

SPEAKER 1: Deciding when to intervene in a conversation in a seminar is not a science. It's an art. And sometimes, it's a really inelegant art. I like to hold off as much as possible and let the conversation go, particularly at the beginning of the class, and as the class is, sort of, starting to get warmed up. I will take a little bit more of a heavier hand towards the end of class, where I feel like we're getting at something and let's keep getting at that, because I think we were really about to have a revelation, and we want-- I want to keep us in that place where that's possible.

SPEAKER 2: So we, sort of, were talking about how Grimes presents this pessimistic view of black freedom in America, and it sounds like we're talking about Douglass's [INAUDIBLE] seems to end with a, sort of, optimism in a sense of forward lookingness related to the abolition movement. And I wonder, to what extent we believe both of them. Do we believe Douglass's optimism? Has it been realized or not? To what extent has it been realized, or not, as time has gone on? Thinking about that.

SPEAKER 3: Yeah and also, as a viewer, just, can a slave really be free? Can they actually be successful, at the time of their freedom?

SPEAKER 1: Or can anyone?

SPEAKER 4: Well I think, to, kind of, address William Grimes' pessimism, there are, of course, real grievances that he's bringing to the table. And often, freedom doesn't make up for those things. Just as authors all across American literature and history have, kind of, talked about how living in a city in America is, particularly early in the 19th century, is gross and terrible and hard.

SPEAKER 1: Is th-- go ahead.

SPEAKER 5: Yeah, I was just-- it's a really good mindset or framework.

SPEAKER 1: Yeah.

SPEAKER 5: Yeah.

SPEAKER 2: I was going to say, I'm curious if people have follow up thoughts about the Grimes and his pessimism. Or I think, we haven't talked as much about, sort of, the evolution-- or we talk a

little about the art of Douglass' narrative and how he seems to end on this note of optimism for black freedom. And I wonder, do people do people buy his optimism, because I'm not 100% sure that I do.

SPEAKER 1:

Yeah and our pessimism and optimism, the right frames for thinking about where these two different narrative arcs end up. It's one of the things that I think is interesting and that I hope we'll continue to talk about in the last couple of weeks of the class is that there is, I think, an oversimplification, even among scholars who study this stuff, about the, sort of, arc of the slave narrative that it always moves from slavery to freedom. What we see in these two, and Douglass' narrative is often seen as the iconic text that does that. And yet, Grimes' narrative is doing something very different.

I knew that we we're short on time, and I didn't want the conversation to get derailed by the awkward silence. And I ac-- and I didn't actually think that pessimism and optimism, as the provokers had framed it, was necessarily the way that everybody was seeing these texts. And so I thought that that silence after Bennett spoke, and there was that awkward silence and everybody laughed, my sen-- my read of that, and I could be wrong, but my read of that moment was that half the room was not really, either understanding or jibing with what Jeremy had framed as the binary between pessimism and optimism.

And so I asked the additional question, not because I thought it was necessarily wrong, but because I thought there might be a way, in asking that question, to invite more people in at that crucial moment when we only had five or ten more minutes in the class. And so that was more of a keep us-- keep the fire burning.

SPEAKER 2:

I was excited for what he was going to add to our provocation, and I thought that when he interjected and reprovoked or redirect or tried-- tried to ask us to clarify something, it was always really valuable.

SPEAKER 6:

I think all of the students in the course really trust that he will intervene in really meaningful ways. We trusted that if it went somewhere off course, if it went somewhere a little less rigorous, he would step in to-- to bring it back in.

SPEAKER 1:

So it was my time to, kind of, wield power, but also relinquish it in the same moment. And that was, as again, not always artfully done.