

HISTORY HAS ITS EYES ON *HAMILTON*:  
AN ANALYSIS OF HOW *HAMILTON: AN AMERICAN MUSICAL*  
CHANGED BROADWAY AND SOCIETY

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## Abstract

This paper analyzes the ways in which *Hamilton: An American Musical* impacted both Broadway and society. When *Hamilton* premiered on Broadway in 2015, it quickly became a massive phenomenon, one that had a major impact on Broadway itself and on society at large. The show's use of color-conscious casting and unique hip-hop style drew in audiences that would not otherwise be drawn to Broadway. The Original Cast's demand for royalties also had a hand in impacting Broadway's finances and inspiring actors to strike. Additionally, Lin-Manuel Miranda made it a priority to involve the show in education, launching the EduHam program and significantly impacting American education, as well as the show's political subject matter leading to many political discussions after its release.

This study outlines the specific ways that *Hamilton* affected Broadway and American society. By combining research on the direct impact the play had on Broadway, the creation of the EduHam program, the musical's impact on social and political arenas, and a survey conducted at Rhode Island College, it argues that no matter one's personal feelings about the show, there is no denying the reach and impact of *Hamilton*, even beyond Theatre business and culture.

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2016, it was nearly impossible to ignore the phenomenon that was the musical *Hamilton*. The show was popular in the theatre community, yes, but it stretched beyond that, even charting at number three on the Billboard 200, which is the highest charting of a cast album since 2011<sup>1</sup>. It is mentioned in mainstream media, including twice in *The Good Place*. The first mention is in season one, when the character “Michael” references the show as an example of banter commonly heard at brunch and says “You haven’t seen *Hamilton*?” as if surprised. The second is when the character “Janet” declares that they have tickets to see the show and mentions Original Cast member Daveed Diggs by name. It is also mentioned in John Mulaney’s Netflix special *Kid Gorgeous at Radio City*, in which he references the show during a bit comparing Donald Trump being the president to a horse being loose in the hospital. In this comparison, he makes a joke about “the horse” i.e. Trump, saying that he “fired the horse catcher,” and Mulaney’s response is that this should not be allowed no matter who the horse is and that he does not “remember that in *Hamilton*.”

These references to the show require not only knowledge of the existence of *Hamilton* as a whole, but also of its success, of its subject matter, and even some knowledge on the people involved in the show. These jokes are not funny if you have never heard of *Hamilton* - and yet all of them were able to land with their mainstream audience. This speaks to how widely known *Hamilton* has become and how popular it is even outside of theatre spaces.

Beyond these references in popular media, *Hamilton* sparked numerous conversations about music and diversity due its casting of almost entirely actors of color, as well as its choice

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Grein, “Before You Watch ‘Hamilton’ on Disney+, First Catch Up on 10 Chart & Award Records the Show Has Set,” (BillboardPro; 30 June 2020).

to stray from typical Broadway music in the use of hip hop and rap as its main mode of storytelling. *Hamilton* was different from anything Broadway had seen before, and while these bold choices could have led to the show failing, as many Broadway shows do, it ended up leading to the exact opposite. *Hamilton* reached incredible success and is still being discussed today, either in praise or criticism, nine years after its premiere on Broadway. There is no denying the reach that this musical has had, and with that, the ways that it had an impact on Broadway, as well as on US society at large. My goal in this thesis is to analyze the specific impact that *Hamilton* has had both in and outside of the theatre industry, specifically in terms of casting, music, finances, and on society as a whole.

## IMPACT OF CASTING

Before I discuss the impact of *Hamilton*'s casting on industry casting practices, it is important to note that I am white and therefore do not face the same struggles as people of color when it comes to casting opportunities, or how they are treated by society in general. My goal in this piece is not to speak over or for people of color, but to observe and analyze the effect that the specific casting choices of *Hamilton* has had on the theatre industry and how it was received by its audience.

One way that *Hamilton* stands apart from many other Broadway musicals is in its cast. Despite the show being about an historically white group of people, the Founding Fathers of the United States, the cast is made up nearly entirely of non-white actors. Not only is this rare for Broadway shows, as many are made up of majority or all-white casts, but it is not unheard of for actors of color to be denied roles specifically because of their race, especially in cases like *Hamilton* where the characters are white historical figures and producers want to keep the show "historically accurate." *Hamilton*, however, makes a point to cast Black and Latinx actors into the roles of white historical figures, and it was, indeed, one of the reasons why Lin-Manuel Miranda wrote the show<sup>2</sup>.

### The Choice to Use Actors of Color

The choice in casting non-white actors to play the roles of white Founding Fathers was a deliberate choice on the part of Lin-Manuel Miranda. Miranda has said that he became a

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<sup>2</sup> Kylie Umehira, "All Hammed Up: How *Hamilton*: An American Musical Address Post-Racial Beliefs," (*Journal of the CAS Writing Program*; no. 9, 2017), 104.

playwright because there were not any parts for him when he auditioned for shows<sup>3</sup>. Before *Hamilton*, he also wrote a show called *In the Heights*, which depicts the Latinx community in Washington Heights in New York City. This show, as well as *Hamilton*, opened doors for actors of color on Broadway, and it also helped to broaden and expand Broadway's audience demographic. Having given Black and brown people a way to relate to the stories being told, more people of color explored ways to see the play.

Miranda says that he chose Hamilton's story because it reminded him of his father<sup>4</sup>, and because it paralleled the immigrant stories of the people in his childhood community<sup>5</sup>. In using Alexander Hamilton's story and having a Latino actor play him, Miranda gives a voice to modern day immigrants and people of color, reminding them that the United States is their country as well<sup>6</sup>. Hamilton's status as an immigrant is brought up multiple times by other characters throughout the show, often as an opportunity to discredit him in some way. This parallels the lives of immigrants today. Political discourse within the US today often targets immigrants - namely immigrants of color and specifically Mexican immigrants. Donald Trump's determination to build a wall across the Mexican border during his presidency is proof of this. There is a lot of political rhetoric surrounding Mexican immigrants' legal status, as well as the recurring claim that they are taking the jobs of "real Americans." Yet, the show ultimately shows support for immigrants like Hamilton in not only having him be the central character but also in showing his successes, which are further articulated in lines such as "Immigrants, we get the job

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<sup>3</sup> Heather S. Nathans, "Crooked Histories: Re-Presenting Race, Slavery, and Alexander Hamilton Onstage," (*Journal of the Early Republic*; vol. 37, no. 2, 2017), 278.

<sup>4</sup> Rebecca Mead, "All About the Hamiltons," (*The New Yorker*; 2 February 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Ariana Quiñónez, "The cultural significance of 'Hamilton's' diverse cast," (*Hypable*; 10 October 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Mead.

done,” from “The Battle of Yorktown.” This idea reflects the experience of many modern day immigrants, including Miranda’s own father<sup>7</sup>.

Another thing that the choice in casting did was allow Black and brown people to see themselves in a history from which they had long been erased. In Western history, but especially in US history, the contributions of Black and brown people have long been negated or omitted<sup>8</sup>. Despite making many contributions to America as it is today, they rarely see recognition for it in the history books. For instance, up until recently, students were not taught about the Tuskegee Airmen, who were a group of African American military pilots who made a number of contributions during World War II<sup>9</sup>. Or, in the context of the Revolutionary Era, there are a number of Black heroes that fought and died during the American Revolution, like Crispus Attucks or Salem Poor, whose names are rarely mentioned in the history books<sup>10</sup>.

