

# Akil Fletcher

## Curriculum vitae

Cotsen Postdoctoral Fellow in the Society of Fellows  
Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology  
Princeton University

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### ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

2023 – 2026   Cotsen Postdoctoral Fellow in the Society of Fellows, Lecturer, Department of Anthropology, Princeton University

### EDUCATION

2023           Ph.D. Anthropology, School of Social Sciences, University of California, Irvine  
  
Dissertation: *Playing in Color: An Exploration of Black Gaming Communities and Practices.*  
  
Committee: Tom Boellstorff (Chair), Damien Sojoyner, Kishonna Gray  
  
Concentration: Digital & Virtual Anthropology, Media, Black Communities, Game Studies, Internet Studies, Social media, Online Platforms, Online Gaming

2016           B.A. Anthropology, The City College of New York, Minor in Sociology, CUNY

2014           A.A. Liberal Arts, Kingsborough Community College, CUNY

### PUBLICATIONS

#### *Journal Articles (peer-reviewed)*

2025           Fletcher, Akil. "Reformatting Blackness: Creating Black Identity in Final Fantasy XIV and Anime." (Forthcoming in *Transforming Anthropology*).

2020           Fletcher, Akil. Esports and the Color Line: Labor, Skill and the Exclusion of Black Players. *Proceedings of the 53rd Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences.* <https://doi.org/10.24251/hiess.2020.325>.

2020           Fletcher, Akil. "Teaching Race through the Lens of Gaming." *Teaching and Learning Anthropology Journal.* <http://teachinglearninganthro.com/2020/01/>.

### ***Book Chapters (peer-reviewed)***

- 2025 Fletcher, Akil. "Black" Keywords. NYU Press. (Forthcoming)
- 2025 Fletcher, Akil. "Gaming Beyond Death: Black Grieving and Restoration in League of Legends." *Emerging Genres, Bloomsbury Approaches to Game Studies* (Forthcoming)
- 2022 Fletcher, Akil. Black Gamers' Refuge: Finding Community within the Magic Circle of Whiteness. In *Routledge Companion to Media Anthropology*, edited by Elisabetta Costa, Patricia G. Lange, Nell Haynes, Jolynna Sinanan, 368 – 378: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

### ***Publications in Development***

Fletcher, Akil. *Playing in Color: How Black Gamers Build Worlds* (Manuscript under review with Princeton University Press).

Fletcher, Akil. *Unlockable Characters: Easter Eggs, Secrets, and Lost Figures in Black Game History*.

Fletcher, Akil. *Can it Crash Again? Pushes against AI and Capitalism in Gaming*.

Fletcher, Akil. *Red Echidnas and Beats: Gamifying Blackness through Hip-Hop*.

### ***Conference Proceedings***

- 2025 Fletcher, Akil, Kystal Cooper, Lindsay Grace, Stephen Jacobs. *Proceedings of the BIPOC Game Studies Conference 2025*. Play Story Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17613/5cqv9-41q73>

### ***Book Reviews***

- 2024 Fletcher, Akil. Review of *Resurrecting the Black Body: Race and the Digital Afterlife*, by Tonia Sutherland. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 38 (2): 243–244. <https://doi.org/10.1111/maq.12845>.

### ***Public Scholarship***

- 2024 Fletcher Akil. Kimberly Hassel, John G. Russell, *Stranger Than Fiction? Yasuke and the Assassin's Creed: Shadows Controversy*, *Journal of Critical Asian Studies* <https://criticalasianstudies.org/commentary/2024/9/23/commentary-kimberly-hassel-akil-fletcher-and-john-g-russell-stranger-than-fiction-yasuke-and-the-assassins-creed-shadows-controversy>.
- 2020 Fletcher Akil, "Why Gamers Should Read Black Authors." *UCI Publications Esports*. <https://esports.uci.edu/why-gamers-shouldread-black-authors/>.
- 2019 Fletcher, Akil. "White Fans, Liberal Ideologies, and the Erasure of Black Stories in Gaming." *Platypus*. <http://blog.castac.org/2019/05/white-fans-liberal-ideologiesandthe-erasure-of-black-stories-in-gaming/>.

