As a low-income student I am hypersensitive to the various ways in which socioeconomic status can affect one's access to things like affordable housing, education, and healthcare. Having this awareness made my internship with Class Action that much more meaningful, since they are an organization that strives to end classism while bringing class to the forefront of our social dialogue. Over the summer I had hoped to participate in the various workshops that the organization offered, while working closely with the staff to learn about how they tackle this “ism” that generally goes unmentioned. Additionally, I was looking forward to researching and writing about the various ways in which classism affects reproductive rights and social justice. I was able to work with some amazing people and I did manage to do a little research with regard to reproductive justice, but since this was an organization in transition, much of what I had hoped to accomplish ended up being placed on the back burner.

Class Action merged with the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) -- Northeast Office in the months prior to my internship after experiencing economic and organizational hardships. IPS has many projects: Inequality and the Common Good, Wealth for the Common Good, Common Security Clubs, the Jamaica Plain Forum, and Responsible Wealth are just a few that are run out of this Northeast Office. Inequality is something that is on IPS’s radar on a daily basis, so it is no wonder that this partnership was made. Chuck Collins, director of IPS, is also a longtime friend of many of Class Actions’ board members. It was an exciting environment to be in, and I was looking forward to a summer in a place where social justice issues are the topic of conversation on a daily basis.
During my first week in Jamaica Plain the last staff person that remained, Jamila, was laid off. Although Chuck Collins was my supervisor, she was to be the one that taught me about Class Action, and the person to which I was to meet with on a daily basis. In the few days before her layoff, we had planned to read and reflect on current events and news articles on a weekly basis, to see how classism plays out in everyday life. Jamila had also participated in and facilitated workshops for Class Action, contributed to their newsletter, and kept the website up-to-date -- all things that were key to the success of the organization which I was to learn about. Our time together was cut short and we were not able to begin what we had planned. Luckily though, before she left, I was able to learn a little about some of the ways Class Action functions.

Jamila instructed me on how to use the database program, FileMaker, and I learned quickly how important the database is to the functioning of the org. Every person that has ever made a donation, attended a workshop, or purchased an item from Class Action is entered here. She taught me how to enter in a donation or a pledge (a one-time payment or a recurring one), how to enter in new people and organizations, and how to put together the corresponding thank you letters which are very important, since they also serve as a receipt for tax purposes.

Since they had just had two big events, the annual spring appeal and their sixth anniversary celebration, there was much to be entered into the database. This ended up being my primary function over the course of the summer after Jamila left. Jerry, the interim director, would make a deposit in Western Mass then send the corresponding deposit slips and copies of the cancelled check/credit card to me in Jamaica Plain which I would then enter into the computer. This task was even more important since Class Action is planning on moving its entire database over to DemocracyInAction (DIA). DIA would allow more ways to sort through
all their information, and make it easier to put together mailings and correspondence. Originally, they were going to be moving the entire DB over on the 1st of July, and there was a big push to get the entire DB up-to-date with donations and pledges before I left for my midsummer vacation. As of the time I finished my internship however, they had still not moved the information over.

After Jamila had gone, Chuck and I got together to go over some of the tasks he hoped I would accomplish during my internship. On the top of the list was the blog that Class Action was in the middle of launching, followed by restructuring and organizing the office library (the Felice Yeskel Memorial Library) which was now a compilation of two organizations, Class Action and IPS, and researching various blogs and websites that were to be added to the “Resources” page of Class Actions’ website. I thought that the blog would be the perfect platform to raise awareness about the intersection of class and reproductive justice, so I immediately set up interviews with organizations in the Boston Area that deal with reproductive rights and justice on a daily basis.

During the third week of my internship, I had the pleasure of speaking with Erica Pollock, Minority Women's Outreach Coordinator at Fenway Health, an organization that specifically serves the LGBT community, and Stacie Garnett of NARAL Pro-Choice Massachusetts, which focuses on health equity and abortion rights (among other issues). My interviews were insightful, and I learned much about the amazing work that they do. In these interviews I discovered that there is an awareness of class issues in the reproductive rights/justice world, but these organizations in particular did not have the resources to bring it into a larger
conversation. The fact that many orgs are struggling to survive means that what precious resources are available need to go to key programs -- classism thus remains on the periphery.