The choice in casting the characters in *Hamilton* as actors of color makes the statement that anyone is allowed to tell the story of their country, and that their voices are just as important. It also helps to bring attention to the role that Black people played in the founding of the United States. Oskar Eustis, who is the artistic director of the Public Theater in New York City, said that in using Black and brown actors to tell the story of Alexander Hamilton, Miranda is saying “This is our country. We get to lay claim to it.”<sup>11</sup> In this way, *Hamilton* exemplifies the need for racial representation in American media, especially in narratives from which they have traditionally been excluded<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Loren Kajikawa, “‘Young, Scrappy, and Hungry’: *Hamilton*, Hip Hop, and Race,” (*American Music*; vol. 36, no. 4, 2018), 480.

<sup>8</sup> Nathans, 275.

<sup>9</sup> Nationalww2museum.org, “The Tuskegee Airmen: The African American Pilots of World War II,” (Accessed 4 April 2024).

<sup>10</sup> Colette Coleman, “7 Black Heroes of the American Revolution,” (*HISTORY*; 26 July 2023).

<sup>11</sup> Kajikawa, 471.

<sup>12</sup> Umehira, 108.



Another way this message can be seen is in the musical genre chosen for the show.

*Hamilton* is commonly referred to as a hip hop and rap musical, both genres which have been invented and dominated by Black people. Daveed Diggs, who originally played Marquis de Lafayette and Thomas Jefferson, was even a successful rapper before joining the show<sup>13</sup>.

*Hamilton* is not just a rap musical about the Founding Fathers - it is the story of white US history told by the people that have always been excluded from it, using their own form of storytelling.

## Historical (In)accuracies

*Hamilton* is part of a larger subgenre of musicals called History Musicals. When it comes to musicals like these, writers have to make the tough decision regarding when to stick to historical accuracy and when to change things for the sake of the plotline<sup>14</sup>. In the case of *Hamilton*, the play roots itself in history by using real historical documents and drawing heavily from Robert Chernow's biography of Alexander Hamilton<sup>15</sup>. However, it also deviates significantly from acknowledged history in its music style, choreography, and in the casting of actors of color in the roles of the white Founding Fathers<sup>16</sup>. The show's use of non-white actors, however, can be seen as a way to make visible the contributions of Black people in American history, which is rarely recognized by larger society<sup>17</sup>.

While *Hamilton* does have a number of ties to real history, the musical has also gotten the attention of many historians who have had their complaints about the show's historical accuracy.

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<sup>13</sup> Clay Oxford, "Broadway Goes Mainstream (Again)," (*Harvard Political Review*; 6 June 2019).

<sup>14</sup> Elissa Harbert, "*Hamilton* and History Musicals," (*American Music*; vol. 36, no. 4, 2018), 418.

<sup>15</sup> Harbert, 418.

<sup>16</sup> Harbert, 418.

<sup>17</sup> Patricia Herrera, "Hamilton, Democracy, and Theatre in America," (*HowlRound*; 13 May 2016).

Specifically, historians commented on the fact that slavery was heavily downplayed in the show and was only really brought up in order to praise specific characters, like Hamilton himself, for being anti-slavery<sup>18</sup>. (This is rather ironic as well, considering that Hamilton was not nearly as much of an abolitionist as the musical may have led you to believe. Alexander Hamilton actually purchased, owned, and sold slaves<sup>19</sup>.) Miranda and the actors, however, insist that the show does address the issue of slavery and condemn it<sup>20</sup>. In the musical sequence “Cabinet Battle #1”, Hamilton calls out Thomas Jefferson for using slave labor to boost the south’s economy. In the song “My Shot” John Laurens declares that “we’ll never be truly free, until those in bondage have the same rights as you and me.” Laurens also states in the song “Stay Alive” that he and Hamilton “write essays against slavery.” It should also be noted that while it did not make the final cut of the musical, the topic of slavery was originally given an entire song called “Cabinet Battle #3,” which was featured on “The Hamilton Mixtape.” In this song Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson debate over ending slavery in the United States. Whether or not this is actually an argument to be used for or against the current production’s handling of the issue of slavery is up for debate, as while it does address a lot of the complaints about the way slavery is handled in the play, it never actually made it to the stage.

Another error that has been noted by historians is that despite the cast being almost entirely actors of color, there are not actually any *characters* of color that play a central role in the show. During the Revolutionary Era, about 14% of New York City’s population was African Americans, most of which were enslaved, and in 1/5 of the city’s white households, there was at least one slave<sup>21</sup>. Despite this, only one character of color exists in the show: in the number

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<sup>18</sup> Lyra D. Monteiro, “Review Essay: Race-Conscious Casting and the Erasure of the Black Past in Lin-Manuel Miranda’s *Hamilton*,” (*The Public Historian*; vol. 38, no. 1, 2016), 95.

<sup>19</sup> Umehira, 106.

<sup>20</sup> Monteiro, 96.

<sup>21</sup> Monteiro, 93.

“What Did I Miss?” an ensemble member appears as Sally Hemings, who was one of Jefferson’s slaves, for only a few bars<sup>22</sup>. In fact, the show actively erases slave characters from the show, which is evident in lines like “no one else was in the room where it happened” which appeared in a scene where Jefferson, Madison, and Hamilton negotiated policy. Historically, all of these men had slaves that were likely serving them during the dinner<sup>23</sup>. Even more explicitly, the show completely erases the role of Cato, who was Hercules Mulligan’s slave. Cato aided Mulligan in spying on the British government<sup>24</sup>. The erasure of this specific character is especially noticeable not only because of how central the character of Hercules Mulligan is in the first act of *Hamilton*, but also because he has a entire verse dedicated to how he spied on the British government in “Yorktown (The World Turned Upside Down).” The song contains no mention of Cato.

With a cast filled with Black actors and for a show geared toward inclusivity, the lack of acknowledgement of slavery and slaves begs the questions as to why it was excluded from the narrative. One possible explanation is that putting more focus on slavery than they did in the musical would change the focus of the narrative, especially when one considers the fact that Hamilton himself was a slave owner and he is meant to be the hero of the show. Another possible explanation is that including actual slave characters would open an entirely new and complicated challenge to the established narrative. Would the actors playing the slaves also be Black, and how would the portrayal of Black people owning other Black people on stage come across to an American audience? Or, would the slaves be white in order to further flip the script, and how would that be received by white audience members seeing that? There are a number of reasons as to why Miranda and the creative team may have chosen not to include slave characters in the

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<sup>22</sup> Monteiro, 93.

<sup>23</sup> Umehira, 106.

<sup>24</sup> Monteiro, 95.

show, but the near complete exclusion of them leads to almost every character in the show being historically white.

### ***Is Hamilton Really Inclusive?***

Given the way that the musical downplays slavery and erases characters of color, this has caused many people to question whether or not the musical itself is inclusive or not. While the actors on the stage are almost entirely actors of color, the show focuses on the white Founding Fathers and does not acknowledge the contributions of Black people during the Revolutionary Era<sup>25</sup>. The advertising for the show even aided in this erasure, as the show was heavily advertised by saying that it was a “story of America then, told by America now.” In framing the show this way, it implies that people of color either did not exist in America at the time or or that they did not contribute to the Revolutionary Era, both things that are not true<sup>26</sup>.

Furthermore, while the show does mention slavery, there is no mention of the violence perpetrated against Native Americans that was taking place during this time. It should also be noted that there are no Native American cast members in the Original Broadway Cast, which begs the question of what roles they might play and what those choices might imply<sup>27</sup>. In the case of the Schuyler sisters, this question is especially important, as their father, Philip Schuyler’s wealth came from the appropriation of Native American land<sup>28</sup>.

Aside from the erasure of the struggles and contributions of Black and brown people in the past, the show also implies that those struggles do not exist today, either, with its investment in the “American Dream.” Part of this “Dream” is the belief that if you work hard enough, you

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<sup>25</sup> Monteiro, 90.

