic similarity between the cedar of Lebanon and Frederick Douglass: “Howl, fir-tree, for the cedar of Lebanon is fallen,” 179 Referring to Douglass as a fallen cedar, Crummell was quoting Zechariah 11:2. Ancient Hebrew prophets and writers held the cedar of Lebanon as sacred as Crummell holds Douglass in comparison:

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**Elocution**

Crummell’s use of poetry and figures of speech is fitting but not surprising for the occasion. Nor is it a rarity in the annals of the Black eulogy to use poetry and figures of speech as vehicles of profundity to buoy the audience’s experience. Asante states that rhetorical devices mark the beginnings of our liberation from the mental enslavement that has gripped us since we arrived in the Americas. 181 John Hope Franklin would later write

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about speeches in the annals of Negro history that “Negros were not only articulate but eloquent.”¹⁸²

African Americans have displayed fine examples of eloquent oratory dating to our entrance to America, usually courageously speaking truth to power over the question of our physical and democratic liberties. For instance, Prince Hall’s 1797 speech, “Pray God Give Us Strength to Bear Up All Our Troubles,”¹⁸³ at exhibiting a character of sanctimonious erudition. His strident choice of words, his rigid organization and sagacious exposition of the Holy Scriptures call courage to stand and noble purpose to take a bow before members of his audience as he connects the audience to heroes in antiquity. Prince Hall used his standing as the founder of Black masonry in America to reveal an admirable grasp of antiquity since the times of Genesis in the Holy Scriptures. He thereby establishes unassailable credibility by projecting his worthy character through intellect and word usage. He successfully engendered virtues of patience and strength to an audience of freed African Americans in Boston, MA, who, though free, still had to operate under the heavy weight of slavery while hoping for change in June 1797. Here is a taste of his eloquence:

“They show that God out of the mouth of babes and Africans shew forth his glory; let us then love and adore him as the God who defends us and supports us and will support us under our pressure, let them be ever so heavy and pressing. Let us by the blessing of God, in whatsoever state we are, or may be in, to be content; for clouds and darkness are about him, but justice and truth is his habitation; who hath said, Vengeance is mine and I will repay it, therefore let us kiss the rod and be still, and see the works of the Lord.”¹⁸⁴


¹⁸³ Hall, Prince. 1797. “Pray God Give Us Strength to Bear Up All Our Troubles.”

¹⁸⁴ (Hall 1797, 5)
This is a fine demonstration of eloquence in African American public address that could only have been produced, echoing Asante, by a people offended, distressed and oppressed, a people whose triumph rests upon overcoming tremendous odds while using the podium as a tool of protest. The odds emboldened their passions, intellect, protest, and delivery. The reality of death only adds artistry and purpose to the rhetorical cause. This accords what Woodson would later state, “[T]he oration is the outgrowth of a conflict between the real and the ideal; it is a “manifestation of man’s idealizing tendency-the desire to make existing institutions harmonize with the ideal.”

Donald Keefer in “Speaking Well of the Dead: On the Aesthetics of Eulogies,” sees eulogies as works of art to assuage the grieving. Keefer compares structures of eulogies to structures of literary tragedy to prove his argument that aesthetics in eulogies is artwork just as aesthetics in literature is artwork. Fine eulogy is seen in relation to the awe it imparts which is derived from the decedent’s standing in the community; talents which awe us by his life; gratitude that such a person graced the earth.

OFFER HOPE AND ENCOURAGEMENT

Here, hope is not eternal; it is a specific hope for the people the rhetor represents; it is contextual and offers a new vision for the community the prophet represents. It is a hope that Black people need in order to survive in a world that is hostile to them.

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185 Woodson, Negro Orators, Introduction pp. 2-3


187 (Keefer 2011)

188 (Johnson 2010, 280)
Crummell likens Douglass' life as a great man with the exact condition of Blacks of the day:

"The natural attitude of men truly great is interesting at first to view, then enchanting to study. They are living challenges for conflict against all that is vicious and strong, and they are conspicuous examples as objects of adverse attacks from social surroundings. …" “Every opposing obstacle displays heretofore hidden ability which leaping higher clears away every bar to their progress.”189

This encouraging, emblematic concept applies as much to Douglass as it does to the community. The weight of oppression is diurnal, and there is always a new twist from varying levels of society, whether subliminally or systematically. Crummell understands this better than most after facing repeated rejection, trying to enter the clergy, attending theological seminary, and earning a Ph. D. at a time when Blacks either could not or did not readily matriculate at institutions of higher learning. He thereby builds credibility in this passage of the eulogy for establishing hope as the foundation to receive a desired balm in the face of obstacles and despair.

The nightmare of enslavement saw African American families ripped apart and sold into the domestic slave trade. The families withstood torture and debasement and the denial to read and write. At the same time, they deferred the gratification of freedom from bondage, all without giving up the hope of liberty well before the end of slavery was in sight. Indeed, the entire progression from foreign enslaved people to God-fearing enslaved is the story of how Blacks merged their African heritage with Western Protestant Christianity in order to find a means of escape, expression and hope for survival in the Black church.

189 (Crummell 1898, 4)
In “The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible,” Dwight Gallagher explains that the early enslaved recognized Christianity and the Bible as sources of validation for their freedom, especially the literate, enslaved. According to Callahan, the themes of exile and exodus in bible stories affirmed enslaved people’s hope for deliverance. The following passage from Callahan demonstrates how enslaved people understood and accepted the Bible:

“American slaves did not read the Bible through, or even over and against the traditions they brought with them from Africa [:] they read the Bible as a text into which these traditions were woven. The characters and events of the Bible became the functional equivalent of the ancestors and heroes long celebrated in West Africa. The many ancestral and natural spirits were subsumed in the Holy Spirit, and the mighty acts of God supplanted ancient tales of martial valor. Biblical patriarchs and heroes now sat on the stools of the esteemed ancestors of ages past. The Black church developed into a formalized site that fashioned the Black aesthetic to combat a system designed to subdue, disempower and destroy their humanity. Only in the Black church did they acquire skills and create cultural forms that fed and seasoned the emergence of the arts, from music to dance to rhetoric. It gave the people the moral authority to reflect back to the world the ugliness of their mistreatment, to speak against the mistreatment, and to marshal a resolve of courage and hope to press forward in the midst of mistreatment.”

Crummell relies frequently on this trend of hope in his eulogy of Frederick Douglass, both temporally and eschatologically.

“Judged by the most severe standard Mr. Douglass, because of the catholicity of his sympathies, has now and will ever wear a victor’s adornment, undaunted by the dust of ages, and unharmed by the ravages of time. Built as is his personality upon a pedestal whose base is eternal principles of justice and fraternity, whose every composing stone a setting from the inexhaustible quarry of God’s treasure house, one name is assured as a light of history to inspire the weak and goad the lagging on to action.

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191 (Callahan 2007, xii)
“Moses, Cicero, Luther and Douglass…” They wrought in spirit and in spirit they live. Their souls are marching on. Their preachings can outlive principalities, empires, hammered brass, carved stone, or molded bronze. These… carry the everlasting and ever moving principle and stamp of the Divine Nature. Products of physical sciences are subject to the mutations of time and discovery. Spiritual results are unchangeable.”

Crummell finally clarifies that hope is also eternal as he commends Douglass into the company of angels and God in heaven. By so doing, he demonstrates the power of prophetic prophecy to keep hope looming in the midst of our distresses and griefs by giving to Douglass, the Black community, and to hope, itself, the promise of eternity:

“Slavery could not contain him. Mr. Douglass was truly sent of God. Human ingenuity could not break his mission. The slavery drag-net for his apprehension failed to catch the fearless champion; …. The whole contemplation is too rich, too high, too beautiful for earthly confines alone. We must look for the outcome in the state of the soul redeemed, entered into the joys of the New Jerusalem. “But now he has come unto the Mount Zion and unto the city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.”

**CONCLUSION**

While ancient Athens used the funeral oration to venerate itself through the death of its solders and statesmen, Alexander Crummell used the earliest iconic Black eulogy to uphold the value of his people by venerating the character of Frederick Douglass.

I have argued that a critical component of the iconic Black eulogy is the choice of rhetor. The momentous social and political value of the attention that the death of a Black

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192 (Crummell 1898, 7)
193 (Crummell 1898, 7)
iconic figure attracts must be wielded by one who is worthy to wield it, or the opportunity to establish value for the community will be lost. I define worthiness as the social standing and intellectual achievement of one who is familiar to society by name, accomplishment, and reputation. Worthiness ensures for the community that the rhetor will transact the occasion as a rhetorical opportunity of epideictic rhetoric to extol the virtues of the icon and soothe the family and community. Worthiness also ensures that the rhetor will employ deliberative rhetorical devices to speak against the situation of oppression and unfairness by uplifting the community and exhorting it to go forward in hope. By his character and accomplishments, I have attempted to show that Crummel was fit to be rhetor of this, the first iconic Black eulogy.

Crummel saw this moment as an opportunity to uplift his people by vaunting the character of his people’s exemplar, Frederick Douglass. He also sought to define his people through that character, a view not yet established in the late 18th century when the very humanity of Blacks was questioned in political and social debate. Even without the benefit of contemporary scholarship on the African American eulogy, Crummel knew what he had to do as a rhetor, because what he did was an innate and natural response to oppression. He used the opportunity to fight back as the oppressed must fight back, or they will remain ill-defined and relegated to inferiority by the rhetoric of their nation.

Crummel saw in Douglass’s iconic death an opportunity to reveal the true character of a people mischaracterized, a character that was consummated in the extraordinary life of Douglass, a man Crummel found worthy to compare to Moses, Paul of Tarsus, Caesar, and even to the fabled cedars of Lebanon for their glory and strength, power and influence in nature. The logical undercurrent of Crummel’s message is clear:
Douglass is a worthy human being and Douglass is Black. If Douglass is a worthy human being, Blacks are worthy. This logical undercurrent is significant because at the time of Crummel’s oration, popular opinion in scientific, academic and social circles sincerely questioned the humanity of Blacks.

Crummel’s approach to eulogy has come to underscore the entire premise of the iconic Black eulogy- that the death of an iconic Black figure is an opportunity to fight against oppression and to reveal the high character of the Black community. It is an opportunity to encourage the community and to leave it with hope to go further into the fight against a palpable oppression that never wanes.

In the next chapter, we will analyze an iconic Black eulogy whose rhetor missed the important opportunity by scolding the audience and the community with pessimistic rhetoric to the chagrin and disappointment of both the family of the deceased Black icon and the community, all while the world watched.
CHAPTER 2
PROPHETIC PROPHECY UNBALANCED IN THE ICONIC BLACK EULOGY OF ARETHA FRANKLIN

Summary of Franklin’s Iconic Eulogy

The eulogy by Rev. Jasper Williams at Aretha Franklin's funeral stirred controversy due to its content. Rev. Williams criticized Black-on-Black crime, single-parent households, and the Black Lives Matter movement. He emphasized the importance of respecting oneself, rejecting victimhood, and restoring family values within the African American community. However, his remarks were met with criticism for being tone-deaf to the occasion and failing to honor Aretha Franklin's legacy. Many found his comments inappropriate for a funeral focused on celebrating Franklin's life and contributions to music and civil rights.

Williams centered on themes of personal responsibility, family structure, and community values within the African American community. He made scolding remarks about the role of fathers in raising children. Williams criticized aspects of contemporary Black culture, including single-parent households, suggesting they have contributed to societal problems. The eulogy sparked debate and controversy for its perceived negative critique of Black culture and its divergence from the expected focus on celebrating Aretha Franklin's life and achievements and how such a stellar life ennobles all Black people.

Analysis

As I just established in an analysis of Douglass's iconic eulogy delivered by Dr. Alexander Crummel, the iconic Black eulogy is an iteration of the ongoing need to extol the decedent’s character and contributions. This illuminates the value of being Black in a
society that devalues blackness, and it propels the community to a sense of resolve and hope that reinforces its unending struggle against oppression.

Areth Franklin died August 16, 2018, of pancreatic cancer at the age of 76. Rev. Jasper Williams, Jr., delivered her iconic eulogy at the Greater Grace Temple in Detroit, MI, on Friday, Aug. 31, 2018. Unlike Dr. Crummell, Rev. Williams extolled neither the virtue nor the accomplishments of the iconic decedent, Miss Franklin. Many of his remarks disparaged the community, and he consequently delivered an iconic Black eulogy that could not fulfill its rhetorical purpose: to honor the deceased, to make sense of death, to uplift the bereaved, and to reknit the community.

There is considerable merit in rhetorical theories that analyze the rhetoric of an iconic Black eulogy in a marginalized community. I argue that an analysis of Franklin's iconic eulogy using the Johnson tenets of prophetic rhetoric in African American rhetoric reveals that Williams used statements that undercut his ability to meet Johnson's established goals.

The rarity and significance of the death of a Black iconic figure makes no room for rhetorical impact that disaffects the collective Black consciousness and brings anger and consternation to the marginalized community rather than hope and resolve. Rev. Williams ended by misconstruing the lament tradition of prophetic rhetoric when he scolded the community rather than the state and faulted the community as immoral rather than decrying oppression as insidious. Williams tainted his sacred role with self-interest and wasted an opportunity for a worldwide positive cultural impact.

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194 Paul Sandya, DETROIT (AP)
I, therefore, argue that the iconic eulogy of Aretha Franklin lost prophetic efficacy when the rhetor used pessimistic prophesy as a tool to scold the audience and community. According to Johnson’s tenets, the rhetor critiques the audience but not within a pessimistic frame. Yet, Williams uses a pessimistic frame when he often scolds the audience and the community for their socio-cultural shortcomings. He then offers them no hope. He consequently loses a vital opportunity to uphold the Black community’s forward march toward equality and against oppression.

I start with an analysis of how the rhetor employs the epideictic and deliberative rhetorical hybrid functions in the genre of eulogy. Williams missed a critical opportunity to validate and uplift a rare African American icon, Aretha Franklin, the height of whose virtue he did not extol. Williams did not follow the Aristotelian precepts of eulogy as a genre. Further, I highlight the relevance of Black Liberation Theology as the genesis of prophetic rhetoric as it developed in the African American rhetorical tradition to reveal that the Johnson tenets of prophetic rhetoric in African American Rhetoric are left unfulfilled in this iconic Black eulogy.

Williams misconstrued the lament tradition of prophecy by faulting the community as immoral rather than the state as the oppressor. He ended with a message of no hope to the detriment of the Black community’s ongoing struggle against oppression—all while the world watched.

The field of rhetorical studies can benefit from this study by inquiring into why the iconic eulogy of Aretha Franklin did not fulfill its purpose. What should have been a momentous occasion of national and cultural pride and impact ended, instead, in a seething offense to the family of the deceased and to many in the community, rendering
the Black eulogy of an icon a regrettable, missed opportunity—a grand faux pas in the annals of iconic Black eulogies.

Jamieson and Campbell set the standard for the use of a functional hybrid. “[T]he functional hybrid will occur when deliberative appeals are subordinate to the eulogy when they can be viewed as a memorial to the life of the deceased, and when they are compatible with positions advocated by the eulogist, whose motives must not appear self-serving, and when advocacy will not divide the audience or community.”

A close reading will reveal that Williams used the epideictic and deliberative hybrids to blame the state of the African American family on Black men, to denigrate the childrearing ability of Black single mothers, and to disregard the historical forces that contribute to the ills of the African American family—all in service to the iconic eulogy of a venerable Black icon who he hardly venerates. He consequently left both the audience and the Black community divided. This is in contradistinction to the rhetorical standard for the use of functional hybrids in eulogies set forth by Jamieson and Campbell, which essentially is to unite and uplift the community.

Williams’ iconic eulogy of Franklin is rhetorically significant because it ended in a eulogy that did not fulfill its ultimate rhetorical purpose. The four Johnson tenets of prophetic rhetoric ensure a rhetorical theory of eulogy that buoys the efficacy of the iconic Black eulogy and insulates it to fulfill its communal purpose. I argue that a close reading of the iconic Franklin eulogy affirms the efficacy of the four Johnson tenets of prophetic rhetoric as a rhetorical construct worthy of inclusion in the Academy.

195 (Jamieson and Campbell 1982)
The rhetor has no less standing than the President of the United States when the rhetor rises to eulogize a Black iconic figure, for all the world watches, and the opportunity is raft with global impact that paints favor upon the deceased and the community. The rhetor must sacrifice parochialism to beckon and reflect the lofty lived accomplishments and ideals of the deceased Black icon and to lift and inspire a mournful community and a saddened world.

