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Understanding Hate Through Journalism
My Summer Internship at Documented

When I began my summer internship with Documented through the Bard Center for the Study of Hate, I expected to learn about journalism, nonprofit development and immigration reporting. I did not initially expect that the internship would fundamentally change the way I thought about hate. Before the summer, I used to think about hate more simply. Sometimes as an individual emotion: something a person feels toward another person or group and expresses through discrimination, harassment, violence or hateful speech. My work at Documented complicated that understanding. I furthered my understanding of hate as an emotion, but as something that can be constructed, reinforced, and normalized through institutions, political language, media narratives, misinformation, and unequal access to information.

This was particularly important because Documented is not simply a traditional news organization. It is a nonprofit newsroom dedicated to covering New York City immigrant communities and the policies that affect their lives. Its current mission describes its work as using community-driven journalism to expand access to news and critical information that helps immigrants in New York and elsewhere thrive. Documented emphasizes trust, direct engagement with immigrant communities, multilingual communication, and journalism that responds to the needs of its readers.

That mission became especially meaningful to me through the lens of the Bard Center for the Study of Hate. The Center defines hate studies as an examination of the human capacity to define and then dehumanize or demonize an "other," as well as the processes that can encourage or constrain that capacity. The internship program asks us not only to work for organizations

confronting hatred, but also to examine how those organizations understand hate, how they attempt to combat it, how they measure success, and what additional scholarship might help them.

Working at Documented led me to understand immigrant hate as a process rather than a single event. Immigrants can be turned into an "other" through political rhetoric, stereotypes, misinformation, economic narratives, and portrayals that reduce complicated human beings to categories such as "illegal," "criminal," "burden" or "outsider." Documented's work attempts to interrupt this process by giving immigrants accurate information, representing their experiences, making institutions accountable, and allowing communities to participate in the production of journalism about themselves.

My own work during the summer took place primarily across Documented's development, research, community engagement, and editorial functions. I worked with Rebecca Neuwirth and Kay Dervishi to organize a volunteer drive in Elmhurst, Jackson Heights, and Corona, Queens, designed to disseminate Documented resources to immigrant communities. I also helped organize a high school volunteer drive, created a fact sheet about New York City's immigrant population, and managed Documented's LinkedIn presence. On the editorial side, I worked with Eileen Grench and Lam Thuy Vo on an article about Katrine Dermody joining the Documented team, an article about our Queens volunteer drive, and an article examining data and TikTok trends among immigrant communities in New York. I also interviewed the journalists across the Documented newsroom, which gave me an unusually broad view of how the organization approaches journalism.

Ultimately, my experience led me to a simple but complicated conclusion: if hate is constructed, then it can also be challenged through the construction of something different.

Documented attempts to replace stereotypes with information, isolation with community, misinformation with evidence, and dehumanization with individual stories. Education, in this sense, is not merely classroom learning. It is the process of giving people the knowledge necessary to understand one another and to recognize when narratives about an "other" are being constructed. My summer at Documented taught me that journalism can function as a form of education, and that education can be one of the most important tools available for dismantling the social conditions that allow hate to grow.

Documented's Approach to Immigrant Communities

The first thing that became clear to me during my internship was that Documented's understanding of journalism is fundamentally different from the idea of journalism as simply reporting information from a distance. Documented describes its model as "community-driven journalism." Its strategic plan explains that the organization attempts to build trust with immigrant communities, listen to their concerns, engage them through the platforms they actually use, and create journalism in response to those needs.

This philosophy was visible in almost every part of my work.

Documented's history also helps explain why this model matters. The organization was founded in 2018 with the goal of covering immigration locally while ensuring that immigrants themselves were not merely subjects of stories but also readers and participants in the news process. Documented has explicitly described its work as an attempt to move away from "extractive" immigration reporting, in which journalists enter communities, collect stories, and leave without necessarily providing anything meaningful in return.

The distinction between reporting on a community and reporting with a community became increasingly important to me throughout the summer. It changed how I thought about the

seemingly simple task of distributing a resource guide. A volunteer drive was not merely a logistical project. It was part of a larger attempt to establish a relationship between a newsroom and the people it serves.

