

The Purpose and Relevance of the Grand Narrative

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Abstract:

Scholars such as Jean-Francis Lyotard often disregard the grand narrative as far too broad to be considered an academic form of history. However, scholars such as Akhil Amar, Nikole-Hannah Jones, and Dorothy Ross prove otherwise. The grand narrative provides a broad perspective of historical events and answers philosophical questions that may appeal to the way society functions today and brings conversations to the table that may improve society overall. Admired and respected scholars use the grand narrative method to answer questions that add to society's understanding of history, proving this method to be a useful and academic tool.

As journalist and 1619 Project-creator Nikole Hannah-Jones shares the story of her Black father proudly waving the American flag outside of their home throughout her childhood, she explains that her “father knew exactly what he was doing when he raised that flag. He knew that [their] people’s contributions to building the richest and most powerful nation in the world were indelible, that the United States simply would not exist without [them].”¹⁴³ But for Jones’ perspective on the importance of Black Americans’ contributions to the United States to hold truth, focusing on one specific area of history won’t help her case; this is a job for a grand narrative. It is extremely common for historians to specialize in a certain field of the broad and extensive topic of history, but is it so bad to take a step back and look at the bigger picture? Scholar Jean-Francois Lyotard defines grand narrative as “a theory that tries to give a totalizing, comprehensive account to historical events...based upon the appeal to universal truth or universal values.”¹⁴⁴ The grand narrative provides a new perspective and offers answers to a variety of questions, including more philosophical ones. Writers who use this method are allowed to move through history at a faster pace and examine broader themes and ideas from a larger time period, focusing on what society can learn to understand how it got to where it is today. Through writings by various admired scholars and writers, the grand narrative proves to be more academic and useful than what many, including Lyotard, give it credit for.

I. The 1619 Project

The 1619 Project, published in the *New York Times*, “aims to reframe the country’s history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of Black Americans at the

¹ Nikole Hannah-Jones, “The 1619 Project”, *New York Times*, (August 2019), 16.

² Jean-Francois Lyotard, “The Field: Knowledge in Computerized Societies”, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, (Manchester University Press: 1984), 3.

very center of the United States' national narrative.”¹⁴⁵ Rather than just focusing on the history of Black Americans during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, the project takes an even larger step back to help answer more questions. Although not a historian, Nikole Hannah-Jones uses the grand narrative method to effectively share a new perspective on American history and the importance that Black Americans have contributed to it and its ideals. She claims that, through various examples like the American Revolution, the Civil War, and Reconstruction, Black Americans “have helped the country live up to its founding ideals” and “without [their] idealistic, strenuous, and patriotic efforts...our democracy today would most likely look very different- it might not be a democracy at all.”¹⁴⁶ With this broader perspective and the approach of American history through the eyes of African slaves and Black American citizens, the reader not only understands their contributions and sufferings, but has a fresh idea of what it means to be an American and learns that the ideas that the country were built on are simply a work in progress. This method allows for a new perspective to emerge and answer questions that are rarely touched upon.

A common theme of the 1619 Project is the use of the grand narrative by multiple writers to show the significant impact Black American citizens have had on the United States; one such author is Tiya Miles, who writes two different examples of how slavery spread throughout and built America. In Miles' first feature, she uses the grand narrative to describe the migration and spread of slavery across America and its lasting effects. Although short, she finds the key points that highlight how and why slavery spread, as “slaveholding societies of the Southeast and Mid-Atlantic were...reaching limits in soil fertility” and the untouched west- that is, untouched by the white slaveholder and disregarding the indigenous people who lived there- “looked

³ Nikole Hannah-Jones, “The 1619 Project”, *New York Times*, (August 2019).

⁴ Nikole Hannah-Jones, “The 1619 Project”, *New York Times*, (August 2019), 16.

irresistible.”¹⁴⁷ She states that “a complex interstate slave trade became an industry of its own” and moves the story along by explaining that “armed conflict between American-identified enslavers and a Mexican state that outlawed slavery in 1829 was among the causes of the Mexican-American war, which won for the United States much of the Southwest and California.”¹⁴⁸ To conclude, Miles references how this had lasting effects for the newly freed Black men who served in the Civil War, as “even while bearing slavery’s scars, black men found themselves carrying out orders to secure white residents of Western towns, track down ‘outlaws’” and “police the federally imposed boundaries of Indian reservations and quell labor strikes.”¹⁴⁹ In this broader view of how slavery migrated west, although Black citizens are free, they still face the cruelty of jobs that do the dirty work for white residents, a reflection of the past. They face targeted racism and segregation for what seems like will last forever. This story on how slavery swept across the nation is useful as it can answer questions like causes of the Mexican-American war, the location of Black populations across America, the underlying causes and problems of the Black struggle, the lasting effects of this migration of slavery, and more.

