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The study of history is a conversation. Contributions to that conversation must enter with facts and verifiable evidence. Such contributions can even be argumentative, but they must not assume there isn't more and equally relevant information that supports different arguments. Multiple truths exist. Plurality of perspectives is a strength. It forces consideration of as many frames of reference as possible. Constructive criticisms serve to scrutinize evidence and remind scholars and students of the potential plurality of truth, which drives the conversation into new apprehensions. Skepticism should be encouraged and all sources should be scrutinized to determine credibility. Hopefully, deeper understanding will result.

On one hand, criticisms that highlight the multiplicity of perspectives and evaluate evidence should be taken seriously. On the other hand, criticisms that make complaints of bias or too much emphasis on a particular aspect should also be criticized. Criticism of a perspective does not negate that perspective. Important questions to ask include: Is there evidence to support the need for emphasis? Is the author trying to help make history speak to contemporary society? What are the reviewer's biases? If there is credible evidence, it should be taken into consideration that certain points of history hit cultural sore spots. Of all the criticisms that arise, some are bound to exist for no reason other than that critic didn't want to hear it. Any source, review, or comment that denies the complexity of an issue should be neglected. History, especially, can be a hard pill to swallow. If anything, these reviews and internet comments illustrate how heated this subject still is, one and a half centuries later.

Precision with words is vitally important. Critics remind scholars and other experts that hyperbole and exaggeration are to be completely avoided. For this reason, the New York Times review is warranted in its semantic objections over chapter titles. Words such as "revolution" should be used sparingly in order to preserve the seriousness of their meanings. However, when new and significant changes occur, it can be difficult to find appropriate adjectives that accurately convey the situation to contemporaries. The New York Times is correct in raising such questions, but that doesn't automatically mean McPherson is incorrect in his word choices. These are issues for readers to contemplate.

Skepticism is always important no matter what is being studied or who the source is. However, the opinion stated in the eighth Amazon.com comment that "the very basic rule of any professional historian/writer should be free of any bias" is simply wrong. The incomplete nature of this sentence aside, complete, unbiased, and objective truth cannot be achieved by any single person. Everyone has a bias. Bias often simply means the author has a perspective and an opinion. Again, if there is reliable evidence to back up the claims, then the perspective should be included in the greater conversation. To insist that one source is biased, but another source is not, is inherently biased. This is the value of formal education. It teaches to include and scrutinize as many credible and relevant sources as possible. Part of this practice requires students to both search out puzzle pieces that have been left out, and understand the source's point on its own terms.

It is true that no single person's writings will encompass all truth. However, some writings contain more truth than others, and often times, truth gets vehemently criticized.

Raised objections to a perspective do not always negate that perspective's credibility or usefulness. All perspectives should be scrutinized. They shouldn't be discarded simply because they take a position, make an argument, and back it all up with evidence. Students must begin their studies somewhere. Source scrutinizing is an important practice. Equally important is giving due consideration to sources that present abundant evidence and research.