
Evaluation Of Historical Accuracy Of The Play Hamilton

With 11 Tony Awards and over 1 million copies of its soundtrack sold, it is no doubt that the musical, Hamilton, has grabbed America's attention since its debut in 2015. The unlikely star of the production, Alexander Hamilton, is brought back to life through the creative mind of Lin Manuel Miranda, the musical's writer and producer. Hamilton uniquely conveys the story of the American Revolution using a hip hop soundtrack and one of the most imaginative librettos ever written. The result is a fusion of the past and present through music and politics. With the popularity of this musical, comes critics and reviews; most of which are labeled 10 out of 10 stars. However, what if we were solely to evaluate the historical accuracy of Hamilton?

This research paper will compare the history of Alexander Hamilton's political and personal life to the portrayal in the play. It will investigate what components of Hamilton's life are excluded from or added to the production, and why Lin Manuel Miranda chose to design the production in this fashion. It is predicted to discover that many elements of the production are implemented to allow Lin Manuel Miranda to create the theatrical vision and entertaining plot that he desires.

This topic is significant as it shows a modern interpretation of historical events and how information is represented in today's society. It emphasizes how entertainment heavily impacts the modern American population. Many individuals are fascinated and engrossed by Alexander Hamilton after the creation of this production. The musical has become so enormously popular that it evokes one's interest in the topic among many viewers who would not have been interested without it. Hamilton emphasizes the trend of popularization of individuals through entertainment and media. It has impacted many outlets, especially regarding music and performance. The play has heavily impacted America and proves the influence of entertainment. It has infiltrated a broader conversation among all ages of people and set records in the industry. The effect of the production in America is undeniable. With this scale of effect, we must ask the question: Is the information we are gaining through Hamilton reliable and consistent?

Alexander Hamilton was born in 1757 on a Caribbean island called Nevis and spent most of his childhood on Saint Croix. His mother died of illness when he was eleven; an illness he had also caught. Hamilton survived and moved in with a cousin. Shortly after, a destructive hurricane demolished his town. He wrote a passionate letter about this tragedy for his local newspaper. Members of the community recognized his intelligence and he was motivated to move to New York City for formal education. After attending multiple schools in New York, he dropped out to fight in the American Revolution. Hamilton began as an artillery captain and moved along to become an aide to General George Washington. After four years in this role, he departed to join his new wife Eliza Schuler in 1781.

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Alexander Hamilton's political career began once he became a successful lawyer. He represented New York at the Constitutional Convention in 1786 and was active in coordinating a second meeting where the framework of the United States Constitution was drafted. However, as a believer in a strong centralized government, Hamilton was not greatly involved in the creation of the Constitution. Due to his beliefs, Hamilton quickly made enemies with those who saw him as a radical extremist. He signed the Constitution, however, immediately started to propose changes. The essays conveying these propositions, known as the Federalist Papers, were written majorly by Hamilton with assistance by John Jay and James Madison.

In 1790, when George Washington became president, Hamilton was chosen by Washington to be secretary of the treasury. Hamilton made major changes within the new government, including establishing a national bank, a national stock exchange, and a centralized currency. He also proposed that the government should assume all debts from the individual states. This became one of the many sources of conflict between himself and Jefferson.

Hamilton resigned in 1794 and was additionally involved in a significant scandal. He was involved in a three-year affair with a woman named Maria Reynolds and was blackmailed by her husband. Allegations of Hamilton using treasury money for this transaction surfaced, and he decided to publish letters to the general public. These documents, known as the Reynolds Pamphlet, were published in order for Hamilton to preserve his professional life. This, in turn, completely exposed his affair and shamed himself, his wife, and his children. This scandal is known as the first national sex scandal.

In the 1800 election, Hamilton was a key figure in allowing Thomas Jefferson to win over Aaron Burr, who Hamilton believed lacked basic beliefs. Burr and Hamilton's relationship had already been tense, and this event further heightened the tension. They lived very similar lives, and this created an intense rivalry between them. A series of essays written by Hamilton took away Burr's opportunity as New York's governor. Soon after, Burr challenged Hamilton to a duel and fatally wounded him.

Lin Manuel Miranda explains the progression of his ideas in his book, *Hamilton: The Revolution*. Within this faux-leather bound book, Jeremy McCarter and Lin Manuel Miranda create a detailed depiction of the famous musical. The book guides the reader through the show's composition and evolution from start to finish. The chapters provide songs from the musical, along with in-depth footnotes from the songwriter himself. The book breaks down the details of the musical in a meticulous manner, describing how and where songs were written, gives accounts of actors playing certain roles, and how scenes were constructed. The book also includes photos, clippings from Miranda's personal journals, and writings from Alexander Hamilton. Although many people cannot see the show live on Broadway, this book is the closest thing to it.

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Lin Manuel Miranda follows the story of Alexander Hamilton, closely through the lens of Ron Chernow's book *Alexander Hamilton*. He was first exposed to this book while on vacation, and before finishing the copy, began to envision the text as a musical production. From there, Miranda initiated a project known as *The Hamilton Mixtape*, which included a version of what is now known as Hamilton's opening number. He then spent the following year working on "My Shot", another number that is included in the show. These tracks were soon performed at a multitude of workshops and festivals as they were still in the works.

McCarter explains that when he first heard Miranda's idea for *Hamilton*, he thought it was just a drunken joke. However, as the idea progressed, he realized the genius behind the fusion of rap and narrative; and of modern times and the American Revolution. This creative idea turned into a revolution of its own, as the musical became a nationwide phenomenon and craze. McCarter and Miranda emphasize their ideas behind the multiracial portrayal they implement in the musical. This concept is based on the idea of telling the story of the American Revolution while also describing the new, more diverse America that is present today. McCarter describes this concept in the introduction of *Hamilton: The Revolution*: "It tells the stories of two revolutions. There's the American Revolution of the 18th century...[and] the revolution of the show itself: a musical that changes the way that Broadway sounds, that alters who gets to tell the story of our founding, that lets us glimpse the new, more diverse America rushing our way. The fact that Lin wrote the show largely in sequence means that this book can trace the two revolutions in tandem". The purpose of this production is not solely to inform the audience of the historical life of Alexander Hamilton, but rather to show the new, diverse America we live in today. The production, as McCarter admits, is an amplification of the straightforward story of Hamilton's life. McCarter states, "The widely acclaimed musical that draws from the breadth of America's culture and shows its audience what we share doesn't just dramatize Hamilton's revolution: it continues it". This, again, confirms that this production is a dramatization, and is not created for purely educational use. This concept allows us to investigate which aspects of the musical lead us to misconceptions about the factual history of Hamilton.

To begin this analysis, we can refer to the song "Satisfied" which depicts Alexander and Eliza's wedding night. John Laurens is finishing a toast and Angelica begins a rant in which she explains her longing for Hamilton. She states "I'm a girl in a world in which my only job is to marry rich. My father has no sons so I'm the one who has to social climb for one" (how to cite musical?). In reality, Angelica did not have this pressure as her father actually had fifteen children. Two of his children were sons who lived well into adulthood. In addition, Angelica had been married to John Barker Church three years before meeting Hamilton. In an interview with *Genius*, Miranda addresses this inaccuracy stating that he forgot Angelica was actually married when she met Hamilton. Miranda overlooked his forgetfulness saying, "I think my brain wanted me to forget because it's stronger dramatically if societally she can't marry him". The absence of this fact in the musical surely adds to the drama, however, it also sacrifices the validity of the

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production.

Diving deeper into the lyrics of Hamilton, we find a line in Act I that resumes the rumor in which Hamilton is a repetitive adulterer. In the production, Aaron Burr sings that, "...Martha Washington named her feral tomcat after him!" to which Hamilton's character replies, "That's true!". This line refers to Hamilton being known to be amorous and possessing similar characteristics to those of a feral cat. Conversely, labeling Alexander Hamilton as lusty is found to be one of his biggest mischaracterizations throughout time. This rumor has been revealed false through multiple academic accounts, including at an event featuring Michael E. Newton and his book *Alexander Hamilton: The Formative Years*. Many gathered to hear and discuss the truth of Hamilton and learn about Newton's most recent discoveries. Newton reveals that the definition of the word "tomcat" prior to 1927 was simply of a male cat. He explains to the audience, "The myth surrounding the tomcat is completely untrue...it is highly doubtful Martha Washington even owned a tomcat, let alone that it was named 'Hamilton' and it was meant to describe [Alexander Hamilton's] character as a womanizer." This myth has been carried through time mostly due to the fact that people are careful to dismiss Martha Washington's words. However, after analyzing Newton's research, it is safe to say that Hamilton is not portrayed correctly in this scene of Hamilton.

