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# Monticello's Master: Sally Hemings and the Deconstruction of the Patriot Archetype

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## **Monticello's Master: Sally Hemings and the Deconstruction of the Patriot Archetype**

Betsy McCann  
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### **Introduction**

When visiting Thomas Jefferson's home and plantation, Monticello, tour guides attempt to aide visitors in experiencing history from a Jeffersonian perspective. While exploring Jefferson's parlor, study, dining room, and sleeping quarters, tour guides provide interesting and insightful narrative about the man and the mind that helped deliver freedom from the tyrannical British Empire. The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, Inc preserves his home and personal belongings. Its goal, as stated on Monticello's homepage is to "Preserve the legacy of this great man and American hero." As a country, we have been taught since elementary school that Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence, should be revered and honored as one of the Founding Fathers of our great nation. Our founding fathers are one of our greatest natural treasures, patriots that are honored as archetypes of "courage, intellect, achievement, and moral certainty" (Deggans, 1F). The October 31, 1998 issue of the journal *Nature* published the results of a DNA study that asserted that Thomas Jefferson was a father to more than country that could be regarded as England's bastard child, but a few bastard children of his own, with his slave Sally Hemings. Since this information has been brought into the public domain, historians, scholars, and citizens have debated its veracity. Even though the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, Inc., in its report released on January 26, 2000, argues:

Although paternity cannot be established with absolute certainty, our evaluation of the best evidence available suggests the strong likelihood that Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings had a relationship over time that led to the birth of one, and perhaps all, of the known children of Sally Hemings. (p.1)

Many newspapers throughout the country have, and continue to argue the opposite. Yet, in the quagmire of this socio-political debate, very rarely is it an issue that Sally Hemings was Martha Wayles Jefferson's half sister (Staples, 18), blurring the lines between family and property. Further, the role of Jefferson as a slave owner while one of the leading proponents of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all men is also avoided by those denying Hemings' descendants' claims to America's patriotic bloodline. Hemings and her children were the only slaves that were freed in Jefferson's will, bringing into question his motivation for doing so. While these questions are left open for historians to debate into perpetuity, the DNA study released by Nature, the responses to its findings and its implications present the larger issue for dissection.

Speaker and Gavel, Vol 41 (2004)

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Even though DNA evidence is one of the most reliable tools used in forensics, considered to be even more accurate than eyewitness accounts, (Bauman, 1991, p.1) a large part of the American populous still refuses to accept these allegations against Jefferson as little more than liberal-driven revisionist history. What is the cause for this discrepancy? Why is a society wholly reticent to accept this information that is generally accepted as truth, yet quick to condemn others, such as Richard Jewel, when less damning evidence is proffered? Many are left wondering whether the scandal is exposing founding father Thomas Jefferson or his namesake, the much more scandal-friendly William Jefferson Clinton. In fact, John Belohlavek, history professor at the University of South Florida even goes so far as to state, "Can you imagine a president accused of having (sex) with a woman many times his junior while in office?" (Deggans, 1F).

We explore the above discrepancy by posing the question: How does the Sally Hemings controversy work to deconstruct the popular conception of Thomas Jefferson as American Patriot through the use of converging and conflicting frames? Kenneth Burke's concept of poetic framing may be used to help answer this question, as Burke asserts history may be socially constructed via poetic frames which reject or accept a given social order or expectations. Historical figures are constructed as heroes, such as Abraham Lincoln, or as buffoons, such as Benedict Arnold, representing the choice to accept or reject the status quo. Burke asserts frames typically exist in isolation; as explored by a number of scholars. While focused and insightful research, the scholars only address the reaction to conflict within the context of an isolated Burkean frame (e.g., Moore 1992, 1996 and Buerkle et. al. 2003). Others have addressed texts in which two frames operate simultaneously, often examining a shift from one perspective to another as a rhetor shifts between rejection and acceptance. In their analysis of public response to Arizona governor Evan Mecham, Buerkle, Mayer, and Olson (2003) address the relationship of Burke's frames by exploring the simultaneous operation of contradictory frames in interpreting and responding to the same texts to establish how competing frames can synthesize to establish a new identity for a specific rhetor.