<sup>26</sup> Monteiro, 93.

<sup>27</sup> Kajikawa, 481.

<sup>28</sup> Kajikawa, 481.

will succeed, which erases the systematic disadvantage that marginalized groups have always, and still do, have<sup>29</sup>. For example, one could surmise that Hamilton was only able to “write his way out” of everything due to the fact that he had white privilege. Black and brown people back then and still today face obstacles in personal, professional, and political spaces due to the color of their skin, which are struggles that Hamilton and his peers, as well as white people today, do not face<sup>30</sup>.

Ishmael Reed has been one of the most outspoken critics of *Hamilton*. Reed is a writer most famous for his satirical work, and his response to *Hamilton* resulted in a two-act play entitled *The Haunting of Lin-Manuel Miranda*. The play takes the structure from *A Christmas Carol* and portrays Lin-Manuel Miranda being visited by the ghosts of slaves, Native Americans, an indentured white servant, and Harriet Tubman. It portrays Miranda as being gullible and incapable of fact-checking while also giving a lot of history lessons to correct Miranda’s work<sup>31</sup>. The play was written not even a year after *Hamilton*’s release and there was a staged reading of it that took place at the Nuyorican Poets Cafe<sup>32</sup>. Even beyond the play he wrote, Reed has openly criticized the show many times, claiming that Miranda was smoothing over Hamilton’s ownership of slaves and his involvement in the genocide of Native Americans. He also stated that the actors must not know about Hamilton’s history, otherwise they would not have participated in the show<sup>33</sup>.

Essentially, while Miranda’s goal in writing the show was to provide inclusion where there had been none, it might be the case that he inadvertently participated in exclusion as well.

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<sup>29</sup> Monteiro, 96.

<sup>30</sup> Umehira, 105.

<sup>31</sup> Hua Hsu, “In ‘The Haunting of Lin-Manuel Miranda,’ Ishmael Reed Revives an Old Debate,” (*The New Yorker*; 9 January 2019).

<sup>32</sup> Hsu.

<sup>33</sup> Hsu.

To quote Loren Kajikawa, who wrote about the show in *American Music*'s 36th volume, "Even a musical that casts the descendants of slaves as white Founders might be participating in other forms of exclusion."

## Has Anything Really Changed?

With the show having premiered on Broadway almost nine years ago now, the question must be asked as to whether or not the casting in *Hamilton* actually changed anything for actors of color in the Broadway space. Following *Hamilton*'s release, the next two years on Broadway featured much whiter casts, and Miranda himself says that the show, and even the 2015-2016 Broadway season as a whole, was an accident of its time, with shows like *The Color Purple* and *Shuffle Along* also premiering in the same season<sup>34</sup>. There was also not a significant change in minority representation and recognition compared to past years, with 95% of all Tony Award winners being white<sup>35</sup>.

One could also argue that the show and its casting has fed into the belief that we live in a post-racial society, meaning that there are no barriers left for people of color and they are now on an equal playing field, an idea that is simply not true<sup>36</sup>. The very fact that *Hamilton* casting has to be labeled as "diverse" supports this, as pieces of art are never identified by the artist's race if they are white. This in itself allows art created by or featuring minorities to be "othered."<sup>37</sup>

Essentially, while racial barriers are changed and being interrogated more, they have not dissolved completely since *Hamilton*'s release and still greatly impact the work and careers of

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<sup>34</sup> Umehira, 107.

<sup>35</sup> Umehira, 107.

<sup>36</sup> Umehira, 103.

<sup>37</sup> Umehira, 108.

non-white actors<sup>38</sup>. Despite the lack of significant change, however, *Hamilton* has opened the door for many conversations regarding race and inclusivity, even within the show itself and how it could be improved.

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<sup>38</sup> Umehira, 107.

## IMPACT OF MUSIC

One of the reasons that *Hamilton* was able to reach such great success was through the music used in the show. Because of its use of popular music genres – in particular hip hop and rap – it was able to attract a much broader audience, creating a story that resonated with diverse audiences<sup>39</sup>. The choice to use hip hop and rap for the show also had an impact on Broadway. The music often used on Broadway has a very particular style, one that new musicals rarely deviate from in order to avoid alienating their audience and to give them the best chance at success. Deviating from the typical Broadway style is a big risk, as it could be a major reason your musical fails. In the case of *Hamilton*, however, the use of hip hop and rap was a big reason for its success.

### *Hamilton* as a Hip Hop Musical

On May 12th, 2009, Miranda announced during his performance at the White House that he was working on a concept album about Hamilton and performed what would eventually become the opening number of the show. He specifically chose hip hop for the show because he thought that Hamilton was someone that embodied hip hop, saying specifically that Hamilton's story reminded him of Tupac Shakur<sup>40</sup>. The play completely breaks away from the typical musical structure, using hip hop's polysyllabic rhymes, R&B, and clave rhythms with opera and ballads sprinkled in as well.<sup>41</sup> The hip hop sound used in the show is actually very specific to Puerto Ricans from New York (Nuyoricans), who developed an aesthetic through hip hop<sup>42</sup>. With

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<sup>39</sup> Oxford.

<sup>40</sup> Mead.

<sup>41</sup> Herrera.

<sup>42</sup> Herrera.



the show often being referred to as a hip hop musical and hip hop often being understood as being Black and oppositional, Miranda is making a statement with the full title of the show being *Hamilton: An American Musical*. The word “American” is often associated with the white and the mainstream, but in using the word to describe a primarily hip hop musical, Miranda is stating that being American is, in itself, oppositional, as the US was founded by a rebellion. He is also emphasizing the overarching theme of the musical, which is that America also belongs to people of color<sup>43</sup>.

With the music within the show being completely different from that of a typical Broadway show, it allows for a shift in the way we view musical theatre and opens the playing field for people who are not white-representing<sup>44</sup>. It signifies a step forward for Broadway in being able to create stories that resonate with diverse audiences<sup>45</sup>. *Hamilton* itself attracted a broad audience with differing musical tastes, as it appealed to both musical theatre fans that would not consider themselves fans of rap music, and to hip hop fans that would not usually engage with musicals<sup>46</sup>. For musical theatre fans, it allowed them to engage in hip hop without any of the typical “cultural baggage” that is associated with the genre - while there is swearing, it is limited and there is not any explicit sexuality or conspicuous consumption in the show, which are oftentimes the trappings of the genre that people find objectionable<sup>47</sup>. Additionally, getting hip hop fans to engage with the show was a significant achievement because of their reputation to shun works that seem lacking in authenticity<sup>48</sup>. In other words, if hip hop fans feel that the performer is not being truthful in their work, that they have not actually experienced the

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<sup>43</sup> Kajikawa, 468.

<sup>44</sup> Herrera.

<sup>45</sup> Oxford.

<sup>46</sup> Kajikawa, 468.

<sup>47</sup> Kajikawa, 469.

<sup>48</sup> Kajikawa, 468.

struggles they are depicting, they will not listen to it. The modern hip hop and R&B style also allowed audiences to easier connect with the music and to remember it - the songs were catchy, so people listened<sup>49</sup>. Overall, the show's success speaks to hip hop becoming an accepted part of mainstream US culture<sup>50</sup>.

### References to Hip Hop Artists

As previously stated, Miranda has made it known that he believes Hamilton is someone that embodies the spirit of hip hop. Specifically, Miranda has said that Hamilton reminds him of artists like Tupac and Notorious B.I.G due to the way he rose up from difficult circumstances through writing – by using his words<sup>51</sup>. So, it is no surprise that there are many references to hip hop artists sprinkled throughout the show.

