

Of Belligerent Humor:
The End of Alexander Hamilton's Political Career

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Alexander Hamilton is considered one of the Founding Fathers of the United States, but many in the country do not fully appreciate his contributions. He brought the infant country through one of the most fragile times in its history through his work as the Secretary of the Treasury. He was an important man, although he came from meager beginnings on the island of Nevis in the Caribbean. His childhood was very different from the other Founding Fathers like Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, John Adams, and James Madison. The son of unmarried parents, he grew up in a home that was not socially acceptable and he did not receive the same level of education that his political counterparts received as young children. However, he was able to pull himself up and attend King's College (Columbia University) in New York at only fourteen years old. He would eventually join the Revolution as a member of Washington's close circle, and later join his cabinet. Hamilton was a very ambitious man who may well have been on the road to becoming the President of the United States. His ambition would give him both friends and foes. He was a political and economic genius, which made him a hero to the merchant classes in New York and a

political rival of Jefferson, Madison, and Adams. Even with political rivals in both parties, he was able to have great success in both his military and political life. During the Revolution he led a successful charge at Yorktown. As the Secretary of the Treasury, he put together the Report of Public Credit, Report on a National Bank, and Report of Manufactures. He also helped assure the economic stability of the United States when it needed to build creditability with Europe to trade its goods. After the many political achievements he had during his early political and military career, Hamilton's life would take a drastic turn in his last ten years. Despite criticism coming from all directions and major disappointments in his career, Hamilton would not hold back his views. He was on a mission to voice his opinions about those that had criticized him and accused him of actions against the government. He lashed out at many men, including Adams, and he burned many bridges. With many poor judgment calls, miscalculations, and attacks against his enemies, Hamilton destroyed his political career and the future of the Federalist Party, leaving him disillusioned and heartbroken.

The exact year in which Hamilton was born has been debated for years. The only thing historians can agree on is that he was born on January 11, 1755 or 1757. Although he claimed the island of Nevis as his

place of birth, there are no surviving records.¹ His whole life he was “taunted as a bastard” because of the circumstances of his birth.² Each of his parents could lay claim to either nobility or a well-respected profession. His mother’s family records say that her grandfather, a physician, immigrated to the island after France passed the Edict of Nantes.³ His father was from a Scottish line of nobility. His paternal grandfather was the Laird of Grange and owned many different homes and land all over Scotland.⁴ Alexander was the product of a common law marriage between his parents because Rachel, his mother, had a husband in St. Croix, whom she was trying to divorce. Both parents had many setbacks both socially and financially. Historian Ron Chernow believes this is why Hamilton was “hypersensitive about class and status” throughout his life.⁵ It would for this reason that he would not receive a formal education at the highly regarded schools in the area with other young boys of high social standing. He would have to rely on tutors and it is believed that his mother taught him because he was comfortably bilingual.⁶ This gave him an upper hand later in life because he was more

¹ Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 7.

² Ibid, 8.

³ Ibid, 8.

⁴ Jack Rakove, *Revolutionaries*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010), 401.

⁵ Chernow, 16.

⁶ Ibid, 17.

comfortable with French than Benjamin Franklin, Adams, and Jefferson, who all had to learn when they were in Paris.

Besides learning from tutors and his mother, Alexander also had to learn hard life lessons. By the time he was fourteen, Hamilton and his older brother James were left alone in the world. Their father abandoned their family, their mother died, their cousin and protector committed suicide, their maternal grandmother died, and they were left penniless after the courts gave their mother's property to her legal husband and legitimate son Peter Levien.⁷ These events would strip Hamilton of any idea he had that the world was fair. Every setback and problem he had in his youth would begin to set him up to succeed were people believed he would fail. It was in his character to be ambitious because he came from nothing. It was also in his character to fight against those that would try to take it all away. After tallying all of the misfortunes that both he and his brother James had gone through, Chernow wrote "that this abominable childhood produced such a strong, productive, self-reliant human being—that this fatherless adolescent could have ended up a founding father of a country he had not yet even seen—seems little short of miraculous."⁸ Even after all of these hardship and setbacks he went on

⁷ Ibid, 24-26.

