CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The Life and Many Faces of Alexander Hamilton

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Everyone knows the face. It gazes out from the ten-dollar bill, confident, strong, thoughtful. Most Americans know the face of Alexander Hamilton from that ten-dollar bill, and most would probably acknowledge that he rightly occupies a place among the pantheon of those we call "the founders." But of all those founders, Hamilton remains the most elusive. For as much as Americans may recognize the face on the bill, few really know the man. And many who think they know him find it hard to embrace him with the same enthusiasm that they do a Washington, a Jefferson, a Madison, an Adams. Hamilton remains both enigmatic and suspect; important, yes, but somewhat tarnished by his supposed lack of idealism, his crass realism regarding economics, finance, military power, and national authority.

Scholars and commentators have not neglected Alexander Hamilton. From before his death in 1804 to the present, historians, political scientists, economists, and others have explored the ways in which Hamilton contributed to the course of American history. And those accounts demonstrate that Hamilton has always functioned as a lightning rod. During his life he embroiled himself in nearly every major political development from the Revolution through the election of 1800. He did so as an active public servant, serving as military officer, delegate to the Constitutional Convention, and first Secretary of the Treasury, and, especially, through his writing. His prolificacy staggers the imagination: at his death at the age of 49 he had produced enough material to fill 27 volumes.[1] Hamilton produced much of that voluminous writing in the contentious debates over everything from the treatment of the Continental Army to the electoral

crisis of 1800 when Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr received the same number of electoral votes and the House of Representatives had to choose who would become president. Hamilton, as most of his biographers have noted, neither shied away from confrontation nor always acted as discreetly as he might have.[2] As a result, he made many enemies who accused him of being everything from a monarchist to an embezzler. John Adams's famous characterization of Hamilton as "a bastard Bratt of a Scotch Pedlar" aptly captures how acid could be the perception of Hamilton by his political and personal enemies. Yet others, notably but not exclusively his Federalist friends such as Fisher Ames and John Marshall, found Hamilton to be not only brilliant, but dedicated to the nation he helped found and a man of high moral character.[3]

But if Hamilton was a figure who aroused strong feelings among his contemporaries, he has been no less so for scholars. As Stephen Knott demonstrates in his essay in this volume and in his book *Alexander Hamilton and the Persistence of Myth,* those who have written about Hamilton, like his contemporaries, have provided us with portraits that range from damning to hagiographic.[4] This volume offers a variety of portraits and perspectives that reflect, in part, the persisting enigmatic character of Hamilton. But the essays below also demonstrate that whatever the disagreements about who Hamilton was and what his influence may have been, he remains a central figure in our continuing effort to understand both the founding era and its legacy on subsequent American history. He demands to be studied because his actions, his motives, and his achievements indelibly shaped his world and ours.

Hamilton's Life

Hamilton had, most certainly, one of the most unusual personal histories of the founders. His lineage, as Adams suggested in his biting quip, did not foretell greatness. He was born on January 11, 1755, on the British island colony of Nevis to Rachel Faucett Lavien and James Hamilton. Five years prior to Alexander's birth, Lavien, who came from a respectable family, had walked out of an unhappy marriage to Johann Michael Lavien, leaving behind both her husband and their young son, Peter. By 1752 she was living with James Hamilton. Through James Hamilton, the fourth son of a Scottish nobleman, Alexander could—and did—claim a distinguished bloodline. But by the time James Hamilton began cohabiting with Rachel

Faucett Lavien, he had little more than that bloodline left. He had come to the British West Indies in 1741 as a 23–year-old seeking his fortune. He never found it. What he did find was a meager if not impoverished life as a merchant, a life marked by "too large a portion of indolence," as his son Alexander put it.[5] James and Rachel had two children, James Jr. born in 1753 and Alexander born in 1755. When Alexander was 10 years old, his family migrated from Nevis to the nearby island of St. Croix. James Hamilton then abandoned his family; he would never return. Three years later, Rachel died. Her son Peter Lavien inherited all she had, leaving James Jr. and 13–year-old Alexander with nothing. A probate court placed them under the guardianship of their cousin Peter Lytton. An unstable individual, Lytton committed suicide less than a year after taking the boys in.[6]

Young Alexander Hamilton somehow managed to overcome the volatility of his childhood. Although he received little formal schooling, he became a voracious reader and fluent in French while his mother was still alive. His intellectual abilities attracted the attention of two merchants, David Beckman and Nicholas Cruger, who employed him as a clerk in their firm in Christiansted, the main city on St. Croix. Hamilton quickly assumed more and more responsibilities for the firm of Beckman & Cruger; as a 16–year-old he ran the operation for several months while Beckman and Cruger were traveling on business. But it was the appearance in St. Croix of Hugh Knox, a Scotch-Irish Presbyterian minister, that changed Hamilton's life forever. Knox recognized that Hamilton's talents extended well beyond mercantile affairs. He cultivated Hamilton's intellectual faculties as best he could, but soon realized that his library could not satisfy Hamilton's appetite. Hamilton's precocious abilities gained wider attention in 1772 when a local newspaper published his vivid description of a hurricane that ravished St. Croix. Knox soon began to collect funds to send 17–year-old Hamilton to the mainland colonies for a formal education.

Soon after arriving at Boston, Hamilton found his way to the Elizabethtown Academy in New Jersey. Here he prepared for admission to the College of New Jersey, today known as Princeton, by mastering Latin and Greek. The trustees of Princeton, however, denied Hamilton's request that he be admitted with permission to advance as quickly as he could. He turned to King's College, today's Columbia, and enrolled in 1774, just as the imperial crisis reached a boiling point. Hamilton combined his studies with political writing, producing his first significant pamphlet, *A Full Vindication of the Measures of Congress,* in late 1774. More political writings followed in 1775 and Hamilton joined the New York provincial militia that

same year. When New York's Provincial Congress ordered the establishment of an artillery company in 1776, it appointed the 21–year-old Hamilton to be its commander with the rank of captain. Although military service cut short his academic career, leaving him without a degree, he embraced his new responsibilities and soon saw considerable action in the battles in New York and New Jersey in 1776 and early 1777, including George Washington's surprise attack on Trenton and the subsequent Battle of Princeton.