## **GRANTS, AWARDS, HONORS, AND FELLOWSHIPS**

- 2025 University Committee on Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Grant, Princeton. (\$3500)
- 2025 Nominated for the Social & Economic Change Award by Black in Gaming.
- 2024 Nominated for the Social & Economic Change Award by Black in Gaming.
- 2024 The Magic Grant for Innovation, Princeton University. (\$50,000)
- 2024 The Council on Science and Technology Annual Call, Princeton University. (\$12,000)
- 2022 – 2023 President's Dissertation Year Fellowship, UCI. (\$48,139.96)
- 2022 Camp Kiki. A Pokémon Go Community Partnership with Niantic Labs. University of Kentucky, Director Kishonna Gray, Co-Director Akil Fletcher. (\$79,450)
- 2021 – 2022 National Science Foundation Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grant, Grant ID: 2049474. (\$13,914.00)
- 2021 Ford Foundation Predoctoral Fellowship (Honorable Mention)
- 2020 Nominated for Best Paper, HICSS-53, Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences.
- 2019 – 2023 National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship Program, Grant ID: 2019286927. (\$102,000.00)
- 2019 – 2022 Nevin's Graduate Endowment Fellowship, UCI, (\$10,000)
- 2018 – 2022 Social Science Merit Fellowship, UCI, (\$20,700)
- 2018 – 2022 Graduate Opportunity Fellowship, UCI, (\$17,000)
- 2018 – 2019 Diversity Fellowship, UCI. (\$10,000)

## **INVITED KEYNOTES, LECTURES, WORKSHOPS**

### ***Invited Keynotes***

- 2025 "From White Circles to Black Worlds" Keynote Lecture for the Digital Justice and Games Symposium. York University.

### ***Invited Lectures***

- 2025 "My Mind the Universe: Building Black Worlds with Online Gaming Spaces," Africana Studies Department, Gettysburg College.

- 2025 "Ethnography and Video Games: Researching through Play and Stories," Social and Cultural Design for Games, Otis College of Art and Design.
- 2025 "Hidden Gamers: Recovering Black Figures in Video Game History," Brock University.
- 2025 "Masks off: How Non-Black Developers Tell Non-Black Stories with Black Bodies." MAGFEST 2025.
- 2025 "Methods for Digital Ethnography," ANT 301: The Ethnographers' Craft, Princeton University.
- 2025 "Grab A Controller: A Black History of Esports" Global Japan Lab, in conjunction with Princeton University and the University of Tokyo.
- 2024 "Digital Black Life" Comparative Cultures, Fordham University.
- 2024 Black Representation in Modern Video Games: Looking Beyond the Veil, Department of Anthropology/ Anthropology Club, John Jay College of Criminal Justice.
- 2024 "From Toonami to Final Fantasy: Exploring the Impacts of Japanese Media in U.S Black Communities, Global Japan Lab, in conjunction with Princeton University and the University of Tokyo.
- 2024 "Black Movement: Black Stillness" African American Studies Faculty and Graduate Seminar, African American Studies Department, Princeton University.
- 2023 "Esports and the Color Line in Game Studies" Guest Lecturer, Georgetown University.
- 2023 "Black in the Magic Circle of Whiteness," PLASMA speaker, University at Buffalo.
- 2023 "Black Fantasy: Reformatting Black Identity in Final Fantasy XIV," Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).
- 2023 "Creating Blackness: Identity in Final Fantasy XIV", Invited Speaker, Purdue University.
- 2023 "Graduate School: Defining Your Interest", SSARC's Graduate School and Research Team, UCI.
- 2022 "Exploring Race through VR and Embodiment", Guest Lecturer, Colgate College.
- 2022 "Black Fantasies: Defining A Digital Double Consciousness in Final Fantasy XIV," Invited Speaker, University at Buffalo.
- 2022 "Analyzing Race in Video Games," Guest Lecturer, University at Buffalo.
- 2022 "Reformatting Blackness: Black Identity in Final Fantasy XIV" Colloquium Speaker, UCI.
- 2022 "An Anthropological Look at Gaming Communities," Guest Lecturer for ICS 60 Games and Society, UCI.

