



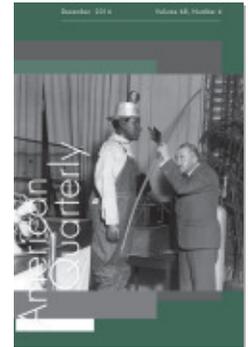
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Hamilton's America: An Unfinished Symphony with a Stutter (Beat)

Ariel Nereson

Hamilton. The Public Theater, New York, April 12, 2015.

How does a bastard, orphan, son
of a whore and a
Scotsman, dropped in the middle of a forgotten
Spot in the Caribbean by providence, impover-
ished, in squalor,
Grow up to be a hero and a scholar?

Lin-Manuel Miranda is no stranger to success on Broadway—his musical *In the Heights* garnered him four 2008 Tony Awards and a Grammy Award.¹ In 2016 Miranda almost tripled his success: the juggernaut musical *Hamilton*, for which he wrote the music and lyrics, and starred as Alexander Hamilton, won eleven 2016 Tony Awards, including Best Musical, Best Book, and Best Score.² Inspired by the historian Ron Chernow's 2005 biography *Alexander Hamilton* and beginning as "The Hamilton Mixtape" performed as a short rap by Miranda for President Barack Obama at the White House in 2009,³ *Hamilton's* connection to contemporary American politics via its unique perspective on the nation's founding has garnered the production endless accolades from various popular media outlets and a steady stream of celebrity attendees from Beyoncé and Jay-Z to the Obamas and a slew of Treasury secretaries, including the current secretary, Jacob J. Lew.⁴ While this review is of the Public Theater production (direction by Thomas Kail, choreography by Andy Blankenbuehler, and music direction by Alex Lacamoire) that enjoyed a thrice-extended run from January 20 to May 3, 2015, much of my commentary remains relevant for its transfer to the Richard Rogers Theatre on Broadway in July 2015, where it continues a sold-out run and has reinvented the concept of the rush line as a performance venue in itself. Since January 2015, Miranda has been awarded a MacArthur "genius" grant, the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, the 2016 Edward M. Kennedy Prize for Drama

Inspired by American History, the George Washington Book Prize, and the Original Broadway Cast Recording has won a Grammy and reached number one on the Billboard Rap chart.⁵ *Hamilton's* primary interventions into the story of the founding fathers revolve around casting choices and the use of rap and hip-hop as the dominant musical genres. Both the nontraditional casting and music reinvent dominant modes of storytelling, advancing Miranda's thesis of "history being up for grabs, and the teller being just as important as the subject."⁶ While seemingly universally lauded by popular critics, a recent critical conversation among historians and cultural critics has emerged, positioning two lines of primary inquiry: *Hamilton* as art/entertainment, and *Hamilton* as history. Yet these lines continually intersect in the experience of the production, creating a web wherein they produce meaning interdependently, not as fragments, complicating the critical division.

Hamilton tells the story of "10-dollar founding father without a father" Alexander Hamilton (Miranda), bookended by two encounters with Aaron Burr (Leslie Odom Jr.): the first meeting between the men in New York City in 1776, where Hamilton seeks Burr's advice at climbing the political ladder, and the last, their infamous duel in 1804.⁷ Act 1 addresses the Revolutionary War, act 2 the aftermath of governing. The entire show is sung (rapped, etc.) through, making the cast recording a good option for a relatively complete version of the show if a live Broadway viewing is not in your future. The musical opens with several historical figures—Burr, Jefferson (Daveed Diggs), Madison (Okieriete Onaodowan), George Washington (Christopher Jackson), John Laurens (Anthony Ramos), Eliza Hamilton (Phillipa Soo)—ruminating on Hamilton's unlikely survival and success, introducing both the central figure and the critical interplay between history and historiography that runs throughout the performance. Burr's opening lines, which began this review, introduce a man who was raised by a single mother out of wedlock and, crucially for this production, came to the colonies as an immigrant believing in the promise "In New York you can / be a new man."⁸ "Alexander Hamilton" paints Hamilton as saved from a life of poverty and insignificance largely by his skill with words: "put a pencil to his temple, connected it to / his brain." Bolstered by the music, it is easy to hear the connections between Hamilton's backstory and popular narratives of social mobility through rapping. Emphasizing Hamilton's immigrant roots is the primary historiographical strategy in this opener, and the production repeatedly articulates the "immigrant" status of many of the founders. This focus is surely related to current (and perennial) debates around immigration reform and who gets to be an American, and clearly states the show's liberal politics. Scholars have discussed