Documented's previous research provides an example of this philosophy. In one research project, the organization worked with more than 1,000 immigrants in New York to understand what information they wanted and how they interacted with local media. The research involved public data, community organizations, surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews. This approach demonstrates that Documented does not assume that journalists already know what immigrant communities need. Instead, it treats communities themselves as sources of knowledge.

This became particularly relevant when I worked on the Queens volunteer drive.

The Queens Volunteer Drive

One of my most significant responsibilities was working with Rebecca Neuwirth and Kay Dervishi to organize a volunteer drive in Elmhurst, Jackson Heights, and Corona. These neighborhoods were particularly appropriate for Documented's community engagement work because of their large immigrant populations and the importance of these neighborhoods within New York's immigrant landscape.

The experience made the concept of community-driven journalism tangible. Rather than sitting behind a computer and producing information for an abstract audience, I was participating in the process of physically bringing information into the community.

Our goal was to disseminate Documented resources and make people more aware of the information available to them. This included organizing volunteers, thinking about where volunteers should go, determining how materials could most effectively reach residents, and

communicating the purpose of the project. The project required development work, research, communications, and community engagement simultaneously.

At first, I thought of the volunteer drive primarily as a development task. I quickly realized that it was much more closely connected to Documented's journalism itself. Information has little value if the people who need it cannot access it. This seems obvious, but it has important implications for immigrant communities. Language barriers, unfamiliarity with American institutions, fear of government agencies, limited access to reliable news, and misinformation can all make it difficult for immigrants to obtain accurate information. Documented's multilingual and community-centered model attempts to address this problem by meeting readers where they are, including through digital platforms and in-person engagement. Its strategic plan specifically identifies WhatsApp, WeChat, and in-person community engagement as parts of this model.

Working in Queens therefore changed my understanding of what it means to "combat hate." A conventional understanding of combating hate might involve responding to a hateful statement or prosecuting a hate crime. Those responses can be important, but Documented approaches the problem earlier in the process. If misinformation or stereotypes help construct immigrants as an "other," then providing reliable information and allowing immigrants to tell their own stories can disrupt that construction before it becomes something more severe.

This was particularly meaningful because Documented's reporting exists within a broader environment in which immigrants can be portrayed as threats, burdens, or outsiders. Documented has reported directly on hate crimes targeting people perceived to be immigrants, including cases in which victims were told to "go back to your country" or were told that they did not belong in the United States.

The volunteer drive made the connection between information and hate much more concrete for me. A resource guide might look mundane compared with an investigation or major news story, but the ability to find reliable information can give an individual greater control over their own circumstances. It can reduce vulnerability and dependence on unreliable sources. In that sense, information itself becomes a form of empowerment.

Working With Development

My work with Kay Dervishi also helped me understand an aspect of nonprofit journalism that I had previously overlooked: journalism depends on an institutional structure.

Documented is a newsroom, but it is also a nonprofit organization. Reporting requires funding, partnerships, fundraising, audience development, communications, and strategic planning. Kay's role at Documented includes development and fundraising, and her professional background includes reporting on philanthropy and nonprofit organizations.

Working with the development team helped me understand that the ability to combat hate through journalism is partially dependent on whether an organization can sustain itself.

This changed how I thought about journalism. I had previously separated journalism from fundraising in my mind. One seemed concerned with producing information while the other seemed concerned with raising money. Documented, however, these activities were interconnected. Funding allows journalists to investigate stories, develop multilingual resources, maintain community relationships, conduct research, and reach audiences that might otherwise be overlooked by mainstream media.

The organization's strategic plan makes this relationship explicit. Documented describes its goal as creating a sustainable model that provides immigrants with information, builds trust

and civic engagement, informs advocates, influences journalism, and can contribute to structural change.

This was important to my understanding of hate because hate is also institutional. If discrimination or exclusion can be reinforced through institutions, then combating it requires institutions capable of creating alternatives.

Creating the New York City Immigrant Fact Sheet

Another important project was creating a fact sheet about immigrants in New York City.

