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**WHO LIVES, WHO DIES, WHO TELLS YOUR STORY: A CASE
STUDY OF HAMILTON: AN AMERICAN MUSICAL TO
UNDERSTAND THE EFFECT OF ENGAGING THE PAST IN THE
CULTURE OF TODAY**

Adrianna C. Halsey
Southeastern University - Lakeland

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WHO LIVES, WHO DIES, WHO TELLS YOUR STORY:
A CASE STUDY OF *HAMILTON: AN AMERICAN MUSICAL* TO UNDERSTAND
THE EFFECT OF ENGAGING THE PAST IN THE CULTURE OF TODAY

by

Adrianna Halsey

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in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for University Honors Scholars

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2018

This thesis is dedicated to my sister, Alexia.
When I needed her most she was right on time.

Abstract

This thesis is a look into how Alexander Hamilton has been portrayed on stage in the musical *Hamilton: An American Musical*, written by Lin-Manuel Miranda. The goal of this research is to show that this musical is not history, but rather a commentary on current culture through one of America's favorite stories (that of the Revolution.) In this show, past figures have been used to discuss the issues of modern America, and that is now being sold as history. This has been discovered through the analysis of primary and secondary sources of the time period, as well as through a listening to and understanding of the show. Through this analysis, it can be seen that anachronism is a real and present danger in the study of history, as modern ideas influence the story being told. While historically based art can be beautiful, it is often shaped into the story writers wish to tell rather than what had occurred.

Key Words: Aaron Burr, Alexander Hamilton, American history, American Revolution, Broadway, *Hamilton: An American Musical*, *Hamilton*, historiography, Lin-Manuel Miranda, musical, theater, Revolutionary War

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Introduction

In the time leading up to the Revolutionary War, Thomas Paine declared, “We have it in our power to begin the world over again.”¹ Lin-Manuel Miranda has taken this idea in a whole new context, using his power to rewrite history rather than restart the world. In his smash hit show, *Hamilton: An American Musical*, he has redefined Alexander Hamilton’s place in American history. Hamilton, who is often remembered as the Founding Father killed by Vice President Aaron Burr in a duel, is now being remembered for much more. Thanks to Miranda, Hamilton’s legacy has started to shift, and he is being recognized now for his vital contributions to the American Republic. Through this show, he has been rediscovered as a Founder, and his legacy has been given a place in the hearts of the American people.

However, an increased knowledge, and furthermore, an increased respect, does not correlate with a correct understanding. In any adapted piece of history, the audience must be cautious. Dramatic embellishment is something that occurs often to create a thrilling and captivating story for a variety of audiences. Facts often get dropped or added, and modern ideas get worked into the themes of the narrative. This is not harmful in works of art, but becomes so when the product is being sold as objective history. If facts have been embellished or modern themes have been added with no warning for the audience, then it becomes dangerous to receive *Hamilton* as history. An audience ignorant to history is better than an audience that has been indoctrinated by false history.

So, research must be done, and depending on the conclusions, America must be properly informed. If this nation accepts an inaccurate representation of this foundational

¹ Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (Philadelphia: Robert Bell, 1776).

time period, then it will fail to understand the values that this nation has been built upon. This thesis proposes that *Hamilton* is wrong, and that audiences are being misled due to the use of a modern method of storytelling influenced by America's current sociopolitical environment. This not only harms the accuracy and credibility of history, but what America is and where it comes from. To better understand this, each of these questions will be explored and answered.

- What is historiography and what fallacies are often faced when history is brought into the modern context?
- How has Alexander Hamilton been understood by different schools of historical interpretation prior to the debut of *Hamilton*?
- How is Alexander Hamilton understood by Lin-Manuel Miranda and the fans of this new show?
- How do the understandings compare? Has Hamilton been accurately represented on stage?
- Finally, in a broader sense, has the show done a sufficient job in capturing the characters and ideas of this time period, accurately representing the foundation of America?

Each of these questions has been researched and explained in the form of an extended literature review. Through research, conclusions have been made that have come from an analysis of primary and secondary sources, listening to and understanding the concepts of the show, an analysis of the audience's response, and various lectures on the time period. By studying each of these, the author will be able to give the reader a deeper understanding of the answers to each of these questions.

The Fallacies in Pop-Culture History

Historiography is the process and methods by which scholars study history and how they write the stories.² These methods that are used in history are vital to how historians understand and present history to their peers and to the people. Without sound method, history would lose a lot of its substance, which would allow it to be shaped into any thought or conclusion, tearing away the legitimacy of the discipline. There are ways to write history that hurt the practice and undermine the story. Two of these are romanticism and anachronism. The romantic movement is one that began in the late eighteenth century, and while that specific movement has ended, principles of the practice have ceased to fade. Anachronism, the insertion of modern ideas into a story of the past, is a major issue that has come in the new wave of modern critical historical scholarship.³ Both of these perspectives in history writing are important in understanding the topics at hand and should be explored.

Romanticism is a past way of communicating the story that has not fully left the discipline. Romantic in this sense is not that of love, but rather an embellished story of glory. The College University of New York in Brooklyn lays out romanticism as a dynamic, imaginative, and symbolic form of writing.⁴ One of the main aspects of this methodology is the creation of a hero. Writers twist the characteristics of the main character to play into the fantasy of the story. Giving the story a hero makes it more compelling, and it makes this figure more lovable and the story more exciting. These fantastical works are based off fact, but the fact is not as important as the story of

² "Historiography Definiton," *Dictionary.Com*.

³ Gordon S. Wood, *The Purpose of the Past* (New York, NY: The Penguin Press, 2008), 8-9.

⁴ "Romanticism," <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/cs6/rom.html>, accessed March 31, 2017.

conquest that the author wishes to share. Facts often cease in the pursuit of grandeur. While the stories written in this style are wonderfully compelling, they often lack a core sense of accuracy. When used in writing accounts of history, romanticism becomes dangerous. History strives to be an objective telling of past events, so when facts are dropped for narrative, we lose the foundation of what the story is.

Carl Trueman is an author who looks at history writing and exposes the flaws many encounter in this pursuit. In his book, *Histories and Fallacies: Problems Faced in the Writing of History*, Trueman offers budding historians an opportunity to grow in historical method and understanding, which will hopefully lead to a generation of historians with a solid grounding in historiography. One of the biggest problems that he calls out is the temptation to impose current beliefs on past ideas. This is known as anachronism and is a dangerous practice for historians. Anachronism is dangerous because it sticks modern ideals on historical figures, completely changing who they were.⁵ Trueman includes an explanation: “A good example might be the term *liberty*. Living at the start of the twenty-first century in a liberal democracy, I am inclined to understand this work in terms of ... the modern democratic mindset, focused on the individual.”⁶ Simple misunderstandings of words and concepts due to change over time is one way in which the past becomes defined by the present. Another way to change the past is through political views. When political views influence history, the whole story is compromised.

⁵ Carl R. Trueman, *Histories and Fallacies: Problems Faced in the Writing of History* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 109.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.

Historian Gordon Wood has noted this recent change in the tide of history. Over the last few decades, people have become less interested in academic history and more involved with cultural, popular history. This new desire for a history that serves as a compelling story, one that emphasizes the marginalized, and that correctly aligns with memory, even when the facts do not necessarily line up with what has been remembered, has started to transform the practice of history.⁷ This has created a great divide in academic history, as historians are starting to change the story to fit the desires of the people. This new practice has begun to deconstruct history as a whole, which has led to a lot of problems with how people write history. Wood has published a book in which he includes many of the book critiques that he has done over time. In *The Purpose of the Past*, he has identified the changing tide in the field of history and the ways that historians have begun to change the practice. As popular history grows, people are looking for more ways in which they can relate the past to their lives. Wood says, “Rather than trying to understand the past on its own terms, these historians want the past to be immediately relevant and useful; they want to use history to empower people in the present, to help them develop self-identity, or to enable them to break free of the past.”⁸

Wood then goes on to discuss the practice of anachronism. Building on what Trueman already says, Wood connects this shift in the practice of history to the widespread use of anachronism. Many historians go in with present-minded agendas, yet that is not how history should work. Wood puts it this way: “The problems and issues of the present should be the stimulus for our forays into the past ... but the present should

⁷ Wood, *The Purpose of the Past*, 2-6.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

not be the criterion for what we find in the past.”⁹ Many new age historians go into history with the expectations of finding where they fit. Everyone wants to be a part of the story, whether or not they actually fit into the history they are studying. Historians can use the past to see where current issues have stemmed from, but current issues should not have a direct effect on how historians see and shape the past.¹⁰ Obviously, no history is completely objective. People grow up establishing their personal principles and worldview, which no one can fully escape.¹¹ While historians cannot fully remove their bias, they must still be aware of it. When they are mindful of how they may taint history, then they can best prevent a subjective product.

⁹ Ibid., 10.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 39.

Historiography Review

Ron Chernow has written one of the most extensive and respected biographies of Alexander Hamilton. In his 738-page study, he goes into great detail on the life of Hamilton. From birth to death, Chernow gives a detailed account of Hamilton's life. As a historian, he reveres Hamilton as a hero of the American nation. "Today, we are indisputably the heirs to Hamilton's America, and to repudiate his legacy is, in many ways, to repudiate the modern world."¹² This work is the story of Hamilton written as a hero, with Chernow seeing him as the founder of capitalist America and a visionary for the future of democracy. However, Chernow is careful to include all of the facts that he can about Hamilton's life, good and bad. This helps the reader build a three-dimensional understanding of who Hamilton was. He knows that Hamilton was not perfect by any means but he also acknowledges that America may not have survived without his influence.