the problems of amplifying a narrative of exceptionalism and a “bootstraps” mentality that circumvents structural inequalities.⁹ In my viewing, and later multiple listenings to the cast recording, I was struck by the complete absence (whether in scripted characters or even in a single reference) of native peoples: the triumphant nature of the immigrant story line results in the characters feeling a total and unproblematic sense of discovery and then ownership of their new country despite the historical reality of native peoples. While narratives of exceptionalism permeate the production’s representation of Hamilton, the show is also quick to illustrate that it is not a hagiography of great men, another example of “founders chic.” A particularly striking moment occurs a few lines in, when Jefferson takes over Hamilton’s backstory. First, Jefferson is played by the multiracial actor (and professional rapper) Daveed Diggs. This casting choice thrusts Jefferson’s engagement with the slave trade into sharp focus, sharpened still further by his first lines, ostensibly about Hamilton: “And every day while slaves were being slaughtered and carted / Away across the waves, he struggled and kept his guard up.” Casting and lyric heighten, rather than erase, the troubling racial legacy Jefferson left behind.

This is a history focused on character rather than event, or at least events exist as opportunities to give insight into the kind of person we are dealing with onstage. This focus allows for a dramaturgically satisfying story, propelled by individuals with recognizable desires. As the revolutionaries keen toward war, we are introduced to fundamental character differences in Hamilton and Burr revealed in the lyrics repeated around and by these characters. Memorably integrating Hamilton’s personal story into the nation’s larger history, Miranda foregrounds the refrain “Hey yo, I’m just like my country, / I’m young, scrappy and hungry, / And I’m not throwing away my shot!” Hamilton’s sense of action and urgency is often rebuked by Burr, who advises him to “talk less, smile more,” and whose own strategy is to “wait for it.”

Act 1 proceeds through Hamilton’s meeting the revolutionaries Laurens, Hercules Mulligan (Onaodowan), and the Marquis de Lafayette (Diggs) and joining their cause, where his companions eagerly seize on his rhetorical skill. Characters are acutely aware of their participation in events of historical significance, as Hamilton introduces himself to his new companions with the line “Don’t be shocked when your hist’ry book mentions me.” These frequent asides to history function both as plausible thoughts for the characters but also as sly checks on getting too sucked into their personal dramas, reminding the audience that history is a constructed and performed enterprise. Importantly, despite compelling characterization of and electrifying performances by the male leads, this is not an exclusively “great man” history. The voices of the



Figure 1. Daveed Diggs, Okieriete Onaodowan, Anthony Ramos, and Lin-Manuel Miranda in a scene from *Hamilton*. Photo credit: Joan Marcus. Courtesy of The Public Theater.

Schuyler sisters—Angelica (Renée Elise Goldsberry), Eliza (Soo), and Peggy (Jasmine Cephas Jones)—ring out throughout the evening, introduced in the wonderful song “The Schuyler

Sisters.” Here the three sound straight out of a Destiny’s Child record, their harmonies waterfaling as they stride through downtown New York, with Angelica reminding the audience that not everyone was included in the rhetoric of independence:

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 wanna revelation
So listen to my Declaration:

Eliza/Angelica/Peggy:

“We hold these truths to be self evident
That all men are created equal”

Angelica:

And when I meet Thomas Jefferson,
.....
I’m ‘a compel him to include women in the sequel!



Figure 2. Phillipa Soo, Renée Elise Goldsberry, and Jasmine Cephas Jones in a scene from *Hamilton*. Photo credit: Joan Marcus. Courtesy of The Public Theater.

The musical theater scholar Stacy Wolf has argued persuasively that the central female figures, while performed brilliantly, do not escape the trope of “muse, wife, whore,” inspiring in Wolf the “killjoy feeling” during a nonetheless thrilling spectating experience.¹⁰

King George III (Jonathan Groff) appears throughout act 1 with a promise of future conflict but also asking the question that act 2 finds our newly American leads unprepared for: “Do you know how hard it is to rule?” Musically, the king’s songs are particularly smart, each composed of lyric variations on the same melody and structure cribbed from another (later) British invasion, Brit-pop.¹¹ This first appearance, “You’ll Be Back,” is brilliantly juxtaposed with the following number, “Right Hand Man,” which introduces George Washington as a very different kind of leader. The song begins with the reminder that armed conflict served as one of few routes to upward mobility both for individuals without the privileges of birth and wealth (like Hamilton) and for communities (the nascent nation). Washington arrives on the scene with a grounded physicality oriented toward action, rapping his way through the tribulations that face him in this war. In a smart reference to Gilbert and Sullivan, Washington reminds the crowd “I’m the model of a modern major general,” but that his past successes are proving meaningless in the current

