

CYRUS O'BRIEN, PhD

PROFILE SUMMARY

A nimble and creative researcher with a love for advocacy and justice. A skilled communicator in text, oral presentations, and visual media. \$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 and Politics. Concentration in International Studies, 2008

PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS + SKILLS

Effective Communications	R
Public Education	Stella
Policy Research	GIS
Quantitative Research	JavaScript, CSS, + HTML
Qualitative Research	SQL
Writing	EveryAction
Data Visualization	Github
Focus Groups + Interviewing	Tableau
Ethnography	Google Data Studio
Archival + Legal Research	SPSS
Survey 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

Just Safe (formerly Alliance for Safety and Justice)

Senior Researcher (2024 - present)

Research Manager (2022 - 2024)

Senior Research Associate (2021 - 2022)

- Manage a team of researchers and lead public education campaigns, conduct innovative research, and support legislative initiatives.
- Research, write, and produce publications to change the narrative about criminal legal reform and chart pathways for communities to re-imagine safety.
- Liaise with elected and appointed officials to shape public policy.
- Shape messaging through talking points, white papers, advocacy letters, op-eds, public education, and social media.

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.
- Led research for the ACLU's Systemic Equality Initiative to promote inclusive capitalism in Black and Brown communities.

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*.

Project on Accountable Justice, Florida State Univ.

Research Lead, Consultant (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.

American Bar Association Rule of Law Initiative

Intern (2007)

- From Rabat, Morocco, analyzed implementation of the Moudawana and assessed court practices in reference to Morocco's obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

CONSULTANCIES

I provide research, analysis, communications, and writing expertise to organizations working to change juvenile and criminal justice systems.

Annie E. Casey Foundation

2012-2014, 2018-2020, 2024-present

DC Justice Lab

2023-present

Fair Fight Initiative

2021-2022

Restore Justice

2020 - 2021

RESEARCH & PUBLICATIONS

CYRUS O'BRIEN, PhD

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, employing 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.

ACADEMIC PUBLICATIONS

- 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).
- 2018 Redeeming Imprisonment: Religion and the Development of Mass Incarceration in Florida. *Dissertation at the University of Michigan.*
- 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).

EDITORIAL PROJECT MANAGEMENT

- 2024 Unseen Billions: *Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice* (June 2024).
- 2024 California Law Enforcement Agencies Are Spending More But Solving Fewer Crimes. *Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice* (February 2024). I contributed data visualizations, maps, and editorial support.
- 2023 Incentives Work: Employment Credits for People on Probation Promote Economy and Public Safety, *Alliance for Safety and Justice* (January 2023).

ADVOCACY REPORTS

- 2026 Crime Survivors Speak: Pennsylvania Victims' Views on Safety and Justice, *Just Safe and Crime Survivors Speak* (Feb. 2026).
- 2024 The Keys to Safety: Why Housing Protections Increase Safety for All, *Alliance for Safety and Justice* (Dec 2024).
- 2024 Lost Work, Pay, and Safety: Victims of Violence Urgently Need Safe Leave, *Alliance for Safety and Justice* (April 2024).
- 2023 Safe Communities Work: Seal Old Conviction Records to Boost Workforce Participation, Build Safety, and Grow the Economy. *Alliance for Safety and Justice* (Sept. 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* (Sept. 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).
- 2022 Unwarranted: How East Baton Rouge Parish's Warrant Practices Make Us Less Safe, *Fair Fight Initiative* (Aug. 2022).
- 2022 Scaling Safety: A Roadmap to Closing America's Safety Gaps, *Alliance for Safety and Justice* (July 2022).
- 2021 Federal Militarization of Law Enforcement Must End, *American Civil Liberties Union* (May, 2021).
- 2020 Illinois Failing Key Pillar of COVID-19 Response: Prisons Remain Crowded while Early Releases Exacerbate Racial Inequity, *Restore Justice*, (June, 2020).
- 2020 Florida's Obsolete Drug Laws Disproportionately Affect Latinos and Women, *The Project on Accountable Justice*, (Jan. 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*, (Nov. 2019).
- 2017 Florida's Prison System: Understanding the Challenges and Opportunities for Reform, *The Project on Accountable Justice*, (Nov. 2017).
- 2016 No Place for A Child: Direct File of Juveniles Comes at High Cost; Time to Fix Statutes, *The James Madison Institute*, (Feb. 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*, (Dec. 2011).
- 2010 Fiscal Responsibility: The Key to a Safer and Stronger Juvenile Justice System, *The Southern Poverty Law Center* and *Florida TaxWatch* (Dec. 2010).

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