- 2022 "Digital Anthropology: Virtual Gaming and Black Experience." Guest Lecturer, Introduction to Cultural Anthropology, Department of Anthropology, Pomona College.
- 2022 "Fieldwork Preparation Bootcamp." Invited Speaker, Anthro in Transit (AIT) Workshop, UCI.
- 2021 "Racial Representation in Esports and Gaming." UCI Esports Center, UCI.
- 2021 Digital Anthropology and Race in Gaming." Guest Lecturer for Introduction to Cultural Anthropology, Department of Anthropology, Pomona College.
- 2021 "Revisiting Esports and the Color Line." Guest Lecturer for The Cultural Politics of Visual Representation (ANTH250A), Department of Anthropology, UCI.
- 2021 "Success in Grant Writing." Guest Lecturer, Department of Anthropology, UCI.
- 2020 "Black Faces in Gaming Spaces." Invited Speaker at UCI Esports Arena.
- 2020 "Race and Gaming." Guest Lecturer, Department of Anthropology, Science Fiction and Anthropology, Ithaca College.
- 2019 The narrator for "Splinters of a Broken Alphabet." Play written by Roxanne Varzi, Department of Anthropology, UCI.
- 2019 "Digital Anthropology and Video Games." Guest Lecturer, Introduction to Anthropology, Department of Anthropology, UCI.

### ***Invited Workshops***

- 2025 "Black and Latine Game Studies Examine Assemblages of Power" Kishonna Gray, Akil Fletcher, Regina Mills, Carlos Kelly, DiGRA25 Malta.

### **CONFERENCES, PANELS, AND PRESENTATIONS**

- 2025 "Gaming Beyond Death: Black Grieving and Restoration through League of Legends," American Anthropology Association (AAA) Annual Meeting 2025.
- 2025 "What is Happening? Social and Economical Factors that affect BIPOC Game Developers" 2025 Conference on BIPOC Game Studies, Panel Discussant with Javon Goard, Kishonna Gray, and Latoya Peterson.
- 2025 "Laboring at the End of the World: Online Black Apocalypses" Paper presentation, Conference of Anthropology and the Black Experience.
- 2025 "Obligations and the Technopolitical" panel respondent, Instruments of Obligations Conference, Princeton University.
- 2024 "Reimagining Gaming Blackness" Innovation Forum, Keller Center, Princeton University

- 2024 "Playing Beyond the Academy: Playgrounds as Sites for Alternative Community" Panel Chair and discussant with Cody Mejeur, Reginald Gardner, Kishonna Gray, and David Nemer. Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA) Conference 2024.
- 2024 "How Gaming Has the Transformative Power to Change Real Lives" Panel Discussant with Shamiel Moore, Erica Ford, Havoc, and Malcolm Coley for the GAMING 4 PEACE SYMPOSIUM.
- 2024 "Future of Education in Gaming Panel" Panel Discussant with Dr. Katryna Starks, Jihan Johnston, and Kiersha Howard. Black in Gaming Fest/ Game Developers Conference.
- 2023 "Playing in Color: How Black Gamers Build Worlds," Presentation for the Society of Fellows at Princeton University.
- 2023 "Panel on Emerging Voices in Black Game Studies" Panel Discussant with Steven Dashiell and Cyan Deveaux. ADE for Game Communities Speaker Series 2023.
- 2023 "Educators Summit: Incorporating Black Game Studies in the Classroom: Benefits to Everyone" Panel Discussant with Lindsay Grace, Latoya Peterson, and Jay Justice. Game Developers Conference 2023 (GDC 2023)
- 2022 "Black Joy. Black Pain: Exploring Narratives of Survival in Gaming" Panel Discussant with Kishonna Gray, Reginald Gardner, Javon Goard, and Joan Miller. Meaningful Play 2022 Conference.
- 2022 "Black Gaming: Exploring Community within the Magic Circle of Whiteness" Doctoral Consortium Foundations of Digital Games 2022 (FDG 2022)
- 2022 "Studying and Speaking to Industries: A Game Studies Roundtable" Panel Discussant with Amanda Cote, Kishonna Gray, Christopher A. Paul, Kelly Bergstrom, Alison Harvey, Christine H. Tran. Console-ing Passions 2022.
- 2022 "Black Gamer's Refuge: Finding Community within the Magic Circle of Whiteness." Games+Learning+Society Conference (GLS 2022)
- 2021 "Gaming in the Dark." Panel Discussant with Stephanie Jones, Aaron Doughty, Reginald Gardner, and Stephanie Ortiz. Society for Cinema and Media Studies 2021 (SCMS 2021).
- 2020 "Esports and the Color Line" Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences 2020 (HIICS 2020).
- 2019 "The Quotidian Practices of Streaming." American Anthropology Association 2019 (AAA 2019).
- 2018 "Summer Research Symposium." University of California, Irvine.
- 2016 "John Jay Student Research Symposium" John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

