

Micah Villarreal

Department of Economics
Northwestern University
2211 Campus Drive
Evanston, IL 60208

<https://micahvillarreal.com/>
+1 (757) 272-3030
micah.villarreal@northwestern.edu
Citizenship: United States

Research Fields

Labor Economics, Economic History, Applied Microeconomics

Position

Postdoctoral Scholar, Department of Economics, Northwestern University, 2025–2026

Education

Ph.D. in Economics, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2025
Dissertation Committee: Peter Kuhn (advisor), Katherine Eriksson, Gonzalo Vazquez-Bare
M.A. in Economics, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2020
B.A. in International Relations & Economics, Wellesley College, 2015

Dissertation

Title: Essays on Inequality and Methods in United States History
Main Advisor: Dr. Peter Kuhn
Other Advisors: Dr. Katherine Eriksson, Dr. Gonzalo Vazquez-Bare

Working Papers

(Job Market Paper) “Black Gold: The Effect of Wealth on Descendants of the Enslaved.”

This paper examines how short-term wealth shocks affected the economic trajectories of descendants of the enslaved in the early twentieth-century United States. I exploit a natural experiment in which Creek Freedmen allottees—Black landholders in Oklahoma—received quasi-random windfalls when producing oil wells were drilled on their land allotments. By constructing and linking microdata from the Dawes Rolls, allotment maps, oil drilling records, and U.S. censuses from 1910 to 1940, I show that oil discoveries were as-good-as-random with respect to pre-treatment characteristics. The wealth shocks had modest direct effects on asset accumulation, but large and persistent impacts on human capital. Treated youths were less likely to work, more likely to remain in school, and ultimately attained higher levels of education. Over subsequent decades, they shifted toward white-collar occupations and urban residence, and—by 1940—had higher rates of homeownership. These findings provide the first causal evidence on the long-run effects of wealth shocks for descendants of the enslaved. They suggest

that wealth enabled strategic investments in education and mobility, generating lasting socioeconomic gains despite ongoing racial barriers. [\[Link to paper.\]](#)

Works in Progress

“Last Place Aversion in the Jim Crow South.”

“The Effect of Wealth on Descendants of Native Americans.”

Professional Activities

Visiting Graduate Student, Center for Economic History at Northwestern University, 2023–2024

AEA Dissertation Fellow at The Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, Summer 2023

Co-President of “Women in Economics at UCSB” (WESB), 2020–2022

Graduate Associate at the Broom Center for Demography, 2020–2023

Research Grants

Early Career Grant, Washington Center for Equitable Growth, 2024 (\$15,000)

Dissertation Research Grant, Russell Sage Foundation, 2024 (\$10,000)

Fellowships & Awards

Doctoral Scholars Fellowship, UC Santa Barbara Graduate Division, 2022–2025

Graduate Research Fellowship, The National Science Foundation, 2019–2024

Peggy Howard Fellowship, Wellesley College Department of Economics, 2019

Natalie Bolten Prize for Best Econometrics Paper, Wellesley College, 2015

Conferences & Seminars

2025 ASSA/AEA Annual Meeting, Wellesley College (scheduled)

2024 University of Tennessee- Knoxville, Bay Area Economic History Workshop (Stanford University), CSMGEP Summer Pipeline Mentoring Conference, IPUMS Data-Intensive Research Conference, Economic History Association, Trans-Pacific Labor Seminar, Southern Economic Association

2023 Princeton University Industrial Relations Section Labor Lunch, Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, Northwestern University Economic History Lunch

Research Assistance Experience

Research Assistant to Professor Youssef Benzarti, 2021

Programmer Analyst in the Social and Economic Policy Division, Abt Associates Inc., 2015–2018

Undergraduate Research Assistant to Esther Duflo, 2015

Teaching Experience

Teaching Assistant, Introduction to Econometrics (undergraduate level), 2023

Pre-Doctoral Work

“Using the Family Self-Sufficiency Program to Help Families with Housing Assistance Improve Earnings, Credit Score, and Debt Levels: A Quasi-Experimental Analysis” (with Judy Geyer, Leslie Freiman and Jeff Lubell), *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 2018.

“What is the impact of a first-year experience course and mentoring program on early postsecondary outcomes? Experimental evidence from the Broncos FIRST program” (with Jennifer Ash, Austin Nichols, Andrea Beach and Daniel Collier). U.S. Department of Education. Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates, 2019.

“Interim Cost-Benefit Analysis of the Compass Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program. Conducted for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development” (with Sam Dastrup, Leslie Freiman, Jeff Lubell and Daniel Weiss). Abt Associates, 2017.

“Evaluation of the Compass Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Programs Administered in Partnership with Public Housing Agencies in Lynn and Cambridge, Massachusetts” (with Judy Geyer, Leslie Freiman and Jeff Lubell). U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates. 2017.

Languages & Skills

Languages: English (native), Spanish (conversational)

Programming Languages: Stata, R, ArcGIS, Python. GitHub, L^AT_EX.

References

Peter Kuhn

Distinguished Professor
Department of Economics
University of California, Santa Barbara
pjkuhn@ucsb.edu
+1 (805) 729-0054

Walker Hanlon

Associate Professor
Department of Economics
Northwestern University
whanlon@northwestern.edu
+1 (847) 491-8218

Joe Ferrie

Professor
Department of Economics
Northwestern University
ferrie@northwestern.edu
+1 (847) 491-8210

Joel Mokyr

Robert H. Strotz Professor
Department of Economics
Northwestern University
j-mokyr@northwestern.edu
+1 (847) 491-5693

Additional Contacts

Placement Director

Professor Robert Porter
Department of Economics
Northwestern University
r-porter@northwestern.edu

Placement Director

Professor Ben Golub
Department of Economics
Northwestern University
benjamin.golub@northwestern.edu

Placement Administrator

Lola Ittner
Department of Economics
Northwestern University
lola.ittner@northwestern.edu

Last updated: November 2025