



Faculty of Arts and Philosophy

“Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story?”

*Reinventing a National Narrative and Its
Political Meaning in ‘Hamilton: an American
Musical’*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The US is going through an identity crisis. With its demographics changing radically, with an outside world where non-state actors are rapidly emerging and changing old geopolitical rules, with America's own self-image increasingly criticized and distrusted, Americans are grappling for a (new) sense of identity (and hence future).

The musical 'Hamilton' is one of the many rising voices that offer their own visions on the identity and future of the US. Returning to the narrative of the Founding Fathers, until now used by conservative groups, it updates this narrative to include racial minorities, women and immigrants and projects an image of the future. In other words, it (ab)uses the past in a contemporary framework to project an image of the future. As such, it becomes political. What is this image of (a future) America the musical creates, and how is it perceived? These questions will form the guidelines through this thesis.

PREFACE

The world is made of stories. Some are old, some are new. Some are long, some are short. Some are so incredible none could believe them, while in some, nothing ever seems to happen – but there is one single truth running through all of them. A story is only as good as its characters.

I have had the pleasure to live my story in excellent company. I would like to thank my fellow students who have shared their advice and research with me, and who were always quick to send me articles I should read. Their support has been heart-warming.

I would like to thank my promotor, professor Ken Kennard, for freeing many hours of his time to read and correct my drafts in his unique way. He taught me that stories are not always what they seem, and that sometimes, you have to pierce through the surface to get to the deeper layers of the tale. This thesis would not exist without his classes and his advice.

I would like to thank my parents without whom my story would never have been written. It takes a great deal of love and patience to listen to unstructured ramblings and long silences about musicals, New York and politics. They have offered me the enormous privilege to go to the university and study what I love. Every word in this thesis is as much as to their merit as to mine.

Lastly, I like to thank my brother Olivier, my guide in the world of modern-day technology and computers, and my companion in the theater. Without him, this thesis might have ended up hand-written.

Thank you for sharing my story.

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USED IMAGES

IMAGE 1: *Obama as George Washington*

Source: The New Yorker (January 2009), cover.

IMAGE 2: *The 'Hamilton' Cast in New York*

Source: KLETNOY (S.) and MOSELY (R.). 'Founding Father Alexander Hamilton's Life Is Now a Hip-Hop Musical', in *Cosmopolitan*, July 13th, 2015, sf.

<http://www.cosmopolitan.com/entertainment/a43043/hamilton-hottest-broadway-show/> (consulted May 20th, 2016)

IMAGE 3: *Grave of Eliza Schuyler Hamilton, Trinity Church, New York*

Source: Mine.

INTRODUCTION

Why do stories matter? They are but words – images, feelings – after all. What do they *do*? Stories entertain. They evoke and imagine, and as such, they matter – but they do more than that. They create. They order. They structure. They give meaning and identity. Stories, good, meaningful stories, and especially historical ones (whether they have a scientific intention or not) enable us to use the past, interpret the present, and project a future.

If stories matter, they really matter in America. Though one of the oldest ‘modern’ nation-states, in terms of a remembered past the US has but superficial roots, that go back at most to the sixteenth century. More than any state in Europe, the US is a creation, not built on ages-old traditions and attitudes and history, but on a narrated construct that enable Americans to make sense of themselves and project (an image of) themselves to the rest of the world. These stories are what historians and sociologists identify as ‘*national narratives*’: a whole of ‘*agreed principles, values and myths that gives the country a coherent sense of identity*’.¹ National narratives are not fixed in time, nor are they uncontested. Different stories battle at different times for dominance. Such clashes continue even in the present.

On May 3rd, 2016, Ted Cruz suspended his campaign, leaving Donald Trump as the only Republican nominee for the presidential elections.² A few months earlier, no one would have predicted such an outcome. Why and how a man who raises such feverish support and fanatical resistance could be elected, will undoubtedly be discussed ad

¹ CAMPBELL (N.) and KEAN (A.). *American Cultural Studies. An Introduction to American Culture*, Routledge (2006), p 2.

² GLUECK (K.) and GOLDMACHER (S.). ‘Ted Cruz Drops Out of Presidential Race’, in *Politico*, May 3th, 2016, sf. <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/05/ted-cruz-drops-out-of-presidential-race-222763>

nauseam in the coming months, but the following seems clear: Trump is repeating a story, a national narrative, that many can and will buy into. It is an old story, a reactionary one. It paints the US as essentially white and male and immigrants as parasites. In essence, Trump is thus repeating one of the oldest American narratives – the interpreted narrative of the Founding Fathers.

This story has long been a dominant force in the US. Especially from the 60s, however, it has been increasingly criticized by women and minority groups. Today, it no longer is the only one accepted. Other variants, or even completely new stories, are vying for legitimacy and authority. Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton are or attempt to be living proof that the US belongs to African-Americans as well as to women.³ Bernie Sanders even tried to convince people the country should become ‘socialist’ – and to a certain extent, he is succeeding. The future will determine which one – if any – will become the new dominant narrative.

One could gain the impression that telling stories is the sole prerogative of politicians. To a degree, this is true. In particular, when a country finds itself at a crossroads, (candidate) leaders need to create a story about the nation’s desirable future. They need to legitimize their (possible) power and provide their voters with an identity. They are also eminently capable of reaching a big audience. However, in reality, they are not the only ones who can create, influence or reproduce national narratives. Stories are only powerful and lasting (and legitimate) when they are shared and believed by a great amount of people. They cannot simply be imposed – people have to be persuaded by it. They need to be supported by cultural products, to be a part of every-day life, to become ‘normal’, ‘how it is and always has been’.

³ This is not to argue that Obama has introduced a post-racial era, but his election as first black president poses a clear challenge to the Founding Fathers-narrative, in which only white men could rule the US.

On January 20th, 2015, a musical opened Off-Broadway⁴ with a very specific version of the Founding Fathers-narrative. Casting each and every Father as African-American and Hispanic, and integrating women and immigrants in the musical, the author Lin-Manuel Miranda inverts the traditional narrative and paints his own vision of what America should be – a multicultural nation, where the current ethnic and racial minorities and women are as much a part of the country as the white men who created it. A year and a half later, the show is booked out for months,⁵ is intending to set up a separate production in Chicago⁶ as well as a national tour,⁷ and there are plans to bring the production to Europe and Australia in 2017.⁸ It would seem many have rather bought into his narrative as well.

In this thesis, I intend to look at the mechanisms of this musical. What is the message Lin-Manuel Miranda wishes to propagate? How does he do so? Why does Obama (and by extension, the Democratic Party) keep popping up? How does the public receive the show? And is the musical indeed as revolutionary as most critics claim? In order to do so, I will first sketch the context⁹ – why now, why Lin-Manuel Miranda? In a second part, I will analyse the musical. After a more elaborated treatment of the Founding Fathers-

⁴ HETRICK (A.). 'Lin-Manuel Miranda Rocks American History with *Hamilton*, Premiering Off-Broadway Tonight', in *Playbill*, January 20th, 2015, sf. <http://www.playbill.com/news/article/lin-manuel-miranda-rocks-american-history-with-hamilton-premiering-off-broadway-tonight-339610>

⁵ When I looked for tickets in November, some shows in April were already sold out, despite the exorbitant prices, ranging from \$177 to several hundreds of dollars. In the first three months at the Richard Rodgers Theater on Broadway, the musical collected over \$57 million in advanced tickets sale. 'Sixty Minutes: *Hamilton*', 04:25-04:30. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/hamilton-broadway-musical-60-minutes-charlie-rose/>

⁶ VIAGAS (R.). 'Chicago Will Get Its Own *Hamilton* Production in Fall 2016', in *Playbill*, December 8th, 2015, sf. <http://www.playbill.com/article/chicago-will-get-its-own-hamilton-production-in-fall-2016-com-374631>

⁷ RICKWALD (B.). 'Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton* Announces New National Tour Plans', in *Theater Mania*, January 26th, 2016, sf. http://www.theatermania.com/san-francisco-theater/news/hamilton-national-tour_75711.html

⁸ SOKOLOVE (M.). 'The C.E.O. of 'Hamilton' Inc.', in *New York Times*, April 5th, 2016, sf. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/10/magazine/the-ceo-of-hamilton-inc.html?partner=rss&emc=rss&smid=tw-nytimesarts&smtyp=cur&r=2>

⁹ For, as Neill Campbell and Alasdair Kean have asserted, '*histories are written [by historians] who themselves are located in a specific social context*'. In order to understand the story, we need to understand the context. CAMPBELL (N.). and KEAN (A.). *American Cultural Studies. An Introduction to American Culture*, Routledge (2006), p 7.

narrative, I will argue that the show, in the words of the producers, ‘updates’ this narrative by integrating African-Americans and Hispanics, women, and immigrants into the story. Lin-Manuel Miranda does so in an implicitly Democratic discourse. How political is his show, and how does he connect with the Democratic Party? I will conclude this chapter by examining Miranda’s historical integrity. Finally, I will shortly analyse the show’s legacy and its critics. How does the audience perceive the play (and the political messages in it)? In other words, who tells what story – and who listens to it?

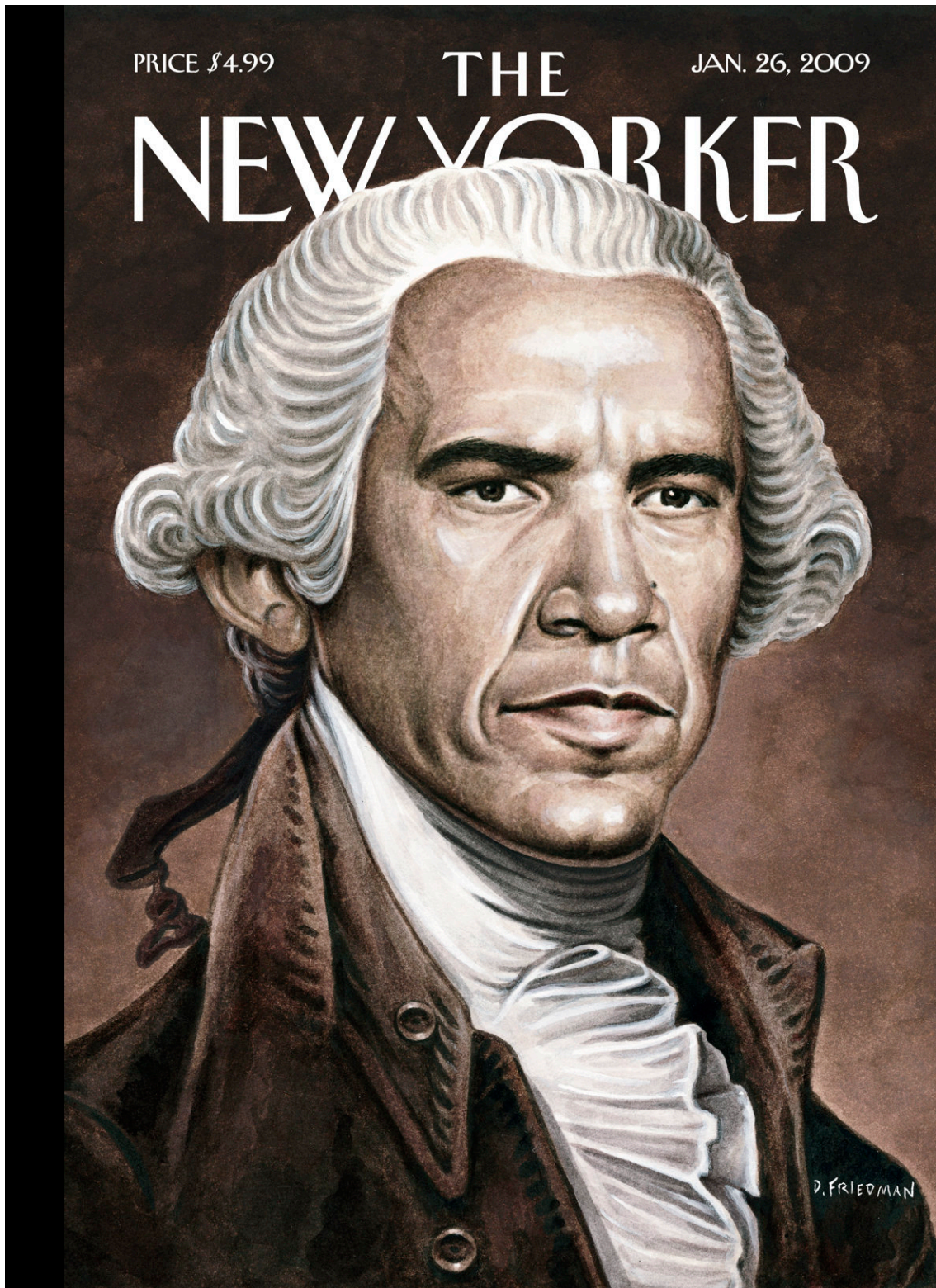


Image 1: Obama as Washington (cover The New Yorker, January 2009)

PART I. SETTING THE STAGE

I. The Time

Just like all ‘good’ stories, this one too began once upon a time – in 2008 to be exact – when for the first time, a black president was elected. In fact, it began before that, but Obama’s election, for all his linkages with the musical, is a good starting point. His presidency all but sparked the creation of the show. “*This is something that was created with him in mind,*” Leslie Odom, Jr. (Aaron Burr) says. “*When Chris Jackson steps forward, as a biracial man, and says he’s George Washington, the first president of our country, we don’t get to divorce ourselves from the new image that we have of a biracial man as the president of our country.*”¹⁰ The show and the president would remain connected throughout his presidency. On May 12th, 2009, when Obama organized one of his first cultural events – An Evening of Poetry, Music, and the Spoken Word – on the White House, Lin-Manuel Miranda performed the musical’s opening number for the first time.¹¹ On March 14th 2016, nearing the end of his tenure, Obama once again invited Miranda and the cast to perform the show’s songs and participate in a student’s workshop.¹²

It is not hard to see why Obama is so closely tied to the musical. As a son of a Kenyan man and an American woman, he presents a living challenge to the traditional Founding Fathers-narrative. After his election, *The New Yorker* was swift to portray him as a black

¹⁰ ‘Why History Has Its Eyes on Hamilton’s Diversity | TIME’, 01:02-01:06 and 01:24-01:40.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWrRP6vRGhQ>

¹¹ ‘Lin-Manuel Miranda Performs at the White House Poetry Jam (8 of 8)’, 04:26.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WNFf7nMIGnE>. In fact, he was asked to perform a number from his earlier musical *In the Heights*, for which he won four Tony-awards and which ‘*reflected themes that the new administration wanted to celebrate: family, the importance of home, the vibrancy of the Latino community.*’ Instead, he decided to introduce a song for what he then still envisioned as a concept hip hop album. His performance initiated a lot of the buzz that would follow him throughout the preparations. MIRANDA (L.M.) and MCCARTER (J.). *Hamilton: the Revolution*, Grand Central Publishing (2016), pp 14-15.

¹² SULLIVAN (L.). ‘#Bam4Ham: Check Out Lin-Manuel Miranda & the Hamilton Cast’s White House Visit’, in *Broadway*, March 14th, 2016, sf. <http://www.broadway.com/buzz/184135/bam4ham-check-out-lin-manuel-miranda-the-hamilton-casts-white-house-visit/>

George Washington (Image 1), the anachronistic fashioning drawing attention ‘*both to the perceived ‘whiteness’ of the US presidency and the Founding Fathers and to the fact that this whiteness may itself have become as anachronistic as a wig.*’¹³ It is not implausible that Lin-Manuel Miranda may have seen this cover and was influenced by it. The anachronism in this image would become the crux of his story, in which he does not depict an African-American as a white Founding Father, but white Founding Fathers as African-Americans and Hispanics.

The New Yorker cover is but one of the many references to the Founding Fathers that flooded the market in the beginning of the 21st century. Of course, the Founders were never forgotten. They were honoured and used throughout history, and especially since the civil rights movements in the ‘60s they were also increasingly criticized.¹⁴ However, in the 1990s and 2000s one saw the rise of the ‘Founders Chic’,¹⁵ defined as a ‘*cascade of books for general audiences presented comforting, celebratory portraits of the founding fathers and the history they helped to make, while brushing past difficult, uncomfortable questions about the founding fathers that academic historians chose to pursue.*’¹⁶ In fact, the phenomenon is wider than just books. The Founders became a marketing brand. They were featured in biographies, television shows,¹⁷ fiction literature and even cookbooks.¹⁸

The Founders Chic-trend can be considered as yet another ‘flare’ from the old Founding Fathers-narrative, that is still present in the American society despite the

¹³ PAUL (H.). *The Myths that Made America. An Introduction to American Studies*, Clausen & Bosse (2014), p 221.

¹⁴ BERNSTEIN (R.B.). *The Founding Fathers Reconsidered*, Oxford University Press (2009), pp 115-139.

¹⁵ A term coined by Evan Thomas in: THOMAS (E.). ‘Founders Chic: Live From Philadelphia’, in *Newsweek*, July 9th, 2001, sf. <http://europe.newsweek.com/founders-chic-live-philadelphia-154791?rm=eu>

¹⁶ BERNSTEIN (R.B.). *The Founding Fathers Reconsidered*, Oxford University Press (2009), p 138.

¹⁷ Bernstein and Paul refer to the HBO series about John Adams, based on his biography by David McCullough, but one could also think about ‘Liberty Kids’, a children’s show that follows the events of the American Revolution, from the Boston Tea Party to the Constitutional Convention, and many other examples.

¹⁸ Paul offers a scathing critique on DeWitt’s ‘The Founding Foodies’, a cookbook that offers historical recipes and trivia. PAUL (H.). *The Myths that Made America. An Introduction to American Studies*, Clausen & Bosse (2014), pp 236-237.

persistent (and just) critique on it, as Trump's rhetoric proves. One should be aware that this continued interest in the Founders is not without implications. As Paul summarizes, the authors of these works '*enact a [culinary] white reconstruction on the backs of blacks and other nonwhites in an essentially nostalgic mode and thus re-install an image of a predominantly white nation.*'¹⁹ The Founding Fathers-narrative is essentially an exclusive one. There is no place for the contributions of African-Americans or women to the creation of the nation. The only Americans that truly mattered (matter?) are the white (wealthy) men.

Such a story seems hard to maintain in an America that never truly was white and male and certainly never will be. In the 18th-century, blacks and Native Americans lived through and fought in or against the Revolution, and today, census reports predict the emergence of a majority minority nation – in which white Caucasians will no longer constitute the absolutely majority - by ultimately 2044.²⁰ However, exactly this gap between the narrative and reality is what makes the narrative so appealing. The society is changing, and this frightens and angers people.²¹ They cling to familiar, fixed stories for support. People do not necessarily vote for Trump because they truly think a wall will fix all the problems (although some do) – they vote for him out of fear, insecurity and anger, and because Trump tells them a story they can connect to.²² It is a nostalgic, make-belief story, but it appeals. It is easy to believe in. The past is a secure place, because we think we know what has happened. If having white, wealthy men in charge worked in the past, why would it not work now? We forget however that our image of the past, our stories about it, are themselves subjective. History is written by the victors.

¹⁹ PAUL (H.). *The Myths that Made America*, p 237.

²⁰ FREY (W.H.). 'New Projections Point to a Majority Minority in 2044', in *Brookings*, December 12th, 2014, sf. <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/the-avenue/posts/2014/12/12-majority-minority-nation-2044-frey>

²¹ Immigration is one of the five reasons Barford mentions when he asks why Americans are so angry – the others being the staggering economy, the decreased standing of the US in the world, the division between Democrats and Republicans, and the failure of the government to connect with the people. BARFORD (V.). 'Why Are Americans so Angry?', in *BBC News*, February 4th, 2016, sf.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35406324>

²² Why do stories matter again?

If there is one thing we have learnt from the current elections, it is that not everyone buys into this story, because they do not want to or because they realize the story is no longer viable. They recognize the disparity between the white, male past that the narrative creates and the increasingly multicultural society America is and will be. These Americans reject the narrative of the Founding Fathers or create new stories – or, as Lin-Manuel Miranda will do, update (and upgrade?) the old story. By creating a musical on the, in 2008 still rather unknown, Alexander Hamilton, he steps into the Founders Chic-trend on the one hand, thus ensuring himself of a relatively large, interested audience that has grown attuned to depictions of the Founding Fathers, while, on the other hand, he turns the narrative upside-down. There are no white men featuring in the musical.²³ In ‘Hamilton’, African-Americans, Hispanics and immigrants make and shape the country – just like they, according to Miranda, are doing today.

²³ With the notable, but understandable exception of king George III.

II. The Man

The musical was conceived – though first as a mixtape, not yet as an actual show – in 2008. It would be performed officially for the first time in 2015. Between those dates, the musical would gradually evolve, with songs created and rearranged and rewritten, even after the show had premiered Off-Broadway.²⁴ Who is the man who dedicated over six years of his life to this work, and still is doing so today?

One cannot fully comprehend the musical's political stances without knowing the man behind it. The very pro-immigrant theme that underpins the musical, makes much more sense when one considers that Lin-Manuel Miranda himself is a son of Puerto Rican immigrants. Growing up in the Latino Inwood neighbourhood in Washington Heights, New York, Miranda has been raised in both the New York and Puerto Rican cultures. He attended Hunter College and later on studied at Wesleyan University in Connecticut, while he would spend every summer with his grandparents in Puerto Rico.²⁵

This upbringing very much defines his cultural and political identity: he is neither exclusively Northern American nor Puerto Rican, but takes pride in both cultures. When he received the Grammy Award for Best Musical Theater Album, his friend Anthony Ramos proudly held the Puerto Rican flag above their heads.²⁶ When he is welcomed by salsa music in Stephen Colbert's Late Night show, he thanks him for making him "*feel welcome with the music of my people*".²⁷ From time to time, he tweets in spanglish, a

²⁴ The Broadway-show would be fifteen minutes shorter than the original one. MIRANDA (L.M.) and MCCARTER (J.). *Hamilton: the Revolution*, Grand Central Publishing (2016), p 277.