Just as Hugh Knox had recognized Hamilton's talents, so too did Washington. On March 1, 1777, Washington appointed Hamilton his aide-de-camp and promoted him to lieutenant colonel in the Continental Army. For the next four years, Hamilton would be at Washington's side; for the rest of his life, Hamilton would be a force in American public life. From 1777 to 1781 he functioned as Washington's primary secretary, drafting letters and reports. He served with him in the field at Brandywine Creek and Monmouth Court House. He wintered with him at Valley Forge and Morristown. He accompanied him to West Point just as Benedict Arnold's treasonous plot unfolded. Yet as vital as Hamilton's services were to Washington, Hamilton yearned to return to a field command. After Washington rejected several requests, Hamilton finally provoked a confrontation in 1781 that led to his resignation from Washington's staff. He soon thereafter received an appointment as commander of a New York infantry battalion, and in October 1781 led a successful assault on the British fortifications at Yorktown.

Military service did not monopolize Hamilton's life between 1777 and 1781. In 1780 he courted and married Elizabeth Schuyler, daughter of one of New York's most prestigious families. They would have eight children together; the first, Philip, was born in January 1782. Hamilton also remained active in political debates, primarily through essays and letters to newspapers. As early as 1780, Hamilton determined that the new national government under the Articles of Confederation required strengthening, and he even called for a national bank and a convention to revise the Articles. Upon leaving active service in late 1781 and returning to New York, Hamilton commenced both the study of law and an active political career, receiving an appointment in 1782 from the New York legislature to serve as delegate to Congress. In Congress he first met and worked with James Madison. Although he left Congress in 1783, his brief experience there further convinced him that the government under the Articles needed revision.

Hamilton then embarked on a legal career, moving to New York City and opening a law office. Through both his legal career and his pen, Hamilton remained deeply engaged in the politics of his state and country. In a series of pamphlets he criticized New York laws that punished Loyalists, and he defended Loyalists in court against suits based on those laws.[7] In 1784 he helped establish the Bank of New York and became one of its directors, and in 1785 he helped found the Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slaves. He returned to active political life in 1786 when he was elected to the New York assembly for the following year. Before his term began, the assembly in 1786 appointed him as a delegate to the Annapolis Convention, which met to discuss the problems of interstate commerce under the Articles of Confederation. Although only a few states sent delegates and the convention resolved no problems, it did adopt a resolution, drafted by Hamilton, that urged that another convention assemble in Philadelphia in 1787 and that it focus on broad constitutional changes. In 1787 the New York legislature appointed Hamilton to be one of three delegates to the Philadelphia Convention. His two fellow delegates, Robert Yates and Robert Lansing Jr., opposed creating a strong central government. Since the convention decided that each state would have one vote, Hamilton could not get his state to vote for proposals he favored. Although he delivered several speeches before the convention, including his infamous June 18 speech in which he praised the British government and proposed a government modeled after it, he left Philadelphia in late June and only occasionally attended sessions during the rest of the summer. He returned to the convention in early September and signed the final document later that month, even though he had deep reservations about its final form. Notwithstanding those reservations, he returned to New York and within a month had published his first *Federalist* essay.[8]

Hamilton conceived the *Federalist* essays as a tactical measure to sway New York opinion in favor of ratifying the new Constitution. He recruited fellow New Yorker John Jay and James Madison to the cause. Between October 1787 and March 1788, 77 essays, all published under the pseudonym "Publius," appeared in New York newspapers. The essays also appeared in bound form in two volumes. Volume 1 included the first 36 essays and appeared in March of 1788. The second volume, published in May 1788, included the remaining 31 articles and 8 essays that had not yet appeared in the newspapers. Hamilton probably wrote 51 of the 85 *Federalist Papers,* Madison 29, and Jay 5.[9] In the spring of 1788, soon after the first volume of *Federalist Papers* appeared, Hamilton gained election to the

New York ratifying convention, which met in Poughkeepsie in June. Hamilton and his fellow Federalist supporters of the Constitution found themselves outnumbered by its Antifederalist opponents, but once word arrived at the convention that Virginia had become the ninth state to ratify the Constitution, the tide turned in the Federalists' favor and the convention approved unconditional ratification. Although the *Federalist Papers* had not accomplished Hamilton's immediate goal of changing New York's position on the Constitution, the collection quickly became *the* authoritative text on America's federal government.[10]

Only fourteen months after New York's ratification of the Constitution, President George Washington nominated and the Senate confirmed Hamilton to be the first secretary of the newly created department of the Treasury. He faced an imposing task. National finances were in disarray, America's credit among lender nations was weak, the country lacked a stable currency, states quarreled over trade relations, and debt plagued both the state and central governments. Within three months of assuming his new position, Hamilton produced his "Report on Public Credit." His ambitious plan called for both the funding of the $54 million national debt and the assumption of $25 million of state debts by the federal government. Both aspects of the plan aroused controversy. Hamilton sought to have the holders of old Continental securities exchange the now-depreciated notes for new bonds at face value; critics, led by former ally James Madison, favored discriminating between the original holders of the securities, many of whom were Revolutionary War veterans, and those who later purchased them at a fraction of their face value. Madison's discrimination proposal failed in the House of Representatives, and Hamilton's funding plan went forward. His plan to have the federal government assume the debts of the states, however, failed in its initial vote in the House. Some states, including Madison's Virginia, argued that the assumption plan punished those states that had paid off much of their war debt by forcing them to pay for the debts of less responsible states. In the famous dinner compromise of 1790, Hamilton, Madison, and Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson hammered out a solution wherein Virginia and other Southern states accepted assumption in return for the establishment of the permanent national capital at a location on the Potomac River.[11]

