Most of my work at Political Research Associates (PRA) focused on fact-checking, reading (to understand the depth of PRA’s work), and exploring different ways of contributing to through meeting participation, writing, and research. Initially, I fact-checked a report on abortion law and the Christian Right. I think this was a great introduction to PRA’s work because it focused not only on current events, but also on the political build-up of the Christian Right. The piece talked about how this build-up created a political infrastructure for conservatism that has promoted anti-abortion related laws throughout the United States. Later, I read a book the author published in 1997 about the Christian Coalition titled *Eternal Hostility: The Struggle Between Democracy and Theocracy*, which outlined the groundwork for Christian political power, and elaborated some of the history in the recent report. Between this detailed history of Christian Right political mobilization and the orientation talk I received with the other interns, PRA solidified important understandings about resistance to the Right — the power of the Right is so much about the way they effectively mobilize and how long that process has taken. This was so illuminating! While I previously understood that maintaining our own mobilization is important, it reminded me how long it takes to build infrastructure, and how effective the opposition is. In addition, I had so many conversations — with folks in the office as well as my academic-oriented friends — about the danger of viewing the Right as monolithic. I definitely feel like my understandings of how to approach critiquing and fighting against the Right have been greatly expanded by my time at PRA.

One project I worked on throughout my internship involved updating profiles of Christian Right leaders and organizations which promote anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-choice agendas
throughout Africa (primarily in the south and eastern parts of the continent). While it was often difficult to locate more recent activities of these leaders and orgs in Africa, this project highlighted a lot of the internationalist work of PRA and focused on the imperialistic functions of the “culture wars.” I focused primarily on the “Legal and Political” profiles. The purpose of the project was to attempt to extend the “shelf life” of the profiles in a previously published book American Cultural Warriors in Africa by Kapya Kaoma (which is being revised), and to use the research to update the information on U.S.-based leaders and orgs on PRA’s website.

Thinking about how the Christian Right built a political infrastructure, particularly around “family values,” taught me so much about the intersection of reproductive rights and social justice issues. Before, because I lacked understanding about the specificity of the Right, it was more difficult to grasp anti-choice arguments. It often felt like unbridled misogyny, patriarchy, or power — but although the Right’s arguments are precisely about these things, there is more contention on the Right about the result of these ideals. For instance, I read a short book titled Ctrl-Alt-Delete, which detailed the different elements of the alt-right, and argued their divergence from other right-wing movements. While PRA’s work focuses primarily on the Christian Right, the work they do often researches and exposes other right-wing movements, usually to the end of fracturing the monolith that the Right appears to be. For example, the book reflected on the minutia of the “alternative right.” Much of it argued that, while the alt-right is heavily informed by white supremacy and facism, it is not the white supremacist movements of the past nor is it fully fascist (though it’s deeply informed by both). Rather, much of it promotes a separatist multiculturalism; rather than advocating genocide, it advocates a separation of ethnicities so that one culture doesn’t oppress others (although, I think the language of ethnicity actually means race, but the word “race” is avoided in an attempt to skirt accusations of racism).
This so-called multiculturalism is really just a disguise for racial puritism and segregation. Fascinatingly, some alt-right affiliates also propose dissolving the U.S. in order to create these ethno-states, but without reference to Indigenous sovereignty or even existence of Indigenous people. I think the nuance that PRA is informed by and produces creates a strong framework to base activist work and theory on. In addition, because PRA has a clear political position but is not funded by specific political sponsors, which tends to create goals and achievement-oriented work that detracts from more radical objectives, it can use its theory and position to the benefit of other groups. For example, Tarso, PRA’s executive director, talked about an instance when an Islamic political group was denied a legal suit because of the organizations “bias.” PRA was able to investigate the group’s work and back them up, stating that their arguments were legitimate. This kind of support work is vital, particularly providing co-sponsorship of marginalized voices to help boost them.

I think that the highlights of my internship were great conversations with the wonderfully smart and kind people in the office; learning new things and gaining fantastic nuance; and using that new knowledge to expand my understandings and critiques of the Right and, by extension, of our leftist movements. Although I’ve gained a lot of knowledge from my academic studies, I think that what I gained at PRA was far more critical and important. The things I’ve been studying are often shaped by history, but are often taught within linear and monolithic understandings of oppression, power, and privilege that are detached from the world. PRA’s work is firmly grounded in the effects and real-life results of misogyny, wealth, misinformation, and racism within legal and political contexts. Often, these effects are discussed through interpretations of the Christian Right’s hold on American (and international) politics. PRA’s work often upholds marginalized voices, and creates a platform for critique and
awareness-building — I think that’s something academic spaces often fail to do or ignore altogether.

I had a really great conversation about Catholicism and reproductive justice with an academic friend that sparked my inspiration for a post on PRA’s blog, *Eyes Right*. Unfortunately, the inspiration didn’t hit soon enough, and because of the timeline of reviewing and editing a post, I couldn’t fulfill this goal. But I think that PRA’s influence gave me an interesting and nuanced insight into reproductive justice frameworks and how they applied to this piece. My idea for the blog post was a discussion of how Catholic articulations of anti-abortion are actually founded in holistic pro-life ideals rather than contradictory ideology that other pro-life positions take (i.e. being anti-abortion, but also anti-welfare and pro-death penalty). That is, the majority of Catholic teachings involve supporting poverty programming, encouraging education, supporting people with disabilities, supporting community health access, and overall creating infrastructure that supports the community. This is not to say that Catholic teachings are as radical as necessary, but that the way Catholicism teaches and understands life is closer to the reproductive justice practice that we need.

Before starting my internship, I was thinking about taking time off from school — I wasn’t sure if that would be the best plan, but I think PRA’s work actually helped me figure those things out. In the best way possible, interning with PRA solidified by decision to leave school for a period of time. It really reminded me how much I love reading and researching — really, just *exploring* and *learning* — and how I need to step back from school to re-solidify that love. Because of the classroom pressure, the work load, and the grand expectations with too few accommodations and often bad accessibility, I need to take time away to reorient myself and get
back the love of learning I have. PRA helped with that — no matter what I was working on or researching, I was constantly learning in a much more productive way than I’ve experienced in a while. That was truly incredible. This internship also reawakened my love of reading and writing that’s been stifled by the pressures of my life.

I’m not sure what advice I could offer to the next RRASC intern except: learn! I think working with PRA was so vital to expanding my knowledge in a non-toxic and open space. Everyone in the office is leftist, smart, and all have excellent methods of listening and guiding. This is an excellent place to ask questions, to offer critique, and to plug in to activism. Although I wasn’t able to take advantage of activist connections, my supervisor is super in-the-know about social justice gatherings and organizations in Boston. They kept myself and the other interns very much in the loop about what was going down at various places — specifically, they kept another intern and I up-to-date on Black and Pink meetings. But I imagine that whatever someone’s interests and focuses are, they can definitely find somewhere to connect you.