

*McLean County Bar Association 2021 Scholarship Essay*

I remember the initial moment I aspired to become a lawyer. In 2015, almost one year after Michael Brown was killed in Ferguson, Missouri, the Department of Justice released the findings of its investigation of the Ferguson Police Department and Ferguson court system. The death of Michael Brown brought notions of systematic injustice to the forefront of national conversation. Yet I, as a junior in high school, did not quite understand what it meant for police departments, courts, and other institutions to so target certain people as to systemically disadvantage them compared to others. The Department of Justice's Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department report clarified systemic injustice for me. At the time, I only read articles pulling out key highlights from the report; I would not read the full report until my first summer interning with the McLean County Public Defender's Office in 2017. Nevertheless, as I read about egregious incidents of police brutality and inefficient courts, I became passionate about using the law to help marginalized people who had been scorned by the very institutions supposed to help them.

My decision in high school to be pre-law in college to help people arose from my service-centered upbringing. My parents exemplified the value of community service, whether teaching Sunday School at church, hosting meals during holidays, or serving on the school board. Service was integrated through my life pre-college, like regularly participating in BANSAGO to deliver Thanksgiving meals to people in Bloomington-Normal. Later, during high school, I continued finding opportunities to give back to the community that raised me. I volunteered as a freshman and new student mentor at my high school, as a Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) huddle leader during FCA's Power Camp summer camp, and as a Sunday School teacher at my church. With my music, I played violin in State Farm's Sounds of Christmas concert multiple years and was a street performer for Inside Out: Accessible Art Gallery and Cooperative. Through these activities, I became more focused on how to offer my services to help the people immediately around me. This service-oriented impetus carried with me through my undergraduate studies at Washington University in St. Louis where I attended as an Ervin scholar, a scholarship program focused on academic excellence, leadership, diversity, and community service.

As a 2L at Washington University School of Law, years after I initially examined the Department of Justice's report, my legal aspirations have remained the same: I want to help marginalized people through the law. I am still learning how to best use my skills and passions to accomplish this goal. My law education aids my progress by exposing me to kinds of law with which I am unfamiliar. For instance, this semester I am taking courses focused on American Indian law and voting rights which have deepened my understanding of both these areas of law and how the United States has simultaneously helped and hurt marginalized communities. In addition, though my mom was on the Unit 5 school board for several years and explained to me the intricacies of the board, my recent summer internship with Legal Services of Eastern Missouri introduced me to education law as a legal practice area. Thus, my law school education has exposed me to jobs and networks, showing me new ways to help marginalized individuals in the country.

Proximity to Ferguson, Missouri was one of the reasons I chose to attend WashU, and I intentionally learned from community members about St. Louis and Ferguson. A reason why I stayed at WashU Law was to find opportunities to learn more as well as discover ways to give back to the communities that gave so much to me. COVID-19 has demonstrated how immunocompromised individuals, people of color, low-income areas, and other marginalized communities face unjust challenges even before crises arise to make things harder. With my legal education and legal aspirations, I hope to dedicate my training to aiding the marginalized whether through non-profit work or through a firm focused on those communities.