struggle: “How can I keep leading, when the people I’m leading keep retreating?” He turns to his fellow revolutionaries for support, selecting Hamilton over Burr for his inner circle (the beginning of a trend) to be his, as the Schuyler sisters sing earlier, “mind at work,” to write pamphlets, stir up support, and organize. Washington rebukes Hamilton’s youthful appetite for violence: “It’s alright, you want to fight, you’ve got a / hunger. / I was just like you when I was younger. / Head full of fantasies of dyin’ like a martyr? / Dying is easy, young man. Living is harder.” Character distinctions between King George and Washington, manifested musically and through Groff’s and Jackson’s performances, reveal two very different approaches to leadership yoked by a shared emphasis on the consequences of actions, even those with energy and goodwill behind them.

Oscillating between public and private, act 1 also gives us the show’s central love story between Hamilton and Elizabeth Schuyler. It is a seemingly textbook romance that flows from first meeting (“A Winter’s Ball,” “Helpless”) directly into their wedding reception, where Miranda reveals that things are not what they appear. Maid-of-honor Angelica is called on to make a toast (“Satisfied”) and in the middle of her speech, one of the best stage moments occurs: the stage rewinds (spins, in fact) back to that winter ball, the characters resetting themselves and freezing as Angelica walks through the scene. She raps, “I remember that night, I just might / Regret that night for the rest of my days.” It is she, not Eliza, who first encounters Hamilton, and they find an immediate, exciting intellectual fit. Angelica’s first-born duty to marry rich and her sisterly duty to see Eliza happy collude against her own happiness, and she thrusts Hamilton into Eliza’s path, resigned: “At least my dear Eliza’s his wife, / At least I keep his eyes in my life.” The urgent drive toward action that has previously defined both Hamilton’s individual journey and the narrative of the show finds a parallel in “Satisfied,” as Angelica prophesies: “He will never be satisfied. / I will never be satisfied.”

As Miranda juxtaposes King George III and Washington, so too he lines up Hamilton’s and Burr’s love stories next to each other. As the war progresses, Burr reveals a clandestine affair of his own with Theodosia Prevost, the wife of a British officer, in one of the standout songs of the evening, “Wait for It.” The song also emphasizes the seemingly arbitrary nature of love, life, and death, noting that none “discriminate[s] / between the sinners / And the saints. / It takes and it takes and it takes.” This resigned attitude leads into “Stay Alive,” a song that emphasizes the realities of the war’s near failure. We are also introduced to General Charles Lee, who “shits the bed at the Battle of Monmouth”

and, to distract from his own cowardice, criticizes Washington in the press, leading Laurens to challenge Lee to a duel.

"Ten Duel Commandments" charts the course of events between Laurens and Lee and becomes a linchpin sonically and thematically for *Hamilton*. Its title is an explicit reference to the Notorious B.I.G.'s "Ten Crack Commandments" and features a huge variety of rhythms and rhymes as Laurens, Hamilton (Laurens's second), Lee, and Burr (Lee's second) outline the rules of engagement. Washington, furious with Hamilton for infighting and fed up with the younger man's rash actions, orders him to return home to Eliza ("Meet Me Inside") who, unbeknownst to Hamilton, is expecting their first child. Her plea for him to stay at home ("That Would Be Enough") also exposes that the standard story of this founding father is highly subjective and skewed toward public rather than private achievements. She begs, "Oh, let me be part of the narrative / In the story they will write someday." But *Hamilton's* wheel turns quickly back to the public conflict of the war ("Guns and Ships"), positioning Lafayette as the revolution's "secret weapon! / An immigrant you know and love who's unafraid to step in!" Lafayette's maneuvers set up Washington and company for a possible victory, and Hamilton is called to lead a troop. Washington, the most lauded founding father of this group, is often a historiographical voice throughout the show, emphasizing the burdens of leading a life of historical significance and his own failings that have faded from the popular record. In "History Has Its Eyes on You," he gives Hamilton key insight into history's machinations: "Let me tell you what I wish I'd known / When I was young and dreamed of glory. / You have no control. / Who lives, who dies, who tells your story." Washington's cautionary lyrics lead straight into the battle of Yorktown in 1781, with Hamilton's urgency at an all-time peak: "Gotta start a new nation, gotta meet my son!" "Yorktown (The World Turned Upside Down)" chronicles the surrender of the British and victory for the revolutionaries while providing frequent commentary on the far-from-universal definition of freedom operating in the colonies. As the white handkerchief of surrender waves, Laurens muses, "Black and white soldiers wonder alike if this / really means freedom," and Washington answers him definitively, "Not yet." The revolutionaries' triumph is strategically balanced by the king's quick entrance ("What Comes Next?"), warning his former subjects, "When your people say they hate you, don't / come crawling back to me."

