

# Cyrus J. O'Brien, PhD

cyrusobrien@gmail.com | cyrusobrien.com

## NON-PROFIT EXPERIENCE

### **American Civil Liberties Union, Research Fellow and Mellon/ACLS Public Fellow** 2020-

- Conduct and release new policy research on topics including police militarization, police violence against people with disabilities, public defense, and federal spending programs.
- Consult with topic experts on the design of research projects to ensure alignment with strategic goals.
- Provide technical assistance to lawyers and advocates across the organization on projects related to research, data, and analysis.

### **Annie E. Casey Foundation, Consultant to the Juvenile Justice Strategy Group 2011-12, 2019-2020**

- Provided technical assistance to data analysts in the St. Louis City Family Court to reduce the number of children in out-of-home placements and to combat racial and ethnic disparities.
- Conducted integrated qualitative and quantitative analyses of juvenile probation practices in St. Louis, Indianapolis, and St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana and successfully advocated for reforms that lowered the number of children under supervision and in custody.
- Researched data practices across jurisdictions and advised the Casey Foundation on ways to streamline data collection and analysis.

### **The Project on Accountable Justice at Florida State University, Consultant and Research Lead**

2013-2020

- Designed and led a research agenda to shrink Florida's criminal justice system and improve prison conditions through research dissemination, legislative change, policy reforms, and media campaigns.
- Researched and wrote a half dozen reports on topics such as prosecuting youth as adults, Florida's drug laws, and the obstacles to reforming Florida's justice system. This involved quantitative analyses of new datasets, legal and social scientific research, and collaborations with journalists.
- Executed a transition to interactive, web-based reports, for which I designed and implemented data visualizations using the JavaScript library D3.

### **Southern Poverty Law Center, Juvenile Justice Policy Specialist Researcher/Paralegal**

2009-2011

2008-2009

- Conducted a comprehensive quantitative analysis of children committed to Florida's juvenile prisons. Wrote and promoted in the media a white paper titled Fiscal Responsibility that advocated for the abolition of out-of-home placements of youth adjudicated for misdemeanors. These recommendations were adopted by the Florida Legislature in 2011 and contributed to a 70 percent decline in juvenile imprisonment.
- Spearheaded SPLC's work in Montgomery County, Alabama and collaborated with court officers to research and implement policies that resulted in an immediate 30 percent drop in the use of detention.
- Conducted legal research to support reforms involving school discipline practices, juvenile diversion programs, and systemic changes to juvenile codes.
- Researched and wrote *Unlocking Your Community's Hidden Strengths: A Guidebook to Community Asset-Mapping*, a 34-page guidebook that advocates for community investment instead of incarceration.

### **Restore Justice, Consultant**

2020

- Led research into the Illinois Department of Corrections' response to COVID-19.
- Collaborated on a report summarizing our findings and briefed the Director of Corrections.

### **American Bar Association, Rule of Law Initiative Intern**

2007

- Conducted interview-based research and wrote an internal report to assess to what extent Morocco's implementation of recent reforms to family law (*Mudawana*) adhered to the U.N.

Conventions on Rights of the Child and on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

- Assisted in the development of a curriculum for Morocco's family court judges to familiarize them with recent changes in the *Mudawana* and the frameworks of international human rights law.

### **RESEARCH IN THE HUMANITIES AND HUMANISTIC SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**University of Michigan, Doctoral Program in Anthropology and History** **2011-2018**

- Designed a mixed methods research study of Florida's criminal justice system to trace how religious interventions impacted the Florida's criminal and juvenile justice systems.
- Conducted 23 months of qualitative archival research in the never-before-accessed internal records of the Florida Parole Commission and Florida Department of Corrections.
- Conducted 13 months of ethnographic research in a 3,600-bed state prison near Tallahassee, involving 800 prisoner participants and extended, iterative interviews with 85 prisoners and staff.
- Interviewed more than 40 current and former corrections officials, prosecutors, private prison executives, judges, and public defenders.
- Wrote an accessible and engaging dissertation arguing that religious efforts to make the criminal justice more effective and humane inadvertently expanded the system, which won the University of Michigan's top dissertation prize, the ProQuest Distinguished Dissertation Award.

**John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics at Washington University in St. Louis,**  
**Postdoctoral Research Associate** **2018-202**

- Investigated the legal, ideological, and administrative frameworks of community-based correctional interventions in the second half of the twentieth century in the United States.
- Analyzed data about community-based interventions to determine that more than 65,000 people were involuntarily confined to more than 2,000 halfway houses in the late 1970s.
- Authored an article, "A Prison in Your Community': Halfway Houses and the Melding of Treatment and Control," which has been accepted for publication by the *Journal of American History*, the journal of record in the field. This article argues that community-based "alternatives" to incarceration risk "widening the net" of the criminal justice system while also legitimizing coercive policies under the guise of "treatment."

### **DIGITAL AND QUANTITATIVE SKILLS**

**Computation:** SPSS (expert), IBM COGNOS Analytics and R (advanced), SAS and Stata (intermediate)

**Programming and Markup Languages:** JavaScript (intermediate), HTML (intermediate), CSS (intermediate), Markdown (advanced), COBOL (basic), Python (basic), Jekyll (basic)

**Multimedia/Data Visualizations:** D3, a JavaScript Library (intermediate/advanced); Tableau (advanced); GIS (basic); facility in editing sound and video in programs, including Final Cut Pro X

**Office:** Microsoft Office Suite (expert), Adobe Suite (intermediate/advanced)

### **SELECTED PUBLICATIONS**

Cyrus O'Brien, *Faith in Imprisonment: Religion and Mass Incarceration in Florida*. Book under contract with the University of Pennsylvania Press.

Cyrus O'Brien, "A Prison in Your Community': Halfway Houses and Melding of Treatment and Control." Accepted by the *Journal of American History* in December 2019.

Southern Poverty Law Center, *Unlocking Your Community's Hidden Strengths: A Guidebook to Community Asset-Mapping* (2012), <https://t.co/b7gsSLiaS1>.

Cyrus O'Brien and Deb Brodsky, *Florida Criminal Justice Reform: Understanding the Challenges and Opportunities*, The Project on Accountable Justice (November 2017), <https://t.co/UCVg5MmSq2>.

Cyrus O'Brien, "The Dynamics of Private Security in Senegal," *Review of African Political Economy* 35:118, (Winter 2008), 655-659, <https://t.co/X8ny5swStE>.

**SELECTED GRANTS AND AWARDS**

Mellon/ACLS Public Fellow, Mellon Foundation and American Council of Learned Societies	2020
ProQuest Distinguished Dissertation Award, University of Michigan	2019
Charlotte Newcombe Dissertation Fellowship, Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation	2018
Leland Hawes Graduate Essay Prize, University of South Florida	2018
Dissertation Fieldwork Grant, Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research	2015
Graduate Research Fellowship, National Science Foundation	2012-2016

**TEACHING AND MENTORING**

- Developed and taught two undergraduate classes about criminal justice and American politics in the School of Arts and Sciences and the Center on Religion and Politics at Washington University in St. Louis, earning teaching evaluations well above average across all domains: learning, course organization, enthusiasm, and individual rapport.
- Mentored two M.S. students in Economics at Florida State University (2015-2016) as they pursued engaged research projects about women and drug offenses in Florida's criminal justice system.

**EDUCATION**

2018	PhD. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Anthropology and History.
2016	MA. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Anthropology and History.
2008	BA with High Honors in History. Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio.