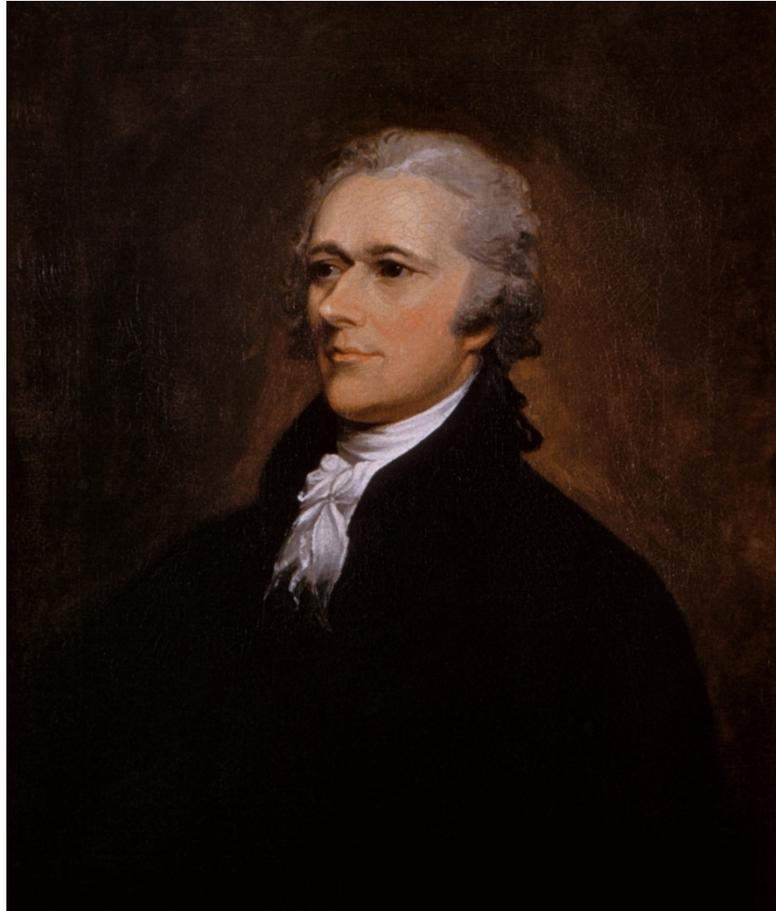


Alexander Hamilton and the early Abolition Movement:

The complexity behind Alexander Hamilton and his viewpoints on slavery and abolition.



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Table of Contents

Table of contents	2
Abstract.....	3
Keywords	3
Introduction.....	4
Chapter 1 – A Secretive Past.....	7
Details of birth	7
Parentage and upbringing	8
Orphanage.....	9
Chapter 2 – Revolutionary Relations	11
A Full Vindication of the Measures of Congress	11
John Laurens.....	13
Private Letters and The Schuyler Family	14
Chapter 3: Runaway Slaves	17
Fugitive Slaves and the Treaty of Paris	17
New York Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slavery.....	20
Chapter 4 –The Federalist.....	23
Becoming Treasury Secretary	23
The Three-Fifths Compromise	24
Hamilton vs. Jefferson.....	26
Conclusion	28
Works Cited.....	31

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Abstract

Alexander Hamilton's increasing popularity makes him an interesting subject to research. Recent media have portrayed him favorable, yet by looking more closely at certain issues one would realize that his character is more complex. One of these issues is slavery. Hamilton had a complicated youth in the West Indies, and his involvement with slavery played a large part in his upbringing. After moving to America, Hamilton became involved with the Revolutionary movement, and later with the Federalist Party and Washington's Cabinet. This thesis will look at how his upbringing, his personal relationships, and political ambitions influenced Hamilton's stance on slavery. My thesis question will therefore be: "To what extent can the fact that Alexander Hamilton acted as an abolitionist be traced to political reasons, rather than to moral ones?". By researching this, I will be able to assess to what extent Hamilton truly can be considered an abolitionist, and find out what ulterior motives Hamilton could have had for his actions and policies concerning slavery and abolitionism.

Keywords

Alexander Hamilton, American revolution, abolition, slavery, runaway slaves, New York Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slavery.

Introduction

On June 17, 2015, Secretary Jacob J. Lew announced that for the first time ever, a woman would be featured on a United States' currency bill, the ten-dollar bill to be specific. Lew, at the time, did most likely not realize that Lin-Manuel Miranda was about to go to Broadway with his production called *Hamilton*, which was based on the life of the first Treasury Secretary – and also the man that was currently featured on the ten-dollar bill – Alexander Hamilton (Calmes). Lew certainly could not have anticipated the major success the Broadway hip-hop musical would become. According to Calmes, *Hamilton* quickly grew a large fan base. These fans became enraged by the idea that their hero, Alexander Hamilton, would be taken off the currency. Eventually Lew decided to put Harriet Tubman, a former slave and abolitionist, on the twenty-dollar bill instead of the ten-dollar bill. She would be replacing Andrew Jackson, who was a former slave owner. As Calmes explains, it felt more righteous to have the former slave replace a former slave owner, rather than a fellow abolitionist. Secretary Hamilton himself had been a fierce abolitionist, or at least was that was what the musical had conveyed to his fans (Calmes).

Many people are familiar with the figure of Alexander Hamilton through his recent representation in the Lin-Manuel Miranda Broadway musical *Hamilton*. Since Alexander Hamilton is such an important figure in United States' early history, research into his views on important issues such as slavery are now more relevant than ever. I think it would therefore be interesting to look at the extent to which Alexander Hamilton can actually be considered an abolitionist, and to what extent the fact that Hamilton behaved as an abolitionist can be traced to political reasons. My thesis question will therefore be: "To what extent can the fact that Alexander Hamilton acted as an abolitionist be traced to political reasons, rather than to moral ones?".

One of the most cited sources on Hamilton is the well-known biography about Hamilton written by Ron Chernow. Chernow's biography is widely considered to be the definitive biography of Hamilton (Brooks, *Creating Capitalism*). As Brooks explains, this can be attributed to the view that although "other writers have done better jobs describing Hamilton's political philosophy, nobody has captured Hamilton himself as fully and as beautifully as Chernow". One of the issues that Chernow did not lay out very extensively in his biography was Hamilton's stance on slavery, yet it played a prominent role in Hamilton's life.

Hamilton died over sixty years prior to the abolition of slavery. Hamilton was born in Charlestown, the capital of the Caribbean island Nevis. At the time, 90% of the Charlestown population consisted of slaves. Hamilton's own mother even owned a few slaves through an inheritance, and one of these slaves was assigned specifically to serve the young Alexander (Chernow, p. 53-115). Most sources, including Ron Chernow's biography, are favorable towards regarding Hamilton as an abolitionist. When discussing the issue of slavery and abolition, these sources mainly focus on his friendship with John Laurens, who recruited slaves in the Revolutionary War in exchange for their freedom (Massey, p. 93), and on Hamilton's involvement with the New York Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slavery (Chernow, p. 528-532). The nature of the relation between Laurens and Hamilton is explained in sources such as George D. Massey's *John Laurens and the American Revolution*, while Chernow and Rury give a broader understanding of Hamilton's time as a member of the New York Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slavery.

