Securing All the World's Pasts for Our Common Future

Joy Connolly

This essay calls on us to future-proof the study of the world's pasts by creating a new field, ancient studies, that would replace "classics" and "classical studies" by drawing together scholars of ancient cultures from disciplines and area studies around the world. Our current disciplinary divisions, burdened by prejudices about race, religion, and national identity, are hindering intellectual exchange and collaboration. Approaching ancient studies from a global perspective demands the conservation of a global archive; commitment to its preservation will help restore the humanity stolen from people invaded, enslaved, exploited, erased, and ignored in past centuries and today. The vitality of the archive's contents will enrich our care for the world in all its variety and complexity and help us imagine a better future for all our pasts – as well as for ourselves and generations to follow.

Quoted from "Ancient Rescue Operation at the American Council of Learned Societies," published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* on May 10, 2069:

> At the 150th ACLS Annual Meeting, the executive directors of the American Historical Association, the Society for Classical Studies, the African Studies Association, the Association for Asian Studies, the Latin American Studies Association, and several other professional societies announced their plan to provide online courses in the history, languages, and art of ancient cultures around the world. "With philanthropic support," the group said, "we will do our best to keep alive the knowledge and skills that were once accessible to students and the public in hundreds of American colleges and universities, but which are housed today in only a few private institutions."

This P. D. James–style *Children of Men* doomsday scenario for the academic study of the world's ancient pasts is nearer than you think. Today, in most of the fields represented at that fictional ACLS Annual Meeting of 2069, enrollments and majors are flat or declining in professional conditions that demand more students and more tuition dollars. Where new disciplinary forms that harness insight and experiment emerge regularly in the sciences (see neuroscience and cognitive science), humanists have traditionally preferred an accretive model, adding emergent fields

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like Black studies to traditional ones like history and classical studies. But the accretive habit fragments faculty, privileges specialization, and slows down collective adaptation to new technologies directly relevant to humanistic study, like machine translation. Worst of all, it lulls faculty into clinging to old disciplinary forms rather than designing new ones. It is unsustainable and undesirable.

The good news is that scholars have options. We can redress the gaps and intellectual injustices still enacted today in the ways we care for evidence and organize our disciplines and departments. We can do the work of "both-and": we can design a field that preserves and refines the skills we need to interpret ancient material and that appeals to a broader base of students, administrators, funders, legislators, and the public than the regionalist, protonationalist groupings that constrain our study now.

In the collective scholarly imagination of the last three centuries at least, the ancient past was populated by white men associated with the cultures of Greece and Rome – much like the past as imagined in *Star Wars*, where white men in white robes fight for the Republic against the Empire.[1] Those days are passing. We are ready for a new field, one that is no longer a plausible vehicle for claims of white supremacy and patriarchy, one that speaks to the interests of students and the public. The new ancient studies will help us to know ourselves in all our thrilling diversity, empowering us to move forward together into a future where we thrive in common – once we do the work of intellectual reparation that will make us better stewards of our global ecology.

I use the term *ecology* to signify not only living things and their physical environment but the total archive of human experience and endeavor in the present and the past. This total archive is our proper object of study and the context for my argument.

We face a flood of wicked problems. Rising atmospheric temperatures are already sparking migration and conflict across the planet and, along with climate change, we are seeing steady declines in social trust, the growth of fundamentalism and the armed policing of borders, persistent inequality, the hollowing out of democracy, and the censoring of speech and the arts. Cultures historically separated by geographical distance are coming into everyday contact, creating as many opportunities for discord as for alliance and exchange.

Figuring out our future conditions of collective thriving is not a task we can assign to experts in a few select fields. The scope and complexity of the challenges are as broad and diverse as humanity itself and demand humanistic investigation and understanding.

Our colleges and universities are our most important institutional stewards of knowledge. If they want to join wholeheartedly in the work of tackling these chal-

lenges, they will have to commit to the production of knowledge for the common good and invest in fields of liberal inquiry that are now being cut down or banished for failing to suit the demands of the market.[2] Its dynamism and concentration on extractive growth make the market far too volatile and present-oriented in its strategic vision, not to mention too inequitable in its organization, to set the priorities of the academy. Scholars, students, administrators, and supporters must push back against market pressures and make a strong case for the value of humanistic skills and knowledge on the bold and honest grounds that they are necessary for our survival as a species. We need to understand how and to what end humans behave, think, believe, dream, and communicate. We must make this case now – boldly, loudly, publicly, with urgency and with no apology.

