



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## Summer 2025

### EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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<b>LAW SCHOOL</b>	Cornell Law School
<b>ORGANIZATION</b>	Promise of Justice Initiative

#### Final Reflection:

This summer, I was a legal intern at a nonprofit organization in New Orleans, LA called the Promise of Justice Initiative. Among many other things, PJI is litigating a lawsuit against the state regarding modern day slavery or the farm line (where incarcerated people-- largely Black men-- are forced to pick crops for hours with little to no pay) at Louisiana State Penitentiary (Angola) and represents clients in their individual criminal cases, some of which present opportunities for larger policy impact. For example, cases where individuals were sentenced with a non-unanimous jury decision, where courts denied the use of a false confession expert, or where we can show that an incarcerated person's circumstances (mental, physical, financial, etc.) should be taken into account when considering the legal requirement of "diligence" in researching one's case.

I am so incredibly thankful I had the opportunity to work here. PJI works with lawyers and community organizers to expose how mass incarceration in Louisiana and the United States' is directly linked to US chattel slavery, and to combat the harm it causes to people, families, and communities every day. Working in the criminal legal system and on prison reform efforts in Louisiana (which incarcerates a higher percentage of its people than any other country on earth), you see the direct links to the system of slavery every day.

Working on the strategic criminal litigation team at PJI this summer, I worked on 4 separate cases, all of which were for elderly Black men who have spent over half their lives in prison for crimes committed as children or young adults. Looking through every single court filing and individual effort to fight their case is heartbreaking because it shows years' worth of work that the courts dismiss, in the blink of an eye, often without considering the person behind the offense they're looking at. Researching the law and how it applies to their cases is extremely



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disappointing because of how difficult it is to prevail on claims that may help get them out of prison (from claims regarding poor representation or unfair practices at trial to legal motions requesting that judges reconsider sentences based on changes in sentencing laws or a person's individual situation).

The prison system dehumanizes people, exploits them, and makes it impossibly difficult to get out of the system once you are in it, without ever offering individuals any support or true opportunity at rehabilitation. I am so proud to do this kind of work, and I can't wait to do more to try to fight for the freedom and dignity the people trapped in the system. Thank you again to Equal Justice America, Cornell Law School, and Promise of Justice Initiative for the opportunity to do this work.