²⁵ MACGREGOR (J.). 'Meet Lin-Manuel Miranda, the Genius Behind "Hamilton," Broadway's Newest Hit', in *Smithsonian*, November 12th, 2015, sf <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/lin-manuel-miranda-ingenuity-awards-180957234/?no-ist>

²⁶ 'Hamilton Wins Best Musical Theater Album', 01:16. <http://www.grammy.com/videos/hamilton-wins-best-musical-theater-album>

²⁷ 'Lin-Manuel Miranda Talks "Hamilton," New York and His Influences', 00:00-00:20. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h7YTPuEMgaE>

conflation of English and Spanish.²⁸ And since gaining recognition through his musical, he has asked Congress to help Puerto Rico solve its economic crisis.²⁹

These concerns and personal convictions translate into political activism. On social media, as well as in Congress, he has, in a way, presented himself as an unofficial spokesperson for Puerto Ricans – and ethnic and racial minorities in general. He was quick and decisive to correct an interviewer when she spoke about the ‘nearly all-minority casting’: “*The casting is not ‘minority.’ Your piece is going to be dated in about five years when we’re the majority. So you might want to say ‘people of color.’*”³⁰ And his twitter reads as a mixture between personal experiences and political comments.³¹ Though he never explicitly refers to the Democratic Party, he must be familiar with its vision, having worked in the summer for his father, who is a political consultant for the Party,³² and finds himself compatible with it – at least more than with Republicans.

Not only his father’s position has influenced him – so did the place where he lives and works. New York City has often been associated with its liberal values.³³ It is also a multicultural city. In 2000, 36% of its inhabitants was foreign-born. Of its population, 32% was Hispanic, 21% Asian-American and 16% African-American.³⁴ Contrary to popular belief, these different nationalities are still (residentially, socially, economically)

²⁸ MIRANDA, Lin-Manuel (@Lin_Manuel): “*Dije Spanglish. Lo estoy inventando aquí on the spot contigo.*” February 24th, 2016 – 09:22. Tweet. https://twitter.com/Lin_Manuel/status/702544137669754880

²⁹ FLORES (G.). ‘Hamilton’ Star Lin-Manuel Miranda Asks Congress to Help Puerto Rico Solve Economic Crisis’, in *Billboard*, March 16th, 2016, sf. <http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/latin/7262964/hamilton-lin-manuel-miranda-congress-puerto-rico>

³⁰ MILLER-MEDZON (K.). ‘Behind The Scenes At ‘Hamilton’ On Broadway’, in *WBAA*, February 16th, 2016, sf. <http://wbaa.org/post/behind-scenes-hamilton-broadway>

³¹ He asked minorities (especially latinos) to go vote and change the nation, for example. ‘Found in Translation by Lin-Manuel Miranda for MovimientoHispano.org’, 00.53. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WujDcO1OQu0>

³² Miranda calls his father an ‘*exemplary New Yorker*’, who made a life for himself and his family and created the hispanic federation. He is a community activist. ‘Lin-Manuel Miranda Hamilton in Conversation Part 2’, 00:00-00:27. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SqpXRR9Qk2c>

³³ It is, paradoxically enough, Sullivan’s starting point: SULLIVAN (T.J.). *Redrawing Party Lines: New York State and the Rise of Modern Conservatism*, State University of New York Press (2009), 247 pp.

³⁴ SABAGH (G.) and BOZORGMEHR (M.). ‘From “Give me Your Poor” to “Save our State”’: New York and Los Angeles as Immigrant Cities and Regions’, in HALLE (D.) (ed.). *New York & Los Angeles: Politics, Society, and Culture a Comparative View*, University of Chicago Press (2003), pp 101-104.

segregated to a significant degree.³⁵ Washington Heights (Lin-Manuel's home), for example, can be considered a barrio.³⁶ His focus on multiculturalism, together with a deep-rooted realization that ethnic minorities are still discriminated against, runs throughout his works.

Miranda has not entered formal politics, nor is he looking to succeed his father as a political consultant. Instead, he utilizes musicals to promote his personal (political) visions. In se, musicals are not a bad genre to do so. Arguably, most historical musicals are inherently political. After all, setting up such a production requires huge investments in human and financial capital. The subject, the time period one wishes to illuminate, therefore, must be selected carefully to suit the needs of the current time. Is it coincidence Luc Plamondon and Richard Cocciante have announced a revival of the musical 'Notre Dame de Paris', based on the book by Victor Hugo and known for its strong pro-immigrant stance, at the exact moment refugees are entering Europe?³⁷ This is not to say all musicals *are* political – but they do have the *capacity* to be so.³⁸

John Bush Jones illustrated this in his 'Our Musical, Ourselves: a Social History of the American Musical Theatre.' He asserts that '*throughout the twentieth century musicals variously dramatized, mirrored, or challenged our deeply-held cultural attitudes and beliefs.*' However, he warns to that, in order to do so, the show must interest and entertain its audiences, which since the Second World War predominantly consists of the white

³⁵ One should note that the degree of segregation between whites and African-Americans is higher than the segregation between African-Americans and Hispanics.

³⁶ HALLE (D.), GEDEAN (R.) and BEVERIDGE (A.A.). 'Residential Separation and Segregation, Racial and Latino Identity, and the Racial Composition of Each City', in HALLE (D.) (ed.). *New York & Los Angeles: Politics, Society, and Culture a Comparative View*, University of Chicago Press (2003), pp 150-186.

³⁷ MUSICALS, French (@FrMusicals): "New Musical Alert ! NDP is back on stage in Paris !" February 18th, 2016 – 03:52. Tweet. <https://twitter.com/FrMusicals/status/700286826330763265>

³⁸ Or what else to think about the news that the UN will invite fifteen ambassadors, including those of Russia, Gabon and Namibia, to see 'Fun Home', a Tony-award winning Broadway-musical on lesbians? NICHOLS (M.), TAIT (P.) (ed.). 'U.S. Turns to Broadway to Promote Gay Rights at United Nations', in *Reuters*, March 3th, 2016, sf. <http://in.reuters.com/article/rights-gay-us-un-idINKCN0W40D9>

middle-class.³⁹ As we shall see, ‘Hamilton’ is a political musical, influencing both formal politics and the popular mind (and is politics not exactly the power to shape public opinions and thoughts?).

‘In the Heights’, Miranda’s first musical, did entertain its audiences. Having been conceived at Wesleyan University⁴⁰ (based on a book by Quiara Alegria Hudes), it was first staged in Connecticut, moved to an Off-Broadway theatre in 2007 and to Broadway in 2008, and it is currently touring the world. It won the Grammy for Best Musical Show Album, as well as four Tony-awards – and it is, in essence, Miranda’s political vision in its purest form.

The story focuses on his hometown, Washington Heights, as a Latino-community, and follows the various characters as they make a life for themselves. In the show, Miranda tackles the question that are at the root of cultural pluralism. Where does one’s allegiance lie? Can one become American without repudiating one’s origins? Neither does the story ignore the discrimination against and economic plight of the barrio – and yet at the same time, it is a positive, vibrant story, depicting the Heights as a community, not as a dangerous Latino neighbourhood one often sees in movies. The show is an example of cultural hybridity, mixing modern, hip-hop and salsa music, as well as English and Spanish. ‘*Paciencia y fe,*’ the actors sing, and ‘*this message provides a good mantra for the entire production as it bounds its way towards a Broadway opening, bursting with energy and infused with the patience and faith of a Latino community that has long been waiting for a positive and multifaceted theatrical production that can hold its own on the Great White Way.*’⁴¹ ‘In the Heights’ proves that Miranda could bring his views and convictions to the stage and gain

³⁹ JONES (J.B.). *Our Musicals, Ourselves. A Social History of the American Musical Theatre*, Brandeis University Press (2003), pp 1-3.

⁴⁰ MEAD (R.). ‘All About the Hamiltons. A New Musical Brings the Founding Fathers Back to Life – with a Lot of Hip-Hop’, in *New Yorker*, February 9th, 2015, sf.

<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/02/09/hamiltons>

⁴¹ HEINZE (R.). ‘Review: In the Heights’, in *Theatre Journal*, vol 60, n°1 (2008), pp 145-146.

success with it, as long as the political message was combined and covered with amusement. To convince an audience, *entertain* them.

As his musical moved to Broadway, Miranda started thinking about a new story. This time, he would not focus on his own community, for, despite the show's success, 'In the Heights' appealed especially to a young and Hispanic audience (the musical was exported to nine countries, including the Philippines, Panama, Brazil and Peru – countries less associated with receiving American musicals). Instead, perhaps influenced by the Founders Chic, he picked up the biography of Alexander Hamilton by Ron Chernow – “*at random*”, he says, “*just looking for something to read on vacation.*” The book came with good reviews, and because of a high school paper, Miranda knew that Hamilton and his son both died in a duel, so it would have a dramatic ending, but that was all he remembered. However, by the time he had reached the second chapter, in which a poor-stricken Hamilton wrote a poem about the hurricane that destroyed his home on St. Croix, after which the town raised a collection to send him to the mainland and receive an education, he decided this was the most “*hip-hop story he had ever read*”.⁴²

Concurrently, it was an immigrant story. Just like 'In the Heights' is a prompt that immigrants came to New York and built small businesses and are the engine of the American economy, 'Hamilton' is a reminder that the '*greatest military commander*' was from France,⁴³ the man who created the financial system came from Nevis, and the man who organized and disciplined the army was '*a gay Prussian, named Friedrich von Steuben*'.⁴⁴ He continues: “*Immigrants have been at every intersection, at every point of our*

⁴² “*It's the essence of hip-hop: take your struggle and make art out of it.*” 'Lin Manuel Miranda Hamilton In Conversation Part 1', 02:02-03:24. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHX-BYBnEc0&list=RDFHX-BYBnEc0#t=12>

⁴³ Miranda might be overstating the importance of Marquis de la Fayette here.

⁴⁴ 'Lin Manuel Miranda Hamilton In Conversation Part 2', 01:25-01:51. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SqpXRR9Qk2c>

founding and our growth (...). As long as Trump is out there, I will be the counterweight saying: “hey, we have always been here, we make our country better.””⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Lin Manuel Miranda Hamilton In Conversation Part 2', 01:54-02:28.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SqpXRR9Qk2c>



Image 2: The 'Hamilton' Cast in New York (Cosmopolitan, July 13th 2015)

PART II: PERFORMING A PLAY

I. Updating the Narrative of the Founding Fathers

In 1969, long before Lin-Manuel Miranda was born or an African-American became president, a musical on the Founding Fathers opened on Broadway. Titled simply '1776', it described the events in and surrounding the First Continental Congress, focusing on John Adams and his fight to make the colonies declare independence – the musical would end with the signing of the Declaration of Independence. In itself, the show was not revolutionary nor openly political: it simply repeated that which children had learned in school since ages – white, wealthy men (and some extraordinary women, like Abigail Adams) have founded this nation by seceding from its tyrant, Britain. Of course, the show possessed some satirical and political comments,⁴⁶ and the Founders were not always depicted in the most venerable way – one should only look at the song 'Sit Down, John!' to note a comical (and sometimes satirical) tone underpinning these serious events.⁴⁷ However, these more liberal tendencies must not have been important enough to prevent Jack L. Wagner, a supporter and close friend of president Nixon and a conservative, to turn the musical into a movie in 1972.⁴⁸

For the musical *was* political – not because of the content, but because of its context and the manner in which it was first staged. '1776' can be situated in the reactionary

⁴⁶ President Nixon would later request the removal of the songs 'Cool, Cool, Considerate Men', which he thought was an attack on conservatives, and 'Momma, Look Sharp', in which a dying soldier addresses his mother – not an image the president would want to propagate in the midst of the Vietnam controversy. LEWIS (F.). 'Heated Debate About 'Cool' Cut', in *Los Angeles Times*, September 7th, 2001, sf.

<http://articles.latimes.com/2001/sep/07/entertainment/ca-42982>

⁴⁷ In the song, the members of the Continental Congress fight over whether or not they should open a window to expell Philadelphia's heat, with the risk to let in flies, all the while pointedly ignoring John Adams, who is trying to persuade to vote for independency – to his great indignation: "*Oh, good God! Consider yourselves fortunate that you have John Adams to abuse, for no sane man would tolerate it!*", after which Congress replies: "*John, you're a bore; we've heard this before. Now for God's sake, John, sit down!*" 'Sit Down, John Lyrics'. <http://www.stlyrics.com/lyrics/1776originalcastrecording/sitdownjohn.htm>

⁴⁸ LEWIS (F.). 'Heated Debate About 'Cool' Cut', in *Los Angeles Times*, 09/07/2001, sf. <http://articles.latimes.com/2001/sep/07/entertainment/ca-42982>

movement against the social movements that had shaken the '60s.⁴⁹ Against the ethnic minorities and women who were demanding more rights, it reinforced the idea that the US was created by white men (and some supporting women), and white men only. It recreated and reinforced, in a way, the traditional narrative of the Founding Fathers. Why do stories matter again?

The narrative of the Founding Fathers is not the only story that matters in America, although it is one of the most important ones. Several authors have pointed at different 'myths that made America'.⁵⁰ Paul defined them as '*popular and powerful narratives of US-American national beginnings which have turned out to be anchors and key references in discourses of Americanness*'.⁵¹ Campbell and Kean, as we have seen, call them stories '*of agreed principles, values and myths that gives the country a coherent sense of identity*'.⁵² No matter the exact definition, all authors agree these national narratives underpin American identity.⁵³ They provide simplified stories about the past and the present that structure and legitimize the often chaotic society. They offer an 'imagined communal mythology' with which one can present themselves internally and externally. They provide a common language for the 'imagined community' Anderson once described. These national narratives are, in sum, what the US aspires to be, and be seen as.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ And because of that, I argue the play is more conservative than liberal, although the end result is rather ambiguous.

⁵⁰ To quote Paul's title; PAUL (H.). *The Myths that Made America. An Introduction to American Studies*, Clausen & Bosse (2014), 450 pp. He mentions seven of these myths: Columbus and the myth of discovery, Pocahontas and the myth of transatlantic love, pilgrims and puritans and the myth of the promised land, the myth of the Founding Fathers, the myth of the melting pot, the myth of the American West and the myth of the self-made man.

⁵¹ PAUL (H.). *The Myths that Made America*. p 11.

⁵² CAMPBELL (N.) and KEAN (A.). *American Cultural Studies. An Introduction to American Culture*, Routledge (2006), p 2.

⁵³ For a more theoretical treatment of national narratives, see especially CAMPBELL (N.) and KEAN (A.). *American Cultural Studies. An Introduction to American Culture*, Routledge (2006), 328 pp; and PAUL (H.). *The Myths that Made America. An Introduction to American Studies*, Clausen & Bosse (2014), 450 pp.

⁵⁴ Paul describes it as follows: '*American myths thus play a crucial role in the symbolization and affirmation of the US nation; it is their cultural work, so to speak, to make discursive constructions of the nation plausible and self-evident, to create internal solidarity and commitment to the nation state and its policies, and to represent the US to outsiders.*' PAUL (H.). *The Myths that Made America. An Introduction to American Studies*, Clausen & Bosse (2014), p 17.

Much like national symbols, national narratives are supposed to be universally accepted and meaningful. Certainly it is true that *'particular kinds of narratives may have predominated at specific times.'*⁵⁵ However, every story is in essence subjective and provides a singular, exclusive view on society. *'Traditional conceptions of a unified American culture when examined turn out to be partial and selective views of what America has been or ought to be, grounded in the privileged status accorded to a white, male, middle-class, heterosexual perspective.'*⁵⁶ These dominant discourses aim to conserve the status quo, which is benefitting those who make and confirm these stories. The myth of the self-made man, for example, implies that those who remain in poverty, do so because they are lazy – should they have worked hard enough, they would have made it in life. There is no need to support them. The myth of the melting pot, on the other hand, tells immigrants they only can become American if they renounce their ethnic pasts. Their cultural identities are inferior to those of the white, 'native' Americans.

The myth of the Founding Fathers has perhaps the most influential implications of them all. Of all national narratives, it is arguably the most central one in American identity.⁵⁷ Every child learns about the Founders. Every adult has at least once referred to them to make a point – “but the founders said...” Especially since the rise of the Founders Chic and the current American identity crisis, people are increasingly looking back to them for guidance and reassurance.⁵⁸ The word “Founding Fathers’ *remains a core component of the way Americans talk about politics and government, one with remarkable rhetorical power.*⁵⁹ They are the venerated Fathers of the country, and they personify the

⁵⁵ CAMPBELL (N.). and KEAN (A.). *American Cultural Studies. An Introduction to American Culture*, Routledge (2006), p 7.

⁵⁶ CAMPBELL (N.). and KEAN (A.). *American Cultural Studies*, p 3.

⁵⁷ *'Inevitably, this defining quality of American national identity and American nationalism focuses attention on the founding fathers and their handiwork.'* BERNSTEIN (R.B.). *The Founding Fathers Reconsidered*, Oxford University Press (2009), p 9.

⁵⁸ BERNSTEIN (R.B.). *The Founding Fathers Reconsidered*, p 10.

⁵⁹ BERNSTEIN (R.B.). *The Founding Fathers Reconsidered*, p 3.

'origin of American nationhood, republicanism, and democratic culture.'⁶⁰ Who they are exactly, is debatable. One could choose all the members of the First Continental Congress, or those who drafted and signed the Constitution. One could also pick those deemed most influential in shaping the country. Paul, for example, choses Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, John Adams, John Jay and Alexander Hamilton as key characters,⁶¹ but other authors may place other emphases. Either way, the conjured image stays the same: they are a '*staid group of white men, frozen in time*'.⁶² Since long these dominant narratives have been repeated again and again – for it is not enough these narratives exist; they need to be constantly recreated in culture.⁶³ Since long too, these dominant narratives have been challenged and rejected. Paul traces how African-Americans, women and Native Americans have opposed the traditional view of the Fathers by pointing at the relevance of their own group on the Revolutionary experience,⁶⁴ but in fact all of the narratives have essentially suffered some kind of criticism.⁶⁵ One cannot impose a view on what America and subjugate certain groups in this narrative⁶⁶ without any protest.

In response to the traditional narrative of the Founding Fathers, African-Americans pointed at Harry Washington, George Washington's slave and cook who would eventually escape, support the British, and found a colony in Sierra Leone, or at Paul

⁶⁰ PAUL (H.). *The Myths that Made America. An Introduction to American Studies*, Clausen & Bosse (2014), p 197.

⁶¹ PAUL (H.). *The Myths that Made America*, pp 201-204.

⁶² BERNSTEIN (R.B.). *The Founding Fathers Reconsidered*, Oxford University Press (2009), p 5.

⁶³ COMMAGER (H.S.). *The Search for a Usable Past and Other Essays in Historiography*, Random House (1967), p 22.

⁶⁴ PAUL (H.). *The Myths that Made America. An Introduction to American Studies*, Clausen & Bosse (2014), pp 213-232.

⁶⁵ One example is the controversy around Columbus Day, which celebrates the arrival of Columbus as starting point of American history, while ignoring the tragic events it started for Native Americans, and their history on the continent. Some have argued for a Native Peoples' Day, while other have rejected such an initiative as simply the reversal of an essentially white holiday. CAMPBELL (N.) and KEAN (A.). *American Cultural Studies. An Introduction to American Culture*, Routledge (2006), pp 24-25.

⁶⁶ For other groups are rarely completely excluded – rather they are given an inferior role in the story. CAMPBELL (N.) and KEAN (A.). *American Cultural Studies*, p 16.

Jennings, a literate slave of Madison who wrote his memoirs, or even at Sally Hemmings, as a Founding Mother. Others rejected the narrative altogether – Frederick Douglass asked in 1841 why African-Americans should celebrate the Fourth of July, that had merely confirmed slavery, in his ‘*What to a Slave is the Fourth of July?*’ They rather pick the Emancipation Proclamation by Abraham Lincoln as founding document. Women too pointed at noteworthy female founders, both during the Revolution as before and after this era. ‘*A feminist revision of the myth of the Founding Fathers not only implies adding women to the canon of male founders, but also points to the Founding Fathers as a patriarchal and paternalistic invention that claimed to speak for women and that denied their natural rights.*’⁶⁷ Native Americans, or rather, historians of Native Americans also note the ways in which the original tribes played an important role in the Revolution.⁶⁸

Needless to say that these traditional narratives and their refutations have provided for fruitful research, to the degree that it fuelled a new school in the ‘60s, called the Critical Myth and Symbol School, in response to the Myth and Symbol School. ‘*This reorientation produced less flattering accounts of the making of America than the narratives produced by the Myth and Symbol School, which now appeared as idealized and romanticized accounts of the evolution of a white patriarchal America.*’⁶⁹ Even Robert Burgoyne in his analysis of the depiction of the past in Hollywood movies, refers to the national narratives to frame his research.⁷⁰

My thesis can be situated in this research as well. On the one hand, then, a traditional narrative of the Founding Fathers exists. It is essentially a reactionary one, used primarily by neoconservative and evangelical groups, such as the Tea-Party and its

⁶⁷ PAUL (H.). *The Myths that Made America. An Introduction to American Studies*, Clausen & Bosse (2014), p 227.

⁶⁸ PAUL (H.). *The Myths that Made America*, pp 213-232.

⁶⁹ PAUL (H.). *The Myths that Made America*, pp 20-21.

⁷⁰ ‘*With questions of national, racial, and cultural identity emerging as a central topic of debate in the United States, the American past has become a contested domain in which narratives of people excluded from traditional accounts have begun to be articulated in a complex dialogue with the dominant tradition. One of the most visible manifestations of this changing narrative of a nation (...) can be found in the resurgence of films that take the American past as their subject.* BURGOYNE (R.), *Film Nation. Hollywood Looks at U.S. History*, Minneapolis (2010), p 1.

Second Revolution-flag. *'The Founding Fathers are used here as a projection screen for the present which enables a fantasy of the nation through a retrospectively imagined original, primary movement.'* On the other hand, groups ignored or subjugated by this narrative have criticized it, offered variants on it or rejected it altogether. 'Hamilton' can be seen as a mix of both. Miranda both confirms the narrative and rejects it by 'upgrading' it. In the words of Leslie Odom, Jr.: *"he's made a bunch of dead white guys make sense to a bunch of black and brown people. He's made them make sense in the context of our time, with our music."*⁷¹

Campbell and Kean said that, in order to study the texts of these narratives, one must address the questions about *'who speaks, who defines, who controls and who is included or excluded from this process.'*⁷² Miranda certainly has taken their words to heart. The question 'who lives, who dies, who tells your story' is central to his tale. Although Aaron Burr, Hamilton's friend and nemesis, acts as narrator⁷³ throughout the show, the often-repeated question is only answered at the very end:

ANGELICA: Every other founding father's story gets told

Every other founding father gets to grow old

BURR: But when you're gone, who remembers your name?

Who keeps your flame?

ANGELICA: Who tells your story? (3x)

BURR, ENSEMBLE

⁷¹ 'The making of the "Hamilton" cast album', 07:50-08:03. <http://www.cbsnews.com/videos/the-making-of-the-hamilton-cast-album-2/>

⁷² CAMPBELL (N.) and KEAN (A.). *American Cultural Studies. An Introduction to American Culture*, Routledge (2006), p 11.