However, there are also reasons to consider the idea that Hamilton was more indifferent towards the issue, and to challenge the general notion that Alexander Hamilton was very progressive when considering slavery. An example of this would be Hamilton's marriage to Elizabeth Schuyler (Chernow, p. 633), whose father owned and traded in a large number of slaves (. Other examples can be found in the way Hamilton wrote about these issues in his personal journals and letters. Ron Chernow's biography does mention the inconsistencies in Hamilton's behavior towards this issue, but Chernow usually does not give a lot of credit (Chernow, p. 633) By also looking at more critical sources, such as Magness' *Alexander Hamilton's Exaggerated Abolitionism* – in which he claims Hamilton bought slaves for his relatives (Magness) – I will be able to give a more realistic portrayal of the complexity behind Alexander Hamilton's abolitionism.

In the first two chapters of my thesis, I will look at how Hamilton's beliefs were shaped. I will look at his youth, which by all means can be considered traumatic (Horton, p. 16). I will also look at his close relationships with people such as George Washington, the Schuyler family, and John Laurens. In the musical *Hamilton*, Alexander Hamilton is portrayed as unwaveringly abolitionist (Miranda), yet these first two chapters will look at some inconsistencies in Hamilton's actions and writings that conflict with Ron Chernow's and Lin-Manuel Miranda's portrayal of the Founding Father. In the third and fourth chapter, I will look at Hamilton's political career and political reputation, and will consider possible anterior motives for Hamilton's sympathy for the abolitionist movement.

In the conclusion, I will look at how Hamilton's actual behavior aligns with the general notion that Hamilton was an abolitionist, by comparing Hamilton's actions to Lin-Manuel Miranda's portrayal of the Founding Father, and Chernow's biography on which the musical was based. I expect that after doing the research, it will become clear that Alexander Hamilton's stance on the issue of slavery is a lot more complex than him simply being the noble progressive abolitionist he is portrayed as by Miranda and Chernow.

Chapter 1 – A Secretive Past

*“And every day while slaves were being slaughtered and carted away;
Across the waves, he struggled and kept his guard up.”*

- Lin-Manuel Miranda, *Hamilton*, “Alexander Hamilton”

When looking at what shaped Alexander Hamilton’s relation with the institution of slavery, and his later involvement with the abolition movement, one should start at the beginning. Therefore, I will have to look all the way back to his time in the Caribbean. Considering the importance slavery had on the Caribbean islands, even more so than would later be the case in the United States, it can be said for certain that the young Hamilton was introduced to the issue at an early age and had to deal with the issue often, most likely on a daily basis. For this chapter, I will be looking at the details of Hamilton’s birth and upbringing, and how this could have potentially influenced his stance on the issue of slavery. I will also look closely at the situation in the West-Indies, in order to give a clear image of the significance of the institution of slavery in the young Hamilton’s childhood environment.

Details of birth

Considering the fact that Alexander Hamilton left so many primary sources, it is striking how unclear some of the details concerning his birth are. Hamilton was born in Charlestown, Nevis, in the British West Indies, yet Hamilton was an illegitimate child and therefore no records of his birth exist. He was born on January 11, either in 1755 or 1757. For a long time, it was believed Hamilton was born on 1757. In Henry Cabot Lodge’s 12 volume collection of Hamilton’s work called *The Works of Alexander Hamilton*, there is not a single sentence written by Hamilton himself about the year he was a born. On the very first page of the first volume, Lodge gives a short chronology of Hamilton’s life, in which he names 1757 as the year Hamilton was born. The collection was published in 1898, and Lodge’s reasoning for using this date at the time seems obvious. This is the year on Hamilton’s tombstone, and therefore most likely the year the people close to Hamilton believed he was born.

According to Chernow, many historians now believe Hamilton’s year of birth to be 1755, rather than 1757. Chernow explains that pieces of evidence such as a testimony from his uncle, the report of a 1768 probate court in St. Croix, a signature as the witness to a legal

document, and a poem in a St. Croix newspaper that many historians believe to have been written by a young Alexander Hamilton, all suggest that Hamilton was indeed born two years earlier than the date written on his tombstone (Chernow, p.17). The reason this evidence seems so compelling, is because it all stems from the period before Hamilton arrived in America. After he arrived in the United States, the young Hamilton had reasons to favor a later birth year.

A potential explanation for Hamilton's lie might be found by looking to his application for Princeton College. According to Chernow, Hamilton would have been eighteen when he applied for Princeton, had he been born in 1755. This would have been relatively late, as most students entered Princeton at the age of fourteen or fifteen (Chernow, p. 48). Chernow claims that this may have been the moment Hamilton decided to change his age, which could have been easily done considering there were no documents proving his real birth date. There is however, no distinctive proof proving one or the other. The only thing that can be concluded for certain, is that Hamilton was not very open and quite secretive about his past.

Parentage and upbringing

According to Larson, Rachel Faucette, Alexander Hamilton's mother, had been legally married to a man named Lavien when she met Alexander Hamilton's father James Hamilton. Rachel and Lavien had separated due to the cruel character of Lavien, and – although there is no distinctive proof – Larson also argues that it is often stated that Rachel was forced into the marriage in the first place (Larson, p. 142).

Hamilton had been born in Charlestown, after his mother had fled St. Croix to escape her husband. When they later had to return to St. Croix, Hamilton was old enough to be aware of the significant part slavery played on the island. According to Tyson and Highfield, for every white person on the island, there were twelve blacks. It was “the source from which every citizen obtains his daily bread and his wealth” (Tyson and Highfield, p. 42). According to Chernow, the neighborhood that the young Alexander Hamilton lived in was very diverse. Hamilton was exposed to both free blacks and slaves at a very young age. As is explained by Horton, the young Alexander Hamilton did not live like most other whites did in St. Croix at the time. The planters lived luxurious lives, but Alexander and his brother had to support their family by working and therefore lived more like plantation laborers (Horton, p. 16). This early exposure may have taught Hamilton about the humanity of blacks, and can be considered an argument for having set the basis for his later abolitionist agendas.

Hamilton's mother had inherited five slaves, which she hired out for income. Later, the number of slaves expanded to nine, as they had four children. According to Chernow, one of these children, Ajax, was assigned specifically to serve the young Alexander (Chernow, p. 23). Little is known about Alexander's relationship with Ajax, but one can assume that they would have had to be close. Hamilton's mother died in 1768, leaving Ajax to Alexander in her will. As an illegitimate child, the court ruled that Hamilton had no right to his inheritance. As Horton explains, this feeling of being an outcast and of being wronged may have caused Hamilton to identify with the West Indian slaves, and helped him sympathize with their struggle (Horton, p. 16-17). Although the loss of his inheritance must have been unfortunate for the young Alexander, this loss was probably for the better. By losing his inheritance, Alexander Hamilton would later be able to claim that he himself had, technically, never owned a slave. This is something most founding fathers were unable to say about themselves. If Hamilton had inherited and owned slaves, Chernow and Miranda would have been forced to include that in their representations, which would have certainly taken away from Hamilton's reputation.

Chernow notes that it was quite strange that Hamilton never named one of his daughters after his mother, Rachel (Chernow, p. 503). Naming at least one child after your mother was a common practice at the time, and not doing so hints at a degree of bitterness. Just like the details of his birth are left out of his writings, mentions of his mother are left out as well. Considering that Hamilton seemed to have felt no resentment to his father, James Hamilton, and often tried to get into contact with him via his brother, one would suspect there were ulterior reasons. One of these reasons could be the fact that his mother's marriage to Lavinia and her reputation made Hamilton uncomfortable, as it reminded him of the fact that he was a bastard. If this were the case, it remains strange that Hamilton was always eager to try and stay in contact with both his brother and father, who must have reminded him of the same things. A plausible explanation is the one that Hamilton regretted his mother's involvement with slavery, and did not wish to be associated with it in his later political life. The less his political opponents knew about his mother, the less they would know about her involvement with slavery.

Orphanage

The period in Hamilton's life in which his involvement with slavery was most morally dubious is undoubtedly the period after his mother's death. Living in the West Indies during his teen years, Alexander Hamilton took a job at a trading firm on St. Croix called

Beekman and Cruger Company. Hamilton worked as a company clerk, which means he took care of the business' paperwork and accounting. Horton claims that the company was mostly known for trading in sugar and slaves (Horton, p. 17), while Chernow claims that they "mostly brokered foodstuffs and dry good" (Chernow, p. 105), but Chernow does agree that they at least once a year handled a large shipment of slaves. Chernow goes on to explain that the conditions on these ships were vile, and that the slaves arrived sickly and thin.

Chernow, whose biography speaks very favorably of Hamilton, is sympathetic towards Hamilton for being exposed to the inhuman scenes he took part in, such as the inspecting, housing, grooming, and pricing of the slaves. Horton, however, is willing to look at the character of Alexander Hamilton more critically. He states that although Hamilton was very alarmed by the conditions of these slaves, he continued working for the business and continued participating in the buying and selling of human beings. Horton goes on to state that Hamilton had written a letter concerning the acquirement of "two or three poor boys", which he wanted "to be put on plantations" (Horton, p. 17). As Horton explains, Hamilton was very aware of what this would mean for "these poor boys".

What should be kept in mind, is that Alexander Hamilton was an orphaned teenager in need for money. At this time, slavery was considered the pillar of the Caribbean economy. Considering the wording of his letters, calling the boys "poor boys" and asking for them to be "bound in the most reasonable manner you can" (Horton, p. 17), it seems likely that Alexander Hamilton was in a situation he did not want to be in. His job as a clerk may have been another vital part of the reason Hamilton would later during his political career become so secretive about his past. Had they known about this, Jeffersonians would have undoubtedly called Hamilton out for being a hypocrite every time the issue of slavery came up.

Looking at all of this, there is one thing that we can clearly state; Hamilton was secretive about almost everything that happened before he arrived in the American Colonies. His mother and the fact that she was in possession of multiple slaves was something he omitted from his writings, and even the exact details of his birth are to this day intriguing topics of debate. Hamilton's actions – in regard to slavery – after his mothers passing put him in an even less optimal position, although he might have had little choice in the matter. It is therefore not strange that upon arriving in the American Colonies, he decided to keep his past a secret from his future political opponents.

Chapter 2 – Revolutionary Relations

“But we’ll never be truly free;

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

- Lin-Manuel Miranda, *Hamilton*, “My Shot” (by John Laurens)

In the previous chapter, we saw how Alexander Hamilton used his opportunity to go the Americas as a way to start over. He avoided the subject of his youth and involvement with slavery, and became a fierce proponent of the American Revolution. As will become clear when we discuss his college years, the young Hamilton was not afraid to speak about the fact that he believed slavery was something that had taunted history. However, we will also look at the time he served under General Washington, and the personal relationships he built during the war. While some, such as his relationships with John Laurens, would help to encourage Hamilton’s belief in the abolition movement, we will also look at how his relationships with others, such as his in-laws and the General himself, caused Hamilton to act in ways that could be considered against the interests of those held in bondage.

A Full Vindication of the Measures of Congress

In August 1772, a large Hurricane on the island of St. Croix caused the young Alexander Hamilton great distress. Hamilton wrote a descriptive letter on the destruction the hurricane caused. The letter was published in the *Royal Danish American Gazette* by Henry Knox. As Gordon explains, this resulted in a group of impressed residents of the island funding Alexander Hamilton’s education in North America. Hamilton arrived in Boston on October 1772, and entered King’s College. At the time, the American colonies were at the brink of war with its mother country, Great Britain. Within the colonies, there was also opposition between Loyalists, who sympathized with the British cause, and revolutionaries, who wanted the American colonies to be independent from Great Britain.

The First Continental Congress took place from September 5, 1774 until October 26, 1774. This Congress discussed the issues concerning the current situation of British rule, and would form the basis for the Revolutionary government. A Bishop from Connecticut named Dr. Seabury published two pamphlets as a response to this First Continental Congress called *Free Thoughts on the Proceedings of the Continental Congress*, and *Congress Canvassed by*

a *Westchester farmer*. According to Lodge, these pamphlets were well-written and in support of the Crown.

The, at the time, either 17- or 19-year-old Hamilton wrote a response to Dr. Seabury's pamphlet called *A Full Vindication of the Measures of Congress*. In this pamphlet, Hamilton argues the revolutionary side of the conflict by comparing the relationship between Britain and the American colonies to that of a slaveholder and his slaves. He goes on to state that "no man in his senses can hesitate in choosing to be free, rather than a slave" (Hamilton, p. 6) and that the American colonies are "threatened with absolute slavery" (Hamilton, p. 14). Although Hamilton is not speaking of slavery in the sense of white farmers owning black people as their literal property, the fact that he is comparing British oppression – something which the essays and his later involvement in the Revolutionary War make clear he was against – with slavery, shows that Hamilton considered slavery to be something very much undesirable. As Hamilton himself explains later in the pamphlet, "the page of history is replete with instances that loudly warn us to beware of slavery" (Hamilton, p. 15).

It should be noted that, although Hamilton states that slavery is undesirable and people should beware of it, he does not get into the situation of the actual states, and only uses this comparison to make an argument for American independence. As Frederick Douglass would later write in "The Hypocrisy of American Slavery", the Revolutionary generation was eager to compare themselves to slaves in order to make clear how badly they were mistreated by the British, but those same Americans would brush over the actual slavery that they were permitting in their own country, the enslavement of African Americans.