The character of Hamilton uses polysyllabic rhymes, which is a style used by rappers Big Pun and Rakim. Hamilton also raps with an elevated flow. Flow, in this context, pertains to the rhyme, rhyme schemes, and rhythms of a rap<sup>52</sup>. An elevated flow uses a more complicated rhyming scheme and more syncopation. The use of these polysyllabic rhymes with an elevated flow was meant to demonstrate that Hamilton had a higher intellect than others and that he was to be feared. In juxtaposition, Laurens, Lafayette, and Mulligan all rap with an “old school” flow with predictable rhymes and beats<sup>53</sup>.

Angelica's raps are similar to strong female MCs (taken from the term “Master of Ceremonies” and an alternative title for rappers), such as Queen Latifah and Lauryn Hill, who

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<sup>49</sup> Harbert, 425.

<sup>50</sup> Kajikawa, 468.

<sup>51</sup> Kajikawa, 472.

<sup>52</sup> Rob Level, “What Is Flow In Rap? An Easy To Understand Breakdown of Rap Flow,” (*Smart Rapper*, 2024).

<sup>53</sup> Kajikawa, 473.

both challenge sexism and misogyny<sup>54</sup>. This holds true for Angelica's character as well, as she specifically mentions in her introduction song "The Schuyler Sisters" that when she meets Thomas Jefferson, she wants to tell him to include women when talking about the equality of "all men."

Aside from the styles referencing hip hop artists, there are also specific lyrics that directly reference famous hip hop and rap lyrics. The line "only nineteen but my mind is older" is a direct quote from Mobb Deep's "Shook Ones, Pt. 2."<sup>55</sup> The use of this line equates the struggle of inner-city youth to Hamilton's struggle: he is a strong individual who overcame poverty, abandonment, and the death of his mother. Another direct reference is the song "Ten Duel Commandments" which was inspired by Notorious B.I.G.'s "Ten Crack Commandments." The countdown in the beginning of the song was even borrowed directly from there and it draws a connection between acting outside the law in the 1990s versus the Founding Fathers acting outside the law in the 1790s<sup>56</sup>

### **Parallels to Hip Hop Culture**

In addition to referencing hip hop artists directly, the show also has many parallels to hip hop culture within it. As previously mentioned, the song "Ten Duel Commandments" is a reference to the "Ten Crack Commandments." In using this reference, it puts the Founding Fathers who participated in duels on the same moral plane as drug dealers laboring in the underground economy in the present day<sup>57</sup>. John Laurens also references the British forces as

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<sup>54</sup> Kajikawa, 472.

<sup>55</sup> Kajikawa, 473.

<sup>56</sup> Kajikawa, 474.

<sup>57</sup> Kajikawa, 474.

“cops,” which can be seen as a parallel to the modern day struggle of marginalized groups with the police<sup>58</sup>.

*Hamilton* also mirrors gendered divisions within mainstream rap music. Male characters like Lafayette, Hamilton, and Washington deliver fast-paced and assertive rapping, which underscores their intellect and valor, while female characters like Eliza Hamilton and Maria Reynolds do not rap. Instead, they sing in an R&B style, underscoring their identification as more traditional female roles. The only exception to this is Angelica, as she does rap<sup>59</sup>. Her engaging in what has been established as a masculine form of expression reinforces the depiction of Angelica as a proto-feminist in the show.

The use of these parallels and references sends a message to hip hop listeners that rappers and their personas are a reflection of American ideals<sup>60</sup>. This aligns well with the overall message of the show: this country also belongs to people of color and they deserve to tell these stories.

## **The Use of Other Music Styles**

While *Hamilton* primarily uses hip hop and rap to tell the story of the Founding Fathers, there are a number of other music styles used within the show. Pretty consistently, however, the music in the show references the Black Atlantic (a term used to describe the fusion of Black cultures with other cultures around the Atlantic), and the choreographer, Andy Blakenbuehler, chose to draw primarily on African American styles of dance<sup>61</sup>. These styles work well within the context of the show as a hip hop musical, as hip hop and rap were genres also created by

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<sup>58</sup> Kajikawa, 473.

<sup>59</sup> Kajikawa, 472.

<sup>60</sup> Kajikawa, 474.

<sup>61</sup> Kajikawa, 469.

Black artists. And with that being the case, it only makes sense that the cast is a majority Black and Latinx actors<sup>62</sup>. In fact, as a whole, the music styles within the show often relate to the actors' ethnicities, while also showcasing where their loyalties lie in regard to the Old or New Guard and to whiteness as a whole: while King George III and Samuel Seabury sing in a style associated with more traditional Broadway tunes, the Founding Fathers rap<sup>63</sup>. This is meant to emphasize the difference between the Founding Fathers and their British enemies<sup>64</sup>. Likewise, this choice emphasizes the fact that while it may seem like *Hamilton* is participating in colorblind casting, it actually falls more in line with color-conscious casting, as the races and ethnicities of the actors are highlighted by the songs they sing<sup>65</sup>.

The musical genres used within the show stretch far and wide, with Washington singing Gospel in "History Has Its Eyes on You," Jefferson singing boogie-woogie in "What'd I Miss," and the Schuyler Sisters singing contemporary R&B in their song ("The Schuyler Sisters"), which is similar to Destiny's Child. "The Room Where It Happens" also includes elements of early jazz. The songs "Aaron Burr, Sir," "Wait For It," and "Non-Stop" all include a rhythmic foundation common in Jamaican dancehall and reggaeton<sup>66</sup>. This type of musical diversity used for the Founding Fathers is also used to contrast the "white"-sounding music that the British sing. "Farmer Refuted" is a great example of this, as while Samuel Seabury's part is underlined with a waltz and harpsichord accompaniment, Hamilton raps over him. This can be seen as pitting the Old World of classical music against the New World of hip hop<sup>67</sup>. Another example of

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<sup>62</sup> Kajikawa, 469.

<sup>63</sup> Monteiro, 91.

<sup>64</sup> Kajikawa, 470.

<sup>65</sup> Monteiro, 91.

<sup>66</sup> Kajikawa, 469.

<sup>67</sup> Kajikawa, 469.

this is seen in “You’ll Be Back” and its reprises, which uses 60s Brit-pop in contrast to the American hip hop of the Founding Fathers<sup>68</sup>.

The show also uses its music to connect itself to the historical time period. This is done, as previously mentioned, in songs like “Farmer Refuted,” which adopts an eighteenth century sensibility by having Samuel Seabury sing old-fashioned lyrics to synthesized harpsichord accompaniment<sup>69</sup>. Alex Lacamoire, who was *Hamilton*’s orchestrator and music director, sampled synthesized instruments from the era in order to tie the show to its historical roots. Additionally, the song “The World Turned Upside Down” was inspired by an eighteenth-century song of the same title that Chernow suggested for Miranda to use in the show. While Miranda did not think the melody served him musically, he decided to keep the title and write his own version<sup>70</sup>.

This use of different genres relies on the audience being familiar with US pop music, but it does not require them to have a deep understanding of hip hop to convey its messages. Because of these different styles, it may seem reductive to refer to the show as a hip hop musical, but Miranda calls attention to and emphasizes the importance of hip hop and rap in the musical<sup>71</sup>. Despite its many styles, *Hamilton* is a hip hop musical above all else.

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<sup>68</sup> Kajikawa, 469.

<sup>69</sup> Harbert, 424.

<sup>70</sup> Harbert, 424-425.

<sup>71</sup> Kajikawa, 470.