⁷³ Although the word 'story-teller' is a better description, for Burr is not a distant, omnipresent author – he is part of the story himself.

WOMEN: Eliza⁷⁴

It is Eliza Hamilton, Alexander's wife, who will secure her husband's legacy by collecting his thousands pages of writing and issuing his biography. Ultimately though, the story is not told by Burr or Eliza. It is told (and recreated) by a Democratic New Yorker, a son of Puerto Rican immigrants, a Hispanic, and he will do so in a very particular way.

1. "For the First Time I felt American": Inclusion of African-Americans and Hispanics in the Narrative of the Founding Fathers

ALEXANDER Hamilton:

Non-white, 30s, Tenor-Baritone. An earnest, ambitious hothead, a man possessed. Speaks his mind, no matter the cost. Must be able to rap VERY well. Eminem meets Sweeney Todd.

ELIZA Hamilton:

Non-white, 20s - 30s, Soprano. Fiercely loyal, self-possessed, proud. Evolves from lovesick, wealthy young woman to the sole keeper of her late husband's legacy. Alicia Keys meets Elphaba.

AARON BURR:

Non-white, 20s-30s, Tenor/Baritone, sings and raps in equal measure. Our narrator. A cool, steely reserve. An orphan raised in wealth, plays his cards and opinions close to the vest. Slow to anger, but when he gets there, look out. Javert meets Mos Def.

GEORGE WASHINGTON:

Non-white, 30s-40s, Tenor/Baritone, sings and raps in equal measure. Authoritative, regal, aloof, aware of his place in history at all times. John Legend meets Mufasa.

KING GEORGE:

Caucasian, 30s-40s, Tenor, British accent. The King of England. Entitled, pouty nihilist. Sees the American Colonies as a deluded former lover, who will come crawling back. Rufus Wainwright meets King Herod in JCS.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ 'Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story', in 'Hamilton, An American Musical', 00:43-01:04.

⁷⁵ Emphasis mine. S.N. 'HAMILTON to Hold Broadway Auditions This Month; Read Lin-Manuel Miranda's Character Descriptions!', in *Broadway World*, March 12th, 2016, sf.
<http://www.broadwayworld.com/article/HAMILTON-to-Hold-Broadway-Auditions-This-Month-Read-Lin-Manuel-Mirandas-Character-Descriptions-20150312#>

The casting is clear. The actors in ‘Hamilton’ have to be non-white, whether they portray main characters or are a part of the ensemble. The only exceptions to this rule are, notably, king George III and Samuel Seabury, the famous loyalist and pamphleteer. The roles of the Founding Fathers (and Mothers) are taken by African-Americans, Hispanics, Asian-Americans, or people of mixed descent (see Image 2⁷⁶).

It is a remarkable choice, and it is even made more noteworthy when contrasted with an article by the actor Azia Ansari, published in the same year ‘Hamilton’ was conquering Broadway, in which Ansari points at the lack of roles for, or played by, minorities in movies. Referring to a report in 2013 by the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies, he claims that less than 17% of the lead film roles went to minorities, while minorities accounted for almost 40% of the American population.⁷⁷ The following year, attempts were made to boycott the Oscars, because once again no non-white actors were nominated for the prestigious awards at all.⁷⁸ And Stephanie Greco Larson showed clearly how minorities are still casted as and portrayed in stereotypical, often simple roles.⁷⁹ Compare this to Hamilton, where all of the lead roles were played by minorities (King George III, who appears in total eight minutes on the stage to sing one song and two reprises of it, and Samuel Seabury, who sings only one short song – although the actor does take a place in the ensemble during the rest of the play – could hardly be classified as lead roles) and the revolutionary character of the casting choices is clear.

⁷⁶ From left to right: Christopher Jackson (George Washington), Jasmine Cephas Jones (Peggy Schuyler/Maria Reynolds), Renée Elise Goldsberry (Angelica Schuyler), Philippa Soo (Eliza Schuyler), Lin-Manuel-Miranda (Alexander Hamilton) and Leslie Odom, Jr. (Aaron Burr).

⁷⁷ ANZARI (A.). ‘Aziz Ansari on Acting, Race and Hollywood’, in *New York Times*, November 10th, 2015, sf. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/15/arts/television/aziz-ansari-on-acting-race-and-hollywood.html?smid=fb-nytimes&smtyp=cur&_r=0

⁷⁸ S.N. ‘Oscar nominees discuss diversity in Hollywood amid the #OscarsSoWhite backlash’, in *Los Angeles Times*, February 25th, 2016, sf. <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/la-et-oscars-so-white-reaction-htmlstory.html>

⁷⁹ LARSON (S.G.). *Media and Minorities. The Politics of Race in News and Entertainment*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc (2006), 363 pp.

The casting has received a high degree of praise, but criticism as well. Recently, a lawyer in New York City filed a complaint at the Actor's Equity Association, the union representing American actors and stage managers, against 'Hamilton's' 'discrimination' against whites. The issue is mainly semantics. Most shows specify race, sex and age of the characters. However, it is discriminatory to refuse to accept white auditions.⁸⁰

Earlier on, Lin-Manuel Miranda had said that the casting was, in fact, colour-blind – he had simply thought of 'Hamilton' as a rap and hip-hop concept album, “*so by the time we got to the point where people were playing this onstage, [the casting] wasn't a question anymore.*”⁸¹ Now however, he changed his mind. Though he promised to modify the exact wording of the casting call, he also pledged that he ‘*would not back away from the show's commitment to hire a diverse cast*’, saying it is ‘*essential to the storytelling of 'Hamilton' that the principal roles, which were written for nonwhite characters (excepting King George), be performed by nonwhite actors.*’ This commitment has been identified as a critical element in the show's success. Obama noted that, through its diverse casting, ‘*the show reminds us that this nation was built by more than just a few great men — and that it is an inheritance that belongs to all of us.*’⁸²

These last words are especially noteworthy. The inheritance, the nation, belongs to all of us. It is a sentiment few African-Americans⁸³ have shared before this show. Research by David Thelen and Roy Rosenzweig has confirmed the existence of several narratives, several pasts, according to who looks back at this past. Many African-Americans do not buy into the story of the Founding Fathers. As a black government worker from

⁸⁰ PAULSON (M.). ‘Hamilton’ Producers Will Change Job Posting, but Not Commitment to Diverse Casting’, in *New York Times*, March 30th, 2016, sf. http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/31/arts/union-criticizes-hamilton-casting-call-seeking-nonwhite-actors.html?_r=0

⁸¹ HAYES (C.). ‘Hamilton’: Lin-Manuel Miranda, Questlove, Black Thought on the Runaway Broadway Hit, Its Political Relevance and Super-Fan Barack Obama’, in *The Hollywood Reporter*, July 30th, 2015, sf. <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/hamilton-lin-manuel-miranda-questlove-812239>

⁸² PAULSON (M.). ‘Hamilton’ Producers Will Change Job Posting, but Not Commitment to Diverse Casting’, in *New York Times*, 03/30/2016, sf. http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/31/arts/union-criticizes-hamilton-casting-call-seeking-nonwhite-actors.html?_r=0

⁸³ We will focus especially on African-Americans here, for Hispanics are more tied to the immigrant-theme that we shall discuss in a later part.

suburban Maryland noted: *'This has always been a stickler with me... the reference to George Washington being the father of the country... Being black, he is no father to me... When it is put that way – 'the father of our country' – that has no meaning to me. The first president, I can understand that, but the father of our country, no.'*⁸⁴ Much more than white Americans, they share a collective past with other African-Americans. When asked about remarkable figures, they mention public persons like Martin Luther King, Christ and black leaders, not family members, like white Americans often do. They do not choose Vietnam and World War II as the most important period in recent history, but the civil rights movements. More than white Americans too, they distrust official history accounts, for they often ignore, minimalize, or distort black achievements.⁸⁵ In other words, African-Americans connect with an American past (few of the respondents referred to African history), but they define this past in a different way, that is often excluded from the official history books. As such, African-Americans feel they and their ancestors, their achievements, their personal and cultural histories, are ignored.

In 'Hamilton', African-Americans are radically integrated into history, or rather, the Founding Fathers are integrated into the African-American past. Before the musical, Daveed Diggs (Marquis de Lafayette/Jefferson) says, the Founding Fathers were *"these old, white people we don't care about."*⁸⁶ However, the show makes history attractive again by removing the old barriers between people. According to Renée Elise Goldsberry (Angelica Schuyler), it gives them *'the opportunity to reclaim the history that some of us don't necessarily think is our own.'*⁸⁷ Diggs related that *'watching Chris Jackson play George Washington for a week, I left thinking that the dollar bill looked wrong. I walked out of the show*

⁸⁴ ROSENZWEIG (R.) and THELEN (D.). *The Presence of the Past. Popular Uses of History in American Life*, Columbia University Press (1998), p 153.

⁸⁵ ROSENZWEIG (R.) and THELEN (D.). *The Presence of the Past*, pp 147-162.

⁸⁶ 'Panel – Hollywood's Diversity Problem', 04:15-04:18 <http://www.cc.com/video-clips/vd9ata/the-nightly-show-with-larry-wilmore-panel--hollywood-s-diversity-problem>

⁸⁷ 'Why History Has Its Eyes on Hamilton's Diversity | TIME', 00:16-00:22 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWrRP6vRGhQ>

with a sense of ownership over American history. Part of it is seeing brown bodies play these people.'⁸⁸ He would repeat throughout numerous interviews too that, *'this is the only time I felt particularly American.'*⁸⁹

This sentiment is shared by part of the audience. Ms. Bailey, a member of a non-profit organisation that brought 640 high school students to see 'Hamilton' Off Broadway, said that she had *"students who were in tears because they felt like they were American for the first time."*⁹⁰ A teacher who had brought his class to the musical too said that, when asked how the casting affected them, the (predominantly African-American) children replied that, *"it just made me really proud, and feel good about being American. Like I belong here."*⁹¹ Lesley S. Hermann, executive director from the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History concludes that the project to bring more students from high schools in poorer neighbourhoods to the musical, would be a success *'if we've inspired a young generation to take history seriously, to get personally involved in it, and someday to serve the country as Hamilton did.'*⁹²

Who lives, who dies, who tells your story? By having African-Americans (and Hispanics, and Asian-Americans) perform the story of a white Founding Father, Lin-Manuel Miranda created a powerful effect, tapping in into the deeply-felt frustration of minorities. However, he does more. African-Americans are telling the story in their own language. The story is not only revolutionary in its colour-reversed (not colour-blind) casting, but also in its use of rap and hip-hop to bring the story to life. Rap, after all, is

⁸⁸ JANESE (B.). 'Hamilton' Roles are This Rapper's Delight', in *The Wall Street Journal*, July 5th, 2015, sf. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/hamilton-roles-are-this-rappers-delight-1436303922>

⁸⁹ See, among others, 'The making of the "Hamilton" cast album', 07:33-07:38. <http://www.cbsnews.com/videos/the-making-of-the-hamilton-cast-album-2/>

⁹⁰ PAULSON (M.). 'Students Will Get Tickets to 'Hamilton', With Its Hip-Hop-Infused History', in *New York Times*, October 27th, 2015, sf. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/27/theater/students-will-get-tickets-to-hamilton-with-its-hip-hop-infused-history.html>

⁹¹ MIRANDA (L.M.) and MCCARTER (J.). *Hamilton: the Revolution*, Grand Central Publishing (2016), p 159.

⁹² PAULSON (M.). 'Students Will Get Tickets to 'Hamilton', With Its Hip-Hop-Infused History', in *New York Times*, October 27th, 2015, sf. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/27/theater/students-will-get-tickets-to-hamilton-with-its-hip-hop-infused-history.html>

eminently the language of an oppositional culture. *‘Ultimately, rap is the voice of urban African American youth, and this voice is a form of resistance to and survival within the dominant social order.’*⁹³ Reiland Rabaka has even identified a complete hip-hop (social and political) movement as descendant of and comment on the previous civil rights movement and black power movement.⁹⁴ Van Zoonen concludes that *‘thus, rap music has been considered as the 1990s version of the civil rights movement. (...) It is also true that popular music offers a vehicle for musicians who want to express and share their political opinions.’*⁹⁵

When Jefferson and Hamilton quarrel in Washington’s cabinet in the form of a rap battle, they do so in a language the African-American youth in specific (although rap and hip hop have found their way into mainstream music as well) understands and connects to. The cast recalls when they performed the ‘Cabinet Battles’, *“they went absolutely crazy.”* (...) *Battles are definitely part of youth culture now. (...) That means that the kids felt empowered to let the competing rappers know what they thought. As Hamilton and Jefferson traded arguments (and insults), the actors heard a lot of OHHHHHs and cheers.*⁹⁶ The show is told by ethnic minorities, and especially African-Americans, for these minorities. Daveed Diggs adds: *‘Every audience is great, but the student matinees where you get to look out and see a sea full of black students, those are the best shows. Those are the shows where you feel you are performing for your family.’*⁹⁷

⁹³ MARTINEZ (T.A.). ‘Popular Culture as Oppositional Culture: Rap as Resistance’, in *Sociological Perspectives*, vol 40, n° 2 (1997), p 272.

⁹⁴ RABAKKA (R.). *The Hip Hop Movement. From R&B and the Civil Rights Movement to Rap and the Hip Hop Generation*, Lexington Books (2013), 414 pp.

⁹⁵ ZOONEN, VAN (L.). *Entertaining the Citizen: When Politics and Popular Culture Converge*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc (2005), p 50.

⁹⁶ MIRANDA (L.M.) and MCCARTER (J.). *Hamilton: the Revolution*, Grand Central Publishing (2016), p 157.

⁹⁷ JANESE (B.). ‘Hamilton’ Roles are This Rapper’s Delight’, in *The Wall Street Journal*, July 5th, 2015, sf. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/hamilton-roles-are-this-rappers-delight-1436303922>

Thence, rap and hip-hop is a language specific to certain groups.⁹⁸ However, as the authors mentioned above have noted, this language is also essentially political. It is the language of a counter-culture, of resistance. In her analysis of several raps, Theresa A. Martinez found several social and political themes running through them: distrust of the policy, fear of a corrupt system, disillusionment with the health care system, anger at racism and lost opportunities, action in the face of oppression, and a plea of recognition.⁹⁹ Rabaka even defined the hip hop movement as as political and social as the civil rights movement. Miranda continues this tradition. His musical contains several political comments, often tied to current political and social injustice. In specific, the character of John Laurens serves as a spokesperson for African Americans.

Including John Laurens in the play as one of the 'squad' of friends (together with Alexander Hamilton, Hercules Mulligan and Marquis de Lafayette), of all the possible persons Miranda could have chosen, is a good choice. Historically, Laurens was the son of Henry Laurens, an important planter in South Carolina and John Hancock's successor of as president of the Continental Congress. He met Hamilton in the army in 1777 and developed a deep (some claim homosexual) relationship with him. He is especially well-known for his abolitionist stances and his efforts to raise a black battalion. However, he would die just after the Revolutionary War was done, in a skirmish with some remaining British.¹⁰⁰

In the play, Laurens is the fiercest abolitionist of the four, and acts as a bridge between past and presence. His very first words are indicative of his function:

⁹⁸ I do not argue, however, that the show is targeted specifically at an African-American audience. It would be ridiculous to do so too, seeing the enormous success the musical has in white circles as well. However, I will claim that musical is using African-American voices to tell the story, and as such, makes a social and political statement, without alienating white audiences.

⁹⁹ MARTINEZ (T.A.). 'Popular Culture as Oppositional Culture: Rap as Resistance', in *Sociological Perspectives*, vol 40, n° 2 (1997), pp 276-279.

¹⁰⁰ CHERNOW (R.), *Alexander Hamilton*, Penguin Books (2005), pp 93-94.

LAURENS: I'm John Laurens in the place to be!

Two pints o' Sam Adams, but I'm workin' on three, uh!

Those redcoats don't want it with me!

Cuz I will pop chick-a pop these *cops* till I'm free!¹⁰¹

'Cops', naturally, was not an existing word in the 18th century. However, it serves to lay a connection (as many are laid) with the present. The (black and brown) revolutionaries are fighting the British, the oppressors, but at the same time, they are fighting the contemporary police that has become notorious for killing ethnic minorities.

However, the real connection between the past and the present does not lie in the Revolution (although it does), but in the theme of slavery and John Laurens' battle for black freedom. His is a fight that continues to this day. He is par excellence the leader of the black movement, then and now. This is stated most clearly in 'My Shot', surely one of the most political songs in the musical. In the content, the four revolutionaries (and a reluctant Aaron Burr) yell for a revolution and state their purposes for it. Where Lafayette connects the battle to the future revolution in France,¹⁰² Laurens declares that

LAURENS: But we'll never be truly free

Until those in bondage have the same rights as you and me

You and I. Do or die. Wait till I sally in

On a stallion with the first black battalion.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Emphasis mine. 'Aaron Burr, Sir!' in 'Hamilton, an American Musical', 01:31-01:43.

¹⁰² 'I dream of life without a monarchy/ The unrest in France will lead to 'onarchy?' 'My Shot', in 'Hamilton, an American Musical', 01:34-0:41.

¹⁰³ 'My Shot', in 'Hamilton, an American Musical', 01:58-02:07.

The theme continues into the next song, ‘the Story of Tonight’, when Laurens initiates a line that will be repeated throughout the play.

LAURENS: Raise a glass to freedom
Something they can never take away
No matter what they tell you
Raise a glass to the four of us

LAURENS: Tomorrow there’ll be more of us

MULLIGAN

MULLIGAN: Telling the story of tonight¹⁰⁴

LAURENS

LAFAYETTE

The song can be heard as another version of the ‘Drink With Me’-number in *Les Misérables*, a nostalgic tavern-scene emphasising the historic importance of the moment – but, as often in this musical, it can be read in the present as well. ‘*Tomorrow there’ll be more of us/telling the story of tonight,*’ sing African-American and Hispanic actors in a play about the Revolution and the fight for freedom. Indeed there will be. Who is telling this story?

John Laurens, at least, would not. In ‘Yorktown’¹⁰⁵ he wonders together with ‘*black and white soldiers*’ whether the defeat of the British ‘*really means freedom*’, only to be rebuked by

¹⁰⁴ ‘The Story of Tonight’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 00:23-00:43.

George Washington: '*not yet.*'¹⁰⁶ His fight is not yet over, and it would not end in the piece. His last song is worth mentioning at length. Standing aside and addressing the audience, Laurens repeats the motive from 'The Story of Tonight', while Hamilton receives word of his death:

LAURENS: I may not live to see our glory.

ELIZA: Alexander? There's a letter for you.

HAMILTON: It's from John Laurens. I'll read it later.

LAURENS: But I will gladly join the fight.

ELIZA: No. It's from his father.

HAMILTON: His father?

LAURENS: And when our children tell our story.

HAMILTON: Will you read it?

LAURENS: They'll tell the story of tonight.

¹⁰⁵ 'Yorktown', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 02:53-02:59.

¹⁰⁶ A reference to Washington's slaves, whom he'd only liberate after his death. In the piece, this is acknowledged by Washington when he bows respectfully for Eliza when she sings 'I speak out against slavery', recognizing that he did not. See 'Hamilton'; Zalmay Khalilzad', 28:01-28:19.
<https://charlieroose.com/videos/26494>

ELIZA: "On Tuesday the 27th, my son was killed in a gunfight against British troops retreating from South Carolina. The war was already over. As you know, John dreamed of emancipating and recruiting 3000 men for the first all-black military regiment. His dream of freedom for these men dies with him."

LAURENS: Tomorrow there'll be more of us...¹⁰⁷

Laurens' last song is highly emotional in its attachment, enlisting the audience in the battle. The fight is not yet over. African Americans and other minorities have not yet reached their freedom. *'Tomorrow there'll be more of us.'* It is simultaneously a threat and a reassurance.

Though John Laurens is the embodiment of this battle par excellence, his theme is shared with Hamilton. When Laurens cries that *'we'll never be free until we end slavery!'*¹⁰⁸ Hamilton echoes his words. However, Hamilton, as Founding Father, does not connect the present injustice and social movements with slavery (although he does), as much as with the Revolution.¹⁰⁹ He is assisted by Laurens anew. Once again, the political song 'My Shot' will serve as an example. When Laurens sings:

¹⁰⁷ 'Tomorrow There'll be More of Us', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical'. This song is the only one not included in the cast album. Miranda says he wants to reserve a treat for those visiting the play, but one could wonder too whether he wants to prevent spoiling an emotionally charged moment by releasing the music alone. Had I heard the song before seeing it performed so soberly in the theater, I doubt the message would have hit home as hard as it did.

¹⁰⁸ 'Yorktown', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 01:38-01:40.

¹⁰⁹ He describes the four revolutionaries as a 'bunch of revolutionary manumission abolitionists'. 'My Shot', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 02:33-02:37.

LAURENS: Rise up!

When you're living on your knees, you rise up

Tell your brother that he's gotta rise up

Tell your sister that she's gotta rise up

it is not hard to connect the struggle of the revolutionaries with that of the (African-American) brothers and sisters Laurens addresses. This theme is picked up immediately by Hamilton in his response to Laurens.

HAMILTON: Scratch that

This is not a moment, it's the movement

Where all the hungriest brothers with

Something to prove went?

Foes oppose us, we take an honest stand

We roll like Moses, claimin' our promised land

And? If we win our independence?

Is that a guarantee of freedom for our descendants?

Or will the blood we shed begin an endless

Cycle of vengeance and death with no defendants?

I know the action in the street is excitin'

But Jesus, between all the bleedin' 'n fightin'

I've been readin' 'n writin'¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ 'My Shot', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 04:14-04:41.

Annotators on genius.com have drawn interesting parallels with the current political situation. Firstly, the *'this is not a moment, it's the movement'* is a catchword referring to Black Lives Matter, a grassroots movement that rose in reaction to police brutality towards minorities.¹¹¹ It may tell us the remainder of the verse has a second, revolutionary interpretation. Moses is a figure often mentioned by African-Americans as a leader, someone who will free them from their slavery. The 'independence' and 'freedom' refers to the Emancipation Proclamation, which if followed by the Jim Crow laws and segregation. The 'action in the street', the manifestations, the riots, may be exciting, but one should also look to other structural solutions (reading and writing).¹¹²

Such an interpretation is not far-fetched. In December 2015, the cast performed the song 'Wait for It' for the theatre non-profit Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS (BCEFA) with explicit references to the contemporary unrest and the Black Lives Matter Movement, by posing in images of struggle and resistance, such as the famous 'Hands Up Don't Shoot'-pose that went viral after the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson of the same year.¹¹³ It seems clear the musical is not an apolitical piece.