On the surface, this was primarily a research assignment. I gathered demographic information and organized it into a format that could be easily understood and used. But the more I worked on it, the more I recognized its connection to the larger question of how hate is constructed. Statistics can either reinforce stereotypes or challenge them. Public discussions about immigration frequently rely on vague claims about how many immigrants live in a city, where they come from, whether they contribute economically, what services they use, or how immigration affects communities. When people lack reliable information, these questions become particularly vulnerable to political rhetoric and misinformation.

Creating the fact sheet required me to think about how information is presented. A statistic does not speak entirely for itself. Context matters. Definitions matter. The choice of comparison matters. The way information is framed matters. This connected directly to what I had learned through the Center for the Study of Hate. If hate involves constructing an "other," then one mechanism of that construction is reducing individuals to generalized categories. An immigrant stops being a neighbor, coworker, student, parent, business owner, or friend and becomes simply "an immigrant." Research can complicate that reduction.

Instead of thinking about immigrants as one homogeneous group, demographic information demonstrates the diversity of New York's immigrant population. Different immigrant communities have different languages, histories, occupations, socioeconomic circumstances, immigration statuses, and experiences. The fact sheet therefore became more than a collection of statistics. It became an exercise in resisting simplification.

Managing Documented's LinkedIn

Managing Documented's LinkedIn account gave me another perspective on how organizations construct public narratives about themselves.

Social media can appear superficial when compared with investigative journalism, but it is actually part of the way an organization communicates its identity. Managing LinkedIn required me to think about which stories, accomplishments, articles, staff members, and organizational developments should be highlighted. I began to see that this work was connected to Documented's broader effort to change the way immigrant communities are represented.

Mainstream narratives about immigration often focus on crises. Immigrants appear in the news when there is a border crisis, a political conflict, a deportation campaign, or a crime story. Documented attempts to produce a more complicated narrative by focusing on people's everyday lives, their needs, their successes, and the institutions affecting them. The social media work therefore required me to think about representation at another level. What does it mean to present an organization publicly as a newsroom for immigrant communities? What stories should be emphasized? What does the organization want its readers, funders, journalists, and potential partners to understand about its work?

The answers were not simply promotional. They were connected to Documented's identity as an organization that believes immigrant communities should have access to information and should have their concerns taken seriously.

The High School Volunteer Drive

I also helped organize a high school volunteer drive. This project was particularly interesting from the perspective of the Bard Center for the Study of Hate because it connected journalism with education in a direct way. Young people were not simply being taught about immigration or hate in an abstract classroom. They were participating in a project designed to connect information with communities.

This reinforced one of the most important conclusions I reached during the summer: education does not have to mean a lecture, textbook, or classroom. Education can mean learning how to identify misinformation. It can mean learning how an institution works. It can mean knowing what resources are available. It can mean understanding why a stereotype is inaccurate. It can mean learning about the experiences of people who are different from you. And it can mean learning how to help someone else access information.

The volunteer project therefore made me think about education as an active process. Rather than simply giving people information, the goal is to develop the capacity to find, evaluate, and use information. That capacity is particularly important in an environment where misinformation can spread rapidly.

Learning From Documented's Journalists

One of the most valuable experiences of the summer was interviewing the journalists at Documented. Speaking with the journalists individually gave me an understanding of the newsroom that I could not have gotten from reading its website. Each journalist approached

immigration through a different subject area, methodology, and set of professional experiences. Yet there was a common emphasis on evidence, relationships with communities, and the responsibility involved in reporting on vulnerable populations. These conversations helped me understand that journalism about immigrants is not simply journalism with a different subject. It requires specific ethical considerations.

For example, a journalist may be dealing with a person who is afraid of government authorities, worried about their immigration status, concerned about family members, or unfamiliar with how American media works. Reporting therefore requires trust. Documented's strategic plan identifies trust as one of the central principles of its community-driven journalism model. The organization says that trust is developed through research, continuous two-way communication, and journalists who regularly engage directly with immigrant communities. I saw the importance of this philosophy repeatedly in conversations with the journalists.