Using a different angle, Miles once again effectively uses the grand narrative to demonstrate that Black Americans built and continue to build the country, with the example of Wall Street. She begins with how Black slaves physically built New York City, as “New York’s enslaved put in place much of the local infrastructure, including Broad Way and the Bowery roads, Governors Island, and the first municipal buildings and churches.”¹⁵⁰ Miles goes more in-

⁵ Tiya Miles, “Chained Migration: How Slavery Made its Way West”, *New York Times*, (August 2019), 22.

⁶ Tiya Miles, “Chained Migration: How Slavery Made its Way West”, *New York Times*, (August 2019), 22.

⁷ Tiya Miles, “Chained Migration: How Slavery Made its Way West”, *New York Times*, (August 2019), 22.

⁸ Tiya Miles, “Municipal Bonds: How Slavery Built Wall Street”, *New York Times*, (August 2019), 40.

depth, stating that “New York City’s phenomenal economic consolidation came as a result of its dominance in the Southern cotton trade” and “gained its status as a financial behemoth through shipping raw cotton to Europe and bankrolling the boom industry that slavery made.” This still has its impacts today, because “the capital profits and financial wagers of Manhattan, the United States, and the world still flow through this place where...the wealth of a region was built on slavery.”¹⁵¹ When thinking of Wall Street, slavery typically is not at the forefront of a person’s mind. The thought of the stock market, restless white men in suits, and money are common images that may possibly pop up in the brain. As Miles uses the grand narrative by moving through the history of Wall Street, she opens up a range of new answers and explanations to the impacts of slavery in America.

The 1619 Project has created a buzz in the media and conversation between scholars and typical American citizens alike. It is not a surprise when a new perspective-- or any perspective-- has critics, especially when a perspective of history comes from a non-historian. The 1619 Project is on a more disputed and somewhat sensitive topic, so it already got a lot of attention. One critic of Jones and her project is Sean Wilentz, who, with five other historians, wrote a letter to the *New York Times* claiming that Jones’ article had several inaccuracies, stating that “we wholeheartedly support the stated goal to educate widely on slavery and its long-term consequences. Our letter attempted to advance that goal, one that, no matter how the history is interpreted and related, cannot be forwarded through falsehoods, distortions, and significant omissions.”¹⁵² Wilentz emphasizes that the letter was not intended to judge the topic of the

⁹ Tiya Miles, “Municipal Bonds: How Slavery Built Wall Street”, *New York Times*, (August 2019), 40.

¹⁰ Sean Wilentz, “A Matter of Facts”, *The Atlantic*, (January 2020).

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/01/1619-project-new-york-times-wilentz/605152/>

project, but simply wanted to help the argument by making sure the facts were accurate. Whether the intentions of the letter claimed by Wilentz were genuine or not, the focus of the fine details is not what Jones wants her audience to take away. Small errors in the 1619 Project do not take away from the key points being made because the use of the grand narrative allows not only scholars but the general public to find answers to more long-term and philosophical questions and understand the big picture as to why there is still much work to be done in systematically gaining true equality for Black citizens in America.

II. Lyotard and the Question of Scientific vs Historical Relevance

There is of course no debate if there is no opposing side, and Jean-Francois Lyotard is the leading critic of the grand narrative, a term that is surprisingly coined by the critic himself. Although more focused on grand narratives in science rather than in history, Lyotard's distaste of big-picture generalizations is not hard to miss, as he goes to great lengths describing how, in postmodern society, the use of grand narratives is no longer needed. He defines postmodernism as "the status of knowledge" being "altered as societies have entered what is known as the postindustrial age," with this transition being "under way since at least the end of the 1950s."¹⁵³ Lyotard goes on to say that "narratives, as we have seen, determine criteria of competence and/or illustrate how they are to be applied. They thus define what has the right to be said and done in the culture in question, and since they are themselves a part of that culture, they are legitimated by the simple fact that they do what they do."¹⁵⁴ Although Lyotard does legitimize the grand

¹¹ Jean-Francois Lyotard, "The Field: Knowledge in Computerized Societies", *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, (Manchester University Press: 1984), 3.