Racism should also be taken into account. Although a lot of the Founding Fathers were against the institution of slavery, many did not consider those colored people to be equal to white people. According to Nash in "African Americans in the Early Republic", the ideology of freeing slaves was not always meant in a compassionate manner. The institution of slavery simply did not provide any economic upside to many people living in the Northern states. As he continues to explain, "legal emancipation did not confer full political, equal economic opportunity, or social recognition" (Nash, p. 14). Looking again at Hamilton's earlier mentioned statement that "the page of history is replete with instances that loudly warn us to beware of slavery" (Hamilton, p. 15), it could be said that Hamilton was not specifically speaking about the African slaves held in America. Slaves throughout history were often captives of wars, and could be of any skin color. The fact that Hamilton refers back to slavery throughout history could be considered an argument in favor of him also believing in equal rights of freedom for blacks and whites. However, for this to be the case

we would have to assume that his quote applies to black slaves as well. Just because Hamilton believed in the injustice of slavery, says by itself little about his beliefs about other rights for African Americans in general.

Considering the prevalent racism at the time and Douglass' argument, we can not rule out the possibility that Hamilton did not really care much for the actual slavery that was going on in the Americas at the time, and even if he did, it is likely he was mainly focused on the Northerners motives, rather than on the wellbeing of the slaves themselves.

John Laurens

Alexander Hamilton joined the Revolutionary War in 1776. Impressed with Hamilton's work ethic and skills – especially in writing – General George Washington offered him a position as one of his most prominent *aides-de-camp* in 1777. This position would allow him to meet a man named John Laurens, who would later become his closest friend and even the best man at his wedding.

John Laurens was the son of a wealthy planter who owned a lot of slaves, so like Hamilton he was introduced to the issue of slavery at an early age. John Laurens fought in the American Revolution for American liberty, but he also had a strong anterior motive. As Massey explains in *Slavery and Liberty in the American Revolution – John Laurens's Black Regiment Proposal*, Laurens believed it was highly hypocritical for the American patriots “to demand their liberty while they held blacks in bondage”. In Massey's book, *John Laurens and the American Revolution*, Massey goes even deeper into this topic.

Laurens had served as an aide-de-camp to General Washington, just like Hamilton had. Laurens left the position when he was appointed his first command, taking over from Lieutenant Colonel Henry Lee, and was thus appointed instead of more experienced men. According to Massey, Laurens was a very unpopular choice. Many of the officers that had served under Lee – and had therefore been more obvious choices to become his successor than Laurens – rejected Laurens' leadership (Massey, p.1).

According to Klein, General Washington had stated on November 12, 1775 that the army would exclude any boy that was still unable to bear arms, old men, and anyone of African-American decent – or as phrased by Washington – “negroes”. John Laurens came up with a plan to use blacks in his regiment anyways. In his book, Massey explains that Laurens asked his father for an advance on his inheritance, but instead of receiving money or land, he asked for his father's slaves. Laurens then offered these slaves their freedom, in return for their service during the Revolutionary War (Massey, p. 93).

Massey explains that Hamilton wanted “to accompany his friend to the new scene of action” (Massey, p. 131). Chan points out that Hamilton thought blacks very capable of serving in the army. In a letter to John Jay, Hamilton mentioned that slaves were welcome additions to the army, and that the only thing that made the blacks inferior was “their want of cultivation (for their natural faculties are probably as good as ours) joined to that habit of subordination which they acquire from servitude”. This letter clearly shows that Hamilton at that time believed that African Americans were not inferior to Anglo Americans by nature. Chan states that Hamilton hoped that, by serving in the army, blacks would be able to prove they were worthy of freedom as well (Chan, p. 217). Although Chan does make a good point here, it should be kept in mind that throughout his essay, Chan seems to focus on the things that point towards Alexander Hamilton’s abolitionism, and not so much on the things that do not. He also does not really look into possible ulterior motives Hamilton could have had. It should not be forgotten that Alexander Hamilton’s main objective during this time was winning the Revolutionary War, and it might very well be that he – at the time – considered freeing slaves to fight in the American army just as a means to that end.

According to Chernow, Hamilton had written to Laurens that he wished Laurens’ plan to succeed, but that he deemed it unlikely (Chernow, p. 317). The reason for this can be explained by the British’ own strategies of using the slaves to their advantage, which will be further explained in the third chapter, *Runaways Slaves*. As Hamilton regarded it, these rivaling strategies were very favorable for the slaves. Yet siding with the Brits, who had never enslaved them in the first place, would according to Hamilton be the more appealing option for the slaves.

Private Letters and The Schuyler Family

Despite his close friendship to John Laurens and endorsement of his plan, it does not seem like Hamilton was entirely made up about the issue. In a letter from Hamilton to Colonel Elias Dayton, Hamilton writes about a “negro” who had fled to the British forces and was captured by the Continental army. He advises the Colonel to return the slave to his former owner, a Mr. Caleb Wheeler, albeit speaking for General Washington. Runaway slaves were a complex issue during the Revolutionary War, and considering Hamilton’s stance on the issue in his later life – which will also be further explained in the third chapter – it seems out of character for Hamilton to be so uncompromising in this example, and for him to be this set on having the slave returned to his former master.

According to Chernow, Hamilton began thinking about marriage in the spring of 1779. Hamilton told his friend John Laurens that he was afraid of making the wrong choice (PAH, vol. 2, p. 37). One of the requirements Hamilton's future wife would have to meet, was that she would need to come from a wealthy family. It is therefore not strange that, after consulting with Laurens, Hamilton would eventually decide on General Philip Schuyler's daughter Elizabeth, who was a member of a rich New York family. What is strange about choosing Elizabeth to be his wife is that the Schuyler family's wealth could mainly be attributed to their large slave holding estate. It is therefore peculiar that Hamilton – who nowadays is often portrayed as an outspoken abolitionist – would marry someone from the Schuyler family.

According to Chernow, becoming part of the Schuyler family may have indeed complicated Hamilton's stance of slavery. Philip Schuyler had over twenty slaves working in his Albany estate, his fields and his mills (Chernow, p. 633). According to Hamilton's grandson and biographer, Alan McLane Hamilton, his wife Eliza was frequently in contact with the slaves and was "probably her mother's chief assistant in the management of the house and slaves" (*Hamilton*, p. 96). Chernow points out how jarring this image is, considering Eliza's outspokenness about slavery and role as an abolitionist in her later life.

Magness goes even further, and states that Chernow and Lin-Manuel Miranda have been enormously misrepresenting Hamilton's abolitionism. Magness even states that there is no evidence for Hamilton's abolitionism at all. While claiming that there is absolutely nothing that shows Hamilton had abolitionist motives at all is absurd, Magness does raise a point that is quite disturbing and should not be overlooked. Magness claims Hamilton bought slaves for his relatives, and points to compelling evidence to support this. Magness has gone through Hamilton's cash books, and found multiple entries that do suggest he had acquired slaves for relatives, such as "Cash to N. Low 2 Negro servants purchased by him for me, \$250" and "John B. Church Dr. to Cash paid for negro women & child 225, ditto paid price of Negro Woman 90". Even Chernow admits that there is reason to believe that Hamilton tried to reacquire a slave formerly owned by Hamilton's sister-in-law, Angelica Schuyler Church.