## IMPACT ON BROADWAY FINANCES

While *Hamilton*'s uniqueness in terms of casting and music has been the topic of conversation for years, the show's impact on the business of Broadway is more extensive. The musical reached new heights in terms of box office success. Despite not needing any reason to try to fill seats, there was a great effort in order to allow high school kids to see the show for a reduced price. Not only was the show a box office success, but it also had an impact on the way that actors in the theatre industry are paid.

### Background on Broadway Finances

An old industry saying on Broadway is that “you can't make a living, but you can make a killing,” which basically means that you either have great success or you can barely make a living. There is no guarantee of great success<sup>72</sup>. Despite the fact that Broadway draws over 14 million people a year, the shows on Broadway rarely ever achieve great financial success<sup>73</sup>. Around 80% of Broadway producers and investors struggle to recoup their investments and it has been that way since the 1960s<sup>74</sup>. A hit on Broadway is a significant financial event.

Between 1984 and 2019, audience attendance had increased from 6.5 million to 14.7 million, and the average ticket price had grown from \$74 (adjusted for inflation) to \$124. The best seats for a show usually cost at minimum \$200 and can even cost over \$1k, with ticket prices for shows fluctuating on an hourly basis<sup>75</sup>. During the 2018-2019 season, the average Broadway-goer's income was \$261k, which is roughly four times the median household income

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<sup>72</sup> Mark Dent, “The economics of Broadway shows,” (*The Hustle*; 20 November 2021).

<sup>73</sup> Dent.

<sup>74</sup> Dent.

<sup>75</sup> Dent.

in the US.<sup>76</sup> There are efforts to make ticket prices more affordable, as often producers who cannot sell out their shows give tickets to the TDF (Theatre Development Fund), which is a nonprofit that sells Broadway tickets at Times Square and Lincoln Center booths for a 20-50% discount. Around 33% of the people who buy tickets this way are seeing their first Broadway show<sup>77</sup>. Despite these efforts, though, Broadway is simply not affordable for most people. Seeing a Broadway show is a significant expense.

The reason for such high ticket prices is that mounting a Broadway show costs a lot of money, and with the way the business is structured, it is difficult to make that money back. Shows are performed 1-2 times a day in theaters ranging from 500-1700 seats, and this creates supply and demand issues that affect both megahits and less popular shows<sup>78</sup>. Producers typically get capital from investors, who are often theatre fans who understand and are willing to take the financial risk because they appreciate Broadway. This capital is usually in units of \$25k-\$50k<sup>79</sup>. This may sound like a lot on its own, but the upfront cost for a Broadway show, known on Broadway as capitalization, is usually \$3-5 million for plays and \$10-20 million for musicals. This amount can be drastically higher as well, as in the case of *Spider-Man*, which had a capitalization of \$70 million<sup>80</sup>. This cost does not even factor in operating costs, which is what is needed for a show to continue being performed. Operating costs include salaries, theater expenses, advertising, general and administrative costs, theater rent, rentals, departmental expenses, and guaranteed minimum royalties. At minimum, they cost \$200k a week, but are often more than \$500k<sup>81</sup>. Essentially, the goal for a production is to sell enough tickets at a high

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<sup>76</sup> Dent.

<sup>77</sup> Dent.

<sup>78</sup> Dent.

<sup>79</sup> Dent.

<sup>80</sup> Dent.

<sup>81</sup> Dent.



enough price in order to exceed the operating costs. Usually, theater owners and producers will set a stop clause that is slightly below the break-even total, and if the box office gross for the show fails to reach that amount for two consecutive weeks, it could be canceled<sup>82</sup>.

## What Does That Mean for *Hamilton*?

With all of that in mind, *Hamilton* went beyond a megahit on Broadway. Even with tickets costing over \$1k and the Richard Rodgers Theatre having a capacity of over 1,300, there still were not enough seats to meet the demand for the show during the 2016-2017 season. This coming August, *Hamilton* will have been on Broadway for nine years, with no signs of its success slowing down. Over the last nine years, the show has grossed over \$900 million with nearly 4 million people having seen the show and almost 3,000 performances<sup>83</sup>. Even in their lowest week in December of 2021, the show still grossed over \$600k and that is the only week where they ever grossed less than \$1 million<sup>84</sup>. *Hamilton* is one of the highest grossing shows on Broadway of all time, going head to head with shows like *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Wicked*, and *The Lion King*, which have all been on Broadway for over 20 years<sup>85</sup>.

With how much success the show achieved, there was no need to discount tickets or go looking to fill seats when the actors were performing to sold out shows every night. There was still a great effort to raise money to allow low-income students in New York, who were a majority Black and brown, to view the show<sup>86</sup>. This was made possible by the Rockefeller Foundation partnering with the Gilder Lehrman Institution of American History in order to

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<sup>82</sup> Dent.

<sup>83</sup> Broadwayworld.com, "HAMILTON Broadway Grosses," (Accessed 15 March 2024).

<sup>84</sup> Broadwayworld.com

<sup>85</sup> Steven Thomas, "The Highest Grossing Broadway Shows of All Time," (*TopView*; 2024).

<sup>86</sup> Monteiro, 98.

provide low cost tickets to public school students in New York City<sup>87</sup>. These tickets were also a part of a larger program called EduHam, which provided a number of Title I schools in New York with historical resources and helped kids become more invested in learning history, which I will discuss later on.

### ***Hamilton* Inspired Actors to Strike**

Beyond breaking box office records, *Hamilton* also had an impact on the business practices behind Broadway, specifically when it came to actors and what they were getting paid for their part in building a successful show.

A little background on how actors are paid: Actors' Equity Association sets a minimum weekly salary for members and actors receive more if the role is particularly demanding, if the character requires more risk, or if it includes understudying multiple parts<sup>88</sup>. Actors get a higher rate of base pay if they commit to a show for an entire year, often receiving a lump-sum bonus at the end of the year<sup>89</sup>. Occasionally, producers will offer profit participation through "overscale" agreements added to the baseline contract. However, this offer is usually only extended to celebrities that are brought in to boost public interest, which is called stunt casting. This pay increase is rarely ever offered to regular working actors, even ones that have stayed with shows before they even reached Broadway<sup>90</sup>.

Some performers that participate in workshops earn a relatively low salary, but earn a share of the show's weekly profit and have the option to continue their role if the show becomes a full production. Those rules, however, do not apply to developmental labs, which are similar

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<sup>87</sup> Madison.

<sup>88</sup> Meermann.

<sup>89</sup> Meermann.

<sup>90</sup> Meermann.

but do not include potential royalties or the right to first refusal of their roles. Because labs have become more popular, it leaves actors with little room to negotiate a stake in the productions they helped to create<sup>91</sup>. Because of this, original Broadway cast members did not receive a difference in rewards for participating in a widely popular show versus a moderately popular one and unless performers were major stars, they rarely got any portion of the show's profit, no matter how successful<sup>92</sup>.

### **How *Hamilton* Changed Things**

Originally, the cast of *Hamilton* had worked under a modified lab contract that did not grant royalty participation. The original cast members were not happy with this agreement, however, so twenty-two of the original cast members of *Hamilton* wrote a letter to push for a share in the show's profits for the cast members who originated the roles and had stayed with the show since its beginning stages. In April of 2016, the producers came to an agreement that the cast would receive 1% of the show's net profit and 0.33% of the profits from future US productions<sup>93</sup>. While *Hamilton* can be seen as an outlier because of its success, theatre is a collaborative art form, and the performers who helped shape the roles should benefit from it.

It was for this reason, inspired by the success of the cast of *Hamilton*, that Actors' Equity decided to strike in January of 2019<sup>94</sup>. This strike was also a result of Actors's Equity and Broadway League having reached a standoff in contract negotiations, as it had been nearly two years of unsuccessful attempts to negotiate a new contract<sup>95</sup>. After five weeks, Actors' Equity

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<sup>91</sup> Meermann.

