

**Ajay Kumar Batra, Ph.D.**  
Department of English  
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## **DEGREES EARNED**

Ph.D., English, University of Pennsylvania, August 2021  
B.A., English (honors, minor in philosophy), University of Chicago, June 2015

## **EMPLOYMENT HISTORY**

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Vanderbilt University, August 2023–present  
Postdoctoral Scholar, Society of Fellows in the Humanities, University of Southern California, August 2021–August 2023  
Teaching Fellow, Department of English, University of Southern California, August 2021–August 2023

## **HONORS AND AWARDS**

Diane Hunter Dissertation Prize, Department of English, University of Pennsylvania, 2022  
Dean’s Scholar Award, School of Arts and Sciences, University of Pennsylvania, 2021  
The 1921 Essay Prize in American Literature, American Literature Society, 2020  
William Patrick Day Essay Prize, Department of English, University of Pennsylvania, 2018  
Sweeten Prize for Best Graduate Essay in American Literature, Department of English, University of Pennsylvania, 2017  
Janel Mueller Undergraduate Thesis Prize, Department of English University of Chicago, 2015

## **RESEARCH**

### **Articles in refereed journals**

Batra, Ajay Kumar. “Becoming Fellow-Servants: Slavery, Theft, and Citizenship in the Nineteenth-Century South.” Accepted for publication in *American Literature*.

Batra, Ajay Kumar. “Reading with Conviction: Abraham Johnstone and the Poetics of the Dead End.” *Early American Literature*, vol. 55, no. 2, 2020, pp. 331–54.

### **Scholarly reviews and non-refereed articles**

Batra, Ajay Kumar. “Conference Review: *Common Reading Initiative: The Age of Phillis*. Society of Early Americanists. Atlanta, Ga. (virtual). March 2021.” *Early American Literature*, vol. 57, no. 3, 2022, pp. 1040–45.

Batra, Ajay Kumar. “Conference Review: *Empire, Sovereignty, and Labor in the Age of Global Abolition*. McNeil Center for Early American Studies. Philadelphia, Penn. (virtual). February 2021.” *Early American Literature*, vol. 57, no. 1, 2022, pp. 327–31.

Batra, Ajay Kumar. "Gallows Respectability." *Common-Place: The Journal of Early American Life*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2017, <http://commonplace.online/article/gallows/>.

Batra, Ajay Kumar. "Review of *Citizen Sailors: Becoming American in the Age of Revolution* by Nathan Perl-Rosenthal." *Journal of American Studies*, vol. 51, no. 4, 2017, pp. 1277–80.

Batra, Ajay Kumar. "Review of *The East Is Black: Cold War China in the Black Radical Imagination* by Robeson Taj Frazier." *Amerasia Journal*, vol. 42, no. 2, 2016, pp. 195–98.

### **Works in progress**

Batra, Ajay Kumar. "Radiant Ephemera: Abolition in the Black Atlantic." Book manuscript.

Batra, Ajay Kumar. "Originary Communism in the Black Radical Tradition." Article Manuscript.

Batra, Ajay Kumar. "Being Made a Fence of: On Enslaved Children's Labors." Article Manuscript.

### **FELLOWSHIPS AND GRANTS**

Postdoctoral Fellowship, Society of Fellows in the Humanities, University of Southern California, 2021–23

Marguerite Bartlett Hamer Fellowship, McNeil Center for Early American Studies, 2019–20

Francis Hopkinson Fellowship, School of Arts and Sciences, University of Pennsylvania, 2017–18

Benjamin Franklin Fellowship, School of Arts and Sciences, University of Pennsylvania, 2015–21

### **INVITED PRESENTATIONS**

"Improper Associations: Theft and Citizenship in Slavery's Archives." Americanist Research Colloquium, Department of English, University of California, Los Angeles. Los Angeles, Calif. May 2023.

"Own Nothing: Rethinking Theft in Slavery's Archives." McNeil Center for Early American Studies. Philadelphia, Penn. October 2022.

