

# AVINASH MOORTHY

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HARVARD  
UNIVERSITY

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## Education

### Harvard University

Ph.D. Public Policy, 2020 to 2026 (expected)

### Carleton College

B.A. Economics, *magna cum laude*, 2018

## Fields

Primary Field: Labour Economics

Secondary Fields: Economic History, Political Economy, Development Economics

## References

Professor Will Dobbie

Harvard Kennedy School

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Professor Desmond Ang

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Professor Claudia Goldin

Harvard University

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## Job Market Paper

### *The Defender on the Move: Black Newspapers and the Great Migration*

After 50 years of limited migration following emancipation, 1.5 million Black southerners made the journey north during the First Great Migration from 1915 to 1940. Over the same period, Black political organization in the South surged and racial violence fell. I examine whether information on northern life and jobs sparked Black migration and southern activism using quasi-random variation in exposure to the Chicago Defender, the most prominent northern Black newspaper. Classifying the coverage of thousands of southern newspapers, I show that information about the North was limited prior to the Chicago Defender's entry in the mid-1910s. To reach southern readers, the Chicago Defender partnered with Black railway porters working for the Illinois Central railroad. In cities along the railroad, I find that individuals who lived near a porter selling the Chicago Defender were 33% more likely to migrate north than similar individuals who did not. These individuals pulled relatives to migrate, consistent with information diffusion across social networks, and moved to cities that received more coverage in articles, ads, and job postings. Counties with access to the Chicago Defender were 1.5 times more likely to form an NAACP branch and experienced 1.4 times fewer lynchings.

## Papers in Progress

Paywalls (with Desmond Ang, Stephen Pettigrew, and Ben Schneer)

Through the 2010s, the news media landscape shifted from an ad-supported to a subscription-based model. What are the effects of the transition? We examine the impact of local newspaper paywalls on news consumption, online browsing behavior and the implications for political and economic knowledge, voting, and community engagement. We assemble the most comprehensive database to date tracking the implementation of paywalls for the universe of daily newspapers in the US. We show that local newspapers skew right-leaning compared to other online news sources and attract readers who are older, whiter, and higher income. We find a sharp drop in time spent reading local newspapers after paywalls are implemented. Users shift news consumption towards national news sites with more left-leaning ideological slants, soft news and entertainment media. These substitution patterns cascade into a host of downstream outcomes, including a leftward shift among local residents in voting behavior and decreased knowledge of local economic conditions and social activity.

## Teaching Mental Health: Evaluating India's Happiness Curriculum (with Kevin Carney)

Around 83% of U.S. K-12 schools have implemented a social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum, yet we have little evidence on their efficacy. We study the effects of India's "Happiness Curriculum," the world's largest SEL curriculum reaching millions of students in grades 1–8. The Happiness Curriculum replaces the first 30 minutes of each school day with guided mindfulness meditation followed by stories and activities designed to help students understand their thoughts, emotions, and relationships. We conduct a randomized control trial in partnership with the state of Tripura following over 4,000 students in grades 1–8 for 2 years. We randomly assign grades to receive either the Happiness Curriculum, daily mindfulness practice, or teaching-as-usual. Students' math scores in SEL and mindfulness grades increase by 0.11 SD after 6 months and 0.29 SD after 2 years, accompanied by an increase in fluid intelligence. Math gains are equivalent to an additional year of learning and are driven by daily mindfulness practice. We observe little effect of SEL on measures of anxiety or depression. Our results reveal that programs targeting mindfulness and state of mind can be cost-effective ways to improve academic achievement.

Blowin' in the Wind: The Impact of Climate Disasters on College Majors and Innovation (with Chloe Tanaka)

### Other Publications or Working Papers

The Effect of Education on Later Life Health Revisited (with Ted Figinski and Alicia Lloro), *FEDS Working Paper 2022-007*

How Does Social Distancing Affect the Spread of Covid-19 in the United States? (with Bhashkar Mazumder), *Chicago Fed Letter No. 442*, 2020

### Teaching

Race and the State: The Role of Public Policy in U.S. Racial Inequality, Harvard Kennedy School Course Assistant for Professor Desmond Ang, 2023

Intermediate Price Theory, Carleton College  
Teaching Assistant for Professor Jenny Bourne, 2017-2018

Introduction to Macroeconomics, Carleton College  
Teaching Assistant for Professor Nathan Grawe, 2016

Introduction to Microeconomics, Carleton College  
Teaching Assistant for Professors Nathan Grawe and Prathi Seneviratne, 2015-2016

### Relevant Experience

Research Assistant, Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, 2018-2020  
U.S. Department of Treasury, Office of Economic Policy, Summer Intern, 2017  
Cornerstone Research, Summer Analyst, 2016

### Fellowships & Awards

Stone Ph.D. Scholar in Inequality and Wealth Concentration, Harvard Kennedy School, 2022  
Ph.D. Affiliate of Centre for International Development, Harvard Kennedy School, 2022  
Ph.D. Affiliate of Evidence for Policy Design, Harvard Kennedy School, 2022  
Doctoral Fellow of Harvard Environmental Economics Program, Harvard Kennedy School, 2020  
Top Undergraduate Senior Thesis, Minnesota Economics Association, 2018  
Ada M. Harrison Prize in Economics, Carleton College, 2018  
Phi Beta Kappa, Carleton College, 2018  
Dean's List, Carleton College, 2016-2017

### Research Grants

The Weiss Fund, with Kevin Carney, 2025 (\$14,343)  
Development Innovation Ventures, with Kevin Carney and Labhya Foundation, 2024 (\$910,000)  
Stone Research Grant, 2024 (\$1,670)  
Fund for Innovation in Development, with Kevin Carney and Labhya Foundation, 2023 (\$680,530)  
J-PAL Learning for All Initiative, with Kevin Carney, 2023 (\$43,276)  
The Weiss Fund, with Kevin Carney, 2023 (\$50,000)  
Stone Research Grant, 2023 (\$2,500)

Mind Brain and Behaviour Initiative, 2022 (\$10,000)  
J-PAL Post-Primary Education Initiative, 2021 (\$31,724)

**Seminars &  
Conferences**

Southern Economic Association, November 2025  
London School of Economics Graduate Economic History Seminar, October 2025  
Harvard Kennedy School Economics and Social Policy Seminar, September 2025  
Harvard Economic History Seminar, September 2025  
Harvard History, Culture, and Society Workshop, April 2025  
Harvard Labour/Public Graduate Student Workshop, March 2025  
Harvard Centre for International Development Ph.D. Retreat, February 2023

**Academic Service**

Referee for American Journal of Health Economics, Journal of Policy Analysis and Management  
Chair of Harvard Kennedy School Ph.D. Mentorship and Wellness Committees, 2020-2023

**Languages**

English (native), French (intermediate)

**Software skills**

Stata, Python, ArcGIS, R, LaTeX, RATS

**Citizenship**

Canada and USA