Regarding Hamilton's decline, multiple inaccuracies are shown in Act II of the production. While it is known that Alexander Hamilton and John Adams did not get along, Hamilton's removal from the Adams administration is not rightly depicted in the musical. A main issue between the two men stems from the election of 1796, when Hamilton supported Thomas Pickney. Chernow writes about their relationship saying, "Hamilton bet on the wrong horse, a mistake that would haunt him the rest of his career. As treasury secretary, he had only limited contact with John Adams, who was excluded from inner policy circle. The two men had maintained a wary distance". This debacle may lead some to believe that Adams fired Hamilton, as it is depicted in the musical. During the song "The Adams Administration", Aaron Burr sings, "Adams fires Hamilton. Privately calls him creole bastard in his taunts". Although this situation may seem likely, it is entirely false. Alexander Hamilton, in reality, resigned from his position in the Treasury in 1794. This instance occurred soon after his wife, Eliza, endured a miscarriage. Many wonder whether Hamilton's decision was based off of this tragic occasion or it was a result of his humiliating public affair with Maria Reynolds. George Washington was devastated in Hamilton's departure. Washington writes a tribute stating:

In every relation which you have borne to me, I have found that my confidence in your talents, exertions, and integrity has been well placed. I the more freely render this testimony of my approbation, because I speak from opportunities of information which cannot deceive me and which furnish satisfactory proof of your title to public regard. My most earnest wished for your happiness will attend you in retirement.

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Hamilton and Washington remained friends after Hamilton resigned, and Hamilton remained politically involved. Through Washington's writing, we can confirm that Hamilton did indeed quit his position and was not fired by John Adams. The fact is that Hamilton retired before Adams was even elected as President. Yet again, we find this as a historical inaccuracy in the plot of Hamilton. There is no evidence as to why Lin Manuel Miranda chose to incorporate this inaccuracy in the musical; however, one can assume that this scenario added tension between Adams' and Hamilton's characters, further creating a dramatic effect.

The Reynolds Pamphlet is an impactful document on Hamilton's career, but not in the same ways that it is portrayed in the musical. This essay, written by Alexander Hamilton himself, was written in 1797 after his affair with Maria Reynolds was exposed. After Reynolds' husband found the two together, Hamilton paid him off to refrain from exposing the affair to the public. These transactions were found to be suspicious, and Hamilton had no choice but to disclose his secret. He used The Reynolds Pamphlet to essentially explain himself and salvage his political career, all while embarrassing and shaming his wife and children. In the musical, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and Aaron Burr approach Hamilton regarding the affair. The song "We Know" shows a scene in which the three men confront Hamilton about his distrustful transactions. Madison claims, "Almost a thousand dollars, paid in different amounts" and Burr adds, "To a Mr. James Reynolds way back in seventeen ninety-one." In reality, these were not the men to find Hamilton guilty. The Reynolds Pamphlet explains that James Monroe, Fredrick Muhlenberg, and Abraham Venable were the ones to approach Alexander Hamilton and make these remarks. Lin Manuel Miranda likely uses Jefferson, Madison, and Burr as the characters to approach Hamilton as they are well developed characters in the plot and the scene adds dramatic effect with these characters in dispute. Not only did the play use the wrong characters for this scene, it also greatly dramatizes how influential the Reynolds Pamphlet really was. The play depicts the Reynolds Pamphlet being the document that ended Hamilton's career, however, it was a later document that is proved to cause the end of Hamilton's career. In reality, it was a text that Hamilton wrote criticizing John Adams during the 1800 election that successfully ended Hamilton's career.

Finally, the play misleads the audience to believe that the presidential election of 1800 is what lead Burr and Hamilton to duel. While this was one of their first public oppositions, it was not what directly led to their duel. After Burr discovered that he would not be vice-president for a second term, he decided to run for Governor of New York. Burr lost, and afterwards, a letter was released stating that Hamilton had called Burr "a man of irregular and unsatiabable ambition". These statements eventually led Burr to confront Hamilton, and the result was a duel.

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