Victories in the political realm are mirrored by the births of Hamilton's son Philip and Burr's daughter Theodosia, with both fathers reinvested in the future of the new nation through their desire to pass it on to their children.

They return to New York and to practicing law (“Non-Stop”), eager to lay the legal foundation of the United States. Hamilton, as always, is quick to jump in to the political fray and defend the Constitution, with Burr exercising typical caution. Hamilton drafts the Federalist Papers with James Madison and John Jay, writing “day and night like you’re running out of time.” In the midst of this political fracas, Angelica marries rich and departs for London, and Eliza continues to plead with her husband to spend more time at home. As Washington ascends to the presidency, the first act concludes with Hamilton leading the Treasury and Eliza asking, “Look around, isn’t this enough?”

Hamilton is often described as “revolutionary,” a descriptor made perhaps too convenient by the events of the title figure’s life rather than apt for the production. In fact, the historical events of the revolution are over before intermission, and the production is far more concerned with governance than revolution. The critical choice to focus on “the revolution” as the cornerstone historical event (even more than Hamilton’s death) of the production mirrors, I think, a similar critical impulse to focus on the production as product, and to critique whether the product is revolutionary in some way. Paying attention to the show’s actual focus on governance, on the practices of leadership and nation building, might also lead us to characterize the artistic practices of *Hamilton* (e.g., choices of casting, promotion, profit-sharing, style as well as content) as the site of its potential revolutionary work.

With the larger narrative emphasis on Hamilton and a new nation, act 2 cleverly opens with Jefferson’s return in 1789. Jefferson has been away in France and does not know Hamilton (“What’d I Miss”); a frantic Madison pulls him aside before his first cabinet meeting to share concerns about the upstart crowd and his big government plans, quickly catching the audience up as well. “Cabinet Battle #1” presents political debate (Hamilton vs. Jefferson on the question of a national bank) in the style of a rap battle, complete with mic drops, effectively connecting the current moment to the early days of the nation through an emphasis on rhetoric, on wordsmithing. Insults fly, Hamilton skeptical that the nation should take “a civics lesson from a slaver. Hey neighbor. / Your debts are paid cuz you don’t pay for labor.” Hamilton comes to the uneasy realization that he must play nice with the South to get the votes he needs to pass his resolutions (the more things change . . .). “Take a Break” finds Hamilton plied by both Eliza and Angelica to spend his summer at the Schuyler compound upstate. He refuses, unknowingly thrusting himself into the path of a scandal that overtakes his political career. The smooth R&B number “Say No to This” tells the story of Hamilton’s meeting Maria Reynolds (Cephas Jones): “Someone under stress meets someone looking pretty.” It is

a steamy song that takes us into their affair, which leads to Maria's husband blackmailing Hamilton for his silence. Hamilton rages, "I am helpless—how could I do this?" in a heartbreaking echo of Eliza's earlier love song. From a growing secrecy in Hamilton's personal life, we are thrown into political secrecy from Burr's perspective in the showstopper "The Room Where It Happens." Burr, the perpetual outsider, waits in the dark as Hamilton, Jefferson, and Madison make a deal: relocating the Capitol to Virginia for approval of Hamilton's financial scheme. This song foregrounds the production's Company as a stand-in for the public at large, with Burr and the Company musing on their limited access to policymaking: "We want our leaders to save the day— / But we don't get a say in what they trade away. / We dream of a brand new start— / But we dream in the dark, for the most part." It is not difficult to see contemporary concerns about government transparency reflected in these founding moments.

Burr's frustration with being a political outsider manifests in his running for Senate against Philip Schuyler, Eliza's father ("Schuyler Defeated"). Burr switches parties in order to win and destroys any shot at personal friendship or political compromise with Hamilton. Prior political friendships are seriously tested in "Cabinet Battle #2," with Jefferson and Hamilton shouting over how or even whether the new nation should support its previous ally France in her revolution. Jefferson frames Hamilton's recent ascendance, "desperate to rise above his station," as an inability to act like a gentleman and honor the agreement with France. Hamilton responds, "We signed a treaty with a king whose head is now in a basket." Washington, presiding over their verbal sparring, decides in favor of Hamilton, leading into "Washington on Your Side," where Burr, Madison, and Jefferson spit insults and doubt Hamilton's power without Washington behind him. They decide to "follow the money and see where it goes," hoping to turn up some dirt on "this immigrant" that will help their party, "Southern motherfuckin'— / Democratic-Republicans!" consolidate power against the Federalists. As that collective gains energy, Hamilton meets with Washington ("One Last Time") to discover that he will not run again for president. As Washington and Hamilton write Washington's good-bye, Washington emphasizes neutrality and collaboration between parties as essential for the new government to survive—an apropos comment for the current political landscape.¹² The act 1 juxtaposition of Washington with King George repeats ("I Know Him"), with the king confusedly singing, "Are they gonna keep on replacing whoever's in charge?" The king foreshadows the inevitable infighting that will follow Washington's exit as the strong but calm hand guiding the nation, expressing doubt that John Adams, "that little guy