Linguistic and rhetorical strategies help fulfill this purpose of eulogy. Inevitably, the rhetor’s job is to deliver the deceased’s last wishes and honor the dead by sharing stories, anecdotes, and displays of culture that link the decedent to the mourners, all in the epideictic tradition of eulogy. Likewise, in the deliberative function, the rhetor must reflect relevant trends that fructify the oration with contemporary relevance. The rhetor must be on guard against constraints that would prevent the rhetor from delivering the best speech to the community of those who mourn.

The family appointed Williams to deliver the eulogy at Franklin’s funeral. Thirty-four years before this delivery, Williams had eulogized Franklin's father, fellow minister, and civil rights activist, Rev. C.L. Franklin. Williams had known and served the Franklin family for decades as its pastor. He said he started working on the eulogy shortly before Aretha died of pancreatic cancer on 16 August 2018. Nonetheless, after his delivery, some questioned why Williams was chosen to deliver the Franklin eulogy.196

Although Rev. Williams meets the Johnson priestly test of being grounded in the community and entrusted to pronounce the sacred by his professional religious

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background and longevity as pastor, I assert in this chapter that he disaffected his priestly role by failing to demonstrate empathy with a grieving community. Moreover, I argue that Rev. Williams developed a pessimistic attitude as rhetor, but his pessimism was aimed at the Black community, not the status quo. This set him on the road to becoming a prophetic prophet, speaking in the wrong manner at the wrong time and, more importantly, in the wrong place—at an iconic Black eulogy. In Section 3 of this Chapter, “Critique, Challenge, Charge, and Judge,” I employ a close reading of Williams’ parole in this iconic eulogy to argue that his use of pessimistic rhetoric was misplaced.

**SHARE THE REAL SITUATION**

Not until May 1954, when Aretha Franklin had begun to establish herself at the age of 12 as a singer with promise in her father’s Detroit church, were segregated schools determined to be inherently illegal by the federal courts in Brown vs. Board of Education.\(^\text{197}\) The Brown vs. Board decision is the decision that finally overturned an 1896 law that instituted legal segregation in the Reconstruction era, which established the Jim Crow laws.\(^\text{198}\)

After much of the mayhem and dangers of the 1950s, President Kennedy finally established the Equal Employment Commission in 1960, when he signed an executive order prohibiting discrimination in federal government hiring based on race. The University of Mississippi was not integrated until 1962, and the March on Washington, at which Aretha Franklin sang, took place in 1963. Another Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964, yet another in 1965, and still another in 1968, each pertaining to Blacks’ rights to


\(^{198}\) Plessey v. Ferguson, 163 U.S. 537 (1896)
partake in American public facilities, voting, and housing, respectively. Franklin was 26 years old and an established international pop star by then.

The University of Memphis made history in 1966 when it hired DeCosta Sugarmon Willis as its first African American faculty member. By 1971, busing was upheld in the United States to achieve segregation in public schools. In 1972 and 1988, two more Civil Rights Acts were passed to expand the reach of prior non-discrimination laws to private institutions receiving federal funds. In 1978, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that race could not be used as a criterion in college admissions in U. California v. Bakke. By 1992, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that race could be one of the factors in college admissions standards to compensate Blacks for having been precluded from attending public institutions of higher learning all along.\textsuperscript{199}

All during these decades of civil rights litigation and legislation, an average day spent listening to American radio brought with it the loving, soothing, ambassadorial music that connected the races in the voice of Aretha Franklin, whose music has consistently been a uniting, colloquial balm in American race relations.\textsuperscript{200}

Most of Franklin’s hits were race crossover hits that materialized right alongside the development of the Civil Rights Movement. Her hits endured at a time when African


\textsuperscript{200} Just in July 2023, however, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down affirmative action policies at the University of North Carolina and Harvard University, ending the obligatory consideration of race as a factor of admitting students to higher education. This confirms the need for the fourth Johnson tenet, hope. Without hope, setbacks can be disarming and foreboding. With hope, they are mere obstacles entreating to be overcome.
American pop artists did not have such cross-cultural appeal between the races in a country of *de jure* and *de facto* segregation, but she had it.

Against such a national, historical, social situation of struggle and endurance of a people of whom Aretha Franklin was emblematic, Williams chose deliberative appeals that did nothing to highlight the value of Aretha Franklin’s works and too little to recall the beauty and purpose of her voice that accompanied the decades of civil rights struggles and victories during the express times in which Franklin lived, sang and made an international impact on racial harmony and togetherness in the world through her music.

Williams did mention that in May 1964, at the Regal Theater in Chicago, Illinois, Aretha was crowned Queen of Soul by DJ Pervis Spann.201 He also referred to her alternatively as the Queen for the duration of the iconic eulogy, and he used some of Franklin’s song titles as a theme to remind the community to love itself. That was the extent of Williams’ acknowledgment of Franklin’s musical and political contributions. Still, the fact that he mentioned them speaks to their significance, which he should have tied to the fight against oppression and the hope of its diminution, especially since Franklin’s musical appeal and impact were both interracial and international, but he did not.


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201 Rev. Jasper Williams, Sr., Franklin Iconic Eulogy, 1.

Nor did Williams mention that Franklin also received The Recording Academy's Grammy Legend Award in 1991, that she was honored with the Lifetime Achievement Award in 1994, or that she has five recordings in the Grammy Hall of Fame: "Respect," "Chain of Fools," "Amazing Grace," "A Natural Woman (You Make Me Feel Like)," and "I Never Loved A Man The Way I Love You." Top those off with the 75 million records she sold in her lifetime, and Franklin’s iconic status is firmly established and undeniable, except that they were not mentioned by Williams in any statistical fashion.

There is no further place in this study for Franklin’s numerous other awards except to acknowledge that Williams never mentioned either of them in her iconic Black eulogy. If Williams had included at least some stellar awards or song titles, he would have buttressed both the epideictic and deliberative appeals in this iconic eulogy. He might have, for instance, raised the audience’s consciousness about the significance of Franklin’s achievements, thereby challenging the audience to reach its own zenith, as Franklin did. He might have buoyed the community with a collective veneer of Franklin’s and, therefore, the community’s value as a worldwide cultural contribution. He might have argued a grand truth about the effervescence of Black music as an elixir to racial distress and as an ambassador to racial disharmony, characteristics emblematic of Franklin and her music, but he did not.
Williams’ use of the epideictic and deliberative hybrid was unbalanced. He neither mentioned nor responded to the magnitude and impact of Franklin’s contributions to national historical experiences in his delivery of the iconic Black eulogy. Williams did mention that Aretha Franklin sang for Dr. King’s rallies at no fee, but he did not mention that she sang at his funeral. He did not note that her songs were standout benchmarks of the Civil Rights Movement, nor did he mention that she often appeared with Dr. King, singing before he spoke at historical events, as she did at the March on Washington in 1963.

He would have refreshed the community with pride and hope if he had done so by acknowledging her contribution and accomplishment. Such refreshment and refinement of purpose empower an embattled people to continue firmly in the fight for equality. This is the responsibility of the rhetor of the iconic Black eulogy to purvey, but Williams did not.

Instead, Williams’ deliberative appeals predominated his epideictic appeals, causing him to implement a rhetorical hybrid that did not fulfill its function—to extol the deceased’s virtue, uplift the community, and offer hope. Williams subordinated the epideictic appeals of the largesse of Franklin’s contributions by giving most attention to deliberative appeals in the African American community that had nothing to do with the iconic singer’s contributions. This contradicts Jamieson and Campbell’s standard for using a functional hybrid where deliberative appeals are subordinate to the eulogy in favor of epideictic appeals that uplift the bereaved, reknit the community, and make sense of death.202

202 (Jamieson and Campbell 1986, 142)
CRITIQUE, CHALLENGE, CHARGE AND JUDGE

Grounded in sacred and communal values, the rhetor prophet challenges, charges, critiques, and judges or warns both the assembled and broader audiences by reinterpreting the sacred to cast a vision of the world as it could be, not as it is because the prophet speaks as a mouthpiece for a community that has no voice.203 Watkins-Dickerson, in “You Are Somebody”: A Study of the Prophetic Rhetoric of Rev. Henry Logan Starks, D. Min., ”colors this third Johnson tenet this way:

“When we hear a phrase like “you are somebody,” the reciprocating action goes through a process of not only validating the “somebodyness” that is being spoken into the individual, but also serving as a reminder that there are moments, spaces, and places where many are deemed “nobodys” in an intricate web of institutionalized injustices and theft of personhood. When a community has the ability to push beyond the liminal space of how Blackness is normatively conceptualized, interpreted and even internalized as sinful is dis-rupted, what used to be conveyed as pessimistic is turned optimistic. As such, a hopeful understanding of what “somebodyness” is and can be for the listener, as well as the speaker, comes into being.”204 While Rev. Williams attempts to promote a vision of the world as it could be, he critiques and judges the audience for its lack of communal values by blaming it for its poor condition. This causes his challenge and charge to the audience to be ill-received, however well-intended, and to subvert the rhetor’s purpose in the iconic Black eulogy- to uplift the community. He ends up puncturing rather than promoting a sense of somebodyness in the Community, totally against the purview and rhetorical movement of the Johnson tenets.

203 (Johnson 2010, 278)

Williams did not employ epideictic appeals to espouse the human strength, dignity, and endurance of the Black family and the Black man, each still surviving through America’s storied, oppressive racial history. Williams, instead, scolded the Black family and the Black man, casting upon them total responsibility for a plight generated by an oppressive legacy that dates from slavery and abolitionism to Jim Crow and Segregation to Desegregation up to the modern era of George Floyd.

Rather than acknowledge the strength of the Black family to endure against the power of the entities that work against the Black family, Williams rested the blame for the condition of the Black family squarely upon the Black man. He reminded the audience that Black men are not present in the home and that Black women cannot effectively raise a Black boy to manhood.\textsuperscript{205} He recounted the failure of Black men to live up to their leadership in the Black family. “Where is your soul, Black man?” Williams asked the audience. “As I look in your house, there are no fathers in the home no more. Where is your soul?” he asked again.\textsuperscript{206}

Here, Williams casts Black men as the obstacle in the sea of oppression while failing to acknowledge that many Black men in the audience are leading their families at home; many Black men in the audience do hail from families with fathers in the home, and many Black men in the audience have excelled at leading their families without regard to whether their own fathers were present in the home in their youth. Williams failed to acknowledge the role oppressive forces play in the Black family's condition while he blamed the oppressed.

\textsuperscript{205} Aretha Franklin Eulogy, August 21, 2018.

\textsuperscript{206} Aretha Franklin Eulogy, August 21, 2018.
Even if the oppressed can take sole responsibility for their condition, as Williams insists, the rhetor’s oration at an iconic Black eulogy is not the situation in which to broach such an allegation for several reasons. Williams should have critiqued, challenged, charged, or judged the oppressive forces in society, consistent with the Johnson tenets of prophetic rhetoric, the spirit of which is to unite and uplift the community while offering hope. Instead, Williams scolded the community, the family, the live audience, and the listeners in global media.

As an iconic Black funeral rhetor, Williams should take a few notes from President Obama, who changed from scolding to more supportive rhetoric after exhibiting a series of scolds to African Americans in several speeches. In *The Scold of Black America: Obama, Race and the African American Audience*, Andre E. Johnson traces how, as President, Obama moved from scolding Blacks for how they fare in America to more supporting rhetoric. In an example from a commencement address at Morehouse College, a historically Black College in Atlanta, GA, Obama is seen scolding the Black audience for its condition in America:

“[I]f we’re honest with ourselves, we know that too few of our brothers have the opportunities that you’ve had here at Morehouse. In troubled neighborhoods all across this country—many of them heavily African American—too few of our citizens have role models to guide them. Communities just a couple miles from my house in Chicago, communities just a couple miles from here—they're places where jobs are still too scarce, and wages are still too low; where schools are underfunded, and violence is pervasive; where too many of our men spend their youth not behind a desk in a classroom but hanging out on the streets or brooding behind a jail cell.”

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After hearing the Morehouse commencement speech, writer Ta-Nehisi Coates stated that "Barack Obama is, indeed, the president of" all America,' but he also is singularly the scold of 'Black America." The President was criticized for criticizing his people. Andre E. Johnson concluded that

“…many demanded that Obama begin addressing the pain and anguish of African Americans. They argued that he had been tone deaf in the killings of unarmed Black people and his "politics of respectability" rhetoric had not and would not help the suffering that many African Americans faced on a daily basis. Therefore, pushed by some in the streets and on social media and critiqued by politicians, preachers, pundits and protesters, Obama found a new voice when speaking on race and racial matters after the Zimmerman verdict. …Obama's rhetoric shifted on racial matters to include systematic oppression and even implicit racial bias as issues that needed to be addressed. By placing those subjects with national commemoration speeches, Obama elevated those issues and called on all Americans to engage in the conversation.”

The Johnson tenets support such a shift for the iconic Black eulogy. The mere public nature of the iconic eulogy draws international attention such that the opportunity for uplift is palpable and calls for fulfillment, for both the need and opportunity to reify the Black community is paramount in the face of such a cultural, iconic loss.

Instead, Williams’ parole as rhetor is steeped in the perpetual scolding of the community. Williams prompted a social media uproar when he declared, "Black America has lost its soul," that “Black women are incapable of raising sons alone,” and that “the

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209 (Johnson 2017, 185)
Black Lives Matter movement is unfounded in the face of Black-on-Black crime....”\textsuperscript{210}

And that was just 26 minutes into the nearly 50-minute eulogy.\textsuperscript{211}

Aretha Franklin was an active component of the civil rights movement, but when Williams mentioned her in this regard, it was not to tie her into a fabric of social reconciliation or community uplift but to use her as a basis on which to proselytize the Black man and the Black family. After acknowledging her as the Queen of Soul, Williams began to use the word soul as a theme to proselytize the Black man by asking him four times, “Where is your soul, Black man?”\textsuperscript{212}

“Where is your soul, Black man? As I look in your house, there are no fathers in the home no more. Where is your soul? 70% of our households are led by our precious, proud, fine Black women. But as proud, beautiful and fine as our Black women are, one thing a Black woman cannot do. A Black woman cannot raise a Black boy to be a man. She can’t do that. She can’t do that. She can’t do that. Black man, where is your soul?”\textsuperscript{213}

This is alarming rhetoric at the eulogy of a Black icon; however, he continues:

“Black man, where is your soul? A study was released not long ago by Tuskegee Institute and in this study it showed how the Ku Klux Klan has killed 3,446 Black people over an 86-year span of time. That’s an awful lot of Black people for anybody to kill. But the study also revealed that Black people killed that number of Black people not once a year and not 86 years, but every six months. So[,] you multiply times two, the 3,446 that means that we kill six thousand plus Black people every year. And over that 86-year span of time, that equates to us killing among us 592,712 Black people are killed by Black people.”\textsuperscript{214}

\textsuperscript{210} US News and World Report Copyright 2018.

\textsuperscript{211} US News and World Report Copyright 2018.

\textsuperscript{212} Aretha Franklin Eulogy, August 21, 2018.

\textsuperscript{213} Aretha Franklin Eulogy, August 21, 2018.

\textsuperscript{214} Aretha Franklin Eulogy, August 21, 2018.
Here, Williams takes it upon himself to say what he wants to say rather than what the community needs to hear, all in contradistinction to Jamieson and Campbell’s mandate about the use of the rhetorical epideictic and deliberative functional hybrid at a Black eulogy:

“[T]he functional hybrid will occur when deliberative appeals are subordinate to the eulogy, when they can be viewed as a memorial to the life of the deceased, and when they are compatible with positions advocated by the eulogist, whose motives must not appear self-serving, and when advocacy will not divide the audience or community.”\(^{215}\)

The rhetor must sacrifice parochialism to beckon and reflect the deceased Black icon's lofty accomplishments and ideals to lift and inspire a mournful community and a saddened world. Had Williams been less self-serving in what he wanted to say, he would have couched his message in the merits of the race rather than its demerits, thereby uniting the audience rather than dividing it. He would have fulfilled the Johnson prophetic tenets: to buoy and uplift the bereaved, not to scold and blame as Williams does here.

Yet, the commendable social progress that rests atop the fall of slavery, legal segregation, and the victories of the Civil Rights Movement provides significant enough epideictic appeals to have been fodder for more euphemistic appeals than Williams chose to deliver. He never once mentioned the modern strides and advances in race relations of which both the African American and the general American society are justly proud.

Likewise, Franklin’s song, “R-E-S-P-E-C-T,” is on the 2021 list as the #1 Greatest Song of All Time—of all time. Had the rhetor mentioned that fact, a sense of uplift, respect, and admiration for the deceased would have readily extended into a sense of

\(^{215}\) Jamison and Campbell, “Rhetorical Hybrids” (1982, p.149)
pride in the community and a sense of hope to go forward in life's journey, but Williams did not mention it. Why not?

It may be that Williams, as a prophet, was using his sanctified imagination, as defined by Womanist biblical scholar Wilda Gafney, who stated that the “sanctified imagination is the fertile creative space where the preacher-interpreter enters the text, particularly the spaces in the text, and fills them out with missing details: names, back stories, detailed descriptions of the scene and characters, and so on.” 216

It may be that by his profession as minister, Williams felt commissioned by God’s biblical call to prophets outlined in Jeremiah 1:10:

“Today, I appoint you to stand up against nations and kingdoms. Some, you must uproot and break down. Others, you must build and plant.”217

Or Williams may have felt to have a license to use such pessimistic rhetoric against the community, according to the Paulinian mandate in 2 Timothy 4:2:

“Preach the word; be instant in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, resort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”218

These passages, supplanted with a career as pastor of a major church in a major American city, must have caused Williams to feel that his calling as pastor both empowered and qualified him to comment as he did on his view of the state of the African American family. He could have called attention to the Black family's deficits to uplift and strengthen it.


217 King James Bible

218 King James Bible
Despite the deficits, neither the genre of eulogy nor the prophetic role of rhetor of the iconic Black eulogy call for tearing down or otherwise affronting the community at an iconic Black eulogy. While the pessimistic rhetoric Williams employs may arguably be appropriate in a weekly sanctuary service or at a socio-political event, it is inapposite to the rhetoric of the iconic Black eulogy, whose design is to uplift, empower, and encourage, and whose execution takes place in front of the whole world, a situation that demands more supportive epideictic rhetoric.

When later asked about his intentions in scolding the community, Williams mentioned, "I was trying to show that the movement now is moving and should move in a different direction. … . What we need to do is create respect among ourselves. Aretha is the person with that song 'R-E-S-P-E-C-T' that is laid out for us and what we need to be as a race within ourselves. We need to show each other that we need to show each other respect. That was the reason why I did it." 219

Williams could have been faithful to his biblical prophetic calling in Jeremiah 1:10 and 2 Timothy 4:2, above, without damning the Black family and the Black man while all the world watched. He could have remained faithful to his prophetic calling without stating that single mothers do not know how to raise a boy to manhood. Even by Williams’ own admission, 70% of Black families are headed by single women. Why tell 70% of single Black women in the audience that they cannot raise their sons to manhood? What kind of reaction was Williams expecting by doing so at an iconic Black eulogy? An indictment against Black women is an indictment against Miss Franklin, as well, as she lay in repose in the casket while all the world watched.

The Johnson tenets anticipate the international attention that a eulogy garners to the Black race. Their focus on sanctity, uplift, speaking truth to power, and engendering hope for the community requires that dirty laundry be dealt with in quite another setting and that, instead, the positive contributions of the iconic Black deceased be the epideictic focus of the message, followed closely by encouraging the community in light of those contributions and imbuing the community with hope to go forward into the stagnant oppression that ever awaits.

The current state of the African American family rests not exclusively upon the actions of the Black man, but upon an illustrious history of the Black man’s subjugation in slavery, indentured servitude, segregation, deprivation, legal exclusion, economic oppression, unjust imprisonment, and the performance of many legitimate civic acts while being Black. Each of these has significantly impacted the state of the African American man and his family, and Williams mentioned none as he exclusively faulted the Black man for the state of the Black family in the iconic eulogy of a Black icon who, herself, was the single mother of four sons.

The Johnson tenets ensure that the province of the rhetor of the iconic Black eulogy is to use the important opportunity of international attention to push back against the Black community’s marginalized status in a sea of American institutionalization. The rhetor must create a better understanding of what blackness is and can be by buoying the community in its incessant fight against marginalization, misinterpretation, and nothingness.

Subscription to the Johnson tenets ensures that the iconic Black eulogy will add insight and understanding to the fight against persistent oppressive forces. Any less
rhetorical treatment disaffects the eulogy of a Black icon and creates a void for failure to speak to oppression. As Asante said in *The Future of African American Rhetoric*, all through the future, whenever an African American rhetor stands to speak, he will lose speaker credibility if he does not address correctives like reparations, reconsideration, and challenges to White supremacy. Williams had no excuse to take a swipe against oppression at so momentous an occasion that harbored such a fruitful opportunity to do so. He chose, instead, to scold.

Williams’ rhetorical practice highlights the need for a prescriptive format for eulogies of iconic Black decedents whose eulogies can fructify the oppressive experience of living Blacks by ensuring a definite rhetorical prescription. Williams not only missed this boat, but he side-stepped the ocean of possibility to speak into the critically positive message of how Black virtue and contribution to society not only persist but thrive and continue to successfully knock against collective oppressive socio/political forces, as they did in the life of Ms. Franklin.

Nor did Williams put a lie to the myth of Black nothingness that is the effect of centuries of perpetual marginalization and nullification, domination and interposition. He singlehandedly miscalculated this critically crucial global message. His miscalculation vivifies the necessity of the iconic Black eulogy as a clarion of the efficacy of blackness. Consequently, his rhetorical miscalculation highlights how pessimistic rhetoric should not

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be used against the community while eulogizing an iconic Black decedent in front of a worldwide audience.

Williams blamed the Black man for conditions in the Black community that took a century of persuasive civic unrest, social transformation, and legal wizardry to generate. Yet, the civil advancements of Black people amidst such struggles bespeak significant enough cultural and social progress to have been epideictic fodder for more euphemistic appeals than Williams chose to deliver. This applies equally to contemporary strides and advances in race relations, of which African Americans and the general American society were justly proud when this iconic Black eulogy was delivered.

There’s the respect that Dr. Crummel earned as rhetor in Chapter 1 of this study when he honored Frederick Douglass by martyring Douglass and by painting Douglass’ character and achievements as those of the community. He thereby established both the potential and possibilities of a race of people. We will see in Chapter 4 of this study how President Obama corrected his habit of scolding the African American community when he became rhetor for the iconic eulogy of Congressman John Lewis.

**OFFER HOPE AND ENCOURAGEMENT**

Here, hope is not eternal; it is a specific hope for the people the rhetor represents; it is contextual, and it offers a new vision for the community that the prophet represents and a hope that Black people need to survive in a hostile world.\(^{221}\) The Franklin eulogy is significant in the annals of public eulogy because it entertains a less romantic view of the community by blaming the community. The rhetor uses pessimistic rhetoric to scold

\(^{221}\) (Johnson 2010, 280)
the community so consistently that hope is not only drowned and forgotten; it is never broached because the rhetor’s pessimistic scolds offend the community.

Williams’ rhetorical praxis in the iconic Franklin eulogy did not emanate from Black Liberation Theology but from prophetic license traced to the Holy Scriptures and from a society that permits free speech in a non-normative fashion. His reliance on theological license and his own self-interest caused him to underestimate the feverish offense he generated by scolding the community at an iconic Black eulogy.

Though the Black community has arguably progressed beyond the abject unfairness of slavery and Jim Crowe to enjoy critical successes in most fields of human endeavor, buttressed by as open a playing field as has ever existed for the Black community, the Black community continues to hope toward full equality, to take full part in the affairs of America. Thus, it needs the hope that should have emanated on the rare occasion of an iconic Black eulogy.

The real rhetorical loss in Williams’ exercise as rhetor is the absence of hope, the absence of imbuing the audience with power and authority to go forward with high expectations, to be better and stronger at overcoming the recurring odds against it. Even if Williams may not have been out of order in his iconic eulogy of Franklin, he was certainly in poor taste to blame the community in any fashion and to give air to its shortcomings devoid of hope during an exhibition speech delivered to all the world. Least of all, Aretha Franklin, the Queen of Soul, the most important woman in the history of popular music and one of the most prolific voices of the last 100 years, deserves better.
In the next chapter, I will analyze the iconic eulogy of George Floyd and the role of tragedy at the intersection of eulogy. I will consider the most recent contemporary approach to public eulogy as espoused by Simon Stow in his work that suggests some rethinking on the construction and purpose of the iconic public eulogy of a Black iconic figure.
CHAPTER 3
THE INTERSECTION OF TRAGEDY AND PUBLIC EULOGY IN THE ICONIC BLACK EULOGY GEORGE FLOYD

Summary of Eulogy of George Floyd

Rev. Al Sharpton's eulogy for George Floyd was a passionate call for justice and change. He began by rejecting the idea that Floyd's death was due to common health issues, emphasizing instead that it was a result of systemic failures in American criminal justice. Sharpton called for accountability regardless of whether one wears blue jeans or a police uniform, highlighting the need for the country to confront its issues with policing and racism.

He referenced Ecclesiastes 3:1, stressing that there is a time and purpose for everything, indicating that now is the time to address the injustices faced by African Americans. Sharpton criticized those who use props like Bibles without understanding their true significance, urging them to stand for justice genuinely rather than exploit tragedies.

Sharpton spoke about George Floyd's final words, "I can't breathe," drawing parallels to Eric Garner's case and other instances of police brutality. He condemned the knee on the neck as a metaphor for the historical oppression faced by African Americans, stating that it symbolizes the systemic racism present in education, healthcare, and various other aspects of American life.

He criticized those who focus on peaceful protests but fail to address the underlying issues of systemic racism and police violence. Sharpton called for accountability for the officers involved in Floyd's death and highlighted the global protests as a sign of a changing time, urging a commitment to justice and reforming the
criminal justice system.

Sharpton ended with a message of faith and hope, stating that despite the challenges, the fight for justice must continue. He invoked the memory of Floyd calling for his mother at the point of death, reflecting on the support and guidance provided by mothers in times of hardship. Sharpton concluded by calling for a commitment to justice and a united effort to bring about meaningful change.

Analysis

The iconic Black eulogies of George Floyd in this chapter and of U.S. Congressman Lewis in Chapter Four take place at the intersection of an African American population that has matriculated into the civic, economic, and educational reforms fought for in the Civil Rights Movement. Where before the doors to equality were legally blocked, they are now opened *de jure*. We shall see in this chapter that contemporary scholarship by Simon Stow asserts that the rhetorical situation of the national Black eulogy may have changed and that it is no longer necessary for a rhetor to promote socio-political agendas in a national Black eulogy. Contemporary scholarship asserts, instead, that the rhetor should focus on unifying rhetoric that supports most people in a national situation of mourning.

My position is firmly against this tide. Without regard to the state of the laws on fairness and without regard to what is good for the American public, as long as the insidious vestiges of racial oppression and racial bias persist, I argue that the rhetorical situation remains the same. Despite the *de jure* changes in American jurisprudence, the Johnson tenets of prophetic rhetoric apply to the contemporary iconic Black eulogy now as much as they ever have in Black rhetorical history.
Of the four iconic Black eulogies I analyze in this study, Floyd's iconic eulogy is the only one that flows from tragedy. George Floyd's status as an icon was precipitated by the manner of his death at the hands of police, before which Floyd was not an iconic figure. Former police officer Derek Chauvin murdered George Floyd by strangling him for 9 minutes and 29 seconds while Floyd was lying in the street. Chauvin was the highest-ranking police officer at the scene, surrounded by four junior police officers who did not intervene.

The manner of Floyd's death had such a halting, reverberating effect on the consciousness of the country and the world that it catapulted Floyd to iconic status. The reverberation both cultivated and unveiled a palpable awareness of racial oppression with which many in America had not come to terms or had not realized before Floyd's strangulation was aired on video and discussed around the world. Sharpton faces the tragedy at the outset of the speech with these first lines:

"I want us to not sit here and act like we had a funeral on the schedule. George Floyd should not be among the deceased. He did not die of common health conditions. He died of a common American criminal justice malfunction. He died because there has not been the corrective behavior that has taught this country that if you commit a crime, it does not matter whether you wear blue jeans or a blue uniform, you must pay the crime you commit."

Interestingly, Sharpton defines the tragedy not as the death of Floyd but as the failure of the American justice system to stop police from killing Black men with impunity. In 1991, for instance, just at the advent of cell phone videos, a savvy bystander videotaped the savage beating of Rodney King at the hands of the L.A. Police Department. A jury acquitted the officers of assault with a deadly weapon and excessive

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222 Sharpton, Al. “Eulogy of George Floyd.” Delivered at Houston, TX, June 19, 2020, 1.
use of force by a police officer. In 2012, George Zimmerman shot and killed 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, and a jury later acquitted him of second-degree murder and manslaughter.

Sharpton wants the audience to know that he has eulogized others under similar conditions of death at the hands of police:

"I did speeches and eulogies at most of the funerals that we've had in this space in the last couple of decades and led the marches and did what we had to do."\(^{223}\)

Later in the speech, Sharpton mentions that he conducted Eric Garner's funeral. Gardner was strangled by police in New York while standing on a street corner. Maybe Sharpton includes the history of his service as eulogy rhetor to highlight the repeating nature of this type of civic murder, and maybe to support his thesis that these murders must stop and that the police culprits must be arrested and jailed, "I, come to tell you, America, that this is the time of building with accountability in the criminal justice system."\(^{224}\)

In analyzing the iconic eulogy of George Floyd, I will begin my analysis by making plain the historical relationship of tragedy to eulogy. Tragedy has been an intimate situational element of the public eulogy since antiquity. I will develop a clear understanding of the Aristotelian genesis of the funeral oration, which constitutes the substructure of the epideictic genre of rhetoric. I will then establish how contemporary scholars have defined the epideictic and deliberative genres of rhetoric to rhetorically undergird the contemporary funeral speech in America, incident to analyzing the iconic Black eulogy of George Floyd.

\(^{223}\) (Sharpton 2020, 7)

\(^{224}\) (Sharpton 2020, 8)
In the most recent view on the rise in eulogy scholarship, Simon Stow asserts a key distinction in African American public mourning in his defining work, "Agonistic Homegoing: Fredeic Douglass, Joseph Lowery and the Democratic Value of African American Public Mourning," in which he analyzes the iconic eulogy of Coretta Scott King, widow of the martyred Civil Rights leader.

Stow identifies a rhetorical distinction between romantic and tragic public mourning that he states has manifested amid the democratic freedoms won by the Black community in America. This distinction and an appreciation of the history of tragedy in eulogy provide me a basis for arguing that the iconic Black eulogy fulfills the four Johnson tenets of prophetic rhetoric in African American rhetoric. The Johnson tenets are a rhetorical substructure of the iconic Black eulogy born by African Americans' cultural and historical experience, which are not fostered in the Aristotelian construct of funeral rhetoric. The Johnson tenets proliferate from Black Liberation Theology Rhetoric, give form to the structure of the iconic Black eulogy, and should be embraced by the Academy.

GROUNDED IN THE SACRED

Alfred Charles Sharpton, Jr., known to the public as the Reverend Al Sharpton, burst on the scene in 1987 as an advocate for Tawana Bradley, a young teen whose claim was that she was raped by a gang of white men that included a police officer. In later

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226 Stow 2010.
years, after being contacted by the family of a 7-year-old girl accidentally killed by Detroit police, Sharpton called a press conference and declined to get himself arrested. Instead, he preached an impassioned but hardly inflammatory sermon whose message - we are all responsible for our children's safety - offended no one.

Sharpton has been right much more often than wrong in his choice of causes, dating back at least to the 1989 murder of Yusuf Hawkins, a black teenager who paid with his life for the mistake of walking down the wrong block in Brooklyn. Many African Americans will be forever grateful to Sharpton for taking on the thankless task of defending the victims of Bernhard Goetz, who opened fire on four unarmed Black teenagers in the subway. Still, he has also made some grave missteps. He spent his early years in a middle-class neighborhood, the son of a prosperous contractor who deserted the family when Sharpton was ten. Overnight, Sharpton moved with his mother, Ada, and older sister, Cheryl, onto welfare and into a housing project.

His other sustenance was preaching; he was a mesmerizing speaker from age four when he gave his first sermon. He rehearsed before his sister's dolls, gowned in one of his mother's housedresses. By 7, he was touring with gospel singer Mahalia Jackson; by 10, he'd been ordained in the Pentecostal Church. He now identifies as a Baptist. This gave him a unique perspective on outsiderness: preaching the Gospel wasn't exactly a route to peer acceptance for a Black teenager in the 1960s.