⁸ Ibid, 26.

to study at King's College in New York and married into one of the wealthiest and socially acceptable families in New York, the Schuylars. He also would serve with distinction in the Revolution as an aid to Washington and become friends with men like the Marquis de Lafayette. After the end of the Revolution, he would help to ratify the Constitution and he became the first Secretary of the Treasury. As the Secretary, he had the federal government take on the debts of the states and helped to set up a national bank to strengthen the country and insure that it would succeed politically and economically. His ambition and his many personal and political achievements would finally begin to spiral downward after 1794 and the Whiskey Rebellion.

The beginning of the end for Hamilton's political career began in 1791, when he convinced Congress to impose an excise tax on whiskey.⁹ At first the tax was not regularly collected and it was lowered at one point. However, after a few years, the government began to enforce the collection of the tax, which led to the whiskey distillers to revolt. The rebels took up arms and seized the government tax collectors.¹⁰ Hamilton saw these actions as a grave defiance against the government that

⁹ Douglas Ambrose and Robert W.T. Martin, *The Many Faces of Alexander Hamilton: The Life & Legacy of America's Most Elusive Founding Father*, (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 72.

¹⁰ William. Nester, *The Hamiltonian Vision, 1789-1800: The Art of American Power During the Early Republic*, 1st ed., (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2012), 73.

threatened the sovereignty and legitimacy of the new government. He believed that the government would have to crush this rebellion or the fragile country could fall apart.¹¹ In order to stop the rebellion, he convinced Washington to ride out to show the resolve of the federal government.¹² Washington and Hamilton mustered around 10,000 men to the cause and set out to the Ohio River Valley. However, once they were halfway there, Washington returned to Philadelphia and let Hamilton continue on without him as the commanding officer. When they arrived at the Valley, the rebels had mostly dispersed and gone home. Hamilton and his men stayed in the area for a few months, collecting reports about the rebels and making a few arrests. Those that he arrested were sent back to Philadelphia to stand trial for treason. Only two would be convicted, but they were later pardoned on the condition that they never raise arms against the country again. Hamilton was not pleased about this outcome.¹³

Washington was praised by the public for the way he handled the rebellion because there were only a few deaths.¹⁴ Hamilton, on the other hand, was criticized about the Whiskey Rebellion. Madison wrote that

¹¹ William Hogeland, *The Whiskey Rebellion: George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and The Frontier Rebels Who challenged America's Newfound Sovereignty*, (New York: Scribner, 2006), 187-187.

¹² Ambrose and Martin, 8.

¹³ Hogeland,, 237-238.

¹⁴ Chernow, 477.

the rebellion was proof that Washington was “the tool of Alexander Hamilton.”¹⁵ Jefferson echoed this sentiment about Hamilton’s “vainglorious desire to exercise power and of his fiendish control over Washington’s mind.”¹⁶ Many in the Democratic-Republican Party saw Hamilton as someone who was using Washington to further his agendas and to run the country. They had been writing pamphlets and letters to newspapers to put forth the idea that Hamilton was using his office as the Secretary of the Treasury to defraud the government, even though they could never prove it. They believed that he was guilty because the husband of the woman he was having an affair with accused him of being a partner in a conspiracy to defraud the government by claiming false pensions from the Revolution.¹⁷ When Madison, a man that Hamilton did not like, and two other cabinet members came to Hamilton’s home to accuse him he told them the story about his involvement with the woman.¹⁸ The woman, Maria Reynolds, after beginning her affair with Hamilton, must have told her husband of the affair because her husband wrote to him and claimed that his honor needed satisfaction. The price of Mr. Reynolds’ honor was one thousand dollars. Hamilton paid him the money, and continued to pay Maria’s

¹⁵ Ibid, 478.

¹⁶ Ibid, 478.

¹⁷ Ibid, 368-370.