At the end of 1790 Hamilton submitted another report to the House that called for the chartering of a national bank. Once again, Madison and others opposed the proposal, arguing that the Constitution did not authorize such a measure. Although both the House and Senate approved a bill

establishing the Bank of the United States in early 1791, President George Washington solicited written opinions from several cabinet members, including Jefferson, who agreed with Madison, before deciding whether or not to sign the bill. Hamilton responded to these objections with a passionate defense of a broad interpretation of the Constitution and especially of the "necessary and proper" clause (Article One, Section VIII, Clause 18). Washington signed the Bank bill. Late in 1791 Hamilton submitted his third famous report to the House. The "Report on Manufactures," which detailed an ambitious plan to establish a strong manufacturing sector of the economy through government subsidies and protective tariffs, proved unsuccessful. Critics objected to Hamilton's proposals on both constitutional and pragmatic grounds, and Congress never acted on the report's recommendations. Hamilton himself, however, remained committed to industrial development. In 1791 he helped form the Society for the Encouragement of Useful Manufactures, which established a site in Paterson, New Jersey. Hamilton hoped that similar private ventures would stimulate the growth of domestic industry.[12]

Hamilton's bold vision and proposals during his first 18 months as Treasury Secretary helped stimulate the development of America's first political parties. By 1792, Jefferson and Madison mobilized those opposed to Hamilton's policies in Congress and launched a vigorous newspaper campaign that criticized Hamilton and his program. Hamilton and his supporters responded with articles in sympathetic newspapers. Soon, Jefferson, Madison, and their allies became known as Republicans, Hamilton and his supporters continued to label themselves Federalists, and the first American party system emerged.[13] The divisions within Washington's cabinet, and the country, grew deeper after revolutionary France declared war on Great Britain in 1793. Washington declared U.S. neutrality and determined that the 1778 alliance with France did not require the United States to support France. Republicans objected and argued that only Congress had the constitutional authority to interpret treaties and declare neutrality. Hamilton published several essays defending Washington's actions, and Madison responded with essays supporting the Republican position. Hamilton continued to attack the French Revolution and its American supporters in 1793 and 1794.

One of Hamilton's last major public acts before he resigned as Treasury Secretary in January 1795 concerned the 1794 Whiskey Rebellion. Prompted by a Hamilton-sponsored excise tax on whiskey, farmers in western Pennsylvania took up arms in protest. Hamilton urged, both in

newspaper essays and in the cabinet, decisive military action, in part as a way of demonstrating the resolve of the federal government. Washington agreed, and he and Hamilton led a force of 10,000 militia against the insurgents.[14]

Although Hamilton left the cabinet in 1795 and never returned to public service, he continued to exert significant political influence until his death in 1804. He vigorously defended fellow Federalist John Jay and the 1795 treaty with Great Britain that bore his name, writing more than a score of newspaper articles and withstanding insults and even physical abuse at a public meeting in New York City. He continued to work closely with Washington, advising him and helping him write his famous farewell address in 1796. In 1797 Hamilton wrote a series of essays criticizing French seizures of American ships trading with Britain, and as the crisis with France deepened in 1798 with the infamous "XYZ Affair," he advocated a military buildup in case of war. President John Adams responded to the crisis by conducting an undeclared naval war with France and by asking George Washington to assume command of the newly enlarged U.S. Army. Washington insisted that Hamilton be appointed inspector general. Adams complied, and in July 1798 Hamilton received a commission as major general. He worked to strengthen domestic fortifications and to reorganize nearly every aspect of the army, from tactics to uniforms. Adams appointed Hamilton as second in command of the army, but when Washington died in December 1799, Adams refused to elevate Hamilton to commander in chief. As relations with France improved by mid-1800, Adams demobilized the enlarged army, and Hamilton ended his military service in June 1800.[15]

Hamilton's relations with Adams, which had never been good, worsened during the course of Adams's term. Hamilton resented not being appointed commander in chief and objected to Adams's diplomacy with France, believing him to be too accommodating to the French. Adams, in turn, rightly suspected that Hamilton used his influence with several members of Adams's own cabinet to thwart Adams's leadership. By 1800, Hamilton was actively working against Adams and lobbying for Charles Cotesworth Pinckney to be the Federalist candidate for president in the election of 1800. In October 1800, just weeks before the election, Republican newspapers published a pamphlet Hamilton had written that viciously attacked Adams. Hamilton had intended to circulate the pamphlet privately among Federalists, but its widespread publication revealed the deep divisions among Federalists and irreparably damaged Hamilton's standing

among many in his party. The election of 1800 resulted in Republicans Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr both receiving the same number of electoral votes as there was then no way of indicating Burr as the vice-presidential choice. The House of Representatives thus had to decide the election, and Hamilton wrote to a number of Federalists and urged them to support Jefferson over Burr. In February 1801, after a tense week of debate, the House elected Jefferson president.[16]

With the Republicans in power, Hamilton concentrated on his legal practice and family concerns, but he managed to find plenty of time to remain politically active. He continued working for the New York Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slaves, which he had helped establish back in 1785. Hamilton's contributions to the Manumission Society reflected his lifelong abhorrence of slavery and his efforts to eradicate it from New York. In 1799, the New York legislature passed a gradual emancipation law that put slavery in the state on the road to a slow but sure extinction.[17] He helped found a newspaper, the *New York Evening Post,* and used its pages to keep up a running attack on Jefferson and his administration. Hamilton also experienced profound personal tragedy when his oldest son, Philip, died in late 1801 from wounds received in a duel with a Republican lawyer named George Eacker. Philip's death devastated Hamilton and, combined with the Republican triumph at all levels of the federal government, led him to the edge of despair. In a famous 1802 letter to old friend Gouverneur Morris, Hamilton lamented, "Mine is an odd destiny. Perhaps no man in the UStates has sacrificed or done more for the present Constitution than myself—and contrary to all my anticipations of its fate . . . I am still labouring to prop the frail and worthless fabric. 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."[18]

But Hamilton did not "withdraw from the scene," and he did not abandon the American world even if he believed it was abandoning him. He worked on drafting what would, in somewhat modified form, become the Twelfth Amendment to the Constitution, which required separate balloting by presidential electors for president and vice-president. Although Hamilton continued to attack the Jefferson administration, he was one of the few Federalists who supported Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase. And some of Hamilton's legal work had profound implications. One of his last major cases, which he argued before the New York supreme court in February 1804, five months before his death, was that of Harry Croswell.

