



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



Name: Clayton Pierce

Law School: Columbia Law School

Organization: NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund

Update 1:

I am thrilled to be near the fourth week of my litigation internship at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (LDF) this summer. So far, I have conducted legal research for cases challenging racial voter suppression laws, spoken with potential witnesses for voting rights litigation, and helped a team of attorneys prepare for upcoming negotiations related to a school desegregation case.

My internship so far has afforded me the incredible opportunity to learn from the dedicated attorneys, organizers, and staff of the LDF. I have learned about impact litigation strategy, best practices for speaking with witnesses and clients, and other invaluable skills for working in impact litigation. It is inspiring to work with so many people dedicated to fighting for racial justice through law.

In the remainder of the summer, I look forward to digging more deeply into legal issues in our cases, collaborating with other interns on legal research, and hearing the stories of the people we are advocating for in the courts.

Update 2:

I am now about halfway through my internship with the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, and it has been a deeply meaningful experience so far. I have had the opportunity to work on voting rights cases challenging voter suppression laws, as well as a school desegregation case.

Speaking to voters about their experiences facing voter suppression laws revealed the impact of those laws on the lives of people subject to them. I feel privileged that voters are comfortable sharing their experiences with me, and hearing their stories solidifies my drive to continue working to protect voting rights.

I am also grateful to the amazing attorneys at LDF who are mentoring me, teaching me the nuances of civil rights litigation and giving me the opportunity to make substantive contributions to our cases.



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Update 3:

In the second half of my litigation internship at LDF, I have primarily remained engaged in LDF's voting rights and desegregation work. LDF is at forefront of advancing voting rights in state legislative houses across the country, and I have had the incredible opportunity to contribute to that work by drafting proposals for legislative provisions of a new state voting rights act.

State VRAs are crucial to advancing the voting rights of Black Americans and other historically disenfranchised communities, because they enshrine under state law protections once thought unassailable under the federal Voting Rights Act. This includes pre-clearance, a mechanism whereby local jurisdictions that administer elections must send election law changes to a supervisory authority if they have a history of discrimination. The Supreme Court in *Shelby County*, a 2013 decision, gutted this part of the Voting Rights Act, allowing jurisdictions with a history of racial discrimination to enact discriminatory changes to their voting laws without clearing it with the Department of Justice. Though formulated differently than the federal VRA, some state VRAs contain new, creative preclearance mechanisms, ensuring that all voters have equal access to the franchise. It has been exciting to work on creating a new preclearance provision in partnership with grassroots organizations dedicated to protecting voting rights at the state level. I am putting into practice foundational tenets of civil rights law and legislative drafting that I learned during my first two years of law school, while considering the practical realities that election administrators deal with each election.

During the remainder of my summer, I look forward to continuing to work on LDF's state VRA campaign and other efforts advancing voting rights across the country.

Update 4:

As I wrap up my litigation internship with the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (LDF), I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to LDF's impactful work and learn from litigators fighting for racial justice. I had contributed to several of LDF's active voting rights and desegregation cases, gaining incredible substantive experience. Highlights of my summer included researching the legislative history of the Voting Rights Act to advance an important claim on behalf of our clients in federal court; interviewing witnesses and clients to share how voter suppression laws impacted them; and taking part in a status conference where I supported our team of attorneys advocating for Black students and families in a desegregation case.

Above all, I am grateful to my mentors at LDF who ensured that I had the opportunity to speak with impacted voters directly. Given that I hope to pursue a career in voting rights litigation, the conversations I had with voters were formative in how I hope to approach this work. I am also thankful that the voters I spoke with entrusted me with their stories and spent significant time speaking with me over several phone calls. Those conversations were deeply meaningful to me.



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

My EJA Fellowship helped me pursue this amazing internship with LDF this summer. Thank you to the EJA staff and all those who support EJA for making these fellowships possible.

Update 5:

I feel immensely privileged for the opportunity to intern at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (LDF). During my internship, I was able to learn from stellar lawyers working to advance racial justice through law by uplifting the voices of Black clients and communities. I had the opportunity to contribute to matters related to school desegregation, voter suppression laws, state voting rights acts, and more. Throughout the summer, I learned not only from supervising attorneys and fellow interns, but from the people impacted by voter suppression laws, too. In phone calls with voters, I learned how onerous requirements for absentee ballots disenfranchise voters, violating their fundamental right to vote. It was meaningful to me to be a part of the team vindicating those voters' rights by challenging voter suppression laws in court.

This summer I was also able to learn about the mechanics of the litigation process, by helping prepare for status conferences and meeting with teams preparing for motions practice and trial. As I begin my legal career, this practical experience was immensely valuable. Most of all, I am grateful for the opportunity to pursue my passion for voting rights and racial justice by serving LDF's clients and working with attorneys to expand their access to the franchise.