¹⁸ Ibid, 416.

husband to be able see her, but ended the affair a few months later.¹⁹ Madison and the others were satisfied with Hamilton's innocence, then, and promised not to make what he told them public.²⁰ However, there were those that would never believe him to be innocent. Once such person was Jefferson. It could be said that these people were either jealous, or were scared that he would try to become the President and never leave office. Whatever the reason for the attacks, Hamilton was beginning to see that his enemies were coming for him in any way possible. All of these attacks were taking a toll on him.

Toward the end of January 1795, after the fallout of the Whiskey Rebellion and the rumors about his affair with Maria Reynolds, Hamilton resigned from his post as the Secretary of the Treasury. He did not make the decision lightly, but he wanted to spare Washington any embarrassment from his actions. Washington was a father figure in Hamilton's life because his own biological father, James, left when he was a young boy. Also, Washington would be one of the most important men in Hamilton's life as he gave him a chance during the Revolution. The success Washington helped earn was a reason Hamilton would be able to marry his wife, Elizabeth, despite having no family or social

¹⁹ Ibid, 369.

²⁰ Ibid, 416.

standing. In a sense, Hamilton owed Washington everything. Washington, on the other hand, was upset because he was about to lose a trusted member of his cabinet. In response to the news of Hamilton's resignation Washington would write one of the proudest tributes he ever wrote:

In every relation which you have borne to me, I have found that my confidence in your talents, exertions, and integrity has been well placed. I the more freely render this testimony of my approbation, because I speak from opportunities of information which cannot deceive me and which furnish satisfactory proof of your title to public regard. My most earnest wishes for your happiness will attend you in retirement.²¹

Washington believed in Hamilton's abilities and dedication to the country, but many did not. Washington had so much faith in Hamilton that he felt that he was losing a great advisor. However, Hamilton believed that his "great opportunities were behind him" because he thought that those who criticized him destroyed any chance for him to hold political office again.²² As, author John Ferling stated, what he "could not have known [then], was that he had reached the apex of his stunning public career and that the mounting popular resentment of the

²¹ George Washington, *George Washington to Alexander Hamilton, February 2, 1795*, in *The Writings of Washington*, Ed. John C. Fitzpatrick, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Offices, 1931-34), Vol. 34, 110.

²² Chernow, 479.

Federalist exercise of power would be his undoing.”²³ As he left office, he no longer needed to curb his resentment of political rivals because Hamilton would lose the “strong, restraining hand of George Washington and the invaluable sense of tact and proportion.”²⁴ Due to the positions that he held with Washington through the Revolution and in the cabinet, Hamilton took on the decorum that Washington had.²⁵ He now longer saw a reason to hold back on all of the issues he saw in the capital (Philadelphia) and on the criticisms of many that he believed were hurting the country. Once he had left the office of Secretary of the Treasury, the flood gate of opinions on the men he worked with to build the country would open and no one was safe from his criticism.

After leaving Washington’s cabinet, Hamilton left to go back to New York with his family to practice law. At this time, Hamilton had a big family to support and was in debt. By practicing law again, he would be able to draw more of a salary and provide more for his family. Although he was far away in New York, some men in the capital were still seeking his opinion. He would continue to voice his opinions on issues and help the man who took over his position. He would also view

²³ John Ferling, *A Leap in the Dark: The Struggle to Create the American Republic*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 377.

²⁴ Chernow, 488.

²⁵ Ibid, 488.

this time as the perfect time to vocally denounce the men that had accused him of wrong doing and those who had criticized him.

Between the years he served as the Secretary of the Treasury and when he was appointed as the Inspector General of the Army in 1798, he did not stay quiet, as he no longer felt constrained by the duty and decorum of public life. He drew upon his deep anger to write pamphlets and letters about those he did not see fit to hold office. Many around him noticed a change in his character. Nathaniel Pendleton, a close friend who would serve as his second in his duel with Aaron Burr, wrote, “The frankness of his nature was such that he could not easily avoid the expression of his sentiments of public men and measures and his extreme candor in such cases was sometimes productive of personal inconveniences.”²⁶ Hamilton, no longer in public office, saw it his duty to inform the public about the men who hold political office. His wife, Elizabeth, also conceded that his character became “perhaps too frank and independent for a democratic people.”²⁷ He did not write to please anyone. He wrote and voiced his opinion because, as he wrote in a letter to Rufus King, “Am I more of an American than those who drew their

²⁶ Nathaniel Pendleton, *The Papers of Nathaniel Pendleton*, New York Historical Society, in Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 619.