Croswell edited a Federalist newspaper and was charged with seditious libel for publishing articles accusing Thomas Jefferson of having paid James T. Callender to print harsh attacks on George Washington, John Adams, and others. Hamilton argued against the common-law tradition that held the truth of a libelous claim was no defense; all the New York attorney general, Jeffersonian Ambrose Spencer, had to prove was that Croswell had published the defamatory articles. Croswell was convicted, and Hamilton appeared before the state supreme court to argue for a new trial and for the admission of truth as a defense in libel cases. Although he lost the case before a Republican-dominated court, most of the New York legislature attended the session in which Hamilton made his argument. The legislature promptly began debate on revising the state's libel law and passed a statute incorporating Hamilton's position in April 1805. Hamilton, of course, did not live to see it.[19]

Hamilton's continued involvement in state and local politics led to his death. Long suspicious of Aaron Burr, Hamilton grew alarmed when Burr decided to run for governor of New York. Many disgruntled northeastern Federalists, convinced that Jeffersonian domination would only get worse over time, contemplated secession and the creation of a separate republic. Most who entertained such a notion believed that New York's inclusion in the new republic was vital, and they believed that Burr as governor would aid their efforts. Hamilton was appalled. He worked vigorously to convince Federalists to support the other Republican candidate for governor, Morgan Lewis (there was no Federalist candidate). Lewis won the April 1804 election. In June, Burr initiated contact with Hamilton and demanded that he explain certain remarks that a letter printed in an Albany newspaper attributed to Hamilton. According to one source, Hamilton labeled Burr "a dangerous man, and one who ought not to be trusted with the reins of government." Even more offensive to Burr was the source's claim that Hamilton had expressed "a still more despicable opinion" of Burr.[20] As was usual with such "affairs of honor," negotiations between the two parties lasted for over a week, and Burr, unsatisfied by Hamilton's actions, challenged him to a duel. Hamilton accepted, and two weeks later, on the morning of July 11, 1804, Hamilton and Burr faced each other on a field in Weehawken, New Jersey, not far from where Philip Hamilton received his mortal wound three years earlier. Burr's shot struck Hamilton, passed through his liver, and lodged in his spine. Hamilton's aides brought him back to Manhattan, where he survived until midafternoon on July 12, giving him time to say goodbye to his wife Eliza and their

children. A well-attended public funeral followed on July 14, and Hamilton was buried in the graveyard of Trinity Church in lower Manhattan.[21]

Even this brief review of Hamilton's life demonstrates his centrality to the history of the founding era. No serious student of that era, including the authors of the essays in this volume, denies that Hamilton played a vital role in some of the most important questions of national politics, public policy, and economic development. But scholars have debated fiercely the meaning and consequences of Hamilton's life. His legacies remain contested: Was he a closet monarchist or a sincere republican? A victim of partisan politics or one of its most active promoters? A lackey for British interests or a foreign policy mastermind? An economic genius or a shill for special interests? The father of a vigorous national government or the destroyer of genuine federalism? A defender of governmental authority or a dangerous militarist? The essays below testify to the continuing debates over both the effects of Hamilton's efforts during his life and the diverse and competing legacies of those efforts and effects in the two centuries since his death. Although the essays will not end those debates, they remind us that in attempting to understand Hamilton and his legacies, we grapple with the vexing and important questions about the nature and meaning of republicanism, federalism, and freedom that Americans have faced not only during the founding era but through all of American history.

This book's contents reflect the conflict and debate among historians and political scientists regarding Hamilton and his legacies. The essays also reveal common threads that suggest that, notwithstanding important differences, some consensus about Hamilton exists among modern scholars. All of the essays, to varying degrees, demonstrate Hamilton's recognition that his life would have a lasting legacy, that his actions would shape and influence posterity. The notion of fame that Douglass Adair long ago identified as one of the distinguishing characteristics of the founders, informed nearly all of Hamilton's public actions. Hamilton fit Adair's definition of an individual who desired fame, a person who sought "never to be forgotten by those later generations that will be born into a world his actions helped to shape."[22] But Hamilton's legacies have not necessarily been those that he intended, nor do scholars agree on what, exactly, those legacies have been. To what extent do we live in "Hamilton's republic"?[23] Was Hamilton, as a recent major exhibition at the New-York Historical Society claimed, "The Man Who Made Modern America"?[24] How, if at all,

did Hamilton, as Stephen Knott argues in his essay, "make us what we are"? The essays in this volume, both individually and collectively, powerfully demonstrate that Hamilton remains a compelling subject, one that prompts scholars to engage in innovative and important work about the man, the era, and the legacies we still struggle to understand.