This is all the more pressing in 2025, a year that has witnessed a concerted attack by the Trump administration and its Republican enablers in Congress on the production of knowledge across academia. The crisis has laid bare the uncomfortable truth that colleges and universities lack a broad base of public understanding and support. This is a consequence of many factors, notably the explosion in the cost of college tuition, but it also arises from the long-standing but ever-growing gap between what the public needs from academia and what highly specialized scholars reward themselves for producing; between the most popular digital modes of circulating knowledge (such as Instagram and television series) and the peer-reviewed books and articles deemed legitimate by the academic community; and between what college students want and expect from college and the department names and divisions that are beloved by faculty but obscure and intimidating to many undergraduates. We have, many of us, become strangers to the people we seek to serve.

What does the past have to do with current challenges? One thing we know for certain about a future in which all humans thrive is that its conditions of life will be very different from ours today. Developing a more detailed vision of that future depends on becoming familiar with alternative modes of seeing and knowing the world. For this purpose, as Alain Locke says, "there is nothing more galvanizing than the sense of a cultural past."[3] The past offers no easy solutions to the dilemmas in which we find ourselves. It does warn us against paths not to take. And looking backward to deepen our knowledge of human experience and to understand better how communities view their origins and values is as important a part of our approach to navigating wicked problems as developing new medical technologies or generative AI (which makes heavy demands on our energy and water supply). The urgency of climate change and other crises means we must direct ourselves to the task of enhancing our collective capabilities using every tool available.

What I call the ancient archive, following historian and political theorist Achille Mbembe, is one of those tools.[4] This archive is the assemblage of materi-

al surviving from every region in the world with a culture or cultures identified as prior to the modern: texts of all kinds, artworks, artifacts, monuments, buildings, biological remains, and oral histories. It possesses a unique capacity to help us understand human life in all its aspects – so long as we construct it as global in scope and our study of it is disposed with global interests and needs in mind.

The full ancient archive (which we have only just begun to assemble in our curricula and research projects) possesses profound explanatory power. By contrast to the regional concentrations of evidence and interpretation that skew the study of antiquity today, it will allow us to gain a fuller and more complete understanding of our conditions of life now and how we arrived here. Fully embracing a global archive would require us to change our habits – to recalibrate our strong tendency to specialize and individualize our research questions, and to make collaborative work part of the typical scholar's career, properly prepared for and rewarded. Understanding the flows of people and ideas across regions and seas is a massive enterprise, best tackled through habits of intellectual exchange eased and enriched by the socializing impact of a new disciplinary formation. This is the best corrective to the web of borders that nineteenth-century scholars laid over the map of antiquity, sometimes so authoritatively that names from ancient Latin and Greek texts were brought forward in time to label new states like Syria, India, and Palestine.

Getting the past right and reflecting on useable pasts are tasks that embrace and transcend the empirical work of archaeology and history. As the archive grows, so does its capacity to correct beliefs and refine histories many of us take for granted. The European refusal to accept Indigenous American ways of knowing as anything but the "curious practices of strange people" helped justify crimes of genocide and enforced migration from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. Until very recently, reputable historians could complain that scholarship on the continent of Africa "rests on nothing more solid than shrewd guesswork," and scholars of ancient Mayan and West African cultures were forced to defend their use of words like "politics."[5] The lesson of the scholarly pathbreakers of the past forty years is that research into cultures beyond Europe compels the rethinking of scholarly business as usual, pushing the expansion and revision of familiar frameworks, methods, and categories. Sooner or later, this push sweeps or seeps into public knowledge, making people's understanding of the world more accurate and allowing for powerful, emotionally laden storytelling about what links us as a species, which improves democratic decision-making and encourages us to think of ourselves as members of a large collective with common experiences.