¹² Jean-Francois Lyotard, "The Pragmatics of Narrative Knowledge", *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, (Manchester University Press: 1984), 23.

narrative, he is claiming that they are too literal, and society feels it must stick to this general story. He uses Marx as an example of this and how his work cannot apply to the society in which we live today, simply because his prediction has ultimately failed, stating that:

What guides Marxism then, is a different model of society...this model was born of the struggles accompanying the process of capitalism's encroachment upon traditional civil societies...in countries with liberal or advanced liberal management, the struggles and their instruments have been transformed into the regulators of the system; in communist countries, the totalizing model and its totalitarian effect have made a comeback in the name of Marxism himself, and the struggles in question have simply been deprived of the right to exist.¹⁵⁵

However, is Marx not relevant today? Are these so-called class struggles that Marx claims shape the evolution of society truly non-existent? It is true that a transition to socialism or communism in places like the Soviet Union or Latin America did not result in a utopian society, even less an overall success, but has capitalism either? Marx's prediction did not completely come true, but it is a prediction after all. Is capitalism not still splitting the class divide even further into appallingly rich and beggarly poor people, especially in poorer countries like Latin America who are forced to depend on the most capitalistic countries in the world to barely survive? Like Marx says, "our epoch...has simplified the class antagonisms...into two great hostile camps."¹⁵⁶ These are questions that can be looked at through the grand narrative perspective to possibly understand. Marx's theory of societal evolution is a grand narrative itself, as it moves through history to answer broader questions on how society has functioned and may

¹³ Jean-Francois Lyotard, "The Nature of the Social Bond: The Modern Alternative", *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, (Manchester University Press: 1984), 13.

¹⁴ Karl Marx, "The Communist Manifesto", *Selected Writings*, (Hackett Publishing Company: 1994), 159.

continue to function in the future. Lyotard claims that Marx and his theory are things of the past and should stay there because society has moved on. But with the social and economic strain that capitalism still puts on this world, there are scholars still searching for answers and alternatives, and some are still turning to Marxism. Many students across the world are still learning about Marx, simply because of his impact on history. Before we tuck Marx away into the dark hole of forgotten history, we must consider how bits and pieces of his narrative may still help to provide explanations on other ways we can try to improve the world and prevent such stark class divide, because the phrase “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle” is worth looking into when wondering how society got to where it is today.¹⁵⁷

As Lyotard claims that grand narratives are for too literal and society should not stick to just this one story, he also argues that the knowledge we now have today as a society through technology and science has progressed to the point where narratives are far too simple because we have so much knowledge at our fingertips through media and computers. With this newly developing technology he explains:

These transformations can be expected to have a considerable impact on knowledge. Its two principal functions- research and the transmission of acquired learning- are already feeling the effect, or will in the future...it is common knowledge that the miniaturization and commercialization of machines is already changing the way in which learning is acquired, classified, made available, and exploited.”¹⁵⁸

The way we have access to knowledge and learning has come far in how readily available information is. Lyotard believes because of this there is no one story that can tie something like

¹⁵ Karl Marx, “The Communist Manifesto”, *Selected Writings*, (Hackett Publishing Company: 1994), 158.

¹⁶ Jean-Francois Lyotard, “The Field: Knowledge in Computerized Societies”, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, (Manchester University Press: 1984), 4.

science together, because "scientific knowledge does not represent the totality of knowledge; it has always existed in addition to, and in competition and conflict with, another kind of knowledge...narrative...its model is related to ideas of internal equilibrium and conviviality."¹⁵⁹ Because there are so many tangents and specific topics of science with the advancement of our knowledge and technology, to Lyotard it is impossible to place it in a grand narrative as it is too general and impractical.