who spoke to me / All those years ago” can play the role. The king’s gleeful concerns about America’s political stability connect directly to Hamilton’s own stability, personal and political. “The Adams Administration” and “We Know” follow Jefferson’s rise to vice president, Adams firing Hamilton, and the Burr/Madison/Jefferson trio’s locating the smoking gun: “We have the check stubs. From separate accounts . . . / Almost a thousand dollars, paid in different amounts . . . / To a Mr. James Reynolds way back in / seventeen ninety-one.” Hamilton reveals all in order to demonstrate that he did not mishandle Treasury funds but paid everything out of his personal finances. In a private moment, speaking to the audience, Hamilton vows to “write my way out” of the growing storm, referencing his past successes with the pen in the political arena and the private: “I wrote Eliza love letters until she fell” (“Hurricane”). He produces the Reynolds Pamphlet, publicly admitting to the affair, humiliating his wife, and ensuring, to the delight of his rivals, “he’s never gon’ / be president now.”

Eliza’s anger and hurt produce one of *Hamilton*’s most creative songs (“Burn”), wherein Miranda imagines her response to the affair as one of destroying not only Hamilton’s pride in his skill with words by burning all his letters—“You and your words, obsessed with your legacy”—but also as a way to control her own appearance in his future story: “I’m erasing myself from the narrative. / Let future historians wonder / How Eliza reacted when you broke her heart.” “Burn” serves as a timely reminder that as much as *Hamilton* invites viewers into this history, the history itself is incomplete, its archives fragmented both by chance and by intentional omission. This downturn in Hamilton’s fortunes grows to tragic proportions as his son, Philip (Javier Muñoz, also Miranda’s understudy), becomes embroiled in a duel with George Eaker to defend his father’s honor (“Blow Us All Away”). The song concludes with the same countdown from “Ten Duel Commandments,” cut short by a gunshot that claims Philip’s life. His death onstage with Eliza and Hamilton by his side dramatically narrows the show’s wide lens; its humanizing force is devastating. We stay in darkness with “It’s Quiet Uptown,” which finds Eliza and Hamilton relocating, shrinking into their grief, and trying to revive their partnership with the beautiful and painful refrain, “They are going through the unimaginable.”

The beauty of “It’s Quiet Uptown” breeds even more sympathy for the Hamiltons, and Jefferson and Madison jump in with “The Election of 1800,” redirecting us: “Can we get back to politics? / Please?” Hamilton’s disappearance from political life along with Adams’s failures has created a vacuum into which Jefferson and Burr step, now as rivals. Though Hamilton likes neither candidate, he ends up supporting Jefferson: “Jefferson has beliefs. Burr has

none.” “The Election of 1800” repeats several motifs and rhythmic structures from “Washington on Your Side,” surrogating Hamilton into Washington’s position (he dies in 1799) but also suggesting that the candidates may change but the political machine does not. Endorsing Jefferson turns out to have significant consequences as Hamilton receives a challenge from Burr (“Your Obedient Servant”) when his reconciliation with Eliza seems to be progressing (“Best of Wives and Best of Women”) that leads to the men’s duel (“The World Was Wide Enough”). “Ten Crack Commandments” echoes again here, as does Hamilton’s frequent line “I imagine death so much it feels more like a memory.” At what turns out to be the end of his life, Hamilton muses, “Legacy. What is a legacy? / It’s planting seeds in a garden you never get to see.” He dies with Angelica and Eliza at his side, Burr realizing “History obliterates. / In every picture it paints, / It paints me with all my mistakes. . . . he may have been the first one to die, / But I’m the one who paid for it.” The great men, the founding fathers, all concerned with their legacies and all turning to dust, lead into the finale “Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story.” Miranda pulls off a brilliant, affecting bait and switch in the musical’s final moment, where Eliza steps into the spotlight and we are treated to a recitation of her remarkable accomplishments after Hamilton’s death. Eliza tells her own story in this moment,¹³ actively inserts herself “back in the narrative,” and ends the show with a moment of historiography rather than history, reminding us that the stakes are not simply “who lives, who dies” but perhaps more important, “who tells your story.”