Ancient studies addresses itself to the full range of human activity and thought in the periods before the modern systems of colonialism and capitalism took hold, with their conceptual limitations and habits of oppres-

sion. This means the ancient archive is also a primary resource for transformative imagination, a place from which we may rethink concepts and categories of experience of all kinds, from gender and race to our relationships with animals and gods to definitions of justice.

In this sense, it assists us in solving the temporal puzzle presented by the climate emergency, which demands that we lean into learning how to live in the future – how to think about the consequences of our actions differently from how we have long been accustomed to do. In places warped by colonialism, imperialism, and extractive capitalism – which is to say, everywhere on the planet but especially the Global South – the archive holds the material for prompting alternative structures of thought, for jolting ourselves out of old habits, values, and beliefs about what is possible.

We think differently about the history of women and the development of what some still call "Western literature" when we reflect that the first poet on the planet whose name is known to us is not Homer but Enheduana, an Akkadian woman living fifteen hundred years before Homer in what is now Iraq. An account of the origins of democracy that encompasses the historical experiences of West Asia, Africa, and the Americas changes expectations and beliefs about the politics of these regions. We are better placed to tell a more accurate story about transregional commerce and to speculate on points of religious or aesthetic commonality across cultures when we gaze at a little bronze Buddha from Kashmir that was discovered in a sixth-century CE gravesite in eastern Sweden, or a graceful ivory statuette of a woman that made its way from India to a storeroom in Pompeii. The archive expands our sense of the ancient potential for interconnection and transcultural development, phenomena that we are accustomed to associate exclusively with modern life. In enlivening our contemplation of a common human experience in the past, it kindles our imagination of a shareable future.

Twenty years ago, in the final pages of her aspirational elegy for the field of comparative literature, Gayatri Spivak spoke of "planetarity" – a concept she suggestively noted was possibly best contemplated from the perspective of precapitalist cultures. Writing at the very beginning of the twenty-first century, Spivak used the image of the planet to signify the opening up of thought about the flows and contacts among people embodied in dry or watery environments, and the very different ways, depending on their locations and histories, humans conceive of and relate to their surroundings and to nonhuman living beings.[6]

More recently, Mbembe began to use the word "planetary" to summon up the connection between human life and the Earth. The planet is the living world that encompasses not only the "natural" spaces of open land, air, and water as well as the human-constructed spaces of cities, agrobusiness, and fish farms, but realms beyond the established ken of European and American thought. Drawing on Africa's animist cosmogonies, Mbembe invokes a principle of animation as the

"vital breath" shared by all beings that are "born together" and form a unity. Among the Dogon in Mali, the Yoruba in Nigeria, and other communities in the Congo Basin, he finds an alternative metaphysics of power and agency, and theories of the world's origin that do not acknowledge the fundamental difference between the human subject and the world around it that European and American thought does. He comments:

> Planetary politics should be connected to a politics of life, to a politics of the Earth. That includes all creation: all the people of the world; the creations or works of humanities; the mass of things we have invented: animals, plants, microbes, minerals; and mixed bodies (which is what we all are). In other words, the whole physical universe, all of reality, including (since I'm drawing from the African pre-colonial archive) spiritual and biological energies consistent with the definition of the living world.[7]

Since the world finds itself in a state of fragmentation, he sees a need to "*re-member* it, that is, put back together its different parts, reassemble it and reconstitute it as an integrated system in which humans and non-humans, physical, chemical and biological components, oceans, atmosphere and land-surface are all interlinked in a grand gesture of mutuality."[8] This re-membering involves gathering of evidence, reordering of knowledge, and embracing new methods.

It is a process of healing, for our archive is damaged and scattered, in serious need of repair. In the colonized regions of the world, it has been virtually annihilated, sometimes by neglect, more often by intentional violence. Anthropologist Renato Rosaldo describes the phenomenon of "mourning for what one has destroyed" that he sees at work in the scholarly activities of recording and recovery that take place in the wake of the conquistadores, the British and French forces in Asia and Africa, and many others. South Asian studies scholar Sheldon Pollock points out the need to study the decline of Sanskrit culture, the dominant transregional order across Asia without parallel until the rise of Americanism and global English, which for the two centuries before European colonialism constituted one of the most innovative fields of systematic thought in human history. Novelist and social critic Samuel R. Delany notes that he has no idea where in Africa his ancestors originated because records of their experience were systematically destroyed, leaving only the trace memory of an arrival in New Orleans to be passed down in family memory.

> The historical reason that we've been so impoverished in terms of future images is because, until fairly recently, as a people we were systematically forbidden any images of our past. . . . When, indeed, we say that this country was founded on slavery, we must remember that we mean, specifically, that it was founded on the systematic, conscientious, and massive destruction of African cultural remnants.[9]

Reparation is the third reason to make the whole world's pasts a priority for institutional investment, so that we may redress the intellectual injustices still enacted today in the ways we care for evidence and design our disciplines and departments. Organizing the search for traces of all histories, not just select ones, will allow us to recover the pasts that have been deliberately erased. A field designed with the goal of helping to build a common life will conserve the global archive that will help restore the humanity stolen from people invaded, enslaved, and exploited in past centuries and today. The vitality, beauty, and creative invention of the full archive's contents will enrich our care for the world in all its aspects.

For the ancient archive to provoke transformative imagination, to help us understand the full complexity of ancient cultures, to do the work of epistemological and cultural reparation, to instill in us generous care for all the world, we need a new field of study. Current forms no longer suit our needs.

In American colleges and universities today, some scholars of the world's pasts are collected in narrowly focused departments of "classical studies," now frequently renamed "Greek and Roman studies" or "ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern studies" (and occasionally combined with departments of religion, European literature, or philosophy). Many others, especially scholars of non-Western pasts, are scattered across disciplinary and area studies departments, with one or two faculty members each placed in history, archaeology, languages and literature, philosophy, Asian studies, Middle Eastern studies, and so on.

Meanwhile, in the wealthiest and most prestigious institutions, European studies is distributed into nationalized degree-granting departments of French, Spanish, Italian, German, Russian, sometimes Romance and Germanic and Slavic languages and cultures, and, the largest of all, English.[10] In either model, a "Western" mental map replicates itself. The second, non-Western group, fragmented and isolated, must constantly fight for survival, department by department. The first or "classical" group suffers from the founding error of its intellectual origins that at least two generations of reform failed to set right.

Reform has failed because the error runs too deep for correction. "Classical studies," even under its relatively new name of "ancient Mediterranean studies," is founded on the notion that ancient Greece and Rome make up the most valuable past, the only past worth studying, the past whose glorious achievements make them representative of the entire "ancient world." We might call them by the compressed name "Greece&Rome" to best convey their symbolic hegemony. This reductive vision of what still passes under the name "the ancient world" was disseminated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by scholars living in a Europe intent on the exploitation of Asia, Africa, South America, and Australia and working in a university system designed to educate a national elite.

The cultures of Greece&Rome that were named "classical" provided a proto-national origin story for the European states that created modernity and, by extension, for modernity itself. They became the first chapters in the autobiography of the West, with Mesopotamia and Egypt furnishing the preface, and India and China serving as sidebar commentary to the narrative arc of European global domination. German scholars, setting the trend for their European and American colleagues, advanced the professional study of Greek and Roman culture as an auto-ethnographic field that married scientific with moral education.[11] They issued subjective judgments about aesthetic and moral value in an objectivist tone that asserted their scholarly authority on a universal scale. To study classical culture was to know and claim heirship of its essence, and this essence was true human perfection, universal in appeal, making the study of other, inferior cultures otiose and even demoralizing.

The legacy of Greece&Rome makes itself felt everywhere in America, from the institutional and physical architecture of the nation's capital to the genres that dominate its literary canon. As the vehicle of elite values and the putatively universal symbol of the best of what humans have thought and said, it has been extraordinarily difficult to dislodge: on the contrary, mastery of knowledge of Greece&Rome offered some marginalized and disenfranchised people a path to recognition and distinction. So long as it is preserved as a field of scholarly study while other ancient cultures must fit in around the edges or vanish altogether, it will continue to broadcast its message of cultural and racial superiority, notwithstanding the politics espoused by individual practitioners. As a field created by nineteenth-century scholars steeped in the secular ethnonationalism of their day, it will always struggle to accommodate research that transcends the temporal and geographical borders of the Greek and Roman empires. The ethnonational frame is one reason why "classical reception," a subfield that studies the transmission and influence of ancient Greek and Latin culture around the world up to the present day, still occupies a marginal place in the field after forty years of efforts to gain it legitimacy. It is why classical studies has always held the study of Judaism and Christianity at a distance, despite the persistent influence of religiosity on American national life.

