

“America, You Great Unfinished Symphony”



Hamilton: An American Musical and its Role in Questioning the Cultural Hegemony of the
Foundation Myth of the United States of America

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Introduction

On November 18th, 2016, Vice President-elect Mike Pence was in the audience, accompanied by some younger family members. His presence alone elicited a range of responses. From a standing ovation after the line “Immigrants, we get the job done” (Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 121) to booing the Vice-President elect as he tried to leave after the show was done. It was at that point that Brandon Victor Dixon, who had played Aaron Burr, asked Pence to wait. Dixon proceeded to make a personal and political appeal to Vice-President elect Mike Pence. In a statement, co-authored by creator Lin-Manuel Miranda, Director Thomas Kail and producer Jeffrey Seller, Dixon asked Pence to remember them and the people they represent:

(...) the diverse America who are alarmed and anxious that your new administration will not protect us, our planet, our children, our parents, or defend us and uphold our inalienable rights” (Healy and Mele).

Mike Pence heard him out, then left (Herrera 239). Brian Herrera notes that such a curtain call speech is not out of the ordinary. Indeed, Pence’s visit on November 18th falls neatly in the eight weeks before Christmas. As he explains: “Mike Pence happened to attend *Hamilton* during the winter 2016 BC/EFA fundraising campaign” (Herrera 241). During the eight weeks before Christmas, and then the eight weeks preceding Easter, companies from Broadway (on and off) and other productions raise funds for non-profit organizations supporting those affected by HIV/AIDS. These so called ‘Bucket Brigades’, so named for the buckets held by volunteers and cast members for donations at the exits of the theater, have become a familiar routine for frequent theatergoers and are now a treasured tradition (Herrera

240). Regardless of who had been in the house, a curtain speech was going to happen. Now, because of security requirements, the cast and crew were aware Pence would be in the audience. Considering his failures as governor of Indiana to “effectively respond to crises in HIV/AIDS and women’s health, the *Hamilton* team was obliged – both by the particularly theatrical tradition of the BC/EFA pitch and by common courtesy – to approach that night’s curtain speech with clarity of intention” (Herrera 241).

Though what happened that night happened within the context of a longstanding tradition, little of that context was left the following day. Dixon’s post-show speech created a perfect storm on social media. President-elect Donald Trump gave it more momentum by tweeting about it the following morning: “Our wonderful future V.P. Mike Pence was harassed last night at the theater by the cast of Hamilton, cameras blazing. This should not happen!” (Trump, Donald J. (@realDonaldTrump), 19 Nov. 2016, 3:48 PM, Tweet). It was followed by: “The Theater must always be a safe and special place. The cast of Hamilton was very rude last night to a very good man, Mike Pence. Apologize!” (Trump, Donald J. (@realDonaldTrump), 19 Nov. 2016, 3:56 PM, Tweet), and: “The cast and producers of Hamilton, which I hear is highly overrated, should immediately apologize to Mike Pence for their terrible behavior” (Trump, Donald J. (@realDonaldTrump), 20 Nov. 2016, 3:22 AM, Tweet).

By tweeting about the statement that the cast and crew had prepared for the Vice President-elect, President-elect Trump got involved in the political discussion. His decision to participate and offer attention to the statement, instead of ignoring it, highlighted the division between the show’s celebration of immigrants and its culturally diverse cast, and Trump’s harsh language on immigration policy and immigrants during and after his campaign. Therefore, *Hamilton*’s political message went beyond the theater, and became part of a larger debate in politics that has taken a sharp turn towards extremism, particularly on the

Republican side, since the 2016 presidential campaign. *Hamilton*, a historical fiction musical about America's founding politicians, had become more palpably political than a musical had ever been. In the hubbub that followed, it most definitely broke beyond the 'Broadway Bubble'.

Since its conception *Hamilton: An American Musical* has consciously questioned many things about the status quo of theater, but also about politics, history, and the making of history. It confronts its audience with topics such as racism and the white representation of America's foundation story, by presenting an almost completely colored cast singing and rapping in musical styles originated and performed by African-Americans and Latinx people. The race-conscious casting used by Lin-Manuel Miranda in his story about the historically white founding fathers is almost a reverse use of minstrelsy, but without the use of white face paint or making the founding fathers seem silly or stupid. Its closing number "Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story?" sends the audience home without any answers, just a reason to (re)open debate on many cultural and political topics that Lin-Manuel Miranda, the author of the show, feels are important.

While most Broadway shows of the past half century have had a decidedly political subject matter, there are some musicals that went further and actually engaged in political discourse. *Hamilton* is not a one-of-a-kind show in that sense. In *South Pacific*, Rodgers and Hammerstein tackled questions of racism by having main character Ensign Nellie Forbush struggle with the ethnicity of her French lover's deceased first wife. Written during the Cold War and set against the backdrop of the Second World War, the musical was a decidedly political one when it opened in 1949.¹ Claude-Michel Schönberg and Alain Boublil redressed

¹ A lot of research has been done on the political message of *South Pacific*, e.g. Beidler, Philip D. 1993. "South Pacific and American Remembering; or, "Josh, We're Going to Buy this Son of a Bitch!"" *Journal of American Studies* 27: 207-222., Bond, Randall Ives. 1996. "*Still Dreaming of Paradise*": Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!*, *South Pacific* and *Postwar America*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI., Gleason, Philip. 1981. "Americans All:

Puccini's opera *Madame Butterfly* in the musical *Miss Saigon*, which opened in 1989. Set against the Vietnam War, it tells the story of a Vietnamese girl and her American soldier lover. This show has dealt with many controversies since it opened in London. It was critiqued for its misogynist and racist representation of Asians through the usage of eye prosthetics and bronzing cream. When the show moved to New York City, it had issues with American actor's unions that denied white actors the right to reprise their roles on Broadway. The unions felt that Caucasian people couldn't play Asian people.²

In 1996, Jonathan Larson wrote *RENT*, a musical about the effects of the HIV/AIDS crisis of the late 80's and early 90's on New York City's bohemian artists, most of them young, impoverished and struggling. This included drug addicts, gay people, a drag queen and a Jewish protagonist. The HIV/AIDS crisis happened during the Reagan administration, and its response (or lack thereof) to the epidemic and the political and cultural views on gay people of that time (and throughout the early 90's) influenced this show. Its story and message were decidedly political as well, advocating diversity and opposition to capitalist America. Similarly, in 2002, *Hairspray* premiered on Broadway. The musical about teenager Tracy Turnblad and her quest for acceptance by her peers coincides with the Civil Rights movement of the 60's and segregation politics in Baltimore. The musical may seem to address only that era, but the take away message for the audience is that racism and segregation are not good and will be punished. *Hairspray* illustrates this by having the racist white characters lose their popular tv-show and having said tv-show become integrated at the

World War II and the Shaping of American Identity." *The Review of Politics* 43 (4): 483-518. Kim, Hyewon. 2017. "The Reconstruction of the South Pacific as a Site of Anti-communist Propaganda in Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific*." *Modern Studies in English Language and Literature* 223-241., Klein, Christina. 2003. *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961*. Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press., Lary, May L. 1989. *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War*. Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press.

² For more information on the controversies surrounding *Miss Saigon* I suggest Tzu-I Chung "The Transnational Vision of *Miss Saigon*: Performing the Orient in a Globalized World" in *Asian-American Performance Art* (2011), pp 61-86., Carol Tater et al, *Challenging Racism in the Arts: Case Studies of Controversy and Conflict*, University of Toronto Press, 1998.

end. What *Hamilton* does that these shows have not managed to do, is accelerate debate within the academic world about the politics of the show, its historical foundation and how the audience (fans, critics, politicians) perceives and engages with the subject matter.

The musical has even sparked edited volumes and special issues of academic journals. Historians Renee C. Romano and Claire Bond Potter put together *Historians on Hamilton*, a collection of essays from a variety of historical scholars that include theater history, African-American history and Revolutionary history. As they acknowledge in their introduction, the Schuyler Sisters sing that “History is happening in Manhattan” (Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 45), and “*Hamilton* is making history, and its impact is being felt well beyond the rarefied haunts of Broadway” (Romano and Potter 1). Besides politicians suddenly deciding to voice their opinions on which subjects musicals should or should not portray and actors should or should not do, there is also a surge in interest for the historical main character, Alexander Hamilton. Important heritage sites such as his grave at Trinity Church, the dueling ground in Weehawken, New Jersey and the Hamilton Grange Mansion are receiving more visitors (Potter 330; Romano and Potter). History teachers in elementary school, middle school, high school and college have found a new and exciting way to inspire enthusiasm for American history in their students. *Hamilton* gives teachers a popular culture connection between students and history.

When the United States Treasury announced they were considering taking Alexander Hamilton’s portrait off of the ten-dollar bill in favor of a woman for the 100th anniversary of women’s suffrage (in 2020), historians wondered why the Treasury Secretary would consider taking the man responsible for the United States financial system off the bill instead of President Andrew Jackson (a man who despised banks and paper money), whose face graces the twenty-dollar bill (O’Malley 133). A non-profit organization, Women on 20s, started campaigning to have Jackson removed as well. With the introduction of Lin-Manuel

Miranda's *Hamilton*, Women on 20s (and many fans of the show) successfully campaigned to keep Hamilton. The show is partially responsible for saving Hamilton's portrait on the ten-dollar bill. This case illustrates how the show is having an effect on Alexander Hamilton's place in history.

Hamilton: An American Musical has not only succeeded in receiving Twitter rants from President Trump, but it has also brought diametrically opposed politicians together in loving and appreciating a cultural product. On March 9, 2016 Jim Dabakis (an openly gay Democrat and Utah State Senator) and Ken Ivory (a conservative Republican Utah State Representative) together donned 18th-century costumes and spread the gospel of *Hamilton*'s virtues to their fellow lawmakers (R. C. Romano 298). The point of this was to encourage their colleagues to vote for their resolution, honoring Lin-Manuel Miranda and *Hamilton* for "the human drama, intrigue, passion, perplexity, and a promise of America's founding in a way that resonates with a modern and ethnically diverse America". It passed and was signed into law by Utah's Republican governor Gary Herbert (R. C. Romano 298). *Hamilton* is capable of asking pressing political questions, yet is appreciated by members of both sides in terms of partisan politics. It both unites people, and divides them at the same time.

The story of the founding of the United States is one that has been a source of "heated conflict over museum exhibits, textbooks, and school curricula" (R. C. Romano 299) These debates can get so heated, that Romano discusses them in battlefield terms. Political conservatives occupy one side of the field, insisting that "historical narratives should cultivate pride in America's past and highlight the nation's exceptionalism and continual progress toward greatness." Opposite them are the political left, who are wondering how such celebratory and patriotic versions of history can foster critical thinking and active citizenship, if the role of racism and oppression in United States history is ignored (R. C. Romano 299).

In her essay, Romano discusses the history of teaching U.S. history. It has always consisted of two viewpoints. On the one hand United States exceptionalism, great deeds and patriotism are deemed the important ideologies to remember. On the other hand, a more (some say negative) factual approach to subjects like oppression, racism, class and slavery is considered the best system. Some states have gone so far as to try and pass legislation that bans any mention of the fact that founding fathers owned slaves (R. C. Romano 302). Others have tried to reduce mention of Jim Crow violence or minimize the role of slavery as a cause for the Civil War.

For each side of this history war, the stakes are always high. Those in favor of the traditional civic myth believe that “nations need histories that promote pride, not shame. (...) Without these civic myths offering a coherent national narrative, they charge, Americans will fragment into competing interest groups and the nation will fracture” (R. C. Romano 304). The critics of such schools of thought, are worried such narratives fail to show the complexities of America’s factual past. They also fear that these narratives “impoverish the capacity of Americans to be engaged, critical citizens” (R. C. Romano 304). *Hamilton* fits right into this debate, walking the tightrope between American exceptionalism and the darker parts of American history, like slavery and racism.

A useful tool for observing such a phenomenon as *Hamilton*, is Antoni Gramsci’s work on cultural hegemony. His theory is based on two ideas:

1. The “spontaneous” consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is “historically” caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.