Hamilton is vibrant, well-crafted storytelling, but its innovations lie in style and approach rather than strictly in content. It is neither the first musical to take on revolutionary history or prominent US political biography (1776, written in 1969, and 2006’s *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson* spring to mind) nor the first to use hip-hop as its dominant musical idiom (that would be 2014’s *Holler If Ya Hear Me*, based on the music of Tupac Shakur, and a flop on Broadway). *Hamilton* does not simply propose that the history of the founding fathers can be told through hip-hop idioms, or that black, Latinx, and Asian Americans can see themselves somehow in these historical figures (though this perhaps would be revolutionary enough). It goes farther, suggesting that this revolutionary story might be *best* told through hip-hop, that hip-hop as a style can help us understand this moment in our history in ways that are urgent and vital. Miranda, speaking about his choice of hip-hop as the dominant genre for *Hamilton*, claims, “We need a revolutionary language to describe a revolution” and that Hamilton’s own prodigious output necessitates hip-hop “because we get more language per measure than any other musical form.”¹⁴ Moreover,

Hamilton's casting argues that we do not fully understand this history and its consequences in the present *unless* we commit to nontraditional casting—it is necessary rather than novel. For Miranda's part, casting choices were equally motivated by artistic considerations as well as political (though the two are hard to parse here): "When I first had the idea for the show, I was already thinking in terms of voices and not in terms of people who look like the Founding Fathers."¹⁵ When *Hamilton* eventually becomes available for schools to stage, Miranda has said that he would welcome gender-bending casting as well: "I can't wait to see kickass women Jeffersons and kickass women Hamiltons."¹⁶ Critical assessments of the merits of *Hamilton's* race-conscious casting tend to assume a homogeneous audience, both in terms of what spectators expect from the show and how they interpret the racially diverse cast performing European American historical figures.¹⁷ There are two issues here: one, that audiences are not homogeneous, either in their demographic composition or in their responses to performance. The second issue is a larger one regarding the conflation of character and performer: concerns about Diggs's mixed-race body acting as a "get out of jail free" card for white spectators to absolve them of guilt over Jefferson's sins assume that audiences are there, first and foremost, to see a portrayal of Thomas Jefferson when, in fact, many spectators see *Hamilton* to see Diggs, Miranda, Odom Jr., Soo, and so forth, and the roles they are playing are secondary.¹⁸ The mixed-race chorus is also largely neglected in critical responses as is the fact that the leads and chorus are omnipresent on the stage, their presence forming a collective body that supplants the primacy of their individual character narratives.

For all the show's emphasis on character, it clearly lays out various triumphs, inadequacies, and paradoxes of the foundations of our American political machine. The production (both at the Public and now on Broadway) has become a huge bipartisan hit, though its most notable attendees in this sphere are certainly the Obamas. The president's first visit to the Public production offered the memorable sight of "our first black president . . . see[ing] our first president, black,"¹⁹ and he has returned to hold a fund-raiser for the Democratic National Committee (Miranda's father is actively involved) at the Richard Rogers Theatre. Miranda and others have noted the confluence of the Broadway premiere (August 6, 2015) with the first presidential Republican debate.²⁰ The president himself has praised *Hamilton's* cross-aisle appeal: "It is brilliant, and so much so that I'm pretty sure this is the only thing that Dick Cheney and I have agreed on—during my entire political career—it speaks to this vibrancy of American democracy, but also the fact that it was made by these living, breathing, flawed individuals who were brilliant."²¹ He



Figure 3. Lin-Manuel Miranda and Company in a scene from *Hamilton*. Photo credit: Joan Marcus. Courtesy of The Public Theater.

continues, “Why I think it has received so many accolades is it makes it [history] live. It doesn’t feel distant. And it doesn’t feel set apart from the arguments that we’re having today.”²² Odom Jr., who plays Burr, has said that the production presents the audience with an opportunity for a kind of radical empathy in offering nontraditional casting, an empathy that works to close the distance President Obama references.²³