Here is our opportunity. Ethnonationalism and its corollary racism fed the growth and popularity of an ancient studies focused on Greece&Rome. Such a narrow concentration made sense in the context of the long first century of modern higher education, when the system was designed to embody and justify national values, and the origin tale of Greece&Rome as the anchor of European and American institutions and democratic spirit still held among white elites (and not only them). But the globalization of higher education that occurred in the wake of World War II, though it wreaked destructive force, also freed faculties from that purpose. Today, American universities and colleges proudly dismiss the old nationalist mission and call themselves global institutions. Hiring faculty and re-

cruiting students from all over the world has become one of the acknowledged marks of excellence for colleges and universities, a selling point on websites and a common theme of orientation-day speeches. Over one million students from outside the United States study in American institutions, representing the system's quick return to pre-COVID highs. Over half of these students come from China and India.[12] (Current moves by the Trump administration threaten to reduce the number of international students and scholars in the United States dramatically, which would weaken American higher education for generations to come.)

These students and faculty find themselves in a system of fields that upholds a nineteenth-century worldview. Though the university's faculty and students come from many places around the world and the faculty in principle publish for global audiences, almost no attention is paid, and no reward is given, to the work of forming new curricula, methods, and priorities that would respond to the interests and perspectives of the global community actually resident on campus. So far, instead of exploring alternatives to the national frame, scholars have mostly doubled down on professional specialization, offering proof of value by the standards of commercial production: more publications, more hurdles to mastery, everything reinforcing the borders of fields and subfields.

The path to progressive evolution is open. With the globalization of the production of knowledge, now that the nation-state is no longer the origin and endpoint of education and research, and precisely because it once again looms dangerously large in global politics, we must redirect our energy to study all the world's pasts, drawing in students and scholars from the composite nation that is the American academy.[13] Organizing ancient studies around the global archive shows the best promise of establishing new academic values and intellectual goals of collaboration, comparative work, translation, and the skills of conserving and interpreting primary materials. Transforming a field that continues to legitimate Eurocentric values and politics, we will foster a decolonized field whose object is repairing the ancient archive of ideas and artifacts and, by extension, the world.

Recognition of intellectual injustice and the unequal numbers of faculty devoted to studying different traditions is only the beginning. After affirmative recognition comes the work of transformative redistribution. In practice, this means redesigning undergraduate and graduate programs with a view to opening up unfamiliar areas of study; it means reassigning funds and faculty lines. Above all, it means tackling the fear – justified by past malpractice – that a move to globalize the study of the past is a threatening act of appropriation and universalization that will erase difference and subordinate everyone to white Euro-American habits and priorities. When the conditions of work are visibly unequal – when in a typical large research university, there may be fifty scholars working on premodern

European literature and only three on premodern Asian literature – it is difficult to set aside the creeping worry that the majority will impose its will.

Respecting this fear, we can equip ourselves by drawing heavily on the large body of work that dissects the failings of past scholarship and explores what equitable scholarship looks like. Here Afrofuturist thought offers the most practical and intellectually exciting way forward. It insists that people of color thrive in all times and places, and that they make history. As Bennett Capers puts it:

> A recurring theme in Afrofuturism is reclaiming the identities and perspectives that were lost as a result of the slave trade and colonialism. In this sense, Afrofuturism is both future-looking and backward-looking, committed to reclaiming approaches, methodologies, and ways of thinking that predate slavery and colonialism. Afrofuturism asks: What would we be without? What would we be if? Most importantly, by engaging in reclamation, by valorizing a range of cultural traditions, it offers a vision of what could be in the future.[14]

