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Wellman Hill Recipient 2019

I spent this summer working as an intern at the InterReligious Task Force on Central America (IRTF). At IRTF, I had the opportunity to work within Cleveland's activist community to help promote social, economic, and environmental justice across Central America.

IRTF was established in 1980 after the execution of four U.S. church women in El Salvador by U.S. trained soldiers. Two of the women were from Cleveland. Since then, the organization has worked to educate Americans about our role in the ongoing violence, poverty, and instability of Central America. To this day America still has massive influence over the well-being of Central Americans, including the 2009 U.S. backed coup in Honduras, which destabilized the country and forced thousands to flee the ensuing violence and poverty.

My main project at IRTF was to conduct research on the U.S.'s role in Venezuela's ongoing crisis. I learned that the United States has used the economic crisis, caused by collapsing global oil prices, as a pretext to impose economic sanctions and weaken the Venezuelan economy further. The United States has been actively trying to push the already desperate situation to a breaking point in order to install a regime that would be friendlier to the U.S.

At IRTF, I had the opportunity to attend conferences across the country related to our work in promoting peace across the region. In June, I attended both the Poor People's Campaign in Washington D.C. and the Equal Exchange Summit in Norton, Massachusetts. At these events, I was able to attend workshops led by activists and learn how to make my own activism more effective. I also witnessed victims of oppressive structures stand up and fight back. Meeting people at conferences like these, outside the bubble of university life, has greatly expanded my understanding of structural violence and how I can be a better ally.

Working at IRTF, I was able to meet and work alongside established figures in the Cleveland activist community. The people I met at IRTF are some of the most thoughtful and caring individuals I have ever known. Their approach to activism and to life has taught me many lessons in how to be a better activist and a better person overall. These are lessons that will stay with me for years to come, and I have the Wellman Hill Grant Program to thank for it. Without it, I would not have been able to work with this wonderful organization.