The rhetoric surrounding the Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings controversy proffers a similar opportunity for scholars, as divergent public responses are indicative of social image construction in the acceptance frame of Burke's epic, and the rejection frame of Burke's burlesque. Both frames work together in establishing a more complete version of the truth, yet work in opposition to one another to effectively prevent a full truth from ever being firmly established. Through our analysis, the tensions between Burke's frames may be more fully examined as well as the implications for the public perceptions of Thomas Jefferson as Americans are faced with rejecting or accepting a particular interpretation and construction of "social order."

### Burkean Frames and Attitudes

Kenneth Burke (1969) noted in *A Rhetoric of Motives* that the basic function of rhetoric is "the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents" (41). The idea of the need for critical action

through rhetoric is the paramount idea of Burke's acceptance and rejection frames. Burke argues all human beings operate through symbolic action, and this symbolic action inevitably creates a social order. The social order strives to create a hierarchy of power, and within the hierarchy Burke's notions of the acceptance and rejection frames are utilized. The problem arises when the individual violates the hierarchy. Feelings of guilt are associated with this violation, and the frames seek to address the problem. The function of the frames is to use them as a guide for punishing or accepting those that violate the hierarchy. Once another is punished, the individuals' feelings of guilt are alleviated. More importantly, the hierarchy is restored, when the audience member experiences the text that person has "vicariously reintegrated himself or herself back into the community, and the hierarchy, as well" (Brummett, 1994, 134). This notion of action by the individual is more fully expressed when Burke (1984) elaborates: "implicit in our theory of motives is a program of action, since we form ourselves and judge others in accordance with our attitudes" (pg. 92).

In personal correspondence with Malcolm Cowley, Burke noted "thinkers build symbolic bridges to get them across gaps of conflict" (Jay, 1988, 212). These symbolic bridges are the frames that help inform society of the validation or the negation of an artifact within the society as whole. This by no means infers the only individuals labeled as "thinkers" or "intellectuals" are building these symbolic bridges to classification. Jürgen Habermas (1984) provides justification for the nature of the Burkean classification through his ideas on rationality. Habermas (1984) notes rationality is the ability for individuals to "under suitable circumstances, provide reason for their expressions" (pg. 17). The above method strives to focus those "suitable circumstances" primarily on an individual within the political sphere, and the public's adaptation towards them.

The poetic framework of acceptance and rejection is created in Kenneth Burke's text *Attitudes Towards History*. Burke (1984) states his case for creating these paradigms for analysis succinctly: "We must name the friendly and unfriendly functions and relationships in such a way that we are able to do something about them" (ATH 4). Again, the notion of naming solidifies Burke's determinism to create a critical framework that allows the public to cast judgment on another individual within the societal framework. The two major categories are acceptance and rejection, but within each category there are three tenets requiring further analysis. The acceptance framework includes epic, comedy and tragedy which "validate and purify the dominating authority" (Buerkle, 2003, 190). The rejection framework is composed of burlesque, satire and elegy and are "methods of responding to a disruption of the social order as evidence of the system's fallibility and subsequently renouncing that particular order of authority and power" (Buerkle, 2003, 190). Before delving more deeply into these frames, a cursory examination of prior research must be taken. This examination will show that this method strives to produce a representation of the Burkean notion of poetic framing yet to be fully explored.

By taking a closer look into prior writings, the credibility of this method is solidified. The majority of the analysis on Burke's poetic framework utilized one of the six key tenets of the framework. The only known example of the ten-

ets being utilized concurrently is within Buerkle et al.'s (2003) *Our Hero the Buffoon: Contradictory and Concurrent Burkean Framing of Arizona Governor Evan Mecham*. Published in spring of 2003, this recent analysis agrees, "Other critics using Burke's definition of the poetic categories have considered texts ... as operating in two or more frames sequentially" (Buerkle et. al., 2003, 188). Buerkle et.al. (2003) suggests future researchers could "push the current analysis even further to find additional tensions among Burke's poetic frames" (pg. 203). This is the goal of our method. The frames discussed within *Attitudes Towards History* are not self-enclosing, for they encompass all things at all times. Thus, make an excellent model in which to frame a societal reality. These frames "have built-in capacities to transcend their own limitations" (Wolin, 2001, 104). It is impossible to stop analysis once the frame stops allowing the rhetor to fully express the notions accentuated within the sphere in question. Because of this, it is necessary to transcend the limitation of one frame and guide the rhetorical analysis amongst the applicable portions of the Burkean framework. Within this analysis, the applicable categorizations are: epic, comedy, tragedy and burlesque.