I also learned that journalism can be both investigative and community-centered. These ideas are not opposites. A newsroom can investigate institutions while remaining accountable to the communities affected by those institutions. Eileen Grench's work particularly demonstrated this relationship. Her reporting focuses on immigration enforcement and the effects of the criminal justice and immigration systems on communities. Her work made me think about the difference between simply documenting that a policy exists and documenting what that policy actually does to people. That distinction became particularly important when thinking about hate. A policy does not have to use hateful language to produce fear or exclusion. Institutions can create environments in which certain groups experience greater vulnerability. Journalism can expose those effects and give communities information about what is happening.

My First Article

I worked on an article about Katrine Dermody joining the Documented team.

Writing about a new member of the newsroom might initially appear unrelated to the study of hate. In reality, the project helped me understand how organizations build capacity to address complicated social problems. Katrine's background includes digital media, video journalism, audience-focused storytelling, editorial production, and multidisciplinary newsroom leadership. At Documented, her work includes supporting multimedia journalism and community-centered storytelling across English, Spanish, Chinese, and Haitian Creole. Working on the article required me to think about how to introduce a person professionally while also explaining why her role mattered to Documented's larger mission. This was another lesson about institutional storytelling. Organizations are made up of people, and their ability to accomplish their goals depends on how those people work together. It also reinforced something I had learned through my interviews: Documented's approach to immigrant journalism is continually evolving. The organization has expanded its use of multimedia, social media, data, community engagement, and multilingual reporting. This evolution reflects the fact that the information environment itself is changing.

If the ways people encounter information change, journalism has to change with them.

TikTok, Misinformation, and the Construction of Immigrant Narratives

My work with Lam Thuy Vo on an article about data and TikTok trends among immigrant communities was perhaps the project that most directly connected my internship to the study of hate.

Documented has already undertaken extensive reporting on TikTok's role in shaping how migrants understand immigration. In one investigation, the newsroom examined popular TikTok accounts followed by migrants and identified different categories of influencers, including

self-proclaimed immigration experts, licensed immigration lawyers, and accounts presenting themselves as news sources.

Documented's research found that migrants frequently rely on TikTok to navigate complicated immigration questions. At the same time, information on the platform can be incomplete, misleading, or outright incorrect. The newsroom has used data analysis, video archiving, transcription, and topic modeling to examine this ecosystem.

Working on this project changed my understanding of misinformation. Before the summer, I thought of misinformation primarily as false information. I still understand it that way, but I now recognize that the consequences are more complicated. Information does not exist in a vacuum.

A person who has recently arrived in New York may be trying to understand immigration law, find work, locate housing, enroll a child in school, access healthcare, or understand what government agencies can legally do. If that person receives incorrect information, the consequences can be significant. Misinformation can therefore increase vulnerability. It can also shape how people understand other groups. A social media ecosystem can repeatedly expose people to images of migrants crossing borders, arrests, political speeches, sensational stories, or claims about immigration without sufficient context. Over time, these images can contribute to simplified narratives about who immigrants are.

This brought me back to the concept of the "other." If hate is partly about constructing an "other," then social media can become a powerful tool in that construction. Repetition matters. Emotional content spreads. Short videos can remove context. Algorithms can connect users with increasingly similar material. But the same technology can also be used to challenge those narratives. Documented's response is not simply to tell people that TikTok is bad or that they

should stop using it. Instead, the organization studies the platform, understands what information is circulating, and produces journalism that can compete within the same information environment. That approach is fundamentally educational.

The Queens Article

The other article I worked on, about the Queens volunteer drive, brought together almost every part of my internship. I was no longer writing about an abstract program. I was writing about something I had helped organize.

That created an interesting shift in perspective. As someone working behind the scenes, I had thought about logistics: volunteers, materials, locations, communication, and outreach. Writing the article required me to step back and think about why the project mattered. Documented's reporting on Queens provides important context. The organization has described Elmhurst, Corona, and Jackson Heights as heavily immigrant neighborhoods, with some areas having populations in which as many as 70 percent of residents were born abroad.