Finally, Hamilton (both the character and the play) calls for two Revolutions. In his last soliloquy, his last words (simultaneously last ones he speaks in the play), are a repetition of Laurens' last words – *'raise a glass to freedom'*¹¹⁴ – and as such, with his last breath, Hamilton reminds the audience that the Revolution is not yet over. *'So there will be a revolution in this century,'*¹¹⁵ he sang before. In fact, the musical can be seen as a sketch for what this new Revolution, this new America, will look like: the founders will be

¹¹¹ See, for example, ELIGON (J.). 'One Slogan, Many Methods: Black Lives Matter Enters Politics', in *New York Times*, November 18th, 2015, sf. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/19/us/one-slogan-many-methods-black-lives-matter-enters-politics.html?partner=rss&emc=rss&_r=1

¹¹² Annotation to: *'This is not a moment, it's the movement (...) I've been readin' and writing'*, in 'My Shot'. <http://genius.com/7872985>

¹¹³ ROMANO (A.). 'Hamilton' Cast does a Modern Version of 'Wait For It' Tied to Current Political Injustice', in *Daily Dot*, December 20th, 2015, sf. <http://www.dailydot.com/entertainment/hamilton-bcefa-performance-wait-for-it/>

¹¹⁴ 'The World Was Wide Enough', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 03:05-03:08.

¹¹⁵ 'My Shot', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 01:00-01:03.

African-Americans, Hispanics and Asian-Americans, who, having fought the two white actors, create a new society. It will be an post-racial society, as the first black president envisioned it, for, as Chris Hayes noted, *'the show somehow really does feel like Obama's America.'*¹¹⁶ The musical is thus simultaneously a depiction of the past and of the future. In essence, it is the casting and the music and the messages that *'makes Hamilton look like a message beamed back from Future America.'*¹¹⁷

2. "Im 'a Compel Him to Include Women in the Sequel": Inclusion of Women in the Narrative of the Founding Fathers

Search 'Hamilton' on Youtube, and comparably few movies from the show itself will pop up. Only two songs are recorded with images and released on the net. One of them is a ballad, the other a battle song.¹¹⁸ Should an unsuspecting surfer happen to find the latter one, he (or she) might notice many things. The surfer might be intrigued by the rap and hip-hop tunes that seemingly fit the characters, dressed in 18th-century frocks and gowns, so badly. He or she might also note the many characters of colour, both in the ensemble and in the leading roles, who fill the stage.

However, the eye of the viewer, however, would eventually fall on the women in the ensemble. It might take a while though. Dressed in the same white, blue and red costume as the male soldiers, they may not be immediately identified as women – but look but a little longer, and the long hair and red lipstick and distinctively female features will become clear. In 'Hamilton's' Revolution, women are soldiers (and witnesses of cabinet battles and voters and members of the Continental Congress) as much as men.

¹¹⁶ HAYES (C.). 'Hamilton': Lin-Manuel Miranda, Questlove, Black Thought on the Runaway Broadway Hit, Its Political Relevance and Super-Fan Barack Obama', in *The Hollywood Reporter*, July 30th, 2015, sf. <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/hamilton-lin-manuel-miranda-questlove-812239>

¹¹⁷ MIRANDA (L.M.) and MCCARTER (J.). *Hamilton: the Revolution*, Grand Central Publishing (2016), p 160.

¹¹⁸ 'Yorktown', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical'

The integration of women in traditionally male roles could easily earn the show the stamp of 'feminist'. In fact, observers have noted the 'good female roles'¹¹⁹ reserved for women in the musical, with special attention to Eliza's special status as perhaps the true heroine of the tale.¹²⁰ 'Hamilton' is as much about women as about African-Americans and Hispanics, and as such it integrated women in the narrative of the Founding Fathers as well. "We get to show who the Founding Mothers are and what they did," Renée Elise Goldsberry says, "and they were not just sowing flags. They were actually the muses, like Angelica Schuyler was to Thomas Jefferson."¹²¹

It would be easy to see the musical as feminist. This may be exactly how Miranda would like to portray his show. Just like he acts as a spokesperson for minorities on his twitter, so too does he sprout feminist comments every now and then. For example, he a supporter of abortion rights, as his tweet shows in which he lauds the three female justices in 'the room where it happens' in the Supreme Court, during the case Planned Parenthood vs Casey in 1992.¹²² Together with Emma Watson, he rapped about equal pay for the UN gender equality campaign that she promotes.¹²³ And in honour of the Women's History Month, the three actresses of the musical (Renée Elise Goldsberry, Phillipa Soo and Jasmine Cephas Jones) rapped and sang feminist quotes.¹²⁴ In the end, we could just rewrite the Story of Tonight to have women sing it (as one fan did¹²⁵), say

¹¹⁹ "Hamilton"; Zalmay Khalilzad', 13:16-13:18. <https://charlierose.com/videos/26494>

¹²⁰ SCHULMAN (M.). 'The Women of 'Hamilton'' in *New Yorker*, August 6th, 2015, sf <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-women-of-hamilton>

¹²¹ "Hamilton"; Zalmay Khalilzad', 21:39 -21:55. <https://charlierose.com/videos/26494>

¹²² MIRANDA, Lin-Manuel (@Lin_Manuel): "Grateful these Justices are in the room where it happens." March 4th, 2016 – 07:32. Tweet. https://twitter.com/Lin_Manuel/status/705777830919974913

¹²³ WAXMAN (O.B.). 'Watch Emma Watson Beatbox While Lin-Manuel Miranda Freestyles About Equal Pay', in *Time*, March 17th, 2016, sf. <http://time.com/4263187/emma-watson-lin-manuel-miranda-hamilton-musical/>

¹²⁴ GLAMOUR (@Glamourmag): "Watch the women of @HamiltonMusical sing and rap feminist quotes for #WomensHistoryMonth." March 3th, 2016 – 14:13. Tweet. <https://twitter.com/glamourmag/status/705516503295066112>

¹²⁵ Blog post, February 19th, 2016. <http://littleredloki.tumblr.com/post/139640579555/the-story-of-tonight-schuyler-sisters-rewrite> (consulted 05/10/2016)

that this play is as much about the Founding Mothers as about African-Americans and Hispanics, and be done with it.

The truth is more complex. Of course, there are feminist moments in the story. Angelica Schuyler is by far the most feminist character in the play. As oldest of the five daughters of Dutch aristocrat Philip Schuyler, she is the ‘wittiest’¹²⁶ and the first to present herself in ‘the Schuyler Sisters’ (although the tone she and her sister Peggy use is lower than that of Eliza, who forms vocally the top of the triangle, and is as such the most important of the three sister). She is also the one, in the same song, to make the most feminist statement:

ANGELICA: I’ve been reading Common Sense by Thomas Paine

So men say that I’m intense or I’m insane

You want a revolution? I want a revelation

So listen to my declaration:

ELIZA, PEGGY: “We hold these truths to be self-evident

ANGELICA That all men are created equal”

ANGELICA: And when I meet Thomas Jefferson

ENSEMBLE: Unh!

ANGELICA: I’m ‘a compel him to include women in the sequel!’¹²⁷

¹²⁶ ‘Satisfied’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 03:10-03:12.

¹²⁷ ‘The Schuyler Sisters’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 01:37-01:55.

Angelica simultaneously suggests she is educated – a trait not universally accepting to be fitting for women in the 18th century – by offering her own (political) comment on Jefferson’s arguably most famous line in the Declaration of Independence. In doing so, she foreshadows the Women’s Rights Convention at Seneca Falls in 1848, when women assembled and drafted the Declaration of Sentiments, modelled after the Declaration of Independence (and in a way, its sequel).¹²⁸ Annotators on genius.com also refer to ‘Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen’ in 1791 as a sequel to the ‘Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen’, the famous French Declaration that was drafted partially by Thomas Jefferson and Marquis de Lafayette.¹²⁹

In the second act, she’s the one Hamilton shares his political thoughts with.¹³⁰ She is the one who understands him best, who can follow his swift ideas. When she first meets Hamilton, she sings her name in her own melody, but when Hamilton introduces his in the same tune his name will always be sung throughout the play, she is quick to copy these notes in her response.¹³¹ It is a first musical indication that Angelica, perhaps more than everyone else in the show, is on Hamilton’s (elevated) intellectual level.

And yet. Even as an intellectual, powerful woman, Angelica will be conquered by love - and a tragic one. One of the most haunting songs in the musical, ‘Satisfied’, takes place just after Alexander’s and Eliza’s wedding. Beginning with the speech by Angelica as bridesmaid, the whole scene than reverts and the previous song is played out again, only this time narrated from Angelica’s standpoint.¹³² In the song, the audience learns that Angelica has actually fallen in love with Hamilton, but realizes that, one, she is her

¹²⁸ REGER (J.). ‘Women’s Movement: an Overview’, in BRONNER (S.J.) (ed.), *Encyclopedia of American Studies*, Hopkins University Press (2015), sf. <http://eas-ref.press.jhu.edu/view?aid=515&from=search&query=seneca%20falls&link=search%3Freturn%3D1%26query%3Dseneca%2520falls%26section%3Ddocument%26doctype%3Dall>

¹²⁹ Annotation to: ‘*So listen to my declaration (...) Work!*’, in ‘The Schuyler Sisters’. <http://genius.com/7857740>

¹³⁰ ‘Take a Break’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 00:00-00:19.

¹³¹ Annotation to: ‘*Where’s your fam’ly from? Unimportant*’, in ‘Satisfied’. <http://genius.com/7910122>

¹³² Who tells the story?

father's heir and Hamilton is penniless; two, *'he's after me cuz I'm a Schuyler sister. That elevates his status'* and that, three, she can never let Eliza know she set him up with her, because, if she knew, no matter how love-struck she is, she would give him up for Angelica.¹³³ It is a potent song, the first of two ultimate sacrifices (the other made by Eliza at the end of the play), both performed by women. At the close of the second act, we learn that she has eventually married for money and is sailing to London, where she will yearn every day for Hamilton's letters and news of her country of birth.¹³⁴ She will never be satisfied.

It is a potent song – but it took a great deal of historical bending to make it work. In fact, Philip Schuyler did have three sons, taking the social pressure off Angelica's shoulders. Moreover, 18th-century Angelica did not languish in a loveless marriage, giving the love of her life to her sister – on the contrary, she would elope with John Barker Church, a wealthy merchant who had fled London because of scandals, but who would return there with his wife and enter high society.¹³⁵ She would have a very social life, entertaining even the later king George IV, although it is true, according to Chernow, that she often longed for her home.¹³⁶ She did flirt with Hamilton, but also with Jefferson, and other men.

One could think of reasons for these profound changes in a musical that prides itself on having even the correct historical street names (Mercer Street): including the side-story of Angelica's eloping would divert attention from the main story and would only complicate the play, Angelica's fate illustrates the social conventions and restraints

¹³³ 'Satisfied' in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 03:02-04:03.

¹³⁴ *'I am sailing off to London. I'm accompanied by someone / Who always pays / I have found a wealthy husband who will keep / Me in comfort for all my days / He is not a lot of fun, but there's no one who / Can match you for turn of phrase / My Alexander.'* 'Non-Stop', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 03:30-03:47.

¹³⁵ CHERNOW (R.), *Alexander Hamilton*, Penguin Books (2005), pp 129-135.

¹³⁶ CHERNOW (R.), *Alexander Hamilton*, pp 281-282.

women have suffered from, the sacrifice provides extra emotional tension...¹³⁷ However, the result is the same. Angelica Schuyler, who eloped with the man she loved, who was presented in such a feminist way in the play, is reduced to a love-struck woman, tragically longing for the hero of the play and mooning over a strategically played comma in one of his letters.¹³⁸

At the same time, she sacrifices herself not for Hamilton, but for her sister. “*I know my sister like I know my own mind/ You will never find anyone as trusting or as kind,*”¹³⁹ she sings when she decides to introduce Hamilton to Eliza, and she sings it again when she turns him away after he has published the Reynolds Pamphlet¹⁴⁰ in order to go and comfort her sister.¹⁴¹ In the end, then, the message is ambiguous. On the one hand, it celebrates sisterly love even above romantic love and it depicts Angelica as a strong, political woman with clearly feminist ideals, tragically trapped in a man’s world but playing by its rules; but it does not show her in her full potential, in her full agency.

Angelica, though one of the strongest characters, is not the heroine of the play. Her sister, Eliza, is. Without her, the story says, we would not even have a tale to tell. Hamilton would have been forgotten, vilified and ignored by his political enemies. It is thanks to Eliza, who collected all his letters and writings and issued a biography, that he lives on in our memories. Miranda, ‘*by implicitly equating Eliza’s acts of narration with his*

¹³⁷ Lin-Manuel Miranda says it would be stronger if they could not marry because of societal standards. ‘Hamilton: Lin-Manuel Miranda On The Play’s Historical Inaccuracies’, 1:57.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YRJEOSyCfvQ&list=RDFHX-BYBnEc0&index=7>

¹³⁸ ANGELICA: ‘*In a letter I received from you two weeks ago/ I noticed a comma in the/ middle of a phrase. / It changed the meaning. Did you intend this? / One stroke and you’ve consumed my waking days. It says:*’

HAMILTON/ANGELICA: “‘*My dearest Angelica*”

ANGELICA: ‘*With a comma after “dearest.” You’ve written*’

HAMILTON/ANGELICA: “‘*My dearest, Angelica.*”’ ‘Take a Break’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 02:31-02:41.

¹³⁹ ‘Satisfied’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 03:48-03:55

¹⁴⁰ In which he extensively describes having had an affair with Maria Reynolds, a married woman, during his marriage with Eliza.

¹⁴¹ ‘*I know my sister like I know my own mind/ You will never find anyone as trusting or as kind/ I love my sister more than anything in this life/ I will choose her happiness over mine every time/ Put what we had aside/ I’m standing at her side/ You could never be satisfied/ God, I hope you’re satisfied.*’ ‘The Reynolds Pamphlet’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 01:08-01:30.

own, he's acknowledging the women who built the country alongside the men. You're left wondering whether the "Hamilton" of the title isn't just Alexander, but Eliza, too.'¹⁴²

Eliza is the heart of the story, and her special status is emphasized by the cast and recognized by observers.¹⁴³ When Charlie Rose speaks about the 'good, female roles,' he turns to Phillipa Soo (Eliza Schuyler): "*Especially. Especially. Here is a woman of dignity.*"¹⁴⁴ She is the beginning and the end in Chernow's book, dedicated to his own wife, the 'best of wives and best of women', a phrase borrowed from Hamilton's last letter to Eliza.¹⁴⁵ Contrary to most biographies, he does not begin his account with Hamilton – not Alexander, at least. His first chapter focuses on Eliza as old woman on the eve of the Civil War, treating her with respect and admiration. It is this passage Miranda will tearfully read on his first Ham4Ham show.¹⁴⁶ In the musical too, she is the centrepiece of the story. She even puts Washington, who by all conventions should have been the most respected figure on the scene, to shame, when she sings that she "*spoke out against slavery*" while Washington, standing behind her, has to acknowledge he did not.¹⁴⁷

However, ultimately, it is not *her* story. She only becomes the story-teller in the very last song – it is Aaron Burr who narrates the rest of the story. After 'the Schuyler Sisters',

¹⁴² SCHULMAN (M.). 'The Women of 'Hamilton'' in *New Yorker*, August 6th, 2015, sf.

<http://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-women-of-hamilton>

¹⁴³ One fan noted: 'Lin Manuel Miranda could have made the entire musical all about Alexander Hamilton and focused the finale on him and his death but he chose to write it about Eliza and how she coped after his death, bringing up every single thing she did to try to honor Alexander's memory and make sure we didn't forget him even though she figured she wouldn't be remembered because she was a woman in a time of oppressing sexism and that still means so much to me.' Blog post, February 20th, 2016. <http://ghzerny.tumblr.com/post/138577420402/what-they-say-im-fine-what-they-mean-lin-manuel>

¹⁴⁴ 'Hamilton'; Zalmay Khalilzad', 13:18:13:23. <https://charlierose.com/videos/26494>

¹⁴⁵ The phrase would of course feature in the musical: 'Best of Wives and Best of Women', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical'. It would also adorn the grave of Valerie Chernow, who passed away in 2006. MIRANDA (L.M.) and MCCARTER (J.). *Hamilton: the Revolution*, Grand Central Publishing (2016), p 168.

¹⁴⁶ Short shows performed to entertain the people participating in the Hamilton lottery in the hopes of obtaining tickets for the show.

<https://www.facebook.com/HamiltonMusical/videos/1188852887808253/>

¹⁴⁷ 'Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story?', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical' and 'Hamilton'; Zalmay Khalilzad', 28:01-28:19. <https://charlierose.com/videos/26494>

she is typified as ‘helpless’,¹⁴⁸ being introduced on the ball by Hamilton and Burr almost like a trophy.¹⁴⁹ Falling in love with Hamilton instantly, she tells her sister that “*this one’s mine*”, but she not undertake anything. It is Angelica who will introduce Hamilton to her, and it is her father who will have to grant permission for the marriage. During the whole song, she is and remains helpless.¹⁵⁰

The story is not her own. Setting up the basis for one of her recurrent themes, she has to ask Hamilton to let her become a ‘part of the narrative’.¹⁵¹ Even when she does, it in a male narrative. Eliza is, par excellence, the ideal house-wife. Contrary to her sister, she is portrayed exclusively in domestic settings. She teaches her son, Philip, to play the piano¹⁵² and mourns for him when he dies in a duel,¹⁵³ but she never meddles in the political pursuits of her husband. As such, she perfectly fits into the expectations of the patriarchy, that ‘*women were only represented by the ‘cardinal virtues’ of ‘piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity*’,¹⁵⁴ and confirms the image of women in American government textbooks that Ellen Boneparth criticized in her article, in which female political behaviour is largely ignored or misrepresented, or women as passive recipients of political rights.¹⁵⁵ Women have no place in politics. After all, they, as the ‘*traditional symbols of innocence and virtue, often figure to demarcate the opposition of self-centered politics with everyday humanity and morality.*’¹⁵⁶ Eliza is pure and supportive. She is always lingering

¹⁴⁸ ‘Helpless’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’.

¹⁴⁹ BURR: ‘*And the Schuyler sisters are the envy of all/ Yo, if you can marry a sister, you’re rich, son.*’

HAMILTON: ‘*Is it a question of if, Burr, or which one?*’ ‘A Winter’s Ball’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 00:56-01:04.

¹⁵⁰ ‘Helpless’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’.

¹⁵¹ ‘*Oh, let me be a part of the narrative/ in the story they will write some day.*’ ‘That Would be Enough’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 02:14-02:20.

¹⁵² ‘Take a Break’ in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 04:46.

¹⁵³ ‘Stay Alive (Reprise)’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 01:52.

¹⁵⁴ CAMPBELL (N.) and KEAN (A.). *American Cultural Studies. An Introduction to American Culture*, Routledge (2006), p 206.

¹⁵⁵ BONEPARTH (E.). ‘The Image of Women in American Government Textbooks’, in *Teaching Political Science*, vol 7, n° 4 (1980), pp 371-388.

¹⁵⁶ ZOONEN, VAN (L.). *Entertaining the Citizen: When Politics and Popular Culture Converge*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc (2005), p 87.

near the edges of the theatre, encouraging Hamilton or struggling to keep up with his pace, but her part in the narrative is confined to this support. She takes no active role.¹⁵⁷

Eliza is virtuous. Hamilton, as politician, is not necessarily. After refusing Eliza's plea to take a break from his financial plan,¹⁵⁸ he enters into an affair with Maria Reynolds, the mysterious, silken, mistreated wife of James Reynolds.¹⁵⁹ It was not entirely his fault of course: he just '*hadn't slept in a week/I was weak (...) Longing for Angelica/missing my wife/that's when miss Maria Reynolds walked into my life*'.¹⁶⁰ She tells him how her husband had mistreated her, and when he offers her a loan and walked her home, she '*turned red/she led me to her bed/let her legs spread*'.¹⁶¹ No matter how many times Hamilton tells himself to '*say no to this*', he ends up in her bed anyway. '*I wish I could say that was the last time/I said that last time. It became a pastime*'.¹⁶²

Hamilton is let off the hook rather easily. The song is constructed in such a way that the audience feels *pity* for Hamilton— he had just been tired and lonely (even though it had been entirely his own fault for adamantly refusing to take a holiday, as Angelica and Eliza had begged him to in the previous song) and Maria Reynolds was simply irresistible. Besides, she may have been in league with her husband, who was quick to blackmail poor Hamilton.¹⁶³

Hamilton made a mistake by stepping into this affair. His most crucial mistake, however, was not stepping into the affaire – it was making it public. Fearful that his political enemies would find his payments to James Reynolds and accuse him of

¹⁵⁷ Van Zoonen, together with other authors, has noted the image Eliza represents as supportive, apolitical wife, is one of the obstacles female politicians have to overcome. ZOONEN, VAN (L.). *Entertaining the Citizen: When Politics and Popular Culture Converge*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc (2005), pp 87-102.

¹⁵⁸ 'Take a Break', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical'.

¹⁵⁹ 'Say No to This', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 04:46.

¹⁶⁰ 'Say No to This', in Hamilton: an American Musical', 00:23-00:35.

¹⁶¹ 'Say No to This', in Hamilton: an American Musical', 01:13 -01:16.

¹⁶² 'Say No to This', in Hamilton: an American Musical', 01:59 -02:05.

¹⁶³ It should be noted that neither is Maria Reynolds blamed entirely for the affaire. In fact, whether or not she was scheming with her husband, or whether she truly loved Hamilton and was tricked as well, is left entirely to the discretion of the audience. We never get to hear her voice. Every time she speaks, she is introduced by Hamilton's "she said". It is Hamilton telling this particular story.

speculation, he tries to secure his legacy by telling everyone he had done nothing illegal – and thus by telling everyone exactly why he had made those payments. In full detail. 95 pages. In ‘the Reynolds Pamphlet’, it becomes clear that in clearing his name, Hamilton has forsaken his political future. ‘*He’s never gon’ be president now*’, Jefferson and Madison gleefully sing throughout the song, but ‘*hey, at least he was honest with our money.*’¹⁶⁴ All of the characters are on the stage again (even George III makes an entrance), and Angelica makes clear that she will support Eliza over Hamilton¹⁶⁵ – but Eliza herself is conspicuously absent. Only at the very end of the song, the ensemble spares a thought for ‘*his poor wife.*’¹⁶⁶

It is in this moment though that Eliza appears at her strongest. No longer does she want to be a part of this male narrative. Finally taking full agency, she sings that:

ELIZA: I’m erasing myself from the narrative

Let future historians wonder how Eliza

Reacted when you broke her heart¹⁶⁷

Eliza, in an act of ultimate contempt, burns the letters he wrote to her, and in doing so, she destroys exactly what is dearest to him – she destroys his words, his memories, his legacy. In this ballad, she makes a powerful choice. She takes full control. In a play where all the characters struggle with how they will be perceived by their descendants,

¹⁶⁴ ‘The Reynolds Pamphlet’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 01:40-01:46.