What if one were to write about the grand narrative of the history of science? Maybe the grand narrative is impractical in terms of science, but when it comes to history it can be truly useful. According to historian G.M. Trevelyan, history cannot be seen or analyzed in such a way as science, for "there is no way of scientifically deducing causal laws about the action of human beings in the mass. In short, the value of history is not scientific. It's true value is educational. It can educate the minds of men by causing them to reflect on the past."¹⁶⁰ Like science, there are several topics and themes under the great umbrella of history with complex moving parts, opinions, and emotions. However, for example:

"In dealing even in affair of which the facts are so comparatively well known as those of the French Revolution, it is impossible accurately to examine the psychology of twenty-five million different persons, of whom- except a few hundreds or thousands- the lives and motives are buried in the black night of the utterly forgotten. No one, therefore, can ever give a complete or wholly true account of the causes of the French Revolution. But several imperfect readings of history are better than none at all."¹⁶¹

¹⁷ Jean-Francois Lyotard, "The Problem: Legitimation", *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, (Manchester University Press: 1984), 7.

¹⁸ George Trevelyan, *Clio, A Muse, and Other Essays*, (Longmans, Green and Co: 1914), 12.

¹⁹ George Trevelyan, *Clio, A Muse, and Other Essays*, (Longmans, Green and Co: 1914), 8.

Although there are many moving parts to history, sometimes a more general account cannot only add more enriching knowledge to the public but also portray it in an easier to understand way.

This is proven in the 1619 Project as there are moving parts to Black history, but Jones' account allows these parts to be easily put together and reaches a broader audience.

The opposite of the grand narrative is the specialization of a certain topic, researching the minute details of specific time eras of countries, areas of the world, branches of governments, and more, something Lyotard finds more useful to current society. A historian who often researches specific events is Natalie Zemon Davis, with her focus on early modern Europe. In one of her writings, she dedicates a chapter to festival life in French societies, and how the societal roles flipped during these carnivals, mocking those at the top. For example, "one of these urban festivals was sponsored by the clerics- namely the Feast of Fools at Christmastime, when a choirboy or chaplain would be elected bishop and preside while the minor clergy burlesqued the mass and even confession and led an ass around the church."¹⁶² This can answer questions for those interested in the lives of the typical French citizens and what activities they participated in for entertainment. The question as to why these particular events question the hierarchical way of life during these times is a peculiar and interesting one, and Davis allows her audience to dig deeper into this world. However, Davis' audience is small. Her language can be confusing for those not experienced in the world of historical writing. There is no narrative across time. It is quite focused, and it does not reach a broader population. Focused history cannot always answer larger questions and a grand narrative is needed to connect these smaller topics to a greater picture.

²⁰ Natalie Zemon Davis, "The Reasons of Misrule", *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, (Stanford University Press: 1975), 98.

This then leads to the question of public history and the use of the grand narrative.

According to Robert Kelley:

“in its simplest meaning, public history refers to the employment of historians and the historical method outside of academia: in government, private corporations, the media, historical societies and museums...an issue needs to be resolved, a policy must be formed, the use of a resource or the direction of an activity must be more effectively planned- and a historian is called upon to bring in the dimension of time.”¹⁶³

Public history allows for knowledge to be spread in a more meaningful and accessible way to encourage the sharing of ideas and information for more debate and understanding into society about the world around it, and the 1619 Project can be considered an example of this. As mentioned previously, Nikole Hannah-Jones is not a professional historian, she is an award-winning journalist. However, she is bringing the history of the Black struggle into the public spotlight through the popular and widely trusted media of the *New York Times*. Her use of the grand narrative to portray her message of the deep racism of America and the exercising of American ideals by Black citizens spreads to a wider audience because its pace is easy to keep up with and easy to understand for the average American citizen. Her simple language and general points can be understood, while her story still leaves a lasting impact on the reader and society at large due to the attention it has gotten across America in the media. The 1619 Project’s grand narrative offered a new kind of debate among historians, journalists, and ordinary citizens alike about an important aspect of American history and culture, introducing a conversation that has the ability to improve society. Therefore, Lyotard’s argument that grand narratives should be

²¹ Robert Kelley, “Public History: Its Origins, Nature, and Prospects.” *Public History Readings*, (1978), 111.

left in the past may not be so applicable to history, as grand narratives are still relevant in the field of public and academic history today.

