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**Class of 2019
Boulder, CO**

This summer I've had an incredible opportunity working in the development sector, an opportunity made possible by the Burch Fellows Program. This summer's lessons—encountered through both work and adventure-- have been rich and heart-wrenching. An internship with a digital identity development initiative offered me a much-needed opportunity to revise my ethic and path for how I intend to make a global impact with econometrics and activism. I also developed a deep passion for exploring New York City's history, mystery, and architecture.

I settled into a cozy apartment on 2nd Avenue in Manhattan's

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**New York City,
New York**

DIGITAL IDENTITY AND REFUGEES

East Village. Many Saturday afternoons were spent in the nearby Tompkins Square Park watching ping pong matches between strangers and revelling at the diversity of language and conversations around me. I went



to protests, marches, and lectures at the United Nations and Cooper Union. I found my favorite bagel shop in the world, salsa danced, rode the subway for fun, and rode on stalled or broken subways (not for fun). Towards the end



of the summer, my roommate and I organized an apartment "meet and greet" where we met our apartment neighbors, old and young, and heard their thoughts on the complexities of New York's rent-controlled and rent-stabilized policies. We had bought a box of donuts from the corner store and from one of our neighbors who had lived in that building for 60 years learned of a neighborhood legend that the Kennedy family used to hang out around that same donut corner store. Each day felt like a tiny ethnographic project of the City.

The company I worked for, ID2020 is focusing on coordinating the development of a decentralized and secure way of legally authenticating people's credentials. Over 1 billion people, many of whom are refugees, are currently unable to authenticate their legal identity and are therefore barred from financial, employment, and health opportunities. These people also bear a higher risk for human trafficking.

My days were spent working in an open work environment (no cubicles!) where my co-workers and I faced each other around tables together as we worked. This was perhaps my favorite part of my job-- getting to be in the same room as many humanitarians I admired, getting to hear and take part in their daily informal conversations around development best practices and strategy.

Unexpectedly, instead of providing me with an affirmation of my career and educational path forward, my internship gave me a much needed deep introspection into my commitment to development work and missions such as that of digital identity initiatives.

What, if anything, is wrong with digital identity's noble-sounding



undertaking? This is not a simple question, nor can I pretend to have the answer. What concerns me, following my summer participating in the planning the 2018 Digital Identity Summit at the United Nations, is that while the rationale behind digitizing human authenticated identities is strong, it also carries with it a host of risks and limitations-- some of which are openly debated in the field and others that are not. These concerns include homogenization, thinly-veiled neocolonialism, a lack of understanding of structural and historical patterns of global poverty, misaligned incentives among private and non-profit stakeholders, and of course, as with all data collection practices, breaches of security and privacy.

My Burch Fellowship experience has inspired me to take the next semester off of university and study a different perspective on development and wealth inequality with the Zapatistas in southern Mexico. The path I was on before the Burch summer, one of the integration of global development, data, and technology, has evolved into something different.

For this opportunity, I am infinitely grateful for the largesse of Lucius Burch and the Burch Fellows Program.