Just about midway through my time in Jamaica Plain, I left for the US Social Forum (USSF) in Detroit with three other RRASC interns. The experience was one that I'll never forget, filled as it was with many high and low points. What was particularly interesting was how much our own socioeconomic status truly impacted our experience at the USSF, and how out of the thousand or so workshops that were being held throughout the week, there was only one that focused specifically on class as the main topic. Because Detroit is struggling to recover from years of disinvestment, has an unemployment rate of about 14.4%, and has about half of its residents out of the labor force, maybe class/classism should have been a more prominent topic.

I began reorganizing the library after I came back from Detroit, which was a fairly easy project since I had done it in my own study at home. I encouraged my supervisor to purchase “Bookpedia,” a program that scans the barcode of the book using iSight (or by typing in the ISN) and searches the web to obtain a synopsis of the book, a picture of the book cover, ratings, and keywords that can be used to search for the book. It took about a week to enter in each of the 700+ books, and Class Action/IPS now has a digital catalog. What is great about this program is that you can export the catalog in an HTML format, and since my supervisor wanted to make the library accessible online, this will enable people visiting the website to see what is available to check out if they are near the office.

The next task that I tackled was compiling a list of online resources. Chuck was looking for a comprehensive list of the various organizations and blogs that deal with class and classism, along with a brief one- to two-sentence description of their purpose so that he could update the
resources page on the Class Action website. In my research I found was that it was difficult to
find sites that dealt primarily with issues of class. Instead many of them dealt with the living-
wage, the working-class and working-poor, and economic justice. On these sites, class/classism
would briefly be mentioned or alluded to, but generally the extent to which classism was
discussed in detail was minimal. Some sites did have a link to the Class Action site as a way for
people to look up classism in detail if they wanted to, but out of the twelve or so pages of links
that I ended up having only a handful made had this connection. This small project made me
even more appreciative of the work that Class Action does, and even more aware of how taboo a
topic classism is.

Having completed my tasks I was looking forward to getting the blog launched and
contributing some of my research in the last few weeks of my internship. My supervisor and I
got together to brainstorm ideas for blog entries, and it was decided that my time at the USSF
was a “hot” topic, and something that would draw readers to the site. He also wanted me to
write on the stark differences between paid and unpaid internships, using my personal
experiences as a jumping off point. I did a lot of research and writing for both entries which I
truly enjoyed, and was able to contribute a well thought out piece of writing. Unfortunately
Class Action has been experiencing some problems with the web developer, and has not been
able to launch the blog, and my work remains in waiting -- including my interviews with
NARAL and Fenway Health.

There were many things that I was able to accomplish over the summer, but I feel that
perhaps this was the wrong time for Class Action to take on an intern. With no staff person on
hand familiar with Class Action’s workshops, marketing practices, or knowledgeable about their
day-to-day happenings, I was left oftentimes fending for myself to discover how to run reports, learn processes, or find missing files. I do feel that I was able to help them through a rough transition period, and I’m so glad to have met some amazing people at the IPS office who I now consider to be good friends, and perhaps in better circumstances I will be able to come back to volunteer when they get a bit more situated.

One highlight of my experience was when I was able to see a brief (hour and a half) version of one of their workshops, held at a Jamaica Plain Forum event hosted by IPS. As the participants lined themselves up in the room by their self-identified class status, and it was interesting to see the reaction on their faces -- you could see their preconceived notions about class being dismantled in front of them. As the workshop progressed, they learned about some of the various class indicators (i.e. if you’re a renter or a homeowner, the size of your house, how many houses you own, etc.), and about how your socioeconomic status positively or negatively affects your access to various public and private services. Even though this is a topic that I’ve studied thoroughly in school, and is something that I plan to address in my future work, it was eye-opening to see how some fellow participants -- some of them my coworkers -- identified themselves classwise.

I’m lucky to have had this experience, and feel as though I have made many connections over the summer that will last a lifetime. Although there were snags, it was well worth the time and effort that I put in. I’m looking forward to remaining a contributor to the Class Action blog once it is up and running, and I truly hope that this merges helps them to survive this rough transition period.