Another historian who has covered Hamilton in depth is Richard Brookhiser. In his book, *Alexander Hamilton: American*, Brookhiser emphasizes Hamilton's importance in the American founding. Throughout history, he has been misunderstood as a Founder, and Brookhiser sees that as unfair. Hamilton was an impassioned and inspiring American nationalist figure. While his foes fought to use his past against him, Hamilton stayed strong and continued to build his identity as a New Yorker, and more importantly as an American,¹³ although he was never fully convinced of the identity he adopted for himself, and sometimes he struggled in feeling that it truly belonged to him.¹⁴ Brookhiser is

¹² Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2004), 6.

¹³ Richard Brookhiser, *Alexander Hamilton: American* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1999), 8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

definitely aware of Hamilton's enemies, and sees them as devious compared to Hamilton's wit and great achievements. While Chernow see Hamilton as a champion of modern American economy and democracy, Brookhiser disagrees. Hamilton lived as a moral guide and inspiring politician, yet "Hamilton's positions fit with no current model."¹⁵ While Hamilton does not fully fit in the current realm of American politics, Brookhiser notes his continued relevance. "Because he was a great man, he generally did it better. His life, and the lives of his peers, can guide and caution us."¹⁶ Brookhiser deeply reveres Hamilton as an American hero, giving him the place he feels Hamilton has earned in American heritage.

Richard B. Vernier has published a book that is a compilation of many of Hamilton's writings. While this book is mostly Hamilton's words, the introduction offers insight to Vernier's view of this Founder, and it explains why he took the time to compile these writings. Vernier recognized the villainized place that Hamilton has in American memory, yet he feels there needs to be a shift in perspective. Through understanding the issues of the early republic, Hamilton can be better understood, rather than just analyzing his policies and personality without context, which is what has created this vilified image. While rooted in British political theory, Hamilton was still committed to the American cause.¹⁷ He was patriotic and passionate, willing to share his opinion and ready to fight for a cause greater than himself. He saw the importance of power in these critical years of early America, which made many upset as they were still recovering from British tyranny. Vernier emphasizes context in his understanding of the past. Working to

¹⁵ Ibid., 10.

¹⁶ Ibid., 11.

¹⁷ Richard B. Vernier, *The Revolutionary Writings of Alexander Hamilton* (Liberty Fund Inc, 2008), xi.

understand Hamilton in his time and through his perspective makes him less of an American villain and more of an American hero.

Thomas Fleming has written many works on the Founding era, focusing on the Revolution and the time following the war. He often looks at the people of these times, analyzing how they acted in the context of the actions of those around them. His book *Duel: Alexander Hamilton, Aaron Burr, and the Future of America* is a look into 1804, the year of the fateful duel between Hamilton and Burr. He is aware of similarities and differences between the two men, and through the lens of 1804, he recounts the dramatic events that led up to the final shot.

Fleming has a very honest view of Hamilton. He is aware of the many things he did to serve this nation but is equally aware of his faults. He does not try to justify the bad, but rather he allows them to become part of the narrative as they were. Fleming does not overemphasize Hamilton's political actions but sees them for what they were and how the public responded. Hamilton's strong personality was a force to reckon with, but he was no more than a man. As a man, he was cosmopolitan, having tried many things throughout his complicated life. Fleming does not ignore those around Hamilton and the political atmosphere of the time period. He is not so focused on Hamilton that he ignores the aligning thoughts, stories, and principles of the other Founders. Fleming does not villainize those who opposed Hamilton, as some do, but overall offers a fair analysis of both sides.¹⁸

¹⁸ Thomas Fleming, *Duel: Alexander Hamilton, Aaron Burr and the Future of America* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1999.)

Hamilton went to the Constitutional Convention with the intent to propose his own system of government.¹⁹ This proposed system was presented in a six-hour speech and was basically a call for a return to monarchy. Billy G. Smith, a professor and a contributor of many scholarly articles,²⁰ says that Hamilton was “advocating that the new nation should return to a monarchy or at the very least have a president and senate elected or appointed for life.”²¹ This was absurd to the Founders in the room with him, as it was bringing back the very thing the nation had just fought to rid itself of. Hamilton’s desire for a strong power for this new nation worried many that he wanted to delegate this power to himself. He was in a constant and brutal pursuit of power throughout his career, forever striving to reach his goals and advance his agenda. Smith looks into the critiques of this time period to further his view on Hamilton. Abigail Adams, who was not an advocate of Hamilton, wrote the following in reference to his drive to power “That man would in my mind, become a second [Napoleon] Bonaparte if he was possessed of equal power.”²² John Adams, her husband, often agreed with her sentiments on the subject, and was also concerned with the level of Hamilton’s ambition. Smith is concerned with Hamilton’s sense of strong government and ambition to achieve. While Americans can thank him for much of America’s development, many forget that he had a strong conservative view (relative to the time period) on how the government should operate. Smith recognizes that many of the Founders found “his over-the-top ambition

¹⁹ Lin-Manuel Miranda and Jeremy McCarter, *Hamilton: The Revolution* (New York, NY: Grand Central Publishing, 2016), 138.

²⁰ Independent Institute, “Billy G. Smith” (2017), http://www.independent.org/aboutus/person_detail.asp?id=3869, accessed February 14, 2018.

²¹ Billy G. Smith, “Alexander Hamilton: The Wrong Hero of Our Age,” *The Independent Review* 21, no. 4 (Spring 2017): 519.

²² *Ibid.*, 521.

distasteful.”²³ Compared to the historians who have written so highly of Hamilton, he is not as impressed by the nation’s first secretary of the treasury, and writes about him in a more critical light.

An important part of understanding this nation and the principles it was built on is understanding the beliefs of the Founders. Understanding their beliefs also gives historians a better sense of who they were and how the people should remember them. One author who seeks to understand the views of the Founders is Thomas West. His book *Vindicating the Founders: Race, Sex, Class, and Justice in the Origins of America*, takes a deep look into the minds of the Founders, analyzing the system they established and the principles it was established under. As he looks at the Founders, Hamilton is present frequently, as he was expressive and opinionated, as well as a major influence in this time period. West takes a look at the issues in society currently and gives the reader perspective through an eighteenth-century lens.

In a chapter dedicated to the issue of race and slavery in the writing of the Constitution and establishment of America, West looks deeply into the Founders’ view of this issue, since it was greatly debated at the time. To set the foundation of the slavery argument, West first looks into the Founders’ view of race. Building off of the idea that “all men are created equal,” as boldly stated in the Declaration of Independence, West looks through the eyes of the Founders to see if they truly believed or understood what they were claiming. He reminds the reader that “all the leading Founders affirmed on many occasions that blacks are created equal to whites and that slavery is wrong.”²⁴ The

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Thomas G. West, *Vindicating the Founders: Race, Sex, Class, and Justice in the Origins of America* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1997), 4.

Founders did not see these African Americans as lesser people, and believed that the promise of liberty did not exclude them.

West then looks at specific Founders' opinions on this topic, including Hamilton's. Hamilton saw that the laws allowed for the ownership of slaves, but he also saw that they have the same capability of living in liberty. While the laws say what they say, it does not change the basic right that all men deserve liberty.²⁵ While most of the world had begun to see them as inferior, Hamilton questioned the notion. He says, "The contempt we have been taught to entertain for the blacks, makes us fancy many things that are founded neither in reason or experience."²⁶ These people were cast aside as lesser human beings with little evidence to support that belief. If given the chance and the proper resources, the black man is just as capable as the white man, according to Hamilton.

Hamilton favored ending slavery. "[He] unsuccessfully proposed an emancipation plan of this kind for South Carolina when he served on General Washington's staff."²⁷ Having grown up in the islands, slavery was a constant part of Hamilton's youth. He saw it everywhere he went and felt that it was a true evil of humanity.²⁸ To support his proposal, Hamilton says, "An essential part of the plan is to give them their freedom with their muskets. ... For the dictates of humanity and true policy equally interest me in favor of this unfortunate class of men."²⁹ Encouraging freedom would increase the number of men fighting in the war. Slaves were tied to the plantation, unable to fight for the cause of

²⁵ Ibid., 5.

²⁶ Ibid., 8.

²⁷ Ibid., 12.

²⁸ "The Immigrant's Tale," *National Geographic History* (May 2016): 85. This article is an excerpt from Ron Chernow's biography on Hamilton. National Geographic's history magazine published this chapter and called it "The Immigrant's Tale," showing Hamilton's humble beginnings and his journey to America.

²⁹ West, *Vindicating the Founders*, 12.

liberty. He also saw the unfortunate situation of slavery, and he had the desire to fit them into the narrative of humanity that the Founders were establishing for their nation.

As time went on, the issue of slavery in America grew. While many believed it was unfit for a nation as enlightened as America, they saw the immediate negative consequences of emancipating the slaves. If slavery had been abolished during the writing of the Constitution, this document would have never been ratified, or the Southern states, those heavily dependent on slavery, would not have joined this new union. To protect the union, the delegates at the Constitutional Convention made many compromises in regards to slavery.³⁰ However, compromising to preserve this young nation does not change the feelings the Founders had in regards to this issue. Hamilton himself was upset with how things were, but understood the circumstances of human nature and the world around him. West says, in response to a quote from *The Federalist*, “The leading Founders were too sensible to indulge the fantasy that human evil might one day disappear ... but the feeling was strong that liberty and enlightenment would continue to grow and that slavery would die an inevitable death.”³¹ Hamilton had grown up with a pessimism in regards to human nature,³² so it can be understood as to why he did not expect this new republic to solve the flaws of humanity. In the minds of the Founders, slavery would soon die out as man came to better understand these enlightened ideas of equality. They had set the ball in motion for its eventual end, but their hands were tied with respect to ending it at the time of the ratification of the Constitution.³³

³⁰ K. Alan Snyder, "American Revolution Course," Southeastern University, Fall 2017.