¹⁶⁵ ‘*I love my sister more than anything in this life / I will choose her happiness over mine every time / Put what we had aside / I’m standing at her side*’. The Reynolds Pamphlet’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 01:14-01:25.

¹⁶⁶ The Reynolds Pamphlet’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 02:08-02:09.

¹⁶⁷ ‘Burn’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 02:19-02:32.

Eliza *'destroys the letters that might have given historians ammunition against her, or evidence from which to draw conclusions—conclusions that she would have no control over.'*¹⁶⁸

'Burn' is not the conclusion of Eliza's story. Grieving over her husband's affaire and her son's death, she eventually forgives Hamilton. It is an emotional moment, and it is made clear Eliza is almost supernatural in her forgiveness,¹⁶⁹ - but it brings her back in the male narrative. In the last song of the musical, she steps forward again.

BURR/ANGELICA: Who tells your story?

WOMEN: Eliza

ELIZA: I put myself back in the narrative¹⁷⁰

Surviving her husband by over fifty years, she will be the one to secure the legacy her husband had been so worried about. She interviews the soldiers who fought with him, she struggles through his thousands pages of writing, she continues his abolitionist plans... Eliza is the ultimate transferor of Hamilton's story – but she does so by erasing herself out of it, not to divert any attention from her husband's achievements. Ultimately, we know almost nothing about her.¹⁷¹ The 'best of wives and best of women' is the one who sacrifices herself, her history, her story, for her husband.

¹⁶⁸ Annotation to: *'I'm erasing myself from the narrative (...)' 'They don't get to know what I said'*, in 'Burn'.

<http://genius.com/7863117>

¹⁶⁹ ANGELICA: *'There are moments that the words don't reach/ There is a grace too powerful to name/ We push away what we can never understand/ We push away the unimaginable/ They are standing in the garden/ Alexander by Eliza's side/ She takes his hand.'*

ELIZA: *'It's quiet uptown'*

ENSEMBLE: *'Forgiveness. Can you imagine?'* 'It's Quiet Uptown', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 03:13-3:50.

¹⁷⁰ 'Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story?', in 'Hamilton; an American Musical', 00:54-01:05.

¹⁷¹ CHERNOW (R.), *Alexander Hamilton*, Penguin Books (2005), p 728.

Of course, this is not entirely true. As often in its treatment of women, the musical here too is ambiguous. Eliza does not entirely erase herself. At the end of her song, she points at her own achievements. ‘*I established the first private orphanage in New York City*’¹⁷² – an orphanage that exists till the present day.¹⁷³ Still, her ultimate role is not as founder of the orphanage. It is the one as story-teller. ‘*The last sound heard is Eliza’s gasp—perhaps her last breath, or her joy at her dying vision of Alexander waiting for her—as the theater goes dark.(...)* There may even be some meaning on a further meta-narrative level. In this song, Eliza has become the extradiegetic narrator (lit. narrating from outside the world of the story). So in a way, she is literally looking out into the theater and seeing the crowds of people that have come to see and hear her and her husband’s story in this amazing play that’s being performed for packed audiences and turning the entire world of theater on its head. *THEY’RE TELLING YOUR STORY. YOU MADE IT, GIRL, YOU MADE IT.*’¹⁷⁴

One could perfectly argue the musical is feminist. Angelica is a well-rounded, political, intellectual figure, whereas Eliza is recognized as heroine of the piece and the reason why we have the play in the first place. Certainly, the women of ‘Hamilton’ are treated with respect. At the same time, the ultimate message is that these women need to sacrifice themselves – Angelica gives up her chance on love, and Eliza, by transferring, by *becoming* her husband’s story, sacrifices her own narrative.¹⁷⁵ Of course, Miranda is bound to history. Eliza did survive Alexander by half a century, and she did save his legacy. How one ultimately perceived the musical, depends on the person seeing it¹⁷⁶ – but at the

¹⁷² ‘Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story?’, in ‘Hamilton; an American Musical’, 02:22-02:28.

¹⁷³ This orphanage, however, also serves her husband. “*In their eyes I see you, Alexander*”. ‘Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story?’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 02:37-02:40.

¹⁷⁴ Annotation to: ‘*Time*’, in ‘Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story?’ <http://genius.com/7905813>

¹⁷⁵ And as such, the apolitical, domestic Eliza (in the private sphere) is seen as the ‘best of women’, over the political and intellectual Angelica (in the public sphere).

¹⁷⁶ Schulman notes: ‘*Is it a feminist ending? Almost. The notion that men do the deeds and the women tell their stories isn’t exactly Germaine Greer-worthy. (...)*But, in placing Eliza front and center, Miranda is reinforcing his over-

very least, one could argue that the musical is less revolutionary in its treatment of women than in its treatment of African-Americans and Hispanics.

3. "Another Immigrant, Comin' Up from the Bottom": Inclusion of Immigrants in the Narrative of the Founding Fathers

Immigrants were never excluded from the Founding Fathers-narrative in the same way African-Americans and women are.¹⁷⁷ After all, in the popular imagination, immigrants belong to the end of the 19th and especially the 20th century, not to the age of the Founding Fathers. However, much like African-Americans and women, their role in history and in the current society is largely ignored. Immigrants are seen as a problem, as foreigners who need to be kept out. The main story forgets that America was, essentially, populated by immigrants. By placing emphasis on the immigrant-background of certain Founding Fathers, Miranda legitimizes their place in America – but he does so by repeating traditional images.

Hamilton is an immigrant. It is the essence of his character. Miranda, himself a proud son of Puerto Rican immigrants (see supra), is adamant about it – he was an “*an immigrant who came here to build a life for himself and ended up helping to build the nation. He is the prototype for millions of men and women who followed him, and continue to arrive today.*”¹⁷⁸. Hamilton was an immigrant, and his story thus, is an immigrant’s story. The very first words in the musical pose a question:

all project, which is in part to displace the founding story as the province of white men. SCHULMAN (M.). ‘The Women of ‘Hamilton’ in *New Yorker*, August 6th, 2015, sf. <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-women-of-hamilton>

¹⁷⁷ Whereas Paul did discuss the protest of African-Americans and women in reaction to the traditional narrative of the Founding Fathers, he does not include immigrants in this chapter. PAUL (H.). *The Myths that Made America. An Introduction to American Studies*, Clausen & Bosse (2014), 450 pp.

¹⁷⁸ MIRANDA (L.M.) and MCCARTER (J.). *Hamilton: the Revolution*, Grand Central Publishing (2016), p 15. He would repeat this throughout the book too.

BURR: How does a bastard, orphan, son of a whore and a
Scotsman, dropped in the middle of a
Forgotten spot in the Caribbean¹⁷⁹ by providence
Impoverished, in squalor
Grow up to be a hero and a scholar?¹⁸⁰

Indeed, how does an immigrant from the Caribbean become ‘Someone’ in the US? It is a question many immigrants still struggle with today. For Hamilton, the first step was to get away from his hometown. Writing a poem about a hurricane that destroyed his town, the young man was sent by his community to the mainland, to New York to obtain an education. There he is greeted by a less than enthusiastic Burr.

BURR: The ship is in the harbor now,
See if you can spot him.
Another immigrant,
Comin’ up from the bottom.¹⁸¹

The first song of the play performs several functions – it introduces the music and the characters, it gives the protagonist’s backstory, it asks central questions¹⁸² - but above all, it portrays Hamilton as an, initially invisible,¹⁸³ immigrant, ‘*comin’ up from the bottom*’. It

¹⁷⁹ More precisely, Saint-Kitts and Nevis and later St. Croix, but by referring to the Caribbean in general, Miranda can connect the historical setting with the contemporary immigration flows, that consists also of immigrants from Puerto Rico and the Caribbean.

¹⁸⁰ ‘Alexander Hamilton’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 00:04-00:18.

¹⁸¹ ‘Alexander Hamilton’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 03:21-03:28.

¹⁸² Already in this song, the theme of ‘legacy’ is present: ‘*When America sings for you / Will they know what you overcame? / Will they know you rewrote the game?*’ and ‘*His enemies destroyed his rep / American forgot him.*’ ‘Alexander Hamilton’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 03:04-03:14 and 03:28-03:32.

¹⁸³ When he does indeed ‘reach’ New York, none of the other actors but Burr pay attention to him. Burr, as the narrator, knows who the young man would become, but in this moment, his expression too is derisive.

is easy to lay links with current Mexican, Latin-American and Caribbean immigration – especially not with the Founding Father being portrayed by an Hispanic actor.¹⁸⁴

Throughout the play, Hamilton continues to be defined by his origins. Introduced as a ‘*bastard, orphan, son of a whore*’,¹⁸⁵ he is also regularly being referred to as an immigrant – often by his political enemies. ‘*This immigrant isn’t somebody we chose / Oh! / This immigrant’s keeping us all on our toes / Oh!*’, Jefferson, Madison and Burr sing in exasperation when Washington chooses Hamilton’s plans over their own in the cabinet meetings,¹⁸⁶ and they repeat this when they confront Hamilton with his money transfers to James Reynolds.

BURR: An immigrant embezzling our government funds

JEFFERSON: I can almost see the headline, your career is done

MADISON

BURR: I hope you saved some money for your daughter and sons

BURR: Ya best g’wan run back where ya come from!¹⁸⁷

JEFFERSON

MADISON

In mimicking (mocking) a Caribbean accent, the three men confirm their xenophobic (and Republican) image (see *infra*). Later, Burr, who usually introduces Hamilton as a bastard and orphan, calls him, just before the duel in seething anger, an ‘*arrogant*

¹⁸⁴ Both Lin-Manuel Miranda and his understudy Javier Muñoz are Hispanic.

¹⁸⁵ ‘Alexander Hamilton’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 00:04-00:08.

¹⁸⁶ ‘Washington on Your Side’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 02:04-02:14.

¹⁸⁷ ‘We Know’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 00:34-00:45.

*immigrant, orphan, bastard, whoreson.*¹⁸⁸ Hamilton, as the arche-immigrant, is thus not immune for the same discrimination immigrants suffer today.

At the same time, the show has moments of immigrant-pride. Hamilton is not the only immigrant in the musical (although he is the most important one). Another notable member of the ‘squad’ is Marquis de Lafayette, the French nobleman who came to fight in the American Revolution, and would later take part in the French Revolution. First struggling with the correct pronunciation of ‘anarchy’,¹⁸⁹ he then spits out the fastest rap in the musical, being lauded as ‘*a secret weapon; an immigrant you know and love who’s unafraid to step in!*’¹⁹⁰ and meets Hamilton before the battle of Yorktown, saying

LAFAYETTE: Immigrants:

HAMILTON: We get the job done¹⁹¹

LAFAYETTE

This phrase usually receives loud cheers, despite being positioned in the middle of the song.¹⁹² It says something about the audience, but also about the impact of the message.¹⁹³

The immigrant-theme is not only supported by the two notorious immigrants, but also by the frequent references to New York, the ultimate immigrant city.¹⁹⁴ ‘*In New York you*

¹⁸⁸ ‘Your Obedient Servant’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 00:03-00:09.

¹⁸⁹ ‘*The unrest in France will lead to ‘onarchy?/ ‘Onarchy? How you say, how you say, ‘anarchy?’* ‘My Shot’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 01:38-01:44.

¹⁹⁰ ‘Guns and Ships’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 00:19-00:24.

¹⁹¹ ‘Yorktown’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 00:18-00:21.

¹⁹² When I attended the show, there were specific parts of the audience that cheered wildly, although most spectators applauded.

¹⁹³ As Miranda describes: ‘*I never anticipated that the audience response would drown out the next few lines every night. So we added two bars just to absorb the reaction. (...) Why does it get such a delighted response? Because it’s true.*’ MIRANDA (L.M.) and MCCARTER (J.). *Hamilton: the Revolution*, Grand Central Publishing (2016), p 121.

can be a new man’,¹⁹⁵ the ensemble sings when Hamilton first arrives in America, and they sing it again when he marries Eliza Schuyler.¹⁹⁶ By marrying into the Dutch aristocracy of New York, Hamilton has become a new man indeed. In fact, he has become an ultimate American. Unlike Jefferson, who would always associate with Virginia, Hamilton, “*because he was an immigrant (...), he always thought of this as the United States of America. He always thought of this as one nation. And his financial plan helped to make us one nation.*”¹⁹⁷

Hamilton and Lafayette and New York all confirm: America was created by immigrants, and continues to be built by them today. ‘*America, you great unfinished symphony, you sent for me/You let me make a difference/A place where even orphan immigrants/Can leave their fingerprints and rise up,*’ Hamilton sings in his dying monologue.¹⁹⁸ The symphony is unfinished though. As Miranda says, ‘*On a certain level, Hamilton is the first proto-immigrant story. He is local boy, comes from Caribbean, works harder than everybody else, makes good. I think it’s a very important reminder that the people who have helped build this country and make it what it is often have come from somewhere else. It’s the renewable life source and blood source that makes this country great.*’¹⁹⁹ Immigrants have founded the nation. They are not problematic, not intruders – they are America’s lifeblood.

Again, Miranda articulates a progressive, inclusive message then – but once again, he uses conservative images. The immigration-theme is couched into two other traditional narratives.

¹⁹⁴ Berrol places a heavy emphasis on the different waves of immigrants in her history of New York. BERROL (S.). *The Empire City: New York and Its People, 1624-1996*, Praeger Publishers (1997), 184 pp.

¹⁹⁵ ‘Alexander Hamilton’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 02:28-02:43.

¹⁹⁶ ‘Helpless’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 03:51-04:07.

¹⁹⁷ ‘Lin Manuel Miranda Hamilton In Conversation Part 4’, 07:27-07:40.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59Y2DwS20_I&index=4&list=RDFHX-BYBnEc0

¹⁹⁸ ‘The World Was Wide Enough’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 02:23-02:32.

¹⁹⁹ MILLER-MEDZON (K.). ‘Behind The Scenes At ‘Hamilton’ On Broadway’, in *WBAA*, February 16th, 2016, sf. <http://wbaa.org/post/behind-scenes-hamilton-broadway>

The first is the myth of the melting pot. Just like the question of feminism before, this issue is ambiguous. The myth, *'in its dominant version, [it] envisions the US in a state of perpetual change and transformation that is partly assimilation, partly regeneration, and partly emergence, and emphasized the continuous integration of difference experienced by both immigrant and longer-established sections of the population.'*²⁰⁰ However, the myth has been criticized, especially in the '70s, because it implied forced acculturation – the (inferior) immigrants had to adapt to the (superior) white American culture. Therefore, the myth continues to be revised. Today, some (including Miranda) lay more emphasis on multiculturalism, in which immigrants keep their cultural identities and differences, while others protest this creates intolerance.²⁰¹ The musical harbours inherently the tension between the two versions.

Thence Hamilton is, as we have seen, the ultimate American. Precisely because he is not from an established state, he is able to call all the thirteen colonies his home. As such then, he is the ultimate symbol of the melting pot before such a melting pot existed. Although in the first song, his benefactors tell him to *'get your education, don't forget from whence you came'*,²⁰² Hamilton would all but ignore his Caribbean past. When Angelica asks him *'where's your family from?'*, he answers curtly, *'unimportant'*,²⁰³ and changes the subject. The only person he tells about his background, is Eliza. Hamilton, in order to become a Founding Father, completely renounces his roots. *'It took an immigrant to fully understand the new nation, and to declare a fundamental hope of the American experiment: Under wise government, these diverse men and women "will be constantly assimilating, till they embrace*

²⁰⁰ PAUL (H.). *The Myths that Made America. An Introduction to American Studies*, Clausen & Bosse (2014), p 258.

²⁰¹ For an analysis of the myth and its forms throughout time, see PAUL (H.). *The Myths that Made America*, pp 257-298.

²⁰² 'Alexander Hamilton', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 01:11-01:15.

²⁰³ 'Satisfied', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 02:00-02:03.

each other, and assume the same complexion,"²⁰⁴ Miranda notes. It is one of the clearest expressions of the melting pot myth.

Conversely, he also refers to the multicultural model where he can. As we have heard, in his dying speech Hamilton compares America to a '*great, unfinished symphony*'²⁰⁵ of which he has only written the beginning notes. The image of a symphony, a unit made up of many different voices and sounds, supports multiculturalism rather than assimilation.²⁰⁶ Miranda thus seems torn between the historical reality (Hamilton never spoke about his past) and his own views on the American immigrant society.

The second myth that supports the immigrant-theme, is one of the self-made man. Like Hamilton is depicted as the proto-immigrant and the proto-American, he essentially made it by working hard. Hamilton constantly writes. In 'Hurricane' he recounts:

HAMILTON: I wrote my way out of hell

I wrote my way to revolution

I was louder than the crack in the bell

I wrote Eliza love letters until she fell

I wrote about The Constitution and defended it well

And in the face of ignorance and resistance

I wrote financial systems into existence

And when my prayers to God were met with indifference

I picked up a pen, I wrote my own deliverance²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ MIRANDA (L.M.) and MCCARTER (J.). *Hamilton: the Revolution*, Grand Central Publishing (2016), p 88.

²⁰⁵ 'The World Was Wide Enough', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 02:22-02:25

²⁰⁶ Annotation to: '*America, you great unfinished symphony, you sent for me*', in 'The World Was Wide Enough'. <http://genius.com/7932237>

²⁰⁷ 'Hurricane', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 01:11-01:33.

He achieved everything – his escape from St. Croix, his military and political status, his marriage – by writing. He spurred the colonies into Revolution by defeating Samuel Seabury’s loyalist pamphlets.²⁰⁸ He made himself indispensable for Washington by taking over his paperwork.²⁰⁹ Hamilton’s work ethic finds its clearest expression in the last song of the first act, ‘Non-Stop’. Recalling how Hamilton sets up a law office, fighting corruption and crime, proposes a new form of government during a six-hour speech at the Constitutional Convention and drafted the Federalist Papers,²¹⁰ the entire company wonders in crescendo; ‘*How do you write like tomorrow won’t arrive?/How do you write like you need it to survive?/How do you write ev’ry second you’re alive?/Ev’ry second you’re alive? Ev’ry second you’re alive?*’²¹¹ Ironically, Hamilton would destroy all by writing the Reynolds Pamphlet too.

In America, the musical suggests, even an orphan immigrant, a bastard, can make it if he or she works hard. He or she does not need privilege, does not need help. ‘*I picked up my pen, I wrote my own deliverance.*’²¹² It is a clear expression of the ‘*expressive individualism and individual success*’²¹³ that defines the myth of the self-made man. This myth is still present in the American society today, and it is used to refer to African-Americans, like Barack Obama, too. However, it carries the risk of placing an extraordinary burden to prove oneself on the shoulders of immigrants, who are often disadvantaged and discriminated against, and of legitimizing the current situation. If Obama can make it,

²⁰⁸ ‘Farmer Refuted’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 01:53.

²⁰⁹ HAMILTON: ‘Ignore them. Congrats to you, Lieutenant Colonel/I wish I had your command instead of manning George’s journal.’

BURR: ‘No, you don’t.’

HAMILTON: ‘Yes, I do.’

BURR: ‘Now, be sensible/From what I hear, you’ve made yourself indispensable.’ ‘The Story of Tonight (Reprise)’, 00:56-01:07.

²¹⁰ ‘John Jay got sick after writing five. James Madison wrote twenty-nine. Hamilton wrote the other fifty-one!’ ‘Non-Stop’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 04:34-04:42.

²¹¹ ‘Non-Stop’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 04:53-05:04.

²¹² Emphasis mine.

²¹³ PAUL (H.). *The Myths that Made America. An Introduction to American Studies*, Clausen & Bosse (2014), p 368.

then other African-Americans can too. They are just too lazy/incapable to make something of their lives. The government should not provide for them. This promotion of the myth of the self-made man and the American Dream could explain, according to Lyra D. Monteiro, why so many conservatives like the play as well.²¹⁴

Again, the message is ambiguous. The musical takes an openly political, pro-immigration stance by placing immigrants at the heart of America's creation – but it legitimizes the current situation and its injustice by confirming the myths of the American Dream and the self-made man. The musical does not mention Hamilton's brother, who did not have the gift of writing like Alexander had and would die in poverty in St. Croix.²¹⁵

Part of the challenge here, is the conflation between past, present, and future. As much as 'Hamilton' tells an historical story in a modern-day context, it also paints a vision for the future. Miranda must know the disadvantages Hispanics face. It is possible he included the myth of the self-made man as an element for the future American society, as it will emerge after the second revolution we spoke about. The American Dream is part of how America should be, not as it is now – but such nuances become lost in a play as complex as 'Hamilton'.

²¹⁴ MONTEIRO (L.D.). 'Race-Conscious Casting and the Erasure of Black History in Lin-Manuel Miranda's Hamilton', in *The Public Historian*, vol 38, n° 1 (2016), p 96.

²¹⁵ Annotation to: 'There would have been nothin' left to do (...) started workin', clerkin' for', in 'Alexander Hamilton'. <http://genius.com/7888910>

II. Saints and Democrats

1. "Be Seated at the Right Hand of the Father": Hagiographic Dialogues

In the 10th century, two great abbeys existed in Ghent. They were alike in status and opulence, and, because of their vicinity, a fierce rivalry existed between them both. In an attempt to secure the favour of the feudal lords, they entered what Jeroen Deploige called a hagiographic debate – emphasising, rediscovering, or inventing relics and saints, each of the abbeys tried to usurp divine favour.²¹⁶

Suppose we supplant the two abbeys by the two political parties in America, and the catholic saints by the secular saints of the American civil religion. 'Hamilton' then becomes a part of a new hagiographic dialogue. It rallies Hamilton and the great Washington to the Democratic cause and contrasts them with mainly Jefferson who, in the musical, becomes a flamboyant hypocrite. The Fathers, the saints, are on our, i.e. the Democratic side.

Casting the Founding Fathers as secular saints is not entirely new. Ever since Robert Bellah introduced the concept of civil religion, the field has yielded fruitful research. Bellah himself defined the term as follows: *'the separation of church and state has not denied the political realm a religious dimension. (...) This public religious dimension is expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals that I am calling the American civil religion.'*²¹⁷ In this civil religion, statesmen can become saints. Portraits of Franklin D. Roosevelt, an eminently secular saint, adorned the home of an Italian immigrant family during the Great Depression, hanging right next to images of the Virgin Mary.²¹⁸

²¹⁶ DEPLOIGE (J.). 'Twisten Via Heiligen: Hagiografische Dialogen tussen de Gentse Abdijen van Sint-Pieters en Sint-Baafs, 941-1079', in *Handelingen der Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde te Gent*, vol 61 (2007), pp 31-82.