Pragmatic concerns about distance also circle *Hamilton*: it is sold out through the foreseeable future (at time of press), and the current Broadway production comes with current Broadway ticket prices averaging \$125 per ticket, though resale values are much higher. Accessibility remains a concern for the show, as the structures of Broadway do not encourage wide attendance. Here *Hamilton* innovates again, creating Ham4Ham, a preshow performance for the many hundreds waiting in the rush line for a limited number of ten-dollar tickets for that evening’s show. Ham4Ham has become its own phenomenon, a way to bring some of *Hamilton*’s magic to the many who will not make it in for the full performance. Broadway stars from other productions have made guest appearances and created once-in-a-lifetime performances that only those waiting in the rush line will have experienced live.²⁴ A recent attempt to move the Ham4Ham ticket lottery online, spurred by public-safety concerns from

the sheer volume of bodies pressing into the street, lasted one day: the servers crashed from fifty thousand people entering the lottery for that night's twenty-one available seats. The show's incredible financial success (in April 2016 the advance sales were "\$82 million, the equivalent of nearly 400 sold-out shows") and its conceptual connection to ideas of "Americanness" have inspired initiatives meant to serve the most capacious definition of the "public" possible.²⁵ *Hamilton's* producers have partnered with the Rockefeller Foundation to provide tickets for twenty thousand New York City high school students from schools that serve primarily low-income families to see the production at ten dollars per ticket. These conscious choices to encourage accessibility partner revolutionary execution to *Hamilton's* revolutionary concept, producing a runaway Broadway hit circulating both as live performance and as recorded music, and designed to encourage those who will continue writing the great unfinished symphony that is America.

Notes

1. Tony Awards, formally known as the Antoinette Perry Awards, included Best Musical, Best Original Score, Best Choreography, and Best Orchestration. The Grammy Award was for Best Musical Show Album, which *Hamilton* was also awarded in early 2016.
2. Miranda played his last performance as Hamilton on July 9, 2016, and was replaced by his understudy, Javier Muñoz.
3. See Miranda's interview with Edward Delman in the *Atlantic*, "How Lin-Manuel Miranda Shapes History," for his account of the role of Chernow's book in inspiring the musical. Chernow remains the historical consultant for the production (Delman, "How Lin-Manuel Miranda Shapes History," *Atlantic*, September 29, 2015, www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/09/lin-manuel-miranda-hamilton/408019/.) Miranda has also said that discovering Chernow's book made him "feel like I'm a mosquito that hit an artery" (Jeffrey Brown, "Hip-Hop and History Blend for Broadway Hit 'Hamilton,'" *PBS NewsHour*, November 20, 2015, www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/hip-hop-and-history-blend-for-broadway-hit-hamilton/).
4. *Hamilton* has been covered in the *New Yorker*, *Rolling Stone*, *Time*, the *Atlantic*, *60 Minutes*, *PBS NewsHour*, NPR, various popular Internet outlets, and robustly in the local New York press.
5. Week of November 28, 2015.
6. Simon Vozick-Levinson, "Revolution on Broadway: Inside Hip-Hop History Musical 'Hamilton,'" *Rolling Stone Magazine*, August 6, 2015, www.rollingstone.com/culture/features/revolution-on-broadway-inside-hip-hop-history-musical-hamilton-20150806.
7. In April 2016 the musical's libretto was published with cultural commentary and an account of its creation by Miranda and Jeremy McCarter as *Hamilton: The Revolution* (New York: Grand Central Publishing). All quoted lyrics are taken from this publication.
8. In a *PBS NewsHour* segment, Miranda explains, "It's not the story of people who have been here for generations, but what it feels like to land here and make your way" (Brown, "Hip-Hop and History Blend").
9. For this line of critique, see Jason Allen, "A Color-Blind Stockholm Syndrome," National Council on Public History, March 9, 2016, ncph.org/history-at-work/a-color-blind-stockholm-syndrome/; James McMaster, "Why *Hamilton* Is Not the Revolution You Think It Is," HowlRound, February 23, 2016, howlround.com/why-hamilton-is-not-the-revolution-you-think-it-is; and Lyra D. Monteiro, "Race-

