

EMERSON J. SYKES

BIO

Emerson is a senior staff attorney with the ACLU Speech, Privacy, and Technology Project where he focuses on First Amendment free speech protections. He is also an adjunct professor of law at New York University School of Law where he teaches a seminar on “Race and the First Amendment.”

Prior to joining the ACLU in 2018, he was a legal advisor for Africa at the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL). In that role, he provided technical legal assistance to civil society leaders, government officials, law students, and other stakeholders from across Africa to improve the legal framework protecting the freedom of association, assembly, and expression on the regional and national levels.

From 2012-13, he served as assistant general counsel to the New York City Council, where he worked to increase transparency for council members’ discretionary spending and contributed to the council’s friend-of-the-court brief against the NYPD’s “Stop and Frisk” program. In 2011, Emerson was a senior policy fellow in the office of a Member of Parliament in Ghana. Emerson previously conducted research and wrote about U.S. foreign policy for The Century Foundation, a progressive think tank, and worked for the National Democratic Institute’s Central and West Africa Team.

Emerson holds a J.D. from the New York University School of Law, where he was a Root-Tilden-Kern scholar for public interest law, and a Master of Public Affairs degree from the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs. He earned his undergraduate degree in political science at Stanford.