Hamilton's time during Revolutionary War gives a confusing picture of his stance on the issue of slavery. Although he has openly endorsed John Lauren's plan, he also made some decisions that were very un-abolitionist. These decisions do not necessarily prove that Hamilton was secretly in favor of slavery. As DuRoss argues, it is more likely that

Hamilton's considered his relationships with his in-laws and General Washington – who would later become the first president of the United States – more important than his personal feelings about the morality of slavery. Looking at the large amount of correspondence between Angelica Schuyler and Hamilton that can be found in Lodge's *The Complete Works of Alexander Hamilton*, it becomes clear that he felt deeply affectionate towards his sister-in-law. It does certainly not seem unlikely that Hamilton would have prioritized having Angelica and his other in-laws think amiably about Hamilton, over the morality of purchasing slaves. The letter sent to Colonel Dayton was written on behalf of General Washington, and refusing Washington – who would become and remain Hamilton's most important ally throughout his political career – would have certainly done him more harm than good. All of this does however imply, contrary to the impression that both Chernow and Miranda give about the character of the Founding Father, that the abolition of slavery was not high on Hamilton's lists of priorities during the Revolutionary War.

Chapter 3 – Runaway Slaves

*“A civics lesson from a slaver, hey neighbour;
Your debts are paid 'cause 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.”*

- Lin-Manuel Miranda, *Hamilton*, “Cabinet Battle #2”

In the aftermath of the Revolutionary War, slavery becomes a hot topic of debate. Many slaves ran away from their masters during the war, and southern plantation owners demanded some form of compensation for their losses. On the other side of the argument, there was Alexander Hamilton – arguing the hypocrisy in fighting a war for independence, yet in return not granting that same freedom to the African slaves. We will look at Alexander Hamilton’s shift to having a more outspoken opinion about the issue of slavery, compared to him being more reluctant about the issue in his younger years. In this chapter, we will also look at how Alexander Hamilton – as an upcoming prominent political figure – is positioning himself for his future political career by alienating himself from certain groups, and in doing so losing support and making some powerful political enemies. After examining all this. This will allow us to better understand whether Alexander Hamilton defending the runaway slaves stems from moral reasons, or if there were also political motivations behind this course of action.

Fugitive Slaves and the Treaty of Paris

During the Revolutionary War, many slaves were offered freedom by the British if they fled to the British side. On May 1, 1775, Jon Murray – better known as Lord Dunmore – proclaimed that he would “arm all my own Negroes and receive all others that will come to me whom I shall declare free” (Nash, chapter 4, Kindle location 3285). Dunmore’s proclamation was a success, and other British officers started offering the same terms. In May 1780, Charleston was sieged by the Brits. As Nash explains, Henry Clinton then proclaimed that all slaves that were captured by the British would be sold off, while those who joined the British by themselves would be rewarded with their freedom (Nash, chapter 7). Nash goes on to explain that this was a military strategy (Nash, chapter 7). It can therefore

be said that the British proclamations to offer slaves their freedom in return for their service had not much of an abolitionist motive behind it. However, the fact that these actions were based on selfish motives did not matter to the slaves themselves, they would receive their freedom all the same – had it not been for the fact that the British lost the war.

According to Lindsay, the number of runaway slaves that fled their masters during the Revolutionary War was very high. In South Carolina, this was the case for 25,000 slaves – about one-fifth of them all. In Georgia, the percentage of runaway slaves was even estimated to be in between 75 and 90 percent of all slaves, and – as Lindsay continues – Thomas Jefferson claimed that the number of runaway slaves in Virginia lay somewhere around 30,000. When the Revolutionary War ended with the Treaty of Paris in 1783, slaveholders demanded the return of the slaves that had fled to the British lines, after the Brits had offered them freedom. According to Lindsay, Dunmore and Clinton’s proclamations caused the British people to view the emancipation of slaves as the morally right thing to do, and therefore Great Britain considered all these runaway slaves as “freeman” (Lindsay, p. 393-394).

As Lindsay states, “by the Seventh Article of the Treaty of Paris, it was stipulated that the British troops should withdraw from the United States without carrying away or destroying any property belonging to the citizens of the United States” (Lindsay, p. 394). When considering slaves as property, Britain did not meet the agreed terms of the Seventh Article of the Treaty of Paris. Washington himself expressed dissatisfaction in a letter to Sir Guy Charleton on May 6, 1783, for the fact that the slaves were not being returned to their former masters (Lindsay, p. 394). As Lindsay explains, Charleton stated that it would be morally unacceptable to return the slaves to their former masters. One of the main concerns he named was the likelihood that many slaves would be severely punished for their betrayal, while the Brits owed them a great debt. He did feel, however, that the former masters had a right of compensation for their slaves according to the Seventh Article of the treaty, and that this compensation should be provided by Great Britain. Washington, however, deemed this scenario unfavorable and unrealistic, as it would be difficult to assess the precise value of a slave, and the slave in question might lie about the name of his former master. Needless to say, it is clear that Washington preferred runaway slaves to be returned to their masters, rather than have the Brits pay some form of compensation for them.

Charleton and Great Britain came up with loopholes to take the runaway slaves with them when they left the United States. Lindsay explains that Congress was discussing the possibility to not ratify the Treaty of Paris, since the Brits were acting against the Seventh

Article. John Jays, who would later be Hamilton's co-writer for the Federalist Papers, was sent by Washington to discuss the issue with Grenville. Grenville, a representative for the Brits, argued that slaves who had been promised freedom by the British before signing the treaty should no longer be considered American property.

The Southern states were enraged by this, yet as Lindsay explains, the Northern states were less intent on re-enslaving the slaves and returning them to their former masters. According to Chernow, Alexander Hamilton agreed that the Seventh Article of the Treaty of Paris had been violated on technical grounds. However, he appealed to higher morality by stating that "in the interpretation of treaties, things odious or immoral are not to be presumed. The abandonment of negroes, who had been induced to quit their masters on the faith of official proclamations, promising them liberty, to fall again under the yoke of their masters and into slavery is as odious and immoral a thing as can be conceived. It is odious not only as it imposes an act of perfidy on one of the contracting parties, but as it tends to bring back to servitude men once made free" (Chernow, p. 527). Chernow explains that by stating this, Hamilton went against his own agenda to defend the rights of private property. What is also important to note, is that Hamilton went directly against George Washington, which is surprising since when he had to write a letter on the same issue to Colonel Elias Dayton for Washington, he did side with the General.