²⁷ Elizabeth Hamilton, *Letter to Anne Grant, 1834*, in Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 619.

first breath on American ground?”²⁸ He sought to defend the country and himself against those who would slander him.

As war with France became more and more likely, the United States began to have a need for an army. To lead this new army, President Adams and the Senate wanted the aging, retired ex-President Washington. There was no one else whom Adams believed he could trust to lead an army. Adams put forth Washington’s name to the Senate without his consent. Washington accepted the appointment, but he would leave the everyday affairs to someone else until there was a real fight with France. His stipulation was that Hamilton would be his second-in-command, with Charles Cotesworth Pinckney and Henry Knox behind him in that order. This did not go over well with Adams, who saw Hamilton as a foreign upstart. Adams had to find a way to keep Hamilton from a position of power. Adams hoped that he could persuade Washington to consider the military careers of the other two during the Revolution and elevate them over Hamilton. He desperately did not want to give Hamilton the appointment because he believed that “if I should consent to the appointment of Hamilton as a second rank, I would consider it as the most irresponsible action of my whole life and the most

²⁸ Alexander Hamilton, *Letter to Rufus King, February 21, 1795*, in *The Paper Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, Ed. Harold C. Syrett, et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961-1987), vol. 18, 278.

difficult to justify.”²⁹ In July of 1798, Adams sent Washington’s list to the Senate for confirmation. Adams hoped that the Senate would take the names, but in reverse order with Hamilton at the bottom. However, by October 1798 Adams had no choice but to appoint Hamilton as Inspector General of the New Army, which proved unpopular. Adams was in a battle he could not win with Hamilton’s appointment because Washington’s wishes were respected more than his own. Adams would continue fight Hamilton’s appointment because he believed, as did his wife Abigail, that Hamilton would use his new position to take over the colonies of other European nations in North America, becoming “America’s Napoleon.”

As Inspector General, Hamilton was able to muster an army not just to defend America, but to set out to take control of other European colonies in North America. In a letter he wrote to James McHenry in 1798, Hamilton stated he believed that, “all on this side [of] the Mississippi must be *ours*, including both Floridas.”³⁰ In this instance, Hamilton made a major departure from when he served under Washington. Before, when Treasury Secretary, Hamilton would defer to Washington’s decisions, but now he was doing what he wanted to do. He

²⁹ John Adams, *Letter to Oliver Wolcott, Jr., September 1798*, in Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 599.

³⁰ Alexander Hamilton, *Letter to James McHenry, January 27-February 11, 1798*, in *The Paper Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, Ed. Harold C. Syrett, et al. vol. 21, 345.

had further declined in judgment when he was no longer under Washington's patronage. He professed neutrality with Britain, but secretly wanted to invade them.³¹ In another episode, he proved his poor judgment when it became known that he had supported an idea put forward by a man named Francisco de Miranda. Miranda was a Venezuelan who proposed that England and America should jointly expel Spain from the Americas.³² Adams would shoot down the idea, even though some supported it because he was in negotiation with France to avoid war. Adams also said this plan would "prepare a way for a province of Great Britain."³³ Adams had legitimate concern about the plan because he knew that the New England states would break away from the union if the Miranda Plan went into effect. The New England states would, at any cost, refuse to submit to English rule again. Hamilton, it seemed, did not take this into account; he just wanted a war with France to expel any French influence in the United States and her neighbors, which also included Spanish colonies.

As the Inspector General, Hamilton was given the command of thousands of men. Not since the Whiskey Rebellion a few years before did he wield so much military power. Although, he made a few

³¹ Chernow, 567.

³² Ibid, 567.