2. The apparatus of state coercive power which “legally” enforces discipline on those groups who do not “consent” either actively or passively. This apparatus is, however, constituted for the whole of society in anticipation of moments of crisis of command and direction when spontaneous consent has failed (Gramsci 145)

These two concepts may seem separate from each other. However, T.J. Jackson Lears notes in his commentary on the theory, that the theory has little meaning unless it is paired with the idea of domination. “Ruling groups”, as Lears describes, “do not maintain their hegemony merely by giving their domination an aura of moral authority through the creation and perpetuation of legitimating symbols; they must also seek to win the consent of subordinate groups to the existing social order” (Lears 569-570). There is a cyclical process at work, in which both the dominant and submissive order organically influence each other at any given moment. A dominant group’s hegemony consists of various components (like values, ideas and experiences), that are legitimized through public discourse. Subordinate groups will not attain the same legitimization for their experiences, ideas and values, but have the possibility of thriving outside of the dominant discourse (Lears 574). Lears argues that the way Gramsci formulated his theory is a point of contention. Gramsci’s construction of his theory was so rigid, that, according to Lears, “he provided a warrant for oversimplified models of class domination” (Lears 586). One has to be careful to not just observe cultural hegemony as an either/or concept, because many culturally hegemonic trends are more nuanced, exhibiting traits mainly found in the subordinate order. Thus, hegemony is not the same as social control. There is no top-down structure through which large institutions deliver the same dogma. One has to account for “conflicts and cultural objectives and internecine power struggles that have little to do with ideology” (Lears 587). As established

before, though there is a dominant cultural hegemony, differing ideologies can and do exist within the subordinate.

Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony relates to *Hamilton: An American Musical* in the following way: the show challenges the spontaneous consent given by the masses to the foundation myth (or civic myth) of the United States. This is something historians have reflected on since the production increased in popularity and became such a massive cultural hit. Questions that have been asked in historical discourse only are now major topics that many people - arguably, the masses - are discussing.

While teachers grab the opportunity to make history (and current politics) exciting, philanthropic institutions see the show as a way to further their philanthropic efforts. The Rockefeller Foundation spent \$1.46 million so twenty thousand inner-city New York City high school students, who attend schools with a high concentration of impoverished students, could go see the show. In June of 2016 the foundation pledged another \$6 million to expand the #EduHam project across the country. One hundred thousand public school children have already or will see one of the two touring versions.

Lin-Manuel Miranda's version of the US's foundation myth offers exceptional men (appealing to conservatives), but tells the story through the current-day music genres of Hip-Hop and Rap, commonly associated with African-American culture. It casts African-American and Latinx actors in the principal and secondary roles. In doing so, *Hamilton* changes the standard Foundation narrative to include minorities (R. C. Romano 307). Romano feels that this juxtaposition is precisely where Miranda's genius lies. Miranda has created a piece in which both longtime owners of the narrative and those excluded from the narrative of America's founding have a place. This juxtaposition is precisely what piqued my interest.

The research question for this thesis is as follows: In what ways does *Hamilton: An American Musical* both affirm the Founders Chic foundation mythology and question it?

The success of *Hamilton* to my mind exists in the fact that the general public, members of the dominant hegemony and members of the subordinate order are now all questioning how the cultural hegemony of the foundation myth of the United States of America works. This thesis sets out to research how it succeeds in triggering this debate, by concentrating on these four specific questions: What is the foundation myth of the United States and how is it taught in schools? What is the impact of color-coded casting on people of color and theater? How do current politics influence the way we understand historical politics? How do historians approach a show that calls itself “historical fiction” yet is approached as historical fact by the audience?

Paradoxically, the historical Alexander Hamilton was quite afraid of the masses. He saw a republic founded on public opinion to be one large unstable institution. It could only lead to anarchy and ruin. Before his death in 1804, he said that “the real disease” of the American republic was “Democracy” (Freeman 46). However, he is now the center of a show in which his persona is seen championing democracy. Furthermore, it can only have attained such a prominent role in popular culture thanks to the masses he was so afraid of. Regardless of Hamilton’s fear of the matter, cultural hegemony plays a role in shaping and reshaping politics and history. The tension between *Hamilton: An American Musical* and current-day politics and history is what this thesis sets out to examine, as it will answer the question of how *Hamilton* is able to both divide and unite at the same time. I propose that *Hamilton: An American Musical* offers a new version of the foundation myth by juxtaposing hip-hop, actors of color and American exceptionalism, and that doing so is a decidedly politically charged move which is at the root of its ability to unite and divide.

In chapter one I will give a brief summary of the history of musical theater and show how *Hamilton* fits into that history. In the second chapter I will discuss the concept of Founders Chic, a dominant and often self-congratulatory form of presenting history, found in research and popular science articles and books that promote a specific view of the Founding Fathers, and the American foundation myth. In chapter three I will discuss the origin of *Hamilton*, its relation to the Obama Administration, and Ron Chernow's biography as basis for the show. This allows me to study the messages *Hamilton* sends to today's audience, which I will do in chapter four. In this final chapter I will close-read four selected songs from the show, in order to establish where and how Miranda's musical becomes political and questions or accepts the cultural hegemony of Founders Chic. I will take into account his own notes on the libretto as published in the "Hamiltome" that is *Hamilton: The Revolution*, Renee C. Romano and Claire Bond Potter's *Historians on Hamilton*, and the *Journal of the Early Republic*'s special edition on *Hamilton* to do so.

The research I will use in this thesis has its roots both in history and popular culture studies. As I am studying the show, not the historical man, I will be using Ron Chernow's biography as the basis, just like Lin-Manuel Miranda used it as the foundation for his show.

Chapter 1: Musical Theater History

To understand the novelty of *Hamilton: An American Musical* and its role in current day popular culture and politics, I will start by discussing its historical background. There are many different starting points to study the history of musical theater. Production assistant John Kenrick starts his history with the ancient Greeks, claiming “At the very beginnings of theatre in ancient Greece, the first dramas were musicals that used dialogue, song, and dance as integrated storytelling tools” (Kenrick 1). However, because of how quintessentially American *Hamilton* is, I follow Larry Stempel, whose historical research on the history of Broadway musical theater offers a decidedly American starting point, a show called *The Black Crook* (Charles M. Barras, 1866). Historian Elizabeth L. Wollman also uses *The Black Crook* as the genesis of American musical theater.

In September 1866, after the Civil War had ended, a show opened at Niblo’s Garden, a theater on Broadway and Prince street. At that point, New York City did not have a consolidated theater area situated around Times Square like it is today. Both Stempel and Wollman agree that *The Black Crook* (475 performances) was a melting pot of “dance, melodrama and variety” (Wollman 187) and combined the “theatrical and dramatic”, terms which fit well together (Stempel 42). It told the tale of Rodolphe and Amina, two young lovers whose love enrages the jealous Count Wolfenstein, who wants Amina for himself. Rodolphe falls prey to a wizard (the titular Black Crook) and is rescued by a fairy queen. At the end of the show Amina and Rodolphe have defeated Wolfenstein and the wizard and everyone lives happily ever after (Wollman 192).

Tacked onto this plot was scenery, state-of-the-art theater technology and a refurbishment of the theater. Altogether, this encompassed a production value of over fifty thousand dollars (Stempel 46). The show was badly received by theater critics but ran for an

unprecedented length of two years and cashed in over one million dollars at the box office. It also “spawned countless imitations, tours and revivals” (Wollman 193). Stempel maintains that although *The Black Crook* was one-play entertainment, “the play itself was not the show’s main attraction as much as the needed foil for its presentations for women, scenery, dance, and song” (Stempel 48). *Hamilton* reflects the role that large production value has come to play in Broadway. Each touring company has two sets in tow (one to play on and one to build ahead of the company), and the London, Chicago and Broadway companies both have expensive sets and rehearsal locations that include working turntables to practice on.

Between the 1860s and the start of the 20th century, other types of shows came and went, including operetta’s (arguably not as successful in the United States as in Europe), light opera, minstrelsy and vaudeville. Minstrelsy is worth exploring further, since the topic of race and racism plays a big part in both *Hamilton* and minstrelsy. According to Stempel, minstrel shows are the first type of variety-show to make a lasting impact on American culture. They are also the basis of a distinctly American form of show business (Stempel 57). In a minstrel show, white northern actors would give the audience a grotesque impression of southern plantation life by imitating black character types. This was called ‘burlesquing’, a term which has since evolved into something completely different, akin to a striptease almost.

These black characters had names like ‘Jim Coon’, or ‘Zip Dandy’; actors used dance, song, dress and dialect to portray them. The most important part of becoming a black character was the now infamous practice of using burnt cork to blacken their faces. This was “inverting the traditional whiteface makeup of circus clowns” (Stempel 57). The first popular minstrel actor was a man named Thomas Dartmouth Rice, whose ‘Jim Crow’ character gained a popular following in the 1830s.

During the 1840s and 1850s the show format went from solo actors to groups, usually quartets, that provided a set type of entertainment (Stempel 57). E.P. Christy, of Christy’s

Minstrels, devised a three-act style, consisting of puns and word jokes, variety acts and farces with song (Stempel 57-58).

This last act was called ‘the afterpiece’. The actors would ‘burlesque’ popular theater of the time, but also make fun of what they considered elitist theater like Italian opera. One of the most striking and popular sources for such parodying was Shakespeare’s *Othello*. As Othello is black, and the heroine Desdemona is white, its content walked a fine line in racially segregated America. Only through the mask of a minstrel artist in the United States of the nineteenth-century was it possible for concepts of miscegenation to be explored, as was the case in *Desdemona, An Ethiopian Burlesque*” (Stempel 58). *Hamilton* employs a similar strategy when it comes to the character of King George III, the only white role in the show. With the use of lyrics and music, as well as simple choreography, King George is reduced to a laughing stock for the audience, a king on the verge of going mad. No effort is made to equate him, and whiteness, with characteristics like ‘great leadership’.

Like Stempel, Wollman emphasizes that there was room for critiquing racial power structures in America on the commercial stage. However, the industry catered to white performers and audiences, not black ones. Black performers started to market themselves as the ‘genuine’ minstrel show. Despite their popularity, both for solo and groups, the producers who ran Broadway believed that there was no market for all black productions. Even success shows like *In Dahomey* (1903, 53 performances) and *Bandanna Land* (1908, 89 performances), that were headlined by Bert Williams and George Walker who were the most popular black performers of their day, could not change the producer’s minds to produce entertainment written and/or performed by blacks (Wollman 193-194), until 1921.

Four successful black vaudeville performers, Flournoy Miller (1885-1971, comedian), Aubrey Lyles (1884-1932, comedian), and the songwriting duo Eubie Blake (1887-1983) and Noble Sissle (1889-1975), created *Shuffle Along* (1921, 504 performances), a show so

successful, Wollman says “[it] is sometimes credited as a catalyst for the Harlem Renaissance – that Broadway’s industry began to introduce small if lasting innovations, both onstage and in the seats of Broadway’s venues (Wollman 194). The four men had managed to convince John Cort, a white producer, to support the show. He offered them the stage of a lecture hall “so far north of Times Square that it was hard to justify calling it a Broadway house at all” (Wollman 195). But the comic plot, about two grocers running for mayor, was a hit. All of sudden Cort was able to put up more money to have the theater renovated and allow for new costuming and scenery. It was no longer a shoestring production. Like *Hamilton*, *Shuffle Along* was celebrated for its score. In fact, its songs were so popular and stayed so popular that Harry Truman, in his 1948 campaign, would use the song “I’m Just Wild About Harry” for his presidential run (Wollman 195-196). It also launched the career of Josephine Baker (1906-1975), who would gain world renown for dancing in a banana leaf skirt.

Hamilton owes the possibilities to make racial casting choices to the groundbreaking work that *Shuffle Along* did. It led to the de facto desegregation of audiences, a slow start away from the racial stereotypes that had come with minstrelsy and opportunities for an increasingly diverse group of talented actors to have a shot at working on Broadway (Wollman 196). Minstrelsy’s racial stereotyping had coded ‘black’, ‘blackness’ and ‘black skin’ with stupid and silly figures who were too dumb to function without a white master. Making fun of them, and coding them this way, was part of keeping the white supremacist power structures in place. *Hamilton* reverses that by having people of color unapologetically portray white people, without face paint, that have been coded as ‘great’, ‘leaders’ and ‘smart’. This erases the stereotypes that were encouraged by minstrelsy and after. People who take issue with a black actor playing Hamilton, would have less problems with a white actor using blackface, because for a long time that was the status quo in the United States.

In the “roaring twenties” *Ziegfeld Follies*, a major, annual revue was produced by Florenz Ziegfeld and was the epitome of 1920’s entertainment. In 1903, New York City saw the rise of ‘Tin Pan Alley’, where songs were written at an alarming pace by songwriters such as Irving Berlin. After World War II, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II gave America its golden age of the musical, with *Oklahoma!* (1943), *Cinderella* (1957) and *The Sound of Music* (1959) (among others), entertaining audiences in theaters and at home on television. Rodgers and Hammerstein’s style of integrating plot, lyrics and music was not entirely new.

Wollman and Stempel both maintain that the first book musical is *Show Boat* (1927, 572 performances). The musical, about three generations of people living and working on a literal show boat cruising along the Mississippi river, had at its origin a novel of the same name, written by Edna Ferber. Themes that the story included were alcoholism, gambling addiction, spousal abandonment and racism. Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II, the show’s writing team, found inspiration in wildly differing musical genres, like opera, spirituals, blues, parlor songs, and jazz, to give each character the musical backing needed for such drama. The show was billed, however, as an “All-American Musical Comedy” (Wollman 198-199) (Stempel 194-195).

The most important facet about *Show Boat* is that it contained a social commentary on the effects of institutionalized racism. This was something Oscar Hammerstein II would continue to do throughout his career (and is especially prevalent in *South Pacific*). The show’s most famous song “Ole Man River” points out “cultural indifference to the plight of African Americans” (Wollman 199). Kern and Hammerstein II tried to elevate both white and black characters. However, while they might try to push boundaries, the main critique scholars have is that, in the end, the show is demeaning to its black characters. They do not

have any character progression, but serve mainly as background characters, at the ready whenever a white character needs them for plot progression (Wollman 200).

In creating a partnership with Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein II fully put the integrated book musical on the map. With the premiere of *Oklahoma!* in 1943 (2,212 performances), and subsequently *South Pacific* in 1949, they also showed an excellent understanding for making a show that supports and questions the cultural and political status quo. As Randall Bond Ives' research demonstrates, both musicals spread a message of optimism for a Post-War America, thereby accepting the cultural hegemony of that era. However, these musicals also touched upon subjects such as tolerance, racism, economic rivalry, cultural imperialism and colonialism (Bond 296). "The fact that *Oklahoma!* was drenched in patriotic sentimentality made its early twentieth-century frontier setting seem remarkably contemporary. (...) Not unlike *Hamilton*, *Oklahoma!* offered a representation of American history that spoke to the nation's contemporary anxieties and desires" (Wollman 202). *South Pacific* (1949, 1,925 performances) was made to speak to the fear of communism in the McCarthy era of Post-War United States. (Kim 238-239). Rodgers and Hammerstein interacted with the dominant order, and consequently became a part of that order. They did not affirm the dominant order by choice. Hammerstein's participation in the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League and both his and Rodgers' liberal political ideals made them targets for FBI that was actively looking for communists (Kim 231). By creating a musical that (on the surface) seemed to promote acceptance of war against Japan they lessened the amount of scrutiny from the FBI.

The difference between Lin-Manuel Miranda's work and the shows made by Rodgers and Hammerstein lies in how they encouraged their audience to respond to the subject matter. *South Pacific* and *Oklahoma!* did not invite comments from the president about how they were promoting a wrong message. The casts and crews did not actively engage in public

debate via op-eds in newspapers or television and radio. The people involved in the musicals did not seek to participate in any debate that ensued. Both the active engagement in public debate and the race-conscious casting of *Hamilton* make it something more than just a hegemonic show.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Jerome Robbins and Bob Fosse made their mark not only as choreographers but as auteurs of musicals. The dance sequences of *West Side Story* (music: Leonard Bernstein) brought the story of Romeo and Juliet (Tony and Maria) into the 20th century. By changing the Montagues and Capulets into Puerto Ricans and Polish immigrants, the tale was given a new dimension. It discussed the hardships of integrating into American life (“America”) and finding love against cultural odds. Again, this was a musical with more subtle critique, not one that sought debate, but a show focused on telling a sad tale.

Bob Fosse turned *Cabaret* (1966) into a signature hit show, kickstarting Liza Minelli’s career and introducing a sexier side of dance into the musical. *Cabaret* openly critiqued society’s way of viewing gay people, sexual bohemians and beauty. It ends with the employees of the Kit-Kat-Klub being marched away to concentration camps, giving a very clear view of both the WW II era it is set in, and how society doesn’t accept people who are different. The show did not, however, inspire a large debate about its subject matter within the public domain.

Today, Andrew Lloyd Webber is considered one of the great names in musical theater, with mega-musicals like *Cats* and *Phantom of the Opera*. He is joined by producer Cameron Macintosh, responsible for hits like *Les Misérables* and *Miss Saigon*. Other Broadway productions, however, are not to be mistaken for being less important. *RENT*, *Avenue Q*, *Wicked* and *The Color Purple* still enjoy runs today. *The Color Purple* is one of the few all-black musicals on Broadway. Based on the Alice Walker novel of the same name, racism and slavery are themes at the very core of the show. It does not necessarily question

hegemonic ideas about slavery and racism, but rather uses them to illustrate the plight of African-Americans in 20th century America.

Topics have changed somewhat, though the format stays the same. *Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812* is an adaption of volume 2, part 5 of Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. It is a new type of adaption of the novel, not written as a critique on today's politics. *Dear Evan Hansen* discusses topics like depression and suicide (as does *Next to Normal*). These shows fit into a larger theme, as such topics are becoming less taboo to speak about in the United States. Deaf Broadway's version of *Spring Awakening* brought about more debate on the role of disabilities in musicals, and how to work towards inclusiveness for all types of disabilities in the art form. However, none of these debates or questioning of hegemonic ideologies, inspired or propelled by musicals, have come close to the effect *Hamilton* has had on the foundation myth of the United States and racism in today's America.

Within the historical context of musical theater, *Hamilton* is new in how it engages with political and cultural discourse. Being able to engage in such discourse is only possible because *Hamilton*'s predecessors paved the way. *The Black Crook* spiked an interest in larger and more intricate staging and lighting; *Shuffle Along* was the starting point for breaking racial barriers within theater; *South Pacific* offered a new way to discuss racism within the setting of a musical; and *West Side Story* opened up the audience to the plight of Puerto Rican immigrants. Likewise, *HAIR* and *RENT* were decidedly political in content matter, even though these shows did not participate in political and social discourse as publicly as *Hamilton* now does. *Hamilton* is a product of its forebears within musicals and musical theater.

Chapter Two: Founders Chic History

The genre of history that most historians have placed *Hamilton: An American Musical* in, is a subsection of Revolutionary War history known as Founders Chic. According to historians David Waldstreicher and Jeffrey L. Pasley, the phrase can be traced to 1999, when journalist Evan Thomas used it in describing an influx of bestselling biographies of various founding fathers. These biographies sketched admirable and favorable versions of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, James Madison and Alexander Hamilton. The expression then evolved to describe an emerging group of “ensemble studies that defined the founders as a remarkable group of 'brothers' or a 'generation' (Waldstreicher and Pasley 140). Since then, four characteristics have developed within the genre, through which identification has become much easier. I will discuss Waldstreicher and Pasley’s four identification points of the genre. In their essay they relate it specifically to *Hamilton*. Considering how other historians have written about the show and have put the show in the same Founders Chic category (Lyla D. Monteiro, Nancy Isenberg, Renee Romano, William Hogeland, and others), I believe that the genre is a workable, academically sound starting point to examine *Hamilton*. The genre is found within scholarly material and forms much of the body of scholarly work from the 1950s onward. However, one of its main features is that it lends itself well for popular science. Founders Chic is a form of history that is aimed at the general public and a concept that has been hegemonic since the end of the Second World War.

The first element of Founders Chic is that such works (be it literature, film, television or theater) are unapologetically celebratory of the “founders” or “founding fathers”. They credit these men (always men) with the birth of the United States and that which is qualified as ‘good’ about America. That usually means a focus on qualities of redemption and enduring

in American political tradition. Waldstreicher and Pasley consider such works to be “works of literary flag-waving that seek to inspire at least a bit of national pride” (Waldstreicher and Pasley 141). The forms are easily accessible, even to people who do not consider themselves especially patriotic. Important themes are leadership and greatness. Though not openly elitist, the implied version of Founders Chic greatness and great men usually conveys assurance to “important people that they follow in important footsteps” (Waldstreicher and Pasley 141).

The second factor is that creators of Founders Chic material are predominantly interested in questions of character. They concern themselves with trying to understand what made these men tick, how their ideas and principles related to their personal lives, and the influence their personalities and relationships with each other had on the events that created the United States. This is a presentist way of observing, because today’s beliefs and ideologies are injected into the writings of people who lived in a different time. *Hamilton* is often critiqued for that same kind of presentism that is visible throughout the show. Historian (and defining writer for the genre) Joseph J. Ellis writes:

The shape and character of the political institutions were determined by a relatively small number of leaders who knew each other, who collaborated and collided with each other in patterns that replicated at the level of personality and ideology the principle of checks and balances imbedded structurally in the Constitution (Joseph J. Ellis, *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation* in Waldstreicher and Pasley 142).

The above quotation is an example of personification. This small group of people is equated with the founding ideals of the United States and the Constitution, embedding in them qualities of great leaders.

The third facet of Founders Chic is that it is “avowedly establishmentarian”, even though it tends to focus on revolution (Waldstreicher and Pasley 142). Founders Chic focusses on politicians who supported national institutions, but in their 20th century context, not the original 18th century context. When looking at the political leanings of Founders Chic works, they are situated on the right, lining up with those conservative nationalists that ended up in the Federalist Party. Politics of the 1780s and 1790s carry more weight than those of the 1770s. The cast of characters is usually the following: The good guys are Washington, Adams, and Hamilton. The bad guys are Jefferson and Burr. Madison takes the place of the side character and the rest is all missing in action.

To finish, Founders Chic seeks to make the founders relatable, so today’s readers and viewers can connect with them and embrace the same behavior, ideals and values. This is where the genre becomes problematic. As Waldstreicher and Pasley assert, “the greatest threat (...) has been the failure to address slavery and racism in this new land of liberty and equality” (Waldstreicher and Pasley 143). In creating versions of these founding fathers that do not acknowledge slavery and racism, that part of history is lost and instead writers are looking to highlight any and all antislavery sentiment that can be found in a founder’s history.

To some extent, the Federalists have a historical advantage. The Federalist party advocated national government over state government, was for good relations with Great Britain and opposed to Revolutionary France, and promoted economic growth. Thomas Jefferson (a Democratic-Republican) was a slave owner, John Adams (a Federalist) wanted to recognize the new country of Haiti that was born after a slave revolt, and Alexander Hamilton (also a Federalist) was a member of the New York Manumission Society. Besides these facts, many readers are unaware how prevalent slavery was in the northern states before the 1800s. These are two reasons why according to Waldstreicher and Pasley, the roles of

abolition and manumission are so important in the Founders Chic genre (Waldstreicher and Pasley 143). These two points are also continually stressed by Lin-Manuel Miranda as important facets of Alexander Hamilton's character. The Founders Chic genre has an agenda to whitewash the past, as demonstrated by the erasure of any accounts of slave ownership or relationships with slaves. Sally Hemings for example, Thomas Jefferson's slave with whom he had several children, is rarely discussed in literature about him. It is only now that such erasure is being addressed and rectified.

The basis of Miranda's *Hamilton* is the 2004 biography by Ron Chernow. In the book, Thomas Jefferson's immersion in slavery makes the reader doubt his advocacy for democracy, religious dissent and other ideals considered liberal in today's America. The Federalist Party inaugurated this move, it is not new. Chernow offers us Alexander Hamilton as the great liberal hero. Director Thomas Kail has always said *Hamilton* "is a show about America then, told by America now" (Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 33). Following that statement, Waldstreicher and Pasley argue that Chernow's biography of Alexander Hamilton "managed to create a strikingly appropriate history for the attenuated form of liberalism that became dominant in the Democratic party". That was (and is) the party of Bill and Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, and Joe Biden. (Waldstreicher and Pasley 145)

This 'neoliberalism' that resonates through Chernow's *Hamilton* is finance friendly, against radicalism and not afraid, even eager, to use the military. Even so, Chernow's Hamilton was still interested in using limited government programs to improve society and willing to expand and protect the individual rights of minority groups. This is the "hegemonic capitalist ethos", that Waldstreicher and Pasley argue, Miranda's Hamilton embodies, because Miranda himself is a product of that same ethos. Luis Miranda, Lin-Manuel's father, is a well-known consultant for the Democratic Party in New York and has done consulting

work for Senators Hillary Clinton and Charles Schumer, among others. His mother, Luz Towns, is a clinical psychologist and board member of Planned Parenthood. It is not strange, therefore, that President Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama turned *Hamilton* into a cultural cornerstone of their presidency. The show embodies ideals like inclusiveness and puts black people in leadership roles just like the first black President and First Lady of the United States. (Waldstreicher and Pasley 146).

In using the hip-hop genre and accompanying vernacular and wordplay, Miranda has updated Founders Chic to the 21st century. He has created great men, leaders even, who use rap battles to settle political debates. The women are transformed into almost stereotypical ‘strong black women’, who have a twenty-first century attitude to match their stereotyping. Furthermore, everything Miranda’s *Hamilton* does is coded as ‘superhuman’ and ‘awesome’. *Hamilton* allows us, for example, to admire the number of Federalist papers he wrote, and the six-hour long speech he held at the Constitutional Convention. What is not mentioned, however, is that in that speech Hamilton was proposing a monarchy. The Convention ignored it, so he left Philadelphia and returned New York. Hamilton was not interested in partaking in the convention that was being built on compromise (Waldstreicher and Pasley 147). The pettiness to which the founders stooped seems more reminiscent of the current political climate than one might like to remember. As Miranda’s Jefferson explains after yet another failing rap battle “We smack each other in the press/And we don’t print retractions” (Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 199)

Lin-Manuel Miranda has said in both interviews and the *Hamilton* that he sees himself in *Hamilton*. The companion book makes that very clear, not just in quotations but in publishing Miranda’s own notes, drafts of songs that did or did not make it, and by emphasizing that the show has around twenty thousand words. Waldstreicher and Pasley argue that this is similar to Chernow’s representation of Hamilton’s own paperwork. Miranda

himself seems to confirm this similarity in his contribution to the hip-hop song “Wrote My Way Out”, that debuted on *The Hamilton Mixtape* CD in 2016. Both Miranda and Hamilton need writing to push themselves further upward, and Miranda sings “I picked up a pen like Hamilton” (Nas, East and Miranda).

Hip-hop and rap, as genres, have an element of self-mythology. Rap battles are renowned as methods to establish yourself above others through the use of “sick burns”. A very popular subject to rap about is the hustle to become great. Rapper Fifty Cent made it clear to audiences outside of the rap world by titling his 2003 album *Get Rich or Die Tryin’*. Becoming rich, and escaping inner-city life, is a rapper’s sole purpose, and he will risk death to achieve that.

In making it so important that the audience is able to identify with the characters, Miranda makes use of the element in Founders Chic where reputations are burnished to seem more perfect than they are. We can see how renewed interest in the role of slavery during the founding of the United States exposes the polish on the story that has been applied through the Founders Chic genre. Currently scholars are trying to create a more inclusive history that includes black founders. While Miranda argues that *Hamilton* is part of that new history, Waldstreicher and Pasley disagree. They feel that besides giving women more stage time than a standard Founders Chic production might have, it is still part of that genre: “Instead it suggests that since Hamilton was a West Indian immigrant” (...) the audience can relate to him “as an unproblematic outsider, regarding him with no more ambivalence than we devote to any tragic hero” (Waldstreicher and Pasley 149). However, Hamilton wasn’t an immigrant in the same sense as the immigrants passing through Ellis Island in New York City. He was a British subject, traveling from one British colony to another. He was white and would not have faced any discrimination that immigrants arriving from the Caribbean or freed slaves

would have faced. Those facets of United States history are not mentioned at all, or just in passing, in the show.

The role of the Founders Chic genre is crucial to examining the current cultural hegemony of the foundation myth. It is through these types of works that such mythology is emphasized and becomes part of a greater cultural hegemony. One that offers us a historical perspective on the founding that underscores greatness in a few good men. One that has very little regard for the roles of women (with the one exception of Abigail Adams and her ‘Remember the Ladies’ letter), the roles of blacks (freed or enslaved) and other minorities. We see institutions personified in the men who created them and try to relate that to 20th and 21st century political debates and questions. Miranda tried very hard to make a historically accurate show. Relying not just on Ron Chernow, but also other historians like Joanna B. Freeman, Miranda has made historical fiction. As it is based on historians that maintain a more “attractive version of Hamilton by editing them to suit modern liberal sensibilities” (Waldstreicher and Pasley 155), Waldstreicher and Pasley are not inclined to see *Hamilton* as revolutionary or groundbreaking. The musical does not break free of the Founders Chic genre on which its origin material is based. In this sense, the musical does little more than emphasize the hegemonic ideals of the foundation myth. However, *Hamilton* does question other facets of current cultural and political hegemonic systems such as racism.

Hamilton is a product of the Founders Chic genre. The four characteristics of Founders Chic – unapologetic celebration of the founding fathers, predominant interest in questions of character, presenting these people as avowedly establishmentarian, polishing the founding fathers to make them relatable for a present-day audience – are found throughout the musical’s origin material and Miranda’s libretto. In Miranda’s effort to create a show that historians would take seriously, he has been unable to remove his work, to some degree, from the trappings of Founders Chic. By staying within the genre which influences much of the

cultural hegemonic concept of the foundation myth, Miranda endorses the whitewashed and polished story of how the United States came to be.

Chapter Three: *Hamilton's* Origin

*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, impoverished, in squalor
grow up to be a hero and a scholar?* (Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 16)

Lin-Manuel Miranda first contemplated writing a musical about Alexander Hamilton, a man he considered the ‘forgotten’ founding father, around 2008. The moniker ‘forgotten founding father’ is one that Miranda himself gave to Alexander Hamilton. Though it is now a phrase widely used in relation to the historical figure, it is not necessarily true. Waldstreicher and Pasley use a stock market example to explain how founders rise and fall and rise again in the game of popularity. “When Jefferson is down, Adams and Hamilton go up”. This cycle began with what they call a ‘Gilded Age Democrats fascination’ with Jefferson, followed by Hamilton-worshipping during the turn of the century (Theodore Roosevelt was a big fan). During the New Deal era Jefferson was revived in popularity, and Hamilton has made a comeback in scholarship marked by the neoliberal 1990s (Waldstreicher and Pasley 151). Alexander Hamilton even had a major exhibition dedicated to him as recent as 2004. Republicans and billionaires Richard Gilder and Lewis Lehrman produced “Alexander Hamilton: The Man Who Made Modern America”. It involved a ten-dollar bill wrapped around the building of the New York Historical Society, and life size statues of both him and Aaron Burr (Waldstreicher and Pasley 137). One can hardly argue that that is the fate of a ‘forgotten’ founder.

Miranda was considering his next show after his previous hit *In the Heights* (a show about the Latino community of Washington Heights, a neighborhood in Manhattan) had

received critical acclaim both off and on Broadway. The moment he performed the opening line of his first Hamilton songs for the first time, Miranda was standing in the White House's ceremonial ballroom. President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama, the first black presidential couple of the United States, were hosting "An Evening of Poetry, Music and Spoken Word". Though he had been requested to perform a song from *In the Heights*, he performed something else. Accompanied by his close friend and composer Alex Lacamoire, he proceeded to rap the first 40 pages of Ron Chernow's biography on the first United States Treasurer. A New York citizen, descendent from Puerto Rican immigrants, was using a genre usually defined as 'black' or 'African-American' to tell the story of a white immigrant founding father.

The "ten dollar founding father without a father" (Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 16) was presented that evening as someone whom history had forgotten. Miranda rapped that "His enemies destroyed his rep, America forgot him". If one looks at the scholarship surrounding the founders, the most forgotten people are those who are persons of color, or women, hardly Alexander Hamilton.

Alexander Hamilton was born on Nevis, a small island in the British West Indies on January 11, 1755³. At the time of his birth it was the "crossroads of a bitter maritime rivalry among European powers vying for mastery of the lucrative sugar trade" (Chernow 6). On Nevis, society was strongly based on class and race, with slavery being a profitable part of everyday life for a small percentage of its citizens. Hamilton's mother, Rachel Faucette, left her husband Johann Lavien (a Dane), after giving birth to their son Peter and moved from St.

³ There is a renewed discussion on his actual birthyear. For a long time, historians accepted 1757 as Hamilton's birthyear, as it was the one used by himself and his family. Chernow argues that new evidence in the form of legal documents make a better case for the year 1755. I am aware that there is still no consensus on the matter, and that Chernow might be wrong. However, considering that the Chernow biography is the material on which the show is based, I will follow his choice of birth year for Hamilton.

Croix to St. Kitts. There she met James Hamilton, Alexander's father, and with him had two children, Alexander and James. As Chernow writes:

They [Rachel and James] were both scarred by early setbacks, had suffered a vertiginous descent in social standing, and had grappled with the terrors of downward economic mobility. Each would have been excluded from the more rarefied society of the British West Indies and tempted to choose a mate from the limited population of working whites. Their liaison was the sort of match that could easily produce a son hypersensitive about class and status and painfully conscious that social hierarchies ruled the world (Chernow 15-16).

His father left the family while Alexander was still young. His mother moved them back to St. Croix. There Johann Lanvien exacted his final revenge on the woman who left him. He wrote a document blasting her as a scarlet woman and sought divorce. The Danish court granted the divorce, with the customary sidenote that Lanvien could remarry, but Rachel could not. Lanvien had successfully maneuvered Alexander and James out of their inheritance and into full illegitimacy (Chernow 20-25). When Rachel died, the probate court awarded Lanvien her estate. The boys then had a succession of guardians, who all died without providing for them.

In the short time Alexander and his brother had been alive, they had suffered quite a few traumatic events. Not only did their father vanish, their mother die, and their next protector commit suicide, but subsequent family members that cared for them all died as well. Rather friendless and penniless, James, at sixteen years of age, and Alexander, only fourteen, were now alone (Chernow 26).

Alexander was offered a position as clerk for the firm Beekman and Kruger, which had a direct trading link between St. Croix and New York City. According to Chernow, it was during his apprenticeship that he learned about all aspects of trade, smugglers and slave trade. All the information and knowledge absorbed during this time in his life would influence his ideas for the soon to be created United States, as well as his staunch abolitionist stance.

Not all historians agree that Alexander was influenced to such extreme extent by growing up in a slave society. He married into a family that had many slaves. Elizabeth Schuyler was Phillip Schuyler's daughter. He was a very rich landowner and used slaves to produce goods that were not produced in the South, like flour and butter (Harris 81). It is possible that Alexander Hamilton made several slave transactions on behalf of his sister-in-law Angelica Schuyler Church, and her husband John Church, and Eliza herself was known to occasionally hire slaves for work around the house (Harris 85). Painting Alexander as a strict abolitionist is perhaps a strong statement, as he did not adhere to abolitionist principles enough to never make slave transactions. However, it fits within the Founders Chic method that Chernow employs.

It is presumed that Hamilton was mostly self-taught and he aimed to be "a man of letters" (Chernow 33). He started publishing poetry in the *Royal Danish American Gazette*. He met a Presbyterian minister named Hugh Knox, who took a liking to him and opened his library to him. Knox encouraged him to write and pursue a scholarship (Chernow 35-36).

On the night of August 31, 1772, a hurricane ripped through St. Croix and damaged it and the surrounding islands. This prompted Hamilton to write a letter to his father (whom he was still in contact with) about the devastating effects. This letter was later published in the *Gazette* and turned into Hamilton's ticket out of the West Indies. A subscription fund was started to send this bright, young, seventeen-year-old to North America to get an education

(Chernow 36-40). Chernow paints a picture of Alexander Hamilton the immigrant, who was on his way to a new life, where he would make a difference in ways no one thought possible. Chernow's portrayal of Hamilton's migration is more reminiscent of the travels that 19th and 20th century Europeans undertook, usually for reasons of persecution. Hamilton, however, was traveling as a British subject from one colony to the other. Those experiences are hardly the same. Again, Chernow is burnishing Alexander's experiences, making him an even more exceptional man than he is.

This short biography of Hamilton's formative years, comprising the first chapters of Chernow's biography, is the basis of the opening number thus cementing the biography as the bible of the show. New York City and immigrant life are themes that resonate throughout the musical and Miranda sees them as core components of Chernow's Alexander Hamilton.

Lin-Manuel Miranda was born in New York City on January 16, 1980, the son of Luz Towns (a clinical psychologist) and Luis A. Miranda, Jr., (a Democratic Party consultant), who are Puerto Rican immigrants. He attended Wesleyan college, where he wrote the first version of *In the Heights*. Together with director Thomas Kail (among others) he revised *In the Heights* after graduating in 2002. The show went on to premier in 2008, garnering thirteen Tony nominations and winning four, including Best Musical and Best Original Score. He co-wrote the music and lyrics for *Bring It On: The Musical*, a show about competitive cheerleading. It was during this time (between 2011 and 2013) that between other projects, he was also, slowly, working on *Hamilton: an American Musical*.

It all started out as a mixtape, a concept rap/hip-hop album named *The Hamilton Mixtape*. Over the course of several years, Miranda wrote and rewrote songs almost in the same order as they would end up appearing in the show. He rapped his second song "My Shot" for the first time during a performance of his improv group Freestyle Love Supreme. Thomas Kail, who directed this improv group, saw the potential (Miranda had been telling

him about his idea for three years at that point) (Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 20-22).

Accompanied by choreographer Andy Blankenbuehler, director Thomas Kail, and composer Alexander Lacamoire, Lin-Manuel Miranda wrote, discussed, polished, rewrote and staged the show right until the off-Broadway premiere at the Public Theater in January of 2015. Ron Chernow accompanied the whole process as its historical consultant. Miranda told him “I want historians to take this seriously” (Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 32). The show sold out its engagement at the Public Theater (Goia), and received rave reviews and critiques. Miranda and his ‘Cabinet’, the word he uses to refer to Kail, Blankenbuehler and Lacamoire, polished some more, and after previews on Broadway (which also had excellent reviews), the show opened on Broadway officially on August 6, 2015.

Since then, five separate *Hamilton: An American Musical* productions have come into being. Chicago has a permanent (for now) production, as does London’s West End. There are two productions touring simultaneously throughout the United States, nicknamed ‘The Angelica Tour’ and ‘The Philip Tour’, after supporting characters in the show. A production will be coming to Puerto Rico in 2019.

The original Broadway production was nominated for thirteen Tony awards and won eleven of them. The original West End production was nominated for thirteen Laurence Olivier awards, and won seven. All five productions are consistently sold out. Via the ‘HamApp’ (an application available for smartphones) people can enter lotteries for the different productions for a chance to win front row seats that only cost \$10/£10, allowing people with a smaller budget the opportunity to see the show as well.

Lin-Manuel Miranda identifies with the historical Alexander Hamilton, who had to overcome many hardships in his youth before immigrating to the colonies and rising up to be

the first Treasury Secretary. Miranda equates overcoming such hardships with growing up in inner-city areas and relates these hardships to the musical genres born in those areas, namely hip-hop and rap. He was supported in his endeavor to create *Hamilton* by President Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama. The Presidential couple saw their policies of inclusiveness and working towards more representation for non-whites represented in *Hamilton*. The musical has also been examined as one of the cultural cornerstones of their presidency, in which they sought to give non-white artists more exposure. Miranda's version of *Hamilton* is not entirely historically accurate, as his version is more a reflection of the 'age of Obama', and increased representation for black and Hispanic peoples.

Chapter Four: *Hamilton*'s Text

The text of *Hamilton: An American Musical*, and the choice of casting, go against the grain and status quo of Broadway. Nancy Isenberg argues that Miranda's goal is not to rewrite history with these choices, but that "his play has more to do with contemporary politics. His Hamilton is a symbol for the age of Obama" (Isenberg 298). The Obama administration is typified by politics of inclusiveness and change, support for minorities, a strong belief in the American Dream and United States exceptionalism, and most of all, the first black president and first lady. These components of the Obama administration are themes that Miranda uses in *Hamilton*. Taking into consideration director Thomas Kail's statement that *Hamilton* "is a show about America then, told by America now" (Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 33), we can see an anachronistic history. The foundation story as told by Miranda is one filled with Obama era politics of inclusiveness, black actors in white roles and exceptionalism. Then again, even if a show promotes a certain ideology, in this case *Hamilton* promoting dominant Obama administration ideals, that does not mean it cannot, at the same time, question that which it is a product of. In *Hamilton*'s case, the genre of Founders Chic, a genre that whitewashes American revolutionary history, is what is being examined. However, by having white people portrayed by actors of color and using musical influences from minority music (such as hip-hop and rap), the show questions the hegemony of white people in today's America. According to the annotations provided by Miranda in his *Hamilton: The Revolution*, we don't see any hip-hop and/or rap inspiration from other artists until the third song "My Shot". The first two numbers ("Alexander Hamilton" and "Aaron Burr, Sir") do not necessarily rely on any hip-hop inspiration beyond his own inventions.

After the character of Aaron Burr opens the show by directing questions at the audience about Hamilton's life, John Laurens takes over:

The ten-dollar Founding Father without a father,
got a lot farther by working a lot harder
by being a lot smarter,
by being a self-starter,
by fourteen, they placed him in charge of a trading charter.
(Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 16)

Further on in the show, Laurens and Hamilton become best friends and in these first lines we see Laurens paint an exceptionalist version of his friend. Hamilton, according to Laurens, and implicitly Miranda, embodies the American Dream of working hard to get what you want and rise up in the world. Historian Lyra D. Monteiro calls this narrative problematic. She argues that having a black actor use such exceptionalist rhetoric denies the problems people of color face in trying to climb up in society. Structural inequalities like institutionalized racism mean people of color have to work much harder than their white peers to achieve the same goals. She also finds it historically inappropriate, as the ancestors of the African American actors who are on stage most definitely would not have had the opportunities that Alexander Hamilton had (Monteiro 66). However, in interviews with members of the cast, they have all answered such questions along the lines of ‘finally feeling ownership’ over a history from which they’ve been excluded for so long. Monteiro’s point is valid, but I do not think we should underestimate the emotional impact such feelings of ownership have on the actors and the audience. It allows them to participate in United States history from which they have so long been excluded; which is important for the actors and their careers. However, the show takes no trouble to show the extreme extent of the inequality in the past and present.

During the song “Alexander Hamilton” the character of Thomas Jefferson, played by a black actor (Daveed Diggs), says the following about Hamilton’s childhood:

And every day while slaves were being slaughtered and carted away.
Across the waves he struggled and kept his guard up.
Inside, he was longing for something to be a part of,
the brother was ready to beg, steal, borrow or barter
(Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 16).

This is interesting, because Miranda situates a black actor in the role of a slave owner, who is using words like ‘slaughtered’ and ‘carted away’ to describe the slave trade. It almost comes across as though Miranda’s Jefferson feels and/or sees the slave trade as being morally wrong. Other principal roles, such as the Schuyler Sisters, Madison, Jefferson and George Washington are played by black, Latinx or multiethnic actors. Their historical counterparts were all slaveowners. Monteiro takes issue with this form of casting. She argues that colorblind casting (as she calls it) actively erases the presence and roles that brown and black people had in the Revolutionary War era (Monteiro 62).

Colorblind casting is the practice of not regarding race when searching for actors, and thereby disregarding previous performances (in the case of revivals) or authors intent of the original material. For example, the 2014 film version of the musical *Annie* had Quvenzhané Wallis, a black girl, play the titular role, and Jamie Foxx, a black man, play Oliver Warbucks. In all other major versions of the show Annie had always been an orphaned Irish girl and Oliver Warbucks a white man. Changing the characters skin color may appear to be colorblind, as Annie’s race has no effect on the plot of the show, but it does have an effect on audiences and actors. Therefore, the decision to specifically cast black actors was quite

meaningful and cannot be dubbed colorblind, as ‘blind’ implies that the casting has no effect, which it does.

Miranda does not see his casting preferences as colorblind, but as authorial intent. *Hamilton* was written with the intention to have it represented by America now. The racial make-up of America in 2015 still had a white majority of 62%.⁴ New York City had a lower percentage of white people in 2015 (43,1%), and a much higher percentage of black and Hispanic people (53,4%).⁵ *Hamilton* is not necessarily told by America now, but by New York City now. Miranda perceives New York City as a stand-in for the entire United States.

The use of such anachronism is not meant to erase the presence of revolutionary brown and black people but to make a statement about today’s culture and politics. The libretto recounts the story of Ron Chernow visiting to hear the first act and being shocked to find out that Miranda’s actors looked nothing like their historical counterparts (Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 33). It had not crossed Chernow’s mind that the people most capable of performing music based in hip-hop and rap would not be white people. Inserting black and brown actors into the white foundation myth is not a mild statement to make about said myth. Miranda goes against the hegemonic whiteness that is pervasive in the myth and denies whiteness the role of being the norm. The decision to cast black and brown actors as white leaders is a counterhegemonic statement. In an interview with THNKR, Miranda discusses such factors of casting, and his belief that race and gender are like height and age, elements necessary to tell a good story. He goes on to explain that he does not feel

⁴ According to the American Community Survey, an ongoing survey by the United States Census Bureau, in 2015 62% of the United States population identified as white, 17,3% as Hispanic or Latino, 12,6% as Black or African American, 5,2% as Asian, 0,8% as American Indian or Alaska Native, 0,2% as Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and 4,8% as other races.
<https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk> (retrieved on 4-7-2018)

⁵ According to the American Community Survey, an ongoing survey by the United States Census Bureau, in 2015 43,1% of NYC’s citizens identified as white, 24,5% as Black or African American, 0,4% as American Indian or Alaska Native, 13,5% as Asian, 28,9% as Hispanic or Latino, and 35,3% as something else.
<https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF> (retrieved on 4-7-2018)

such adherence is necessary for high school productions, because “when you’re in high school, you should be able to play whatever role you want” (Miranda, Lin-Manuel Miranda on Race & Its Role in Theater 03:00-03:30). Miranda is excited to see how *Hamilton*, with its characteristically black roles, is performed by high schools. He accepts that white high school productions of *Hamilton* will not be able to adhere to his authorial intent of inherently black casting for the show. When people talk about Miranda’s colorblind casting, they negate the fact that he is not blind to the effects of casting on race. He casts race-consciously, not blindly. Therein lies his ability to utilize *Hamilton* as a counterhegemonic musical.

Monteiro’s issue with *Hamilton* lies in the fact that, except for a few bars of music during “What’d I Miss” when an ensemble member takes on the role of Sally Hemings, there are no historically accurate black or brown roles. When one looks at the popularity the show enjoys with (mostly) African American and Latinx children, erasure of their ancestors is not the first thing they take away from *Hamilton*. Rather, representation on a big Broadway stage is what is most important. I will return to Monteiro’s arguments in discussing other songs.

Thomas Jefferson’s four lines in “Alexander Hamilton” evoke not only that “Hamilton’s early life was marked by trauma and a firsthand view of the brutal practices of the slave trade” (Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 16), but also the trauma of other immigrants and citizens of ghetto neighborhoods who are trying to make their way in the world via any means possible. Only 34 seconds into the show, the first connection between immigrants, African Americans and other ghetto citizens, and a white founding father is made. The use of words like ‘brother’ strengthen that connection. Slavery is noted right from the start, by an African American actor (Daveed Diggs portrayed the double role of Marquis de Lafayette and Thomas Jefferson) in the role of a future slaveholding president. By having an African American actor mention slavery, Miranda makes the first suggestion of tension that lies in the combination of Founders Chic history and current issues of racism.

This tension is problematic because Miranda is combining different kinds of suffering and making it all universal. There is a big difference between the suffering endured by slaves and the suffering endured by white immigrants. By elevating all people's suffering to the same moral plane as that of enslaved people's suffering, Miranda makes use of Gramscian politics of consent that is typical both of the Founders Chic genre and musical theater. The masses are consenting to having their individual forms of suffering equalized, because it allows them to partake in the Founders Chic hegemonic structure in which *Hamilton* situates itself. The line "Immigrants, we get the job done" from "Yorktown" receives applause, standing ovations and cries of agreement every night, regardless of in which town the show is playing. Monteiro's questions about erasure of suffering are related to those people who experienced the Revolutionary War, whilst Miranda is speaking for those that suffer today. This anachronism employed by *Hamilton* glosses over the trauma experienced in the Revolutionary War, and therefore seems to erase it from the public consciousness. The power of the counterhegemonic statement of placing black and brown actors in white roles is larger than the will to accurately address different forms of suffering through racism. This tension between hegemonic and counterhegemonic statements flows throughout the musical.

The song continues with James Madison (played by Okieriete Onaodowan), Hamilton's future writing partner, explaining to the audience how Hamilton, as a child, made use of writing to work through his pain:

Then a hurricane came, and devastation reigned.
Our man saw his future drip, dripping down the drain.
Put a pencil to his temple, connected it to his brain,
And he wrote his first refrain, a testament to his pain
(Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 16).

The wordplay in Madison's first line is only apparent when spoken aloud. The word 'reigned' sounds the same as the word 'rained', which would also be an apt description for the effects of the hurricane. Not only was the hurricane 'king' of the situation, 'reigning' over the islanders, but the hurricane was also literally 'raining' devastation upon them.

The company continues on to welcome Hamilton to his new country by repeating "in New York you can be a new man" (Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 17). This is a sentence that functions more like a mantra, returning as a *leitmotif* throughout the show. Miranda uses the song to emphasize New York City's historical and cultural role as a place to reinvent oneself.

The company then sings about and to Hamilton, almost as a sort of praise:

You could never back down, you never learned to take your time!

Oh, Alexander Hamilton, when America sings for you.

Will they know what you overcame? Will they know you rewrote the game?

The world, will never be the same

(Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 17)!

In these lines Hamilton's flaws are turned into attributes of his greatness. With the swelling orchestra and full chorus, Miranda chooses to make Alexander Hamilton the greatest founder, one who changed the course of a young nation forever. It is definitely true that Hamilton did have a large impact on many institutions and choices, but the way Miranda presents him here is a classic example of Founders Chic, imbuing the historical character of Alexander Hamilton with a narrative of a 19th century immigrant, and polishing his great leadership and writing skills.

The narrator, Aaron Burr, continues on with this narrative:

The ship is in the harbor now, see if you can spot him.

Another immigrant coming up from the bottom.

His enemies destroyed his rep, America forgot him

(Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 17).

Again, the narrative of an immigrant hustling his way up to the top and facing destructive forces in the process is emphasized. The last sentence enforces Miranda's framing of Hamilton as the 'forgotten' founder. During these lines, the Hamilton character makes his



Figure 1: "Alexander Hamilton" - Getty Images

way to center stage (Fig. 1). The full company is arranged around him, with the principal characters (except for Burr) on the balcony structure, and the ensemble on stage with Hamilton, but at a distance. At the end of the first song, the audience knows precisely where the show stands concerning Hamilton's place in history. The audience is invited to identify with the multi-racial cast through usage of Founders Chic exceptionalism which is present in

the lyrics. The show's opening number might be filled with patriotic flag-waving sentiment but seeing black and brown actors do the flag waving does question the status quo of the white foundation myth from which they have been excluded from for so long.

In "My Shot", African American artists like Tupac and Mobb Deep are revisited. While Alexander Hamilton is telling the audience about his plans for the future, he sings "I gotta holler just to be heard" and "Only nineteen but my mind is older" (Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 26, notes 1 and 2). The first quote references Tupac and Miranda notes in his annotation "and Tupac responds: Holla if ya hear me!". The second lyric comes from Mobb Deep's song *Shook Ones Part II*. Miranda intertwines artists that have had a fundamental impact on African American popular culture with a fundamentally white history. By having himself, a Latino performer, sing these lyrics he manages to bring together both African American and Latino minorities and simultaneously question the white history which he is performing. By using subordinate musical genres, Miranda makes a counterhegemonic statement against the white history he endorses by performing. The tension between the hegemonic and counterhegemonic statements seems to stay unresolved, strengthening and weakening each other at the same time.

The first lyrics that Hamilton raps in the opening of "My Shot" again engage with the Founders Chic genre:

I'm not throwing away my shot! (2x)

Hey yo. I'm just like my country, I'm young, scrappy and hungry
and I'm not throwing away my shot!

I'm 'a get a scholarship to Kings College

I prob'ly shouldn't brag, but dag, I amaze and astonish.

The problem is I got a lot of brains but no polish

I gotta holler just to be heard, with every word I drop knowledge.

I'm a diamond in the rough, a shiny piece of coal

Tryin' to reach my goal, my power of speech unimpeachable.

Only nineteen, but my mind is older

(Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 26).

Words like “amaze” and “astonish”, and sentences like “with every word I drop knowledge” and “I’m a diamond in the rough” are all references to Alexander Hamilton’s greatness. The fact that Hamilton himself vocalizes them emphasizes his belief in himself. He is able to amaze and astonish people by doing things that no one else can do. He refers to himself as a diamond, a rare gemstone. The use of the word ‘unimpeachable’ makes for entertaining wordplay. Having Hamilton’s “power of speech, unimpeachable” foreshadows his writing of the Reynolds Pamphlet in Act II, where his powerful writing ruins his political career. The word “unimpeachable” also refers to the process of removing a sitting president, and thus adds an association with politics to the character. Miranda’s Hamilton is of strict moral character, doing right by all laws. This only lasts for the first act, as in the second we see his moral downfall with Maria Reynolds in “Say No to This”.

The lines that follow all glorify the immigrant narrative that is built around its likeness to 19th century immigrants:

These New York City streets get colder, I shoulder

Every burden, every disadvantage, I’ve learned to manage,

I don’t have a gun to brandish, I walk these streets famished.

The plan is, to fan this spark into a flame.

But damn it’s getting dark so let me spell out my name,

(Miranda and McCarter, Hamilton the Revolution 26).

“Colder” and “shoulder” reference not just the weather conditions of New York City, but together become the figurative “cold shoulder” that New York City gives Hamilton. He speaks of “burden” and “disadvantage”, hardships not explained upon further but mentioned to emphasize the sufferings of being an immigrant. He walks “these streets famished”, unable to still his literal and figurative hunger. He wants to be more in this world than just another average Joe. He wants to make his mark and rises to the occasion, even in the face of famine and other obstacles. Miranda does not really name these obstacles, which allows the audience to fill in their own ideas. This makes identifying with the main character easier.

The character of John Laurens (usually portrayed by an actor with Latino roots and originated by Anthony Ramos) proclaims:

But we'll never be truly free,
Until those in bondage have the same rights as you and me
You and I, do or die
Wait till I sally in on a stallion with the first black battalion
(Miranda and McCarter, Hamilton the Revolution 27).

The historical John Laurens was a staunch abolitionist, campaigning to abolish the lifestyle he had known growing up as a child on a large slave plantation in the south. His father, Henry Laurens, was a significant South Carolina slaveholder (Chernow 121). Yet again Miranda fuses together minorities and different forms of suffering and greatness. In this case he sets the scene for further mentions of abolitionism (and its failure) throughout the show.

Miranda adds white Broadway into the mix by having Aaron Burr (always played by a black actor and originated by Leslie Odom Jr.) reference Rodgers and Hammerstein's show *South Pacific*. The sentence "You've got to be carefully taught: if you talk, you're gonna get shot!" is a direct reference to the song "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught" in which a supporting character in *South Pacific* (Lieutenant Cable) explains how American children are taught to be racist. Arguably, the sentence is ambiguous. It refers to the risk members of minorities run: if they speak up, they will get shot. This can be seen as a reference to political hegemonies cracking down on minorities when they protest or fight for their rights. Though Miranda does not mention this in any of his annotations or interviews or writing, it is hard to ignore the impact of police brutality against African Americans over the past years and the increase of publicity surrounding these actions. Burr is not only warning his fellow revolutionaries. He is explaining the realities of war; not just the Revolutionary War, but the violent war against African Americans that is being waged in the United States. A direct example of this is the "Black Lives Matter" movement, which came to life after the acquittal of George Zimmerman, a white man, for shooting Trayvon Martin, an African-American teenager. The movement gained (inter)national recognition for their demonstrations against police brutality and resulting African-American deaths in police custody after organizing protests against the deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown (the latter which resulted in unrest in Ferguson, MI). "As Laurens and the boys rap about equality, Burr comes in with some cold reality" (Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 27 note 9) also meant for the audience.

Hamilton responds to his comrades by summing up how incredible this moment in time is⁶:

⁶ which didn't happen until much later, but for sake of plot devices, Miranda had to make use of his artistic license.

Let's hatch a plot blacker than the kettle calling the pot...
What are the odds the gods would put us all in one spot,
Poppin' a squat on conventional wisdom, like it or not,
A bunch of revolutionary manumission abolitionists?
Give me a position show me where the ammunition is!
Oh, am I talkin' too loud?
Sometimes I get overexcited, shoot off at the mouth.
I never had a group of friends before,
I promise that I'll make y'all proud (Miranda and McCarter, Hamilton the
Revolution 27).

“What are the odds the gods would put us all in one spot” seems to endorse the conviction that this is a pre-ordained meeting. It recalls American exceptionalism. Ordained by the Christian God worshipped by the puritans, these men were meant to make and carry America onward and upward. Only exceptional men would be capable of creating that ‘city upon a hill’. Hamilton continues on, singing “A bunch of revolutionary manumission abolitionists?”, referring to himself, Laurens, Marquis de Lafayette and Hercules Mulligan. He is clearly explaining to the audience where these men stand on the subject of slavery. The question mark is misleading, as Miranda raps it as a statement, not as a question. Again, this is something many historians mentioned in this thesis take issue with. Polishing up someone’s good qualities does not diminish the existence of bad qualities. In the last three lines, Miranda creates a human Hamilton, one who seems in touch with his bad traits (“shooting off at the mouth”), but that is immediately excused, because it only happens as he is so very excited to be part of something larger than himself. Hamilton is worth empathizing with, because he has

never had any friends, according to Miranda's lyrics. That is not historically accurate. From the moment he was taken in by the merchant Thomas Stevens, Hamilton became the closest of friends with his son, Edward Stevens (Chernow 27). He kept in contact with Edward throughout his life and had other friends besides these four men. Miranda even borrows a line from a letter Hamilton wrote to Edward. In "Aaron Burr, Sir" he says: "I wish there was a war". In 1769 he wrote that line, hoping that he could rise up through the military.

Further on Hamilton raps:

Scratch that, this is not a moment, it's the movement.

Where all the hungriest brothers with something to prove went.

Foes oppose us, we take an honest stand,

we roll like Moses, claimin' our promised land

(Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 29).

The movement is the Revolutionary war. However, the movement can also refer to something current. The Black Lives Matter movement has seen support from Miranda himself; he has used the hashtag in his tweets. The movement of color-conscious casting in theater is a discussion that has reared its head again since rehearsals and previews of the Off-Broadway version of the show began. The movement Hamilton is talking about is that of the American Revolution. However, Miranda references a movement larger than the story of this founding father. For him, the movement collectively refers to all movements questioning what America stands for. I will come back to that statement later. "We roll like Moses, claimin' our promised land" is a direct biblical reference, but also refers to how minorities are working to create their own promised land in the United States.

The next four lines speak of a foreshadowing of United States foreign policy:

And? If we win our independence?

‘Zat a guarantee of freedom for our descendants?

Or will the blood we shed begin an endless cycle of vengeance and death
with no defendants” (Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 29)?

There is no guarantee of freedom for anybody who is not white, and Hamilton rightly foresees the bloodshed that will commence in the name of everyone’s freedom. Arguably, that ‘cycle of vengeance and death’ continues to this day in the forms of institutionalized racism and the police brutality that the Black Lives Matter movement fights against.

During the middle and end of the song John Laurens is imploring his fellow citizens to:

Rise up! When you’re living on your knees you

Rise up. Tell your brother that he’s gotta rise up

Tell your sister that she’s gotta rise up

When are these colonies gonna rise up (3x)

(Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 28)?