Sharpton came to the attention of some influential figures, including Jesse Jackson. He was so impressed by the 15-year-old Sharpton that he named him New York City youth director for his economic development program, Operation Breadbasket. Another friend he made in those years was Teddy Brown, the eldest son of soul singer
James Brown. In 1973, Teddy died in a car crash, and the young Sharpton became a kind of substitute son and, eventually, personal aide and road manager to the singer.

Sharpton took away two things from that experience: his hairstyle, copied from James Brown, which the singer made him promise never to change until after Brown's death, a promise he kept despite the inconvenience of being a prominent Black leader with straightened hair; and a wife, Kathy Jordan, a backup singer in Brown's entourage. They had two daughters, Dominique and Ashley. It isn't easy being Al Sharpton's kid, says Dominique, 29: "I see him on television sometimes, and I just hold my breath," waiting to see if he will say something brash that can be "twisted around" and used against him. Sharpton and his wife amicably separated in 2004. Sharpton has weathered some minor embarrassments over finances and taxes in his career. Still, he is one preacher who has managed to negotiate the temptations of fame untouched by sexual scandal.227

In debate, few I have witnessed display a quicker mind or tongue than Sharpton. His political instincts are unmatched, and his personal charisma has been undimmed. He has run for the U.S. Senate three times, once for mayor and, memorably, for President, in 2004. He never came close to winning each time, but he rose above footnote status, maybe because of his charisma. He is untroubled by this record of futility because, he insists, it was never his intention to win: "I ran for office to change the debate and raise questions about social justice, and I did that." He supports himself on income from his.

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radio talk show, *Keeping It Real With Al Sharpton*, and from "love offerings" at the sermons he preaches almost every Sunday in churches nationwide.\(^{228}\)

While Jackson takes a broad, programmatic view of the civil rights struggle, Sharpton most often focuses on individual instances of injustice. "It's simple," says Clayborne Carson, director of the Martin Luther King Jr. Institute at Stanford and a friend of Sharpton's. "If you want policies put forth, you call Obama or [Newark, N.J., Mayor] Cory Booker. But if you get beat up by the police, you'd better call Al Sharpton."\(^{229}\) Sharpton accords this perspective of his civic purpose while delivering the iconic Floyd eulogy:

"… [C]ritics would say all Al Sharpton wants is publicity. Well, that's exactly what I want because nobody calls me to keep a secret. People call me to blow up issues that nobody else would deal with. I'm the blowup man and I don't apologize for that because you get away too much with hiding things."\(^{230}\)

Given his visibility in public conflict involving African Americans, his longevity as a representative of the Black community, and his validation as a member of the clergy, Rev Sharpton readily brings the sacred to bear upon the temporal unrest in the African American community. The community has, therefore, accepted him as a rhetor in several eulogies, the most significant of which is the iconic Black eulogy of George Floyd.

Before the Floyd eulogy, Sharpton had established a reputation as a rhetor at funerals of Blacks who were mistreated by authorities, starting with the funeral of Michael Brown. In 2014, police officer Darren Wilson shot and killed Michael Brown in

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\(^{230}\) (Sharpton 2020, 4)
Ferguson, Missouri. According to the L.A. Times Newspaper, Sharpton's shining moment came when, as the final speaker at the St. Louis' Friendly Temple Missionary Baptist Church, he "was compassionate, godly, scolding and wry-qualities that have served him well as he has transformed himself from a cartoonish promoter of racial justice into a respectable leader with a pipeline to the president."\footnote{LA Times “His shining moment: Al Sharpton’s eulogy for slaying victim Michael Brown,” by Robin Abcarian, 25 August 2014.}

Sharpton's experience as a funeral rhetor, the national attention he garners, and his respectability to whites while still being revolutionary enough to be acceptable to Blacks all afford him palatability. He is not as rhetorically incendiary to most Americans as Farrakhan; he acceptably propounds the American spirit of protest for equality. He knows how to bring just the right amount of indignation and sadness borne by the deliberative realities of the facts while giving air to the epideictic flourishes that unite those of the races who are willing to unite. All this is done with just the right amount of logic to fashion an intelligent message with the amount of tempered emotion to both indulge and quell anger, anxiety, and revolution. Even as a civic figure, Sharpton's religious background, and imprimatur are sufficient to meet the first Johnson Tenet that the funeral rhetor of the Black eulogy be grounded in the sacred. As if to appease those in the audience who desire the sacred, Sharpton made a rather perfunctory remark about sacredness to meet the sacred test, but he wants his audience to know that he intended to deal with the tragedy:

"So it is not a normal funeral. It is not a normal circumstance but it's too common and we need to deal with it. Let me ask those of you that in the traditions of eulogies need
a scriptural reference, go to Ecclesiastes 3:1 which says, 'To everything there is a time and a purpose and season under the heavens.'"\textsuperscript{232}

Pursuant to this scripture, Sharpton builds the eulogy around the thesis that it is time to make changes in how police kill Black men.

**SHARE THE REAL SITUATION**

**Politics and Public Mourning**

Since mourning necessarily defines the rhetorical situation at a funeral, the death of public figures has been related to politics and public mourning since antiquity. Socrates satirizes that democracy demands that public mourning must cause the Athenians to be praised in Athens.\textsuperscript{233} Nicole Loraux later asserts that the funeral oration invented Athens just as much as Athens invented the funeral oration.\textsuperscript{234} Loraux’s assertion is tied to the eulogy’s historical relationship to theories of epideictic. The role of epideictic is so integral to the development of the eulogy as genre that the development of epideictic calls for acute attention in this chapter of this study, where I seek to establish its ancient development.

Sharpton accomplishes this in the following manner:

"The reason why we are marching all over the world is we were like George, we couldn’t breathe, not because there was something wrong with our lungs but that you wouldn’t take your knee off our neck. We don’t want no favors; just get up off of us and we can be and do whatever we can be."\textsuperscript{235}

\textsuperscript{232} (Sharpton 2020, 1)


\textsuperscript{235} (Sharpton 2020, 6)
Yet, the rhetoric of the eulogy is more than just epideictic; it is also deliberative in view of contextual realities that give rise to the eulogy, like the significant social events at the time of death that produce constraints surrounding it. These constraints are subjects of the deliberative genre in the rhetoric of eulogy. For instance, the setting and circumstances surrounding the death may illicit a deliberative response.

Two authors have established themselves as leaders in the epideictic/deliberative rhetorical hybrid in marginalized communities. Melissa Renee Harris and Ashley R. Hall in their article, “My Living Shall Not be in Vain: The Rhetorical Power of Eulogies in Civil Unrest,” deal with the rhetorical power of eulogies when addressing marginalized communities on the verge of civil unrest. It looks at the significance of the situation in rhetorical analysis as evidenced by the eulogies of unjustified Black deaths at the hands of the police, Dr. King’s eulogy of the 16th Street Church bombing in Alabama, and President Obama’s eulogy of Clementa Pinckney after the massacre at Emmanuel AME Church, among other eulogies.

Harris and Hall argue that the Black Eulogist has a unique mandate when faced with death at the hands of unjust institutionalized practices directed at marginalized populations. They theorize how the eulogy can move between remembrance of the deceased as an epideictic function of the genre and a rallying cry for action in the deliberative function. Harris and Hall have made it axiomatic that a eulogist must

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construct the eulogy by analyzing rhetoric that emerges after tragedies in marginalized communities.

Sharpton accomplishes this by building his eulogy around Ecclesiastes 3:1, which he cleverly uses as a theme throughout the eulogy to excoriate, challenge, judge and charge the community and the power structure. Ecclesiastes 3:1 states, “To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under the heaven,” a verse he mentions one minute into the eulogy. He develops time as a recurring theme in the eulogy: time to correct the injustice in the criminal justice system that inured to Floyd’s death:

“I think that it is our job to let the world know when we see what is going on in the streets of this country and in Europe, around the world, that you need to know what time it is.”

“It’s time for us to stand up in George’s name and say get your knee off our necks.”

“There is a time and a season and when I looked this time, I saw marches where in some cases young Whites outnumbered the Blacks marching. I know that it’s a different time and a different season. When I looked and saw people in Germany marching for George Floyd, it’s a different time and a different season. When they went in front of the Parliament in London, England and said it’s a different time and a different season, I come to tell you, America, this is the time of building with accountability in the criminal justice system.”

“I’ve come to tell you, … time is out for not holding you accountable. Time is out for you making excuses. Time is out for you trying to stall. Time is out for empty words and empty promises. Time is out for you filibustering and trying to stall the arm of justice. This is the time we won’t stop. We going to keep going until we change the whole system of justice.”

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239 (Sharpton 2020, 4)

240 (Sharpton 2020, 6)

241 (Sharpton 2020, 7,8)

242 (Sharpton 2020, 8,9)
“You changed the world, George. We’re going to keep marching, George. We’re going to keep fighting, George. We done turned the clock, George. We’re going forward, George. Time out, time out, time out.”

Here, Sharpton ends the eulogy with a clarion call: time out for the power structure not responding to calls for justice. By the time Chauvin murdered Floyd, police had already killed too many Black men with impunity. The structure of power protected police from a fair standard of justice, and many of the murdering police officers were suspended, fired, or walked free.

Sharpton’s responses build the community by uncovering rhetorical truths that speak to the situation. This includes making the deceased appear innocent and defenseless after having been vilified by the murdering establishment. He then associates the martyr with the community, unifying the community and vindicating the death, all of which create value for the entire oppressed group, not just for the deceased. Sharpton delineates the situation for the worldwide listening audience as he speaks truth to power on behalf of the community:

“…George Floyd’s story has been the story of Black folks because ever since 401 years ago, the reason we could never be who we wanted and dreamed of being is you kept your knee on our neck. We were smarter than the underfunded schools you put us in, but you had your knee on our neck. We had creative skills, we could do whatever anybody else could do, but we couldn’t get your knee off our neck. What happened to Floyd happens every day in this country, in education, in health services, and in every area of American life, it’s time for us to stand up in George’s name and say get your knee off our necks. Sharpton uses palatable logic to state the harsh, deliberative facts of the strangulation death at the hands of the police that everyone knows but may be reluctant to
express or hear. He metaphorically aligns the community’s neck with Floyd’s neck because Floyd’s situation is a parallel situation in which the community finds itself. As he stated above, “What happens to Floyd happens every day in this country….”

Sharpton’s rhetoric subscribes to Harris and Hall’s prescription while simultaneously fulfilling the mandate of the second Johnson tenet, “sharing the real situation.” Sharpton asks the congregation and people all over the world to stand for 8 minutes and 46 seconds, the amount of time the police officer’s knee was on Floyd’s neck. Here, nothing need be said, for the impact of silence vindicates Floyd’s defenselessness and builds the community through a solidarity that speaks directly to the situation:

“[W]e’re going to stand for 8 minutes and 46 seconds. Though that was the time that George was on the ground. And we want you all over the world to stand with us for 8 minutes and 46 seconds and make that commitment for justice in the name of George.”

What a clever reinforcement of the situation by the rhetor.

**CRITIQUE, CHALLENGE, CHARGE AND JUDGE**

People around the world stood to honor the decedent as his funeral was broadcast across the globe. George Floyd achieved iconic status because of how he died. Floyd’s eulogy will necessarily call to fore the ancient pain of oppression all anew, with the effect of uniting the oppressed, unveiling the cloak of racial oppression to be better seen and understood by the public, and engendering resolve to go forward with better treatment of oppressed minorities, just as Sharpton stated when speaking to the silent audience which he blames by implication for the situation of race in America:

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*246 (Sharpton 2020, 13)*
“We need to break it down because you don’t know what time it is. You all are operating like it is yesterday. And the reason you’re late catching up to what these protests mean is because you didn’t turn your clock forward, talking about make America great. Great for who and great when? We going to make America great for everybody for the first time.”

Here, Sharpton’s reference to making America great is an acknowledgment of his chagrin at the Republican Party and its leader, then President Donald Trump, whose campaign phrase was to , “Make America Great Again,” a phrase which many minorities feel is a veiled message of minority exclusion in American affairs. So, Sharpton “break[s] it down” to the silent audience that minorities are aware of this phrase that looks backward to segregation and exclusion. He then corrects and recasts the phrase to be inclusive of all Americans:

“We going to make America great for everybody for the first time. Never was great for Blacks. Never was great for Latinos. Wasn’t never great for others. Wasn’t great for women.”

This statement is an excellent example of how the iconic Black eulogy is a platform for social challenge and change. The expression “Make America great again” implies that it is no longer great because of the advances that minorities have made, which implies that to make it great again is to exclude minorities from advancing. The death of a Black icon makes possible an international retort to such a phrase and the spirit behind it.

247 (Sharpton 2020, 10)

248 (Sharpton 2020, 10)
Accordingly, Sharpton critiques and judges in a non-incendiary way, considering the manner of George Floyd’s death:

“…Just like in one era, we had to fight slavery, another era we had to fight Jim Crow. Another era we dealt with voting rights. This is the era to deal with policing and criminal justice…. this is the time to stop this. … I saw marches where in some cases young Whites outnumbered the Blacks marching. I know that it’s a different time and a different season. When I look and saw people in Germany marching for George Floyd, it’s a different time and a different season. When they went in front of the Parliament in London, England, and said it’s a different time and a different season, I come to tell you America, this is a time of building with accountability in the criminal justice system.”

Where Black men are killed at the hands of police, the rhetor of the iconic Black Eulogy must heighten the innocence of the icon. Here, Sharpton plainly fulfills the mandate of the third Johnson tenet, where he critiques and judges the racial climate in America as it currently is, noting that the time for changing the status quo has come. Sharpton takes full advantage of this international opportunity to call for racial justice.

**HOPE AND ENCOURAGEMENT**

The rhetor of the Black Eulogy, then, constructs an illusory hope as a stratagem to help endure oppression rather than as a weapon to fight against it. With no stratagem, the audience has no hope of freedom from the insidious omnipresence of oppression.

Sharpton uses a known stratagem in the community, God, Himself:

“There’s a God that still sits high, but He looks down low and He’ll make a way out of no way. This God is still on the throne. Grieving, we can fight. I don’t care

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249 (Floyd Eulogy, 7-10)
who’s in the White House. There is another house that said if we fight, He’ll fight our battles. If we stand up, He’ll hold us up.”

In all my studies, I have not come across an iconic Black Eulogy either in practice or precept that espouses violence and disharmony, no matter the cause of death. The iconic Black Eulogy always takes the responsible high road, maybe because discourse is rather intellectual, maybe because intellectualism espouses non-violent responses to racism; maybe because the iconic Black Eulogy is at its core a reverent, religious sermon usually delivered in a church where solemnity and dignity are kept, where the presence of holiness is palpable at the realization of the loss of life, no matter the injustices suffered.

The iconic Black eulogy is also a ventilation that provides a space to exhale, to exhaust the steam that builds when a fellow member of the race is killed at the hands of the civil authorities because of race. The iconic Black eulogy, therefore, provides a collectively intelligent, peaceful way to protest as the Black community relies heavily upon the funeral rhetor to orchestrate and voice the community’s sentiments while investing in the community a sense of hope for better days to come. This casts the iconic Black Eulogy as a speech of social and political responsibility that deters violent forms of protest.

The repose generated by an iconic Black death creates a situation for the public to listen well enough to see injustice and deeply enough to make changes, just as the death of MLK did and just as the death of George Floyd has done. After King’s death, segregation laws and practices that had previously withstood legislative and judicial challenges were summarily changed in short order, most notably in the Civil Rights Act.

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250 (Sharpton 2020, 12)
of 1968 and the rapid renaming of boulevards across major cities in America after Dr. King.

The more iconic the death, the more powerful and effective the iconic Black Eulogy is at calling out oppressive acts and rallying social structures to deplore such acts. By this, I mean that the significance of the eulogy is proportionate to the significance of the deceased's life and death. When a person of great importance or a person who has experienced a highly publicized and impactful death is eulogized, that person’s eulogy tends to hold such profound cultural weight and resonance because of the person’s contribution to life as reflected in the public impact of her death. This is because the eulogy serves not just as a reflection on the individual's life but also as a commentary on broader social, political, or cultural issues that the individual's life and death symbolized.

Since George Floyd’s death, Black men have begun to figure prominently in television commercials and ad campaigns as never before. Commercial advertising has promoted the Black man as never before. He is the subject and center of television, magazine, and internet ads, as though he has always been considered worthy. It is almost funny, except that it is not. It is as though he had never been kept out of such ads or had never been so derided as to be excluded from such ads in the first place.

It appears that immediately after the Floyd strangulation, the American consciousness is either trying to forget that it once officially derided the Black man by not including positive images of him in national ads, or the American consciousness is apologetic for not having included positive images of the Black man in such ads.