- Conscious Casting and the Erasure of the Black Past in Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton*," *Public Historian* 38.1 (2016): 89–98.
10. Stacy Wolf, "Hamilton," *Feminist Spectator*, February 24, 2016, feministspectator.princeton.edu/2016/02/24/hamilton/.
 11. For Diggs's breakdown of the characterization techniques used in *Hamilton*'s various hip-hop and rap structures, see Jesse David Fox, "In the Room Where It Happens, Eight Shows a Week," *Vulture*, January 11, 2016, www.vulture.com/2016/01/roundtable-interview-with-the-cast-of-hamilton.html#.
 12. This essay went to press before the 2016 presidential election during a period of heightened rhetoric about partisan politics and party extremism.
 13. One such accomplishment was the establishment of the first private orphanage in New York City. That orphanage grew into Graham-Windham, a social services organization that serves over four thousand children today. Soo has forged a strong relationship with the agency, and many cast members have become pen pals with the children at Graham-Windham. Soo has also started "The Eliza Project," designed to bring first-class arts education to these children, as the *Wall Street Journal* recently reported. See Leslie Brody, "'Hamilton' Cast Helps Children in Need," *Wall Street Journal*, December 29, 2015, www.wsj.com/articles/hamilton-cast-helps-children-in-need-1451442302.
 14. Brown, "Hip-Hop and History Blend." For analyses of *Hamilton*'s hip-hop influences and relationship to current music, see Anthony Tommasini and Jon Caramanica, "Exploring 'Hamilton' and Hip-Hop Steeped in Hamilton," *New York Times*, August 27, 2015, www.nytimes.com/2015/08/30/theater/exploring-hamilton-and-hip-hop-steeped-in-heritage.html; and Spencer Kornhaber, "The Case for 'Hamilton' as Album of the Year," *Atlantic*, December 17, 2015, www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/12/hamilton-cast-album-best-album-of-2015/420975/.
 15. Vozick-Levinson, "Revolution on Broadway."
 16. Caryn Robbins, "'Hamilton's' Lin-Manuel Miranda Is 'Totally Open' to Women Playing the Founding Fathers," *Broadway World*, November 13, 2015, www.broadwayworld.com/article/HAMILTONS-Lin-Manuel-Miranda-is-Totally-Open-to-Women-Playing-The-Founding-Fathers-20151113.
 17. See the Jefferson historian Annette Gordon-Reed's reading of the Hamiltons as they appear in the musical as "white" for a version of this line of argument: "Hamilton: The Musical: Blacks and the Founding Fathers," National Council on Public History, April 6, 2016, ncph.org/history-at-work/hamilton-the-musical-blacks-and-the-founding-fathers/.
 18. See Allen, "Color-Blind Stockholm Syndrome."
 19. Jeff MacGregor referring to Christopher Jackson (George Washington), who is multiracial. See MacGregor, "Meet Lin-Manuel Miranda, the Genius behind 'Hamilton,' Broadway's Newest Hit," *Smithsonian Magazine*, November 12, 2015, www.smithsonianmag.com/ist/?next=/arts-culture/lin-manuel-miranda-ingenuity-awards-180957234/.
 20. In an interview Miranda notes, "I find it ironic that on the night *Hamilton* opened, there were real candidates in a real debate that meant nothing, while in a theater, actors playing Hamilton and Jefferson were re-creating, in hip-hop verse, a debate where there were enormous stakes: whoever wins sets the precedent for how the country is going to run" (Frank DiGiacomo, "'Hamilton's' Lin-Manuel Miranda on Finding Originality, Racial Politics [and Why Trump Should See His Show]," *Hollywood Reporter*, August 12, 2015, www.hollywoodreporter.com/features/hamiltons-lin-manuel-miranda-finding-814657). See also Rebecca Mead, "Why Donald Trump and Jeb Bush Should See 'Hamilton,'" *New Yorker*, September 25, 2015, www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/why-donald-trump-and-jeb-bush-should-see-hamilton.
 21. Barack Obama and Marilynne Robinson, "President Obama and Marilynne Robinson: A Conversation—II," *New York Review of Books*, November 19, 2015, www.nybooks.com/articles/2015/11/19/president-obama-marilynne-robinson-conversation-2/.
 22. *Ibid.* See *Playbills* interview with Diggs for further thoughts on the connection between *Hamilton* and the Obama presidency: Jennifer Ashley Tepper, "Rapper Daveed Diggs Gets Real about Getting His Shot in Broadway's 'Hamilton,'" *Playbill*, January 4, 2016, www.playbill.com/news/article/rapper-daveed-diggs-gets-real-about-getting-his-shot-in-broadways-hamilton-377247.
 23. Daoud Tyler-Ameen, "Being Aaron Burr: Leslie Odom Jr.'s Star-Making Year in 'Hamilton,'" *The Record: Music News from NPR*, December 21, 2015, www.npr.org/sections/therecord/2015/12/21/460526573/being-aaron-burr.
 24. Follow the Twitter hashtag #Ham4Ham for video postings of these performances. See also Laura Reineke, "'Hamilton's' Ham4Ham Preshow: The Complete Compendium (So Far)," *Vulture*, January 14, 2016, www.vulture.com/2016/01/hamiltons-ham4ham-preshow-complete-compendium.html.
 25. Michael Sokolove, "The CEO of 'Hamilton' Inc.," *New York Times Magazine*, April 10, 2016, 39.