

# CYRUS O'BRIEN, PhD

RESEARCH, ADVOCACY, DATA, JUSTICE

## PROFILE SUMMARY

A nimble and creative problem-solver with a love for research and data and a passion for social and racial justice. A skilled communicator in text, oral presentations, and data visualizations. \$500k+ won through competitive grants and fellowships. Collaborative leader and fun to work with.

## 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. Additional Concentration in International Studies (2008)

## PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS + SKILLS

Effective Advocacy	R
Technical Assistance	SPSS
Campaign Strategy	CSS, HTML, JavaScript
Policy Analysis	d3.js
Qualitative Research	Markdown + Jekyll
Quantitative Research	Basic Video Editing
Writing + Content Creation	System Dynamics/Stella
Data Analysis	Tableau
Data Visualization	Google Data Studio
Focus Groups + Interviewing	GIS
Ethnography	Google + Heap Analytics
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

National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship

**Cyrus O'Brien, PhD**

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## EXPERIENCE

### **American Civil Liberties Union**

*Research Fellow and Mellon/ACLS Public Fellow (2020 - present)*

- Conduct and publish new policy research on topics including police militarization, police violence, right to counsel, and federal spending programs.
- Manage research projects from design through implementation, production, and publication. Consult with topic experts on research design to ensure alignment with strategic goals.
- Provide technical assistance to lawyers and advocates across the organization on projects related to research, data, and analysis.

### **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 undergraduate courses in legal studies, religious studies, American culture studies, and religion and politics.
- Investigated the legal, ideological, and administrative frameworks of community-based correctional interventions in the second half of the twentieth century in the United States.
- Built a database of community-based facilities to determine that more than 65,000 people were involuntarily confined to more than 2,000 halfway houses in the late 1970s.

### **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 St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana and successfully advocated for reforms that lowered the number of children under supervision and in custody.

### **Restore Justice**

*Consultant (2020 - present)*

- 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.

### **The Project on Accountable Justice**

*Consultant and Research Lead (2013 - 2020)*

- Designed a research agenda to shrink Florida's prison system and improve prison conditions through research dissemination, legislative change, policy reforms, and media campaigns.
- 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.

# PUBLICATIONS

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## OVERVIEW

I work hard to make rigorous research accessible and easy to digest. I have published in top academic journals, written for popular audiences, composed white papers for policymakers, and developed data visualizations that make even the most complex phenomena meaningful. I write in different genres for different audiences and employ techniques from history, data journalism, explanatory reporting, and legal writing. A practiced ethnographer and historian, I use storytelling to bring a human element to campaigns for justice and equality.

## 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

- 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).

## ADVOCACY REPORTS

- 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).

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