²¹⁷ BELLAH (R.N.). 'Civil Religion in America', in *Religion in America*, vol 96, n° 1 (1967), pp 3-4.

²¹⁸ See the exposition 'Hard Times', in The Tenement Museum in New York (103 Orchard St, New York).

However, the focus of the civil religion is on the American Revolution. According to Catherine Albanese, ‘*the American Revolution was in itself a religious experience (...) which provides the fundamental basis for American civil religion as we know it.*’²¹⁹ Just like the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are the sacred texts,²²⁰ the Founding Fathers (and Washington especially) are the saints. Today, undoubtedly influenced by the musical, one can visit the graves of Alexander and Eliza Hamilton just outside Trinity Church in New York and feel on a pilgrimage. Amidst a sea of bland crosses and tombs, the marble headstones of the pair are covered with dimes and pebbles and flags, and a single rose on Eliza’s grave (see Image 3). The place is continuously visited by young and old alike.

The secular saints of the Revolution, by virtue of their status in the *civil* religion (and thus in politics), do not exist in a vacuum. They are, depending on the needs of the time, adopted and renounced by the parties. Whereas Jefferson was heralded as a Democratic hero by Franklin D. Roosevelt himself and as his intellectual hero,²²¹ the Virginian has lost status in the party in more recent times because of his history with slavery. Seth Lipsky suggested Republicans should pick him up²²² - and they did, for when Jefferson was attacked at the University of Missouri in Columbia and at the College of William and Mary in Virginia as a rapist and a racist, Republicans introduced #standwithJefferson on twitter and draped an American flag around a contested statue of the Virginian.²²³

²¹⁹ ALBANESE (C.L.). *Sons of the Fathers. The Civil Religion of the American Revolution*, Temple University Press (1976), p 6.

²²⁰ Visiting the National Archives to see these objects is almost like a religious experience.

²²¹ BERNSTEIN (R.B.). *The Founding Fathers Reconsidered*, Oxford University Press (2009), p 132.

²²² LIPSKY (S.). ‘If Democrats Ditch Thomas Jefferson, Republicans Should Snatch Him Up’, in *New York Post*, August 19th, 2015, sf. <http://nypost.com/2015/08/19/if-democrats-ditch-thomas-jefferson-republicans-should-snatch-him-up/>

²²³ JASCHIK (S.). ‘Jefferson is Next Target’, in *Inside Higher Ed*, November 23th, 2015, sf. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/11/23/thomas-jefferson-next-target-students-who-question-honors-figures-who-were-racists>. The attack on Jefferson fits in the nationwide renegotiation of the American past and identity. Around the same time, Woodrow Wilson was attacked as well. NEWMAN

'Hamilton' is an additional voice in these hagiographic dialogues. It splits the Founding Fathers into two camps and reserves the 'greatest' of these Founding Fathers for the Democratic Party. These camps are clearly divided, mimicking the political polarisation today.²²⁴ There is no room for grey zones, such as the connection between Angelica and Jefferson,²²⁵ or the earlier friendship between Madison and Hamilton.²²⁶ The only ambivalent figure is Aaron Burr, who is coincidentally also the story-teller.²²⁷

On the Democratic side, the first saint is Hamilton.²²⁸ By virtue of merely *being* the hero in a Democratic-oriented play (see *infra*) with a seemingly progressive message, he is already cast in this camp. Moreover, he embodies some Democratic values. As we have discussed, Hamilton is the ultimate immigrant, making a life for himself in New York.²²⁹ He is a proponent of black freedom/rights, referring to himself and his friends as '*a bunch of revolutionary manumission abolitionists*'²³⁰ and calling Jefferson out on slavery.²³¹ A deleted third 'cabinet battle' focused explicitly on the (historical) debate surrounding the petition from a Quaker delegation in Philadelphia to abolish slave trade and slavery,²³² with Hamilton supporting the Quakers against Jefferson,²³³ but Miranda had to admit it

(A.). 'At Princeton, Woodrow Wilson, a Heralded Alum, Is Recast as an Intolerant One', in *New York Times*, November 22th, 2015, sf. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/23/nyregion/at-princeton-addressing-a-racist-legacy-and-seeking-to-remove-woodrow-wilsons-name.html>

²²⁴ See, for example, MILLER (G.) and SCHOFIELD (N.). 'The Transformation of the Republican and Democratic Party Coalitions in the U.S.', in *Perspectives on Politics*, vol 6, n° 3 (2008), pp 433-450.

²²⁵ CHERNOW (R.), *Alexander Hamilton*, Penguin Books (2005), p 315.

²²⁶ ELLIS (J.J.). *Founding Brothers. The Revolutionary Generation*, Random House inc (2000), p 54.

²²⁷ His status is emphasized in the first song, when all the actors but Burr appear in white. It is only as Burr introduces them, that they dress in coloured costumes. The story comes alive in full colour through Burr.

²²⁸ Whether or not this is his rightful place, will be discussed in a later chapter.

²²⁹ Since the days of Tammany Hall, the Democrats have long since been seen as champions of the immigrants in the city. See, for example, BORTMAN (E.). 'Tammany Hall', in BRONNER (S.J.) (ed.), *Encyclopedia of American Studies*, Hopkins University Press (2016), sf. <http://eas-ref.press.jhu.edu/view?aid=589&from=search&query=tammany%20hall&link=search%3Freturn%3D1%26query%3Dtammany%2520hall%26section%3Ddocument%26doctype%3Dall>

²³⁰ 'My Shot', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 02:33-02:37.

²³¹ 'A civics lesson from a slaver. *Hey neighbor/ Your debts are paid cuz you don't pay for labor/ "We plant seeds in the South. We create."/ Yeah, keep ranting/ We know who's really doing the planting.*' 'Cabinet Battle #1', in 'Hamilton, an American Musical', 01:48-01:58.

²³² ELLIS (J.J.). *Founding Brothers. The Revolutionary Generation*, Random House inc (2000), pp 81-118.

²³³ MIRANDA (L.M.) and MCCARTER (J.). *Hamilton: the Revolution*, Grand Central Publishing (2016), pp 212-213.

would suggest Hamilton was a fiercer abolitionist than he actually was, and removed the song.²³⁴

Moreover, he would oppose interfering in an ensuing war between France and Britain, saying that *'if we try to fight in every revolution in the world, we never stop/ where do we draw the line?'*²³⁵ According to Miranda, *'this line gets a really wild-card reaction every night, depending on the audience. Sometimes nothing. Sometimes applause. Once a profound "Oh, sh*t." We still recognize ourselves in this one.'*²³⁶ Clearly, the audience connects the line with the more recent invasions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Hamilton is cast as one of the Democrats, who largely opposed these wars.²³⁷

All of these references are very implicit. Nowhere does Hamilton present himself openly as a Democrat.²³⁸ David Brooks, a conservative, even says in Miranda's book that none of the parties today would have room for Hamilton. *Republicans have become allergic to government, and can't see what Hamilton saw: the government can let more people into the system, and help capitalism solve the structural problems it is facing. But Democrats balk at embracing somebody whose programs would create more opportunity for gifted upstarts at the expense of creating more misery for the people who can't excel. "Hamilton said that if we have to make harder for people who can't hack it, we're going to do that."*²³⁹

Whereas this is true, this vision is not at all reflected in the musical – and neither is it in the reflections of the audience. On tumblr, a (granted often left-leaning) social network site, many classify Hamilton as a Democrat (usually while reflecting on the current

²³⁴ HAYES (C.). 'Hamilton': Lin-Manuel Miranda, Questlove, Black Thought on the Runaway Broadway Hit, Its Political Relevance and Super-Fan Barack Obama', in *The Hollywood Reporter*, July 30th, 2015, sf. <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/hamilton-lin-manuel-miranda-questlove-812239>

²³⁵ 'Cabinet Battle #2', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 02:05-02:09.

²³⁶ MIRANDA (L.M.) and MCCARTER (J.). *Hamilton: the Revolution*, Grand Central Publishing (2016), p 193.

²³⁷ If we lay the connection with the current elections, Hamilton becomes linked with Bernie Sanders, not with Hillary Clinton, who voted in favour of the war.

²³⁸ Large part of his identification with the Democrats may stem rather from Jefferson's connection to the Republicans, thus casting his political enemy in the opposing camp (see infra).

²³⁹ MIRANDA (L.M.) and MCCARTER (J.). *Hamilton: the Revolution*, p 257.

elections),²⁴⁰ and in fanfiction that reinvents the musical's characters in a modern setting, he is often portrayed as a Democratic political activist.²⁴¹ Patrick Healy, who sees both Hamilton and Jefferson rather as Republicans and Hillary Clinton as the weathercock Burr, is a rare voice in the debate.²⁴²

Hamilton does not appear much as a Democrat in his own right. The references to his Democratic status are implicit, hidden, or are derived from the general context of the musical, that is Democratic. Most of his identification with the part derives from his opponent. Jefferson is Republican – of the worst kind - and therefore his political enemy has to be a Democrat.

Jefferson's identification with the Republican Party is much more explicit than Hamilton's Democratic connection and centers on certain themes, many of which are introduced in his opening number, simultaneously the first song of the second act. Coming back from Paris, where he acted as an American ambassador, he is welcomed with open arms by the ensemble.²⁴³ He won't be able to enjoy '*Virginia, my home sweet home*'²⁴⁴ though for

²⁴⁰ Some reactions: '*Alexander Hamilton would have torn Donald Trump to pieces by now and also publicly humiliated him on multiple occasions*'. Blog post, January 9th, 2016. <http://alexanderhamilton.tumblr.com/post/136959249825/alexander-hamilton-would-have-torn-donald-trump-to>; '*i had this dream last night where donald trump said that had he been alive, alexander hamilton would vote for him and alexander's ghost appeared and said 'i'd rather french kiss secretary jefferson*'. Blog post, January 31th, 2016. <http://alexandrhamilton.tumblr.com/post/138418153880/i-had-this-dream-last-night-where-donald-trump>

²⁴¹ For example, one story focuses on Hamilton's and Burr's battle to pass anti-gun laws after Philip Hamilton has been shot. CHROME, 'I'll Make the World (Safe and Sound for You)', in: *Archive of Our Own*, March 8th, 2016. Fanfiction. <http://archiveofourown.org/works/5380469/chapters/12427175>

²⁴² HEALY (P.). 'Hamilton' and the Republicans Hopefuls', in *New York Times*, August 1th, 2015, sf. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/02/sunday-review/hamilton-and-the-republican-hopefuls.html>

²⁴³ BURR: '*You simply must meet Thomas. Thomas!*'

ENSEMBLE: '*Thomas Jefferson's coming home! (5x) Lord he's/ been off in Paris for so long!*'. Note the difference with how Hamilton was welcomed as '*another immigrant, comin' up from the bottom*'. 'What'd I Miss?', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 00:42-01:02.

²⁴⁴ 'What'd I Miss?' in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 01:43-01:45.

JEFFERSON: There's a letter on my desk from the President
Haven't even put my bags down yet
Sally be a lamb, darlin', won'tcha open it?
It says the President's assembling a cabinet
And that I am to be the Secretary of State, great!
And that I'm already Senate-approved...
I just got home and now I'm headed up to New York.²⁴⁵

Besides sideways referencing to Sally Hemmings, Jefferson's notorious slave/mistress, this part establishes the huge privilege Jefferson enjoys. He needs not worry about the future – he has a large estate and a high-level position the moment he returns home. The contrast with the hard-working Hamilton (who just before the break had been writing 'non-stop') couldn't be larger. Again contrary to Hamilton, he sees Virginia as his home. New York, in his eyes, is as much as foreign country as France. Throughout the play, Jefferson will always identify with either Virginia or the South,²⁴⁶ never with the US in general.

Lastly, Jefferson is immediately portrayed as a hypocrite, especially regarding black freedom/rights. '*Someone must keep the American promise*'²⁴⁷ Burr introduces Jefferson on the scene. It is a reference to Lyndon B. Johnson's speech about the Voting Rights Act – an act Jefferson and his followers would never have agreed with, according to genius.com, making it '*sly reference to Jefferson's hypocrisy and double standards about*

²⁴⁵ 'What'd I Miss?', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 02:00-02:18.

²⁴⁶ Madison swiftly enlists him in the defense of the Southern interests, when he greets him in the same song. '*I've been fighting for the South alone/ Where have you been?*'. 'What'd I Miss?' in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 02:59-03:04.

²⁴⁷ 'What'd I Miss?' in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 00:38-00:41.

freedom'.²⁴⁸ This impression is strengthened when Jefferson exclaims not much later that '*I can't believe that we are free*',²⁴⁹ echoed by the ensemble (depicting his servants/slaves). There would be no freedom for his slaves yet!

Each of these themes (his slaves, his privilege, his support for states' rights and the South, and additionally his aversion of Wall Street) would crystalize in the next song, the first Cabinet Battle. Here Jefferson emerges clearly as a Republican.

JEFFERSON: His plan would have the government assume state's debts

Now, place your bets as to who that benefits:

The very seat of government where Hamilton sits

(...)

If New York's in debt—

Why should Virginia bear it? Uh! Our debts are paid, I'm afraid

Don't tax the South cuz we got it made in the shade

In Virginia, we plant seeds in the ground

We create. You just wanna move our money around

This financial plan is an outrageous demand

And it's too many damn pages for any man to understand

Stand with me in the land of the free²⁵⁰

The distrust of a central government, the emphasis on states' rights, the identification with the South, the glorification of the simple, independent farmer... These are traits associated with the Republican Party today. Jefferson also echoes contemporary

²⁴⁸ Annotation to: '*But someone's gotta keep the American promise*', in 'What'd I Miss?'.
<http://genius.com/7958946>

²⁴⁹ 'What'd I Miss?', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 02:21:02:27.

²⁵⁰ 'Cabinet Battle #1', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 00:37:01:07.

Republicans, who found Obama's Affordable Care Act to long and complicated to vote upon.²⁵¹ Additionally, he would act as a spokesman for the *'our poorest citizens, our farmers, live ration to ration/as Wall Street robs 'em blind in search of chips to cash in'*,²⁵² while his friend and ally Madison bemoans that Hamilton *'doubled the size of the government/wasn't the trouble with much of our previous government size?'*²⁵³ As we have seen, their xenophobic comments in both 'Washington on Your Side' and 'We Know' only add to their Republican identification. When Hamilton exclaims exasperated after the Cabinet Battle that *'they don't have a plan, they just hate mine!'*, the annotators on genius finely remarks: *'summary of the current GOP strategy'*.²⁵⁴

Jefferson appears a saint to the Republicans. In a musical that promotes progressive and liberal (Democratic) values, he must be the enemy. Indeed, critics pointed out how *"Hamilton" has deliciously skewered him as a flamboyantly scheming hypocrite.'*²⁵⁵ The sentiment, though not the indignation, is shared by many. A fan noted that in high school, she saw Thomas Jefferson as the author the Declaration of Independence and the champion of the common man – now, she considered him a *'mac-and-cheese loving hypocrite.'*²⁵⁶ Another fan made a list of all the good things Jefferson did: *'he died'*.²⁵⁷

Of course, these are exaggerations, and not all share these views. My brother loved Jefferson in the musical, and this is the intention of the show too. Daveed Diggs said that

²⁵¹ Annotation to: *'And it's too many damn pages for any man to understand'*, in 'Cabinet Battle #1'.

<http://genius.com/7929836>

²⁵² 'Washington on Your Side', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 00:44-00:51.

²⁵³ 'Washington on Your Side', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 01:34-01:38.

²⁵⁴ Annotation to: *'But they don't have a plan, they just hate mine!'* in 'Cabinet Battle #1'.

<http://genius.com/7932423>

²⁵⁵ SCHUESSLER (J.). 'Thomas Jefferson, Neither God nor Devil', in *New York Times*, April 5th, 2016, sf.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/06/books/thomas-jefferson-neither-god-nor-devil.html?&moduleDetail=section-news-5&action=click&contentCollection=Theater®ion=Footer&module=MoreInSection&version=WhatsNext&contentID=WhatsNext&pgtype=article>

²⁵⁶ Blog post, April 7th, 2016. <http://evil-bones-mccoy.tumblr.com/post/142433638467/me-in-high-school-thomas-jefferson-was-the>

²⁵⁷ Blog post, December 20th, 2016. <http://ciphereye.tumblr.com/post/134497084816/good-things-thomas-jefferson-did>

he “*wanted to create a character where you could absolutely fall in love with this guy, and then a few hours later be like ‘wait a minute.’*”²⁵⁸ Musicals, political or not, need to entertain. Only by entertaining people, you make them think about your piece. Jefferson is charismatic and flamboyant and ultimately wrong. In death, Hamilton still wins. At the end of the play, Jefferson (as president) has to concede that, *‘I’ll give him this: his financial system is a/work of genius. I couldn’t undo it if I tried/... And I tried.’*²⁵⁹

Why is Jefferson Hamilton’s only enemy? Was it not Aaron Burr who shot him? Miranda could easily have made the musical about their enmity – but he portrayed Burr in an unusually positive way.²⁶⁰ Burr is not a bitter, scheming, tricky politician who would later commit treason against the US and who would never regret having shot Hamilton.²⁶¹ As heir of an esteemed family, he simply has much more to lose. Where Hamilton yells *‘just you wait’* and fights and writes and offends, Burr will *‘wait for it’*²⁶² – his defining motive. He is fundamentally different from Hamilton. It will take until well into the second act before Burr reveals what he wants – he wants *‘to be in the room where it happens’*²⁶³ – and to achieve this, he will join Hamilton’s enemies. A collision between the two is bound to happen. Ironically, it is the one moment that Burr shows rashness and Hamilton reluctance, that the latter’s fate is sealed.²⁶⁴

It is impossible not to sympathize with Burr. There are several reasons for this positive depiction. For one, Miranda identifies with Burr on a personal level. *“I feel like I have been*

²⁵⁸ ‘Hamilton’; Zalmay Khalilzad’, 25:11-25:21. <https://charlierose.com/videos/26494>

²⁵⁹ ‘Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story?’ in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 00:18-00:26.

²⁶⁰ In interviews, Miranda is quick to defend Burr as an early feminist with redeeming qualities. ‘Lin-Manuel Miranda and Thomas Kail on Hamilton and Burr (April 21th, 2015) | Charlies Rose’, 02:13. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TarYyihspdc&list=RDFHX-BYBnEc0&index=12>

²⁶¹ As he is described in, for example, ELLIS (J.J.). *Founding Brothers. The Revolutionary Generation*, Random House inc (2000), pp 20-47.

²⁶² ‘Wait for It’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 03:14.

²⁶³ ‘The Room Where It Happens’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 05:18.

²⁶⁴ This final confrontation reveals how much the musical tries to portray Burr as a victim rather than a murderer. The whole preamble to the final shooting serves to emphasize how nervous, how frightened Burr was. Hamilton was a marksman, he was fiddling with his guns, he put up his glasses (assumingly to aim better for Burr’s heart), Burr could not make his daughter an orphan... Today, lawyers would plead ‘self-defence’. ‘The World Was Wide Enough’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 00:00-01:41.

Burr in my life as many times as I have been Hamilton,' he said, *'I think we've all had moments where we've seen friends and colleagues zoom past us, either to success, or to marriage, or to homeownership, while we lingered where we were—broke, single, jobless. And you tell yourself, 'Wait for it.'*²⁶⁵ Secondly, the old question comes in again. Who is telling this story? Burr is.

BURR: History obliterates

In every picture it paints
It paints me and all my mistakes
When Alexander aimed
At the sky
He may have been the first one to die
But I'm the one who paid for it
I survived, but I paid for it
Now I'm the villain in your history²⁶⁶

On a more fundamental level, taking Burr out of the hostile camp focuses the audience's negative attention on Jefferson. Burr is the story-teller. He is not one of the saints to assign to a party. That leaves Hamilton and Jefferson to represent respectively the Democrats and the Republicans, battling for the favor of the highest saint.

This is, naturally, Washington. Already in his life, he was honored, and this veneration increased after his death. Just like the Italian family in the Great Depression, *'one European traveler of the period [19th century] observed that "every American considers it his sacred*

²⁶⁵ MEAD (R.). 'All About the Hamiltons. A New Musical Brings the Founding Fathers Back to Life – with a Lot of Hip-Hop', in *New Yorker*, February 9th, 2015, sf.

<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/02/09/hamiltons>

²⁶⁶ 'The World Was Wide Enough', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 04:06-04:30.

duty to have a likeness of Washington in his home, just as we have the images of God's saints."²⁶⁷

He was described as an innocent man (the only other innocent man in the christian tradition being Christ himself), a pious farmer and military hero. His grave and home became sacred places,²⁶⁸ and his mother was compared to the Virgin Mary.²⁶⁹

In the musical, Washington is introduced epically in 'Right Hand Man',²⁷⁰ as a besieged general trying his hardest to save New York against the British, mutineers and adulators, and, of course, picking Hamilton to assist him. However, a more telling description appears in the next song, when Burr, trying to swallow his jealousy of Hamilton, sings:

BURR: How does the bastard, orphan, son of a whore

Go on and on

Grow into more of a phenomenon?

Watch this obnoxious, arrogant, loudmouth bother

*Be seated at the right hand of the father*²⁷¹

In this symbology, Washington is cast as a deity, making Hamilton a Christ-like figure instead. The connection between them – their friendship – is emphasized throughout the

²⁶⁷ ALBANESE (C.L.). *Sons of the Fathers. The Civil Religion of the American Revolution*, Temple University Press (1976), p 159.

²⁶⁸ Complete with miracles: when Marquis de Lafayette visited the grave, an eagle supposedly flew over. ALBANESE (C.L.). *Sons of the Fathers*, p 170.

²⁶⁹ ALBANESE (C.L.). *Sons of the Fathers*, pp 143-181.

²⁷⁰ HAMILTON: '*Here he comes!*'

ENSEMBLE: '*Here comes the General!*'

BURR: '*Ladies and gentlemen!*'

ENSEMBLE: '*Here comes the General!*'

BURR: '*The moment you've been waiting for!*'

ENSEMBLE: '*Here comes the General!*'

BURR: '*The pride of Mount Vernon!*'

ENSEMBLE: '*Here comes the General!*'

BURR: '*George Washington!*' 'Right Hand Man', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 00:53-01:05.

