

Micah Herskind
Summer 2018 PRRAC Internship

During the summer of 2018, I interned at the Poverty and Race Research Action Council (PRRAC), a civil rights research and advocacy organization that focuses on federal housing policy and its many intersections with racial discrimination, environmental justice, and school segregation. Working with PRRAC was an important and foundational experience in which I learned significantly, both concretely about federal housing policy and low income housing programs, and just as importantly, about myself and the type of work I hope to one day pursue. Further, working with a fantastic team of interns—including two legal interns and another undergraduate—made the summer both more enjoyable and educational, as we learned and worked together.

My main projects related to the very core of PRRAC's work, focusing on school and housing segregation. For example, much of the first half of the summer was spent working on a report for PRRAC called "Coordination of Community Systems and Institutions to Promote Housing and School Integration," which will be published soon and on which I'm listed as a co-author. The report involved looking at innovative programs across the nation that tackle the interconnected issues of school and housing segregation. These two forms of segregation feed into each other because where one lives often determines where one's children go to school, as well as the funding that school receives. Consequently, housing and school segregation feature a reciprocal relationship of continuing inequality. Working on this report was both a challenging and rewarding experience; whereas I initially felt confusion on exactly how to proceed, working my way through the task was very rewarding at the end.

PRRAC's work is also increasingly intersecting with issues of environmental justice, as housing segregation and where low income communities of color are concentrated generally relate to a disproportionate burden of environmental hazards being borne by communities of color. The deputy director of my organization is currently working on a book project with a professor from Yale Law School, and I had the opportunity to do preliminary research for one of the book chapters. As part of this work, I looked at a community in New Mexico, and its attempts to ask the Environmental Protection Agency for help against a corporation trying to bring an environmentally hazardous facility to an area that was already predominantly filled with similar facilities and were closest to low income communities of color.

PRRAC also provides technical assistance to counties working on completing the formerly federally-required Assessment of Fair Housing, which was instituted as part of the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing rule instituted in the Obama administration. While Secretary Carson recently—and tragically—discarded the rule, some localities have decided to proceed with the Assessment of Fair Housing. As part of this process, localities must complete a comprehensive review of any and all factors relating to fair housing in the region. I completed a section of the Assessment of Fair Housing that required the use of federal housing and segregation data.

Beside the many smaller tasks of assisting those in the office, my last major project was compiling a database of recent scholarship relating to school segregation, collecting all journal articles published within the past five years that relate to school segregation. While this work was perhaps more tedious at times, it was nonetheless an important project; after creating the

database, I sorted the authors of these articles by “educational equity assistance region,” which will allow PRRAC to reach out to scholars across the country to further the work of desegregation. Because much of PRRAC’s work involves connecting social science researchers and social justice advocates, my hope is that this database will be useful in furthering PRRAC’s mission.

I am immensely grateful to the Arthur Liman Program for making this summer possible. Working at PRRAC cemented my desire to attend law school to pursue public interest law; further, because of PRRAC’s emphasis on social science research, this summer further piqued my interest in pursuing both a J.D. and a Ph.D., in order to continue to blend research and action. I will forever remember my summer at PRRAC, and am indebted to both the Arthur Liman Program as well as my supervisor, Peter Kye, the rest of PRRAC’s fantastic staff, and my fellow interns.