

# **Voices of JUSTICE** Informing the Public & Transforming America's Death Penalty

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[www.voicesofjusticespeak.com](http://www.voicesofjusticespeak.com)

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## ABSTRACT

Capital punishment in the United States is a well-researched and hotly debated topic. Yet, despite the wide range of research available on the subject, the debate tends to become emotionally-driven. This capstone adds a unique perspective to the topic through a series of interviews with individuals that either are directly impacted by or directly impact the criminal justice system in regards to capital punishment. The four main groups featured are “the unimpeachable” (a term borrowed from Amnesty International that includes victims’ families, exonerated inmates, former executioners, etc.), academics and scholars, “the loved ones” (which includes individuals with loved ones on death row and spiritual advisers), and “the fighters” (which is composed of activist groups such as Amnesty International and the NAACP, as well as attorneys who have worked on death penalty cases.) Combining the interview

material with related secondary research, this capstone provides an in-depth, comparative look at the differing ways groups advance the cause of educating the public and working to abolish the death penalty.

This project is a collaborative effort that combines the fields of study of Communications and Justice. It provides a web platform for the public to see the actual people that are impacted and the practical issues with the execution of the death penalty, not just the emotional arguments and the headlines made by big cases. Based on the sincere belief that in order to affect change in policy, it is necessary to educate the public, this capstone is meant to be an informative starting point to encourage discussion of this important issue. The final product can be viewed at [www.voicesofjusticesspeak.com](http://www.voicesofjusticesspeak.com).

## INSPIRATION

This project is a collaborative effort that combines the fields of study of Communications and Justice. We sincerely believe that in order to affect change in a policy, it is necessary to educate the public. With this in mind, we wanted to have a tangible final product that made our research accessible to many. Through conversations with our advisers, we decided to focus on the concept of first person accounts, and from this simple concept, our project has grown considerably.

We would like to thank everyone that has made this amazing experience possible:

American University Honors Program

Robert Johnson and Gemma Puglisi, Advisers

...and all of the voices of justice for sharing their stories and their hope.

# Social Media Plan

## Executive Summary

One of the driving forces behind this capstone has been the sincere belief that public education is vital in order to affect change. For this reason, we intend to maximize the amount of individuals who visit Voices of Justice ([www.voicesofjusticespeak.com](http://www.voicesofjusticespeak.com)) by utilizing social media. We plan to distribute the link through Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Additionally, we plan to utilize the connections that we have made through the course of this project. Many of the organizations with whom we spoke- including Amnesty International and the NAACP- encouraged us to provide them with the link to our website so that they could potentially link it to their websites. By associating Voices of Justice with as many well-known organizations as possible, we hope to increase the traffic to our website and, consequently, increase public knowledge about this important issue.

## Objectives

- to increase public awareness of the issue of the death penalty,
- to better inform the debate on the death penalty

### 1. Target Audience

The American University Community

#### 1. Strategy

We hope to have a summary of the project as well as a link to Voices of Justice included on the websites of the School of Communication, the School of Public Affairs, and the University Honors Program.

### 2. Target Audience

General United States' Population

#### 2. Strategy

We will contact everyone that has been involved with this project (individuals who we had the opportunity to interview, organizations whose events we attended, and others who we have met through the course of this project) and encourage them to help spread the word to their respective communities. We will also increase our use of social media- specifically, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn- to ensure that Voices of Justice reaches as many individuals as possible.

## Tactics

*Facebook:* Through periodic Facebook statuses, we will provide information about different aspects of the death penalty with a link to Voices of Justice. We will also encourage our Facebook friends to share the website with their friends, etc.

*Twitter:* Through our personal Twitter accounts, we plan to use the hashtag “#voicesofjustice”. This hashtag will be associated with different facts about the death penalty. For example:

Did you know that TX and VA have combined for over 575 executions since 1976, almost half of the national total? #voicesofjustice

## Evaluation

We will analyze the traffic on our website using Google Analytics.

# Project Breakdown

## Events

DC for Troy Davis

- Lainey Shany- *activist*
- Lawrence Hayes- *death row exoneree*
- Thomas Ruffin- *attorney for Troy Davis*
- Reverend Hagler- *religious activist*
- Mike Stark- *Occupy DC movement*

Dead Man Walking- Washington College of Law

- Sister Helen Prejean- *author of Dead Man Walking*
- Kirk Bloodsworth- *death row exoneree*

Evening with an Executioner

*Hosted by Virginians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty*

- Jerry Givens- *former executioner*

## Interviews

Individual interviews with 7 people

- Richard Dieter
- Robert Johnson
- Laura Moya
- Gemma Puglisi
- Jim Rocap
- Hilary Shelton
- Terri Steinberg

Information interview with 1 person

- Lainey Shany

## Website

- Original design and code
- Video hosting on Vimeo

## Presentations

- Honors Capstone Research Conference
- SPA Undergraduate Research Symposium Awards
  - *Best Overall Project in the Poster Session*