<sup>92</sup> Eric Meermann, "Giving Original Cast Members Credit - And Cash," (*Palisades Hudson Financial Group LLC*; 1 March 2019).

<sup>93</sup> Meermann.

<sup>94</sup> Meermann.

<sup>95</sup> Meermann.

and the Broadway League came to an agreement, which ended in allowing actors who take part in a show's early development to split 1% of the show's profits for the first ten years of the run, including money from touring productions, and there was also an increase to base salary for actors participating in developmental labs<sup>96</sup>. In a nutshell, because of *Hamilton* and its actors pushing to earn a percentage of the royalties, all theatre actors now receive a share of the pay for originating roles.

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<sup>96</sup> Meermann.

## IMPACT ON SOCIETY

As already stated numerous times, *Hamilton* was met with massive success. While the show has had a massive impact on Broadway and theatre spaces across America, the show's success spanned far beyond the confines of the theatre industry. In terms of critical recognition, the cast and crew of the show received sixteen nominations for the 2016 Tony awards, winning eleven of those nominations<sup>97</sup>. The show won the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, and Lin-Manuel Miranda, Ron Chernow, and Thomas Kalil all received the 2016 Records of Achievement Award from the National Archives Foundation<sup>98</sup>. Miranda was also awarded a MacArthur Genius Grant, a Washington Book Prize, and a Grammy Award for his work on the show<sup>99</sup>.

The show was further recognized by historical attractions, such as The New York Historical Society creating a series of exhibitions called the *Summer of Hamilton* and Colonial Williamsburg advertising with the line "Be in the room where it REALLY happened."<sup>100</sup> In addition, "The Hamilton Mixtape" was released in 2016 and had popular artists like Sia, Kelly Clarkson, and Chance the Rapper featured on it<sup>101</sup>, further signifying its mainstream success. The show also amassed a cult following, one that was unmatched by any recent Broadway shows<sup>102</sup>. As previously mentioned, a number of historians have commented on the show, which also speaks to its success.

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<sup>97</sup> Madison.

<sup>98</sup> Madison.

<sup>99</sup> Madison.

<sup>100</sup> Madison.

<sup>101</sup> Oxford.

<sup>102</sup> Oxford.

## Historians Respond

In the first section of this thesis, where I discussed the casting impact *Hamilton* had on Broadway, I explained how many historians take issue with historical inaccuracies within the show. Namely, many historians feel as if slavery is downplayed and that it is only mentioned in order to make certain characters look good for being anti-slavery. Historians alike say that it does not display an accurate picture of the slaveholding practices of the main characters, and many believe that the show is far less historiographically progressive than it appears, as the story centers around white men just as most other historical narratives<sup>103</sup>. Two historians, Benjamin Carp and Nancy Isenberg, take issue with the source material as well, as they believe that Chernow's original biography was deeply flawed and hero-worshipping<sup>104</sup>.

Despite the many criticisms in regards to the show's historical accuracy, there are historians that have good things to say about it as well. Joanna Freeman, for example, says that the musical has a lot of history and that it is presented with respect and appreciation. However, she also notes that it erases the complexities and struggles of marginalized people and notes that the absence of the problematic past is part of its appeal<sup>105</sup>. Overall, the fact that *Hamilton* has attracted the attention of so many historians says a lot about the success of the show, and was also what Miranda hoped for when writing it<sup>106</sup>.

## Impact on Education

*Hamilton* also had an impact in terms of education throughout America. In a general sense, the show generated an interest in American Revolutionary history. There are also cultural

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<sup>103</sup> Harbert.

<sup>104</sup> Harbert.

<sup>105</sup> Harbert.

<sup>106</sup> Harbert.

heritage institutions and schoolteachers that have used the show to increase their outreach<sup>107</sup>. On a larger scale, though, there was also an active effort made from the producers of *Hamilton* to help teach history to kids in Title I schools.

In October of 2015, just two months after *Hamilton* originally premiered on Broadway, EduHam was launched<sup>108</sup>. The program was a collaborative effort between Lin-Manuel Miranda, Jeffery Seller (the producer of *Hamilton*), the NYC Department of Education, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History<sup>109</sup>. The program was designed specifically to engage students with American history by using *Hamilton* through providing students with educational resources, opportunities for student performances, and subsidized tickets to *Hamilton*<sup>110</sup>.

From the beginning, Miranda and his father, Luis, both wanted there to be an educational component to the show<sup>111</sup>. Partnering with the Gilder Lehrman Institute was ideal, since their main mission is to promote the knowledge and understanding of American history to the K-12 population. The Institute uses historical documents to help teach American history, which is exactly what they were able to provide to students who participated in the EduHam program<sup>112</sup>.

The way the program works is by providing multiple resources for students to use in order to learn about the founding era. These resources include: study materials such as historical documents, primary sources, and multimedia resources aligning with key themes and moments from *Hamilton*; online access to lesson plans, quizzes, and interactive activities; and integration

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<sup>107</sup> Madison.

<sup>108</sup> Elisa Shoenberger, "EduHam: The Educational Component of *Hamilton: The Musical*," (*Book Riot*; 22 December 2019).

<sup>109</sup> Shoenberger.

<sup>110</sup> Hamiltontickets.org, "Hamilton Education Program (EduHam)," (Accessed 7 November 2023).

<sup>111</sup> Shoenberger.

<sup>112</sup> The Gilder Lehrman Institution, "The impact of the Hamilton Education Program," (Vimeo; 3 April 2018).

with core subjects like history, language arts, and social studies<sup>113</sup>. Using these materials, the students create original projects inspired by the founding era, such as songs, raps, poems, or scenes. These projects are then selected from to be showcased on stage at the Richard Rogers Theater before the students get to watch *Hamilton*<sup>114</sup>. On top of attending a *Hamilton* performance, the students also get the chance to participate in a Q&A session with the cast members of the show<sup>115</sup>.

While the program primarily targeted Title I schools in New York, focusing on reaching students with low-income backgrounds, it eventually expanded to include schools all around the country<sup>116</sup>. It started originally with 20,000 students, and grew to 250,000 by 2020, including 32,000 students in Chicago that participated. In the fall of 2020, EduHam was released online for all schools across the US to be able to participate<sup>117</sup>.

The program had and continues to have a positive impact on young students all across America by making learning history more fun for them and also giving them a way to build their confidence and creativity. It makes history more accessible and relatable to them, while also helping to foster an appreciation and love for theatre and the arts<sup>118</sup> – for many students it allowed them to see live theatre for the very first time<sup>119</sup>. This program did not just have an impact on the younger students, however: many of the teachers involved took away some of the tools and approaches involved in the program and started using them for other projects - including adult level classes<sup>120</sup>. Essentially, the program not only allowed students to learn in a

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<sup>113</sup> Hamiltontickets.org.

<sup>114</sup> Hamiltontickets.org.

<sup>115</sup> Hamiltontickets.org.

<sup>116</sup> Hamiltontickets.org.

<sup>117</sup> Shoenberger.

<sup>118</sup> Hamiltontickets.org.

<sup>119</sup> Shoenberger.

<sup>120</sup> Shoenberger.



new way and enjoy it, but it also taught teachers different ways to approach subjects and will allow for more exciting and inclusive learning environments all across the United States going forward.