Stephen Knott's opening essay provides a sweeping examination of Hamilton's image from his own era through the middle of the twentieth century. Americans, Knott argues, have almost always evaluated Hamilton alongside Thomas Jefferson, and for much of American history Hamilton has suffered from the comparison. Knott questions whether the relative positions of Jefferson and Hamilton in American memory should persist, of whether the credit "given the poet should exceed that given the architect and engineer of the founding." The "predominant impression of Hamilton in the American mind," Knott suggests, remains that of Jeffersonian newspaper editor Philip Freneau, who in the 1790s portrayed Hamilton as "monocrat, Anglophile, and enemy of liberty." Hamilton's reputation reached its nadir, according to Knott, in the 1930s as Progressive historians, especially Claude G. Bowers, extended Freneau's negative portrayal. "By the end of the New Deal," Knott writes, "the Hamiltonian image in the American mind was something akin to a hybrid mix of Ebenezer Scrooge and Benito Mussolini." Even though recent scholarship has improved Hamilton's image by contrasting his role as founder of the New York Society for the Manumission of Slaves with his rival Jefferson's attitudes and actions concerning slavery, and even though some American liberals in the 1950s and 1960s gravitated toward Hamilton's "support for national power" as they increasingly viewed "Jefferson's states' rights doctrine as camouflage for Jim Crow," Knott argues that Americans still resist embracing Hamilton. Part of that resistance, Knott explains, results from the misleading but persistent image we have inherited from Jefferson and his descendants.

As Knott demonstrates, scholars have long contrasted Hamilton with his fellow founders, and with good reason. The essays by Robert M. S. McDonald and James Read show that Hamilton's life and legacy have been bound up with his collaborators and enemies, especially Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. McDonald argues that Hamilton's biting attacks on Jefferson, attacks motivated by Hamilton's conviction that Jefferson sought personal glory over the public good, actually helped make Jefferson a prominent national political figure. As McDonald argues, "At the same

time that Hamilton worked to destroy Jefferson's reputation, he promoted Jefferson's image as the opposition's chief leader and unintentionally stimulated the development of a Republican press that would rush to Jefferson's defense." McDonald's point here, that Hamilton "unintentionally" helped "thrust [Jefferson] to the forefront of Americans' political consciousness," helps us see how some of Hamilton's legacies have been more than a bit ironic. In trying to destroy Jefferson, Hamilton actually strengthened Jeffersonianism. As Madison and other Jeffersonians came to Jefferson's defense, they forged the reputation most Americans, as Knott argues, still have of him: the people's defender against the aristocratic Hamiltonian Federalists.

James Read also looks at the Hamilton-Jefferson relation. Read detects a strange asymmetry in the often heated conflict between them. Jefferson, he maintains, presented Hamilton not as an individual but as a representative of monarchism, corruption, and subversion of republican government. Hamilton, on the other hand, though he opposed Jefferson's policies, did not accuse Jefferson of subversion or disloyalty. Instead, Hamilton directed his fiercest attacks against what he saw as Jefferson's "devious and mischievous character" and Jefferson's attempts to harm him personally. When there were great public issues at stake, Read argues, Hamilton's view of Jefferson was moderate and balanced; his view of Jefferson was most vitriolic when responding to a perceived personal attack. Read thus concludes that one of the central conflicts of the 1790s—that between the Federalist Hamilton and the Republican Jefferson—was, at least from Hamilton's perspective, driven more by offended reputation than by ideology. Although Read argues, in seeming contrast to McDonald, that Hamilton "made no serious effort to build a party or an ideology on the basis of a demonized archetypal image of Jefferson," Read's analysis of the Jefferson-Hamilton feud ultimately complements McDonald's essay. As Read states, although Hamilton may not have tried to build the Federalist Party on his personal critique of Jefferson, that critique, as McDonald points out, encouraged Republican mobilization and counterattack that focused not only on Hamilton, but on the policies and principles Republicans associated with him. Federalists then responded in kind, escalating the conflict into a full-blown struggle between rival parties. Like McDonald, Read acknowledges the unforeseen consequences, the unintended legacies, of Hamilton's conflict with Jefferson.

The next three essays all grapple with Hamilton's relation to the complex and contentious notion of "republicanism" in early American politi-

cal thinking. Robert W. T. Martin's essay explores Hamilton's "reconceptualization of republicanism" in the 1780s and 1790s. This new theory of republicanism, Martin argues, led Hamilton to develop a "nuanced conception of citizenship" that contrasted sharply with other contemporary notions of the role of citizens in a republic, which tended to be considerably more egalitarian and participatory. Early national politics thus witnessed a battle between two "competing visions of the proper virtue of republican citizens." Hamilton's republicanism emphasized that "the people's virtue lay not in vigilance, but confidence." Citizens of Hamilton's republic exercised their political responsibilities by electing the "better sort." Citizens were then to express "confidence" in those they had elected. In Hamilton's view, "ambitious men could be trusted with power because their historical reputations would so clearly depend on truly serving the public good." The problems of a republic, Hamilton believed, derived less from the ambitions of the elite than from the people's malleability, their susceptibility to demagoguery. Martin's close examination of Hamilton's views on representation and press liberty reveals that Hamilton believed that "the solution to classic problems of republicanism was not a closer connection to the *demos,* but a greater reliance on the ambitions of the elite." Martin concludes that Hamilton's "elitist republicanism" attempted to reformulate "received wisdom" and adapt it "to novel circumstances" so that "wise guides" could lead the new American republic while enjoying the "public confidence" of those who elected them and recognized their authority.

