

I had such an edifying and incredible summer as an intern with the Mid-Atlantic Innocence Project (MAIP) in Washington D.C., and am extremely grateful to the Liman Program for making it possible. After having the experience, I left more devoted to law and criminal justice reform than I ever thought I would be.

The Mid-Atlantic Innocence Project works to prevent and correct the conviction of innocent people in D.C., Maryland, and Virginia. Since the project began in 2000, MAIP has helped secure the release or exoneration of 28 men in the region. These men spent a total of 494 years in prison—years that were not spent with their children and their families.

During my time there, I was fortunate enough to witness the exoneration of one of these men Jerome Johnson, who had been in prison for 30 years. It was an extremely emotional moment for everyone in the courtroom, watching a man who had been so bitterly wronged be granted an innocence he should have never lost.

My work focused mainly on screening cases. I would receive court trial transcripts and any available evidence used in the trial, and suggested whether or not MAIP should take the case. I based my suggestion on two things: 1) do I think the client is factually innocent & 2) can we prove their innocence? This involved examining many things about the case including the makeup of the jury, the availability of DNA and other forms of evidence, the legitimacy of that DNA evidence and those conducting the studies, the story of the prosecutor, the alibi provided by the client, and the adequacy of the defense provided for the client.

After writing my suggestion, I would meet with my supervisor, the rest of the team, and other lawyers to discuss the case and eventually decide together whether or not we took the case. After screening, we would begin the investigation process which would involve interviewing

those related to the case, and finding what available evidence could be used to prove the client's innocence.

The day I left the Mid-Atlantic Innocence Project, I ordered a copy of 'Picking Cotton', a book recommended to me by my supervisor, to my house to read the following week.

The book helped me reflect on how unique working at MAIP was because as stated in the book, humanity rarely questions the decisions made by the judicial system and even toasts its "successes". So to be in an environment where we are trained to question and trained to analyze provided me with an understanding deeper than anything else I could have pursued during my summer.

Meanwhile, working at MAIP helped me reflect on the book and understand that Ronald Cotton's (one of the main characters in the book) case is certainly not unique. With each chapter, I was constantly reminded of a case I had screened or discussed, and the exoneration I was fortunate to witness. In Ronald Cotton's writing, I read the story of Lamar Johnson, another exoneree, and I empathized with the pain and hopelessness of Jerome Johnson's 30 years in prison.

Working at MAIP has really bolstered my interest in criminal justice when I was worried that it wasn't what I was really passionate about. And this is all thanks to the Mid-Atlantic Innocence Project and the Liman Program for making it all possible.



Jerome Johnson and myself at the MAIP fundraiser, which raises more than \$280 thousand dollars, the largest single source of revenue funding the work they do.