Within the acceptance frame, the epic attempts to create a schema that allows for the construction of a hero. Three key notions are important factors with the epic: teleology, inborn dignity, and projection device. But first, a summation of the function of the epic is necessary.

The most important notion within the epic classification is, for the purposes of this method, the idea of the "hero." A hero is an individual who has the ability to rise above the situation and meet the challenges presented. The epic frame "celebrates the ideals of the dominating order through the admiration of a hero who embodies the ideal attitudes and goals of the community" (Buerkle, 2003, 191). Burke (1984) advances the notion of the hero within his epic framework by calling upon the philosophy of Marx: "Marx could restore the possibility of the hero function of his group, with all the enrichment of the individual that such a possibility contained" (ATH, p. 95). Burke's (1984) analysis of Marx expounds upon the theory that the hero (within the epic frame) is one who absorbs the need for judgment amongst the members of society; the first example that comes to mind is the politician. The politician is precisely whom Burke had envisioned when designing the poetic forms and more specifically, the epic: "He [Burke] believed that conservative politicians had used simplistic frames to guide their thinking about social and political reform" (Wolin, 2001, 98). The individual within the society uses the epic frame to "share the worth of the hero by the process of 'identification'" (Burke, 1984, ATH, p.36). This, in turn, humanizes the hero and bodes well for the individual "and incidentally dignifies any sense of persecution that may possess the individual, who may also feel himself marked for disaster" (ATH 37).

Three key elements are applicable to the epic framework (and others, are explored later). The first is teleology. Teleology is "the perfection of a thing—the idea that within every concept or representation of a dog, for instance, is the concept of the perfect dog" (Brummett, 1994, 131). This notion of perfection is fitting for the epic framework because if the telos of the hero is not in place,

then the hero must be cast out for the judgment of the society, thusly appealing to the epic framework. The "teleology of symbols intersects with real life problems and solutions" because of the ability of the individual (or a group of individuals compose society) to place the hero within the appropriate paradigm (Brummett, 1994, 131).

The second element is inborn dignity. Burke utilizes this unification device when discussing Adolph Hitler, but the notion is fitting elsewhere. Burke elaborates "this categorical dignity is considered to be an attribute of all men, if they will but avail themselves of it, by right thinking and right living" (Rhetoric, 1969, 213-4). Again, through the Marxist lens established earlier, in conjunction with the framework of the epic acceptance paradigm, inborn dignity is a quality that must lend itself toward the hero. If the hero does not avail himself towards this dignity, he/she are at risk at placing oneself at the whim of society. When defining the hero, Burke emphasizes the importance of inborn dignity: "It [the hero] lends dignity to the necessities of existence, 'advertising' courage and individual sacrifice for the group advantage ..." (ATH, 1984, 35-6).

Finally, is Burke's concept of the projection device. The projection device serves as a method for the individual to distribute his or her own personal faults to the hero. The process of the projection device is "the ability to hand over one's ills to a scapegoat, thereby getting purification by dissociation" (Rhetoric, 1969, p.214). This process takes the blame for the action off the shoulders of the individual because the "individual realizes that he is not alone responsible for his condition" (Rhetoric, 1969, p.214). The notion of placing the guilt elsewhere instead of addressing the problem internally is a valuable one. Instead of changing patterns of behavior deemed negative, the individual is granted the autonomy to assign the guilt elsewhere "and he wants to have them 'placed,' preferably in a way that would require a minimum of change in the ways of thinking to which he had been accustomed" (Rhetoric, 1969, p.214). The projection device serves a two-fold purpose, first, to elevate the individual of any guilt. Second, this device serves to allow the individual to maintain current patterns of behavior and is not forced to change current rationalizations.

The next frame explored is tragedy. To fully understand this frame we must, first, delve into how Burkean tragedy differs from the Greek classical notions of tragedy. Second, how the tragic frame impacts the individual in conjunction with the hero and fits into the notion of acceptance. Finally, one of the most important functions of Burkean tragedy, the tragic hero must be fully explored.