Just a month after Floyd’s murder, BBC provided a list of ten significant changes it had assessed in light of the murder of Floyd:
“There have been global tributes and protests of racism and societal inequalities. Statues of Confederates have been taken down. Many companies have come to stand in solidarity with Black Lives Matter. Police officers are being charged and found guilty at higher rates. Police departments are making policy changes. Major celebrities are donating and bailing out protesters. More people are speaking out about the everyday racism and discrimination they have faced. Black out Tuesday was implemented across social media. Street names have been changed – Black Lives Matter Plaza is the name of the street leading up to the White House and the Mayor of New York City has pledged that all five boroughs will have a street named Black Lives Matter.”251

This type of public attention evidences and engenders a national reflection on the state of race in America, not only in the public consciousness but also in the individual consciousness. There is hope for the iconic Black Eulogy to increase and become the ambassadorial arm of justice and fairness, not solely because it reacts rhetorically to injustice and unfairness, but because it motivates White Americans to acknowledge that racial unfairness does exist, is true, does happen, is real, and can change for the better with the help of White America. American liberty and justice do not arrive to do their bidding at the doorsteps of all Americans. To fully arrive, liberty and justice need all the help they can muster from all people; the Black Eulogy is a consistent source of support.

In the deep, deep Black south of yore, hope and help were used synonymously, as in “Hope me Jesus.” This way of thinking assisted a struggling and maligned people. It unveils the interplay of hope as being tantamount to help while enduring great distress. It reveals why hope is such an integral part of prophetic prophecy in the iconic Black eulogy. Without embracing hope in the ever-changing, invisible future, the help for a

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251 The Mississippi Link, Christopher Young, “The War Against Being Woke” vol. 29, no. 34, June 8-14, 2023.
people to press forward and advance beyond oppression is thwarted. As the iconic Black eulogy survives and is better defined rhetorically, hope must survive with it.

So it is that hope is an integral component of the Johnson tenets of prophecy in African American rhetoric. Accordingly, Rev. Sharpton peppered his parole with hope:

“There’s a God that still sits high, but He looks down low and He’ll make a way out of no way. This God is still on the throne. Grieving, we can fight. I don’t care who’s in the White House. There’s another house that said, “If we’ll fight, He’ll fight our battles. If we stand up, He’ll hold us up.”

“Reverend Jackson told us, “Keep hope alive. Then I know that President Obama wrote a book about hope. But I want you to know that in my life there are times when I lost hope. Things can happen like this that will dash your hope, but there is something that is sister to hope called faith. …We didn’t come this far by luck. We didn’t come this far by some fate. We came this far by faith leaning on the Lord, trusting in His holy word. He never, He never, He never failed me yet. From the outhouse to the White House, we come a long way.”

As freedoms change in the laws, racism, classicism, and economic oppression become more insidious, not less. Racism is a force that does not merely lie in repose when laws against it change. It morphs in its insidiousness to perpetrate, proliferate and perpetuate. As long as racism continues, there will be a reason to resist racist forces by speaking out against them in eulogistic rhetoric. This is why Asante has advised that as long as there is oppression, no Black rhetor has any excuse not to stand and speak out against it. Likewise, as long as an iconic Black decedent requires a public funeral in a situation where oppression exists, no iconic Black funeral rhetor has any excuse not to call out unfairness and unite the audience against it, as Rev. Sharpton has done in the

252 (Eulogy of George Floyd, 12)
253 (Eulogy of George Floyd, 12)
254 (Eulogy of George Floyd, 12)
iconic eulogy of George Floyd, for that is the very manifestation of our hope. That is the very structure and purpose of the Johnson tenets: to reify a people in distress.

Whereas in past times, in the annals of American lynching of Black people, there was no concerted national response to a civic murder. Now, the contemporary iconic Black Eulogy, as a matter of responsibility, is empowered and is expected to respond publicly, even nationally, whenever the state unjustly takes an iconic Black life in America.

We come to an awareness of the reality of oppression in moments like the murder of a Black icon at the hands of the government. The iconic Black eulogy is our hope, our revolution within democracy. It is our shield to press through oppression, knowing that we will be free from it one day, whether in this life or the next, because God will make a way:

“He’ll make a way for His children. Go on home, George. Get your rest, George. You changed the world, George. We’re going to keep marching, George. We’re going to keep fighting, George. We done turned the clock, Geroge. We’re going forward, George. Time out, time out, time out.”

CONCLUSION

The iconic Black Eulogy teaches the extreme value of message as a countermeasure to oppressive acts. A message, as performative, can be as combative and responsive as any protest march or any show of physical force. It is configured to respond to and fight against any experience that culminates in the unjust death of an oppressed minority in America, especially when the death is at the hands of an arm of government.

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255 (Eulogy of George Floyd, 13)
As is evident in Floyd's iconic eulogy, the rhetorical value of the iconic Black Eulogy is that, at the very least, given a loss of life at the hands of the government, the message against oppression is heard and listened to, even if not agreed with. There is no shedding of blood to manifest reaction to an oppressive act that ends in death at the hands of the government.

Here is Sharpton’s real value to the community as rhetor: his penchant for dealing with harsh, emotionally charged race-related deaths at the hands of state police violence while avoiding incendiary language and emotion to purposely appease the oppressed without inciting violent responses and to put the power structures at ease and yet on notice:

“I’ve come to tell you, … time is out for not holding you accountable. Time is out for you making excuses. Time is out for you trying to stall. Time is out for empty words and empty promises. Time is out for you filibustering and trying to stall the arm of justice. This is the time we won’t stop. We going to keep going until we change the whole system of justice.”

In the next chapter, I continue to analyze the iconic Black eulogy as an iteration of prophetic rhetoric at its intersection with presidential rhetoric in the eulogy of the Honorable John Lewis, U.S. Congressman. Former President Barak Obama is funeral rhetor.

CHAPTER 4.
THE POWER OF THE PRESIDENCY ESCALATES THE ICONIC BLACK EULOGY TO PREEMINENCE IN THE ICONIC EULOGY OF THE HON. JOHN LEWIS, U.S. CONGRESSMAN FROM GEORGIA

256 (Sharpton 2020, 8,9)
Summary of the iconic eulogy of Congressman Lewis

President Obama's eulogy of Congressman John Lewis celebrated Lewis' lifelong dedication to civil rights and social justice. Obama honored Lewis as a transformative figure in American history, highlighting his courage as a Freedom Rider, his leadership in the Civil Rights Movement, and his decades-long service in Congress. The iconic eulogy emphasized Lewis's unwavering commitment to nonviolent protest and his belief in the power of ordinary people to bring about extraordinary change. Obama urged Americans to carry forward Lewis's legacy by continuing the struggle for equality and justice, emphasizing the importance of voting rights and peaceful activism in shaping a more just society.

Analysis

In this final chapter of the study, we analyze how the power of the presidency becomes rhetorical power, and we examine how that power illuminates the iconic Black eulogy with an efficacy it could not otherwise have. An analysis of the Lewis iconic eulogy first calls for an analysis of the rhetorical role the President plays when juxtaposed against the funeral situation where, as here, former President Obama is rhetor for the funeral of an iconic Black figure whom he introduces as:

“John Lewis: first of the freedom riders, head of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, youngest speaker at the March on Washington, leader of the March from Selma to Montgomery, member of Congress, representing the people of this state and this district for 33 years, mentor to young people, including me at the time, until his final day on this Earth, he not only embraced that responsibility but he made it his life’s work. Which isn’t bad for a boy from Troy.”257

GROUNDING IN THE SACRED

President Barack Obama is an exquisite study as a rhetor because there has never been one like him. He ascended to the White House with the support of many elements of a society that has been oppressive to persons of his race. His successful elections to high political office made hope come alive for many Americans and world citizens who look hopeful about the democratic ideals that define America. The African American community placed such value and expectation on him that his seminal experience put him in the defining forefront of presidential rhetoric and a precipitous rhetorical space as rhetor of the iconic Black eulogy.

Even as President of the United States and rhetor of an iconic Black eulogy, Obama must still pass the Johnson tenet of sacred rhetor, for Obama is not a preacher. The test to determine the sanctity of a rhetor, according to Johnson, is that the rhetor must ground himself in the sacred in order to identify with the audience, which renders the rhetor an understanding, connected part of the community fabric, for there is no prophetic discourse outside of the community Obama must reveal somewhere in his speech a knowledge of the holy and oneness with the community. After all, he must address a church audience attending an iconic Black funeral. The audience expects either a person of faith or a person whose faith is well-established along the tumultuous pathway of life. While Obama is sacred to some by having risen atop the leadership of the secular world, that is mere sentiment. The Johnson tenets require something more sacrosanct since neither by profession nor by calling President Obama a preacher. He must demonstrate the indicia of a preacher and establish proximity to the community in order to be
grounded in the sacred. I argue that even as a layperson to the clergy, President Obama fulfills the sacred tenet.

Momentous situations call for momentous rhetors. Being President of the United States puts a rhetor in an exclusive category where the rhetor is arguably bigger than many situations he speaks in. Successfully conjoining the power of rhetoric with powerful situations pregnant with political and social eventualities is part of President Obama’s genius. He is personable enough to convey the high sense of the presidency in its ordinary run. At the same time, he cuts through the pomp of public appearance with a personability that puts his personal imprimatur upon the audience and the occasion, all with a display of language and logic that buoy his credibility.

When a President of the United States rises to speak, the power of the Office takes a national reception for granted; people listen, and history is made. Having served as the first Black President of the United States, Obama is in an intersectional position as rhetor of the eulogy of Congressman Lewis. I argue here that the eulogy of a Black icon is so embedded in cultural and rhetorical history that even his superior political position does not inoculate President Obama from adhering to the four Johnson tenets of African American eulogy, just as any rhetor of the iconic Black eulogy must.

**Eulogy of a Black Icon**

The eulogy of a Black icon is a significant opportunity. It is an occasion to reveal, instruct, and boast to society of the virtues of a race of people not often esteemed for their virtues. The iconic status and contributions of the decedent are representatives of the people open to claim and be refreshed by them, all while the rhetor takes the audience on the forward march of human dignity to which African American people must always
subscribe. Until racism is extinct, Black people are in a continual conundrum of enduring oppression while also fighting against it.

According to the four Johnson tenets of prophetic rhetoric in African American rhetoric, the Black Eulogy rhetor’s job is to determine how the iconic figure fit into history, iterate the obstacles he overcame, reveal how he either alleviated or endured the pangs of oppression, and establish the charge and hope he leaves to a world made better by his life’s work and example.\(^{258}\)

The context of U.S. Representative John Lewis’ iconic eulogy is on point. A decades-long civil rights pioneer from Georgia, the Congressman was eulogized by an iconic rhetor, President Barack Obama, after coming to his final rest just as the country was paying heightened attention to police brutality. This generated eulogistic calls in the Congressman’s eulogy for deliberative action to stop police violence and to continue marching peacefully against it. as funeral rhetor, President Obama opined:

“Today we witness with our own eyes police officers kneeling on the necks of Black Americans. George Wallace may be gone, but we can witness our federal government sending agents to use tear gas and batons against peaceful demonstrators.”\(^{259}\)

Obama often takes advantage to ground his identity in the religious, political, and intellectual values of America. This affords him the agency to sustain a close, respectful relationship with the community as a funeral rhetor:

“If we want our children to grow up in a democracy, not just with elections, but a true democracy, a representative democracy, and a big-hearted tolerant, vibrant, inclusive America of perpetual self-creation, then we’re going to have to be more like John. We don’t have to do all the things he needed to do because he did them

\(^{258}\) (Johnson 2010, 274-280)

\(^{259}\) (Obama 2020, 1)
for us. But we got to do something. As the Lord instructed Paul, do not be afraid. Go on speaking. Do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in the city who are my people.”  

He reminds the audience how democracy is not automatic and must be worked at and fought for, “or else whirlpools of hatred, violence and despair can rise again. …He [Lewis] knew that every single one of us has a God-given power and that the faith of this democracy depends on how we use it. That democracy isn’t automatic. It has to be nurtured. Has to be tended to.”

President Obama swings between the prophetic and diplomatic modes of address. Three times, he argues himself into the role of a prophet by referring to the Holy Scriptures. Indeed, his opening line was a scriptural reference, and his closing line adjured God to bless America. Opening line:

“James wrote to the believers, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.”

Middle of the speech:

“Like John the Baptist preparing the way, like those Old Testament prophets speaking truth to kings, John Lewis did not hesitate – he kept on getting on board buses and sitting at lunch counters, got his mugshot taken again and again, marched again and again on a mission to change America”

Closing line:

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260 (Obama 2020, 5)
261 (Obama 2020, 5)
262 (Obama 2020, 1)
263 (Obama 2020, 4)
“What a gift John Lewis was. We are also lucky to have had him walk with us for
a while and show us the way. God bless you all. God bless America. God bless
this gentle soul who pulled us closer to his promise. Thank you very much.”

He then deliberatively summons the audience to act upon the highest of its culture
by exhorting it to believe in its own power, engage in protest, vote, support equal
treatment, and be a better, truer version of itself. Obama affirms that John Lewis was a
gift to us and that we should emulate him. “God bless America” were among his final
words. Having already firmly established a connection with the community in the
foregoing experts, Obama’s alignment with the Holy Scriptures casts the role of prophet
upon him. It concomitantly establishes his sacred rhetorical impress upon the audience.

Presidential Priestly Role in National Eulogy as Genre

In their book, *Presidents Creating the Presidency: Deeds Done in Words,*
Campbell and Jamieson introduce the genre of national eulogy, a genre in which the
President of the United States assumes a priestly role to make sense of a catastrophe and
to transform it from evidence of destruction into a symbol of national resilience.

To Campbell and Jamieson, the genre is not merely a convenient heuristic that
permits the characterization of speeches. It is also a subtle tool that provides access to the
complexities inherent in public presidential communication. Consequently, rhetoric is a
key part of how presidents exercise and expand executive power and establish precedents
for its use by their successors, such that the President’s words are deeds. Thus, “in

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264 (Obama 2020, 9)


266 (Campbell and Hall 2008, 336)

267 (Campbell and Hall 2008, 341)
their speaking, the presidency is constituted and reconstituted,“268 causing presidents to aim for the rhetorically timeless. However, they do not consistently achieve timelessness like Abraham Lincoln did with his Gettysburg Address. Granted, the authors write of a national eulogy “only when someone must make sense of a catastrophic event that unexpectedly kills U.S. civilians while also assaulting a national symbol,“269 the authors’ analysis of the President as rhetor in national eulogies reifies my analysis of President Obama as a sacred rhetor of the iconic Black eulogy.

The section of the authors’ brief focus on national eulogies uncovers the increasing role presidents are assumed to play when national tragedies strike, such as the Murrah bombing in Oklahoma or the national tragedies generated by adverse weather conditions like hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. The authors also focus on how a good epideictic address can erode or increase presidential executive power. They give credibility to the role of eloquence in rhetoric and how it reifies presidential power. A ceremonial occasion that requires epideictic rhetoric, for instance, must, to succeed, strike universal themes of continuity and change, for the point of the presidential address is to reconstitute the public.270

Though a former President of the United States, Obama cannot escape the impression of presidential power as rhetor. In this iconic Black eulogy, Obama increases presidential power by striking themes of continuity and change. To further establish President Obama’s sacredness as rhetor, I first discuss the continuous theme of pastors of

268 (Campbell and Hall 2008, 341)
269 (Campbell and Hall 2008, 73)
270 (Campbell and Hall, 2008, 43)
Black churches carrying the torch of civic unrest before demonstrating Obama’s focus on
the embattled civic right that affects the community, the Voting Rights Act.

**Black Church**

Christian faith has long been the source of courage and revolution in the face of
civic unfairness in America. From slavers who brought the enslaved with them to church
to slavers who allowed the enslaved to have their own worship services, African
Americans, since slavery, have had an intimate socio-political connection to the Black
curch. The parole of rhetor of the iconic Black eulogy consequently developed in ways
that forge social change.

Early in American history, the Black Church led rebellions against injustice.
Frederick Douglass, a lifelong advocate against injustice, was an ordained minister at
AME Zion Church in New Bedford, MA. Rev. Adam Clayton Powell pastored
Harlem’s Abyssinian Baptist Church before becoming an outspoken U.S. Congressional
advocate for civil rights in the North. The bus boycott at Selma, AL, precipitated Rev.
King to the forefront of the Civil Rights Movement, which was organized, run, and
funded through the Black Church. The activity of the Black Church precipitated the
signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, casting the
Black church as the parent of the Civil Rights Movement.

