

Micah Villarreal

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

<https://micahvillarreal.com/>
+1 (757) 272-3030
micahvillarreal@ucsb.edu

Academic Positions

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

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

Research Fields

Primary Labor Economics, Economic History (United States)

Secondary Economics of Inequality

Working Papers (Abstracts at End)

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

“Last Place Aversion in the Jim Crow South.”

Works in Progress

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

“Black Wealth and Economic Development.”

“Last Place Aversion on Black Wall Street.”

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

Walker Hanlon

Associate Professor
Department of Economics
Northwestern University
whanlon@northwestern.edu

Joe Ferrie

Professor
Department of Economics
Northwestern University
ferrie@northwestern.edu

Joel Mokyr

Robert H. Strotz Professor
Department of Economics
Northwestern University
j-mokyr@northwestern.edu

Working Papers – Abstracts

(Job Market Paper) “Black Gold: The Effect of Wealth on Descendants of the Enslaved.” September 2025 Can short-term wealth shocks narrow racial wealth disparities in the long term? In this project, I leverage quasi-random oil discoveries on Black-owned land in the early 1900s to study how positive wealth shocks affected Black economic progress in the short and long term. I first establish that wealth receipt in this context can be treated as a random shock. I then demonstrate that the money had a positive causal effect on the human capital of the first generation. Landholders who find oil are more geographically mobile, leading to occupational mobility and entry into higher status occupations. Work on longer-term outcomes, including intergenerational outcomes, is still in progress.

“Last Place Aversion in the Jim Crow South.” December 2021. I explore whether variation in the “status” of nonwhite and white Americans in the Jim Crow South has a relationship with racist sentiments, as proxied by Ku Klux Klan (KKK) activity. I propose that such a relationship could be explained by “last-place aversion” on the part of poor white Southerners. In this exploratory draft, I report some estimates of the relationship between three possible measures of “status” and KKK activity at a county-level. I am intentionally agnostic to the reasons why literacy rate, home ownership rate and income of white and nonwhite people vary between place and over time, instead taking them as given. I find that there is a strong and positive relationship between nonwhite income and klavern activity.