

Project 3: Genre Remediation

Assignment: In “Navigating Genres,” Dirk explains that genres are “tools to help people to get things done” (252). For the final assignment of the semester, you will be using this approach toward genre to present what you’ve done this semester to a new audience. In order to do this, you will remediate your literacy narrative OR rhetorical situation analysis into a new genre of your choice. For example, you might produce a video, create a website, design a twitter campaign, compose a photo essay or a song, write an op-ed, or work in any other number of genres.

The final product of your remediation will be an actual text in your new genre as well as a reflective essay and a brief presentation, addressed to the class, that answers the following questions:

- What new exigence does your remediated text respond to and why?
- Who is the intended audience(s) of your remediated text? Why did you choose to address your writing to this audience(s)?
- What were the most significant constraints you faced writing in this new rhetorical situation and how did you address them in your writing?
- What genre is your remediated text and how does this genre help you respond to the new rhetorical situation you’re writing in?

Tips for Writing and Research:

- In order to successfully remediate your work into a new genre you will need to use your awareness of the rhetorical situation to select a genre that best meets the demands of this new situation.
- Once you have selected a new genre, you will need to find other examples of this genre and research its conventions.

Due Dates: Proposal Nov. 9; First Draft Nov. 19; Final Dec. 3 / Presentations will take place during the week of Nov. 26.

Assignment Specifications: Below are the criteria I will use to assess each student’s project.

The remediated text

- Is written in a genre different than the original text
- Is written in a genre appropriate to the new rhetorical situation
- Reasonably follows the conventions of the new genre

The reflective essay

- Identifies the new audience for the revised text
- Identifies the new exigence of the revised text
- Identifies the genre of the revised text and why this genre was selected, based on audience and purpose
- Explains the revisions the author made to change the genre and why
- Is at least 900 words

The presentation

- Covers the first four bullet points above (requirements for the reflective essay)
- Is presented orally, in person, and not read from a script
- Lasts from 4 to 6 minutes

FELON
DISENFRANCHISEMENT



IOWA



KENTUCKY

Rhetoric on Felon Disenfranchisement: Comedy to Cartoon

Comedian John Oliver recently covered felon voting rights on his late-night talk show, *Last Week Tonight*. In this September 2018 episode, he stressed the issue of felon disenfranchisement, particularly in Florida, where the permanently disenfranchised population was most significant. As of the November 2018 midterm elections, most felons in Florida have regained their voting rights through an amendment to the state's constitution, but two states, Kentucky and Iowa, still permanently disenfranchise all of their felons. In response to these two states that still permanently disenfranchise, I remediated John Oliver's segment into a political cartoon aimed at increasing awareness of felon disenfranchisement and persuading viewers to support reform.

I decided to theoretically publish my cartoon on the *U.S. News* website, which is part of the reputable *U.S. News & World Report*. I chose *U.S. News* because the site uploads weekly cartoons, is free to access online, and has a broad audience. The entire platform reports that its audience consists of over 300 million people with various political tendencies, with about thirty-one percent Democratic, twenty percent Republican, twenty-six percent Independent, and twenty-three percent identified as other. Of course, not all 300 million look at the weekly cartoons, but it is reasonable to assume that many people with mixed political affiliations do view them. This audience differs from Oliver's, which also consisted of millions of people, but instead was primarily liberal. The *U.S. News* audience was appropriate for my cartoon since I focused on felon disenfranchisement in multiple states, which needs national attention from all political parties in order to be changed.

Felon disenfranchisement may be described as an exigence, a term which rhetorician Lloyd Bitzer uses to describe a problem in need of change that invites rhetorical response. The

exigence of the original work, John Oliver's segment, was the 1.4 million Floridians who were unable to vote because of felon disenfranchisement. These Floridians were also part of a broader exigence, the six million disenfranchised felons throughout the nation. Since Florida restored felon voting rights in November, I remediated Oliver's message to respond to the exigence in the two states that still permanently disenfranchise like Florida did. Therefore, the exigence of my remediation is the harsh felon disenfranchisement in Iowa and Kentucky.

I chose to respond to this new exigence through the genre of political cartoon because of the purpose I wanted to fulfill, which was to spread awareness of felon disenfranchisement and to gain support for voting law reform. In "Navigating Genres," Kerry Dirk emphasizes purpose as the force behind both creating and choosing genres, since genres function to achieve actions. A number of genres could have been effective for the action I aimed to achieve, such as an article or a website. However, after a brief search online, I only came across one cartoon about felon disenfranchisement, so I thought my cartoon could contribute uniquely to the discourse around felon voting laws. Additionally, the short amount of time needed to interpret a cartoon gives the genre an edge over others when considering time constraints. These functional advantages, plus my personal interest in producing visual rhetoric, led to my decision to use the political cartoon genre.

In changing Oliver's TV segment into a political cartoon, I remediated from text to visual. Sam Corbett explains remediation as "a subjective distillation and representation of a particular set of ideas expressed in the original text," and he recommends looking for "main themes or concepts" when remediating from text to visual. By focusing on these main themes and concepts, I produced a highly simplified version of Oliver's message. My cartoon consists of a jumble of states positioned as if they are standing in line to vote, representing the forty-eight

states that restore felon voting rights. Kentucky and Iowa are standing off to the side, and signs on the polling place read “Vote Here” and “Except you two,” the latter with an arrow pointing to Kentucky and Iowa. A line of stanchions separates Kentucky and Iowa from the rest of the states, making the two appear especially excluded. This image reduces Oliver’s message, which included multiple arguments as well as commentary and statistics, to the simple concept that felons in all states get to vote except in Kentucky and Iowa. Also, although various political parties may react differently, the cartoon’s message comes off as politically neutral, which is ideal for the *U.S. News* audience, just as Oliver’s comedy and rhetoric worked for his liberal audience. As for the cartoon’s design, I followed conventions of the genre by keeping the overall image simple, drawing in a cartoonish, almost messy style, using variations of the common, all-caps, handwritten font, and creating a playful signature. I also considered how symbols and colors would be interpreted by my audience, as Corbett suggests. For instance, I included the American flag on the “Vote Here” sign to evoke irony through its symbolism of freedom and democracy in the presence of harsh voting laws. I also placed Florida in clear view to celebrate the state’s recent amendment. I decided to make the cartoon black and white, as political cartoons conventionally are not in color unless it either adds to or does not distract from the cartoon’s meaning. In this case, colors would have been distracting, such as by red- or blue-colored states appearing Republican or Democratic. Decisions such as these symbols, colors, placements, and texts allowed me to communicate my intended message, while following the genre’s conventions guaranteed that the audience’s expectations of a political cartoon would be satisfied.

Though I changed the genre, exigence, and audience of Oliver’s TV segment to create something different, I did not necessarily create something new. By keeping the essence of

Oliver's message, the conventions of political cartoons, and the content from current felon disenfranchisement information, I created a text that came mostly from other texts. I found that remediating with an awareness of remediating reminded me of, as filmmaker Kirby Ferguson puts it, the "derivative nature of creativity," in which all ideas come from other ideas. With this aspect of creativity in mind, I credit a lot of the effectiveness of my cartoon to Oliver, other cartoonists, and those who published information on felon voting rights. If my cartoon were actually published, perhaps someone would remediate it to create something new, yet not new, from it as well.

Works Cited

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