

## Nonviolent Crimes Should Mean No Jail Time

In 2018, the United States of America had more than 10.8 billion is legal marijuana sales (“Last Prisoner”). However, there are still thousands of individuals being arrested and serving multi-year sentences for minor possession of marijuana. It's also no secret that America has a long history of police brutality, particularly towards people of color. POC in America are much more likely to be arrested for marijuana use or possession, despite using it at similar rates to white people (NORML). The Last Prisoner Project is trying to fix these issues, and these same issues are responsible for the death of Marvin D. Scott III. My genre remixes will educate American citizens and give them opportunities to help create change on these large (petition) and small (infographic) scale issues.

The rhetorical situation my petition responds to is the ongoing issue in America of arrests and prison sentences in relation to nonviolent crimes, primarily involving marijuana, mostly at the expense of POC. The first exigence is the fact that so many Americans are given prison sentences for victimless crimes (mainly marijuana possession), and the significant damage that a prison sentence can do to a person. Another exigence is the lack of knowledge your average American may have about this issue. The petition is full of facts stating the damages a prison sentence can do an individual, for example: “A very alarming 60% of all prisoners with four or less previous arrests are arrested again within five years of their initial release from prison [(James)]” (Wexler, “The Inconsistencies”). The petition also states the concerning amount of prisoners in America compared to the rest of the world: “America accounts for 25% of the world's prisoners despite being less than 7% of the world's population. [(Lee)]” (Wexler, “The Inconsistencies”). The petition observes that this discrepancy is the result of the fact that the American prison system is a for-profit business,

and this results in overpopulation as well: “The American prison system is a billion dollar industry which makes profit. This is a key reason why 18 states reported in 2014 that their prisons were over 100% capacity [(Liebelson)]: the more people in prison, the more money is made” (Wexler). The reason there’s a ‘need’ for people who commit victimless crimes to go jail is because the prison system makes profit, and the petition points out that this fact along with the lack of rehabilitation in the prison system is why it has been so detrimental to so many Americans and needs immediate, significant change. The petition also points out that POC are targeted by these issues more: “POC are over 4x more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession than a white person [(NORML)]” (Wexler, “The Inconsistencies”). The second exigence is addressed in the petition by the simple act of the petition’s existence, with the hope that each reader becomes educated and is motivated enough to share it with their peers.

The audience of the petition is all American citizens. This is implied in the petition: “This is why it is vital that we eliminate prison sentences for victimless crimes - the effect it can have on one's life is detrimental” (Wexler, “The Inconsistencies”). The use of ‘we’ indicates that it is up to the reader along with their peers to create change. The goal of the petition is to be seen and shared by as many people as possible, to raise awareness and create change at the same time. In order to begin to solve the exigences presented, it’s going to take a lot of American citizens to get on board. The constraints are those who don’t care to read, sign, or share the petition as well as those responsible for the petition being made in the first place.

This differs from my Project 2 paper because I just briefly touched on these large-scale issues and did not present an isolated rhetorical situation involving them. My Project 2 paper

presented a rhetorical situation of a specific incident that was the result of these large-scale country-wide issues. I felt it was very important to address these large-scale issues in a more in-depth manner. One of the exigences in my Project 2 paper did address the history of mistreatment towards POC by police, and for Project 3 I wanted to significantly expand upon this idea and incorporate the need for prison reform as well.

I chose the genre of a petition because it kills two birds with one stone. The petition educates the reader on these important issues, and upon the conclusion of their reading it gives them an opportunity to sign the petition and to share it with others. One of the exigences for this genre was the lack of knowledge and awareness on these issues, and the other was the issue's existence. Through the petition, each person becomes educated on the issue, shares the petition to their peers, and through this process begins to make leeway towards change (even if it is minor). The petition's covering of both exigences in this rhetorical situation made it a great fit. The petition can solve both exigences by doing its intended purpose – being signed and shared. Through this process many individuals will become educated and if enough signatures are garnered change could be made. The completed petition will be sent to senators, lawmakers, philanthropists, lobbyists, and anyone in a position or with means to push-start a movement for change.

In order to make a persuasive petition, I simply call it how it is. I made sure that the petition was written not out of a manner of opinion, but out of a manner of fact. The facts presented in the petition paint a clear picture of all the wrongdoings in the prison system in relation to marijuana arrests that primarily target POC. I then used my own words to show how all the facts were related and why immediate action is needed. I used a direct and assertive tone and unquestionable word choice to not leave room for doubt. I did not use

words like ‘should’, I used words like ‘needs’ in order to assert the urgency of the matter, and that it shouldn’t be a debate. I made sure the reader understood that change is needed, and not that change is wanted. I made sure the reader understood why change is needed as well: “A victimless crime, off a substance that generated 10.8 billion in legal sales in 2018, resulting in jail time and all the terrible hardships that come with is something that simply needs to stop” (Wexler, “The Inconsistencies”).

My second rhetorical situation, which I’ve used to create an infographic, is the case of Marvin D. Scott III. The exigences are the arrest, death, and lack of justice for Marvin Scott. Marvin Scott was arrested on March 14, 2021 for minor marijuana possession. Scott, a diagnosed schizophrenic, was having a mental episode at the time of his arrest. Police did not follow proper protocols as they restrained, pepper sprayed, and covered his head with spit hood all over a potential misdemeanor. Scott was taken to a local hospital after exerting ‘strange behavior’ where he was later pronounced dead the night of his arrest. An independent autopsy determined the likely cause of death to be from the physical struggle of the restraint and asphyxia from the spit hood. The infographic has five sections, which go into detail on these exigences: “Why was Scott arrested?”, “How was Scott arrested?”, “How did Scott die?”, “What has happened since?”, and “How can you help?” (Wexler, “Justice”). The arrest, death, and lack of justice for Marvin Scott are all addressed in this infographic. For the arrest and death, I described the details of each to the reader. As for the lack of justice, I gave an update on the case and gave ways for the reader to do their part in attempting to get justice for Marvin Scott.

As with the petition, the audience is all American citizens. The goal of the infographic, similarly to the petition, is to be seen by as many people as possible. The goal is to educate

the audience on the exigences and then change can begin. This is made clear in the last section, as it is addressing everyone: “How can you help?” The use of ‘you’ indicates that each person who reads the poster can help solve the issues described in it. The infographic gives opportunities for the audience to be “mediators of change” (Bitzer 7) with the links and phone numbers on the infographic. The infographic gives the phone number of the Collin County District Attorney, a GoFundMe to the Scott family, a link to the Last Prisoner Project to learn more, and a link to the petition in an attempt to prevent more incidents such as Scott’s from occurring again. The constraints are those who read the poster and decide to not help or spread the word, and those responsible for the poster being made in the first place.

This differs from my Project 2 paper because the rhetorical situation is now from the infographic rather than the Last Prisoner Project tweet. The Last Prisoner Project is still used in the infographic as the image at the top is the Last Prisoner Project’s and there is a link to the LPP website at the end of the infographic. The exigence of the death of Marvin Scott remains from my Project 2 paper, but I wanted to incorporate his initial arrest and the aftermath of Scott’s death to paint a clearer picture than my Project 2 paper of the entire situation. I painted a clearer picture by including more details from the start of Scott’s arrest, and even more details about the aftermath of Scott’s death. I felt it was necessary for people to know there have been around 40 protestors each night for last four weeks outside of Collin County Jail in support of Scott, so I included that in the infographic. I did not eliminate anything from my Project 2 paper, but just expanded on it in Project 3.

I chose the genre of an infographic for similar reasons I chose the petition: to educate and give opportunity to create change in the same place. The infographic presents the case of Marvin Scott in an organized and factual manner. I believe a reader who had yet to become

familiar with the case would come away with a genuine understanding of what happened, and if they would like to know more the infographic provides a link for that as well as multiple links and phone numbers for ways they can help. The infographic fits the situation as it is a great format to relay the case of Marvin Scott while having an opportunity to provide more ways to help. Unfortunately, the first two exigences cannot be solved, but the infographic gives ways for the reader to do their part in trying to solve the third exigence (lack of justice).

In order to make a persuasive infographic, I followed a similar strategy to my petition. The first priority was to educate the reader on the situation with facts. All the public knowledge on the case is summarized in individual sections to ensure the reader has a genuine understanding of the situation. The facts of the unjust treatment of Scott, and how his arrest was inhumane are all there. There shouldn't have to be any further persuasion than that for one to be inspired take action. The facts are the facts; all I could control was the manner in which I presented them. I presented them in individual sections titled with questions to peak the reader's interest. Breaking it up this way not only highlights the exigences, but also is more likely to entertain a reader than if it was presented as one big block of information.

Both genres allow for the audience to be educated and make change on these important issues and situations. These issues have been prevalent in America for decades, and the time for change is now. These genres are the bare minimum of what can be done, but it's not easy when it is up to the general public to create real change. The key is to be persistent and not to let up. We have to use our voices and the goal of these artifacts was to give the audience an opportunity to do that, as well as to be educated on these issues. Moving forward, we take it one day at a time and continue to demand accountability for all those responsible for the injustices in our prison and policing systems.

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