Alexander Hamilton was at the time gaining a large political following, and many northerners were reluctantly willing to accept Hamilton's notion that Grenville was actually right, and that the slaves had fought for and deserved their freedom. Hamilton's stance on the issue was a risk for his political ambitions, on the grounds that some people already considered him a loyalist to the British crown. After the war, he had always been a fierce proponent of maintaining good relationships with Great Britain. According to Chernow, he "craved American respectability in Europa" after the war ended (Chernow, p. 486). Siding with the Brits and going against the southern states, who already had their loyalist conspiracy theories about Hamilton, was definitely not a move that would advance his political career. In a way, there is a comparison to be made between Alexander Hamilton's role as a prominent politician, helping the northern states realize that the Seventh Article of the Treaty of Paris was immoral, and Abraham Lincoln, going against the 1850 version of a Fugitive Slave Act during the American Civil War. Both were willing to enrage southern states in order to, according to themselves, fight for what is morally right.

There does not seem to be much benefit for Alexander Hamilton agreeing with Grenville, so therefore it seems like this could be one of the few moments in his career where

Hamilton's abolitionist actually did not have an ulterior motive. However, there is one possibility that should not be overlooked. Although the notion that Hamilton was a secret loyalist is ridiculous, it is not impossible that he agreed with the Brits on the grounds of maintaining good relationships with them, rather than just for moral reasons. The war had just ended, and as someone who wanted to see America thrive, it would have been detrimental to get into another conflict with Britain over something America was in the moral wrong.

New York Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slavery

In 1785, John Jay and several other prominent New York citizens formed the New York Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slavery. According to Chernow, this society was established in order to protect former slaves from being kidnapped by slaveholders and being sold back into slavery (Chernow, p. 528). Alexander Hamilton joined shortly after the society was founded, and in his first meeting, one of the members, Robert Troup, read the following statement to explain the New York Manumission Society's intentions: "The benevolent creator and father of men, having given to them all an equal right to life, liberty, and property, no sovereign power on earth can justly deprive them of either. The violent attempts lately made to seize and export for sale several free Negroes, who were peaceably following their respective occupations in this city, must excite the indignation of every friend to humanity and ought to receive exemplary punishment" (New-York Historical Society, reel 1). Noteworthy about this statement is that Troup explicitly speaks about "free Negroes". He does not mention any slaves, although the organization is called the *New York Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slavery*.

Ironically enough, this probably had to do with the fact that Troup himself – and with him the majority of the New York Manumission Society's members – still owned slaves. As Chernow explains, the fact that over half of the organization that fought for the abolition of slavery owned slaves, was a problematic contradiction the New York Manumission Society had to deal with. In order to overcome this issue, Aaron Burr – Hamilton's future political nemesis and eventual demise – drafted a bill which would automatically make all blacks born after a certain date be considered free by law. This date would be set in the not-so-near future (Chernow, p. 529-530). This meant that if this bill was ever passed, all forms of slavery would only be outlawed after a certain date. Choosing a future date enabled Burr – who owned at least four slaves himself – and most of the other members of the assembly, to keep their slaves for the coming years in order to adjust to the changes.

This plan was too radical for the New York Manumission Society, and eventually they agreed on a plan that allowed slaveholders to free slaves on a voluntary basis, which in practice would change absolutely nothing. As Chernow explains, Hamilton, Troup, and Matlack then formed their own committee. The main goal of this committee was to set up some rules for the emancipation of the slaves that were owned by the members of the Manumission Society themselves. On November 10, 1785, they proposed that slaves under twenty-eight should gain their freedom on their thirty-fifth birthday, slaves between the age of twenty-eight and thirty-eight should be freed in seven years, and every slave above the age of forty-five should be freed immediately. Although this might now not seem like that much of a radical idea – it allowed slaveholders to keep most of their slaves for at least seven years – for the New York Manumission Society it was. The timetable set by Hamilton felt too restricting for many of its members. Eventually, the society rejected Hamilton's proposal, and went with the earlier agreed upon agreement that they would be able to emancipate their slaves when they saw fit (Chernow, p. 532). Something that should be kept in mind is that Hamilton's proposal would only apply for members. If the members were to agree with this, in a decade they would have lost most of their slaves, while every other American slaveholder would be allowed to keep them. It is therefore not unlikely that most members were in fact willing to give up slavery, but not if they were the only ones, since this would have given them enormous financial disadvantages, while southern slaveholders would be able to continue their practices.

As Rury explains, the organization did more than just have these outcome-less debates. They provided education by establishing the New York African Free School and they worked together with the Methodist Episcopal Church to give free blacks the opportunity to practice religion. Although these initiatives were certainly positive contributions, it is hard to call the New York Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slavery really abolitionist. Therefore, it is also difficult to say much about Alexander Hamilton's abolitionism just by him being a member of the New York Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slavery. As Horton states, slavery was finally banned in New York in 1827, twenty-three years after Hamilton's passing. Horton states that Hamilton was an essential part of the organization that fought for it, and should therefore deserve some of the credit for this 1827 law.

It is still important to remember that just the fact that Hamilton was a member of the New York Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slavery, did say little about his

abolitionism. Hamilton realized that the Society itself was hypocritical, as most members owned slaves. He therefore tried to convince the other members to think of ways to gradually free their slaves. In the end, the New York Manumission Society did little about slavery, and might have been a way to make the members feel like they were helping, while actually being part of the problem. Therefore, it is more important to look at his actions as an individual and as a cabinet member – which we will do in chapter 4 – than to look at the part he played as a member of the New York Manumission Society. As a member of the Society, Hamilton did little to actually challenge the institution of slavery, and instead focused on ending the hypocrisy of its members. His support for Grenville's notion that it would be morally unethical for Americans to recapture slaves that were offered freedom by the British, on the other hand, is a clearer example of Hamilton combatting the institution of slavery. Hamilton's stance went against the interests of the the United States, and other than maintaining relationships with Britain and morality, there does not seem to be a clear political benefit for Hamilton to side with this argument. One could make the case that Hamilton himself had not owned slaves, and that the retrieval of runaway slaves would be especially beneficial for his southern opponents. However, that argument can in a way be weakened by the fact that this would mainly be financial benefit for the southern plantation owners, yet it would make little political difference for them. Then there is also the fact that he went directly against George Washington on this issue, something he had not been willing to do during the Revolutionary War. Considering that his endorsement of Grenville's beliefs would create political adversaries, enrage the south, went directly against Washington's stance, and only had financial yet no political consequences for the south, it really does seem that Hamilton took this stance mostly for moral reasons.