Studying the global archive involves the cocreation of scholarly practices in collaboration with scholars from all over the world that have the explicit goal of seeking understanding outside the priorities, lenses, categories, and habits of the scholarship that is born with and from European modernity. Borders will be one of the first things to go, at least metaphorically, in most arguments on behalf of designing a new structure for thought and study. Senegalese politician and poet Léopold Sédar Senghor called for the world to come to "a new rendez-vous, a meeting place of giving and receiving" knowledge, opinions, experiences, and perspectives.[15] Setting a global scope for ancient studies clears the way to making Senghor's giving and receiving an institutional and intellectual reality. The most important border to be erased is between "the 'West' and the rest," as ancient studies intentionally clears space for the study of cultures beyond the Mediterranean.

Establishing scholars of all the world's pasts in a self-conscious community will allow us to identify commonalities and differences and to work together in a spirit of honesty and generosity on developing new paradigms of scholarship born outside the still dominant European-American context. The new field builds chronopolitical alliances, healing breaches across domains that were divided two hundred years ago for purposes that are not ours today. It places us in a better position to reassess and re-turn the past so as to "unearth and infiltrate new futures into the present" and to fight more effectively to preserve the archive of the world's pasts.[16]

One of the most important questions will be about the temporal definition of the "ancient past." How does a community define its "ancient past," its "antiquity"? Perhaps most challenging of all: "Do all cultures and communities have an antiquity?" In 2044, the United States is projected to become a majority-minority country, with people of color making up more than half the population. This diverse community will produce new answers to these questions that open up new paths to hope.

Meanwhile, the still predominantly white professoriate has a dual responsibility: to advance its own diversification and to clear the ground for the new ancient studies to emerge – a field that will be finally rightly shared with many others.

We had best turn ourselves to this work quickly, because we are losing skills, material, and people. Each year, fewer and fewer students in American institutions study Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, ancient Chinese – indeed any language other than English, especially languages no longer spoken. American higher education has never invested in teaching Indigenous languages or knowledge systems. The skills of close attention to material evidence fostered in archaeology, epigraphy, papyrology, and numismatics are becoming difficult to find in all but the wealthiest institutions. Archaeological sites and artifacts are at risk in many parts of the world and, lacking a public that understands their value, will be destroyed by intention or neglect. Even ancient cultures with wealthy constituents are failing to attract the funds they once did, and cultures that lack a tradition of philanthropic stewardship are at enormous risk. We are losing ecological diversity, not only in the biosphere but in our languages and cultures.

I will end by repeating the Afrofuturist challenge: What might we do if we could? What if we were to set aside the language of impossibility and loss and adopt bold new arguments for the necessity of studying the past? What do we have to lose that we won't lose within a generation in any case? I propose the following manifesto for the new field, against the backdrop of an American academy that embraces humanistic inquiry for its world-preserving benefits:

> Ancient studies gathers together scholars of the world's premodern cultures, variously defined and located across chronological time, to study in its full plurality the range of human activity on the level of the individual and the group, from creative expression to state formation, around the world. With the overarching mission of cultivating mutual understanding and bridging differences across people, the field cultivates skills in interpreting evidence (texts of all kinds, artworks, other remains) and its modes of preservation and transmission. It employs tools and methods from various disciplines, including anthropology, archaeology, art conservation, art history, ethnic and gender studies, history, linguistics, literary studies, philosophy, politics, and religious studies. It celebrates equally collaboration, generalist knowledge, and scholarly specialization, each as necessary for the production and circulation of knowledge. Acknowledging the limits on past approaches to studying antiquity, which concentrated on Greece and Rome to the near exclusion of other cultures, it encourages the exploration of understudied periods and regions and the generation of new research questions emerging from cross-cultural comparisons and juxtapositions. In a world preoccupied with the demands of the present,

ancient studies instills care for the world and for the traces earlier humans have left behind in texts, materials, and memories, on the grounds that this stewardship is an act of care for ourselves and the future.

This is study the whole world needs.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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ENDNOTES

[1] Bennett Capers refers to the racial makeup of the (futurist) past as imagined in *Star Wars*. Bennett Capers, "Afrofuturism, Critical Race Theory, and Policing in the Year 2044," *New York University Law Review* 94 (1) (2019): 101.