²⁷¹ Emphasis mine. 'A Winter's Ball', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 00:03:00:18.

musical. Turning a respectful Burr away curtly,²⁷² Washington convinces a reluctant Hamilton to join his staff and entrusts him with the paperwork (not with a military command, much to Hamilton's chagrin). It is not always a perfect friendship. When Hamilton participated in a duel between John Laurens and Charles' Lee to defend Washington's honor,²⁷³ against Washington's explicit orders, their frustrations (Washington's refusal to grant Hamilton a command, his fatherly insistence on calling him 'son' and 'young man', Hamilton's stubbornness) are bared in a confrontation.

WASHINGTON: Your wife needs you alive, son, I need you alive—

HAMILTON: Call me son one more time—

WASHINGTON: Go home, Alexander

That's an order from your commander²⁷⁴

The scene mimicks a real confrontation between Hamilton and Washington, after which Hamilton was indeed dismissed.²⁷⁵ However, the next song declared it was Eliza who asked Washington to send her husband home, so that she could tell him she was pregnant.²⁷⁶ Indeed, Washington would soon regret having sent away his right hand man.

²⁷² WASHINGTON: 'Burr?'

BURR: 'Sir?'

WASHINGTON: 'Close the door on your way out.' 'Right Hand Man', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 03:32-03:34.

²⁷³ After a near-defeat during the Battle of Monmouth, according to the musical entirely Charles' Lee to blame, a sulking Lee complains that 'Washington cannot be left alone to his devices/Indecisive, from crisis to crisis/The best thing he can do for the revolution/Is turn n' go back to plantin' tobacco in Mount Vernon.' 'Stay Alive', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 02:06-02:17.

²⁷⁴ 'Meet Me Inside', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 01:07-01:20.

²⁷⁵ Although the historical confrontation was about Hamilton arriving late and being rebuked by Washington, after which he quit the army. CHERNOW (R.), *Alexander Hamilton*, Penguin Books (2005), p 151.

²⁷⁶ ELIZA: 'I wrote to the General a month ago'

Encouraged by Lafayette, he offers Hamilton the command he had longed for.²⁷⁷ The rest of the play, both men will work together. They craft the new government together.²⁷⁸ They govern together. In the two cabinet battles, Washington chooses Hamilton's views over Jefferson's,²⁷⁹ and he protects and advises the younger man too. It is when Washington abdicates his position, that the story turns sour for Hamilton.

Images tell more than a thousand words. The relationship between both men is summarized most clearly at the end of the first act. When Hamilton accepts the position of Secretary of the Treasury, despite Eliza's desperate protests, he snatches himself free from her and ascends the stairs where Washington is silently waiting in a white spotlight, while beneath him the ensemble bursts into a melee of themes and swirls around.²⁸⁰ By virtue of Washington's grace, Hamilton is taking his place 'at the right hand of the Father'.

Washington is the ultimate Father, a deity in the American civil religion – and he favors the Democratic Hamilton over the Republican Jefferson. It is clear whose side history is on. It's even more interesting when one considers the connections between Washington and the Democrat Barack Obama. "*To be doing a show that is obviously so relevant, not just to the country but to that office in particular, for me playing George Washington, it was the black first president for the first black president,*" Chris Jackson said in an

HAMILTON: 'No'

ELIZA: *'I begged him to send you home'*. 'That Would Be Enough', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 00:26-00:31.

²⁷⁷ *'Alexander Hamilton/Troops are waiting in the field for you/If you join us right now, together we can turn the tide/Oh, Alexander Hamilton/I have soldiers that will yield for you/If we manage to get this right/They'll surrender by early light.'* 'Guns and Ships', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 01:20-01:48.

²⁷⁸ The scenography during the constitutional convention suggests Hamilton and Washington were the only significant players in the debates on the new government.

²⁷⁹ Much to Jefferson's chagrin, who spews his bile in 'Washington on Your Side' and decides to quit the government to *'show these Federalists who they're up against!/Oh!/Southern motherfuckin'—/Democratic-Republicans!'*. Note the emphasis on the South, a region nowadays seen as more Republican-leaning. 'Washington on Your Side', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 02:12-02:18.

²⁸⁰ 'Non-Stop', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 05:28-06:25.

interview.²⁸¹ Washington is not openly identified with Obama, but the contemporary president certainly influenced the musical. When Washington and Hamilton cite parts of the Farewell Address, the latter speaks while the first weaves a melody through the words. This is *'a straight grab from will.i.am's song "Yes We Can" in support of Barack Obama's presidential campaign in 2008, which intertwines spoken and sung versions of a speech by Obama.'*²⁸²

In 'History has its eyes on you.' Washington sings to Hamilton:

WASHINGTON: I know that we can win

I know that greatness lies in you

But remember from here on in

WASHINGTON: History has its eyes on you.²⁸³

MEN

Washington is designating Hamilton as his successor (emphasized when Hamilton echoes this motive and making it his own) – and he might as well be speaking to Obama as well.²⁸⁴ This is his chance to lead the new revolution Laurens and Hamilton had sung about (see supra). Either way, the Revolution is a Democratic one. The saints, the forefathers, favor the Democratic Party.

Though we have spoken about saints, we must be careful not to identify them as perfect, infallible men. No man in the musical is perfect. Hamilton would ultimately

²⁸¹ 'Why History Has Its Eyes on Hamilton's Diversity | TIME', 00:47-00:59.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWrRP6vRGhQ>

²⁸² Annotation to: *'Though, in reviewing the incidents of my administration, I am (...) Of our mutual cares, labors, and dangers'*, in 'One Last Time'. <http://genius.com/7855800>

²⁸³ 'History Has Its Eyes on You', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 01:05-01:24.

²⁸⁴ 'Why History has Its Eyes on Hamilton's Diversity | TIME', 01:12-01:18.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWrRP6vRGhQ>

destroy himself by his arrogance and hurt Eliza in the way. Jefferson, despite being the enemy, is charismatic. Washington admits he *'led my men straight into a massacre/I witnessed their deaths firsthand,'*²⁸⁵ and he would acknowledge he never freed his slaves, like Eliza did. 'Hamilton' is not a fairy-tale. It needs to convey the impression of historical accuracy in order to convince an audience, and history is messy. Moreover, it cannot take an obvious political stance (see *infra*). The musical suggests, rather than dictates. It is up to the audience to pick up the messages he or she wants to hear.

2. Democrats, Social Movements and 'Camelot'

'The show is somehow overtly political without seeming so,' Jeff MacGregor remarked.²⁸⁶ I have to agree with him. The show can be seen and interpreted on different levels. Spectators can perfectly ignore or dismiss its political implications. The colour-reversed casting becomes an artistic novelty, the story a purely historical one, the references to the present are either missed or ignored. At no point does an actor turn to the audience and proclaim that this is a Democratic truth. The true geniality lies in the musical's ability to wrap a political vision (no less the future of America, that is African-American and Hispanic) into sophisticated entertainment.

Is this political vision a Democratic one? Partially. Certainly, it overlaps. Miranda, as son of a political consultant for the Democratic Party who sometimes helped his father, must have been influenced by the vision of the party. Moreover, his background as son of Puerto Rican immigrants makes him more likely to vote Democratic than Republican. However, the musical does not convey the party's vision – it conveys Miranda's vision,

²⁸⁵ 'History Has Its Eyes on You', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 00:08-00:14.

²⁸⁶ MACGREGOR (J.). 'Meet Lin-Manuel Miranda, the Genius Behind "Hamilton," Broadway's Newest Hit', in *Smithsonian*, November 12th, 2015, sf. <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/lin-manuel-miranda-ingenuity-awards-180957234/?no-ist>

that just happens to be Democratic. It explains why the ‘Democratic’ saints, as discussed above, are not openly Democratic, while Jefferson and Madison are clearly Republican. The future of America, as Miranda envisions, is everything the contemporary Republican Party opposes.²⁸⁷ Hamilton’s fight is Miranda’s. Because of the political polarisation, Hamilton and Miranda must then be Democratic – but the writer realizes the Democratic Party does not (and cannot) necessarily support his entire vision either.²⁸⁸ ‘Hamilton’ is not an instrument of the party, used to promote a Democratic Manifesto. Rather, the musical and the party have entered a mutually symbiotic relationship.

Parallels may be drawn to the ‘party in the street’ Michael Heaney and Fabio Rojas introduced when they analysed the anti-war movement in its relationship with the Democratic Party in this century. They define social movements as sustained interactions between challengers and authorities, in which the first have the intention to change certain aspects in the social and political world. Social movements are decentralized and often fragmented.²⁸⁹ They can act as a mainstream political party, with the focus on an institutional approach or as a radical social movement which emphasizes protest and actions and refuses to compromise. However, they can also act as a party in the street. Such a street party uses an inside-outside strategy: it connects with a political party on an institutional level, but does not become absorbed by it.²⁹⁰

I argue that ‘Hamilton’ is part of, or rather forming, its own party in the street. It connects with politics, and especially with the Democratic Party, but it does so in order to advance its own vision and influence the party, not to serve it. If it is true that a

²⁸⁷ He told Frank DiGiacomo that Trump should see his show, should watch how a military hero and the creator of the financial system were both immigrants. DIGIACOMO (F.). ‘Hamilton’s’ Lin-Manuel Miranda on Finding Originality, Racial Politics (and Why Donald Trump Should See His Show)’, in *The Hollywood Reporter*, April 9th, 2015, sf. http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/features/hamiltons-lin-manuel-miranda-finding-814657?utm_source=twitter

²⁸⁸ For obvious reasons: Miranda has a very specific view on very specific issues, whereas the Democrats are very diverse and wide-spread.

²⁸⁹ HEANEY (M.T.) and ROJAS (F.). *Party in the Street. The Antiwar Movement and the Democratic Party after 9/11*, Cambridge University Press (2015), p 16.

²⁹⁰ HEANEY (M.T.) and ROJAS (F.). *Party in the Street*, p 22.

musical can be(come) a party in the street (which I believe it is), it is both weaker and stronger than the movements Heaney and Rojas described. Stronger, because Miranda was able to reach a much larger audience. Had he taken an openly political stance, he would have driven large segments of the audience away. By packing it into entertainment, he gives the audience the room to ignore the political message – and this is simultaneously its weakness. Without a strong, clear cause to rally around, it is hard to create a collective, movement-bound identity, which is imperial to promote these causes. Despite its enormous success, the musical does not appear to have wrought any large political changes – but one. It managed to keep Alexander Hamilton on the ten-dollar bill.

When MacGregor wrote his article, he notes that *'there's even the question of whether or when Hamilton will come off the \$10 bill. While everyone agrees it's time for an American woman on our paper money, very few think the father of our paper money is the guy to replace. Better bloody, bloody Andrew Jackson, who killed a lot of folks – and sold many fewer tickets on Broadway.'*²⁹¹ On April 20th, 2016, it was finally agreed that this American woman would be Harriet Tubman, who would share the \$20 bill with Andrew Jackson.²⁹² Asked about the importance of the musical in this decision, secretary of the treasury Jack Lew replied: *"I wouldn't exaggerate it,"* but added that, *"I do give credit to Lin-Manuel Miranda, the crew of Hamilton, for bringing American history to life."* He also said that the *'Treasury had "expanded the view of what we were doing you know, right around, a little before the musical became a pop hit.'*²⁹³

²⁹¹ MACGREGOR (J.). 'Meet Lin-Manuel Miranda, the Genius Behind "Hamilton," Broadway's Newest Hit', in *Smithsonian*, November 12th, 2015, sf. <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/lin-manuel-miranda-ingenuity-awards-180957234/?no-ist>

²⁹² Apparently none of the actors involved in this decision realized the hypocrisy of placing a woman who helped dozens of slaves escape on the same bill as a slave-owner.

²⁹³ FLORES (R.). 'Harriet Tubman to Go on \$20 Bill; Hamilton to Stay on \$10', in *CBS News*, April 20th, 2016, sf. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/harriet-tubman-to-go-on-20-bill-hamilton-to-stay-on-10/>

Certainly, the importance of the musical should not be overstated – but neither should it be underrated. If an interviewer explicitly asks about the musical as a factor in the decision, one can safely assume the musical must at least been on the minds of Lew and others. The musical did (help to) make a change. It is able to do so, because Hamilton’s legacy is a major theme in the show, and thus a cause the audience can easily align themselves to. How could one, after watching Eliza sacrifice fifty years of her life to salvage her husband’s memory, refuse to ‘tell his story’? Having Hamilton removed from the \$10 bill would erase everything his much-loved wife stood for. Hamilton’s legacy had to be secured, and so it was, and in this aspect, the musical did make a change – but influencing the design of the dollar bills, no matter the symbolic importance, is hardly a cataclysmic event. The real importance of the show does not lie in the political field, but in the popular mind. (see *infra*)

Nevertheless, because of its position towards politics, the musical still is a (part of a) party in the street. The creators are politically engaged. Miranda, as we have seen, has strong views on the position of minorities and immigrants. Oskar Eustis, the artistic director, is the son of a father who was involved in the Democratic Party, and of a mother and stepfather who were members of the Communist Party. The musical was staged in the Public Theater, known for its socially conscious musicals.²⁹⁴ Moreover, they actively reach out to the Democratic Party, and above all, to Barack Obama, the symbol for Miranda’s future America (see *supra*). *‘This was a president I had worked hard to elect, and I wanted to show something about the American experience and do something new there because I felt like I was part of something. And now, with the show opening as Obama’s presidency is winding down, it feels very fitting and full circle. I don’t know what his legacy will be. I do know*

²⁹⁴ MIRANDA (L.M.) and MCCARTER (J.). *Hamilton: the Revolution*, Grand Central Publishing (2016), pp 102-103.

*that the thing that Hamilton and Obama have in common is that they're totally improbably stories – except they happened.*²⁹⁵

The musical received a boost in 2009, when Miranda performed 'Alexander Hamilton' at the White House. Staging a hip-hop song about a 250-years old secretary of the treasury in front of the first black president, surely is a good way to get attention.²⁹⁶ Even better is it when the president visits the show (just like Hillary Clinton, several UN ambassadors, and Dick Cheney)²⁹⁷ – and the top is reached when the entire cast is invited to the White House to perform songs and participate in a workshop on Alexander Hamilton.²⁹⁸ Miranda participated in an improvised rap with words provided by Obama, such as constitution, congress and Obamacare – although the actor did not make any overt political statements.²⁹⁹

The connection between a musical and a president is not new. *'Obama's support of the show seems destined to tie Hamilton to his presidency in the history books, just as John F. Kennedy's presidency is tied to Camelot.'*³⁰⁰ Davidson analysed how the musical about King Arthur posthumously became linked with the president, when his widow told Life that

²⁹⁵ DIGIACOMO (F.). 'Hamilton's' Lin-Manuel Miranda on Finding Originality, Racial Politics (and Why Donald Trump Should See His Show)', in *The Hollywood Reporter*, April 9th, 2015, sf.

http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/features/hamiltons-lin-manuel-miranda-finding-814657?utm_source=twitter

²⁹⁶ Miranda says the musical went viral for seven years, and he keeps hearing about it today still. Lin Manuel Miranda Hamilton in Conversation Part 2, 04:34-04:50.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SqpXRR9Qk2c>

²⁹⁷ EILPERIN (J.). 'What the Musical 'Hamilton' Says about Obama's Presidency', in *Washington Post*, July 18th, 2015, sf. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/07/18/what-the-musical-hamilton-says-about-obamas-presidency/>

²⁹⁸ SMITH (J. F.). 'Hamilton' Takes a Road Trip to the White House', in *New York Times*, March 14th, 2016, sf. http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/15/theater/hamilton-takes-a-road-trip-to-the-white-house.html?smid=fb-nytimes&smtyp=cur&_r=0

²⁹⁹ On Obamacare, he only had to say that 'it was hopeless before you enacted that system.' SULLIVAN (L.). '#Bam4Ham: Check Out Lin-Manuel Miranda & the Hamilton Cast's White House Visit', in *Broadway*, March 14th, 2016, sf. <http://www.broadway.com/buzz/184135/bam4ham-check-out-lin-manuel-miranda-the-hamilton-casts-white-house-visit/>

³⁰⁰ TEPPER (J.A.). 'Rapper Daveed Diggs Gets Real About Getting His Shot in Broadway's Hamilton', in *Playbill*, January 4th, 2016, sf. <http://www.playbill.com/news/article/rapper-daveed-diggs-gets-real-about-getting-his-shot-in-broadways-hamilton-377247>

Kennedy was very much like Arthur, a *'well-meaning, fallibly human but ultimately idealistic character in Camelot, a man more sinned against than sinning.'*³⁰¹

There are differences. Camelot was not created with Kennedy in mind – the connection was laid only later – whereas Hamilton clearly and deliberately relates to Obama. Moreover, Obama is still alive. He can actively use the musical to promote his own world view, which, according to many commentators, overlaps with the musical's vision. Jennifer Eilperin notes that *'the musical's theme meshes perfectly with the Obamas' vision of politics,*³⁰² *and has several similarities to the president's personal story. It is the story of a fatherless boy born on an island, who rises to political influence on the basis of his intellect and work. (...) And the show's political message — that a group of outsiders can challenge the establishment — harkens back to Obama's first presidential campaign.'*³⁰³ Obama himself said that *"there's not a black America and a white America and Latino America and Asian America – there is the United States of America.(...) The idea of America that was represented here was more than just numbers, more than just statistics. It's about who we are, who's seen, who's recognized, whose histories are affirmed."*³⁰⁴ The show looks like Obama's (now much discredited³⁰⁵) post-racial America

³⁰¹ DAVIDSON (R.). 'The "Reel" Arthur: Politics and Truth Claims in "Camelot, Excalibur, and King Arthur"', in *Scriptorium Press*, vol 17, n°2 (2007), p p 66.

³⁰² Obama's appeal to legalize the illegal immigrants in the country, fits nicely in 'Hamilton's' pro-immigration theme. SHEAR (M.D.). 'Obama to Appeal Immigration Ruling to Supreme Court', in *New York Times*, November 10th, 2015, sf. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/11/us/politics/supreme-court-immigration-obama.html?smid=fb-nytimes&smtyp=cur&r=0>

³⁰³ EILPERIN (J.). 'What the Musical 'Hamilton' Says about Obama's Presidency', in *Washington Post*, July 18th, 2015, sf. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/07/18/what-the-musical-hamilton-says-about-obamas-presidency/>

³⁰⁴ MIRANDA (L.M.) and MCCARTER (J.). *Hamilton: the Revolution*, Grand Central Publishing (2016), 284.

³⁰⁵ PARKS (G.S.) and HUGHEY (M.W.) (eds.). *The Obamas and a (Post)Racial America?* Oxford University Press (2011), 310 pp.

come true,³⁰⁶ while, in Miranda's eyes, Obama could be the harbinger of the future envisioned in the show. Their overlapping visions strengthen each other.³⁰⁷

On November 2nd, 2015, the connection was most clearly made when Obama hosted a Democratic fund-raising at the Richard Rodgers Theater, where *Hamilton* had moved on Broadway. Selling the seats for \$5000, the money will be poured into the Democratic Hope Fund and used to settle the debts of Obama's election campaign (and to fund the campaign of the next candidate).³⁰⁸ Though the official show book is quick to assert that '*in spite of all the similarities between his worldview and the show's, Obama didn't try to claim it for a single political party*',³⁰⁹ this is errant nonsense. The Democratic Party (or at least the Democratic presidential candidates) very much tries to use the musical. Is it coincidence that Bernie Sanders visits the musical on the eve of election day in New York?³¹⁰ Hillary Clinton at least beat him to it – she saw the musical when it was still at the Public Theater, and quoted it to 'throw shade at the Republican Party': '*and if anything's clear from last night's #GOPdebate: "They don't have a plan—they just hate mine."*'³¹¹

³⁰⁶ TEASLEY (M) and IKARD (D.). 'Barack Obama and the Politics of Race: the Myth of Postracism in America', in *Journal of Black Studies*, vol 40, n° 3 (2010), pp 411-425; and MCKENZIE (B.D.). 'Barack Obama, Jeremiah Wright, and Public Opinion in the 2008 Presidential Primaries', in *Political Psychology*, vol 32, n° 6 (2011), pp 943-961.

³⁰⁷ Obama's support for the musical should not be exclusively political. Obama might like the musical personally, precisely because it fits his world view well.

³⁰⁸ PAULSON (M.). 'Obama Planning to See 'Hamilton' Again to Raise Money for Democrats', in *New York Times*, October 5th, 2015, sf. http://www.nytimes.com/politics/first-draft/2015/10/02/obama-planning-to-see-hamilton-again-to-raise-money-for-democrats/?_r=0

³⁰⁹ MIRANDA (L.M.) and MCCARTER (J.). *Hamilton: the Revolution*, Grand Central Publishing (2016), 284.

³¹⁰ CAPLAN (D.) and PARKS (M.). 'Bernie Sanders, Wife Attend Broadway Musical 'Hamilton,' About Founding Father Alexander Hamilton', in *ABC News*, April 9th, 2015, sf.

<http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/bernie-sanders-wife-attend-broadway-musical-hamilton-founding/story?id=38270518>; and CHUNG (J.). 'Bernie Sanders went to *Hamilton* and Everyone Freaked Out', in *Gothamist*, April 9th, 2016, sf. http://gothamist.com/2016/04/09/bernie_sanders_hamilton.php

³¹¹ CHUNG (J.). 'Bernie Sanders went to *Hamilton* and Everyone Freaked Out', in *Gothamist*, 04/9/2016, sf. http://gothamist.com/2016/04/09/bernie_sanders_hamilton.php (consulted 05/15/2016). Moreover, the Inner Circle Dinner, a political event hosted during election time in New York on which Hillary Clinton was invited, was partially hosted by Leslie Odom, Jr. in his character of Aaron Burr. *Sine Nome*. 'Hillary Clinton Drops in at Inner Circle Show, Needles Mayor', in *Newsday*, April 10th, 2016, sf. <http://www.newsday.com/news/new-york/hillary-clinton-drops-in-at-inner-circle-show-needles-mayor-1.11673400>

III. "Yo, Who the Eff is This?": Reinventing Hamilton

'Hamilton' lies in the political field by virtue of its connection to Obama and the Democratic Party. However, it does not bring (institutional) political change. Its major influence lies in the minds of the audiences. 'Hamilton' is at the same time inherently historical and glaringly anachronistic. By using (abusing?) history, Miranda creates a fiction of the past to support a vision on the future – and many people buy into it. Why? Why did Miranda pick a historical subject, a white Founding Father, to introduce a multicultural society? Why did he not simply create a story of how own? 'In the Heights' contained approximately the same message as 'Hamilton', but, despite its success, it never became as immensely popular. Why not?