³¹ West, *Vindicating the Founders*, 30.

³² Chernow, "Hamilton," 85.

³³ Snyder, "American Revolution Course."

A second issue that West discusses is that of having property ownership as a requirement for voting. At the time of the founding, voting was limited to white men who held property.³⁴ The Founders had fair reasons behind this restriction. They felt that those who held property had more of a devotion to vote for qualified leaders and beneficial laws, and it would affect them most directly.³⁵ Without certain restrictions, men could come in from anywhere, cast a vote, and leave, with little regard for the future.

The Founders also felt that those who owned something were those who were independent and capable.³⁶ Hamilton's views specifically align with this second reason behind the restrictions. West says, "Hamilton did not fear the opinions of the poor. He feared that the poor would not really have opinions of their own and that they would magnify the votes of some voters at the expense of others."³⁷ It is not the fact that they were poor that Hamilton was worried about, but rather the fact that the poor are often dependent on others. When a man is dependent on another man, especially for his livelihood, he is more likely to side with the one supporting him or be manipulated by the one supporting him. Hamilton wrote, "If it were probable that every man would give his vote freely, and without influence of any kind, then, upon the true theory and genuine principles of liberty, every member of the community, however poor, should have a vote. . . . But since that can hardly be expected. . . . some who are suspected to have no will of their own, are excluded from voting."³⁸ He understood that the ideas of liberty could not

³⁴ West, *Vindicating the Founders*, 111.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 120.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 121.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 122.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

be fully obtained, and respected the restrictions when they seemed proper. This did not make him an enemy of the poor but a supporter of fair public policy.

Hamilton also had thoughts on immigration that cannot be ignored. Later in *Vindicating the Founders*, West discusses the perspectives of the Founders on the idea of immigration. Hamilton, by no means, was opposed to European immigration to America. He himself was an immigrant. However, he did not believe that citizenship should be readily given to all who relocate to America.³⁹ Thomas Jefferson and Hamilton actually agreed with each other in the sense that they opposed massive immigration into America from indiscriminate groups. When outsiders come into a new place, they bring their own ideas and principles, which can either be channeled to promote the American system or can be used to water down the system by changing the attitudes of the citizens around them.⁴⁰ However, when the election of 1800 came around and Jefferson was supported by a group of recent immigrants, he began to change his thinking. Once president, he called for immediate naturalization to promote hospitality and the rights of mankind. Hamilton however, kept his views of residency requirements to gain naturalization.⁴¹ Immigrants had to live on American soil for a certain number of years before gaining their citizenship, and Hamilton felt this was best. He wrote, “The safety of the Republic depends essentially on the energy of a common national sentiment; a uniformity of principles and habits.”⁴² For immigrants to come to America and immediately have the privileges of American citizens was not fair, and it was a threat to the republic. West builds off of Hamilton’s writings, saying, “Hamilton, like the earlier Jefferson, was

³⁹ Ibid., 154.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

arguing that ‘real republicanism’... can only be sustained by a ‘temperate love of liberty.’” That, in turn, requires that immigrants leave behind their ‘foreign bias and prejudice.’”⁴³ Foreigners do not learn to fully adapt and respond to the American system right away, and therefore they should not have a full part in it until they have come to understand it. This does not mean that America should not welcome outsiders with open arms, but rather, America can welcome them and teach them her ways, allowing them to later participate in the representation found in this nation.

⁴³ Ibid., 155.

Hamilton in History

Hamilton's story does not start in a place of glory but rather as a poor boy in the British West Indies on the island of Nevis. While many of the other Founders came from families of influence and wealth, growing up comfortably in the colonies, Hamilton grew up in shame and misery as he faced death and exploitation almost every day of his childhood. Hamilton claims to have been born in 1757, but historians find that he was most likely born in 1755.⁴⁴ His mother had married a man that spent her inheritance and made her life miserable. She could not gain a divorce, so she fled from him.⁴⁵ On her own, Hamilton's mother fell in love with someone else. This man, Hamilton's father, was a down-on-his-luck businessman who fled to the islands to find economic prosperity. These two were both outcasts seeking a fresh start, and it may have been the similarity of their situation that brought them together.⁴⁶ Since his mother, Rachel, could not legally obtain a divorce, she and James, Hamilton's father, could never legitimize their marriage. Rachel had inherited some property on the island of Nevis, which is where she lived with James and where Hamilton was later born.

As Hamilton grew up, it is unlikely that he received any formal schooling, but it is assumed that he was tutored, which gave him his reading and writing skills that he is so well known for now.⁴⁷ At the age of ten, his father fled, never to be seen again by the family.⁴⁸ Two years later, Hamilton and his mother got sick. He was able to recover but unfortunately, his mother passed away. All of her belongings went to her family from her

⁴⁴ Chernow, "The Immigrants' Tale," 77.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 82.

earlier marriage, so Hamilton and his brother were left to their cousin with nothing but each other. This cousin soon committed suicide, leaving them with an uncle who died about a month later. By the time he was fourteen, Hamilton had no family other than his brother.⁴⁹

This hardship did not stop him, and it built a resilience in him that was unmatched. He soon started working as a clerk for a merchant. This is where he learned about the economy and where he built a strong work ethic. On the side, Hamilton was devoted to reading all he could, as well as writing frequently.⁵⁰ He had access to books through a friend of his, Rev. Hugh Knox, who worked to get some of Hamilton's writings published in the *Royal Danish American Gazette*. One of Hamilton's writings that was particularly important was a letter he wrote describing the terrors of a hurricane that had torn through his homeland. After reading this letter, many local business men were impressed, which prompted them to raise the money necessary for Hamilton to sail the mainland colonies in search of an education.⁵¹

Hamilton was ashamed of his past, and he worked hard to remove himself from it entirely once he had made it to America. "He cut himself off from his past and forged a new identity. He would find a home where he was accepted for what he did, not who he was."⁵² The world he grew up in was harsh and structured. He saw the evils of mankind all around him every day, one of them being slavery. This built in him a pessimistic understanding of the nature of humanity and an abolitionist sentiment that he carried with him throughout his life. His situation in the islands had developed within him a work

⁴⁹ Ibid., 83-84.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 84-85.

⁵¹ Ibid., 86.

⁵² Ibid., 87.

ethic and desire for greatness like no other.⁵³ Coming to the colonies at that time gave Hamilton the perfect opportunity to become all that he could.

Once in America, Hamilton wasted no time. His ship landed in New York in the fall of 1772.⁵⁴ The plan was for him to study at the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University), but after meeting with the college's president, Dr. John Witherspoon, Hamilton was denied as he was so young and wanted such a quick education, which the board of trustees did not feel was a good idea, and so looked to study elsewhere. He pursued his education at King's College (now Columbia University), in New York City.⁵⁵ New York was a vibrant city, growing immensely, and serving as a hub of political thought. This political atmosphere gave Hamilton the chance to speak out and share his opinions. His early thoughts show a respect for rights but an understanding of the need for a centralized power. He incorporated the revolutionary sentiment of the time period, believing that the colonies should not be bound by the tyrannical government of the British crown.⁵⁶ As the revolutionary spirit continued to grow within the colonies, Hamilton was increasingly prepared to fight back, bring liberty to the nation that he now saw as home, and create a name for himself in the process.

When the war broke out at Lexington and Concord, Hamilton was still in New York. Before joining the fight, he was continuing to share his opinions, speaking out for liberty and distracting mobs. One night after the outbreak of the war, Hamilton was spending the evening with his professor, Dr. Cooper, when a mob came to tar and feather the professor. Hamilton stopped them at the front door and spoke long enough for Cooper

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Vernier, *Revolutionary Writings*, xi.

⁵⁵ Brookhiser, *Hamilton: American*, 21.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 24.

to escape out the back.⁵⁷ He joined a drill company shortly into the war, and served with a reckless spirit.⁵⁸ While serving with this company, he was promoted to captain, and eventually he caught the eye of General George Washington with his fierce defense of the conflict and the initiative he took in organizing a group of artillerymen.⁵⁹

He was hired as a writer and advisor for the cause, aiding Washington in the war efforts and writing to Congress for the much-needed army supplies.⁶⁰ Washington kept Hamilton by his side. Hamilton was a strong aide and important to Washington's leadership. This, however, did not work well with Hamilton. He did not want to be writing for the cause but fighting for the cause. His goal was to prove himself on the battlefield and obtain national glory, which he was unable to do as a writer and advisor.⁶¹ Hamilton's time came to fight, although it was not until the end of the war. In the final months of this conflict, there were many battles in the Southern theater of the war. The British found themselves camped on a peninsula in Virginia, and their navy was up in New York. Landlocked and without a navy, the British were vulnerable, and Washington knew he needed to trap them and end the war.⁶² At first, Hamilton had no command in this effort, as Lafayette's assistant was chosen to lead the charge. Washington, however, advocated on behalf of his secretary and got him the position he had longed for. Washington's plan was to run a siege on redoubts nine and ten in the British camp. Hamilton was assigned redoubt ten, and with the bullets removed from their guns so that they would run no risk of being noticed by the enemy, he and his men charged with their

⁵⁷ Ibid., 25.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 26.

⁵⁹ Thomas Fleming, *The Great Divide: The Conflict Between Washington and Jefferson That Defined America, Then and Now* (United States: Da Capo Press, 2015), 82.

⁶⁰ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 107.

⁶¹ Fleming, *The Great Divide*, 82.