³³ John Adams, *Letter to Elbridge Gerry, 1799*, in Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 568.

miscalculated judgments, Hamilton put together a strong military with many aspects that would free the country from calling upon state militias. Nevertheless, Adams and many others were afraid that Hamilton would use that army to make him, as Abigail Adams called him, “a second Bonaparty.”³⁴ During the time that Hamilton was the Inspector General, Adams was negotiating a peace treaty with France to avoid war. By June of 1800, Hamilton’s military career was done, and he was disappointed over the ill-fated army. He had wasted a year and a half of his life on a position that would not bear fruit. Hamilton wrote his wife that he had to play “the game of good spirit but...it is a most artificial game and at the bottom of my soul there is a more than usual gloom.”³⁵ He had lost a great opportunity to revive his career, as Adams put a stop to it before it could begin again. Although he was disheartened over the whole affair, he would now discharge all the stored up bitterness that he had against Adams.³⁶

During the election season of 1800, Hamilton would make another poor judgment call from which his political career would never recover. Over the previous five years, he had lashed out against many

³⁴ Abigail Adams, *Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 1798*, in Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 614.

³⁵ Alexander Hamilton, *Letter to Elizabeth Hamilton, 1800*, in Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 602.

³⁶ Chernow, 602.

who had slandered him and opposed him, but it would be his lashing out against Adams that would be his undoing. As Inspector General, he had stifled all of his anger against Adams, just as he did when he served under Washington. This was because he had a position that he wanted and that position required decorum. Now that the Army was disbanded, “he would no longer be able to refrain from vendettas.”³⁷ Adams and Hamilton had always been political rivals and foes although they were members of the same political party. Adams had always believed Hamilton to be a foreign upstart. Hamilton believed that Adams had wasted a year and half of his life. Hamilton’s answer to the way that Adams treated him was to find any way possible to remove Adams as President.

As the Presidential election of 1800 came closer, Hamilton needed to find a way in which to remove Adams from the office of President, but still keep a Federalist in office. His answer to this problem was to nominate another Federalist for the presidency. He and other anti-Adams Federalists selected Charles Cotesworth Pinckney as the Federalist nominee.³⁸ But, following the disaster in New York and the heavy losses of the Federalist Party there, Hamilton believed that the

³⁷ Ibid, 619.

³⁸ James Rodger Sharp, *The Deadlocked Election of 1800: Jefferson, Burr, and The Union in the Balance*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 98.

Federalists had to stand together, and that “to support *Adams* and *Pinckney* equally [was] the only [way] that can possibly save [them] from the fangs of Jefferson.”³⁹ He knew once the New York elections were over and more Republicans than Federalists held office there, the electors for the President in New York would be anti-Federalist.⁴⁰ However, once Adams fired Timothy Pickering, his Secretary of State, and James McHenry, the Secretary of War, because they both quarreled with Adams about the peace negotiations with France, Hamilton had a change of heart.⁴¹ Both of these men were friends of Hamilton’s and their firing gave Hamilton and others the firm belief that Adams had a “unfit and incapable character” and the only hope for the Federalists was to support Pinckney as President and disavow their support for “a weak and perverse man.”⁴² There were many Federalists that supported Hamilton’s plan to remove Adams as President, but they still wanted a Federalist. Fisher Ames wrote that the “only way to do it, is by voting for

³⁹ Alexander Hamilton, *Letter to Sedgwick, May 4, 1800*, in *The Works of Alexander Hamilton; Comprising His Correspondence, and His Political and Official Writings, Exclusive of the Federalist, Civil and Military*, Ed. John C. Hamilton, Vol. 6, (New York: Joint Committee of the Library of Congress, 1850-51), 436.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 436

⁴¹ Sharp, 98.

⁴² Alexander Hamilton, *Letter to Pickering, May 14, 1800*, in *The Works of Alexander Hamilton*, Ed. Henry Cabot Lodge (New York: G.P. Putman’s Sons, 1904), 10.

General Pinckney, at the risk...of excluding Mr. A”⁴³ For the Federalists and Hamilton, Adams was a danger to the country and he would be the reason why the country could be torn apart.

Hamilton understood that even if Pinckney did not win the election, Adams would not be able to win without him.⁴⁴ Adams got wind of the behind-the-scene dealings Hamilton was involved in and became enraged, stating to McHenry that Hamilton was “the greatest intriguer in the World—a man devoid of every principle—a Bastard, and as much a foreigner as Gallatin. Mr. Jefferson is infinitely a better man.”⁴⁵ This was another reason why many, including Hamilton, believed that Adams was unfit for office. Adams was dismissing cabinet members because they were friends of his enemy Hamilton, and they asked for his opinion on matters. Hamilton wanted Pinckney as President not only to usurp Adams, but because if Pinckney won, Hamilton would most likely receive a cabinet post and “once again determine the nation’s fate.”⁴⁶ This election and the removal of Adams from office would help Hamilton to regain a political office which he wanted more than

⁴³ Fisher Ames, *Letter to Chauncey Goodrich, June 22, 1800*, in *Memoirs of the Administrations of Washington and John Adams*, Ed. George Gibbs (New York: W. Van Norton, 1846), 366-367.

⁴⁴ Nester, 156.

⁴⁵ John Adams, in a *Letter from James McHenry to John McHenry, Jr., May 20, 1800*, in William Nester, *The Hamiltonian Vision, 1789-1800: The Art of American Power During the Early Republic, 156-157*.

⁴⁶ Nester, 156.

anything. Adams had destroyed his chance at military glory, but he could get everything back if his plan worked. However, Hamilton would make one of the most disastrous miscalculations of his life: he would write a damaging pamphlet to criticize Adams' presidency and character.

By writing a pamphlet against his own party's president he committed what Ron Chernow called "a form of political suicide that blighted the rest of his career...he was a genius for the self-inflicted wound and was capable of marching blindly off a cliff—traits most pronounced in the late 1790s."⁴⁷ He had already committed some of these "self-inflicted" wounds in the previous years with criticizing his enemies and going against Adams in the election. But, it was in October of 1800 that one of the final nails in his political coffin would come about. Not only would this kill any chance of a political comeback, but it would be the beginning of the end for the Federalist Party. This pamphlet would destroy both Hamilton and the party because it would show the world the deep rift in the Federalist Party.

Hamilton was not alone in his belief that Adams was, as Oliver Wolcott, Jr. said, "crazy."⁴⁸ Men like Walcott would encourage

⁴⁷ Chernow, 619.

⁴⁸ Oliver Wolcott, Jr. *Wolcott to Hamilton, Sept. 3 and Oct. 2, 1800*, in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, Ed. Harold C. Syrett, et al. vol. 25, 107-8, 140-46.

Hamilton as he began to contemplate how to expose the president.⁴⁹

Hamilton wrote to both McHenry and Pickering to preserve all the internal papers that they could to aid him.⁵⁰ In encouraging Hamilton, Walcott wrote him stating somebody had to write a “few paragraphs exposing the folly” of the president.⁵¹ With the encouragement of other Federalists, Hamilton wrote the pamphlet, *Concerning the Public Conduct and Character of John Adams, Esq., President of the United States*, in which he criticized John Adams about the way in which he had led the country and his character. In the pamphlet Hamilton wrote that:

Not denying Mr. Adams patriotism and integrity, and even talents of certain kind, I should be deficient in candor, were I to conceal the conviction, that he does not possess the talents adapted to the *administration* of government, and that there are great and intrinsic defects in his character, which unfit him for the office of chief magistrate.⁵²

He condemns Adams’s ability to be president, but he also tells the readers that he thought that Adams was a decent man. In order to write

⁴⁹ Chernow, 619.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 619.

⁵¹ Oliver Walcott, Jr., *Walcott to Hamilton, July 7, 1800*, in *The Works of Alexander Hamilton; Comprising His Correspondence, and His Political and Official Writings, Exclusive of the Federalist, Civil and Military*, Ed. John C. Hamilton, Vol. 6, (New York: Joint Committee of the Library of Congress, 1850-51), 447.

⁵² Alexander Hamilton, *Letter from Alexander Hamilton, Concerning the Public Conduct and Character of John Adams, Esq., President of the United States*, in *The Works of Alexander Hamilton; Comprising His Correspondence, and His Political and Official Writings, Exclusive of the Federalist, Civil and Military*, Ed. John C. Hamilton, Vol. 7, (New York: Joint Committee of the Library of Congress, 1850-51), 689.

this indictment about Adams, Hamilton had to rely on the letters and papers from Wolcott, Pickering, and McHenry because he knew without the sources to back up his claims he would not have credibility.⁵³ With those sources Hamilton would not look like a man trying to get back at Adams for disbanding the Army.⁵⁴ The pamphlet was intended only for the eyes of select members of the Federalist Party. Nevertheless, a copy landed in the hands of a member of the Democratic-Republican Party. No one knows for sure who obtained a copy of the pamphlet, but many historians have pointed their fingers at Aaron Burr.⁵⁵ Whoever it was, he wasted no time in having portions printed in the newspaper *Aurora* and other Republican newspapers.⁵⁶ When having the pamphlet published in the newspapers, the Republican knew that it would show the country the deep rift in the Federalist Party and damage Hamilton's standing with many in his party.⁵⁷ The Republican John Beckley, who had leaked the Maria Reynolds pamphlet, hoped that the pamphlet would deliver the *coup de grâce* to Hamilton's career.⁵⁸ Beckley would be correct in the fact that the pamphlet did deliver the final blow to Hamilton's career and it ensured that the Republicans would win the election for president. It

⁵³ Chernow, 620.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 620.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 620-621.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 622.

⁵⁷ Ambrose and Martin, 8-9.

⁵⁸ Chernow, 622.

would also ensure that no other member of the Federalist Party would hold the office of President again, and that Hamilton would no longer be in the day-to-day affairs of government.

Realizing that his own political and military careers were now over, Hamilton would lay all of his hopes on his son Philip. Philip was his father's hope for a bright political future for his family and himself, since he lost all hope for himself after the fallout of the presidential election of 1800, his pamphlet criticizing Adams, and losing a leading position in the Federalist Party. Philip was his oldest son and was like his father in many ways. He had gone to King's College and studied to be a lawyer just like his father. His aunt Angelica told his mother, "What flattering prospects for a mother! You are, my dear sister, very happy with such a husband and such a promising son."⁵⁹ Philip and his father shared many of the same talents and he was regarded as the family's "brightest as well as the eldest hope of [his] family" and was being groomed for "major accomplishments" by his father.⁶⁰ It was thought that Philip would be the one that could perpetuate his father's work since

⁵⁹ Angelica Schuyler Church, *Letter to Elizabeth Hamilton, 1800*, in Allen McLane Hamilton, *The Intimate Life of Alexander Hamilton*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 212.

⁶⁰ Alexander Hamilton, *Hamilton to Rush, February 12, 1802*, in *The Works of Alexander Hamilton; Comprising His Correspondence, and His Political and Official Writings, Exclusive of the Federalist, Civil and Military*, Ed. John C. Hamilton, Vol. 6, (New York: Joint Committee of the Library of Congress, 1850-51), 527.; Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 651.

Alexander had fallen out of favor with many of his political friends and party members. However, on November 24, 1801, all of Hamilton's hopes for his oldest son Philip disappeared when Philip died in a duel with George Eacker.

The duel with Eacker originated in the Fourth of July celebrations of 1801. During the celebrations, the young Republican lawyer gave a speech that blamed the XYZ Affair and French privateering for the Quasi-War on Britain.⁶¹ Eacker went further to suggest that "Hamilton's army had been designed to cow Republicans" and he gave credit to Jefferson for chasing Federalist aristocrats from the government and saving the Constitution.⁶² Once the speech was published, Philip would take up the cause of defending his father's name and reputation.⁶³ Philip would have his chance to confront Eacker when by chance he spotted Eacker at the Park Theater in Manhattan on the July 20.⁶⁴ Philip and his friend Richard Price began to taunt Eacker about the speech. Eacker asked Philip and Price to leave their box and step into the lobby, where Eacker muttered "It is too abominable to be publicly insulted by a set of rascals."⁶⁵ The term rascals was a term in those days

⁶¹ Chernow, 651.