Burke notes "tragedy flowered when the individualistic development of commerce had been strongly super-imposed upon the earlier primitive-collectivist structure" (ATH, 1984, p.37). This illustrates how the individual is affected directly by the hierarchy of society, and (identical to the epic frame) within the tragic frame the individual must take action. In tragedy, "hierarchy embodies authority, transgression represents disobedience and guilt arises from the 'fear of being excommunicated' by those in authority with whom we must communicate in order to minimize chaos and terror" (Moore, 1992, 110). Therefore, within the tragic frame, it is the hierarchy that preserves the social order and acts to inform society through these ideas of guilt.



The tragic frame fits into Burke's acceptance frame through the usage of the tragic hero. The tragic hero is "depicted as engaging in actions that are inevitable insofar as they arise out of situations or character flaws that members of the audience may have as well" (Brummett, 1994, 134). Since the actions the tragic hero is taking are worthy of being condemned, the tragic hero must be condemned as well. This alleviates the feelings of guilt within the audience because "When audience members experience a tragic text, then, they see their own guilt purged by seeing it punished and destroyed" (Brummett 134). This is a frame of acceptance because it allows the individual to "resign" himself to a sense of his limitations" (ATH, 39). This resignation is not a destruction of the psychology of the individual, thus, allowing society to remain intact. Because the audience believes the tragic hero's crime is their crime "the offence is dignified by nobility of style" and is not sacrificing anything but the tragic hero (ATH, 1984, p.39).

The third frame within acceptance is comedy. Two key elements within the concept of comedy must be addressed. First, the comic fool takes the position of the scapegoat within the comedic frame (just as the hero and the tragic hero have done). Second, the consequences of the comedic frame are deserving of attention. The comic frame supports the hierarchy through the use of humor: "humor uses incongruity to support the status quo in nontransitional states" (Wolin, 2001, p.104). The use of humor within the comic frame prompts the audience to accept the guilty act by believing the problem itself is not important. The notion of acceptance aids in maintaining a hierarchical and informed society.

The guilty act is always a result of the comic fool. The fool is not committing a crime but merely acting stupid: "comedy warns against the dangers of pride, but its emphasis shifts from crime to stupidity" (ATH, 1984, p. 41). Since stupidity is the cause "the guilty act was inevitable insofar as it was a common human failing. In this way, the comic fool is regenerated into the social hierarchy" (Brummett, 1994, p. 134). The allowance of the comic fool back into the hierarchy is the main principle of this acceptance frame, and allows us to draw consequences out of the comedic frame.

By alienating the comic fool as one who is a victim of stupidity "society sanctions symbolic enactments of social estrangement as a method for confronting transgression and binding people together" (Moore, 1992, p. 112). This allows comedy to remain within the acceptance framework because it continues to allow the individual to remain within their place in the hierarchy, yet place blame on another. The important aspect of this frame is not on the fool but "on the social role portrayed by the rejected clown for the good of the community" (Moore, 1992, p. 112). The nature of the comic frame does not allow for dire consequences of the comic fool. The worst consequences are "shame, humiliation, and embarrassment" which are quite a departure from the condemnation the tragic hero faces.

The comedic frame is linked to the burlesque frame in context of the fool. Within burlesque, the fool is one who "deliberately suppresses any consideration of the mitigating circumstances that would put his subject in a better light" (ATH, 1984, p.55). From this notion, the burlesque is placed within the rejection

framework. This framework is more negative because the fool is dismissing the social hierarchy to the point of a "reduction to absurdity" (ATH, 1984, p.54). The individual is therefore forced to reject the fool, as to not risk the complete collapse of the social order. The individual is forced to look beyond the actions of the fool and "not merely be equal to it, we must be enough greater than it to be able to 'discount' what it says" (ATH, 55). The audience must look above and beyond the actions of the fool. In so doing, the audience is merely rejecting the actions, not outright denouncing them. This is the fine line within the burlesque frame, because "only by keeping a distance between society and the imbecile, does burlesque avoid becoming an entirely cruel frame" (Buerkle, 2003, p. 191). The audience insists the fool "be separated from the clan to make clear what values are acceptable" (Buerkle, 2003, p.191). In this way, the formulation of ideals and values within the social order can occur. This is the relative genius of the imbecile; they force the social order to draw conclusions based on their behavior. Burke notes this through the political example of the French Revolution: "At the time of the French Revolution, when a 'bill of rights' was being drawn, some members of the Assembly suggested that a 'bill of obligations' be included to match them" (ATH, 1984, p. 55). The mere thought of solidifying the notions of the audience is something that does not occur within the acceptance frames. The rejection paradigm is, therefore, one of change.