## **TEACHING AND ADVISING**

- 2025 ANT 437/ AAS 437: Gaming Blackness: The Anthropology of Video Games and Race, Fall 2025, Department of Anthropology, Princeton University, Instructor of Record
- 2025 ANT 354/HUM 373: Digital Anthropology: Methods for Exploring Virtual Worlds, Spring 2025, Department of Anthropology, Princeton University, Instructor of Record
- 2024 ANT 437/ AAS 437: Gaming Blackness: The Anthropology of Video Games and Race, Fall 2024, Department of Anthropology/African American Studies, Social Science, Princeton University, Instructor of Record (Included International trip)
- 2024 ANT 354/HUM 373: Digital Anthropology: Methods for Exploring Virtual Worlds, Spring 2024, Department of Anthropology, Princeton University, Instructor of Record
- 2023 ANT 437/ AAS 437: Gaming Blackness: The Anthropology of Video Games and Race, Fall 2023, Department of Anthropology/African American Studies, Social Science, Princeton University, Instructor of Record
- 2019 SOC230A: Race and Ethnicity, Winter 2019 Department of Sociology, School of Social Sciences, University of California, Irvine, Teaching Assistant
- 2019 SOC230A: Race and Ethnicity, Spring 2019 Department of Sociology, School of Social Sciences, University of California, Irvine, Teaching Assistant

***Undergraduate Senior Thesis***

- 2025 Via Matthews – Currently in progress, Princeton University
- 2025 Khalil A. Benjamin, Branded Bodies: Investigating the Hypermasculinization & Hypersexualization of the Black Male Body in the Modeling Industry, Princeton University

**PUBLIC SCHOLARSHIP AND MEDIA APPEARANCES**

- 2025 The Research Left Behind, Season 2, Episode 1
- 2025 Black Gaming Communities and Practices with Akil Fletcher, Nevada Humanities
- 2024 Graduation Speaker For New York Public Schools, City Polytechnic High School of Engineering, Architecture, and Technology
- 2024 Appearance on Nerds @ Work with Tsuderi Podcast
- 2023 Appearance on Our World Openly with Antoni Kalkowski
- 2021 Career Day Speaker for NY Public Schools, City Polytechnic High School of Engineering, Architecture, and Technology
- 2020 Graduate Student Spotlight, UCI School of Social Sciences
- 2019 Graduate Student Spotlight, Department of Anthropology, UCI

## **WORKS REVIEWED**

- 2024 Article reviewed for the Journal of Economic Anthropology
- 2024 Article reviewed for the Journal of the Society for Psychological Anthropology (ETHOS)

## **UNIVERSITY SERVICE**

- 2025 Princeton Humanities Council Funding Guest Speaker
- 2025 Senior Thesis Reader, Princeton University
- 2024 – 2025 Anthropology Undergraduate Advisor, Princeton University
- 2024 – 2025 Conference Program Chair, BIPOC Games Conference
- 2024 Graduation Ceremony Speaker for Kingsborough Community College
- 2023 Guest Speaker for Kingsborough Community College, College Discovery, The Journey After College
- 2023 Graduate Advisor & Treasurer for BGXS, UCI Black Gxming Society
- 2022 Graduate Advisor & Treasurer for BGXS, UCI Black Gxming Society
- 2021 Executive Committee Member of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion for the Esports Conference, UCI
- 2020 Guest Speaker at Kingsborough Community College, College Discovery, Freshman Orientation
- 2019 Guest Speaker at Kingsborough Community College, College Discovery, Career Development Day
- 2019 – 2020 NSF & Ford Grant Editor, UCI
- 2019 Peer Mentor, Competitive Edge Program, Graduate Division, UCI
- 2018 Guest Speaker at Kingsborough Community College, College Discovery, and Graduation

## **COMMUNITY AND INDUSTRY SERVICE**

- 2024 "Gaming For Education" Black Girl Gamers Online Summit, Black Girl Gamers.
- 2024 "How Gaming Has the Transformative Power to Change Real Lives" Panel Discussant with Shamiel Moore, Erica Ford, Havoc, and Malcolm Coley for the GAMING 4 PEACE SYMPOSIUM
- 2024 "Future of Education in Gaming Panel" Panel Discussant with Dr. Katryna Starks, Jihan Johnston, and Kiersha Howard. Black in Gaming Fest/ Game Developers Conference.

- 2023 Program Coordinator and Director of "Camp CRECE—Youth Esports and Gaming Camp" sponsored by Niantic, Inc., and the University of Kentucky.
- 2022 Program Coordinator & Director of "Camp Kiki – Youth Esports and Gaming Camp" sponsored by Niantic, Inc, and the University of Kentucky.