The scholarly debate over "republicanism" has devoted much attention, as Martin's essay demonstrates, to the meaning and role of "virtue" in the early republic. Barry Alan Shain's essay investigates the diverse uses of virtue in *The Federalist Papers.* Shain favors viewing "Publius" as a single rather than as a multiple author.[25] Whatever differences Hamilton and Madison had after *The Federalist*—and the essays by McDonald, Read, Martin, and Sheehan testify to the magnitude of those differences—Shain believes that in *The Federalist* Madison, Hamilton, and Jay spoke with one voice. And that voice, Shain argues, expresses a "consistent and powerful liberal theory of government," one that sought to channel "men's selfish natures rather than [encourage] self-limiting virtue." Publius addressed two audiences, a modern Federalist one that denied that virtue could be the basis of a republic, and a traditional Antifederalist audience that believed that political virtue was necessary to republican government. Although Shain acknowledges that Publius occasionally appealed to

virtue, Publius did so only in a rhetorical fashion, to satisfy his traditional audience. Far more frequently, Shain asserts, Publius insisted that "good government was possible without a politically virtuous people or a truly virtuous government." Much like Martin's notion of Hamilton's "elitist republicanism," Shain argues that Publius devised a "new foundation" for republicanism: "the desire for fame and honor of each individual office holder." In placing confidence not in virtue but in the "selfish quest for fame in those who would govern," Publius, Shain maintains, "aligned himself with progressive liberal thought" by abandoning "traditional republican remedies," such as "a virtuous and selfless leadership or on frequent electoral recurrence to the people." Shain concludes that, as many Antifederalists argued, the "government defended by Publius was one that had taken Montesquieu's essence of monarchical government, a striving for honor and recognition, and had transformed it into a foundation for a new kind of popular system with republican form and monarchical essence." In an important and underappreciated way, Shain asserts, Publius attempted to recover the essence of monarchy by dressing it in the new clothes of republican rhetoric and forms.

Although Shain believes that Hamilton and Madison spoke with one voice as Publius, Colleen Sheehan emphasizes the fundamental differences between them in the post–*Federalist Papers* years. Examining Hamilton and Madison's acrimonious battle in the early 1790s, she posits that the conflict arose from their profoundly differing beliefs regarding "the nature and role of public opinion in a republic." Hamilton and Madison both "sought to cultivate and form public opinion," but their "competing visions about the mode of its formation, the character of its composition, and the extent of its influence on government" reflected opposing "philosophic conceptions of republicanism." Sheehan agrees with Shain that Hamilton believed that a successful republic had to channel "men's selfish passions and interests" rather than rely on people's virtuous dedication to the public good. Much like Martin, she contends that Hamilton advocated a rather "submissive role for the citizenry," essentially consisting of electing the "better sort to political office and supporting the government they had chosen." The "wise republican statesman" would cultivate "opinions of confidence by promoting measures that gratify the average citizen's passion for material gain." Hamilton's conception of public opinion as "the confidence and esteem" of the people in their leaders contrasts sharply, Sheehan argues, with Madison's understanding of public opinion as the active and ongoing sovereign authority in republican government. Reject-

ing Shain's view that Madison as Publius shared Hamilton's "vision of a modern commercial republic composed of diverse rival economic interests actuated by the untutored passion of acquisitiveness," she asserts that Madison "was a more unhesitating democrat than is generally believed." Unlike Hamilton, Madison believed that the duties of the citizens were not limited to participation in elections, but were "substantial and ongoing." His conception of the role of the statesman and educated elite in a republic, Sheehan argues, was not to "inspire respect and confidence" in their own abilities, but rather to exercise "a kind of civic leadership that aspired to cultivate civic understanding, refine mores and manners, and educate the people for their indispensable role in a self-governing republic." Sheehan concludes that Hamilton vigorously resisted the Madisonian and Republican democratization of the politics of public opinion in the 1790s and throughout the remainder of his life, which has contributed in no small way to the legacy of his aristocratic tendencies and sympathies.

One of the ironies that Sheehan notes is that although Hamilton resisted the "new politics of public opinion," he undoubtedly was "the chief American theorist of the modern commercial republic." And if there is one legacy of Hamilton that approaches consensus it is that of the economic genius whose farsighted policies paved the way for American economic development. Carey Roberts in his essay argues that this one rather clear and undisputed image we have of Hamilton misunderstands Hamilton's influence on the 1790s' economy. Roberts maintains that "Hamilton was neither a defender of an aristocracy of wealth nor was he the architect of America's economic 'take-off.'" Hamilton's inflationary policies, Roberts shows, contributed to an "artificial boom" that suggested that the economy was stronger than it actually was and prompted investors to envision a long era of economic growth. When busts came in 1792 and 1796, those disappointed investors—the very aristocracy of wealth that most people assume Hamilton carried around in his back pocket—concluded that Hamilton and his policies either caused the busts or failed to protect their investments. Not until the late 1790s, well after Hamilton left office, did the economy significantly improve, and its improvement may well have been due to policies antithetical to Hamilton's. Roberts thus concludes that Hamilton's policies not only promoted an unstable economy during most of the 1790s but also seriously damaged the Federalist Party's political fortunes. Again noting the contrast between the legacy of Hamilton and his actual experiences, Roberts notes that Hamilton's policies proved unable to win over the "monied interests" to the Federalist cause.

If Roberts helps question the legacy of Hamilton as the brilliantly successful Secretary of the Treasury, Daniel Lang seeks to draw attention to one of Hamilton's less familiar legacies: that of an early proponent of what international relations theorists label as "realism" in foreign affairs. Lang analyzes closely Hamilton's attitudes and policies regarding the "strategic and human rights issues" that the dramatic slave revolution in Saint-Domingue posed to America in the 1790s. In doing so, he demonstrates much about Hamilton's geopolitical imagination and the principles that informed that imagination. Lang notes that although "Hamilton's opposition to slavery was clear and long-standing," the United States' "alliance commitments" and "financial debt to France" limited Hamilton and the United States' ability to "affect events" as France's richest colony revolted and fought a 13–year struggle that eventually resulted in the creation of the independent nation of Haiti. Nonetheless, as Lang points out, Hamilton's actions and thoughts reveal both his suspicions of revolutionary France and his indirect efforts to aid the creation of an independent Haiti. Lang also concludes that Hamilton's behavior toward the Saint-Domingue revolution, including his recommendation that Haiti adopt a lifelong executive and a military government, "makes clear that enthusiasm for republican government . . . must be tempered by knowledge that it may not be appropriate in all circumstances." Hamilton's "realist" approach to the Saint-Domingue revolution, Lang notes, ought to be one of the Hamiltonian legacies with which modern diplomats and politicians grapple as they ponder America's role in international affairs.