⁶² Snyder, "American Revolution Course."

bayonets. Within ten minutes, Hamilton and his crew completed their mission, and with few casualties.⁶³ The battle ended and the Americans were victorious in their pursuit of liberty.⁶⁴

Following the war, Hamilton served as a member of Congress under the Articles of Confederation. However, he could not contain his frustration with this ineffective government. He quit Congress and worked with James Madison in creating a new convention to discuss trade.⁶⁵ This Annapolis Convention proved to be an ultimate failure, and when Madison proposed a new convention to discuss the Articles, Hamilton showed his full support. Their plan was to completely change the federal government, creating a more effective system for America.⁶⁶

Delegates came to this convention from throughout the colonies to discuss the drafting of a new government. Hamilton was there, and was sure to make a name for himself. Within this convention, he gave a long speech that advocated a strong executive that served for life, reminding many of the monarchy that they had just struggled to be freed from.⁶⁷ To many, this was absurd conservatism, but Hamilton stood firm in his beliefs. His goal was to establish a powerful government that was equipped with a strong leader.⁶⁸

Hamilton's extreme ideas did not take hold among the members of the convention, but they were able to come up with a system that Hamilton felt would be effective. Ratification, however, was a whole new challenge. Some states were hesitant to

⁶³ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 164.

⁶⁴ Snyder, "American Revolution Course."

⁶⁵ Fleming, *The Great Divide*, 11.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁶⁸ Smith, "The Wrong Hero," 521.

accept this new Constitution and to join this new American union, as this system was more centralized rather than a collaboration of states. To have the Constitution ratified, nine out of the thirteen states needed to approve it. It was especially important to have large states in favor, as they were in key locations and had a big influence on the states around them. Collaborating with John Jay and James Madison, Hamilton wrote a series of essays in defense of the Constitution, and why it would serve the nation better than the Articles ever would. The plan was for each man to write twenty-five essays, each under the pseudonym Publius. In the end, Hamilton far exceeded his colleagues by writing fifty-one essays. Jay wrote five, and Madison wrote twenty-nine.⁶⁹ Through their persuasive arguments and the promised addition of the Bill of Rights, the Constitution was finally ratified in 1788, and the American Republic was formed.⁷⁰

With this new government came the need for someone to serve in the executive office. The unanimous choice was for former General of the Continental Army, George Washington, and in 1789 he started his first term in office. Washington did not want to face this new position alone, so he set up a group of advisors to serve with him. The positions established were secretary of state, secretary of the treasury, secretary of war, and attorney general.⁷¹ When offered the position of secretary of the treasury, Hamilton eagerly accepted. Yet, he was not walking into an easy position. Establishing a new nation's finances would take work and cooperation. Right from the start, Hamilton had to figure out a plan for the nation's large debt and lack of credit. As a financially minded man, he started this position aware of the economic situation and with ideas on how to

⁶⁹ Brookhiser, *Hamilton: American*, 68-69.

⁷⁰ K. Alan Snyder, "American Republic Course," Southeastern University, Spring 2018.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

help it.⁷² His goal was to bring the newly established United States to a place of prosperity, centering his plans around the concept of a national bank.⁷³ He also wanted to restore the finances of the nation by having the federal government assume the national and state debts, building credit and trust for the nation.⁷⁴ A unified debt would not only help the finances of America, but it would also help unify these thirteen states into a nation.⁷⁵

However, many had not forgotten about Hamilton's personal desire to elevate his status and his belief in a strong government. They were afraid of the position he had been granted. "The Treasury made the politicians uneasy for several reasons. As the chief tax collector, the secretary would have the most direct impact on the people. He would supervise the collection of revenue at the nation's ports—the chief—in fact, the only—immediate hope of financing the federal government."⁷⁶ Those in opposition to Hamilton saw his call for the bank as a power grab, and his other plans as an attempt to turn American into a new form of Britain.⁷⁷

Caught up in political opposition and the creation of a national bank, Hamilton was stressed, and let his pure humanity show. During the summer of 1791, he met a woman named Maria Reynolds while his wife was vacationing with family in upstate New York. Maria had come to his door, begging for help. Hamilton brought her home and offered her some money, and from there intimate relations began. Caught in the affair by Reynolds' husband, Hamilton was stuck in a tough spot. James Reynolds would

⁷² Fleming, *The Great Divide*, 83.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Snyder, "American Republic Course."

⁷⁵ Fleming, *The Great Divide*, 87.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 84.

⁷⁷ Snyder, "American Republic Course."

accept payment in exchange for Hamilton to continue the affair in secrecy. Secure in his deceit, he continued in his unfaithfulness. Yet, no secret stays secret forever. Hamilton broke off this affair in the summer of 1792, but he had to pay an additional sum to get rid of James Reynolds. Done with this affair, Hamilton thought he was free from the secrets and the lies that swarmed all around it. However, as his peers continued to grow suspicious of him, they looked to his finances to tear him down. Three politicians of the time went to accuse Hamilton of fraud, but found out more than they were expecting. He gave them a detailed account of the affair and swore them to secrecy.

As his administration continued, Washington increasingly sided with Hamilton, making Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson increasingly hostile towards the two. Having already disliked Hamilton for his opposing political views, the divide grew unrepairable over the French Revolution. Jefferson was absolutely for the Revolution, believing it was a pure representation of democracy. Hamilton and Washington saw it more as the bloodstained chaos that it was. When faced with the decision on whether or not to get involved, Washington agreed with Hamilton and chose the path of neutrality. The treaty that the Americans had made with the French during the American Revolution was with the king, who had been executed at the hands of revolutionaries. The American government had not found its own stability and did not have an established army. Finally, the French were a chaotic mess unraveling into deeper radicalism, with no clear leadership.⁷⁸ It only made sense that Hamilton and Washington would be for neutrality, but this destroyed any peace between Hamilton and Jefferson.

⁷⁸ Fleming, *The Great Divide*, 155.

During the Adams administration, Hamilton had his affair exposed by a Scottish journalist. This writer did not dwell on the romantic relations, but rather accused Hamilton of speculation, as the others had done years before.⁷⁹ Hamilton would not accept these accusations, and later that year Hamilton published his own pamphlet in response. Now known as the Reynolds pamphlet, Hamilton defended the honor of his public service saying, “The charge against me . . . is a connection with one James Reynolds for purposes of improper pecuniary speculation. My real crime is amorous connection with his wife.”⁸⁰ Discrediting the foundation of what was published against him, Hamilton brought public punishment upon himself for the infidelity he had in his marriage.⁸¹ “Hamilton considered corruption ‘a more heinous charge’ against a public servant than adultery.”⁸² According to Hamilton, a broken marriage was better than corruption in the public realm. To defend his office, he felt that his hand had been forced to expose this personal mistake. Yet, in the world of politics, there were other things to think about, and while the world was shocked by this revealing document, many moved on in light of the international problems occurring for America.⁸³

The election of 1800 was an interesting one. Aaron Burr had been running as Thomas Jefferson’s vice president, but they ended up with the same number of electoral votes, tying for the presidency. The choice went to the House of Representatives. Federalists were greatly in favor of Burr, as Thomas Jefferson was their biggest enemy and the leader of the Democratic-Republicans.⁸⁴ However, not all Federalists felt this

⁷⁹ Brookhiser, *Hamilton: American*, 132.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*, 134.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁸⁴ Walter R. Borneman, *1812: The War That Formed a Nation* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004), 8.

way. Hamilton could not stand the thought of Burr becoming president, and spoke out against him. Hamilton felt that Jefferson had “pretensions to character,” while Burr had none.⁸⁵ The vote was not up to Hamilton, but with Hamilton’s attacks on Burr and concessions promised by Thomas Jefferson, Jefferson won the election, making Burr the vice president.⁸⁶

Towards the end of his term as vice president, Burr chose to run for governor of New York. During his campaign, Hamilton spoke out against Burr again, but this time it was in private at a dinner party, reemphasizing his belief that Burr lacked character. While these words were spoken among friends, they were somehow leaked, and Burr lost the election. Burr blamed Hamilton for his loss, believing that it was his words that cost him the position he wanted. In anger, he called for Hamilton to take back what he had said, but Hamilton would not retract what he felt was true. In response to this, Burr called Hamilton to a duel. After his son died in a duel, Hamilton was against the practice, but to protect his honor he decided to go.

Since dueling was illegal in New York, Hamilton and Burr met outside of the city in Weehawken, New Jersey on July 11, 1804.⁸⁷ Hamilton went to defend his honor with the feeling that he would be fine and that this quarrel would blow over. With no desire to hurt Burr, Hamilton aimed his gun towards the sky to completely avoid shooting him. Burr, however, still enraged, aimed directly for Hamilton and delivered a fatal wound, although he did not die right away. He was brought back to his law office in New York City and passed away there on July 12.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Ibid., 9.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Fleming, *The Great Divide*, 332.

⁸⁸ Snyder, “American Republic Course.”

Secondary Characters: The Important People in Hamilton's Life

Hamilton himself was not the only historical figure in the spotlight at this time. Others were present and had an immense impact on his life. These people include Elizabeth Schuyler, John Laurens, George Washington, the Marquis de Lafayette, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and Aaron Burr. They were his friends, colleagues, enemies, and much more. Examining these figures through the lens of history will help audiences better understand the characters of the show as well as Hamilton himself.

Elizabeth Schuyler, Hamilton's wife, was thoroughly devoted to her rambunctious husband throughout her life. She was smart, but not well educated, and she took interest in politics and military affairs. Hamilton often looked to her for advice and opinion on those matters.⁸⁹ They met during the Revolutionary war, as Hamilton's position on Washington's staff enabled him to socialize with such an elite family. Once they had met, Hamilton found himself spending many nights with her family, completely infatuated with Elizabeth.⁹⁰ They married in December of 1780, happily in love with each other.⁹¹ Through this marriage, Hamilton entered the elusive world of the New York upper class. The Schuyler family was one of great esteem and wealth.⁹² She raised their eight children on a tight budget while Hamilton was off working on the problems of the early republic. When Hamilton publicized his affair, Elizabeth stood by her husband remaining faithful to their vows.⁹³ Their marriage lasted through his death in 1804, and following his death she dedicated her life to his legacy.⁹⁴ Elizabeth carried on after his death, caring for her

⁸⁹ Jenny L Presnell, "Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton," <http://exhibitions.nysm.nysed.gov//albany/bios/s/elschuyleranb.html>, accessed March 19, 2017.

⁹⁰ Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 129.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁹² Brookhiser, *Hamilton: American*, 47.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁹⁴ Presnell, "Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton."

remaining seven children. She continued on with a gentle spirit and a strength rooted in the religious beliefs that she had found during her lifetime.⁹⁵

Hamilton had a rocky reputation throughout his life, and when he died, the floor was open for his enemies to tarnish it for all of history. His wife wanted him to be remembered as he was, hard-working and passionate. She went through her husband's writings and worked to establish a biography of his life that "would secure Hamilton's niche in the pantheon of the early republic."⁹⁶ One of her sons, John Church Hamilton, worked hard alongside his mother in her pursuit, and he was able to publish a seven-volume history of his father's life. Written in a hagiographic style, idealizing the subject at hand, it was finished after Elizabeth's death. She passed away in November of 1854, dying at age ninety-seven.⁹⁷

A friend of Hamilton's was John Laurens, who was a key figure in the American Revolution. Laurens grew up an abolitionist, even though he was from a slaveholding family.⁹⁸ This is something that he and Hamilton saw eye-to-eye on, believing that the American system of slavery needed to end. In the war, Laurens had "a reputation for reckless bravery in a succession of major battles and sieges. John Laurens distinguished himself as one of the most zealous, self-sacrificing participants in the American Revolution."⁹⁹ Meeting in 1777, Laurens and Hamilton were fast friends. They shared many character traits and goals, relating on many different levels.¹⁰⁰ They met through working for Washington, and they were inseparable, sharing frequent and affectionate

⁹⁵ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 1.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹⁸ Paul Pavao, Janelle Whitelock, and Esther Pavao, "John Laurens," *Revolutionarywar.net* (2010), <https://www.revolutionary-war.net/john-laurens.html>, accessed December 3, 2017.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 94.

correspondence.¹⁰¹ After the mess at the Battle of Monmouth, and the trial against him that followed, General Lee spoke out loudly against Washington and his crew. Laurens urged Hamilton to write against the attacks, but Hamilton refused. Laurens took matters into his own hands and challenged Lee to a duel. Hamilton served as Laurens second, and after shooting Lee in the side, Laurens was satisfied.¹⁰²

Hamilton had dreams of working together with Laurens in the nation once it was free, serving in one spirit and one mind. However, this dream never came to be. In August of 1782, as one of the last casualties of the American Revolution, Laurens was shot in an ambush against British troops in South Carolina.¹⁰³ Laurens's death was hard for Hamilton. He had lost his ally, leaving him to fight on his own in the political world. He lost an emotional and vulnerable side of himself, closing himself off from forming any other friendship like this.¹⁰⁴

One of the champions of the American Revolution was in fact not American. The Marquis de Lafayette was a Frenchman who was so charmed by the goals of American liberty that he came to help the Continental Army in any way he could. Now characterized as "America's favorite fighting Frenchman,"¹⁰⁵ Lafayette was key in American independence and interacted with Hamilton during the war. Serving as an honorary major general in the army, Lafayette came into contact with Hamilton and Laurens, and they developed a three-way friendship.¹⁰⁶ Hamilton was fluent in French,

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 95.

¹⁰² Ibid., 117.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 172.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 173.

¹⁰⁵ Miranda and McCarter, *The Revolution*, 118.

¹⁰⁶ Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 95.

which aided his friendship with the Marquis, and they also formed an affectionate friendship.¹⁰⁷

When the time came for the Battle of Yorktown, Lafayette was given the task of choosing the man to storm the second redoubt, and Hamilton was not his first choice. Washington had to step in and get Hamilton appointed to this vital position. Yet, these men never lost their affection for each other. While they went their separate ways following the war, Hamilton back to New York and Lafayette back to France, they maintained correspondence throughout the years to come.¹⁰⁸

Being present for most of the important events of this time period, and leading a good majority of them, George Washington came into contact with Hamilton throughout much of their respective careers. Working as his aide, Hamilton spent a lot of time with Washington throughout the war. During the tough winter at Valley Forge, Congress was growing increasingly upset with Washington and the American army, and conspiracies to overthrow the general had taken root. Hamilton defended the general during this winter and helped persuade the Congress that it was not Washington's fault but rather theirs.¹⁰⁹

Following their time spent together in the war, Washington and Hamilton did not interact much. This changed around the time of the Constitutional Convention. These two had similar ideas for the new government but Hamilton's were a little more extreme. Their interactions during this time showed a still very formal relationship between the

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 96.

¹⁰⁸ Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*. While there is no specific page to cite for this fact, it is mentioned throughout Chernow's work.

¹⁰⁹ Fleming, *The Great Divide*, 8.

two, although reconnecting at the convention brought back the closeness that they had shared during the war.¹¹⁰

As president, Washington grew increasingly frustrated with Jefferson, and began to see his secretary of treasury as his most important cabinet member.¹¹¹ As the divide continued to grow between Federalist and Democratic-Republican, Washington found himself aligning more with the Federalists' views, and siding more with Hamilton's ideas.¹¹² Hamilton served in Washington's cabinet until resigning in 1795. The final thing he ever did for the president was draft his farewell address at the end of his second term, written through Hamilton but shaped to Washington's style to capture the president's legacy.¹¹³ The points of the speech warned listeners of the threats to the Union, but also looked to highlight all of the good that had and could happen.¹¹⁴ Leaving the executive department, they both understood the need to be aware of what was facing America, while not ignorant of all that they had achieved and been blessed with.

Thomas Jefferson, the drafter of the Declaration of Independence, was seen as a spokesman of democracy. He was a constant advocate of liberty, although his view of liberty was different than others, creating some problems throughout his career. Politically, Jefferson was a typical southerner who was opposed to a strong central government and a fighter for states' rights. He was the founder of the Democratic-Republicans, one of the first political groups. This group was directly opposed to the Federalist party, which was the political faction Hamilton led. Jefferson created a major

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 83.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 118.

¹¹² Snyder, "American Republic Course."

¹¹³ Brookhiser, *Hamilton: American*, 127.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 128.

obstacle for Hamilton throughout his political career, as these two did not agree on nearly anything. Jefferson was against many of Hamilton's ideas, perceiving American liberty differently. He thought a centralized authority was the path to tyranny and the loss of rights, and that farmers were virtuous people unlike those in industrial work. Jefferson and Hamilton were directly opposed in terms of the National Bank and the French Revolution, and even when they were not at direct odds, they never fully agreed. While never admitting it, Hamilton's death was a great boon for Jefferson, and a huge favor from Aaron Burr. Jefferson could now continue on without Hamilton's opposition.¹¹⁵

James Madison was deeply connected with many of the men during this time period. Madison worked for the Annapolis Convention that was called to discuss trade issues between the states, but with low attendance and growing issues, he was the one calling for a new convention. With Hamilton's support, Madison was able to get the Constitutional Convention going. Both men felt that a complete renewal of American government was going to be needed.¹¹⁶ They were in the same state of mind with needing a new system for the American government, and when it looked like the Constitution might not be ratified in New York, then they banded together with John Jay to write the *Federalist Papers*, promoting ratification.¹¹⁷

Madison grew further from Hamilton and increasingly closer to Jefferson, becoming his right-hand man of sorts. "The once independent thinker had become an echo of Thomas Jefferson's angry ideological voice."¹¹⁸ Madison becoming a shadow of Jefferson was bad news for Hamilton. An increasingly great divide continued to grow

¹¹⁵ Fleming, *The Great Divide*, 332.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹¹⁷ Snyder, "American Republic Course."

¹¹⁸ Fleming, *The Great Divide*, 134.

between Jefferson and Hamilton, and Madison served as a powerful weapon for Jefferson. The common love for liberty had split under alliances and party conflict, and the men that had collaborated to get the Constitution ratified had lost their bond.

Aaron Burr is the infamous man who brought Hamilton's life to an end in their fateful duel of 1804. By the age of two, Burr had lost both of his parents, making him an orphan just like Hamilton. He attended the College of New Jersey with the intent to go to seminary, but he decided that he did not agree with Calvinist doctrine and decided to pursue law instead.¹¹⁹ Hamilton's short time in New Jersey may have brought him into contact with Burr, either on the street or at gatherings with mutual friends.¹²⁰ These men, having served in the war and the practice of law in New York, had their lives in the same sphere, but they did not work together often. Burr was a senator while Hamilton was working as secretary of the treasury, and it was not until the election of 1800 that their animosity towards each other began. Once Hamilton had spoken out against Burr, refusing to retract his words when asked, he knew that a duel would follow. Burr killed Hamilton in this duel and went on to complete his time as vice president. However, this duel ruined Burr's political career, and after his time as vice president, Burr was done with public office.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ United States Senate, "Aaron Burr: 3rd Vice President," https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/VP_Aaron_Burr.htm, accessed December 7, 2017.

¹²⁰ Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 43.

¹²¹ Fleming, *The Great Divide*, 332.

Hamilton in Hamilton: An American Musical

Aside from the historical view, there is Lin-Manuel Miranda's personal and public portrayal of Hamilton. This portrayal is one that has made the history of the American founding fun for many people who have never cared much for history. The show centers on the story of Hamilton and the founding of America through his story. Yet, centering a show around someone often makes that person (whether its intentional or not) into a hero, as well as guaranteeing a villainous portrayal of the one who brings that person's demise. As this story has taken the stage, Aaron Burr has been shaped as the villain throughout Hamilton's career. This is just one part of the new shape this story has taken thanks to Miranda's portrayal of these events. Through interviews, Miranda's writings, and the show itself, one can find how he interprets the time period, directly influencing how he chose to tell the story. This show has gotten many Americans interested in a past that many do not care to know, and it is important to understand varying responses to this show as Hamilton reclaims his legacy in the heart of the American people.

Audiences and admirers of the show can get an inside look into the world of Hamilton through Miranda's book, *Hamilton: The Revolution*. This work describes the creation of the musical, as well as lyrics annotated by Miranda himself. It offers pictures of the show, explanations *for* the lyrics, explanations *of* the lyrics, the stories of the cast, and the way it has all come to work together, creating the spectacle that audiences love. This book is a direct source from Miranda, who is the main mastermind behind the show. It offers insight into the creation of the show and the elements of the show itself, so the

audience can better understand the facts and views that have shaped the Hamilton seen on stage.

Miranda decided that pursuing the creation of a hip-hop musical on the founding era would have to be something he would have to take seriously if it were to be successful, and he worked on it with the hope that historians would see the value in it. In order to secure historical accuracy, Miranda looked to the Hamilton expert himself, biographer Ron Chernow, who was asked to be the historical consultant for the show. He gladly accepted and proceeded to work alongside Miranda to ensure a sound sense of history in the final product.¹²² However, details available on life in the eighteenth century are limited, and Chernow knows this. He recalls that “much of the detail that Lin wanted for the show – about smoking [a pipe] and a hundred other things – he would have to invent for himself.”¹²³

As historical advisor, Chernow told Miranda to create history as he needed, since the facts known by historians were not sufficient to meet Miranda’s needs. Building on this idea, Miranda describes his view of history as he was working through the creation of this project. He says, “Ron tells you a story and he’s the star of the story. I tell you a story and I’m the star of the story. History is entirely created by the person who tells the story.”¹²⁴ Miranda took certain liberties throughout the creation process, defending their necessity for the sake of his story. Chernow came to appreciate the way Miranda used the facts, shaping them to his tale, without completely throwing them to the side.

¹²² Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton: The Revolution*, 32.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

Yet, reshaping facts is not the same as creating a factual history. The mentality that Miranda and Chernow are portraying here is very postmodern in thought and has allowed anachronism to influence their history. Theirs is different than the world is now and our present-minded ideas cannot capture it correctly. As Miranda makes it “his story,” he finds the pieces of Hamilton that he feels reflects himself. For him, Hamilton is a passionate immigrant who would not stop until he achieved his dream. A man with a heart for modern America, Miranda used Hamilton’s time period to make him a man of freedom. However, Hamilton does not fit as well as we wish he would. Historians understand that “Hamilton’s positions fit with no current model.”¹²⁵ Hamilton believed in American freedom that was very different to today’s America.

The ways in which the stage, costuming, and genre have come to represent Hamilton also show off Miranda’s use of history and perspective in this show. In a short video that can be found on Instagram, *Hamilton* set designer David Korins discusses the inspiration behind the style of the *Hamilton* stage layout. He says, “Since most people were immigrants, and came through the waterways, we were drawn to the idea of using nautical elements as storytelling devices.”¹²⁶ The designer also mentions the fact that many carpenters in New York during the time period were shipbuilders. The water and the vessels found upon it were key in the early days of America, and they wanted to be sure to represent that in the show. The design was built using the same methods as the carpenters used hundreds of years ago.

¹²⁵ Brookhiser, *Hamilton: American*, 10.

¹²⁶ *Hamilton*, "Let's Take a Closer Look at Some of the Research That Inspired the Design of Our Show" (Instagram post), posted January 2, 2018, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BddfWmvgGnq/?hl=en&taken-by=hamiltonmusical>, accessed January 5, 2018.

The set, created to portray both the immigrant and the carpenter, was created with the essence of New York City at the core. In the sense that Hamilton is now the applauded leader of American immigration (in the eyes of many adoring fans), he is also the leader of the New York attitude. “He is also the model New Yorker: opinionated, hyper-verbal, always on the make.”¹²⁷ Korins used this idea to create the set that can now be seen in the show. He decided to create something that had “details drawn on from the corners of modern-day New York that remain truest to Hamilton’s time.”¹²⁸ The point of using modern details, a theme that Miranda has incorporated deeply into the whole show, is to show that the atmosphere of the New York depicted is not much different than what is right outside the doors of the theater.¹²⁹ Creating a historical scene with connections to the present is vital in the story being told. He describes it this way, “It looked like New York City – not in 1776 or in 2015, but some idealized version of itself, independent of time, where people of many races and backgrounds danced together.”¹³⁰

Miranda uses the set to shape an idealized version of America, which helps show what he is all about. He is not looking to stage the objective past, but create his idealized past, compelling audiences to chase after the future he has come to desire. Through this idealized past, he creates the New York City as he wishes to see it and that fits the character he has created. Modern ideas create connection with the audience but an incorrect history. Hamilton was not a ship builder and he did not identify with the common men of his time period. This diverse set misses the core of its main character, as Miranda looks to create an inclusivity that does not work with the story that is being told.

¹²⁷ Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton: The Revolution*, 38.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

Costuming is another big aspect of the show, and Paul Tazewell was equipped with the task. “When he heard Lin’s demos, he knew that *Hamilton* would need to combine [the distant past and our own time] ... The challenge was figuring out where those two eras meet.”¹³¹ Miranda wanted to keep the spirit of hip-hop while properly portraying the time period being shown, although this was not an easy feat. Tazewell was uncertain where to go with these ideas for the show, but he felt that it would be best to grab on to an idea and just give it a go. To capture the perfect mix, he looked to a combination of eras. He mixed trends from then and now, coming up with “period from the neck down, modern from the neck up.”¹³² In keeping a modern upper half, Tazewell was attempting to show more of who the actors are, rather than who they were portraying. Tazewell says it this way, “I didn’t want Chris [Jackson] to be in a powdered wig as Washington. ... I wanted to see him for who he was.”¹³³ The goal of this costuming was to remind people that they are all a part of the triumphant story of the American Revolution.

Miranda’s choice of hip-hop was another way for him to write more Americans into the American story. “American history can be told and retold, claimed and reclaimed, even by people who don’t look like George Washington and Betsey Ross.”¹³⁴ Miranda’s whole mission is one of inclusion. He wants to include hip-hop on Broadway.¹³⁵ He wants to include minorities that he feels have been written out of the story. He wants to open theater and history to all genres and all people, giving those who

¹³¹ Ibid., 113.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 95.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 196.

have normally not had a place the spotlight. The Founding Fathers were not against inclusion, but it was a different time period so they were not for it in the way that Miranda has preached it through his show.

Lin-Manuel Miranda cannot see Hamilton without seeing hip-hop, which is what initially sparked the idea for this show. The article, “All About the Hamiltons,” found in the *New Yorker*, summarizes his ideas and helps give an overview on Miranda’s understanding of Hamilton. Through the use of a genre that is typically characterized as ambitious, upbeat, and that promotes the underdog, Miranda captures Hamilton’s restlessness and ambition. It is fitting to who he was and an efficient way to portray those qualities about him. Miranda sees Hamilton as a man with a sense of self-destructive brilliance that eventually led to his demise. His story is that of a great American hero as well as a powerful immigrant story. Miranda ties Hamilton’s life to that of his own family, along with many other immigrants who have come to America in search of opportunity and a new life. This idea of immigration is a strong theme in the show. While this gives current audiences something to connect to, it is dangerous to the story. Through emphasizing his immigrant status, Miranda is emphasizing a political idea that he himself holds. Immigration is a key issue in current American politics, and something that Miranda is passionate about. Miranda wants to expand America to be more than a nation of white male leaders. The American nation was the work of all kinds of Americans, and he has set out to make the nation aware of that.¹³⁶

It is shown in the set, costuming, and genre that history is not the primary focus, but the current humanity of the American people. This creates a celebration of the

¹³⁶ Rebecca Mead, “All About the Hamiltons,” *The New Yorker*, February 9, 2015, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/02/09/hamiltons>, Accessed March 31, 2017.

American people, but does not show history as it was. This show, if it is to be considered history, should be looking for the best way to show it as it was. Having the actors still seen for who they are helps solidify the fact that *Hamilton* is a commentary on today's America, rather than a telling of history. While Miranda has created a wonderfully diverse and inclusive story, it is America now and not America then.

When his work premiered, Miranda had this to say: "Something else was in the air, something that would become clearer in the years to come. Sometimes the right person tells the right story at the right moment, and through a conversation of luck and design, a creative expression gains a new force. Spark, tinder, breeze."¹³⁷ Alexander Hamilton's legacy was reestablished at the right time because the right man saw something in this story. It is more than history. He sees this as a cultural event that will continue to shape the audiences as more have the opportunity to see the show and understand the Hamilton that Miranda has created.

Presenting this show to the public was more than a performance, but a cultural phenomenon. "That night, Lin reintroduced people to the poor kid from the Caribbean who made the country rich and strong."¹³⁸ He has taken it in his power, as Paine so declared, to begin the world again, which he did through recreating a forgotten and misunderstood story. Miranda has created a beautifully fascinating work of art for audiences to enjoy. Through beloved characters of the past, audiences enjoy a colorful commentary on America's current sociopolitical environment. Yet, through all of this good, the past has been missed. Hamilton has been lost to the stage, as he has become the hero of the American nation then and now. The man that has been created for the stage is

¹³⁷ Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton: The Revolution*, 15.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

reflective of Hamilton, but it is not who Hamilton was. History that promotes a current mindset creates an inaccurate understanding of the past and audiences are left with a false sense of where America came from.

Hamilton: An American Musical's Impact on America

As mentioned, this show has not gone unnoticed. Even though it has only been on stage for a few years, the impact has been great among theatergoers and the nation itself. *Hamilton* has shaken the Broadway world, opening the stage to new genres, ideas, people, and stories. But greater than the world of theater has been the impact this show has had on the nation itself. The American people have begun to see their past in a different way thanks to Miranda's work. History has become more relevant to many and the American founding has become more important for many. Fans have gone wild with this new take on old stories, and commentators have begun to carry on the conversations that Miranda had intended to spark. The conversations started, however, have created a mania that strays even further from historical truth and American virtue. Many fans have run with themes and characters as well as plot lines from the show, taking them out of context, while the commentary on the show's interpretation of the past is being accepted as infallible. It seems that everyone has something to say about *Hamilton*, and the thoughts published fall all across the spectrum.

The world has gone wild for this show, and the "revolution" has only just begun. For many, seeing the musical is a transformative experience, a breath of fresh air, a new understanding of a long-forgotten tale, and everyone wants a piece of all the action. One writer described his experience this way: "I didn't leave the theater after seeing *Hamilton*. I resurfaced."¹³⁹ It is clear even through the title of his article that Todd VanDerWerff had one of the life-changing experiences that many have when witnessing the spectacle

¹³⁹ Todd VanDerWerff, "Hamilton Isn't Perfect. But It's *Perfect.* I Couldn't Write For a Month After I Saw It," *Vox.Com* (August 2016), <https://www.vox.com/2016/8/9/12385772/hamilton-broadway-musical>, accessed March 10, 2018.

that is *Hamilton*. His article, “Hamilton isn’t perfect. But it’s *perfect.* I couldn’t write for a month after I saw it,” talks deeply about his love and connection to the musical. Following his bold opening line about resurfacing as he exited the theater, VanDerWerff goes on to say he “felt as if I had been sitting on the floor of the ocean and needed to take my time breaking the water’s surface, lest my body depressurize . . . And now here I was again, learning to breathe air once more, after so much time on someone else’s oxygen.”¹⁴⁰ Ultimately shaken by the nearly three-hour spectacle that he had witnessed, he felt as though he had to relearn how to breathe following the show. It takes a lot to have that kind of effect.

Rocked by what he believed the theme to be, VanDerWerff shares this insight with his readers. “The characters in *Hamilton* tell stories and worry about legacies and hope for greatness, but *Hamilton*’s greatest gift in the end is that it reminds us that there is more to life than living the kind of life that gets a Broadway musical written about your centuries after your death. Kindness is important. Building a better world is important. Compassion is paramount.”¹⁴¹ He summarized like this: “There is immense value in greatness, yes, but in the end, *Hamilton* says, there is even more value in *goodness*.”¹⁴² So, Alexander Hamilton has taught us the value of goodness, and through this people will be compelled to live better lives and work for a better world. To VanDerWerff, there is a utopian message of creating a more perfect world told through the life of Alexander Hamilton. Thanks to the ability of historians to reshape the past, this is possible and has been done well for audiences all over the world to see.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

VanDerWerff is not the only one who has felt so transformed through witnessing this work of art. Theater critique Michael Billington celebrates the modernity of the show, saying, “The power of *Hamilton* lies in its ability to make the past seem vividly present ... Miranda has created an invigorating and original musical that, at a time of national crisis, celebrates America’s overwhelming debt to the immigrant.”¹⁴³ The national crisis that he refers to is the current issues of diversity and immigration in the nation. This show is a portrait of present realities through the lens of the past, and this has been done so seamlessly. Another response to the show says, “Miranda’s uniquely personal focus as a son of immigrants and as an inexhaustible wordsmith, *Hamilton* hits multilevel culture buttons, hard ... Miranda may be a composer-lyricist and star, but the world he creates is vibrantly democratic.”¹⁴⁴ This show is a display and commentary on culture as well as a political commentary on democratic America. It is a true understanding of the Constitution, according to some, and a true portrayal of how America should be. A third reviewer says, “The hip-hop musical about equality and inclusion, officially opening here Wednesday, is a testament against the racism and cultural wars that threaten the spirit of the Constitution.”¹⁴⁵ Critics are raving, the good reviews outweigh the bad, and audiences all over are celebrating the parts of *Hamilton* that make it different.

¹⁴³ Michael Billington, “*Hamilton* Review: Revolutionary Musical a Thrilling Salute to America’s Immigrants,” *The Guardian* (December 2017), <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/dec/21/hamilton-review-musical-london-victoria-palace-lin-manuel-miranda>, accessed March 11, 2018.

¹⁴⁴ David Cote, “*Hamilton*: Theater Review,” *TimeOut* (August 2015), <https://www.timeout.com/newyork/theater/hamilton-1>, accessed March 10, 2018.

¹⁴⁵ Jeffrey Fleishman, “With Racial Clashes Rattling the Country, the ‘*Hamilton*’ Message of Inclusion Marches on,” *Los Angeles Times* (August 2017), <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-ca-hamilton-arrives-pantages-20170816-story.html>, accessed March 11, 2018.

One of the aspects of *Hamilton: An American Musical* that has caught audience's attention and applause the most is the mixed-race casting. Using actors of various races completely changes the image that many have of early America. Showing diversity in a time period that is dominated by Caucasians gives America a new depth, and reminds the audience of the fact that America has always been a melting pot. Miranda says this about his casting choices: "Diversity on stage eliminates the 'distance between the audience and the story,' Miranda says. 'Let's not pretend this is a textbook. Let's make the founders of our country look like what our country looks like now.'"¹⁴⁶ His casting is all about the inclusion of modern America and the enjoyment of a new kind of history, and audiences love it.

The Huffington Post is a journal that runs under a liberal worldview.¹⁴⁷ Since the debut of *Hamilton*, this publication has been singing the praises of equal opportunity in theater. In the article, "No, the 'Hamilton' Casting Call For 'Non-White' Actors is Not Reverse Racism," the author Zeba Blay, affirms the casting of the show.¹⁴⁸ In the original casting call, the show called for non-white actors. Blay notes that the use of the prefix "non" sounds discriminatory, and that this wording was not the most effective way to set their casting standards. However, the concept behind what they were looking for should be praised. The overall goal was to open the stage to more people, choosing the roles based off talent rather than looks for these typically white parts. Blay praises the

¹⁴⁶ PBS Newshour, "Hamilton the Musical Tells the Immigrant Story of a Founding Father," *PBS.org* (November 2015), <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/daily-videos/hamilton-the-musical-not-your-fathers-founding-father/>, accessed March 10, 2018.

¹⁴⁷ Allsides Staff, "HuffPost," *Allsides.com* (2018), <https://www.allsides.com/news-source/huffpost-media-bias>, accessed November 28, 2017.

¹⁴⁸ Zeba Blay, "No, The 'Hamilton' Casting Call For 'Non-White' Actors is Not Reverse Rascism," *HuffPost* (March 2016), https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/no-the-hamilton-casting-call-for-non-white-actors-is-not-reverse-racism_us_56fd2e83e4b0daf53aeed9b9, accessed November 15, 2017.

colorblind casting of this show, but if it is specifically excluding Caucasians, then is the casting really colorblind? If the goal was to find the right talent, then all should be welcome to audition for the parts. Looks did play a role in the casting, just not in the way most people would think for a show about this time period, so that often gets ignored. Opening the stage to more people is not effective if others are being shut out in the process.

Blay believes that this casting achieves *Hamilton's* purpose. She says, "What makes *Hamilton* works so well is the fact that it's a commentary on America's past through the prism of America's present, its future. It works because the historically white, male founding fathers are being played by a predominately non-white cast of blacks and Latinos."¹⁴⁹ While the demographic of America has changed since the Revolution, if *Hamilton* is doing what Blay so happily claims it is doing, then white people are going to be written out of the story entirely. However, in her mind, this casting and underlying mission cannot be seen as reverse racism. The reason she gives is as follows: "But the fact of the matter is, quite frankly, not everything is about white people."¹⁵⁰ Inclusion has been granted through discrimination, which is a twisted way of achieving a more equal theater and society.

The New York Post agrees with Blay, and in an article written by their editorial board, they declare that this casting was simply common sense. In their editorial, "White People and *Hamilton* Don't Mix," the board claims that "casting white actors might be

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

truer to history – but it would also be rank censorship and artistic butchery.”¹⁵¹ Through casting minorities, they are being given their place in the American founding, just like Hamilton. The *Post* focuses on the white man cast in the show, because there is one. The ridiculous villain, the comedic relief, is found in King George III. At various points in the show, King George is pleading for the colonies to come back, and he grows increasingly more confused as the new American nation continues to be successful. He is the character that is guaranteed to make audiences laugh because they are laughing at him. The crowds love to hate and ridicule King George. This is a bold move, as he is the only white character in the show. It is a direct comment on current politics. The white man has become the ridiculous bad guy, and the minority has begun to fight to create America as its own. This just expands the concept of this show as a commentary on current social issues through the past. It expands the delusions gained by the audience and the misinterpretations of history.