III. Amar and Other Scholars' Perspectives

The 1619 Project is not the only recent example of grand narrative use. The question of what it means to be an American can be looked at through multiple different lenses along with Black history, and in a traditionally academic manner as well. Akhil Amar is an American legal scholar who has a passion for the United States Constitution. He uses a broader storytelling of US history to explain the importance of the Constitution. He emphasizes the metaphor of the Constitution set up like a structured building, with the Founding Fathers and the American people as the architects. The American people are the true creators of the Constitution however, because it fits to the people's needs and rights and remains up to date on said needs through amendments. Amar suggests that the most important part of the document is "the blank space" at the end as it "is a constant reminder to us that the document is not finished" and "had amendments been blended into the original text, the document might seem perfect and complete."¹⁶⁴ Amar celebrates the fact that the original text is never changed, simply amended. This is opposed to many other countries who completely rewrite Constitutions rather than change or amend it, such as France, which has changed its Constitution dozens of times throughout its history. Amendments allow America to not forget about its past mistakes; they are a confession. The democracy of America is still a work in progress, and without this blank space left for these amendments, progress cannot happen or be recognized. He states that "rather than prying loose and carting off embarrassing textual remnants of American's imperfect history, like the Fugitive

²² Akil Amar, "Architecture", *Indiana Law Journal*, vol. 77, (2002), 686.

Slave Clause or the Three-Fifths Clause, We, the People, have added on new rooms to the old edifice. No whitewash: the old mistake remains in place and in view as a lesson to all.”¹⁶⁵

Learning comes from mistakes and recognizing that mistakes like these exist is always a step in the direction of progress. Amar moves through the history of America through examples of how the Articles and Amendments have been exercised for centuries. He explains John Marshall’s aims to define the scope of congressional power under Article 1, then describes that “when Abraham Lincoln suspended habeas corpus...it does not say that only Congress may suspend, and there are good textual, practical, and structural reasons to think that a President in Lincoln’s situation should be able to make the decision.”¹⁶⁶ By bringing his audience through the history of America in the lens of the Constitution and using the metaphor of architecture, he portrays the importance, the influence, and the vital impact the Constitution has had in any government or societal decision for centuries. He uses this unique grand narrative to emphasize that We, the People truly keep this country moving forward, and it would not be possible to have this power without the Constitution.

In a similar writing by Amar, he claims that the reign of the filibuster can end by simple majority rule, and once again vividly takes his audience through the course of American government to answer this. He begins with how “some senators today...think that the Senate’s current filibuster system cannot be abolished by a simple majority vote. They should think again, for they have misread America’s Constitution, written and unwritten.”¹⁶⁷ The “unwritten” part is important, for in those parts is where the answer to how majority rule formed lies in four factors:

²³ Akil Amar, “Architecture”, *Indiana Law Journal*, vol. 77, (2002), 687.

²⁴ Akil Amar, “Architecture”, *Indiana Law Journal*, vol. 77, (2002), 696-7.

²⁵ Akhil Reed Amar, “LEX MAJORIS PARTIS: HOW THE SENATE CAN END THE FILIBUSTER ON ANY DAY BY SIMPLE MAJORITY RULE,” *Duke Law Journal* 63, no. 7 (2014), 1484.

“First, majority rule has unique mathematical properties that make it the obvious answer... second...majority rule was the natural default of all assemblies...third, the Constitution’s text evidently incorporated this majoritarian premise, albeit by implication...fourth...majority rule was not only implicit in the Constitution’s text, but also visible in its very enactment.”¹⁶⁸ Amar establishes what majority rule is before providing several examples of how it has been used through the years in order to emphasize how it can be used to end the filibuster. Examples of majority rule being used in government include the “enactment process in 1787-88” and “the 1892 case, *United States v. Ballin*, [in which] the Court explicitly embraced majority rule as the background master norm for each house of Congress.”¹⁶⁹ Using events that sweep across American history provides a broader outlook on how majority rule has influenced almost every decision made in the US, adding to Amar’s main argument that it can be used even on something like the filibuster. He explains that there have been instances where it has almost happened: “in the early twenty-first century, Republican senators frustrated by the success of the Democratic minority in blocking votes on various judicial nominations loudly threatened to revise the old filibuster rule by a simple majority vote. This threatened revision, popularly nicknamed ‘the nuclear option,’ never came to a conclusive floor vote.”¹⁷⁰ Although this writing is much more focused on the logistics of precisely how the filibuster could end and why it should, Amar still comes to this conclusion by increasing the lens on how decision making in American

²⁶ Akhil Reed Amar, “LEX MAJORIS PARTIS: HOW THE SENATE CAN END THE FILIBUSTER ON ANY DAY BY SIMPLE MAJORITY RULE,” *Duke Law Journal* 63, no. 7 (2014), 1485-87.

