

Ajay Kumar Batra
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ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

- 2023– Vanderbilt University
—Assistant Professor in Race, Diaspora, & Empire, Department of English
- 2021–23 University of Southern California
—Postdoctoral Scholar, USC Society of Fellows in the Humanities
—Teaching Fellow, Department of English

EDUCATION

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

RESEARCH & TEACHING INTERESTS

African Diasporic Literature before 1900 | Hemispheric American Literature before 1900 | Cultures of Slavery and Emancipation | Colonialism & Postcolonialism | Racial Capitalism | Histories of Race & Caste | Autobiography | Poetry & Poetics | Archival Theory & Practice | Critical Race & Ethnic Studies | Critical Prison Studies | Critical Theory | Black Studies | Abolition

PUBLICATIONS

Peer-Reviewed Articles

---- “Own Nothing: Rethinking Theft in Slavery’s Archives.” Invited to Revise & Resubmit. *American Literature*.

2020 “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

2022 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.

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

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

2017 Book Review: *Citizen Sailors: Becoming American in the Age of Revolution* by Nathan Perl-Rosenthal (Harvard, 2015). *Journal of American Studies*, vol. 51, no. 4, 2017, pp. 1277–80.

2016 Book Review: *The East Is Black: Cold War China in the Black Radical Imagination* by Robeson Taj Frazier (Duke, 2014). *Amerasia Journal*, vol. 42, no. 2, 2016, pp. 195–98.

WORKS IN PROGRESS

Radiant Ephemera: Abolition in the Black Atlantic [Book Manuscript]

“A Total World: C. L. R. James and the Meaning of Black Study” [Article Manuscript]

AWARDS & FELLOWSHIPS

2021–23 Postdoctoral Fellowship, USC Society of Fellows, University of Southern California
2022 Diane Hunter Dissertation Prize, Penn Department of English
2021 Dean’s Scholar Award, School of Arts & Sciences, University of Pennsylvania
2020 1921 Prize for Best Article in American Literary Studies, American Literature Society
2019–20 Marguerite Bartlett Hamer Fellowship, McNeil Center for Early American Studies
2018 William Patrick Day Essay Prize, Penn Department of English
2017–18 Francis Hopkinson Fellowship, University of Pennsylvania
2017 Sweeten Prize for Best Graduate Essay in American Literature, Penn Dept. of English
2015–21 Benjamin Franklin Fellowship, University of Pennsylvania
2015 Janel Mueller Undergraduate Thesis Prize, University of Chicago Department of English

PRESENTATIONS

Invited Presentations

2023 “Improper Associations: Theft and Citizenship in Slavery’s Archives.” Americanist Research Colloquium. UCLA Department of English. Los Angeles, Calif. May 2023.

2022 “Own Nothing: Rethinking Theft in Slavery’s Archives.” McNeil Center for Early American Studies. Philadelphia, Pa. October 2022.

2021 “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.” Society of Early Americanists Virtual Seminar Series. October 2021.

Conference Panels Organized

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

Conference Presentations

2023 “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.

2022 “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.

2021 “Abolition.” Society of Early Americanists. Atlanta, Ga. (virtual). March 2021.

2020 “Abolitionism as Presentism.” C19: The Society of 19th-Century Americanists. Miami, Fla. (virtual). October 2020.

2019 “‘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.

2018 “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.

2017 “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

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

2019 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.

2018 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 EXPERIENCE

Vanderbilt University

2024 (Spring—Upcoming)
Primary Instructor, Department of English
ENGL 3894: Major Figures in Literature (Topic: Herman Melville)
ENGL 3892W: Problems in Literature (Topic: Histories and Futures of Abolition)

2023 (Fall—Upcoming)
Primary Instructor, Department of English
ENGL 3654: African American Literature (Topic: Lit. of Slavery and Emancipation)
ENGL 1260W: Intro to Literary and Cultural Analysis (Topic: Prison Writing) University of Southern California

2023 (Spring)
Primary Instructor, Department of English
ENGL 440: American Lit. before 1865 (Topic: Early Americans at Work)

2022 (Fall)
Primary Instructor, Department of English
ENGL 445: The Literatures of America (Topic: Histories and Futures of Abolition)

(Spring)
Primary Instructor, Department of English
ENGL 440: American Lit. before 1865 (Topic: Early Americans at Work)

University of Pennsylvania

2020 (Summer)
Primary Instructor, PennCAP (College Achievement Program) Pre-Freshman Program
Writing Seminar (Topic: Place and Belonging)—Online

2019 (Spring)
Primary Instructor, Department of English
ENGL 200: Junior Research Seminar (Topic: Abolition, Past & Present)

2017 (Spring)

Teaching Assistant, Departments of English and Latin American and Latino Studies
ENGL 073: Radical Arts: Literature, Visual Arts, Theater, and Cinema in the Americas.
Instructor: Jennifer Flores Sternad Ponce de León.

2016 (Fall)
Teaching Assistant, Department of English
ENGL 103: Comics and Graphic Novels.
Instructor: Jean-Christophe Cloutier.

PROFESSIONAL & INSTITUTIONAL SERVICE

2020–21 Organizer and Moderator, Brown Bag Works-in-Progress Series, McNeil Center for Early American Studies, Philadelphia, Pa.

2017–18 Research Assistant: Ania Loomba, *Revolutionary Desires: Women, Communism, and Feminism in India* (Routledge, 2018).

2016–17 General Body Representative, Graduate Student Government of the School of Arts and Sciences, University of Pennsylvania.

2015 Editorial Intern, *Critical Inquiry*. Chicago, Ill.

2014 Editorial Intern, *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Chicago, Ill.

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 of 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 (kazanja@english.upenn.edu)
Professor of English and Comparative Literature, University of Pennsylvania

Nancy Bentley (nbentley@english.upenn.edu)
Donald T. Regan Professor of English, University of Pennsylvania

Chi-ming Yang (cmyang@english.upenn.edu)
Professor of English, University of Pennsylvania

Deborah A. Thomas (deborah.thomas@sas.upenn.edu)
R. Jean Brownlee Professor of Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania