

Hamilton & History

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Hamilton's Plot Point Problems (an incomplete list)

- The two main characters, Hamilton and Burr, barely knew each other during the war years; their paths rarely crossed.
- Alexander Hamilton did not punch the bursar at Princeton College.
- Hamilton did not carouse at a tavern with Mulligan, Lafayette, and Laurens in 1776 and Sam Adams, who Miranda name-checks as the brewer of the beer at that pub, is a reference to a brewing company that wasn't established until 1984. In truth, Hamilton met Mulligan, Lafayette, and Laurens separately and later.
- Angelica Schuyler sings that "My father has no sons so I'm the one / Who has to social climb." That's nonsense. In 1776, Philip Schuyler had three sons.
- Angelica Schuyler married her British husband before she ever met Alexander Hamilton.
- Samuel Seabury wrote four loyalist pamphlets, not one. He wrote them in 1774 and 1775, not in 1776. By 1776, the patriots had already imprisoned Seabury in Connecticut for speaking out against the war.
- King George did go mad later in life, although not until many years later. The causes were medical not geopolitical.
- Burr's meeting with General Washington, the meeting in which he tries to offer questions and suggestions, is invented.
- John Laurens was not "in South Carolina redefining bravery" during the Battle of Yorktown. He was there at the battle and went to South Carolina later.
- Hamilton never asked Burr to join him in writing *The Federalist Papers*
- John Adams didn't fire Hamilton during his presidency. Hamilton had resigned earlier, in 1795, while Washington was still president.
- The men who confronted Hamilton about his check stubs from different accounts and who stumbled onto the Maria Reynolds affair were not Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and Aaron Burr. They were actually three congressmen: Abraham Venable, Frederick Muhlenberg, and James Monroe (the future president).
- Philip's duel was in 1801. It occurred after the election of 1800, not before it.
- The election of 1800 was not a "landslide." It was extremely close and in the ensuing runoff between Burr and Jefferson, Hamilton did not literally break a tie by casting the decisive vote.
- The Burr-Hamilton duel, which occurred in 1804, had little to do with the election of 1800, four years earlier. The real cause was the avalanche of insults Hamilton threw at Burr while he was running for the Governorship of New York in 1804. When his insults ended up in the papers, Burr demanded satisfaction.

Cut Lyrics of "Cabinet Battle #3"

Source: Lin-Manuel Miranda and Jeremy McCarter, *Hamilton: The Revolution* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2016), 212-213

The Slavery Debate

WASHINGTON

The issue on the table
A petition from a Quaker delegation in Philadelphia
Calling on Congress to end the African slave trade and abolish slavery, in all its forms
If this comes to a vote in Congress
What is the White House's position?
Secretary Jefferson, you first
Tread lightly

JEFFERSON

The constitution clearly states
That the states have to wait
Until eighteen-oh-eight to debate

HAMILTON

Sir-

JEFFERSON

Wait
That's the price we paid
For the southern states to participate
In our little independence escapade
We made concessions to the south to make them less afraid
You take away our property? Secession talk will escalate
But for a second let us say that we can legislate
Unanimous emancipation. Freedom reigns, and yes, it's great.
We cannot cure prejudice or righteous, desperate hate
So back to Africa, or do they get a separate state?
It's a sin. It's growing like a cancer
But we can't address the question if we do not have an answer

HAMILTON

Is it my turn? Good
Plantation states are packed with promise makers
Do you realize the precious time these legislators wasted?
Institutionalizing slavery only multiplies our troubles
Wait till the 1800's, and their population doubles
You all know
This is the stain on our soul and democracy
A land of the free? No, it's not, it's hypocrisy
To subjugate, dehumanize a race, call 'em property
And say that we are powerless to stop it. Can you not foresee?
Sir, even you, you have hundreds of slaves
Whose descendants will curse our names when we're safe in our graves
How will the South find labor for its businesses?
How will Thomas Jefferson find his next mistresses?

JEFFERSON
How dare you

HAMILTON
Yet still, people follow like lemmings
All your hemming and hawing, while you're hee-hawing with Sally Hemings

WASHINGTON
That's enough

MADISON
Hamilton, if we support emancipation
Every single slave owner will demand compensation
And as for slandering Jefferson with talk of mistresses
Do you really wanna-

MADISON AND JEFFERSON
Do you really wanna have that conversation?

HAMILTON
No

WASHINGTON
I've heard enough, gentlemen. You can go.
Slavery's too volatile an issue. We won't get through it.

MADISON
Sir, we'll keep it off your desk.

WASHINGTON.
Good. Do it.

The Bechdel Test

The Bechdel test is a measure of the representation of women in fiction. It asks whether a work features at least two [named] women who talk to each other about something other than a man. It is named after the American cartoonist Alison Bechdel, in whose comic strip, *Dykes to Watch Out For*, the test first appeared, in 1985. Source: adapted from Wikipedia.



Suggestions for Further Reading

Source: Michael Blaakman writing at *The Junto*, <https://earlyamericanists.com>

- **Alexander Hamilton.** The musical, of course, depicts just one of many possible interpretations of the ten-dollar founding father's contributions to the making of our young nation. For a different take—one that might be more in line than Ron Chernow's biography (the inspiration for the musical) with the political priorities of our own "Bernie" moment—check out Woody Holton's brilliant book on the revolutionary struggle between economic elites and ordinary folks, *Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution*, a finalist for the National Book Award.
- **Eliza Hamilton.** As someone who lost both a son and a husband to duels, Eliza Hamilton well knew that duels were part of a broader culture of political combat and personal honor—a culture we twenty-first-century Americans dimly understood until Joanne Freeman reconstructed it in *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic*. The book concludes with a meditation on how the founders tried to shape the way their own stories would be told, despite who lived and who died. Transparency in advertising: Joanne Freeman is my mentor. But you needn't take my word for the fact that the book rocks; it's the basis for the musical's number "Ten Duel Commandments."
- **Aaron Burr.** After his fateful duel with Hamilton, Burr went west, plunging himself into shady land schemes at and beyond the nation's borders. Kathleen DuVal's fantastic new book, *Independence Lost: Lives on the Edge of the American Revolution*, ends before Burr reached the borderlands. But the stories she uncovers about the diverse peoples on the southern and southwestern edge of U.S. nationbuilding do capture the spirit of his character: the shifting loyalties, the tug between ideology and interest, the calculating political intrigue. (For two great books on other frontier regions, take a look at Alan Taylor, *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers, and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution*, and, on the Ohio River valley, Patrick Griffin, *American Leviathan: Empire, Nation, and Revolutionary Frontier*.)
- **Angelica Schuyler.** Hands-down, the pick for fans of Angelica's character curious about her relationship with Alexander has got to be Cassandra Good's prize-winning *Founding Friendships: Friendships between Men and Women in the Early American Republic*. Revolutionary America meets *When Harry Met Sally*—with a comma after "this is a damn good book."
- **George Washington.** For fans who want to know more about the context of the consummate Virginian, two books spring immediately to mind. Rhys Isaac explores the elite struggle to preserve authority over enslaved people in the context of war in *Landon Carter's Uneasy Kingdom: Revolution and Rebellion on a Virginia Plantation*. Readers interested in the visionary Trumpian schemes of the eighteenth-century Virginia gentry, including the pride of Mount Vernon himself, should check out Charles Royster, *The Fabulous History of the Dismal Swamp Company: A Story of George Washington's Times*.
- **Marquis de Lafayette.** When revolution ravaged the homeland of America's favorite fighting Frenchman in the 1790s, many French elites sought refuge in the new republic. François Furstenberg breathtakingly recreates their world, their experiences, and their role in American politics—especially amid the nation's capital at Philadelphia during the Washington administration—in *When the United States Spoke French: Five Refugees who Shaped a Nation*. In her new book, *Revolutions Without Borders: The Call to Liberty in the Atlantic World*, Janet Polasky brings to life the spirit of the Age of Revolutions and the transatlantic connections that brought revolutionaries around the world together.
- **Thomas Jefferson.** You will not understand Thomas Jefferson until you read Annette Gordon-Reed's masterpiece about the family Jefferson enslaved, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family*, which, like *Hamilton*, deservedly won All The Awards. I know I said I wouldn't list any biographies, but here I just have to. *Hamilton* lampoons Jefferson as an utter hypocrite, but Gordon-Reed and her fellow TJ scholar Peter Onuf have recently published a biography that seeks to understand how Jefferson

made sense of his own self. (Hint: he didn't think of himself as a paradox wrapped in an enigma swallowed on a toothpick by a sphinx.) *Most Blessed of the Patriarchs: Thomas Jefferson and the Empire of the Imagination* recently debuted on the *New York Times* bestseller list.

- **Peggy Schuyler.** Peggy Schuyler lived rich, died young, and gets about 30 seconds of stage time. For the heart-wrenching story of another sister of a revolutionary—one who lived poor and died old, but likewise gets far too little stage time in our stories of the Revolution—pick up a must-read by Jill Lepore, the most talented writer working on early America today: *Book of Ages: The Life and Opinions of Jane Franklin*. You will cry. Unless you have no soul.
 - **King George III.** LOL. *Hamilton* fans who fancy a bit of schadenfreude might enjoy Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy's *The Men Who Lost America: British Leadership, the American Revolution, and the Fate of the Empire*. More of a military history than most of the books on this list, this title dispels the myth that the British were simply stupid, and instead tries to explain how generally genius generals and a not entirely incompetent king managed to lose a continent despite themselves.
 - **Hercules Mulligan.** Among the oldest members of the musical's revolutionary set, Hercules Mulligan had been agitating on behalf of the American colonists' British liberties since 1765, as a member of the Sons of Liberty and New York's committee of correspondence. For a great recent book on a famous episode in the long run-up to revolution, check out Benjamin Carp, *Defiance of the Patriots: The Boston Tea Party and the Making of America*. (Yeah, yeah, Mulligan was in NYC and the Tea Party was not, but whatever.)
 - **Samuel Seabury.** Heed not the rabble! Instead, read Maya Jasanoff's vivid account of the globetrotting and dizzyingly diverse group of Loyalists who fled as refugees from the young republic: *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World*.
 - **Ensemble.** If your reading habits tend more towards short stories than big books, I can't recommend highly enough *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation*. A compendium of short and fast-paced essays by some of the best historians currently studying the American Revolution—including many of the authors on this list—this book brings together a huge cast of characters and lets you see and experience the Revolution through their eyes."
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Critiques of *Hamilton: The Musical*

A selection of reflections, reviews, and think pieces that informed this talk and that are worth your time.

- Jason Allen, "A Color-Blind Stockholm Syndrome," *National Council on Public History@Work Blog*, March 9 2016, <https://ncph.org>
- Michelle DuRoss, "Somewhere In Between: Alexander Hamilton and Slavery," *Early America Review* 9, no. 4 (2010).
- Donatella Galella, "Being in 'The Room Where It Happens': Hamilton, Obama, and Nationalist Neoliberal Multicultural Inclusion," *Theatre History* 59, no. 3 (Sept 2018).
- Philip Gentry, "Hamilton's Ghosts," *American Music* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2017).
- Annette Gordon-Reed, "Hamilton: The Musical: Blacks and the Founding Fathers," *National Council on Public History@Work Blog*, April 6, 2016, <https://ncph.org>
- *Journal of the Early Republic* 37, no 2 (Summer 2017). A special edition featuring essays by Joanne B. Freeman, Andrew M. Schoket, Heather S. Nathans, Marvin McAllister, Benjamin L. Carp and Nancy Isenberg. Edited by Catherine Kelly.
- Kat Long, "Why Elizabeth Hamilton is Deserving of a Musical of Her Own," *Smithsonian Magazine*, February 25, 2016, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com>
- Katherine S. Madison, "'Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story': The Use and Representation of Records in Hamilton: An American Musical," *American Archivist* 80, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2017).
- James McMaster, "Why Hamilton is Not the Revolution You Think It Is," *Howlround*, February 23, 2016, <https://howlround.com>
- Lyra D. Monteiro, "Review Essay: Race-Conscious Casting and the Erasure of the Black Past in Lin-Manuel Miranda's Hamilton," *The Public Historian* 38, no. 1 (Feb 2016).
- Alex Nichols, "You Should Be Terrified That People who like 'Hamilton' Run Our Country," *Current Affairs*, July 29, 2016, <https://www.currentaffairs.org>
- Ishmael Reed, "Hamilton: the Musical: Black Actors Dress Up like Slave Traders... and It's not Halloween," *Counterpunch*, August 25, 2015, <https://www.counterpunch.org>
- Aja Romano, "Hamilton is fanfic, and its historical critics are totally missing the point," *Vox*, July 4, 2016, <https://www.vox.com>
- Renee C. Romano and Claire Bond Potter, eds., *Historians on Hamilton: How a Blockbuster Musical is Restaging America's Past* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2018)
- Paul Street, "Miranda, Obama, and Hamilton: an Orwellian Ménage à Trois for the Neoliberal Age," *Counterpunch*, June 24, 2016, <https://www.counterpunch.org>
- Stacy Wolf, "Hamilton," *The Feminist Spectator*, February 24, 2016, <http://feministspectator.princeton.edu>

Resources for Teachers and Students

- <http://TeachingHistoryWithHamilton.org>

"Both riveting and heartrendering, *Stolen* joins the great literature of America's founding tragedy, earning a place alongside the work of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Edward P. Jones, and Toni Morrison."

—JANE KAMENSKY, JONATHAN TRUMBULL PROFESSOR OF AMERICAN HISTORY, HARVARD UNIVERSITY

STOLEN

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AND THEIR
ASTONISHING ODYSSEY HOME**



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