The significance of distributing resources in these communities becomes clearer when considered alongside the broader immigration environment in New York. Documented's recent reporting has examined immigration enforcement in Queens, including street arrests, community responses, and the ways fear can affect everyday life.

The volunteer drive therefore represented a small-scale example of a much larger principle: journalism should not simply describe problems; it should help people navigate the environments those problems create. This does not mean that journalists become social workers or political organizers. Rather, it means that journalism can provide information that allows people to make informed decisions for themselves. That distinction is important. Documented's role is not to tell immigrant communities what they should think. Its role is to give them

information, context, and a platform through which they can understand what is happening around them.

What Does Documented Mean by Hate?

After spending the summer at Documented, I would describe its understanding of hate as indirect but deeply structural. Documented does not need to label every piece of journalism as "anti-hate" for its work to confront the processes that create and sustain hatred. The Bard Center for the Study of Hate defines hate studies around the human tendency to identify an "other" and then dehumanize or demonize that person or group. Documented's work can be understood as challenging that process at multiple stages. First, Documented challenges ignorance. Second, it challenges misinformation. Third, it challenges stereotypes. Fourth, it challenges institutional invisibility. Finally, it challenges dehumanization by putting individual people and communities at the center of stories. This is why I have come to think of hate as a construct.

People are not born knowing which groups to hate. They learn categories. They encounter narratives. They receive messages about who belongs and who does not. Political institutions, media organizations, social networks, schools, families, and communities can all contribute to the construction of these categories. That does not mean that individuals have no responsibility for their own beliefs or actions. Rather, it means that individual hatred develops within a broader social environment.

Consequently, combating hate requires changing that environment.

Immigrant Hate Must Be Erased Through Education

The strongest conclusion I reached from my internship is that immigrant hate cannot be confronted only after it has become explicit. Waiting until someone commits a hate crime, threatens an immigrant, or openly advocates discrimination means responding at the end of a

much longer process. The earlier stages matter. A person first encounters a narrative. The narrative creates a category. The category becomes associated with certain characteristics. Those characteristics become stereotypes. The stereotypes become normalized. The group becomes an "other." Eventually, discrimination or hatred can become easier to justify. Education can interrupt this process. By education, I do not mean simply teaching people that hate is wrong. That is important but insufficient. Education must involve teaching people how narratives are constructed, how statistics should be interpreted, how misinformation spreads, how institutions operate, and how to distinguish evidence from rhetoric.

This is where Documented's work is particularly significant. A fact sheet can educate. An investigative article can educate. A resource guide can educate. A TikTok investigation can educate. A community interview can educate. A volunteer drive can educate. Even a LinkedIn post can educate if it directs people toward reliable information. The summer showed me that these seemingly separate activities are actually connected.

The Relationship Between Journalism and Hate

Before this internship, I would have described journalism primarily as a mechanism for informing the public. I now think that description is incomplete. Journalism also determines which people are visible. It determines which experiences receive attention. It determines which claims are investigated. It determines which institutions are held accountable. And, importantly, it can determine whether people are represented as complicated human beings or simplified categories. This is particularly important in immigration reporting.

Documented's stated goal is to create journalism that centers immigrant communities and gives them access to information while avoiding extractive reporting. Its current strategic plan describes the ultimate goal as helping immigrants become heard, represented, and empowered

while also informing advocates and contributing to structural change. I came to see this as an anti-hate model even when the word "hate" was not being used. It works because it changes the relationship between the journalist and the subject. The immigrant is not simply a source. The immigrant is a reader, participant, a member of the audience, a person with knowledge. That distinction matters because dehumanization begins when people are reduced to categories rather than recognized as individuals.

What I Learned About My Own Role

The internship also changed the way I think about my own role in combating hate. I initially imagined that working against hate required a dramatic intervention. I thought that meaningful work would necessarily involve confronting hateful groups or directly responding to hate crimes. Instead, my experience taught me that social change often occurs through less visible work. Organizing volunteers is not dramatic. Creating a fact sheet is not dramatic. Managing LinkedIn is not dramatic. Helping prepare an article is not dramatic. But these activities contribute to an ecosystem that makes reliable information more accessible.