Chapter 4 – The Federalist

*“That's the price we paid;
For the southern states to participate;
In our little independence escapade;
We made concessions to the south to make them less afraid;
You take away our property? Secession talk will escalate.”*

- Lin-Manuel Miranda, *Hamilton*, “Cabinet Battle #3” (by secretary Jefferson)

After the Revolutionary War ended, Alexander Hamilton started lobbying for the Constitution to be passed. Alexander Hamilton was the co-author of a series of 85 essays called *The Federalists Papers*, of which John Jays wrote five and John Madison 29. The other 51 articles were written by Hamilton himself. Out of the 51 Federalist Papers’ essays Hamilton wrote, seven were written on the subject of taxation, yet none really addressed the issue of slavery or equal right of freedom for blacks and whites in a direct way. More specific issues that do involve slavery in a way are addressed, such as in the 54th article – which was written by Madison. Still, it is important to note that slavery was not a well-addressed issue in the Federalist Papers. Although mainly focusing on the United States’ finances during his career, slavery did come up frequently. To fully understand Hamilton’s way of thinking during this period, it is important to look at how the nation’s financial situation was influenced by slavery during this period, and how slavery played a part in Hamilton role as the most prominent member of the federalist party, a member of Washington’s cabinet, and as the political nemesis of Southern plantation owner and Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson.

Becoming Treasury Secretary

The fact that such a large number of essays in the *Federalist Papers* was written on the subject of taxation, says enough about where Hamilton’s priorities lay. It was clear that Alexander Hamilton had his mind set on becoming the Treasury Secretary. As is noted by Chernow, Hamilton states that “there is no part of the administration of government that requires extensive information and a thorough knowledge of the principles of political economy so much as the business of taxation” in the 35th essay, called “The Same Subject

Continued” – referring back to an earlier chapter called “Concerning the General Power of Taxation” (Chernow, p. 624-625). According to McDonald, there is a story about Washington, in which he asks financial expert Robert Morris what to do about the public debts. According to the story, Washington was advised that “there is but one man in the United States who can tell you: that is Alexander Hamilton” (MacDonald, p. 128). If true, this endorsement might have been very significant in the appointment of Hamilton as Treasury Secretary. According to Morris, Hamilton had been preparing for years for the position of Secretary of State (McDonald, p. 128).

Alexander Hamilton’s main ambition was to serve as Treasury Secretary, and his main objective was turning the United States into a financially healthy country. When considering the issues of slavery and racial inequality, it is important to keep this in mind. Whether the young Alexander’s belief that “the page of history is replete with instances that loudly warn us to beware of slavery” (Hamilton, p. 15) – the quote by Alexander Hamilton in *A Full Vindication of the Measures of Congress*, in which he compares the enslavement of slaves and their masters to the enslavement of the Americans by the British crown – was simply a – at the time commonly used by revolutionaries – manner of speech in order to make a better case for American Independence or if Hamilton, as the financial operator of America in the early years of the United States’ existence, actually sympathized with the African slaves, is certainly worth looking at.

The Three-Fifths Compromise

The 54th article of the Federalist Papers might nowadays be one of the most notorious pieces of writing in African-American history. The article is titled “The Appointment of Members Among the States”, and speaks in favor of choosing members of the House of Representatives from the States by looking at the numbers of the population. According to Philbrick, this was decided in the Constitutional Convention of 1787, rather than having it being related to land values, as was the case for taxes. Southern states, however, wanted slaves to be counted as population too, even those were not allowed to vote. Eventually the Northern and Southern states came up with a compromise, counting the slaves as three-fifths of a person. As is explained in the 54th article, the idea behind this compromise was based on the facts that slaves were property – as they were owned by masters – but also human as human – since they were bound to the law in the same manner as free people were.

This particular essay was written by Madison, not Hamilton. However, as the major contributor of the Federalist Paper and a proponent of the Constitution, it can be assumed that

Hamilton was a proponent of what was written by Madison. Even if the Three-Fifths compromise was part of a larger compromise that would be the U.S. Constitution, it was certainly not a deal breaker for Hamilton.

Supporting this compromise seems to give a very different image of Alexander Hamilton than has been painted by both Chernow and Miranda. Many people nowadays consider the The Three-Fifths Compromise a controversial and even racist clause of the Constitution, although as Philbrick explains, before claiming such a thing one would first need to look at the context. As Hamilton is the major contributor for the series of essays that speaks in favor of this clause, it is important to look at how this compromise came to be. As if you look at the actual documents, as Philbrick states, there is technically little racist about them. In neither the Three-Fifths clause of The Constitution nor the 54th Federalist Paper, the words “blacks”, “negros” or other indications as to the ethnicity of the slaves is mentioned. The only distinction, according to Philbrick, made is that of free people and slaves, so according to Three-Fifths clause itself, a free black man counts as much towards the population of a state as a free white man. However, it seems like Philbrick is focusing very much on the literal meaning, yet less on the practical one. Although the Three-Fifths compromise might not technically have been meant racist, in theory it certainly was. At these early years of the United States, it was certainly impossible for a black man to vote – even if he was a free man. Hamilton can not have been unaware of this.

Stating that the Three-Fifth compromise is “technically not racist” is one thing, but how about slavery? This clause is most certainly dehumanizing slaves. Although it might at the surface seem strange that someone such as Hamilton would support a clause that basically states that a slave is only sixty percent human, supporting it actually was in a way beneficial for the abolition movement. The Southern slave-holding states wanted slaves to be counted the same way as free men were counted. The Northern states, where slavery had a less prominent role in their economy, felt like slaves did not need to be counted. Counting slaves as free humans would have majorly benefited slaveholders. The Southern states would get a lot more representation thanks to the large slave population, but none of these slaves would actually be represented. In fact, their presence would give their oppressors more representation, further benefiting the institution of slavery.

Having the Constitution passed was of major importance for Alexander Hamilton. According to Chernow, “nobody fought harder or more effectively for the new Constitution than Hamilton” (Chernow, p. 575). Considering the 51 essays he wrote in such a short amount of time, it might even be said that passing the Constitution was the most important

thing for Hamilton at the time. The fact that he supported the Three-Fifths clause, like more Northern Founding Fathers did, was part of a compromise, in which he did not want to give the southern, slaveholding states too much power. The best way to do that was to – in that moment – dehumanize the slaves two three-fifths of a free man.

Most of all, the Constitution and having the United States work as a successful nation likely outweighed everything else for Alexander Hamilton. When analyzing the Three-Fifths clause, there is certainly a case to be made about Hamilton supporting it being actually beneficial to the abolition movement. What is more likely, however, is that Hamilton's main outcome was to give the southern, usually Jeffersonian/Democratic-Republican states, less power than the Northern, usually more Federalist states. Had Hamilton wanted them to count as full human beings, the Southern Slaves would have gotten too much power, yet had he pushed to not have them counted at all, the Southern politicians could have decided not to back the Constitution, which was unacceptable to Hamilton. Therefore, at least on this issue, Alexander Hamilton's motives were most likely not moral but political.

Hamilton vs. Jefferson

Hamilton is often considered to be the leader of the Federalist Party, one of the earliest parties in American history. The party stood for pro-government, and was based on Alexander Hamilton's ideas for a strong national government and a national banking system. They were opposed by the Democratic-Republicans. If the northern, Federalist states regarded Hamilton as their leader, then the Democratic-Republican party considered their leader to be Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson. Thomas Jefferson was the first Secretary of State and Hamilton's political nemesis, as Jefferson's views on government control were opposed to those of Hamilton. Jefferson believed the U.S. government should be involved as little as possible.