²⁷ Akhil Reed Amar, “LEX MAJORIS PARTIS: HOW THE SENATE CAN END THE FILIBUSTER ON ANY DAY BY SIMPLE MAJORITY RULE,” *Duke Law Journal* 63, no. 7 (2014), 1493.

²⁸ Akhil Reed Amar, “LEX MAJORIS PARTIS: HOW THE SENATE CAN END THE FILIBUSTER ON ANY DAY BY SIMPLE MAJORITY RULE”, *Duke Law Journal* 63, no. 7 (2014), 1495.

government has played out by majority rule and how it has been so useful to so many crucial and possible pivotal points in history. Amar's use of grand narrative once again shows that looking at the grander scheme of things can sometimes lead to more answers rather than looking so up closely.

In a final example of a recent and scholarly use of the grand narrative, Dorothy Ross tackles the challenge of examining the grand narrative in American historical writing (perhaps even a grand narrative of the grand narrative). She starts the conversation on how there has been "widespread discontent with the results of historical study pursued today" due to the "absence of an assured grand narrative in current American historiography."¹⁷¹ She references William Sloane, a 19th century history professor, in which his confidence in knowing that "the grand narrative of all history" is "a narrative of progress" stems from something "no longer available to us a century later: 'an evolutionary philosophy' that disclosed the unity and continuity of all history." Ross explains that the lack of a grand narrative in history academe has brought about discontent, because in the 1950s the "moment of American triumphalism initiated a political mentality and a retreat from grand narrative that have colored historical practice ever since."¹⁷² This may bring to reason why scholars like Lyotard are so critical of the grand narrative, as the attitude of the time was that of progress and not looking back to the past for answers because "the weakening of religious belief and the industrial transformation of society called it into question,"¹⁷³ hence Lyotard's argument of technological advancement being the answer for the present and future historical research and writings. Although someone like Amar is supportive of

²⁹ Dorothy Ross, "Grand Narrative in American Historical Writing: From Romance to Uncertainty." *The American Historical Review* 100, no. 3 (1995), 651.

³⁰ Dorothy Ross, "Grand Narrative in American Historical Writing: From Romance to Uncertainty." *The American Historical Review* 100, no. 3 (1995), 651.

³¹ Dorothy Ross, "Grand Narrative in American Historical Writing: From Romance to Uncertainty." *The American Historical Review* 100, no. 3 (1995), 654.

an attitude of progress as well, he believes that looking to and reflecting on the past is the best way for progress to happen. Perhaps if Amar's viewpoint were the attitude of the time, the grand narrative would not be lost. Ross goes on to say that "many of the historians who established the profession wished to separate history from its divine background and to recover the past realistically...history was to become a science, not literature."¹⁷⁴ It is interesting that just before this more scientific approach of history came about, Trevelyan drafted an entire essay on how history is not a science. As Ross examines the pros and cons of the grand narrative now, she states that "the regular or heuristic adoption of grand narratives is in many ways the easiest to imagine and construct, allowing historians to explore, as they question, familiar stories."¹⁷⁵ This perhaps is why many writers and scholars of today continue to use the grand narrative. They may not use it so intentionally to explain the existence of humanity or all of history, but, in order to get bold points across about current topics, the use of the grand narrative of areas of history does play out to be useful.

IV. A Brief Conclusion

With the topic of the grand narrative, the understanding of history is at stake. It is important to understand how to frame history and sometimes take a wider view of what has happened to gain answers to lingering questions. Specializing in a certain topic of history can add to knowledge. But, sometimes taking a step back and looking at the big picture is necessary in order to truly understand history, which respected authors like Amar and Jones have demonstrated. Whether it

³² Dorothy Ross, "Grand Narrative in American Historical Writing: From Romance to Uncertainty." (1995), 654.

³³ Dorothy Ross, "Grand Narrative in American Historical Writing: From Romance to Uncertainty." (1995), 676.

be a greater appreciation and understanding of the Constitution or a need to centralize Black history and culture into the American conversation, the grand narrative is a useful tool in what it means to be engaged with universal, not always so literal, questions.

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