Laurens does this while Hamilton is rapping his lyrics towards the crowd (of ensemble and audience) on top of a soapbox. Laurens is the MC, or hype man, to lead singer Hamilton. Hamilton and Laurens, together, are the main actors in this song that implore the audience to also rise up and stand against the current situation in politics and society and make a change. Change was necessary in 1776 but is also necessary in the present. This is an important ambiguity that amplifies the critique that *Hamilton* is a show about America then, told by

America now. “My Shot” is in that sense a call to arms. Rise up, and dare to challenge the conventions, be they current or historic.

“The Story of Tonight” references the struggle for freedom in the person of Laurens, who sings: “Raise a glass to freedom, something they can never take away, no matter what they tell you” (Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 35). Though this is a drinking song, meant to further establish the bond between these four men, this sentence is a subtle nod to those men, women and children in chains. The abolitionist Laurens is subtly saying that even though slavery is abundant throughout the young nation, you should pay no heed to what your oppressors are telling you to keep you oppressed. Yet again we can also read this as a message for today’s minority youth. No matter what is said, you will always be free and that should be celebrated. Though the sentence could also be taken as a denial of oppression as rising up against your unfreedom is not right because unfreedom does not exist, Miranda wrote it to convey a “yearning and innocence” (Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 35). It is meant as an uplifting message, not one of denial. Monteiro argues that this is one of the many scenes in the show where historically, black people, free or enslaved, would have been present. According to research by Patrick Rael⁷, during that time around 14 percent of New York City’s citizens were African American. The large majority of these people were slaves. She maintains this erasure of slavery and accurate black roles in the show all goes back to the genre of its source material: “Founders Chic historians emplot slavery when it serves to upraise the character of their heroes (...) and diss their flawed characters” (Monteiro 64-65). She has similar problems with the next song in the show.

“The Schuyler Sisters” is a homage to New York City and ‘Destiny’s Child’-like introduction number for Angelica, Eliza and Peggy Schuyler. McCarter writes that “just as

⁷ Patrick Rael, “The Long Death of Slavery”, in *Slavery in New York*, edited by Ira Berlin and Leslie M. Harris (New York: New Press 2005).

Hamilton is the prototype of the immigrant striver (hard-working, ambitious, desperate to prove himself), he is also the model New Yorker: opinionated, hypervocal, always on the make” (Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 38). The anthem echoes what many immigrants will have thought in the past and today. Passing through Ellis Island or JFK Airport’s immigration department, Miranda’s refrain “Look around, look around, at how lucky we are to be alive right now” (Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 44) echoes the gratefulness of many immigrants grateful to enter a country that offers them a place to make something of themselves. This refrain repeats itself in the show, and when looked at from a current-day perspective seems to offer the audience hope. Even today, when politically and socially things are not going well for African Americans and minorities, one should still appreciate how great it is to live in the present. It is a sentiment Miranda echoes daily in his Twitter feed, tweeting that people should be grateful for today, every day.

This song has some points worth critiquing. The character of Angelica Schuyler (originally played by Renée Elise Goldsberry) takes center stage to establish her character’s intelligent feminism by singing:

I’ve been reading ‘Common Sense’ by Thomas Paine.

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

You want a revolution? I want a revelation!

So listen to my declaration:

We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal.

And when I meet Thomas Jefferson,

I’m ‘a compel him to include women in the sequel! Work!

(Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 44)

Nancy Isenberg argues that this is an example of faux-feminism. She maintains that this type of power-player feminism is only seen in the historically accurate version of Aaron Burr, his wife and daughter. She claims their “more credible, genuine eighteenth-century feminism” is transposed upon the ‘hip and happening’ Miranda-fied Schuyler Sisters. This, says Isenberg, “[i]gnores the tremendous resistance in this era when it came to treating women as intellectual equals, and it sanitizes the retrogressive thinking of most founders. (...) Why did it take nearly a century-long campaign to secure the female vote if the women of 1776 were ‘hip’ power players” (Isenberg 299-300)? This is a good point. However, I believe that Miranda is going for a different type of feminism here. The fiercely intelligent Angelica is portrayed by black women, offering those actresses a new role and people in the audience a new black character to identify with that has positive connotations. Intelligence and beauty are characteristics that, in the past, have not commonly been associated with non-white characters on stage. Her depiction is anachronistic, and Miranda’s representation of Angelica polishes away the repression that women endured in the 18th century. However, having non-white actresses play such strong women can be considered feminist and have liberating effects on actors and audiences.

Angelica and her sisters Eliza and Peggy Schuyler were slaveholders. Miranda critiques the role of slavery by having these three sisters portrayed by actresses of color (Phillipa Soo has a Chinese-American background, and Jasmine Cephas Jones is African American). The sisters’ role as slaveholders, however, is never mentioned in the show and therefore the musical negates a huge part of their lives. In creating a cleaner version of these three ladies, be it for story- or time purposes, Miranda gives the Schuyler Sisters the same Founders Chic treatment that the male roles receive and erasing the role black women played in fighting against slavery. His erasure of the Schuyler Sisters slaveholding past is in line with the Founders Chic hegemony, but having non-white actresses portray them is

counterhegemonic to the white norm that exists within Founders Chic. Yet again Miranda confronts the audience with the tension that exists between hegemony and counterhegemony in his musical.

Monteiro's issue with this song, besides black women portraying slave-owning ladies, is that in the song, Miranda does not cast these women regardless of race. Philippa Soo passes for white easily (even though she is part Chinese), and sings the lyrics that musically come the closest to old-school Broadway tunes. Renée Elise Goldsberry is black, and therefore sings the more 'black' styles of rap and hip-hop. Jasmine Cephas Jones looks mixed and is given the RnB style (Monteiro 60). All three of them cry out "Work!" and snap their fingers in the air (Fig. 2), a word and gesture that has connotations with aggressive black women who want to get things done or will not take attitude from anybody, and white slave drivers demanding their slaves get to work.

When looking at the castings of the other *Hamilton* companies, the trend continues. Aside from the swings (who learn several roles as understudies for both ensemble and principals) the ladies all fit this casting pattern: white-passing, black, mixed. Can we call that 'revolutionary'? I believe we can, because even though from a historical standpoint there are



Figure 2: *The Schuyler Sisters* - Source: YouTube Still

many reasons why black women might not want to identify with these ladies, Miranda turns them into smart, brave and assertive women. In the end that is what I, as a member of audience am identifying with, and it is important to be clear that the musical is not aiming for historical accuracy on this point. Monteiro claims that as Miranda has brought a history so thoroughly archived and researched to the stage, he has a responsibility to the public to do that history justice (Monteiro 66). No popular culture representation of the past can be considered accurate, as they are all driven by what will speak to current audiences, not what the facts are. By choosing to portray black people as slaveholders, Miranda consciously makes political implications about how we like to remember the past. He implies that there is a level playing field in which it does not matter if a black person plays a slaveholder. That implication negates the trauma suffered by slaves of that era, and possibly the suffering of descendants of slaves during the Jim Crow era and after. Miranda also decides what he feels is worth remembering, which is the good qualities of his characters, not the bad qualities. In a Gramscian context, Miranda is reinforcing the status quo of the exceptional and polished history that is apparently worth remembering, even if he changes that history by including black people.

The next song in *Hamilton*, “Farmer Refuted”, functions as an introduction to King George III, the only explicitly white cast role in the show. “You’ll Be Back”, the first of three songs sung by the king of Great Britain, gives the audience a glimpse of King George’s view on the Revolutionary War. By casting a white actor (Jonathan Groff, who replaced Brian D’Arcy when the show went from the Public Theater to the Richard Rodgers theater) in the role, Miranda accentuates the white oppression against which his multi-colored cast is fighting. Miranda’s authorial intent is clear, there can be only one white supporting role (a British character), and no leading roles in his race-conscious production. America herself is mixed, as opposed to Britain, which is white. The choreography for the song is simple. King

George wears a large, over-the-top outfit, and stands awkwardly still for most of the song. Having him address the audience as if they were his subjects works excellently as comic relief (especially in the West End production, which I saw in March). King George is the anti-American, with no choreography, a simplistic melody and to be read as white. All five Hamilton productions do have a few white ensemble members, but these are not usually understudies or swings for larger roles. That makes King George stand out.

“Right Hand Man” introduces George Washington to the stage. Originated by Chris Jackson, Miranda’s version of the first president of the United States resembles more of a father figure for Hamilton.

After the ensemble gives the audience some idea of what is going on in the background (“Thirty-two thousand troops in New York Harbor”), Hamilton opens up to the audience about his feelings:

As a kid in the Caribbean I wished for a war,
I knew that I was poor I knew it was the only way to
Rise up.
If they tell my story I am either gonna die on the battlefield in glory or
rise up!
I will fight for this land,
but there is only one man who can give us a command, so we can rise up!
Understand? It’s the only way to rise up!
(Miranda and McCarter, Hamilton the Revolution 60)

He emphasizes being poor as a child and wanting to escape that now. “Rise Up” returns as the mantra to live by, to want to go farther and break out from the trappings of his youth.

Hamilton acknowledges the fact that death is a real possibility, but that death on the battlefield is glorious. It is almost reminiscent of a rapper stuck in a gang war in the ghetto. This similarity is created by having Hamilton reflect on his only options to socially and financially climb up in the world. He is aware that death is a very real possibility in war in the same way that death by violence is a very real possibility in a gang war. His only other option then, is to win and get promoted through military ranks to a position in which he can escape his surroundings. Winning a war provides peace for the victor, be it between warring nations or gangs.

However, Hamilton understands that there is a hierarchy (even in the fledgling republic), and that he cannot rise above his station without being given an opportunity. This is the first moment Miranda deviates from the ‘bootstrap/American dream’ myth. Hamilton is dependent on his superiors. That means he will work for the admiration and validation of those superiors.

Aaron Burr and company introduce George Washington as the main act of the evening:

Ensemble: Here comes the general!

Aaron Burr: Ladies and Gentlemen.

Ensemble: Here comes the general!

Aaron Burr: The moment you’ve been waiting for.

Ensemble: Here comes the general!

Aaron Burr: The pride of Mount Vernon!

Ensemble: Here comes the general!

Aaron Burr: George Washington!

(Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 60)

This sequence almost screams Founders Chic. Washington is referred to as ‘the pride of Mount Vernon’, and the intensity with which Leslie Odom Jr. introduces him on the cast album creates a larger-than-life spectacle. Right after, we learn Washington is not interested in being larger than life, as he has more pressing matters on his mind:

We are outgunned, outmanned,
Outnumbered, outplanned.
We gotta make an all out stand.
Ayo I’m gonna need a right hand man.
Check it- can I be real a second? For just a millisecond?
Let down my guard and tell the people how I feel a second?
Now I’m the model of a modern major general,
The venerated Virginian whose men are all lining up,
to put me up on a pedestal,
writin letters to relatives embellishin’ my elegance and eloquence,
but the elephant is in the room,
the truth is in ya face when ya hear the British cannons go...
(Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 61)

Set against a hip-hop backdrop, Miranda references an older musical by Gilbert and Sullivan: “Now I’m the model of a modern major general...” is a line drawn from *The Pirates of Penzance*. Miranda is paying homage to people who helped make Broadway what it is today.

By asking the audience “can I be real a second? For just a millisecond? Let down my guard and tell the people how I feel a second?”, General Washington is presented as a human

being. Not just the founding father who built a nation, but a man with feelings. He is worried about the war situation and can't really talk to anyone about it. His soldiers are all waiting in line to exclaim what a great man he is, even though he feels the situation is far from great at that moment. The elephant in the room that Washington refers to is the fact that at that moment, the colonies are losing their independence war. Today's *Zeitgeist* is one of change, promoting a new sense of masculinity, one where men are not afraid to share feelings. This George Washington asks the audience for just a moment, to listen to how he feels. This is juxtaposed with the character of Hercules Mulligan, who sings (in "Aaron Burr, Sir"): "Up in it/lovin' it/yes I heard ya mother said: 'come again?'/Lock up your daughters and horses/of course it's hard to have intercourse over four sets of corsets" (Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 25). George Washington continues being open with the audience when he sings:

Any hope of success is fleeting,
how can I keep leading, when the people I'm leading keep retreating?
We put a stop to the bleeding as the British take Brooklyn,
Knight takes rook, but look
(Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 61)

The war is not going well, and the great general faces soldiers who do not really want to fight. This is an excellent opportunity for a classical Founders Chic hero to make an appearance:

They're battering down the Battery, check the damages.
We gotta stop 'em and rob 'em of their advantages.