## Impact on Politics

Beyond the efforts made toward education, *Hamilton* has also had an impact on the political landscape. At its very core, *Hamilton* is a political piece - not only just by virtue of being a show *about* politics and history, but because it was made by and stars artists of color. It is a diverse work, and diversity is politicized, which makes *Hamilton* an important player in the struggle to define US national identity<sup>121</sup>. *Hamilton* led to a national dialogue surrounding race because of the use of actors of color<sup>122</sup>. The show also continually emphasized the fact that Hamilton was an immigrant, which is not only important for representation, but also had positive effect on Latinx immigrants as it is empowering for them in a time when the political climate is actively against them<sup>123</sup>. For example, as previously mentioned, Trump often promised to build a wall across the Mexican border during his presidency, the political rhetoric surrounding Mexican immigrants' legal status is frequently heated, and connected to the notion that they are taking the jobs of “real Americans.” There is also the common stereotype about Mexican immigrants being drug dealers, which Trump vowed to crack down on.

Aside from simply sparking many conversations and providing representation for people of color, Miranda has also used the attention of *Hamilton* to make political differences as well.

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<sup>121</sup> Kajikawa, 480.

<sup>122</sup> Umehira, 103.

<sup>123</sup> Umehira, 106-107.

Indeed, his appeal to the US Congress to solve the economic crisis in Puerto Rico paralleled Hamilton's efforts to obtain relief support for St. Croix after a disastrous hurricane<sup>124</sup>.

The excitement over the play being a way for marginalized groups to claim their place in the US mirrors the excitement many felt over Barack Obama becoming the first Black president of the US, which was the era when the show was released<sup>125</sup>. The response to the show during the Obama era and the Trump era, however, was dramatically different<sup>126</sup>.

### **Response During the Obama Era**

The Obamas were some of the earliest and biggest celebrities to praise and attend *Hamilton*<sup>127</sup>, which is not much of a surprise with the messaging of the show, and also with Miranda having first announced he was writing the show at the White House in the first year of Obama's presidency. Obama's own story even has parallels with the show, which was likely also part of what drew him to the show. For example, while he may not be an immigrant, Obama's citizenship status was frequently questioned during his campaign and his election, and it was constantly used to try to undermine him, much like Hamilton's actual immigrant status. Obama also used code-switching (the ability to adapt one's language and mannerisms to different contexts) and hip hop references in order to appeal to more voters during his campaign, similar to how Miranda used hip hop in the musical to attract a wider audience. Obama's story, *Hamilton*, and mainstream rap all hold powerful symbols of Blackness and open the door for difficult conversations surrounding the ongoing racial discrimination that exists in America<sup>128</sup>.

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<sup>124</sup> Herrera.

<sup>125</sup> Kajikawa, 476.

<sup>126</sup> Kajikawa, 476-478.

<sup>127</sup> Kajikawa, 477.

<sup>128</sup> Kajikawa, 476-467.

While Obama was a Democrat, during his presidency, *Hamilton* was able to be embraced by both liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans due to its themes of individual effort. The plot of the show and the Founders' myth allows the show to be interpreted in ways that both conservatives and liberals can enjoy. While liberals celebrate the musical for immigrants and people of color being placed in leadership roles, conservatives view it as endorsing the idea that anybody can rise up through hard work. Both of these different views embrace diversity as being a good thing<sup>129</sup>.

### **Response During the Trump Era**

Trump's response to the show was drastically different from Obama's, and it impacted the nation's view of it as well. In November 2016, Mike Pence went to see *Hamilton*, just after Donald Trump had been elected. Brandon Victor Dixon, who was playing Aaron Burr, delivered a message, reading a statement to Pence from the stage detailing how the cast and crew were fearful of where the country may be going after this election and how they feared their rights may no longer be protected<sup>130</sup>. These concerns were completely valid, as Trump's brand of nationalism fears diversity, something that was proven in a study published by *The Nation*, which argued that the fear of diversity is what led many people to vote for Trump<sup>131</sup>.

Despite the audience applauding Dixon's message, Trump demanded an apology on Twitter, claiming that Pence had been harassed at the show<sup>132</sup>. He also bashed the musical and claimed it to be overrated<sup>133</sup>. This response was in stark contrast to Pence's reaction, which was to say, in response to the cast's statement and to boos that had been directed at him, that it was

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<sup>129</sup> Kajikawa, 478.

<sup>130</sup> Kajikawa, 478-479.

<sup>131</sup> Kajikawa, 479.

<sup>132</sup> Kajikawa, 479.

<sup>133</sup> Kajikawa, 479.

“what freedom sounds like.”<sup>134</sup> Pence also stated that he enjoyed the show and that he was not offended by what was said<sup>135</sup>.

With this response in mind and the way that American society was shifting at that time, it is no surprise that this was just around the time where the tide of public opinion turned against *Hamilton*. While there are likely many other factors as well, including a disdain for fandom behavior, it does not seem like a coincidence that many people started to dislike the show and claim it to be overrated around the same time that Trump took over as president and started making very similar statements about the show. While originally, the musical may have seemed like proof of America being a place that accepted diverse voices and uplifted them, Trump’s presidency was proof that this may not be the case. In the era of Trump’s presidency, *Hamilton* seemed a stark reminder that the US still has a long way to go in terms of accepting minorities.

## Survey

In order to get a better gauge on the overall societal impact of *Hamilton*, I decided to conduct a survey here at Rhode Island College in order to see the ways that it impacted the students here. Obviously I wanted to survey the students in the Theatre department, but on top of that, I wanted to survey students within the History, English, Education, and Political Science departments, as they seemed like the most likely outside of Theatre to have their fields of study impacted by the show, given its subject matter.

The questions in the survey included:

1. What is your major?

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<sup>134</sup> Vaughn Hillyard, “Pence on Hamilton Boos: ‘What Freedom Sounds Like,’” (*NBC News*; 20 November 2016).

<sup>135</sup> Amy B Wang, “‘Hamilton’ actor on the cast’s speech for Pence: ‘There’s nothing to apologize for,’” (*The Washington Post*; 21 November 2016).

2. Are you involved in theatre/have you ever been?
3. Have you heard of *Hamilton: An American Musical* before?
4. If so, do you know what it is about?
5. Have you listened to and/or seen it?
6. Can you name any of the Original Cast members of *Hamilton*? If so, please name as many as you can.
7. Do you know who wrote *Hamilton*? If so, please name them.
8. Would you consider your general thoughts on *Hamilton* to be positive or negative?
9. What is your general opinion of *Hamilton* - either the musical itself or the phenomenon that it has become?
10. If at all, how has this musical had an impact on your field of study, your artistic pursuits, your attitude toward the government and society, etc?

The first two questions allowed me to categorize the students in order to see the difference between what those who are involved in theatre and/or are pursuing it as a career had to say, versus what those who had never been involved in theatre or were not pursuing performance careers had to say. Questions 3-7 allowed me to see how much knowledge of the show the students had, regardless of whether or not they had actively chosen to engage with it. The last three questions allowed me to understand how the students felt about the show and how it had personally impacted them - if it had at all.

I would like to note that the results on this survey do not necessarily reflect all college students' views on the show, or even all students at Rhode Island College. This survey was conducted over the course of only a few months and only distributed to a select few classes in the previously mentioned departments. If there was more time to distribute it, I would have loved to

have gotten it to everyone in the aforementioned departments, and even reached out to other colleges in order to get a wider scope. However, the responses I did get were very informative and told me a lot about the impact and reception of *Hamilton* on those that did fill it out. In total, I received 53 responses to this survey, and you can find the in depth results as an appendix at the end of this paper.