An interesting aspect arises out of the burlesque framework, when Burke's notion of commercial use is applied. Again, this unification device appears in Burke's critique of Adolph Hitler's rhetoric. The term commercial use is self-explanatory when applied to the fool; he is looking to sell something. Within the context of Hitler it was the need for "financial backers for his movement" (Rhetoric, 1969, p.214). This is the ideal fit for the politicians, for through campaigning they are trying to win both favor and, in Burke's phrasing, "financial backers" (Rhetoric, 1969, p.214).

Through an in-depth analysis of Kenneth Burke's poetic forms, and the probable concurrence between epic, tragic, comic and burlesque we can now move forward in the analysis of the method to Thomas Jefferson and his liaison with Sally Hemings.

Analysis of the public reactions to the DNA evidence pertaining to the paternity of Sally Hemings's children reveal how Americans try to make sense of cultural norms of the eighteenth century as well as hold tightly to a historical construction of a founding father. Following a review of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, Inc.'s report, a dissection of the dissenting minority report demonstrates the use of the epic frame in constructing a new identity for Jefferson as well as defending a historical construction. Further, by exploring the media and public responses to this information, a deeper understanding of the use of epic and burlesque frames in tandem can be garnered, as well as an illumination of the oppositional forces at play when both frames are used concurrently.

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### DNA Does not Lie, Unless the Populos Says It Does

President of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, Inc., Dr. Daniel P. Jordan, released the official statement on the TJMF research committee report on Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings on January 26, 2000. Stressing the foundation's commitment to scholarship and Jefferson's legacy in regard to the "complex and extraordinary plantation community that was Monticello" (2), Jordan asserts that "honorable people can disagree on this subject" (1) but the Foundation concurs with the DNA findings. The report assesses the methods of the DNA study and reviews a number of documentary sources such as Jefferson's personal correspondence, recollections from community members and other freed slaves as had previously appeared in other print sources, and a number of secondary sources pertaining to Jefferson, Hemings, and slavery in general. The report initially identifies a number of scientifically proven facts regarding the DNA evidence, primarily other men considered to have fathered Hemings' children are not DNA matches, and that Eston Hemings was a descendent of Field Jefferson, Thomas Jefferson's father. This evidence does not prove Thomas Jefferson as the father. However, the groups of proven facts related to Sally Hemings construct a more precise link to Jefferson, as her birth patterns match Jefferson's documented Monticello visitation schedule, but not the documented visitation of any other Jefferson male. Further, the descendents of Hemings passed down through generations an oral history of lineage linking back to Thomas Jefferson. In 1873, Madison Hemings, another of Sally's children asserted his siblings (Beverly, Harriet and Eston) were all fathered by Jefferson, and there were no conflicting reports the children had different fathers, and all bore a striking resemblance to Jefferson. The Foundation's concludes the DNA study was conducted in a scientifically valid manner; based on DNA, documentary and statistical evidence Jefferson was likely the father of Eston Hemings; the nature of Jefferson and Hemings's relationship was unclear (whether she was a lover or merely property); and the further implications of the relationship should be explored and used to increase community knowledge and public understanding.

The dissenting minority of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, Inc. released its minority report on April 12, 1999, eight months before the official report. Citing historical evidence as its primary reason for dissent, the employment of Burke's frames starts to become clear. The minority report is contending because the argued events took place two hundred years ago, only a few people would have known the truth, and only one left direct evidence in re-

sponse to the claims. On July 1, 1805, Jefferson wrote a letter to Robert Smith, Secretary of the Navy stating,

"You will perceive that I plead guilty to one of their charges, that when young and single I offered love to a handsome lady.... It is the only one founded on truth among all their [Federalist] allegations against me.<sup>1</sup>"