⁶² Ibid, 651.

⁶³ Ibid, 651.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 651-652.

⁶⁵ George Eacker, *American Citizen*, November 26, 1802.

that led to duels,⁶⁶ which would be the case for Philip when he retorted, asking Eacker who he was calling a rascal.⁶⁷ In this instance they both came to blows and finally retired to a tavern where Eacker told Philip that he expected to hear from him. Philip told him that he would and by the time Eacker left the theater that night the challenge had been issued by Philip.⁶⁸

Philip consulted his friend David S. Jones about the duel and what he should do. Jones would take him to the Schuyler family authority on dueling, John Barker Church. He told Philip the insult demanded a response, but because Philip had also given the first offense, he should try to resolve the matter.⁶⁹ There was fear about the political ramifications about the duel between the two of them, so Church and Jones tried to negotiate a truce with Eacker's second. Many wondered where Alexander was during this time, but the *New York Evening Post* indicated he knew nothing about the duel.⁷⁰ However, the truth was that Alexander knew about the duel and applauded his brother-in-law's attempt to avoid bloodshed. He also knew that Philip had to defend his honor. He told his son to throw the first shot, which he and Eacker both

⁶⁶ Chernow, 652.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 652.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 652.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 652.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 652.

did, but Eacker fired a second shot which lodged into Philip's side.⁷¹ Philip died the next day surrounded by his parents and siblings; he was only nineteen.

Hamilton took the death of his oldest son hard and withdrew into an emotional decline. Condolence letters piled up and he would not answer them for some time. Once he had started to write back to his friends to thank them for their condolences, he wrote Governor Morris in February 1802:

Mine is an odd destiny. Perhaps no man in the United States has scarified or done more for the present Constitution than myself; and contrary to all my anticipations of its fate, as you know from the very beginning. Yet I have the murmurs of its friends no less than the curses of its foes for my reward. What can I do better than withdraw from the scene? Every day proves to me more and more, that this American world was not made for me.⁷²

This passage was written during a time of deep grief and despair. He lamented that he worked tirelessly to build the country from the ashes of Revolution and in the end he had nothing to show for it. Not only did he have nothing to show for his work, he had suffered more personal and professional losses than anyone else, all in the service of his adopted country. Though he said he was going to withdraw from the scene of

⁷¹ Ibid, 652-653.

⁷² Alexander Hamilton, *Hamilton to Morris, February 27, 1802*, in *The Works of Alexander Hamilton; Comprising His Correspondence, and His Political and Official Writings, Exclusive of the Federalist, Civil and Military*, Ed. John C. Hamilton, Vol. 6, (New York: Joint Committee of the Library of Congress, 1850-51), 530.

public life, he did not. He would continue to support friends and talk about politics, but not participate in the day-to-day affairs. One of the last times he would voice his criticisms, it would be against Aaron Burr. This time it would not be his political career that he would lose, but his own life. Alexander Hamilton died at the age of forty-nine on July 12, 1804, leaving behind his wife, seven children, and a legacy of political achievements and loss.

Alexander Hamilton was a man of many passions and great abilities. He came from nothing to become one of the most important men in United States history. But, he had a problem. He was unable to curb his voice against his critics and that would lead down a road from which he would never recover. He only curbed himself when he served under Washington and Adams. Hamilton was a both a political and economic genius, but he made several bad decisions. He had begun to make miscalculations about his criticism, and he did not stop. It can be said that his passion for his adopted country was so great that he believed that he had to fight for it. Could he have saved his career if he kept his decorum like he did when serving under Washington? Perhaps he could have and gone on to more prominence in the government, maybe even becoming president. However, he never found out and his last act to save his country from those he saw unfit was to attack Aaron Burr and make

sure the Vice-President did not become Governor of New York or the President.

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