For one, 'In the Heights' was not nearly as revolutionary as 'Hamilton'. Though it was new in depicting a Latino community in a more positive light,³¹² it does not invert theatrical norms by mixing hip-hop, rap, historical drama and people of colour as actors as 'Hamilton' did. Most importantly though, 'In the Heights' is not historical – and it is history that provides an excellent vehicle for political messages. As Roberta Davidson described about 'Camelot', *'the return of a 'once and future' king who shares the artist's ideals and concerns – who offers a real world solution which he alone, charismatically, can persuade the public to adopt, and about which the public is informed through the medium of the artist's text – links the artist's idealized and articulated political agenda with the weight of timeless and universal truth, and presents a claim to linking the fictional narrative with objective reality. Accordingly, there is a significant weight placed upon the veracity of the world. (...) The artist must make a good claim to veracity – that this Arthur, out of all the possible Arthurs past and present, is, indeed, the*

³¹² The difference in mood is apparent when one compares the depiction of the Hispanics in 'In the Heights' with those of the Puerto Rican Sharks in 'West Side Story'.

authentic Arthur.³¹³ What is true for king Arthur is also true for Hamilton. The musical has to be perceived as historically accurate in order to convey a message.

Of course, it is easier to claim to speak for a figure as mythical as King Arthur than for a very real Founding Father who died only two centuries ago, and especially when the author's view compel him to cast historically white figures as black and Hispanic, incorporating contemporary issues openly in the play. Still, the audience seems able to separate contemporary elements from the historical story. They know the Founding Fathers were not black – but the story as it evolves, the Revolutionary War, the Constitutional Convention, the Reynolds Pamphlet, Washington's Farewell Address, intersects sufficiently with the history the audience has learnt in schools to evoke a sense of historical accuracy.

'Hamilton' does emphasize its historical basis. When one buys anything related to 'Hamilton' on the internet or in the theater, the biography by Ron Chernow, on which the musical was based, is always suggested, as are a couple of other books. Together, they form a 'canon' on Hamilton – always a dangerous situation, for it implies that *these* books tell the truth, and other interpretations are excluded. Never mind that every biography is subjective, and that Chernow, for example, is especially interested in Hamilton's supposedly immigrant background and in defending him against claims that he was a loyalist and elitarian, and in general portrays him in a distinctively favourable light. The musical and the book show the 'real' Hamilton. In reality, Chernow would act as the historical consultant, although '*more than mere fact-checking, the eminent historian, who*

³¹³ DAVIDSON (R.). "The "Reel" Arthur: Politics and Truth Claims in "Camelot, Excalibur, and King Arthur", in *Scriptorium Press*, vol 17, n°2 (2007), pp 62-63.

was then 59 years old, gave Lin affirmation.’³¹⁴ He would not protest much against the many historical changes in function of the story-telling.³¹⁵

Not only does the musical hire a historical consultant – Miranda himself appears to have researched this history, and he has. Details in the show make it seem all the more reliable.³¹⁶ That he wrote a *musical*, instead of a speech or high-school lecture, ironically enhances its reliability in the eyes of many Americans. They know history can be used and distorted. That is why they often distrust and loath the ‘official’ history provided by high-school classes, just like fictional movies and books. On the other hand, they do trust college professors and places where one can encounter (and interpret) history on their own terms, such as musea.³¹⁷ Moreover, ‘*although respondents described the past as being with them in many settings, they shared the sense that the familial and intimate past, along with intimate uses of other pasts, mattered most.*’³¹⁸ A musical fits perfectly into these expectations. This is not a pre-fabricated history lesson to serve official interests. This is living, reliable history one can connect to (“*why am I crying over Alexander Hamilton?*”³¹⁹) and encounter on his or her own terms.³²⁰ After all, why would a musical lie about the past – and certainly a man as accessible and enthusiastic and disarming as Lin-Manuel Miranda? He is no faceless official dictating what to believe. On twitter and on genius.com, he rather

³¹⁴ MIRANDA (L.M.) and MCCARTER (J.). *Hamilton: the Revolution*, Grand Central Publishing (2016), p 32.

³¹⁵ One example is that John Laurens, Hercules Mulligan, Marquis de Lafayette, Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton could not possibly have met before the Revolution.

³¹⁶ An example: in ‘The Room where It Happens’, Burr correctly states that the previously called Clermont Street was renamed after general Mercer when he died in the Revolution (‘*You know Clermont Street? (...) / They renamed it after him. The Mercer legacy is secure*’). It has no consequence for the plot, but it does evoke the sense of historical accuracy. ‘The Room Where It Happens’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 00:09-00:13.

³¹⁷ ROSENZWEIG (R.) and THELEN (D.). *The Presence of the Past. Popular Uses of History in American Life*, Columbia University Press (1998), pp 90-113.

³¹⁸ ROSENZWEIG (R.) and THELEN (D.). *The Presence of the Past*, p 20.

³¹⁹ Lin-Manuel Miranda Talks “Hamilton,” New York and His Influences’, 01:23-01:26.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h7YTPuEMgaE>

³²⁰ “*Chris Jackson is a great George Washington gate-way drug*,” Daveed Diggs said. Indeed, one can learn about this part of history on its own – but one will do so through distinctive, ‘Hamilton’-influenced glasses. Panel – Hollywood’s Diversity Problem’, 04:40-04:44. <http://www.cc.com/video-clips/vd9ata/the-nightly-show-with-larry-wilmore-panel---hollywood-s-diversity-problem>

seems to encourage the audience to research about Hamilton and share his enthusiasm for the new hero.

If Miranda checks his facts, only deviating from them for narrative purposes, and relies on Chernow as historical consultant, the history in the musical should be ‘true’ (if this is ever possible), should it not?³²¹ Only, facts and names do not make a story historically correct. Since the narrative turn and postmodernism, it has been commonly accepted that every historical account is subjective and thus, essentially, a story about the present rather than the past – or, in other words, *‘the historical narrative within a postmodern context is now ‘accepted’ as subjective, hence it offers an understanding of the past through a lens of the present, projecting an image of the future.’*³²² Certainly, it is neigh impossible to recreate history as it ‘has been’ – and with a political and social vision as outspoken as Miranda’s, it comes to no surprise that, should the musical-Hamilton and the historical Hamilton meet in an alternate universe, they would not recognize each other.

Discussing all the differences between the historical and performed Hamilton would stand as a paper in its own right. However, most historians of Hamilton would raise their brows when they heard musical-Hamilton being described as an immigrant and portrayed as a defender of slaves’/blacks’ rights. Rexford Tugwell and Joseph Dorfman offered an entirely different perspective on him.³²³ He would not have been considered an immigrant in his time, because Nevis (and the Caribbean) were (English) colonies, arguably even more important than their North-American counterparts. Moreover, rather than a spokesman for blacks, Hamilton held aristocratic ideals, *‘which included not only approval of monarchy and distrust of democracy, but also a thorough conviction, apparent in every*

³²¹ After all, Miranda did say that *“I want historians to take this seriously.”* MIRANDA (L.M.) and MCCARTER (J.). *Hamilton: the Revolution*, Grand Central Publishing (2016), p 32.

³²² I would like to thank prof. Ken Kennard who, during an informal meeting, suggested this to-the-point phrase.

³²³ TUGWELL (R.G.) and DORFMAN (J.). ‘Alexander Hamilton: Nation Maker’, in SAVETH (E.N.) (ed.). *Understanding the American Past*, Boston (1954), pp 158-177.

*measure he sponsored in his life, that wealth was a badge of virtue and that successful traders were the natural protectors of society.*³²⁴ Whereas he is often characterized as a realist, as opposed to the idealistic (and, according to the musical, unrealistic³²⁵) Jefferson, Hamilton now becomes a visionary.

There are other differences. The colonies were not screaming for independence, but for recognition before George III rejected them.³²⁶ Burr did not appear to have regretted having shot Hamilton.³²⁷ The Dinner Table Bargain was not the only informal compromise made to settle the position of the new capital.³²⁸ The relationship between Washington and Hamilton was not as personal as the musical suggests.³²⁹ Historically, then, the musical adopted a pick-and-mix method – it picked up elements it could use and crammed them together in a contemporary framework, simultaneously distorting the original picture beyond recognition. ‘Hamilton’ is not concerned about the past. It is concerned about the present and the future. To propagate and legitimize a political and social vision, it projects it to the past, but, as Miranda himself admitted earlier, he could have picked any biography.³³⁰ It was merely coincidence Hamilton’s happened to possess elements he could use, and that that particular biography was available at that time.

Miranda has a vision, and he uses an historical musical to see it materialized. *‘What I can tell you is that works of art are the only silver bullet we have against racism and sexism and*

³²⁴ TUGWELL (R.G.) and DORFMAN (J.). ‘Alexander Hamilton: Nation Maker’, in SAVETH (E.N.) (ed.). *Understanding the American Past*, Boston (1954), p 161.

³²⁵ Jefferson receives a tongue-lashing from Washington over exactly this issue: *‘frankly, it’s a little disquieting you would/let your ideals blind you to reality.* ‘Cabinet Battle #2’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 01:44-01:48.

³²⁶ BERNSTEIN (R.B.). *The Founding Fathers Reconsidered*, Oxford University Press (2009), pp 41-49.

³²⁷ ELLIS (J.J.). *Founding Brothers. The Revolutionary Generation*, Random House inc (2000), pp 20-47.

³²⁸ ELLIS (J.J.). *Founding Brothers*, pp 72-73.

³²⁹ FERLING (J.E.). *The First of Men. A Life of George Washington*, the University of Tennessee Press (1988), p 379.

³³⁰ Maybe not any biography. Chernow’s ‘Alexander Hamilton’ lend itself uniquely for Miranda’s vision – it was reasonable to depict him as an immigrant, as a friend of Washington’s, surrounded by strong (female) characters... because he was more or less unknown to a larger audience.

*hatred. (...) Art creates change in people's hearts. But it happens slowly.*³³¹ In order to do so, he constantly mingles past, present and future³³² – and it works. Miranda is doing for Hamilton what Disney did for Pocahontas. He is replacing one vision on a historical character with another (inaccurate) one, and people believe it. Before the show existed, “*who talked about Alexander Hamilton? People thought he was a president but he never was.*”³³³ When the cast performed the opening number on the Grammy Awards, Google Trends ‘*reported that searches for "Who is Alexander Hamilton?" spiked four times the normal rate during the show's live performance from the Richard Rodgers Theatre in New York City.*’³³⁴ With an audience generally ignorant of who he was, it is easy to change or form their knowledge on the historical figure.

Miranda knows the power of musicals. “*The only history you know, is from musicals,*” he said during an interview.³³⁵ “*That's gonna be the Hamilton-effect for a while; that there is going to be a generation of people who filter American history through this show. That's why I felt the burden of being as historically accurate as possible, because I know our theatre-heads – we are just going to take that as facts.*”³³⁶ And they are. As one fan noted, ‘*I think it's great that now*

³³¹ DIGIACOMO (F.). ‘Hamilton’s’ Lin-Manuel Miranda on Finding Originality, Racial Politics (and Why Donald Trump Should See His Show)’, in *The Hollywood Reporter*, April 9th, 2015, sf.

http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/features/hamiltons-lin-manuel-miranda-finding-814657?utm_source=twitter

³³² One should only look at the book of the musical, that uses 18th-century style chapter titles and constantly equals the American Revolution with the revolution the musical has brought in theater. MIRANDA (L.M.) and MCCARTER (J.). *Hamilton: the Revolution*, Grand Central Publishing (2016), 287 pp.

³³³ Lin-Manuel Miranda Talks “Hamilton,” New York and His Influences’, 02:04-02:08.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h7YTPuEMgaE>

³³⁴ ROBBINS (C.). ‘Following HAMILTON Grammy Performance, Americans Google ‘Who is Alexander Hamilton?’ in *Broadway World*, February 18th, 2016, sf.

<http://www.broadwayworld.com/article/Following-HAMILTON-Grammy-Performance-Americans-Google-Who-Is-Alexander-Hamilton-20160218>

³³⁵ “*You know about Argentinian history, you know a lot about the founding, you know about one failed revolution in 1848, you know about the founding documents and that John Adams was obnoxious and disliked, and you know about cats.*” ‘Lin Manuel Miranda Hamilton in Conversation Part 4’, 05:36-06:06.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59Y2DwS20_I&index=4&list=RDFHX-BYBnEc0

³³⁶ ‘Lin Manuel Miranda Hamilton in Conversation Part 4’, 06:41-06:58.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59Y2DwS20_I&index=4&list=RDFHX-BYBnEc0

*thousands of young people have weirdly specific knowledge of Alexander Hamilton's life.*³³⁷ There are even plans to implement a 'Hamilton'-based curriculum by the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, in which students will study the same documents Miranda used. Moreover, students from high poverty schools are given discount tickets for the show, and get to perform their own projects on the show on stage.³³⁸ 'Hamilton' is going to shape how younger generations will view the Founding Fathers. It is the greatest change Miranda could have hoped to achieve.

³³⁷ Blog post, October 25th, 2015. <http://dolohkov.tumblr.com/post/131879408060/i-think-its-great-that-now-thousands-of-young>

³³⁸ FERTIG (B.). 'Broadway's 'Hamilton' Makes Its Way into NYC's High School Curriculum', in *NPR*, April 14th, 2016, sf. <http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2016/04/14/474185125/broadways-hamilton-makes-its-way-into-nycs-high-school-curriculum>



Image 3: Grave of Eliza Schuyler Hamilton (Trinity Church, New York City)

PART III: LEAVING A LEGACY – CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

‘Hamilton’ has become an enormous hit. Audiences like the unconventional music style and its high tempo, the story that is both largely unknown and yet familiar, the ingenious lyrics and recurring motives, the set and clothing. Like Jones asserted, a musical has to offer entertainment – and ‘Hamilton’ offers loads of it. Its revolutionary character is recognized by the industry as well. Besides being nominated for sixteen Tony-Awards (a record in its own right),³³⁹ ‘Hamilton’ has won a number of other prizes, including the Kennedy Prize for Historical Drama.³⁴⁰

The reviews follow suit. Practically all of them consider the musical a masterpiece, a revolution in history and theater, noting the colour-reversed casting and the use of hip-hop and rap.³⁴¹ As one reviewer summarizes, *‘the musical is a triumph, one that has already been seen and lauded by presidents past (Bill Clinton), present (Barack Obama) and possible future (Hillary Clinton) – not to mention, in an illustration of its ability to bridge political differences,*

³³⁹ PAULSON (M.). ‘“Hamilton” Makes History with 16 Tony Nominations’, in *New York Times*, May 3th, 2016, sf. [http://mobile.nytimes.com/2016/05/04/theater/hamilton-tony-nominations-record.html?_r=0&referrer=http://www.bing.com/search?q=PAULSON+\(M.\)+“Hamilton”+Makes+History+with+16+Tony+Nominations’,+in+New+York+Times,+05/03/2016,+sf.&a=results&MID=2500](http://mobile.nytimes.com/2016/05/04/theater/hamilton-tony-nominations-record.html?_r=0&referrer=http://www.bing.com/search?q=PAULSON+(M.)+“Hamilton”+Makes+History+with+16+Tony+Nominations’,+in+New+York+Times,+05/03/2016,+sf.&a=results&MID=2500)

³⁴⁰ PAULSON (M.). ‘Hamilton’ Wins Kennedy Prize for Historical Drama’, in *New York Times*, February 22nd, 2016, sf. http://mobile.nytimes.com/blogs/artsbeat/2016/02/22/hamilton-wins-kennedy-prize-for-historical-drama/?_r=0&referrer=https://www.google.com/

³⁴¹ See, for example, BRANTLEY (B.). Review: ‘Hamilton,’ Young Rebels Changing History and Theater’, in *New York Times*, June 8th, 2015, sf. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/07/theater/review-hamilton-young-rebels-changing-history-and-theater.html>; HETRICK (A.). ‘Lin-Manuel Miranda Rocks American History with *Hamilton*, Premiering Off-Broadway Tonight’, in *Playbill*, January 20th, 2015, sf. <http://www.playbill.com/news/article/lin-manuel-miranda-rocks-american-history-with-hamilton-premiering-off-broadway-tonight-339610>; and SIEDE (C.). ‘George Takei and Lin-Manuel Miranda Shift the Historical Lens on Broadway’, in *A. V. Club*, May 11th, 2015, sf. <http://www.avclub.com/article/george-takei-and-lin-manuel-miranda-shift-historic-227516>

former Vice President Dick Cheney.’³⁴² Cass Morris even compared Miranda with Shakespeare.³⁴³

The result of this extremely positive reception has been the growing attention of some critics to this narrative. ‘*One of the most interesting things about the Hamilton phenomenon is just how little serious criticism the play has received. Indeed, it has played to near universal acclaim from points all along the political spectrum. (...) What, in this age of concerns about inequality and big banks, are we doing going gaga over a play about a man who promoted both?*’³⁴⁴ I hope my thesis has sufficiently answered this question.

Nevertheless, there are words of criticism to be found. The most profound and eloquent one, flows from the pen of Lyra Monteiro. In essence, she says, ‘Hamilton’ is ‘*another rendition of the “exclusive past,” with its focus on the deeds of “great white men” and its silencing of the presence and contributions of people of color in the Revolutionary era.*’³⁴⁵ Despite its colour-reversed casting, the show all but ignores the African-Americans during the Revolution. Cato, Mulligan’s slave who spied together with his master, is completely absent – Sally Hemmings is only referenced to. In ‘The Schuyler Sisters’, an African-American-casted Angelica sings ‘*how happy we are to be alive right now*’,³⁴⁶ completely ignoring that (most of) her ancestors were enslaved at that time, even in celebrated New York. It also is conservative in its promotion of the American Dream, ignoring structural inequality. In sum, ‘*the history it tells is essentially the same whitewashed version of the founding era that has lost*

³⁴² SCHECK (F.). ‘Hamilton’: Theater Review’, in *the Hollywood Reporter*, June 8th, 2015, sf. <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/lin-manuel-mirandas-hamilton-theater-813145>

³⁴³ *It’s not just that Manuel is a linguistic genius. It’s that he’s a linguistic genius in many of the same ways that Shakespeare was.* MORRIS (C.). ‘#YayHamlet: What Shakespeare and Broadway’s Biggest Hit have to Do with Each Other’, in *ASC Education*, February 16th, 2016, sf. <http://asc-blogs.com/2016/02/16/yayhamlet-what-shakespeare-and-broadways-biggest-hit-have-to-do-with-each-other/>

³⁴⁴ GORDEN-REED (A.). ‘Hamilton: the Musical: Blacks and the Founding Fathers’, in *The Public Historian*, April 6th, 2016, sf. <http://ncph.org/history-at-work/hamilton-the-musical-blacks-and-the-founding-fathers/>

³⁴⁵ MONTEIRO (L.D.). ‘Race-Conscious Casting and the Erasure of Black History in Lin-Manuel Miranda’s Hamilton’, in *The Public Historian*, vol 38, n° 1 (2016), p 90.

³⁴⁶ ‘The Schuyler Sisters’, in ‘Hamilton: an American Musical’, 01:56-02:05.

*favor among many academic and public historians. Here there is only space for white heroes. (...) Is this the history that we most want black and brown youth to connect with—one in which black lives so clearly do not matter?*³⁴⁷ This criticism is echoed by others.³⁴⁸

Whereas this is valid criticism, I have argued this is not the point of the musical. The story is not about the past and its (important) African-Americans and its slavery. Most of the historical characters and elements are symbols to refer to modern-day issues. They embody values that should be part of a possible future America, in Miranda's vision. To what degree he intended the political and social consequences it had, remains questionable. Certainly, as a writer, he also wanted simply to produce an entertaining product, which he infused with his own vision on America's future – and which he could sell to an audience.

The audience bought it.³⁴⁹ It does so, because the musical is less revolutionary as it would like to make itself seem. Certainly in its treatment of women and of immigrants, the show remains ambivalent. Moreover, it allows the audience its agency. It offers a political and social vision, but it is hidden within a historical story. One can pick up separate elements of this vision. The purely political (and thus most potentially dangerous) aspects are the hardest to catch, for a musical that is to openly political, is often pushes away part of its potential audience and has less chance to have its vision accepted. The (apparently) feminist aspects are easier to find, and of course the vision on immigrants and African-Americans are the most obvious.

³⁴⁷ MONTEIRO (L.D.). 'Race-Conscious Casting and the Erasure of Black History in Lin-Manuel Miranda's Hamilton', in *The Public Historian*, vol 38, n° 1 (2016), pp 96-97.

³⁴⁸ GORDEN-REED (A.). 'Hamilton: the Musical: Blacks and the Founding Fathers', in *The Public Historian*, April 6th, 2016, sf. <http://ncph.org/history-at-work/hamilton-the-musical-blacks-and-the-founding-fathers/>; and SCHUESSLER (J.). 'Hamilton' and History: Are They in Sync?', in *New York Times*, April 10th, 2016, sf. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/11/theater/hamilton-and-history-are-they-in-sync.html?smid=fb-nytimes&smtyp=cur&r=0>

³⁴⁹ 200 000 Tickets even before the show went to Broadway. MONTEIRO (L.D.). 'Race-Conscious Casting and the Erasure of Black History in Lin-Manuel Miranda's Hamilton', in *The Public Historian*, vol 38, n° 1 (2016), p 90.

However, one could also completely ignore the political and social implications, and just consume the musical as an entertaining play. After all, with or without the underlying messages, the show has all the elements of a classic tragedy. It has humour. It has catchy songs. It has relatable characters. It has a dramatic story-line. Just like in the Greek tragedies, characters rise and fall often by their inherent characteristics. And, as we demonstrated, it offers a vision on America. It is not a perfect vision. Like the traditional narrative of the Founding Fathers it ‘updates’, it also excludes groups. Though Asian-Americans are present in the show, they are certainly not the focus, and both Muslims and Native Americans are completely absent. Moreover, America’s future according to Miranda keeps conservative elements, such as a belief in a self-made man and the American Dream.

‘Hamilton’, Miranda, is not the only one to propagate a vision on America. More and more voices are presenting their increasingly different projects for the nation (for who had ever thought a candidate calling himself socialist could have been successful?). However, the demographic statistics do lend his views a viability that is denied to those (like Trump) who support traditional stories, such as the original version of the Founding Fathers-narratives. The old stories that have shaped and structured American society are coming to an end. The future will determine which new (or adapted) stories will take their place – and whether this will be one of them.

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- 'The Story of Tonight', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 01:32.
- 'The Schuyler Sisters', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 03:07.
- 'Farmer Refuted', in 'Hamilton: an American Musical', 01:53.
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Act 2.

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