While Lang suggests that foreign policy specialists could benefit from an engagement with Hamilton's foreign policy legacy, Peter McNamara's essay directly confronts the ways twentieth- and twenty-first-century policy makers have attempted to use other aspects of Hamilton's legacy. He critically examines Herbert Croly's influential book *The Promise of American Life* (1909) and contrasts Croly's Hamilton with Hamilton himself. Croly believed that Hamilton's great insight was the notion of a "national principle." Hamilton perceived how an energetic national government could, through legislation and policy, address vital national interests. But Croly, according to McNamara, criticized Hamilton for fearing democracy and for focusing on "institutional" devices to secure republicanism rather than concentrating on, as McNamara puts it, "the deeper political task of shaping the characters of citizens." McNamara argues that Croly's public philosophy proposed "to revive the idea of cultivating civic virtue as the central goal of political life." Croly thus envisioned a public philosophy

that could utilize "Hamiltonian means to Jeffersonian ends." A democratized but energetic national government, Croly believed, could advance the cause of progressive politics. McNamara demonstrates, however, that "Croly too hastily assumed that Hamiltonian methods or means might be decoupled from Hamiltonian ends or goals." Along the same lines as Shain and Sheehan, McNamara argues that Hamilton rejected the idea that virtue could provide a sufficient basis for modern republicanism. Instead, like Martin, McNamara points out that Hamilton chiefly sought to cultivate the people's confidence, not their virtue. And since Hamilton stated that the "people's confidence in and obedience to government" were directly proportional to the "goodness or badness of its administration," the key to a successful national government was not how democratic it was but how effectively it identified the common good and acted in pursuit of it. Croly, and other twentieth-century progressives, McNamara contends, failed to recognize that "Hamilton's 'national principle' encompassed within it both ends and means, and thus Hamiltonian means are not simply extendable or transferable to non-Hamiltonian ends." McNamara concludes by suggesting that the dramatic twentieth-century expansion of government programs—an example of utilizing "Hamiltonian means"—has led the "public to question the effectiveness of government" and to lose confidence in it, the antithesis of "Hamiltonian ends." Attempts like Croly's to use Hamilton's legacy require policy makers to consider "precisely the very idea of Hamiltonian 'means' as well as the original ends to which they were directed." Only then can we determine how "Hamiltonianism" might still function as an American public philosophy.

In the book's epilogue, John Patrick Diggins contemplates the legacy of Hamilton for one profoundly influential American: Abraham Lincoln. Diggins challenges the long-held tendency to identify Abraham Lincoln with Thomas Jefferson and Jeffersonian doctrines. Instead, Diggins argues, "Lincoln's political mind and the values he stood for . . . place him closer to Alexander Hamilton and the values he expressed and the vision he had for America." Both Hamilton and Lincoln emerged from poor backgrounds, "were nationalists at periods in American history when most loyalties were local and regional," and abhorred slavery. Their mutual abhorrence of slavery derived from both their shared vision of "an economic system open to all" and their understanding that man was "an economic creature and a social animal, determined by interest and desiring distinction." Hamilton and Lincoln "both looked to ambition as the dri-

ving force that makes a difference in life," and they sought to help shape a society and government that rewarded healthy ambition even as it checked overweening ambition that threatened stability and opportunity. Lincoln, Diggins contends, "shared Hamilton's dream of a republic of workers and entrepreneurs, a culture that rewarded ambition and extended to people of all colors the right to rise." In their commitment to a society that allowed all to rise as both of them had, Hamilton and Lincoln looked forward to and encouraged the development of modern, capitalist America. And in "upholding the authority of the nation-state against the doctrine of state sovereignty and secession," Lincoln, Diggins concludes, boldly took "his stand with Hamilton against Jefferson and the Jeffersonian tradition." Lincoln, Diggins suggests, helped extend and expand Hamilton's legacy and, by doing so, made America more firmly "Hamilton's republic."

The essays in this volume do not resolve all the debates that surround Hamilton and his legacies. Nor do they clear away all the shadows that obscure the face of our most elusive founder. Scholars will continue to contest the nature of Hamilton's republicanism, the extent of his elitism, his commitment to equality, and his legacies to the new nation. But these excellent essays do help us both see the man more clearly and appreciate his centrality to any understanding of the nature of the Founding Era. Hamilton's life and legacies, as much as those of any other founder, make us ponder what America was, is, and should be. And that is the legacy of which he would be proudest. This volume powerfully demonstrates that we can benefit from his legacy only by trying to see him clearly and by engaging critically his still compelling thoughts about the nature and meaning of the republic to which he devoted his life.

NOTES

1. Harold C. Syrett et al., ed. *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton,* 27 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961–87), hereinafter *PAH.* The *PAH* do not include Hamilton's legal papers. They are located in Julius Goebel, Jr., and Joseph H. Smith, eds., *The Law Practice of Alexander Hamilton,* 5 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press for William Nelson Cromwell Foundation, 1964–81).

2. The biographical literature on Hamilton is enormous. For thoroughness, see Broadus Mitchell's two-volume study, *Alexander Hamilton: Youth to Maturity, 1755–1788* (New York: Macmillan, 1957), and *Alexander Hamilton: The National Adventure, 1788–1804* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), and Ron Chernow, *Alexander*

Hamilton (New York: Penguin Press, 2004). Other important biographies include John C. Miller, *Alexander Hamilton: Portrait in Paradox* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), Forrest McDonald, *Alexander Hamilton: A Biography* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), and Richard Brookhiser, *Alexander Hamilton: American* (New York: Free Press, 1999).