The work also taught me that nonprofit organizations rely on people performing many different roles. A journalist may report a story, but someone must research it, edit it, publish it, promote it, fund it, distribute it, and connect it to an audience. This made me appreciate the institutional side of combating hate. Good intentions are not enough. Organizations need resources, systems, research, professional expertise, and relationships with communities. The Bard Center's internship program itself recognizes this by asking students to examine not just whether an organization opposes hatred, but how it understands the problem and whether its approach is effective.

Conclusion

My summer at Documented changed the way I understand both journalism and hate.

I entered the internship thinking about hate largely as an interpersonal problem: individuals who dislike, discriminate against, or attack other people. I left understanding hate as something that can also be socially constructed. Groups can be categorized as outsiders. Stereotypes can be repeated. Misinformation can spread. Political language can normalize exclusion. Institutions can reinforce inequalities. The media can either reproduce these narratives or challenge them.

Documented operates within this complicated environment.

Its work does not treat immigrants as passive recipients of journalism. Instead, it attempts to build relationships with immigrant communities, understand their information needs, and produce journalism that responds to those needs. Its strategic plan emphasizes trust, community engagement, multilingual journalism, and the goal of ensuring that immigrants are heard, represented, and empowered.

My own work allowed me to experience this model from several different perspectives. Working with Rebecca Neuwirth and Kay Dervishi on the Queens volunteer drive taught me that journalism is only useful when it reaches the people who need it. The project in Elmhurst, Jackson Heights, and Corona showed me the importance of connecting digital journalism with physical communities. The high school volunteer drive showed me that education can take place through participation. Creating the immigrant fact sheet showed me how factual information can challenge stereotypes and provide context to political debates. Managing LinkedIn taught me that public communication is part of an organization's larger mission. Interviewing Documented's journalists allowed me to understand the ethical and practical challenges of reporting on immigrant communities. Working with Eileen Grench and Lam Thuy Vo introduced me to the

editorial process and showed me how reporting can combine human stories with institutional and data analysis. The Katrine Dermody article showed me how the development of a newsroom itself can strengthen an organization's ability to reach communities. The TikTok project showed me how misinformation can influence vulnerable communities and how journalism can respond through research, data, and evidence. Most importantly, all of these experiences helped me understand the relationship between hate and information.

Hate does not appear from nowhere. It is learned, constructed, reinforced, and normalized. That means it can also be challenged. If misinformation can construct an "other," accurate information can complicate that image. If isolation can make people vulnerable, community engagement can create connection. If stereotypes reduce individuals to categories, journalism can restore complexity by telling their stories. If ignorance allows prejudice to persist, education can provide people with the tools to question what they have been taught.

This is why I ultimately understand Documented's work as connected to the Bard Center for the Study of Hate even though Documented is, first and foremost, a newsroom.

Documented educates. It educates immigrants about the institutions that affect their lives. It educates the broader public about immigrant communities. It educates journalists about how community-driven reporting can work. It educates readers about misinformation. And, through its investigative work, it educates institutions and policymakers about the consequences of their decisions.

My central lesson from the summer is therefore simple: if hate is constructed, then combating hate requires constructing something else. That "something else" is knowledge, community, representation, trust, and empathy. Education is not the only solution to immigrant hate. Structural inequality, political rhetoric, discriminatory policies, economic conditions, and

institutional practices all matter. But education is one of the places where those processes can be challenged before they become normalized. It gives people the ability to question categories, investigate claims, recognize manipulation, and understand people who have been presented to them as fundamentally different.

My internship at Documented showed me that journalism can be a form of this education. I began the summer expecting to learn how a newsroom works. I left with a much broader understanding of how information itself can be a form of social power. The work I did, whether distributing resources in Queens, creating research materials, helping with development, managing social media, interviewing journalists, or contributing to reporting, was part of a larger effort to make immigrant communities more informed, visible, and empowered.

In the end, that may be one of the most important ways to confront hate: not simply by telling people what not to hate, but by giving them the knowledge and human connection necessary to see the "other" as a person in the first place.