The ambiguity of this statement is dismissed as the committee simply states, "How can it be [ambiguous]?" (2). The minority report argues Jefferson's nobility as a founding father outweighs scientific evidence because he displays a "character as great as the situation" (Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 42), placing their construction of Jefferson well within the epic framing of "hero." The minority report asserts, "None of the others who would have had first hand knowledge of the facts have put down statements in their own handwriting and their own words" (p.2) even though it is common knowledge that in the eighteenth-century slaves were typically discouraged from reading and writing. The acceptance frames present in the minority report reinforce the idea Thomas Jefferson was a man "above" dallying with a slave and work to firmly place Jefferson in the role of hero, and at times in the position of martyr, as the minority report argues to not have "historical accuracy overwhelmed by political correctness," (5) which would make Jefferson's historical significance "meaningless" (5). The minority report illustrates Burke's notion of how discrediting a national legend may be personally upsetting to those who believe in the hero as ideal, because the follower's sense of personal identity and worth is too wrapped up in the hero's persona. The minority report celebrates Jefferson's accomplishments in his lifetime and reinforces his "significantly powerful denial" as stated in his letter to Robert Smith. The minority also employs the use of the burlesque frame to reduce the claims made against Jefferson as outside the norm of Jefferson's expected person. By using the two frames, the dissenters hope to establish a significant psychological distance between "their" Thomas Jefferson and the accusations presented against him.

The majority of those within the media and the general public that accept Jefferson's paternity of Hemings's children as truth, continue to use the epic frame to construct a new identity for Jefferson that is not completely removed from historical constructions of "patriot." Page (1998) argues, "[Jefferson receives] high marks for his public performance, low marks for his private behavior." (A32). The new wrinkle to this, however, is the utilization of the burlesque frame to support the Jefferson's new identity by asserting that due to cultural norms of the time it would be somehow ridiculous to think that Jefferson did not have sexual relationships with the slaves on his plantation, as Deggans (2000) notes, "Jefferson always saw the moral evil of slavery, but he couldn't get out of it." (1F). This intersection of Burkean framing devices illustrates how when the burlesque frame is used in conjunction with the epic frame, historical constructions and values can remain intact, but with greater depth, understanding, and embracing a larger truth.

Those who disagree with the DNA evidence also use both of Burke's frames to further assert their position. Media and public dissenters seek to more firmly entrench Jefferson's identity within the epic frame, ideally isolating him

so thoroughly that accusations become immaterial to the legacy and the icon that dissenters are defending. As one respondent claimed, "The debate shows how far the politically correct crown will sink in order to defame one of our nation's greatest statesmen." (Sample, 2000). Dissenters place every claim well within the burlesque frame by arguing that the very fact that the accusations were made in the first place is completely and thoroughly ridiculous. Dissenters usually refer to Thomas Jefferson's mental resolve and supreme intellect as reasons why he would never participate in a situation that boiled down to a "moral impossibility" (Jefferson and Sally Hemings, 1998). Basically, Jefferson was too busy being the epic hero for any element of his life to ever cross over into the burlesque frame. Leading Jeffersonian scholar and disputer of the Hemings claim, Joseph Ellis, author of *American Sphinx*, referred to the Hemings allegations as a "tin can tied to Jefferson's reputation." (Page, 1998). Burlesque framing functions as a means of defense for the dissenters, when presented within the greater context of Jefferson's epic persona. For example, John Works, a member of the Monticello Association stated after the group voted to deny Hemings descendants membership stated the vote should, "kill this forever so it doesn't keep coming up again." (Works, 2002), and continued to assert that the information about Hemings's children was nothing more than a myth. No mention was made of the scientific validity of the evidence, but Works asserted that a "blue-ribbon panel" of scholars and "just plain patriotic citizens" (Burritt, 2000) had unanimously decided that the allegations were untrue. Further, the Monticello Association, in that vote, chose "not to recognize the Hemings descendants in any... form," and argued that the evidence claimed that Jefferson "forsook his most sacred oath and was a monstrous scoundrel." (Oliphant, 2002). Dissenters place Sally Hemings, her children, and the claims of Jefferson's paternity in a burlesque frame that seeks to construct the allegations as outside of the norm of historical accuracy and possibility.

When combined with epic framing, dissenters construct a two-sided message that constructs a new identity for Jefferson, and further supports their assertions. Non-believers reframe Jefferson in light of the accusations by creating a Jefferson that is more myth than man. Dissenters solidify their claims that Jefferson is still a patriot in spite of the allegations of miscegenation via their use of the burlesque frame within the epic acceptance frame. When used together, the claim of Jefferson as a man of mythic proportions rising above allegations of miscegenation allows people to believe that the largesse of the value of the content of the epic frame dissolves any concerns within the burlesque frame, thus using acceptance and rejection mechanisms to promote the same ideology.