3. For Adams's comment, see Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 12 July 1813 in Lester J. Cappon, ed., *The Adams-Jefferson Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 354. For Ames, see his eulogy of Hamilton, "A Sketch of the Character of Alexander Hamilton," in Seth Ames, ed., *Works of Fisher Ames,* 2 vols. (Boston, 1854; reprint, edited and enlarged by W. B. Allen, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1984), I, 510–519.

4. Stephen F. Knott, *Alexander Hamilton and the Persistence of Myth* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002).

5. *PAH,* 25:89, letter to William Jackson, 26 August 1800. This fascinating letter constitutes Hamilton's most extensive commentary on his family background.

6. The most recent and judicious discussion of Hamilton's youth is Chernow, *Hamilton,* 7–40.

7. Hamilton focused especially on arguing against the Trespass Act, which permitted individuals who had fled New York City when the British captured it to sue Loyalists who had occupied their property during the period of British control.

8. For more on Hamilton's role in the Annapolis and Philadelphia conventions, see Mitchell, *Hamilton: Youth to Maturity,* 356–413; and Chernow, *Hamilton,* 222–242.

9. The authorship of a number of the *Federalist Papers* remains in dispute. For the latest effort to determine who wrote which numbers, see Robert Scigliano's introduction to The Modern Library's edition of *The Federalist* (New York: Random House, 2000).

10. On Hamilton's role in the creation of the *Federalist Papers,* see Mitchell, *Hamilton: Youth to Maturity,* 414–425; and Chernow, *Hamilton,* 243–269. See also the essay by Barry Shain in this volume.

11. The best discussion of Hamilton's career as Secretary of the Treasury is McDonald, *Hamilton.* On the dinner compromise, see Jacob E. Cooke, "The Compromise of 1790," *William and Mary Quarterly* 28 (1971), 629–648, and Joseph J. Ellis, *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 48–80.

12. On Hamilton and the Society for the Establishment of Useful Manufactures, see Chernow, *Hamilton,* 370–388. Although the society failed during Hamilton's life, Paterson did become a center of early American manufacturing by the 1840s.

13. There exists a voluminous secondary literature on the first American party system. See Stanley Elkins and Eric McKitrick, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788–1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 257–488,

for a thorough overview. See also the essays by James Read, Robert McDonald, Colleen Sheehan, and Robert W. T. Martin in this volume.

14. On the Whiskey Rebellion, see Thomas Slaughter, *The Whiskey Rebellion: Frontier Epilogue to the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). On Hamilton's role, see Chernow, *Hamilton,* 468–481.

15. On the political and military developments of the later 1790s and Hamilton's relation to them, see Chernow, *Hamilton,* 546–602; and Mitchell, *Hamilton: The National Adventure,* 423–487.

16. On the Hamilton/Adams feud, see Chernow, *Hamilton,* 592–629; and David McCullough, *John Adams* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 549–552. Hamilton's efforts to influence the House vote for president proved futile. Federalists continued to support Burr over Jefferson. See Elkins and McKitrick, *Age of Federalism,* 746–750.

17. On Hamilton and slavery, see James Oliver Horton, "Alexander Hamilton: Slavery and Race in a Revolutionary Generation," *New-York Journal of American History* 65 (Spring 2004), 16–24; and Chernow, *Hamilton,* 210–216.

18. Hamilton to Gouverneur Morris, 29 February 1802, *PAH* 25: 544. For more on Philip Hamilton's death, see Chernow, *Hamilton,* 650–655. Hamilton's daughter Angelica suffered a mental breakdown following her brother's death and never recovered.

19. On Hamilton and the Croswell case, see Goebel, ed., *Law Practice of Hamilton,* 1:775ff; Chernow, *Hamilton,* 667–671; and Robert W. T. Martin's essay in this volume. Many praised Hamilton's argument before the Supreme Court as one of his greatest feats of oratory and legal reasoning. For more on early American libel law, see Robert W. T. Martin, *The Free and Open Press: The Founding of American Democratic Press Liberty, 1640–1800* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

20. The remarks attributed to Hamilton derived from a letter from Charles D. Cooper that appeared in the April 24, 1804, edition of the *Albany Register.* Burr included Cooper's letter in a June 18, 1804, letter to Hamilton that initiated the correspondence that led to the duel. For that letter see Joanne Freeman, ed., *Alexander Hamilton: Writings* (New York: Library of America, 2001), 1008–1010.

21. The Burr-Hamilton duel has produced a vast literature. See Joanne Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 159–198; Freeman, "Dueling as Politics: Reinterpreting the Burr-Hamilton Duel," *William and Mary Quarterly* 53 (April 1996), 289–318; and W. J. Rorabaugh, "The Political Duel in the Early Republic: Burr v. Hamilton," *Journal of the Early Republic* 15 (1995), 1–23. For more on the relations between Burr and Hamilton, see Thomas Fleming, *Duel: Alexander Hamilton, Aaron Burr, and the Future of America* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), and Arnold A. Rogow, *A Fatal Friendship: Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999).

22. Douglass Adair, "Fame and the Founding Fathers," in Trevor Colbourn, ed.,

Fame and the Founding Fathers: Essays by Douglass Adair (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974), 3–36, quotation from 14.

23. Michael Lind, *Hamilton's Republic: Readings in the American Democratic Nationalist Tradition* (New York: Free Press, 1997).

24. The exhibit, and its title, elicited criticism, as does anything regarding Hamilton. See Edward Rothstein, "Our Father the Modernist," *New York Times,* September 10, 2004; and Mike Wallace, "That Hamilton Man," *New York Review of Books* 52 (February 10, 2005).

25. On the question of whether one should treat Publius as a single author, see George W. Carey, "Publius—A Split Personality?" *Review of Politics* 46 (January 1984), 5–22; and Alpheus Thomas Mason, "The Federalist: A Split Personality," *American Historical Review* 57 (April 1952), 625–643.