Obama’s very first proposition to the audience sets the stage for the entire speech
to encourage and reconstitute the public to its ultimate civic duty:

“Now, this country is a constant work in progress. We were born with
instructions: to form a more perfect union. Explicit in those words is the idea that
we are imperfect; that what gives each new generation purpose is to take up the

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unfinished work of the past and carry it further than anyone might have thought possible.”

**Obama’s Infusion of Character and Personality**

James Jasinski uses interpretative inquiry to describe what he calls the most important development in rhetorical criticism. It concentrates on providing thick descriptions of specific cases rather than constructing and verifying abstract theoretical principles. Representation of agency within the specific text of Obama’s eulogy of Lewis is an interpretive inquiry of agency because of the neoclassical concern for the rhetor’s ethos, the main tenet of which is character. Agency does not only speak to character but to the way a rhetor places himself within a communicative relationship. I assert that as a representation of agency, Obama uses his character as a mode of proof by using strategies of involvement with the audience.

**Unspoken Agency**

He first accomplishes this by what he does not say. He never mentions that he was President of the United States. Like everyone else, he is present merely to pay homage to a civil rights icon. He is dressed down in the plainest way to blend and not call attention to himself. He wears a simple, dark suit with a white shirt and a dark necktie with distinction in neither color nor fabric. No secret servicemen are in sight, and there is no other indicia of the presidency at the lectern, not even the presidential seal which Obama

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272 (Obama 2010, 1)


274 (Jasinski 2001)

275 (Jasinski 2001)
could have used had he wanted. The only time Obama alludes to his presidency is later in the speech when he tells how he shared the victory of the presidency with Congressman Lewis and by implication, with the community:

“The next time I saw him, I had been elected to the United States Senate. And I told him, John, I am here because of you. On Inauguration Day in 2008, 2009, he was one of the first people that I greeted and hugged on that stand. I told him, ‘This is your day, too.’”

Otherwise, Obama is poised and balanced in manner and style. He is reasonably restrained in his execution so that he is one with members of the audience. This earns for him a consonance with the community that is validated by consistent, affirming applause as he speaks.

In a round of communal solidarity, Obama builds his entire speech around the right to vote, a right under contemporary attack at the time he spoke and the right to which Congressman Lewis dedicated his life. As Obama states:

“Like John, we have got to fight even harder for the most powerful tool we have, which is the right to vote. The Voting Rights Act is one of the crowning achievements of our democracy. It’s why John crossed that bridge. It’s why he spilled his blood.”

He then speaks against the government for using divisive tactics to keep people from voting:

“We may no longer have to guess the number of jellybeans in a jar in order to cast a ballot. But even as we sit here, there are those in power who are doing their darnedest to discourage people from voting – by closing polling locations, and targeting minorities and students with restrictive ID laws, and attacking our voting

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276 18 USC 713 and executive Orders 11916 and 11649.

277 (Obama 2020, 8)

278 (Obama 2020, 6)
rights with surgical precision, even undermining the postal service in the run-up to an election that is going to be dependent on mailed-in ballots.”

By pitting himself against the government he once led, Obama isolates his character as an element of the persuasive process and more closely places himself in a communicative relationship with the community.

Continuing to build an even tighter connection with the audience, Obama again uses his character as an element of persuasion. He advocates the community’s position by speaking against those in power who target minorities by attacking the Voting Rights Act:

“But once the Supreme Court weakened the Voting Rights Act, some state legislatures unleashed a flood of laws designed specifically to make voting harder, especially, by the way, state legislatures where there is a lot of minority turnout and population growth. That’s not necessarily a mystery or an accident. It was an attack on what John fought for. It was an attack on our democratic freedoms. And we should treat it as such.”

Here, Obama reveals a character more in line with the community than with the state, though he was once chief of state, which he never mentions. Instead, he uses the pronouns “we” and “our” to further tighten his connection with the community and to make himself cousin to the modern protesters who support equal treatment for all citizens. He then advocates for an election day as national holiday so that all people, especially the working poor, can take part in the electoral process:

“We may no longer have to guess the number of jellybeans in a jar to cast a ballot, but even as we sit here, there are those in power who are doing their darnedest to discourage people from voting by closing polling locations and targeting minorities and students with restrictive ID laws and attacking our voting rights with surgical precision, even undermining the postal service in the run-up to an

279 (Obama 2020, 5)
280 (Obama 2020, 6)
election that’s going to be dependent on mail-in ballots so people don’t get sick."\(^{281}\)

Calling the Voting Rights Act a crowning achievement of our democracy, Obama finally advocates in the speech that the Voting Rights Act be renamed after the deceased icon:

“\text{You want to honor John? Let’s honor him by revitalizing the law that he was willing to die for. And by the way, naming it the John Lewis Voting Rights Act, that is a fine tribute. But John wouldn’t want us to stop there, trying to get back to where we already were. Once we pass the John Lewis Voting rights Act, we should keep marching to make it even better.}^{282}\)

There was apt applause.

**SHARING OF REAL SITUATION**

**Venue**

As we analyze the situation, the venue is worthy to note in this iconic Black eulogy. Lewis was a U.S. Congressman for 34 years. His iconic eulogy might have taken place in the U.S. Capital Building with the pomp of state he was due as legislative arbiter of voting and civil rights laws long passed. Instead, the ceremony was held at Ebenezer Baptist Church, in the pulpit once occupied by Dr. Martin L. King, Jr., in Atlanta, GA.

Having given his life so deftly to fighting for the civil rights of the nation, Lewis or his loved ones may have chosen this particular church as a symbolic safe space, foregoing the pomp of state on the Hill in favor of a culturally specific venue that marked the

\(^{281}\) (Obama 2020, 6)

\(^{282}\) (Obama 2020, 7)
bedrock of the movement to which Lewis dedicated his life. As Obama states at the outset of this iconic Lewis eulogy:

“It is a great honor to be back in Ebenezer Baptist Church in the pulpit of its greatest pastor, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., to pay my respects to perhaps his finest disciple. An American whose faith was tested again and again to produce a man of pure joy and unbreakable perseverance, John Robert Lewis.”

Though this iconic Black eulogy took place in a venue marked by African American history, the presence of the White audience is an important part of the situation, for the iconic nature of the eulogy embraces a worldwide audience through the media.

**The Eavesdropping Audience**

Pepe claims that 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.” As a representative of the community, President Obama is cognizant of the national spotlight that is cast upon the Black Eulogy at the death of iconic figures. He knows that the iconic Black Eulogy is delivered in the presence of the White American audience, beckoning all Americans in the audience with an opportunity to learn, listen and analyze the oppressive experience of being Black in America, as well as the African American viewpoint and disposition regarding its oppressive experience.

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(Obama 2020, 1)

James L. Golden and Richard D. Rieke call this the eavesdropping audience.\(^{285}\) While the rhetor of an iconic Black Eulogy is speaking directly and specifically to a Black audience, the rhetor is well aware of the White presence and perspective. So, the rhetor intends to impact Whites who eavesdrop on what the rhetor is saying. According to Golden and Rieke, a concern for the eavesdropping audience arises from its association with the existing power structure, so the eavesdropping audience is a rhetorical consideration when the rhetor prepares the iconic Black Eulogy. This reveals an ambassadorial function of the iconic Black Eulogy which can make known the reality of oppression; speak truth to power; and engender empathy with the White audience that has power to induce positive change.

Obama demonstrates a keen awareness of the eavesdropping audience. First, he speaks truth to White power when he takes the side of the community and cites instances where voting rights are being curtailed, as I have shown so far in this chapter; but also by providing remedies to that curtailment:

- By making sure every American is automatically registered to vote, including former inmates who’ve earned their second chance.
- By adding polling places and expanding early voting, and making Election Day a national holiday, so if you are someone who is working in a factory, or you are a single mom who has got to go to her job and doesn’t get time off, you can still cast your ballot.
- By guaranteeing that every American citizen has equal representation in our government, including the American citizens who live in Washington, D.D. and in Puerto Rico. They are Americans.
- By ending some of the partisan gerrymandering – so that all voters have the power to choose their politicians, not the other way around.\(^{286}\)


\(^{286}\) (Obama 2020, 7)
Speaking to a White audience is not a new situational phenomenon in American public address. In *The Address to Negroes by a Free Black from 1789*, for instance, the free Black orator, very cognizant of his White audience, encourages slaves to make obeisance to slave masters, to take care of the masters’ goods, and to hope for liberty in an honest rather than a subversive manner.\(^{287}\) In such a situation as 1787, where White people carefully listened whenever a free African American spoke in public, the African American rhetor had to speak circumspectly and supportively of slavery, or he could find himself defreed. Even for freed African Americans, freedom was tenuous and could be retracted upon the least provocation. The free Black orator in 1787 ends the speech by encouraging free Blacks to live peacefully and to read the scriptures,\(^{288}\) encouragement that the Black rhetor could successfully defend if approached by any White citizen who had the authority to have him arrested for speaking anything threatening to the White citizens’ sensibilities.

Times change, but one must ever be on guard for the phenomenon of the eavesdropping audience to first be true to one’s own self and then to one’s cause, and finally to the sensibilities of White citizens, even when speaking directly to a White audience.

Accordingly, by 1901, the Hon. George White, in *Defense of the Negro Race—Charges Answered*, delivered a very intelligent speech on the floor of the U.S. Congress, a speech that argues for the right of Black Americans to not only be treated more fairly as


\(^{288}\) (Bustill 1787, 4)
citizens, but to be more fairly embraced and supported by White America and its systems.²⁸⁹

Hon. George White is a Black U.S. Congressman whose term is ending and with its end, there will be no more Black congresspersons serving in Congress due to the Reconstruction Era laws that outlawed Blacks as elected officials in the U.S. Congress and in the U.S. Senate, as well as in many state legislatures. Because his term was ending, Congressman White's comments were rather audacious and unapologetic. It took courage to speak and argue so fluidly in favor of Black people in a White Congress that expelled all Blacks elected congress members in 1901. He brings 32 years to an end, a period when 40 African Americans sat in Congress. He is a learned man by virtue of the clarity of his thought and the erudition of his language:

“I want to enter a plea for the colored man, the colored woman, the colored boy, and the colored girl of this country. I would not thus digress from the question at issue and detain the House in a discussion of the interests of this particular people at this time but for the constant and the persistent efforts of certain gentlemen upon this floor to mold and rivet public sentiment against us as a people and to lose no opportunity to hold up the unfortunate few who commit crimes and depredations and lead lives of infamy and shame, as other races do, as fair specimens of representatives of the entire colored race… In the catalogue of members of Congress in this House perhaps none have been more persistent in their determination to bring the black man into disrepute and… show that he was unworthy of the right of citizenship than my colleague from North Carolina, Mr. Kitchin. During the first session of this Congress… he labored long and hard to show that the white race was at all times and under all circumstances superior to the Negro by inheritance if not otherwise, and… that an illiterate Negro was unfit to participate in making the laws of a sovereign state and the administration and execution of them; but an illiterate white man living by his side, with no more or perhaps not as much property, with no more exalted character, no higher thoughts of civilization, no more knowledge of the

handicraft of government, had by birth, because he was white, inherited some peculiar qualification…”

Congressman White’s speech, delivered to a White audience in Congress, makes intelligent, logical retorts based on the fairness provisions of the U.S. Constitution. He highlights the ill-treatment that is the actual fate of Black people. Though delivered 120 years earlier, White’s speech is similar to President Obama’s treatment of the Voting Rights Act as rhetor for the iconic eulogy of Congressman Lewis, where Obama spoke to Whites in the audience while battling the suppression of the Voting Rights Act:

“And if all this takes eliminating the filibuster – another Jim Crow relic – in order to secure the God-given rights of every American, then that’s what we should do.”

Here, Obama calls to the White congressional audience which has the power to eliminate the filibuster as a Jim Crow relic. Obama cleverly joins with the White audience by acknowledging that this is something “we” should do.

**Safe Place as Cultural Significance of the Black Eulogy**

Safe places have a history. Before there was a White audience to be aware of, there were safe spaces that did not include the White audience, spaces with a rich sense of place that embraced an understanding of the situation in which African Americans have found themselves. A safe space embraces compassion for the people and a moving understanding of their struggle for acceptance.

The concept of a rhetorical safe space grew from the slave yard death rituals to early African American church attendance, where the enslaved, if allowed to attend

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290 (White 1901)

291 (Obama 2020, 7)
churches of their masters, were relegated to the balconies of the establishments where they found safe spaces, modicums of freedom to express themselves within their respective slave communities. Nunley has coined this as the hushed harbor eulogistic tradition which creates safe spaces for conversations about issues pertinent to Black life but not permitted in the public sphere.292

The Black Eulogy is a product of a rhetorical safe space. Nineteenth century enslaved African Americans used physical space through public ritual in order to advocate for a way to participate in their own funerary ceremonies in plantation life. Cleaning the deceased body, grieving the deceased, boarding the body, watching the body, marching to the graves, and burying the body were public, cultural tasks that called forth the enslaved’s power over the physical space in which they exercised their funerary practices.293

The songs they sang at burials, the beliefs they held and acts they performed in relation to their ancestry, the communication of the drums, the time at which they buried their dead all grew from funerary traditions rooted in Africa, now creating spaces in bondage, spaces that were exclusive to them, exclusively theirs-- free spaces; spaces of freedom, safe spaces. When death visited an enslaved person, the enslaved’s contact with the dead was immediate, dramatic, inescapable, because slavery predated


embalming and undertaking practices in America. The enslaved were effective at sending word of death throughout their areas, as reflected in the sizes of funeral processions, which could range from 300 to 700. By the time the ceremony was over, the slave burial was a traditionalized activity in which the slave community took part. Post burial activities were light-hearted and fast paced and resembled the west African interments that went from crying to singing and dancing.

One Virginia slave preacher journeyed five miles at night to speak at the funeral of a slave girl, a funeral that the master had forbidden to take place. When awakened by the tumult of the funeral celebration, the master tried to break up the gathering but could not disperse the over 100 slaves present. The master reneged on his attempt to stop and allowed slave funeral services from then on.

A place to mourn their dead empowered the enslaved to escape the shackles of slavery through funerary praxis. In addition to their connection to their ancestors, I contend that their fight to bury their dead with ceremony developed from a need to experience freedom in enslavement. Seeing death brought with it the modicum of a taste of freedom which drove the development of the Black Eulogy to develop as a sacrosanct, safe rhetorical space right from the beginning of the Africans’ experience

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294 When bereft families began to require that their beloved soldiers ‘bodies be transported back home, the need for embalming grew. It met its national significance at the death of President Abraham Lincoln, whose embalmed body traveled to be viewed in Washington, DC, New York, and Chicago before being interred in Illinois. The successful, prolonged exposure of his body proved the efficacy of embalming and generated the growth of the funeral industry as a profession. (Adkins 2012, 9).

295 (Roediger 1981, 169)

296 (Roediger,1981, 173)

297 See also Hatcher, William and Jasper, John. 1908. The Unmatched Negro Philosopher and Preacher, FH Revell, New York. 36, for a slave preacher’s comment that “Another demand in this case – for the slaves knew how to make their demands – was that the Negro preacher ‘should preach the funeral’.”
in American slavery. It is now developing into a powerful, cultural manifestation of rhetorical hybrid constructs.

This is nowhere more evident than in the cultural legacy of an anthology of African American sermons collected from the last 300 years in America, “Preaching with Sacred Fire,” by Martha Simmons and Frank Thomas. They write, “Even during the most difficult and oppressive times, the delivery, creativity, charisma, expressivity, fervor, forcefulness, passion, persuasiveness, poise, power, rhetoric, spirit, style, and vision of Black preaching gave and gives hope to a community under siege.”

CRITIQUE, CHALLENGES, CHARGES AND JUDGMENT

Pessimistic Rhetoric

Obama engages in pessimistic rhetoric to motivate the community to take action in the fight against voter suppression:

“And yet, even if we do all this – even if every bogus voter suppression law was struck off the books today – we have got to be honest with ourselves that too many of us choose not to exercise the franchise; that too many of our citizens believe that their vote won’t make a difference, or they buy into the cynicism that, by the way, is the central strategy of voter suppression, to make you discouraged, to stop believing in your own power.”

Obama takes the opportunity of the iconic Black eulogy to scold the community in order to embolden the community to realize its own responsibility in the voting process. He warns the community about the tactic of generating discouragement and


299 (Obama 2020, 7)
cynicism into the voting process, tactics designed to keep the community from the poles.