This false sense of inclusion and equality is something that many have received from the show, and has brought harm to theater and history. As encouraging as it is to the concept of inclusiveness, it is not fair to the truth of the past to write history to be inclusive. Unfortunately, it was not. That does not mean that we cannot strive to make the future more inclusive and equal. The past may not line up to our beliefs now, and while disheartening, that gives no one the right to change the past to fit that purpose.

Yet, not all are impressed by this new place Hamilton has taken in America’s heritage, and many are aware of the implications of a show like this. While the genius of

¹⁵¹ *New York Post* Editorial Board, “White People and ‘Hamilton’ Don’t Mix,” *New York Post* (March 2016), <https://nypost.com/2016/03/31/censoring-hamilton-in-the-name-of-equality/>, accessed December 4, 2017.

the show cannot be ignored, there are historical realities that are ignored in the way he has come to be known. In an article from the culture section of *The Guardian*, writer Sarah Churchwell says, “Miranda creates a myth for Hamilton by celebrating him as a symbol of immigrant inclusiveness, egalitarianism and meritocracy: historically it’s a stretch, but theatrically it’s genius.”¹⁵² She acknowledges that the historical past has been intermingled with the political present, and that the show is layered. With how the show has been created “the result is the most unexpected of phenomena: a Broadway hit that is about political, economic and racial history while also offering an implicit but acidic running commentary on the racial and cultural politics of the US today.”¹⁵³ It is one part history and one part modern, creating a new story with relatable themes. He is commanding that the white man step down while immigrants and American minorities step up. “[Miranda] takes the long American minstrelsy tradition of white people in blackface on stage and reverses it. He appropriates its music, rewrites its lyrics, turns its politics on its head, and fashions the whole thing into a show that is simultaneously an excoriation of current American political realities, an encomium to American revolutionary energies, and a celebration of American musical theatre history.

Miranda has offered a new perspective “[Who Lives Who Dies Who Tells Your Story] encapsulates the entire musical, which continually raises questions of historiography and the power to shape a national narrative.”¹⁵⁴ The people have the

¹⁵² Sarah Churchwell, “Why ‘Hamilton’ is Making Musical History,” *The Guardian* (November 2016), <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/nov/05/why-hamilton-is-making-musical-history>, accessed March 10, 2018.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

power to shape their history as they wish. It is a power everyone holds, a power that Miranda has used in a bold way.

In his work, *Alexander Hamilton: The Wrong Hero for Our Age*, Billy G. Smith gives his own response to what he is calling an “important cultural event.”¹⁵⁵ He defends the stance that Alexander Hamilton was not a liberal champion for the people, even though many now see him as such. Smith writes, “Even though he lived a rags to riches story, he wanted desperately to separate himself from the past and from the rabble.”¹⁵⁶ Hamilton was not looking to be a part of the common mass of society. He wanted to change his story to be one of prestige and status. He did what he could to grow in wealth and position, while cutting himself off from his tragic past. While noted by many historians, many current fans ignore this fact. They now hold him as the poor immigrant from a broken home that many can relate to.

Hamilton was one of the most conservative Founding Fathers, even though, in today’s society, he is portrayed as a revolutionary for the democratic ideals of modern America. Many of Hamilton’s actions that are portrayed in glory by today’s readers created much scorn in many people of his time period. He was a man trying to do the best for his nation through a conservative mind set, while being influenced by the politics of the new America. His long speech at the Constitutional Convention, while referenced in the show as a sign of ambition and wit, was a proposal for an American monarchy.¹⁵⁷

Another issue is found through the people in the story. “The important ‘men’ in *Hamilton*... operate in a vacuum. They debate, argue, and fight with virtually no

¹⁵⁵ Smith, “The Wrong Hero,” 522.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 519.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

influence from outside the major ‘room’ that Burr so elegantly sings about wanting to be ‘in.’”¹⁵⁸ Miranda has limited the time period through the men he chose to include in “his story.”¹⁵⁹ The entire Continental Army, Constitutional Convention, or men in early politics cannot be included, but by only showing a few men without mention of other figures, the story is limited to the actions of those represented. The perspective of the audience shifts as they start to see the men on stage as more involved and more important than they were. Leading members of the time period such as Ben Franklin, John Marshall, and James Monroe are completely left out of the narrative, and their achievements are thrown to the wayside. Many of the factors involved in the creation of the nation are left out or briefly mentioned. Limiting those involved shapes the story to be what Miranda wants to share, and not fully what happened.

Smith also mentions the racial side of the show. He acknowledges Miranda for being brilliant in his multiracial casting for a typically all-white time period, and for reminding audiences of the budding anti-slavery movement. However, he brings up a new and interesting point. Building off his critique of the “vacuum” that Miranda has created for his characters, he mentions the fact that no African Americans from the time period are portrayed. While Miranda is emphasizing the inescapable diversity of America, he is ignoring the fact that there were brave and important men and women of varying races that lived during this time period. Many African Americans used this time period for their own freedom, fighting in the army for the same goals as white Americans. With a push for more inclusive histories, there is plenty of information on

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 521.

¹⁵⁹ Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton: The Revolution*, 33.

these people.¹⁶⁰ Yes, this time period was dominated by Caucasian males, but if inclusion was the intent, then it would have made sense to include someone from the time period. What better way to make a history inclusive than by showing the heroic men and women of various backgrounds and races who stepped up and served well in this era.

Another response that is similar to Smith's article is the article, "Alexander Hamilton as Immigrant: Musical Mythology Meets Federalist Reality." Phillip W. Magness focuses on the musical's portrayal of Hamilton as a "self-made immigrant who rose to political preeminence despite his own birth."¹⁶¹ Through his research, Magness expresses his concern for the immigrant view of the show's hero. "Given the prominence of the immigrant theme to the story it tells, its factual oversights cultivate a deeply problematic historical image of Hamilton that scholars of the Founding era will likely have to contend with – and correct – for many decades to come."¹⁶²

What is the problem with the emphasis on Hamilton's immigrant status? Magness offers a few reasons as to why this is harmful for history. The first fact he offers is that Hamilton was not necessarily an immigrant but rather "an internal migrant of the British Empire."¹⁶³ Hamilton came from the Caribbean; more importantly, he came from the British West Indies. Since America was a colony at the time of his arrival, and with his birth in a colony, Hamilton was a British citizen, just like his American counterparts. This waters down the immigrant image that so many people have come to identify with, but is closer to the truth than what many now know.

¹⁶⁰ Smith, "The Wrong Hero," 522.

¹⁶¹ Phillip W. Magness, "Alexander Hamilton as Immigrant: Musical Mythology Meets Federalist Reality," *Independent Review* 21, no. 4 (Spring 2017): 497.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 498.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 499.

Hamilton, as an immigrant, is now used to show the immigrant dreams of security and legacy. Hamilton's final soliloquy is the peak of the immigrant tale and a moment that shows the depth of what Miranda is trying to share. "Hamilton dreams of a legacy in which other refugees, migrants, and low-born persons might come to enjoy the promises of self-made success in the country he helped to found."¹⁶⁴ Hamilton's final words are an expression of the America Miranda hopes for: one that allows for all people to make a difference, regardless of race or place of origin, and one that allows for success of all kinds for all people.

Magness understands Hamilton in history as a man who did not support relaxed borders and easy immigration. He did not want to give citizenship away gratuitously, and had an aggressive position in the world of immigration. He was a strong nationalist who was worried about foreign influences shaping American freedom. To Magness, as others should see, this does not line up with the heroic immigrant story that Miranda has been promoting. While he came from an island, Hamilton had a love for the American system that he did not want to be tainted by outsiders.

Audiences are all over the map in response to the show. Opinion pages, newspaper articles, and musical reviews show high praise for the show. They celebrate it as a celebration of American culture and values. Yet, many scholarly articles are starting to step up and explain that all that glitters is not gold. Miranda has done a good thing for theater and American society, but he has not done a good thing for history. It is so easy to get caught up in the praise of adoring fans and ignore the critiques that are aware of the shortcomings and inaccuracies of the show.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

Conclusion

Hamilton is wrong as history. Factually, it stays close to the truth, but various themes and storytelling methods have taken away from the factual reality of the work and made it into a commentary rather than a history. It has been a cultural event that has rocked American society. It has brought a new sense of inclusion to many who have felt left out and has called out the wrongs that America still faces today. While it does this so well, it uses a story that does not support this. The story, therefore, has been changed to fit the modern commentary. Present ideas have flooded in to create an anachronistic story of a romanticized Hamilton. It makes great theater, but showcases some terrible historiographical fallacies.

More research needs to be done on this topic. It would be beneficial to take a deeper look into Miranda's political beliefs and understanding of America as well as his historical background, as well as various interviews on the creation process and in response to the hype over the show. There are also hundreds of reviews on the show, positive and negative, that could be researched to get a better understanding of the reaction of the audiences. Looking at the parts of his life and the Founding story that have been left out of *Hamilton* would also be helpful. Why did they get left out? What do they add to the understanding of this character and his life? What is not there that should be researched? Finally, an analysis of Hamilton's writings and specific beliefs would give a deeper look into his life and his perspective. While this is an overview of the situation, it is a start to compiling all of the various perspectives of Hamilton and the show that are out there. This is just the start of understanding, but it provides a foundation of historical awareness and of the arguments against the historical nature of Hamilton.

Hamilton: An American Musical has been made to be enjoyed. It is a beautiful spectacle and an incredible work of art. This paper has not been written in an attempt to get people to stop enjoying what Miranda has done. This is just a warning. Audiences have begun to believe a false foundation, and that cannot continue. Research is important, and if *Hamilton* is to be history, then there needs to be a change. For now, it just needs to be relabeled, so that audiences are aware of what they are really getting when they see the show. Historians may feel helpless when analyzing this show, but as a work of art, *Hamilton* is sure to satisfy.

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