

# Maya Brady: Taking the Fast Track into Social Justice



Image courtesy of Brady's Facebook

## By Saeri Plagmann

I look out of my window with the zoom room open on my laptop, waiting for Maya to join. Seven minutes pass since the time we were scheduled to meet, and I instinctively check my calendar to make sure I didn't mistake the date and time. Sure enough, she was running late. As I grab my phone to send her a message, a box pops up on my screen, and the familiar face that I had known since freshman year appears. She smiles her infectious smile as she unmutes herself to greet me, and I'm immediately taken back to when I lived in the dorms my freshman year with Maya as my residential assistant.

Maya is a petite, soft-spoken person. She seems reserved and quiet at first glance, but talking to her would reveal that she's an open book with a big heart. Her eyebrow and lip piercings hint that she has an adventurous and edgy side to her, and she has an aura that makes it easy to vent your frustrations and worries. It

embarrasses me now to reminisce about the number of times I barged into her room when I had an emotional breakdown my first year of college. She helped me get through so much, whether it was to just sit and listen or to give me advice. But that's who Maya is. She always wants to help others in any way she can, and that extended into her path after college.

### **An established career woman**

Maya currently works full-time at BerlinRosen, one of the country's top public relations firms based in Manhattan. She went straight into the workforce after graduating from UCSB in just three years. As an Account Executive, most of her days are taken up by meetings with various clients and her media and communications team. In fact, she had just come from one before this interview, which ran a little longer than she anticipated. "It's busy. And sometimes it can be long hours, but it's for good work," she reflected. Maya is only a year older than me, but there was such an authoritative and mature air around her. The way she carefully and thoughtfully formulated her answers, and the way she spoke about her work and her passions told me that this was not the light-hearted RA I once knew. Taking a step into the real world is definitely a humbling experience, but after listening to what she's been up to post-graduation, her experience was nothing short of sobering.



Image courtesy of Brady's Facebook

### **Confronting the real world**

Her journey began in the summer of 2020. As a recent college graduate who majored in Sociology and minored in History, Maya knew that she wanted to pursue a job that involved working with marginalized communities. The problem was that the pandemic made job searching even more difficult than it already was. Living back home in Sacramento, she spent months applying to random jobs on LinkedIn, all the while working retail so that she could pay rent. For a while, her life revolved around going from one temporary odd job to the next—whatever paid. But her day-to-day was always clouded over by the worry of not being able to break out of this cycle. She recounted this time of her life pensively.

It was in October of that year when things started to turn around for her. BerlinRosen reached out with an internship offer, and five months later, she found herself moving to New York after accepting a full-time paid position with them. Now a communications and media relations support for various organizations, she's where she always aspired to be— earning a good salary while working on social issues that she cares about the most.

### **Giving back**

Maya's success story wasn't just a stroke of luck. She worked unconditionally hard to get to where she is, motivated by the need to repay her parents. Maya is the oldest child to an immigrant Filipino mother and an African American father, and her parents sacrificed everything to ensure that she had access to every opportunity. She reflected thoughtfully as she told me about how they worked tough jobs and long hours, just so that her college tuition and rent were paid. She understood that they wanted her to be more comfortable than they ever were, and it became important to her that she enter into a white-collar job to bridge the gap between what she could attain and what her parents could never have. So now, her goal is to save up enough money to buy her mother a house as a way to repay her for everything she's sacrificed.

When she thought about the career path she chose for herself with BerlinRosen, Maya added that she wanted to stay close to working-class communities despite living in a rich city like New York, because that's where she came from and that's where her family will always be. It was this desire that led her to pursue her current position, one that would allow her to work closely with local organizations all across the country.

### **An early career milestone**

Currently, Maya is collaborating with Youth First, a social service group dedicated to shutting down youth prisons around the nation. She is deeply invested in criminal justice, especially when it pertains to youth. "I feel like it's archaic and abusive to throw kids into the system over a minor misdemeanor [like] stealing," she said, and passionately explained to me the outdated system of having kids age out in juvenile detention, only to be thrown into the adult system where the rest of their lives are stripped from them.

As an Account Executive, Maya's primary responsibility is to write press releases, do talking points, pitch reporters, and set up interviews, but she recently experienced a major career milestone when she pitched a producer for Last Week Tonight with John Oliver who was doing a segment on youth justice and juvenile crime. She

beamed as she spoke about the fulfillment she felt from being able to connect her work to a national audience, adding that she's had several of these "unreal" opportunities since working at BerlinRosen. For instance, in November, she got to work with the mother and prosecutor of Philando Castille, an African American who was fatally shot in 2016 during a traffic stop. She recounted that they received a lot of coverage from major news outlets such as CNN and VICE, which was really important to her because it was a community-based effort and it was a huge step in initiating change in the field of criminal justice.



Image courtesy of BerlinRosen

### **Looking ahead to the future**

Time seemed to fly by as I caught up with Maya. I was eager to ask her more about her life in New York, but halfway through our conversation, I heard a phone timer go off on her end. It was clear that she had a tight schedule and needed to move on to her next appointment, so I jumped to the question I was curious about the most: what does the future look like for her? She took a moment to ponder the question, but eventually said, "I feel like I'm

at a good place right now." Her short time at BerlinRosen was proving to be more fruitful than she imagined, and she expressed her hope of wanting to stay with the company for at least ten years. She added that graduate school overseas is always a possibility, and depending on who is running in 2024, she might be interested in jumping on a campaign. It's all a loose plan, but the main thing is that she likes what she's doing right now.

### **Advice to college seniors**

Having only recently been a senior in college herself, Maya knew what I would be looking at in a couple of months when I graduate. Before I concluded the interview, she said, "Make good use of [the] time that you have now and really appreciate what you have." She stressed that it's really easy for seniors to fall into productivity traps, but that it's important to have time for yourself and to build relationships before you have to fall into the "nine to five grind" after college. When I asked about

how to best navigate the uncertainties of life immediately after graduating, she simply said to not stress too much because things always work out in the end. As was the case with her, anything can happen in a year. "You just have to keep your head held high and stay hopeful and optimistic," she said with a smile.