### Conclusions

It is first necessary to examine what this analysis can tell us about why people reject information. Burke's assertions construct a process by which people rationalize information they receive. This information, once it is placed within a specific frame or frames, is then responded to in a way the information receiver deems appropriate. Key to Burke's assertions is that receivers always place information in the frames of their own choosing, therefore establishing perception

as a choice as to whether to reject or accept information. Information consumers, then, will always and can always find reason to reject new information, even with a preponderance of evidence demonstrating the opposing viewpoint to be true. The analysis of Burkean framing even illustrates how acceptance frames can be constructed to aid in the rejection of information, and rejection frames can be used to aid in the acceptance of information.

Within the analysis of the Hemings/Jefferson issue it must also be considered what the general acceptance or rejection means for the construction of Jefferson as patriot and the construction of historical events. Both believers and non-believers still consider Jefferson to be a patriot via these constructions. Those that believe he fathered Eston Hemings still generally view Jefferson as a patriot, arguing that no matter behaviors he engaged in as an aspect of his personal life, his contributions to the creation of American society still provide adequate support for his role as patriot. More appropriate to believers' acceptance of claims is the dialogue that has been opened among acceptors regarding the practice of founding fathers owning slaves. The primary question arising from their reconstruction of Jefferson as patriot stems around the hypocrisy of guaranteeing life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness while contributing to the subjugation of a race of people. This dialogue will continue among believers as future generations try to rationalize historical contexts for actions that are dubious in modern society. Dissenters reconstruct Jefferson in spite of the allegations in a manner that diminishes the value of the burlesque when placed in the greater context of the Jefferson hero epic. This reframing can have far-reaching implications as we construct heroes not based on the larger picture of the patriot as person, but the patriot as a collection of societal contributions.

From a perspective of historical values, dissenters present an interesting conundrum for consideration, do we only judge leaders based on contributions, or based on the bigger picture of who the person was as an American citizen? This even lends itself to modern interpretations as different factions of society downplay issues such as Bill Clinton's marijuana use and George W. Bush's cocaine use. It is not the information that necessarily shocks the American sense of historical values, but rather the accuracy of American historical memory. Further, the implications for historical accuracy should be considered in light of the scientific evidence in so far as "the black oral tradition is sometimes more reliable than the official "white" version of history." (Staples, 2003). Despite denials by white historians (*A Presidential Indiscretion*, 1998) the oral tradition of black history survived, ultimately being supported by numerous types of evidence and scholarly opinions. This offers perspective on the very foundation of our historical understanding. What should be accepted as truth? What perspective is the most accurate and valid? Wellman (2000), perhaps, states it best, "When the lies about this country are replaced with the truth we will be able to live together."

In regard to Burkean methods, the use of acceptance and rejection frames to accomplish the same purpose provides greater insight to the flexibility and breadth of Burke's methodology when applied to a variety of events. Conflicting frames used in congruence illustrate the lack of absolutes in historical reconstructions. Further, this congruence illustrates the communicative ability of in-

Speaker and Gavel, Vol 41 (2004)

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formation consumers to weigh differing perspectives in light of one another and then use both sides of an issue to promote a broader notion of acceptance or rejection. This application can be used to examine the construction of argumentation that uses varying perspectives to promote an ideology or belief system. Further, future research should build upon this analysis by exploring other situations where conflicting frames are used in tandem. Additionally, research should explore using Burke's frames in combination with other perspectives such as feminist theory, postmodern theory, and perhaps even postcolonial perspectives. The combination of using Burke's foundational approach with more modern rhetorical approaches could lend greater insight to all of these perspectives, as each argues a basic power structure that is used in different ways to communicate different meanings.

While the issue of whether or not Thomas Jefferson fathered Eston Hemings will never be resolved with one hundred percent certainty, it is evident that Thomas Jefferson's identity as patriot remains firmly embedded in American culture. Perhaps this controversy can raise the necessary questions of where we place values as a society, and teach us to be critical of who we declare as America's heroes. Although the issues in this discussion revolve around shades of gray, scholars and the public will continue to consider the information in terms of black and white. Regardless, this discussion lends poignancy to whether or not we should construct an American identity of mythological proportions or one that is reflective of all of America's citizens, regardless of heritage.

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