Let's take a stand with the stamina God has granted us.
Hamilton won't abandon ship, Yo, let's steal their cannons!
(Miranda and McCarter, Hamilton the Revolution 61)

Hamilton observes the British destroying defenses around Battery Park and decides that the best way to help the revolution is to steal British equipment. It is an historically accurate event; Hamilton really did steal British cannons. Having Hamilton note that it is through God's hand that he has enough strength to complete the feat makes this scene another example of Exceptionalism, because God chose him.

In the meantime, Washington is forced to leave Kips Bay behind and is despairing more and more:

We gotta run to Harlem quick, we can't afford another slip.
Guns and Horses giddyup, I decide to divvy up,
My forces, they're skittish as the British cut the city up.
This close to giving up, facing mad scrutiny,
I scream in the face of this mass mutiny:
Are these the men with which I am to defend America?
We ride at midnight, Manhattan in the distance.
I cannot be everywhere at once, people. I'm in dire need of assistance...
(Miranda and McCarter, Hamilton the Revolution 61).

The sixth line is a direct quote, said in a rare outburst. All of the audience know the outcome of the Revolutionary War, which means that Miranda can make use of theatrical irony. Seeing Washington in such state of despair about the war makes his achievement of winning

it seem even more exceptional than it is, and he can only achieve it by having assistance in the form of an equally exceptional man; Miranda's Hamilton fits that description nicely.

When Washington tries to hire Hamilton as his aide-de-camp (or right-hand man), we see the fatherly side of Washington (who died childless):

Washington: Why're you upset?

Hamilton: I'm not –

Washington: 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 dying like a martyr?

Hamilton: Yes.

Washington: Dying is easy, young man. Living is harder

(Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 64)

Washington sees the youthful drive and lack of restraint in Hamilton and tries to temper them with a lesson from his own experiences. This returns during "History Has Its Eyes on You" and will be discussed further there. When Hamilton takes the offer to become George Washington's right-hand man the ensemble goes into full overdrive and in a repeating refrain presents the audience with these (for lack of a better word) ethnic founding fathers:

Ensemble:	Hamilton	Schuyler Sisters:	L/L/M
Here comes the General	Rise Up!	Rise Up!	What? (2x)

Company: Here comes the General

Hamilton: What?

Washington: And his right-hand man!

Company: Boom!

(Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 65)

Hamilton: An American Musical accepts the Founders Chic hegemony in source material and word choice, as demonstrated by the close reading of several songs. Its content accepts the hegemonic ideals of Founders Chic history, namely polishing reputations (otherwise known as whitewashing), a large focus on questions of character, presenting the main characters as establishmentarian and being unapologetically celebratory of the founding fathers. It is the form of the show that makes people claim that *Hamilton* is revolutionary. By race-consciously casting black and brown actors, using hip-hop, rap and Latin musical influences Miranda questions the predominance of white hegemony in the foundation myth. As that myth influences both political and cultural spheres, it can be argued that *Hamilton* also questions the white hegemony within those two spheres. By using Founders Chic as a vehicle, he creates a cultural product that can align people on both sides of the political spectrum and black and white people. However, by embracing the four Founders Chic characteristics, *Hamilton* also endorses the characteristics as hegemonic. *Hamilton* exists on the tension between affirming long held ideas about the founding fathers and their qualities and questioning where minorities and slave descendants stand in the nation they have made.

Conclusion: History Has Its Eyes on You

With three standard productions and two touring companies, *Hamilton: An American Musical* has certified its success in any metric thinkable in the theater world. All five companies sell out months in advance, and *Hamilton* continues to encourage debates on topics of historical accuracy and racism. This past May audition dates were announced for the production in Puerto Rico. Furthermore, it has managed to not just excite the masses, but also historians and scholars.

Lin-Manuel Miranda said: “I want historians to take this seriously” (Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 32), and he has achieved that goal. In using Ron Chernow’s biography on Alexander Hamilton, and Joanne B. Freeman’s work on honor and dueling in the Revolutionary War era, Miranda had a good place to start. The show has a claim to historical accuracy in the areas of Alexander Hamilton’s military career, romantic life, the concept of dueling and his last duel with Aaron Burr, but not in the area of the personal lives of side characters and politics. As with all popular culture depictions of the past, Miranda is geared towards what the audience wants, and the overarching story he wants to tell, rather than if all the facts are correct.

The problem he has created for American citizens, however, is that *Hamilton* is now seen as actual history, with many audiences (who have either seen the show or listened to the cast album) walking away thinking that Phillip Schuyler had no sons (not true) and Alexander Hamilton and friends were very anti-slavery. The abolitionist version of Hamilton that Miranda has created speaks louder to the general public than the debate between historians about how anti-slavery he actually was. *Hamilton* may not claim 100% historical accuracy, but Miranda does not hide the fact that he tried real hard to create a show that historians would take seriously. It is through the work of historians that the public (the

Gramscian masses) are confronted with the main question of how we remember the past. It is not a historian's problem to solve, but they do play a large part in helping the masses examine this question and work towards a solution.

The overarching debate that has returned to the forefront is that of cultural hegemony. Traditionally, musicals are hegemonic, supporting the main political and cultural ideologies of their time. I have argued that *Hamilton: An American Musical* is an exception to this, as it challenges the spontaneous consent given by the masses to the foundation myth (or civic myth) of the United States. It challenges the spontaneous consent by utilizing a new form in the musical genre. Miranda utilizes hip-hop, rap and Latin music genres to cross boundaries between Broadway's predominantly white and black audiences who are less represented in the theater audience. The musical genres and lyrics, combined with race-conscious casting to include people of color in the foundation myth of the United States. These decisions can be classified as counterhegemonic, as they question the norm of whiteness that is found within the foundation myth of the United States. The counterhegemonic decisions overpower the hegemonic Founders Chic characteristics the musical inhibits. Putting black and brown actors in the shows of people who have been polished up, examined thoroughly and celebrated unapologetically is such a revolutionary concept, that the act of including them speaks louder than the hegemonic Founders Chic concepts it continues to endorse. *Hamilton: An American Musical* is a counterhegemonic musical that examines the tension between Founders Chic white hegemony and black and brown inclusiveness, and when examined, the musical is more counterhegemonic than hegemonic.

Within all types of education, *Hamilton* has now become a fresh way to interest students of all ages in the Revolutionary War, and Miranda's production team plays into that through the #EduHam project. Teachers are developing syllabi to make use of the innovative play. On top of all this, a traveling "Alexander Hamilton" exhibition will be opening in

Chicago, where the focus will be on his life and be more historically accurate. There appears to be an unheard-of amount of discussion of history, that for so long has only been participated in by historians and scholars.

The questions the production raises are valid: Why do people of color feel excluded from history? The people of color who were present during the Revolutionary War period have not received the same amount of attention from scholars. It is only in the recently that scholars such as Annette Gordon-Reed have delved deeper into the importance of slave owning by the founding fathers. Historians and journalists alike have also started to contest the once standard divide between the North as a place of freedom, and the South as a place of slavery (Harris 73). Beyond that, research is being done on the lives of black people during that time, Annette Gordon-Reed is the curator of a new exhibit at Monticello (Thomas Jefferson's mansion) about the lives of Sally Hemings and their children. These people have long been forgotten or neglected in discussions about Thomas Jefferson's life (Gordon-Reed). People of color feel excluded from American history because they have been excluded in some parts. Topics such as slavery, the Reconstruction and the Civil Rights Movement have always been the main topics in which their history is considered, thereby negating their roles and lives in other parts of American History.

What are the implications of having historically white people portrayed by people of color? Many actors in *Hamilton* have said they feel portraying a founding father or mother is akin to taking ownership of American history. By being a part of this musical, they break not only racial barriers by portraying historically white people but create a new inclusive foundation history. The traits that the Founders Chic genre usually only bestows upon its white founders (greatness, exemplary leadership) are now granted to people of color.

Historians are asking questions about the production itself: What are the effects of people learning history from a musical, where the nuances are discarded in favor of drama? The general audience of the show might take historical dramatic fiction for fact. That is a dangerous consequence in an era of fake news where facts do not seem to matter much. However, the show's popularity does offer teachers at any level a possibility to connect fact with fiction. Lesson plans with *Hamilton* at its center have been developed, and the forthcoming exhibit on Alexander Hamilton will provide a much more factual account of his life. Does this show really help people understand the origins of American politics, when so much of Hamilton's considerable amounts of writings, policies and choices (as well as those of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison) are lost to artistic license? The musical is not historically accurate, as it takes to much artistic license for sake of plot devices. *Hamilton's* historical accuracy is non-existent when considering that black and brown actors are playing white people. The musical does not represent revolutionary politics well. *Hamilton* might offer the audience a beginner's course on where these three men stood across the political line, but it cannot do their politics justice. To truly understand their views and policies, people will have to read the original documents and books, such as the Federalist papers, alongside research on these men. *Hamilton* might intrigue people enough to do that, others will be happy to accept the narrative that the musical provides.

There seems to be no clear consensus that can be concluded at this point in time. Every scholarly article acknowledges that it is because of this show that their discipline and era of research has gained much larger interest with the masses. They also consider the effects, with some historians arguing that effacing history for drama does the understanding of history no good, and others arguing race-conscious casting both is and is not the way to make a statement about people of color in theater, on stage and in history. Yet others argue that what Miranda is presenting to the audience is not an example of history of the early

republic, but a critique on modern-day politics. Isenberg maintains “his play has more to do with contemporary politics. His *Hamilton* is a symbol for the age of Obama” (Isenberg 298). Jeremy McCarter prefers to say that “(...) American history can be told and retold, claimed and reclaimed, even by people who don’t look like George Washington and Betsy Ross” (Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 95)

Conclusively, *Hamilton* is a product of the Obama era. Riding on the same ideology of the “Yes We Can” and “Change for America” campaign slogans, it offers black and brown people a version of history that includes them. The Obama administration ran on a platform of inclusiveness for the present, and his endorsement of the musical extended that inclusiveness to the past. However, by having a black president approve a show that glosses over the implications of having black people play slaveholders and negates the suffering of black and brown people during the Revolutionary War era, Obama contributes to the whitewashing of racism in United States history. This is an example of the subordinate group of black people being enveloped into the dominant culture of Founders Chic through playing the founders, but in that process accepting the dominant cultural whitewashing and glossing over suffering endured by people of the same race.

The age of Obama has passed, and today the United States is struggling with what it stands for. The Trump presidency is characterized by a repeal of many progressive Obama-measures, and a president who has lied or made misleading claims over 3000 times in the first 466 days in office (Kessler, Rizzo and Kelly), and seems to run the Oval Office via his Twitter account. African Americans, minorities and immigrants are all feeling the effects of an administration that does not seem to have their best interest at heart.

Miranda, in creating *Hamilton: An American Musical*, has given these groups of people something to identify with the United States and what it stands for or should stand for, or could be believed to stand for in the Obama era. Above all, it offers a starting point for

questioning and critiquing today's politics and socio-cultural relationships between minorities and the majority. Night after night, the line "Immigrants, we get the job done" (Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* 121) receives loud applause and cheers from every audience across the five productions. That is because that line signifies what America has stood for, for so long, to so many people. On the contrary, that cannot be said of today's administration.

In the end, Miranda's body of work that consists of *Hamilton: An American Musical*, *The Hamilton Mixtape*, #EduHam and the upcoming Alexander Hamilton Exhibition, is historical fiction. It is simply a limitation of the art form to not be able to make a historically accurate show. That would lengthen its already considerable runtime of 2 hours and 45 minutes. Nevertheless, he has created something that deeply questions the white part of cultural hegemony within the foundation myth and white hegemony in theater. It walks the line of accepting and promoting Founders Chic ideology, but places that in the hands of black, brown and Asian actors, thereby questioning the whiteness of the foundation myth it supports. *Hamilton* might not be as well done or as accurate as historians would prefer it to be, but the musical has had resounding political implications. The debate about representation within the foundation myth, inclusiveness in political history and current politics, and the role of representation for non-whites in theater is taking place and that is something that both historians and politicians should be thankful for. At uncertain political times like these, only the questioning of why we believe what we believe, can help move a country forward in understanding the past, the present, and give some insight to the future.

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