He reminds the community that its power to change rests in its willingness to take action:

“So we are also going to have to remember what John said: “If you don’t do everything you can to change things, then they will remain the same. You only pass this way once. You have to give it all you have.” … We cannot treat voting as an errand to run if we have some time. We have to treat it as the most important action we can take on behalf of democracy.”

Forensic Discourse in the Iconic Black Eulogy

As I consider the future growth of the iconic Black eulogy, forensic possibilities are latent in the iconic Black Eulogy and should be explored for their rhetorical value.

Though a eulogy is neither legislative nor forensic by definition or genre, the press of the iconic Black Eulogy against official mistreatment is argumentative and brings to the genre of eulogy a propensity to either lay the foundation to advance a forensic argument, or to fuse forensic precepts into the discourse without the strident formality that attaches to forensic argument or occasion.

In the annals of homiletics in the African American church, Earle Fisher has introduced a call toward more revolutionary homiletics and hermeneutics from the pulpits of the Black church. He argues that the Black church’s conventional engagement with both religion and with the sacred text renders the sermons incapable of empowering the underprivileged.

300 (Obama 2020, 7)

301 More than a mere deliberative resolve to go forth and be better, the iconic Black eulogy appears to have developed a space for the argument against oppression, especially in response to recent spates of murders of African American men under the hand of American police.
Fisher reasons that our experiences shape our theologies, and our experiences take place in a cultural, social and political context. Therefore, theology is contextual and rhetorical, and Black preachers do not preach Black liberation theology; they preach White evangelical theology in Black face, which produces a rhetoric that is socially conscious but not liberatory, and that the Black sermon therefore “needs to make space for a more militant and revolutionary rhetoric that the moment calls for.”

While this is not my argument, it is analogous to mine. Fisher seeks to expand the vigilance of Black religious militant rhetoric to reflect the context because rhetoric is contextual. I seek the consideration of forensic components in the iconic Black eulogy with the same contextual reasoning. Fisher’s argument, if plausible for a sermon in the Black church, is also plausible for an iconic Black Eulogy which, by any other name, is a sermon.

The long-settled construct of argumentation is to state a claim supported by reasoning, evidence and a warrant. As rhetor of the iconic Lewis eulogy, Obama states a claim against the official weakening of the Voting Rights Act:

“No John, we have got to fight even harder for the most powerful tool we have, which is the right to vote.”

Obama supports his claim by reasoning:

“The Voting Rights Act is one of the crowning achievements of our democracy. … We have to engage in protests where that is effective, but we also have to

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304 (Obama 2020, 6)
translate our passion and our causes into laws and institutional practices. That’s why John ran for Congress thirty-four years ago.\textsuperscript{305}

Obama states the evidence:

“But once the Supreme Court weakened the Voting Rights Act, some state legislatures unleashed a flood of laws designed specifically to make voting harder, especially, by the way, state legislatures where there is a lot of minority turnout and population growth.”\textsuperscript{306}

Obama states the warrant:

“It was an attack on what John fought for. It was an attack on our democratic freedoms. And we should treat it as such.”\textsuperscript{307}

Here, Obama claims to engage in protest to preserve the right to vote. He supports the claim with evidence of what has been done to diminish the efficacy of minority voting rights. He offers his reasoning for advocating the claim and shows by a warrant why the evidence supports the claim, arriving at a conclusive assumption that connects the evidence to the claim.

I assert that this rhetorical structure can be appropriate to undergird arguments in the rhetoric of the iconic Black eulogy in America, as Obama does here. This is especially so when the decedent is an iconic African American figure whose iconic status is not derived by any explosive talent but by the manner of death at the hands of police, creating the type of exigency ripe for argument against racial oppression, especially where unfair racial profiling is established as part of the context.

\textsuperscript{305} (Obama 2020, 6)
\textsuperscript{306} (Obama 2020, 6)
\textsuperscript{307} (Obama 2020, 6)
HOPE

Obama tells the audience that at the time of his presidential inauguration, Lewis said to him:

“‘[T]he election of Barack Obama is a major downpayment on the dream. The dream is not paid in full. There’s still work to do. We’ve come a distance, we’ve made progress, but we still have a distance to go.’” 308

The two gentlemen attended a virtual conference with young activists who were mobilizing their communities following the police killing of George Floyd. Speaking of the final time Obama would spend with Lewis reveals how Lewis’ legacy will continue to inspire the world for generations to come. “He could not have been prouder to see this new generation of activists standing up for freedom and equality, a new generation that was intent on voting and protecting the right to vote,” 309 Obama said in his eulogy, evincing for the community the hope Lewis experienced while witnessing his work live through the generations he inspired with his work.

During the Reconstruction Era, Black elected officials in the U.S. Senate and Congress were expelled, state legislatures followed the national trend, and the Jim Crow era was born. The Reconstruction Era stands for the proposition that gains in race relations and civil rights in America can be retracted. The recent removal by the United States Supreme Court of affirmative action laws in higher education underscores the need for positive vigilance in face of impermanence in a land where affirmative race-related changes in one generation can go unaffirmed in the next.

308 (Obama 2020, 7)

309 (Obama 2020, 7)
This positive vigilance is hope - the patient faith in positive outcomes. This is the hope that guides the African American community until fairness manifests. Without hope, despair results. With hope, there is faith that fairness will one day appear and prevail.

Obama demonstrates Lewis’ impenetrable hope regarding the victory at the John Pettus Bridge which Obama sees as emblematic of the hope of a people; and he includes it in the iconic Black eulogy. He first divulges the drama of what happened as the marchers proceeded to cross the Bridge:

“And we know what happened to the marchers that day. Their bones were cracked by billy clubs, their eyes and lungs choked with tear gas. As they knelt to pray, which made their heads even easier targets, John was struck in the skull. And he thought he was going to die, surrounded by the sight of young Americans gagging, and bleeding, and trampled, victims in their own country of state-sponsored violence.”

Obama paints the tension of life for Blacks in the south. The conversations that he imagines the police having in regard to the marchers clearly reveal the attitude of the status quo, that the segregated system that denies civic rights to Blacks is not only firmly in place but is vigorously advocated and enforced by civic authority:

“And the thing is, I imagine initially that day the troopers thought they’d won the battle. You can imagine the conversations they had afterward. You can imagine them saying yeah, we showed them. They figured they’d turn the protesters back over the bridge; that they’d kept; that they’d preserved a system that denied the basic humanity of their fellow citizens.”

Next, Obama refers to the world being able to visualize the injustice because of the presence of television cameras, a new phenomenon of the times. He had hope that the

310 (Obama 2020, 3)

311 (Obama 2020, 3)
attention and scrutiny of the world would align with the truth of mistreatment to bring the pressure of change to bear upon the malevolent culture of injustice.

“Except this time, there were some cameras there. This time the world saw what happened, bore witness to Black Americans who were asking for nothing more than to be treated like other Americans. Who were not asking for special treatment, just equal treatment, promised to them a century before and almost another century before that." 312

Speaking to the White audience, he makes it clear that these Americans were not asking for ‘special treatment, just equal treatment’ already established in the laws of the land. Similarly, the iconic Black eulogy offers the same visualization to a worldwide audience of the state of injustice. This is an opportunity to align the plight of the community with the pressures produced by a chagrined world in reaction to the drama of injustice. This is one of the reasons that the iconic Black eulogy is so significant an exercise of advocacy and protest against injustice.

Having set the stage with the dramatic facts of the reality of societal oppression, Obama begins to introduce the idea of the hope of change by characterizing Lewis’ experience in the aftermath of the brutalized march. He demonstrates by scriptural reference that though overcome with violence to the point of needing medical attention, Lewis is forward looking, undaunted, and filled with hope:

“When John woke up and checked himself out of the hospital, he would make sure the world saw a movement that was, in the words of Scripture, hard-pressed on every side but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair. Persecuted, but not abandoned. Struck down but not destroyed.” 313

312 (Obama 2020, 3)
313 (Obama 2020, 3-4)
Patience and faith must mature before hope is rewarded, and here, patience and faith finally come to light. The world takes note of how the drama of racial inequity and unfairness affected a former President of the United States:

“They returned to Brown Chapel. A battered prophet. Bandages around his head. And he said more marchers will come now. And the people came. And the troopers parted. And the marchers reached Montgomery. And their words reached the White House. And Lyndon Johnson, son of the South, said we shall overcome. And the Voting Rights Act was signed into law.”

In the Holy Scriptures, James wrote to the believers, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.”

Here is the hope of the iconic Black eulogy, a critical player in the process of dismantling the systems that produce and maintain race-based inequality. Along with sermons, protests, and the written word, the iconic Black Eulogy is a strong rhetorical force to keep vigilant in the fight against oppression. Molefi Asante, in *The Future of African American Rhetoric*, states that all through the future, an African American rhetor when he stands to speak will lose speaker credibility if he does not address correctives like reparations, reconsideration, and challenges to white supremacy. Addressing these correctives is important because a worthy public rhetor must have an ethical base. Speaking to correctives and challenging White supremacy supply the public rhetor with an ethical base in response to the unfairness that consternates life for the oppressed.

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314 (Obama 2020, 4)
315 (John 1:2)
316 (Asante 2014, 290)
These correctives are therefore always relevant when an African American rhetor stands to speak in public, and they are especially relevant for the rhetor of the Black Eulogy, as Obama foretells:

“And someday when we do finish that long journey toward freedom, when we do form a more perfect union, whether it’s years from now or decades or even if it takes another two centuries, John Lewis will be a founding father of that fuller, fairer, better America.” 317

Here, Obama echoes the forbearance and patience consistent with the direction of the Holy Scriptures which adjures us to be patient as hope for that we do not see.

“For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man sees why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.” 318

CONCLUSION

As rhetor of Congressman John Lewis's iconic Eulogy, President Barack Obama, by virtue of his position as the former leader of the free world, brought a presidential rhetorical distinction to the iconic Black eulogy. I have shown how Presidents of the United States reside in a rhetorical class of their own. Presidential rhetoric carries with it the continual responsibility to reconstitute the nation at the happening of a national tragedy. As former president and rhetor of an iconic Black eulogy, Obama had to acknowledge Congressman Lewis' death by citing the racial offenses against which Congressman Lewis fought. He then had to simultaneously put the nation at ease, validate the nation's precepts, and render its ideals stronger. An exemplar of audience

317 (Obama 2020, 7)
318 (Romans 8:24)
connection, Obama left both the nation and the community stronger as he subscribed to a bible-based hope that the community both expected and required.

More importantly, I have demonstrated that even as President, Obama, as rhetor of an iconic Black eulogy, was as subscribed to the Johnson tenets as any other rhetor of an iconic Black eulogy must be. His presidential status did not exempt him from the rhetorical constructs of the iconic Black eulogy; rather, it emboldened him to subscribe to those precepts and by so doing, he reified them with his power.

CONCLUSION OF THE DISSERTATION

The iconic Black eulogy began to develop rhetorically in the 1600s during the mid-Atlantic slave trade to American plantations where, at the death of the enslaved, informal comments and spoken observations developed into speeches whenever the enslaved were allowed to speak. After slavery, these orations evolved to conjoin with American rhetorical practices in the Greek tradition of eulogy rhetoric. They have now matured to become the iconic Black eulogy, a rhetorical iteration that has grown beyond the Greek tradition to reflect the peculiar experience of contemporary African Americans.

I have sought to demonstrate how the rhetorical underpinning of the iconic Black eulogy rests precisely within the Aristotelian genre of eulogy. Yet, through a lens of Black Liberation Theology rooted in the African American rhetorical tradition, I have used a close reading to analyze the Black eulogies of four African American icons, arguing that they subscribe to the four Johnson tenets of prophetic rhetoric in the African American rhetorical tradition. They are, therefore, proper iterations of prophetic rhetoric and should be included in the Academy.
This is especially evident in the Black eulogies of African American icons, where worldwide attention centers on the iconic Black eulogy as a cultural and rhetorical source of understanding, resolve, and hope of a community and a nation in response to racial oppression. I have shown that the role the iconic Black Eulogy plays in the aftermath of iconic Black death, and I have demonstrated how it has been a pivotal axis toward better race relations in America. This role of the iconic Black eulogy grew from cultural and rhetorical conditions not accounted for in the Aristotelian genre of eulogy.

The vital role first became apparent at the death of Frederick Douglass, whose accomplishments and death established him as the first iconic African American to die at the receipt of worldwide attention. Accordingly, the first iconic Black eulogy was delivered at his death by Dr. Alexander Crummell, who set the purpose for the iconic Black eulogy to not only extol the virtues of the deceased and uplift the community according to its Aristotelian rhetorical precepts but to assert the humanity and valor of the deceased and to act as a corrective social response to the unfair estimation and treatment that African Americans endured in the oppressive society of the era, an era that debated the humanity of Black people as a matter of civic, academic and political indulgence. Black Liberation Theology would later establish this purpose for eulogy pursuant to the African American rhetorical tradition.

Rev. Williams' value as rhetor of the Aretha Franklin eulogy demonstrates what not to do and how not to be as rhetor of an iconic Black eulogy. Williams was myopic and spoke for himself rather than for the community. Rather than conjoin, reknit, and encourage the family and the community, Williams' use of pessimistic rhetoric caused
disunity in the family and community, all in contradistinction to his duty as a rhetor of an iconic Black eulogy.

His rhetorical experience highlights the need for a prescriptive format for eulogies of iconic Black figures whose orations should fructify the oppressive experience of the Black community. By not subscribing to the Johnson tenets, Williams established the both the need and the efficacy of a prescriptive format for iconic Black eulogies.

Whenever the family and community sit to mourn an iconic Black decedent, they collectively reflect upon the reality that is oppression--how African Americans have survived it, how they will endure it going forward, and how only hope will sustain them as they endure. At such an opportunity, the rhetorical precepts that the Johnson tenets espouse are paramount if the rhetor is to achieve the purpose of the oration- to uplift, inspire, and give hope.

The iconic Black eulogy has now matured into a critically reliable national response to death by navigating the realities of oppression and racism in America, as the iconic Black eulogy of George Floyd demonstrates. The unparalleled public nature of Floyd's manner of death at the hands of state-sponsored violence catapulted him to iconic status, touching off protests around the world. Yet, his iconic Black eulogy, delivered by the Rev. Al Sharpton, was a source of peaceful protest seasoned with hope for the future and resolve for all races to embrace improved relations. This is significant. Considering the manner of Mr. Floyd's death, a more revolutionary eulogy in response to the manner of death might have precipitated civic mayhem. Mr. Floyd was choked to death for 9 minutes and 29 seconds by an officer of the law, a policeman who should have protected rather than killed Mr. Floyd- and all the world saw it on video.
Sharpton was encouraged to opt for peace and hope according to the rhetorical tradition of the iconic Black eulogy, a tradition firmly established in African American rhetorical tradition that Sharpton was subscribed to follow, and he did. Sharpton demonstrated that hope has two daughters: anger about how things are and courage to make sure things do not remain as they are by bringing peace and resolve to an anomalous situation. He thereby affirmed the iconic Black eulogy as a rhetoric of peace and conjunction at the hands of official mistreatment that ends in death.

Even as contemporary scholars pay more attention to African American rhetoric, they rarely use the Black eulogy for rhetorical analysis. By tracing the rhetorical and cultural development of the Black eulogy and by highlighting the development of its rhetorical constructs beyond its Aristotelian roots, I have demonstrated in this study that the iconic Black eulogy is an iteration of prophetic rhetoric rooted in the African American rhetorical tradition that is now ripe for inclusion in the Academy.

**Future Directions**

Harris and Hall’s hypothesis that the eulogy be constructed according to an epideictic/deliberative hybrid presents a unique opportunity to contemplate the iconic Black eulogy beyond its Aristotelian rhetorical precepts. The epideictic perspective underscores a cultural pride that rests upon the accomplishments of the deceased, whose iconic status invites the whole world as an audience and presents an invaluable opportunity to expose racial unfairness, express despair, and argue against it.

The deliberative function is especially relevant where dysfunction or unfairness color the situation. The deliberative function focuses on socio/cultural events that led to or were otherwise applicable at the time of death.
Television and the internet have made iconic Black funerals available to the general American public, exposing the public to the consistent loss of Black icons whose appeal crosses cultural boundaries. Simon Stow in his scholarly article on the iconic Black eulogy of Coretta Scott King, "Agonistic Homegoing: Frederick Douglass, Joseph Lowery, and the Democratic Value of African American Public Mourning," underscores the importance of public mourning in the African American tradition as a form of democratic participation. 319 By highlighting conflict and struggle, these mourning practices challenge the community to remain vigilant and active in the pursuit of justice.

Stow’s analysis is the most recent academic writing to suggest a shift in how the Black community responds to public mourning at the loss of an iconic Black figure. It therefore speaks to my analysis of the iconic Black eulogy and supports my argument that the Johnson tenets of prophetic rhetoric are a rhetorical substructure of the iconic Black eulogy worthy of the Academy. In view of Stow’s article, we should be on guard rhetorically to protect the power of the iconic Black eulogy to speak to power against oppression in a worldwide space.

At the outset of his article, he admits that this dichotomy “does not exhaust the totality of possible mourning practices… but function[s] as ideal types for the identification of two key public responses to loss,”320 romantic and tragic public mourning.


320 (Stow 2010, 681)
Stow advances that romantic public mourning generates a consensus-based understanding of democracy, while tragic public mourning generates an agonistic understanding of democracy.\textsuperscript{321} In sociology, agonism emphasizes conflict's positive and negative aspects rather than replacing disagreement with a generalist perspective for all sides of a conflict, as romantic public mourning does. Stow demonstrates how both romantic and tragic public mourning shape political outcomes.

Before considering Stow’s romantic/tragic distinction in public mourning, it is important to state that Stow does not advocate for the Romantic frame; rather, he sets it up as a contrast to the Tragic frame. He uses the Romantic frame as a foil to highlight the strengths of the Tragic frame. The Romantic frame tends to idealize and oversimplify, whereas the Tragic frame confronts the harsh realities and complexities of human experience.

I accord Stow’s perspective that the Romantic frame is a social phenomenon that needs to be countered with the more grounded and realistic approach of the Tragic frame. This strengthens my argument about the necessity of adhering to prophetic rhetorical precepts in iconic Black eulogies.

**Romantic Public Mourning**

In nomenclature, akin to the Romantic Movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, romantic public mourning seeks to suppress conflict through a sense of esthetics that focuses on a higher unity. It is consensus-based in that “it demands little

\textsuperscript{321} (Stow 2010, 681)
of its audience except a recommitment to the polity’s idealized vision of itself.”\textsuperscript{322} It tends towards homogeneity of perspective, predicated on an understanding of democracy as consensus that embodies a \textit{telos} of reconciliation that eschews politics.\textsuperscript{323}

As Loraux argued in “The Divided City, On Memory and Forgetting in Ancient Athens,” consensus commitment is an “ideology for the divided city” that seeks to unite divisions.\textsuperscript{324} I contend that applying the commitment of consensus approach to the iconic Black eulogy is problematic because it excludes minority viewpoints in the drive toward normalization in the general population.

In his funeral rhetoric for Mrs. King’s iconic eulogy, President George H. W. Bush dealt with romantic responses, as evidenced in an excerpt from his remarks: “I come from a rather conservative Episcopal Parish. I’ve never seen anything like this in my life… It’s absolutely wonderful …the music, itself. It’s just spectacular.”\textsuperscript{325} President Bush then praised the Kings for rejecting race bating and said he had recently watched the movie, Glory Road. This movie dealt with [racial] integration, with college students who “didn’t know what discrimination was until they saw this movie.”\textsuperscript{326}

In his remarks, President Bush neither mentioned nor advocated against the evils that MLK or his wife fought against and overcame. By not doing so, he seemed to

\textsuperscript{322} (Stow 2010, 682)
\textsuperscript{323} (Stow 2010, 682)
\textsuperscript{325} (Stow 2010, 690)
\textsuperscript{326} (Stow 2010, 690)
overlook the fact that race still divides, that oppression still exists and that something needs to be done about it. Stow even states that President Bush seemed to suggest that America was burying the memory of its previous divides and, in so doing, demonstrating the closure of race as a political issue in the United States.

Here, President Bush overlooked all the work, the battles, blood, and tears that precipitated an end to *de jure* strongholds for which the Kings fought and won. Instead, Bush used ideas that foster unity to the degree that the young people in Bush’s company had never heard of racial inequality, as though it were merely a thing of the past, which Stow labels as burying the memory of race as a political issue. President Bush’s use of romantic public mourning constitutes a consensus approach commitment.

The same commitment to consensus is characteristic of the romantic public mourning movement, where a decision is made for the whole in order to avoid conflict. This approach keeps the peace in favor of the majority view by suppressing conflict through a narrative of higher unity that stifles the minority view.

Another example of the commitment of consensus approach was reached by the Supreme Court in 2023 when it ruled that race could not be a factor in college admissions.327 In its effort to be fair to all students, the Court ruled that colleges and universities could no longer consider race as a specific basis for granting admission,328 a decision that had long benefited students of color in college education.

In an analogous manner, the Court’s ruling illustrates how the commitment of consensus approach to romantic public mourning in the rhetoric of eulogy can foster

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328 Students for Fair Admissions, 600 U.S. 3.
situations that disaffect minority perspectives by suppressing conflict. Through a narrative of higher unity, the romantic public mourning approach to eulogy suppresses the struggles of minorities in favor of acknowledging peace for the whole.

Stow suggests that the romantic approach to public mourning is in decline because of changes in African American political rhetoric; and he further suggests that a reconstituted approach to public mourning in American public mourning. 329 may replace the tragic approach in the national Black eulogy, which calls out differences and advocates for change, justice, and liberty. 330

I assert that until the oppression, racism, and unfairness that has disaffected an entire race of people exist no longer, the tragic public mourning approach to eulogy will not go away in American public mourning. As long as racial inequities exist in America, there will always be a need to speak against unfairness and inequality at the death of a Black iconic figure, without regard to national peace or togetherness.

**Tragic Public Mourning**

“Tragic public mourning, by contrast, is pluralistic, critical, and self-consciously political. It is built on an agonistic understanding of democracy in which conflict and disagreement are recognized as central to democratic politics.” 331 Agonism makes room for the expression of conflicts that are central to democratic politics, even to the point of acknowledging the legitimacy of opposing views. 332

329 (Stow 2010) 681
330 (Stow 2010) 681
331 (Stow 2010, 682)
Rev. Joseph Lowery and President Jimmy Carter, two rhetors who spoke at the funeral of Coretta King, embraced the agonistic approach central to the tragic public mourning tradition. Rev. Lowery, a Civil Rights leader, and President Carter generated public furor when they made agonistic remarks critical to sitting President George H. Bush’s Administration. President George H. Bush attended the funeral. Speaking of Mrs. King, Rev. Lowery said:

“She extended Martin’s message against poverty, racism, and war. She deplored the terror inflicted by our smart bombs on missions way-a-far. We know now there were no weapons of mass destruction over there, but … Coretta knew and we know there are weapons of misdirection right down here: Millions without health insurance, poverty abounds. For war, billions more, but no more for the poor.”

President Carter took the podium and implicitly critiqued Bush’s policies in Iraq, discussed the government surveillance of the King Family by the FBI, and drew attention to the Bush Administration’s warrantless wiretaps of citizens. Carter also said there were “not yet equal opportunities for all Americans…” Both comments generated public furor centered on the fact that a public funeral was neither the time nor place for politics. Stow suggests that the public reaction was part of a broader commitment to romantic public mourning and the sense of consensus in American politics. Stow reasoned that this romantic sentiment was even shared broadly by African Americans:

“As an African American, I was somewhat appalled by the fact that some of our ‘Black leaders’ used the funeral as a political platform to scold President Bush concerning the war… I appreciate the fact that speakers had a captive audience with the President, but I disagree with the time and place.”


334 CBS (2006)

335 (Stow 2010, 691)

336 (Stow 2010, quoting Venetia Poole, Atlanta Journal Constitution reader, 691)
The iconic Black eulogy, according to the tragic tradition as I have shown in this study, has always been the time and place to entertain, advocate, or speak against the unfair conditions that affect African Americans in America. Since African Americans are gaining legal parity with other Americans, Stow asserts that African Americans no longer desire or need to protest at public mournings. Yet, even Stow acknowledges by the close of his article that “it may be that African American responses to loss still constitute one of the last best hopes for inculcating a tragic perspective, not only in our practices of public mourning but also in the broader polity.” Stow’s acquiescence, because it reverberates, because it affirms the viability of the tragic public mourning approach to eulogy as espoused in the iconic Black eulogy.

Sharpton’s iconic eulogy of George Floyd was peaceful and non-revolutionary. However, Sharpton still had to acknowledge the deliberative truth of the events that led to Floyd’s death and therefore had to advocate against the events in the tragic public mourning tradition. Where the truth is as horrid as here, it takes precedence over the romantic tradition that Stow identifies.

Not Sharpton alone, but any rhetor of an iconic Black eulogy must be free to advocate against deliberative measures rooted in oppression and unfairness. As long as racism and oppression persist, there will always be a response against them, especially at a gathering of Blacks with a microphone at the funeral of a Black icon. Racial oppression is tragic and will always call for a tragic response at an iconic Black funeral, no matter any civic advancements.

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337 (Stow 2010, 693)
Accordingly, I have consistently emphasized the worldwide attention that the iconic Black eulogies garner, along with their reception and impact. I have noted institutional changes that flowed from them; and I have noted their effect on the Black community both emotionally, historically and as a measure of hope going forward.

Although all Black eulogies may be informed by the orations in iconic Black eulogies, all Black eulogies do not propound a rhetorical impact with power and effect on the White audience. It is the iconic nature of the iconic Black eulogy that enervates, projects, and propounds rhetorical impact, because it affects non-Black people in the world, including the people who have the power to ease the heaviness of oppression, as we witnessed however so briefly in the civic and corporate economic opportunities that flowed to minorities in an effort to be fair after the iconic Black eulogy of George Floyd.

This same rhetorical impact found its genesis in the iconic Black eulogy of Frederick Douglass for a different purpose - to reify the humanity and dignity of African Americans whose very humanity was the touchstone of civic debate at the time Douglass lived, a time when Blacks were thought to be less than human. White society heard in the Douglass iconic eulogy what it would have neither cared to hear nor have the opportunity to hear in a Black eulogy of the day. Indeed, a Black eulogy of the day would not have had a deceased subject worthy to advocate against the social, political, inhumane treatment of African Americans of the day.

The principal scaffolding of my study is conjoined to analyze the orations of four particular iconic African Americans whose funeral rhetors happened to be men. It is regrettable that women rhetors are scarcely cited, although I am happy to have drawn attention to several women rhetorical scholars whose reasoning I employ in my analysis.
This highlights the need in the Black community to seek women orators to deliver iconic Black eulogies. Though eulogies tend to be the province of pastors and there are fewer women pastors than men, the Black community must make purposeful efforts in the future to identify and subscribe to accomplished women with the requisite notoriety to be rhetors of an iconic Black eulogy.

Looking further afield, the iconic Black eulogy must carve a space within rhetorical form to establish an understanding of the Black experience. The iconic Black eulogy is an efficacious platform due to the attention that the world casts upon it at the death of an iconic African American. The iconic Black eulogy has the ability to invite the world into the communal realm where the memory of the African American experience is kept. Within that realm lie important keys to mutual understanding between the races. Understanding is a necessary platform from which to progress further in the long progression of peaceful and fair coexistence in a society that can only change for the better as it reconciles its past.

The iconic Black eulogy of Coretta King demonstrates a fight to retain the rhetorical impact of the iconic Black eulogy amid the economic and civic advances of oppressed minorities. That is, in face of the economic and political advancements in the African American community, there remains a need to extoll the deliberative function of the iconic Black eulogy, because until racism is non-existent, it will always be necessary to fight against it. I have demonstrated that the iconic Black eulogy provides an opportunity for that fight that must be fulfilled.

The iconic stature of U.S. Congressman John Lewis attracted a United States President as a rhetor, which gave occasion to mingle presidential rhetoric with African
American rhetoric to substantiate and further vivify the iconic Black eulogy by distinguishing its rhetorical impact differently from other Black eulogies.

Finally, the iconic eulogy of Franklin merely underscores the necessity of studying iconic Black eulogies because it missed the worldwide opportunity to fight oppression, unite the community, improve race relations, and uplift the family as it should have. The iconic eulogy of Franklin, arguably the most indulged singer of all time for those currently alive, attracted the attention of the entire world.

If fighting oppression and extolling the virtue of iconic decedents are primary and secondary reasons that insure the impact of iconic Black eulogies, then the tertiary reason is presented by Franklin’s iconic eulogy which failed its purpose and thus behooves scholars to attend to the codified components of an iconic Black eulogy as found in the Johnson tenets that I advocate in this study.

Although all Black eulogies may or may not carry possibilities of better understanding between the races, their colloquial nature puts them out of reach of the races that are a preponderance of a worldwide audience. Thus, the iconic Black eulogy is positioned for rhetorical impact in a manner that the Black eulogy is not, because unlike the iconic Black eulogy, the Black eulogy is not witness to the world or to the powers that can make a difference in how the world is run or how oppression can be spoken to, fought against and dethroned.

**Effect of Digital Media on the iconic Black eulogy**

The rise of digital media has transformed how communities engage with mourning and memorialization. Digital media platforms have significantly expanded the audience for Black eulogies, making them accessible to a global community and fostering
a sense of shared mourning and activism. Contemporary Black eulogies delivered through digital media often employ a blend of traditional oratory and modern multimedia elements. These eulogies leverage visual aids, music, and social media interactions to enhance their emotional and rhetorical impact. The use of digital storytelling techniques, as discussed by Adam Banks in "Digital Griots," helps preserve and disseminate cultural narratives in innovative ways.338

Rev. Al Sharpton's iconic eulogy for George Floyd, delivered amid the global protests following Floyd's death, exemplifies the power of the digital Black eulogy. The live-streamed eulogy reached millions of viewers worldwide, highlighting systemic racism and calling for justice while providing a platform for global solidarity and action.

President Barack Obama's eulogy for civil rights icon John Lewis also illustrates the intersection of traditional and digital media. I have demonstrated how Obama's speech, broadcast live and widely shared online, combined historical reflections with contemporary calls to action, emphasizing the ongoing struggle for voting rights and racial equality.

Scholars like John Postill in "The Rise of Nerd Politics: Digital Activism and Political Change," highlight the increasing role of social media platforms in facilitating public mourning and expanding the reach of memorial practices.339 Postill investigates


the impact of digital activism on political movements, focusing on how online platforms facilitate collective action.

Postill emphasizes the integration of digital tools in mobilizing and sustaining social movements, highlighting the synergy between online and offline activism. His work provides a framework for analyzing the role of digital media in contemporary Black eulogies, which often serve as catalysts for political engagement and activism. Global movements like Black Lives Matter have brought renewed attention to issues of racial injustice and police brutality, often using digital media to mobilize support and raise awareness. The intersection of these movements with traditional practices of mourning has created new dynamics for the delivery and reception of Black eulogies.

**Future Research**

Future research could explore additional iconic Black eulogies, analyzing their rhetorical strategies and socio-political impacts. Studies could also examine the evolving role of the Black eulogy in contemporary society, considering how digital media and global movements influence its development. Further exploration of the intersections between secular and religious rhetoric in the iconic Black eulogy could provide deeper insights into its cultural and rhetorical significance.

Future research can also explore the impact of emerging media platforms, such as TikTok and Clubhouse, on the delivery and reception of Black eulogies. These platforms offer new opportunities for creative expression and community engagement, potentially transforming how eulogies are experienced. The integration of digital humanities methodologies can enhance the analysis of Black eulogies. Using tools for digital text analysis, sentiment analysis, and multimedia archiving can provide new ways to study the
content, delivery, and impact of these eulogies.

There is also potential for studying the intersectionality of the iconic Black eulogy with other cultural and social movements worldwide. Understanding how the iconic Black eulogy resonates with and influences global movements for justice and equality can provide a broader perspective on its rhetorical power.

By examining these future prospects, scholars can continue to uncover the transformative potential of the iconic Black eulogy in contemporary society and its enduring significance in the fight for justice and equality. The power of the iconic Black eulogy to address systemic injustices, mobilize support, and inspire ongoing activism underscores its enduring relevance and impact in the digital age.

**Final Thoughts**

The iconic Black eulogy remains a powerful and enduring form of prophetic rhetoric, capable of addressing the deepest injustices and inspiring the highest aspirations of the African American community and communities beyond. By examining the eulogies of Frederick Douglass, Aretha Franklin, George Floyd, and John Lewis, this dissertation has highlighted the transformative potential of the Black eulogy to shape collective memory, foster unity, and mobilize action. As a beacon of hope and a call to justice, the iconic Black eulogy continues to play a crucial role in the ongoing struggle for equality and human dignity.
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