

CYRUS O'BRIEN, PhD

RESEARCH, DATA, JUSTICE

PROFILE SUMMARY

A nimble and creative problem-solver with a love for research and data and a passion for advancing human flourishing. A skilled communicator in text, oral presentations, and data visualizations. \$500k+ won through competitive grants and fellowships. Collaborative leader and former teacher who loves facilitating the successes of colleagues.

EDUCATION

Ph.D., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor
Anthropology and History, 2018

M.A., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor
Anthropology and History, 2016

B.A. with High Honors, Oberlin College
Majors: History + Politics. Concentration in International Studies, 2008

PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS + SKILLS

Effective Advocacy	R
Policy Analysis	Stella
Quantitative Research	GIS
Qualitative Research	JavaScript, CSS, + HTML
System Dynamics	D3js
Writing + Content Creation	Markdown
Data Visualization	Github
Data Modeling + Forecasting	Tableau
Focus Groups + Interviewing	Google Data Studio
Ethnography	SPSS
Archival Research	Microsoft + Adobe Suites

SELECTED AWARDS AND HONORS

Mellon/ACLS Public Fellowship, Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and American Council of Learned Societies

ProQuest Distinguished Dissertation Award, University of Michigan Society of Fellows and Rackham Graduate School

John C. Danforth Postdoctoral Fellowship, Washington University in St. Louis

Wenner-Gren Foundation Dissertation Fieldwork Grant

Charlotte W. Newcombe Fellowship

National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship

Cyrus O'Brien, PhD
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EXPERIENCE

Alliance for Safety and Justice

Research Manager (2022 - present)

Senior Research Associate (2021- 2022)

- Conduct quantitative and qualitative research to model the effect of ASJ's proposed changes to law, policy, and practice.
- Analyze federal microdata and large datasets from state governments to develop and advocate for effective policy solutions.
- Research, write, and edit publications to change the narrative about criminal legal reform and chart pathways for communities to re-imagine safety.
- Manage a team of researchers providing data analysis, communications support, and policy research.

American Civil Liberties Union

Research Fellow and Mellon/ACLS Public Fellow (2020 - 2021)

- Conducted and published research on militarization, right to counsel, and federal spending programs.
- Provided 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 - 2012 and 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 Jefferson Parish, Louisiana and successfully advocated for reforms that lowered the number of children under supervision and in custody.

Restore Justice

Consultant (2020 - 2021)

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

Washington University in St. Louis

Postdoctoral Research Associate, John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics (2018 - 2020)

- Developed, taught, and supervised teaching assistants for courses exploring the history and politics of race and religion in the U.S.
- Wrote and published "A Prison in Your Community," which appeared in the *Journal of American History*.

The Project on Accountable Justice

Consultant and Research Lead (2013 - 2020)

- Designed and implemented a research agenda to shrink Florida's prison system and improve prison conditions.
- 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 (2009 - 2011)

Researcher/Paralegal (2008 - 2009)

- Researched, wrote and promoted in the media a white paper that served as the basis for 2011 legislation that 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.

RESEARCH

CYRUS O'BRIEN, PhD

OVERVIEW

I work hard to make empirical research accessible and easy to digest. I have published in top academic journals, written for popular audiences, composed white papers for policymakers, and created data visualizations that make even the most complex phenomena meaningful. I am methodologically rigorous while also being methodologically flexible, striving to collect and analyze data as efficiently as possible to answer the questions that drive decision making. I am detail-oriented while keeping in view the broader dynamics of law, practice, and institutions. As a student of social life and system dynamics, I am attuned to small factors that have large impacts.

BOOK UNDER CONTRACT

Faith in Imprisonment: Religion and the Making of Mass Incarceration excavates the role of religious ideas and organizations in shaping the structures and experiences of mass incarceration. It draws on nearly two years of archival research I conducted in previously unaccessed archives, 13 months of ethnographic research I conducted in a 3,600-bed Florida prison, and more than 120 interviews with prisoners, probationers, legislators, prosecutors, judges, prison administrators, prison staff, and other policymakers. It is under contract with the University of Pennsylvania Press.

ACADEMIC WRITING

- 2021 "A Prison in Your Community: Halfway Houses and the Melding of Treatment and Control," *Journal of American History*, Volume 108, Issue 1 (June 2021), Pages 93-117.
- 2019 "Review: 'Jesus Saved an Ex-Con,'" *Reading Religion* (April 2019).
- 2008 "The Dynamics of Private Security in Senegal," *Review of African Political Economy*, Volume 35, Issue 118 (December 2008), Pages 655-659.

BLOG POSTS

- 2023 California's Felony Theft Threshold Is Lower Now than for 80% of California's History, *Alliance for Safety and Justice* (December 1, 2023).
- 2021 "How America Disguised 65,000 Prison Beds," *American Civil Liberties Union Blog*, (July 14, 2021).
- 2021 "It's Past Time To End the Federal Militarization of Police," *American Civil Liberties Union Blog*, (May 12, 2021).

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POLICY RESEARCH

- forthcoming The Case for Renter-Focused Protections for Survivors of Violence, *Alliance for Safety and Justice*.
- 2023 Safe Communities Work: Seal Old Conviction Records to Boost Workforce Participation, Build Safety, and Grow the Economy, *Alliance for Safety and Justice* (September 2023).
- 2022 Just Work: Barriers that Keep People with Records from Full Workforce Participation Cost Florida More than \$40 Billion Annually, *Alliance for Safety and Justice* (September, 2022).
- 2022 Scaling Safety: A Roadmap to Closing America's Safety Gaps, *Alliance for Safety and Justice* (July 2022).
- 2022 No Eviction without Representation: Evictions' Disproportionate Harms and the Promise of Right to Counsel, *American Civil Liberties Union and the National Coalition for a Civil Right to Counsel* (May, 2022).
- 2021 Federal Militarization of Law Enforcement Must End, *American Civil Liberties Union* (May 12, 2021).
- 2020 Illinois Failing Key Pillar of COVID-19 Response: Prisons Remain Crowded while Early Releases Exacerbate Racial Inequity, *Restore Justice*, (June 15, 2020).
- 2020 Florida's Obsolete Drug Laws Disproportionately Affect Latinos and Women, *The Project on Accountable Justice*, (January 2020).
- 2019 Florida Rolled Back Parts of the War on Drugs, but Hundred Remain in Prison Under Obsolete Laws: Justice Demands that Reforms be Made Retroactive, *The Project on Accountable Justice*, (November 2019).
- 2017 Florida's Prison System: Understanding the Challenges and Opportunities for Reform, *The Project on Accountable Justice*, (November 2017).
- 2016 No Place for A Child: Direct File of Juveniles Comes at High Cost; Time to Fix Statutes, *The James Madison Institute*, (February 2016).
- 2012 Unlocking Your Community's Hidden Strengths: A Guidebook to Community Asset-Mapping *The Southern Poverty Law Center*, (November 2012).
- 2011 Findings of the Center for Smart Justice Review of Criminal Justice Data, *Florida TaxWatch*, (December 2011).
- 2010 Fiscal Responsibility: The Key to a Safer and Stronger Juvenile Justice System, *The Southern Poverty Law Center* and *Florida TaxWatch* (December 2010).
- 2010 Opportunities to Strengthen Florida's Juvenile Justice System, *The Southern Poverty Law Center*, (September 2010).