"Exodus in Place: Abolition Geographies in Denmark's Charleston." Center for Law, History, and Culture, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, Calif. October 2021.

"Looting, Black, Radicalism, and Early American Studies." Virtual Seminar Series, Society of Early Americanists. October 2021.

### **CONFERENCE ACTIVITIES**

#### **Conference panels organized**

"Keywords for Early African American Studies." Society of Early Americanists. Atlanta, Ga. (virtual). March 2021.

#### **Conference presentations**

"Being Made a Fence of: On Enslaved Children's Labors." C19: The Society of Nineteenth-Century Americanists." Pasadena, Calif. March 2024. (Upcoming)

- “Remnants of Fugitivity.” C19: The Society of Nineteenth-Century Americanists.” Pasadena, Calif. March 2024. (Upcoming)
- “Slavery, Abolition, and the Global Anglophone.” Modern Language Association. Philadelphia, Pa. January 2024.
- “Cedric Robinson’s Ellipsis.” Society of Early Americanists. Washington, D.C. June 2023.
- “Close Reading in the Archives of Slavery.” Society of Early Americanists. Washington, D.C. June 2023.
- “Capitalism and the Enslaved: Theorizing on the Plantation.” American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies. St. Louis, Mo. March 2023.
- “Abolition, Democracy: Horizons of Black Radicalism in the Early Nineteenth Century.” C19: The Society of 19th-Century Americanists. Miami, Fla. April 2022.
- “Denmark and Clarinda: Crafting Black Communes in Charleston.” C19: The Society of 19th-Century Americanists. Miami, Fla. April 2022.
- “Abolition.” Society of Early Americanists. Atlanta, Ga. (virtual). March 2021.
- “Abolitionism as Presentism.” C19: The Society of 19th-Century Americanists. Miami, Fla. (virtual). October 2020.
- “‘And *that* is the writing of history’: C. L. R. James, Slavery, and Speculative Thought.” Lapidus Center for the Historical Analysis of Transatlantic Slavery. Schomburg Center for the Research in Black Culture. New York. October 2019. [[Video](#); session at 1:59:33]
- “The Artifice of the Given: Self-Writing in the Early Black Atlantic.” McNeil Center for Early American Studies. Philadelphia, Pa. September 2019.
- “‘To examine who it was I had with me’: Black Modes of Self-Reckoning.” Futures of American Studies Institute, Dartmouth College. Hanover, N.H. June 2019
- “Fading Relations: The Specter of Togetherness in Early Caribbean Women’s Self-Writing.” American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies. Denver, Colo. March 2019.
- “Conspiracy’s Imprints: Denmark Vesey and the Nonevent of Insurrection.” American Studies Association. Atlanta, Ga. November 2018.
- “Abraham Johnstone and the Poetics of the Dead End.” Tepoztlán Institute for the Transnational History of the Americas. Tepoztlán, Morelos, México. July 2018.
- “Conspiracy of Belief: The Making of an African American People.” American Comparative Literature Association. Los Angeles, Ca. March 2018.
- “Ambivalent Respectability: The Wrongful Convictions of Abraham Johnstone.” Modern Language Association. New York, N.Y. January 2018.
- “Refugees of All Colors: Freedom and Bondage in French Asylum, 1793–1803.” McNeil Center for Early American Studies. Philadelphia, Pa. October 2017.

“Writing Racial Landscapes: Reason, Cataloging, and Racism in Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*.” The Society for the Study of Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States (MELUS). Cambridge, Mass. April 2017.

“Reading Commodities, Writing Histories: Compulsory Retrospection in Marx and Melville.” Yale Department of Comparative Literature. New Haven, Conn. April 2017.

### **Other conference activities**

Chair and Moderator. “Remapping Ecological Futures.” Refashioning: Postcolonial Pasts, Decolonial Futures—A Caribbean Studies Symposium. Vanderbilt University. Nashville, Tenn. March 2024.

Chair and Moderator. “How to Be a Global Anglophonist?” Modern Language Association. Philadelphia, Pa. January 2024.