An example of something Jefferson was in disagreement with Hamilton over, was Hamilton's belief that the United States should invest in manufacturing. According to Ball, agriculture had the opportunity to provide the United States with higher profits. Jefferson opposed these plans, as they would have drastic effects for Americans making a living in agriculture. As Ball explains, the main reason agriculture had been so sustainable at the time, was because the plantation owners did not pay for labor, but used slaves instead. Jefferson got his way and Hamilton did not get his plan passed at the time, but this instance clearly showed that Hamilton was trying to take slavery – one of their greatest assets – away from their opponents.

In 1792, when a slave revolt in Haiti became a revolution against the French, Jefferson became distressed. As Horton explains, Jefferson had often visited France, and at times even lived there. Besides that, he also felt very uneasy about the idea that slaves were revolting so close to the American border. Hamilton supported its leader Toussaint Louverture and recognized the legitimacy of Haiti, while Jefferson refused to. Hamilton urged for close economic ties with the black nation, and even “suggested a plan of government that ultimately helped to shape Haiti’s national constitution” (Horton, p. 23). While issues like these came up, Hamilton and Jefferson were always on opposite sides.

When looking at Hamilton as a member of the Federalist party, he starts to become more outspoken about abolitionism than ever. On the other hand, most of the “abolitionist” arguments he makes, can also be considered favorable for his own political career. Although an argument could be made about the Three-Fifths Compromise being a positive law for slaves and a step forward for abolition, by taking away two-fifths of their master’s power, this was certainly not Hamilton’s intention. As the name suggest, this was a compromise, and all Hamilton likely hoped to gain out of it was giving his political opponents less power. His involvement in trying to push investments in manufacturing is quite similar. The Three-Fifths Compromise were on paper all about slavery, yet in practice they were about not giving southern states too much influence. The manufacturing investments were in theory about helping the economy, but would in the process also deteriorate the market position of the plantation owner. Both the manufacturing investments and Haiti recognition were about helping slaves, yet they were also in the United States’ economic interest. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, Hamilton’s main priority were America’s finances, so it is hard to determine which of these were truly done out of morality.

Conclusion

*“This is the stain on our soul and democracy;
A land of the free? No, it's not. It's hypocrisy”*

- Lin-Manuel Miranda, *Hamilton*, “Cabinet Battle #3”

After looking more thoroughly at the writings and actions of Alexander Hamilton, we can conclude that the representation of Hamilton's stance on slavery has been portrayed a bit too favorable in both Chernow's biography and recent popular media such as Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton*. In the hip-hop musical, Hamilton is portrayed as a noble immigrant who overcame hardships, and is in a political battle against the southern states and the evil slaveholder Thomas Jefferson. In truth, things were more complex.

During his youth in the Caribbean, Hamilton was exposed to the horrors of slavery, and while his mother was alive he even had the “fortune” of having slaves in the house as well. After losing his mother, the young Alexander decided to get a job as a clerk, in which he had to occasionally handle the shipment of slaves. Considering that Hamilton took a job as a clerk at a company that was involved in slave trade, it is certainly difficult to see him as an abolitionist during that time period (Chernow, p. 53-115). What should be taken into account though, is that Hamilton was very young and a recent orphan. Since he was not a legitimate child, he was not allowed his mother's inheritance, and therefore in dire need of money. His later secrecy about his years in the Caribbean also suggest some form of shame, or at least the knowledge that this had been unethical and could be used against him in the future. *A Full Vindication of the Measures of Congress* on one side suggests Hamilton did indeed feel for the slaves at his young age, which would explain his secrecy, yet likely his intentions were more focused on making a case for the American Independence.

When researching which Americans acted in ways to further the abolitionist cause during the Revolutionary War, one should not start by looking at Hamilton, but by looking at his friend John Laurens. Although Hamilton supported his friend's black battalion, he himself did nothing to contribute to the cause, since George Washington required him by his side. The fact that his relationship with Washington was a higher priority than abolitionism was, is also clear by looking at Hamilton's “From Alexander Hamilton to Colonel Elias Dayton, 7 July 1777” (Hamilton), in which Hamilton shows little remorse for a runaway slave, and acts

as was instructed by Washington. The fact that he also married into a prominent slave holding family, and that there is reason to suspect he helped his family members acquire slaves, makes it even harder to see much abolitionist in Hamilton during his youth and revolutionary years.

After the Revolutionary War, there certainly were many instances in which Hamilton acted as an abolitionist. He was one of the few Founding Fathers that did not own slaves, and even a member of an abolitionist group, albeit one in which many members owned slaves themselves – yet Hamilton was the one who tried to convince the members to release their slaves. He fought Jefferson on the issue of slavery whenever he could. There were, however, many political reasons, and also financially beneficial reasons for going against Jefferson on this issue. Jefferson was his political nemesis, and some of Hamilton's plans for supporting abolition would be beneficial for securing the nation's financial health. According to Chernow, Hamilton believed that the two could go hand-in-hand, and that "Hamilton's staunch abolitionism formed an integral feature of this economic vision" (Chernow, p. 45). It could as well be argued that Hamilton did possibly not care much for the wellbeing of the slaves during these battles with Jefferson. However, this seems unlikely when looking at Hamilton's most noteworthy, and arguably most morally inclined, abolitionist action. Hamilton sided with Grenville and Great Britain on the issue of runaway slaves. There was little upside to taking that stance, and many Americans would inevitably turn against him. Although it could be argued that Hamilton wanted to preserve relations with Great Britain, his stance also went against that of George Washington, something he had not been willing to do about the same issue years earlier.

Considering how often Chernow is quoted in other sources and referred to as the definitive story of Hamilton (Brooks, *Creating Capitalism*), pointing out the duplicity in Hamilton's stance on the issue was very necessary. Lin-Manuel Miranda did not portray Hamilton as a perfect man, and neither did Ron Chernow. The difference between this thesis and sources such as Chernow and Miranda, is that they failed to really show the inconsistencies in Hamilton's stance on slavery, and instead focused on more relatable shortcomings, such as his struggle with infidelity. Miranda and Chernow tried to tell a story of an immigrant, who came to America with the best intentions, and knowing exactly what was right and wrong for America.

In truth, Hamilton's story is one of personal growth. Hamilton acted very inconsistent on the issue of slavery until the end of the Revolutionary War, and often prioritized his own political career over the wellbeing of slaves. However, after the war, Hamilton seemed to

have changed in regard to the issue of slavery. Most of his decisions are still based on what would be best for the country according to federalist ideas, yet after the war the decisions and compromises he made became more positive for both slaves or former slaves. Therefore, it seems safe to say that Hamilton was an abolitionist, yet a more complicated one than for example John Laurens. The abolition of slavery was something he believed in, but it was not one of his priorities. At times – and especially in his younger years – he seemed to not be very concerned with the issue. Eventually, however, he would grow into more consistently doing the morally right things, by trying to find common ground between his own interests, and those of the slaves.

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