



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Final Reflection:

It was a privilege to work with the National Immigration Law Center and Equal Justice America during such a complicated and frightening time for immigrant rights. I was able to advocate for policies that protect immigrants at a time when their protections are being dismantled. At the same time, the public discourse was rife with language that dehumanized and blamed immigrants. I found solace working with people who understood the importance of humanizing immigrants and centering their experiences.

I was able to collaborate closely with NILC's amazing Workers' Rights group and learn about the intersection between labor rights and immigrant's rights. One of the most eye-opening pieces I was able to research was the way that employees exploit immigrant workers. Employers in various sectors often use threats of immigration enforcement and deportation to silence workers who complain about illegal working conditions. Federal policies created to protect vulnerable workers from this type of exploitation are quietly being rescinded. I was also able to research how funding for federal programs created to fight gun violence have been funneled towards Immigration and Custom Enforcements (ICE) to arrest immigrants. I worked on making sense of these changing policies and look at ways to resist the Government's actions.

Policies that protect immigrant rights have life changing impacts, and the disjointed recission of these policies has been devastating for immigrant communities. The chaos created by the quiet dismantling of essential programs is intentional. Advocates are now unable to effectively counsel immigrants on what programs are still available, and immigrant could face deportation if they mistakenly apply to a defunct policy.



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This semester I am taking Immigration Law, and I have already enjoyed the way it reflects the work that I did this summer and my perspective of the current erosion of immigration protections. The demonization of all immigrants, including those seeking asylum, has always seemed contrary to the idea of the American dream and the country as a “melting pot.” While researching the horribly xenophobic policies enacted by the current administration, I usually had the words on the Statue of Liberty floating around in the back of my mind. What happened to “Give me your tired, your poor, / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free?” Isn’t that what America is supposed to be about?

My professor expressed that it is, and it isn’t. American history reveals clear cycles where immigrants are welcomed and then rejected. In the late 1800s, America welcomed Chinese immigrants who came to work on building the railroad. After the demand for workers died down, Chinese immigrants faced vicious xenophobia from the Americans that had once welcomed their help. The Chinese Exclusion Act ensued, banning Chinese nationals from entering the United States. This push and pull cycle of acceptance and rejection has played out numerous times in American history, including during the Cold War. We are in one of these cycles now, as immigrants welcomed to work in various sectors are now being demonized, deported, and rejected. We are in a very difficult era for immigrants, but not the most difficult era for immigrants we’ve ever had. I am so grateful for my time at NILC, and hopeful for the future of immigrants as advocates continue to humanize the most vulnerable in our communities.