[2] See the American Academy of Arts and Sciences 2024 Humanities Indicators report *The Academic Humanities Today: Findings from the 2024 Department Survey* (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2024), https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/higher-education/bachelors-degrees-humanities#31602. But note that students with degrees in humanistic fields earn salaries that are competitive with those of majors in what are widely perceived to be more "market-friendly" fields like business. National Humanities Alliance, "Humanities Majors Find Lucrative Careers," https://www.studythehumanities.org/career_success (accessed May 12, 2025).

[3] Alain Locke, quoted in Mark Dery, "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delaney, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose," in *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, ed. Mark Dery (Duke University Press, 1994), 179.

[4] Achille Mbembe, "Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive," document written to form the basis of a series of public lectures (2015), https://wiser.wits.ac.za/system/files/Achille%20Mbembe%20-%20Decolonizing%20Knowledge%20and%20

the%20Question%20of%20the%20Archive.pdf; and Achille Mbembe, "The Power of the Archive and Its Limits," in *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Jane Taylor, et al. (Springer Nature, 2002), 19–27.

[5] Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation–An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3 (3) (2003): 265–266, citing Walter Mignolo and Jacob Pandian; Michael Gomez, *African Dominion: A New History of Empire in Early and Medieval West Africa* (Princeton University Press, 2019), 121; Bernd Reiter, "First Peoples of the Americas: Lessons on Democracy, Citizenship, and Politics," in *Constructing the Pluriverse: The Geopolitics of Knowledge* (Duke University Press, 2018), 279–297; and Gary Wilder, "From Image to Flesh in a World Seen from the South," *Social Text* 42 (1) (2024): 105–122.

[6] Gayatri Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (Columbia University Press, 2003), 101, 72–73.

[7] Achille Mbembe, "How to Develop a Planetary Consciousness," interview by Nils Gilman and Jonathan Blake, *Noēma*, January 11, 2022.

[8] Achille Mbembe, "Bodies as Borders," *From the European South* 4 (5) (2019): 5.

[9] Renato Rosaldo, "Imperialist Nostalgia," *Representations* 26 (1989): 107; and Sheldon Pollock, "The Death of Sanskrit," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43 (2) (2001): 393. Delany is quoted in Dery, "Black to the Future," 190–191.

[10] Pollock calls this a "lunar landscape…riddled by the gopher holes" of departments abandoned by students understandably baffled by their distribution of knowledge. Sheldon Pollock, "Areas, Disciplines, and the Goals of Inquiry," *Journal of Asian Studies* 75 (4) (2016): 915.

[11] See Constanze Guthenke, *Feeling and Classical Philology: Knowing Antiquity in German Scholarship, 1770–1920* (Cambridge University Press, 2022), now joined by the analysis of the German influence on the development of classical scholarship in Walter Scheidel's *What is Ancient History?* (Princeton University Press, 2025).

[12] "International Students," in *Open Doors 2024 Report on International Educational Exchange* (Open Doors, 2025), https://opendoorsdata.org/annual-release/international-students.

[13] I draw the term "composite" from a speech Frederick Douglass gave in Boston in 1867: "The simple organization of a people into a National body, composite or otherwise, is of itself [an] impressive fact. As an original proceeding, it marks the point of departure of a people, from the darkness and chaos of unbridled barbarism, to the wholesome restraints of public law and society. It implies a willing surrender and subjection of individual aims and ends, often narrow and selfish, to the broader and better ones that arise out of society as a whole. It is both a sign and a result of civilization." See "(1867) Frederick Douglass Describes the 'Composite Nation,'" BlackPast, January 28, 2007, https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1867-frederick-douglass-describes-composite-nation.

[14] Capers, "Afrofuturism, Critical Race Theory, and Policing in the Year 2044," 17.

[15] Quoted and discussed in Immanuel Wallerstein, *European Universalism: The Rhetoric of Power* (The New Press, 2006), 48.

[16] Kodwo Eshun, quoted in Sean Blenkinsop and Estella C. Kuchla, *Ecologizing Education: Nature-Centered Teaching for Cultural Change* (Cornell University Press, 2024), 87.