Chair and Moderator. “Milestones in Black Studies Roundtable: Robinson, Morrison, Gilroy.” Society of Early Americanists. Washington, D.C. May 2023.

Roundtable Participant. “Teaching Across Periods, Early America to the Present Day.” Society of Early Americanists. Eugene, Ore. March 2019.

Panelist and Facilitator. Special Session on Ethical Mentoring. Society of Early Americanists. Eugene, Ore. March 2019.

Respondent. “Expanding the National Canon: Black and Indigenous Perspectives.” Tepoztlán Institute for the Transnational History of the Americas. Tepoztlán, Morelos, México. July 2018.

Respondent. “Yesterday’s and Tomorrow’s Struggle.” Tepoztlán Institute for the Transnational History of the Americas. Tepoztlán, Morelos, México. July 2018.

Chair and Respondent. “Filiopietism’s Presentism.” Society of Early Americanists Special Topic Conference. The Danforth Center on Religion and Politics, Washington University in St. Louis. St. Louis, Mo. March 2018.

## **TEACHING**

### **Vanderbilt University**

ENGL 3620W: Nineteenth-Century American Literature (topic: Labor in American Literature). Spring 2024.

ENGL 1260W: Introduction to Literary and Cultural Analysis (topic: Prison Writing). Spring 2024.

ENGL 3654W: African American Literature (topic: Literatures of Slavery Emancipation). Fall 2023.

ENGL 1260W: Introduction to Literary and Cultural Analysis (topic: Prison Writing). Fall 2023.

### **University of Southern California**

ENGL 440: American Literature before 1865 (topic: Early Americans at Work). Spring 2023.

ENGL 445: The Literatures of America: Cross-Cultural Perspectives (topic: Histories and Futures of Abolition). Fall 2022.

ENGL 440: American Literature before 1865 (topic: Early Americans at Work). Spring 2022.

## University of Pennsylvania

PennCAP (College Achievement Program) Pre-Freshman Writing Seminar (topic: Place and Belonging).  
Summer 2020 (virtual).  
ENGL 200: Junior Research Seminar (topic: Abolition, Past & Present). Spring 2019.  
ENGL 073: Radical Arts: Literature, Visual Arts, Theater, and Cinema in the Americas. Teaching  
Assistant (instructor: Jennifer Flores Sternad Ponce de León). Spring 2017.  
ENGL 103: Comics and Graphic Novels. Teaching Assistant (instructor: Jean-Christophe Cloutier). Fall  
2016.

## SERVICE

Member, Graduate Studies Committee, Department of English, Vanderbilt University, 2023–24.  
Member, *Ad hoc* Committee on Merit Rubrics, Department of English, Vanderbilt University, 2023.  
Organizer and Moderator, Brown Bag Works-in-Progress Series, McNeil Center for Early American  
Studies, Philadelphia, Penn., 2020–21  
Research Assistant, Ania Loomba, *Revolutionary Desires: Women, Communism, and Feminism in India*  
(Routledge, 2018), 2017–18.  
General Body Representative, Graduate Student Government, School of Arts and Sciences, University of  
Pennsylvania, 2016–17.  
Editorial Intern, *Critical Inquiry*, Chicago, Ill., 2015.

## PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Modern Language Association (MLA)  
American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (ASECS)  
American Studies Association (ASA)  
Association for the Study of the Worldwide African Diaspora (ASWAD)  
C19: The Society for Nineteenth-Century Americanists  
Early Caribbean Society (ECS)  
Society of Early Americanists (SEA)

## RESEARCH LANGUAGES

English (native speaker)  
Spanish (speaking, reading, writing)  
German (reading)

## REFERENCES

David Kazanjian, Professor of English and Comparative Literature, University of Pennsylvania  
Nancy Bentley, Donald T. Regan Professor of English, University of Pennsylvania  
Chi-ming Yang, Professor of English, University of Pennsylvania  
Deborah A. Thomas, R. Jean Brownlee Professor of Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania