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Title of documentary: Taming the Beast

Tagline: The U.S. prison-industrial complex is a hungry beast that feeds on dark meat. Can it be tamed?

What is documentary about? My documentary is about the U.S. prison-industrial complex. Since the doc will be aimed at a **demographic** of 14- to 30-year-old students and voters, it will focus on the issue through the lens of hip hop. Specifically, the doc will advance a **persuasive claim of fact**: *The U.S. uses prisons to disenfranchise the poor and ethnic minorities*. To be **convincing (logos)**, the doc will include, among other things, statistics and facts from the U.S. Department of Justice. To be **compelling (pathos)**, it will include archival (forensic) footage from prisons and police arrests, and to be **credible (ethos)**, the doc will include interviews with prominent hip hop artists, prison scholars and activists, and inmates and parolees.

What is the topic? *Prisons are tools used to oppress people. The United States has the largest prison population per capita in the world.* [Note: The bold and italics line is an enthymeme.] The film would begin with Nas's lyrics: "I'm a prison cell six by nine ..., I'm the place many fear cause there's no way out..., I take the sun away put misery instead ..., When you wit me most folks consider you dead..."¹ The United States is addicted to prisons², and many of the men and women who inhabit these facilities are often abandoned by family, friends, and society. Popular hip hop artist Nas's lyrics remind us of the stark material reality faced by the nearly 2.3 million prisoners in the United States and 5 million others on probation, parole, and house arrest.³ A significant number—approximately 500,000—of those incarcerated are serving time for non-violent drug offenses or victimless crimes.⁴ As of 2009, black, non-Hispanic males had an imprisonment rate that was six times higher than white, non-Hispanic males.⁵

What result do you want film to have? 1 in 31 adults is under some form of correctional control.⁶ This means that in our class, which has 30 adults (28 students and 2 instructors), statistically one is going to find himself or herself under correctional control. This is absurd. Because this is a documentary advancing a **claim of fact**, I want viewers to agree that the prison-industrial complex in the U.S. is a problem. However, if they also do the following, I would be happier: (1) be cautious themselves so they do not end up in the belly of the beast; (2) consider engaging in forms of civil disobedience like *jury nullification*, which is the practice of voting for acquittal even if there is enough evidence to convict someone for a non-violent offense (e.g., drug crime); (3) be careful when judging parolees, considering them for employment; (4) supporting and giving time or money to the Prison Entrepreneurship Program, ACLU, or Innocence Project.

What form will the doc take? The documentary will likely be a compelling narrative with a specific beginning, middle, and end, following the journey of a citizen (a hip hop artist, if possible) from arrest to incarceration to parole. Through the story, there will be chapters (topics) on various themes that answer who is incarcerated, why they are incarcerated, who this incarceration benefits, how the situation developed (e.g., the 1-to-100 crack to cocaine sentencing disparity which led crack addicts to be incarcerated for up to 30 years; and three-strikes laws⁷), how the U.S. compares to other countries, and so on.

How does it support your social justice strategy? My social justice strategy, as noted in exam part I, is social libertarianism in civic life and social democracy in economics. I believe people should have the right to life and the pursuit of happiness with limit government intervention in civic life (e.g., drug use) and maximum social protection in economic life (e.g., right to minimum level of healthcare, education, housing, etc.). Reforming laws to stop the "school-to-prison pipeline" as it is often called, particularly for those caught in the drug game (mainly people without adequate schooling, housing, and access to healthcare), fits my strategy perfectly.

References

- ¹ Nas, “Last Words” (1999). Retrieved from <https://www.bing.com/search?q=nas+last+words&PC=U316&FORM=CHROMN>
- ² Walmsley, R. (Ed.). (2009). *World prison population list*. (8th Ed.). London: International Centre for Prison Studies, School of Law, King's College.
- ³ Butler, P. (2009). *Let's get free: A hip hop theory of justice*. New York: The New Press.
- ⁴ Butler, 2009
- ⁵ Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) (2010). Total correction population. Retrieved from <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=11>
- ⁶ Pew (2010). 1-in-31 U.S. Adults in Prison. Retrieved from <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/about/news-room/press-releases/0001/01/01/one-in-31-us-adults-are-behind-bars-on-parole-or-probation>
- ⁷ Butler, 2009