### **Analysis of Results**

When starting this survey, there were a number of things that I anticipated from these results, and a lot of them lined up with what the actual results were. There were also a number of results that surprised me. For instance, I anticipated that everyone would have heard of the show before, as there was a period of time when it was pretty much impossible to escape. And while almost everyone said they had heard of the show, there were two people who said they had not. One of these people, however, was able to tell me who wrote the show, which makes me think they may have simply misunderstood the question. The other person actually seemed to have never heard of the show before, as the rest of their answers all aligned with someone that had not. This was a shock to me, as I had expected that no matter what people felt about the show, everyone would have at least heard of it. It is also interesting because while I included the question in the survey purposefully, surveys like this are usually self-selecting, meaning that normally, if you have not heard of the topic being surveyed about, you would not then decide to take the survey. Yet, this respondent did.

Beyond that, I did also predict that most people would be able to identify Lin-Manuel Miranda as both the writer and an Original Cast member of the show, and that most would also be able to describe what the show was about. And while there were many people that were not

able to do any of these things, there were still a significant number that had very basic knowledge of the show in these terms, even if they had never seen it or heard it, and even if they were not involved in theatre at all. These results are further evidence of what I already knew about the reach of the show up until this point - that it was able to get so big that even people who were not seeking to learn about it ended up having a certain amount of knowledge on it simply because of the people around them talking about it.

This brings me to something else about the results that surprised me, which was that many people when asked about how the show impacted them talked about having formed a community in some way through the show – not simply in the sense that people with no interest in the show had friends and family that enjoyed it, though there were people that said things along those lines as well. More interesting, there were people who said the show brought them closer to friends and family: there were people who said they engaged with the play and its music because of their siblings or because they had friends in theatre and that this commonality was able to bring them emotionally closer. There were also people who said that they made new friends purely because of a shared interest in the show.

Similarly, survey respondents often mentioned the *Hamilton* fandom, which was another source of community that people gained from watching the show. However, most people who talked about the fandom spoke negatively of it, either talking about how the show did not deserve the hype or simply that they found the fan culture surrounding the show to be strange. Specifically, two people brought up “Miku Binder Jefferson,” which was a piece of fan art that depicted Thomas Jefferson as portrayed by Daveed Diggs in an alternate universe where the Founding Fathers are queer college students. The drawing was posted by Tumblr user “umbronydraws” and Jefferson was one of many pieces that depicted the Founding Fathers.

However, the Jefferson drawing in particular gained traction and became a popular meme on the internet. In this depiction, the artist drew Jefferson wearing a chest binder with the face of Hatsune Miku printed on it, which is a Japanese voice synthesizer.

This depiction of Jefferson is especially interesting because it mirrors exactly what Lin-Manuel Miranda was doing with *Hamilton* - placing himself and others like him into the roles of Founding Fathers. Miku Binder Jefferson does exactly the same thing, only with queer college students. It shows an investment in the founding of the USA and a desire to be represented in the identity of America. Despite this parallel, many people look down on this depiction and view it as a reason to dislike *Hamilton* as a whole.

What this tells me is that fandom culture in general can sometimes be what turns people off from something, and was likely a contributing factor to what inevitably made *Hamilton* “cringe<sup>136</sup>,” which is what was said a few times about the show in the survey results. Essentially, the show's overwhelming popularity and the ways it inspired so many people creatively is what led to many people in the survey population reacting negatively to the show. They did not approve of the ways in which others expressed the joy the show brought them. Its success ended up fueling the backlash it ultimately received.

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<sup>136</sup> Cringe means to “recoil in distaste” or “embarrassing, awkward” according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary.



## CONCLUSION

When Lin-Manuel Miranda first announced in 2009 that he was working on a hip hop musical about Alexander Hamilton, there was no way of predicting the kind of success that the show was going to receive. While becoming a megahit on Broadway is in and of itself a major feat, the show reached levels of success rarely ever seen before and secured its place in the mainstream cultural conscience.

From the beginning, *Hamilton* was meant to make history and to start conversations. Miranda specifically set out to create roles for BIPOC actors and to give them the chance to tell a story that they have always been erased from. Despite the fact that not much has changed in terms of representation on Broadway since *Hamilton* premiered in 2015, the show was able to do exactly what it set out to do. While not all the conversations surrounding the show are positive and there has been a lot of criticism directed at the show, especially from historians, every conversation has been an important one that needed to be had. Art like this is meant to get you thinking, and every conversation surrounding *Hamilton* and its use of Black and brown actors is proof that the show got people thinking.

The musical also made history with the music used, as it strayed very far from the typical Broadway sound. Instead of appealing to regular Broadway-goers, the show appealed to the general public with its use of hip hop and rap. And while those were the two primary genres used, the music traditions referenced in the show stretch even further with the use of ballads, gospel, jazz, and even making musical references to the time period. Above all else, however, *Hamilton* is a hip hop musical and that fact is part of what fueled its success, especially with mainstream audiences.

The financial impact that *Hamilton* had on Broadway is arguably the easiest to point out, as the way the show handled things made real, physical change on Broadway. After the Original Cast members petitioned for a portion of the royalties of the show, the producers agreed, which ended up setting an example for actors not only on Broadway, but all over America. It ultimately led to Actors's Equity striking and then making a deal with the Broadway league that gave actors who took part in a show's early development to split 1% of the show's profits for the first ten years of the run, including money from touring productions, and also allowed for an increase to base salary for actors participating in developmental labs

Beyond Broadway, however, *Hamilton* was able to have a real effect on education all across the USA through EduHam. While the program originally started out as a way to get tickets to Title I schools in New York City, it has expanded and is now available online for students all over America to participate in. It has had a real impact on students, giving them a fun way to learn history as well as giving their teachers new tactics that they decided to implement into other studies as well.

Even moreso, Miranda made attempts to leverage *Hamilton*'s success in order to get aid to Puerto Rico during their economic crisis. At its very core, *Hamilton* is a political musical and this can be seen in the way that both liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans are able to find things they enjoy about the show. Additionally, the fact that both Obama and Trump had vastly different reactions speaks to the politics in the show as well, with Obama being an early supporter of the show, while Trump heavily criticized it.

With the limits of this thesis being what they are, there are things I would have loved to explore, had I had the time to do so. As previously mentioned, I would have loved to expand the survey outward to reach more people both at Rhode Island College, and in other colleges in order

to properly understand the impact that *Hamilton* may have had on those specific majors. Another subject I would have liked to explore is the *Hamilton* fandom itself, and the way that it shaped not only pop culture through things like the Miku Binder Jefferson meme, but how the show's fandom ultimately impacted the public view of the show itself. I would have also liked to further explore Black theatre and musicals as a whole and how those specifically may have had an impact on *Hamilton* and what it became - and even how *Hamilton* further impacted Black theatre. Another area I would have liked to explore deeper was the impact *Hamilton* had on education even beyond the EduHam program, as well as the way it affected and impacted politics.

No matter your personal feelings about *Hamilton*, there is no denying the impact that the show had on both Broadway and society. While its diverse cast and catchy songs were what ultimately launched its success and are what secured its place in mainstream media, the musical was able to make real change in leveraging its commercial success. *Hamilton*, while being about the history of America, was able to make its own history and stands out as one of the most influential musicals ever mounted on Broadway.

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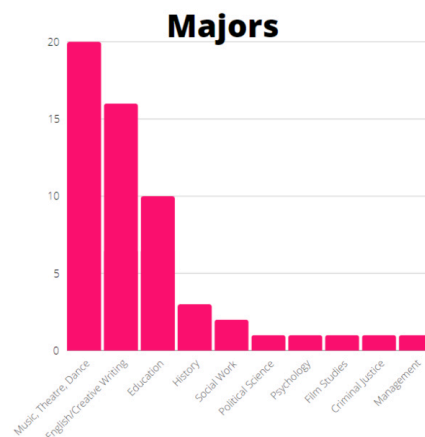
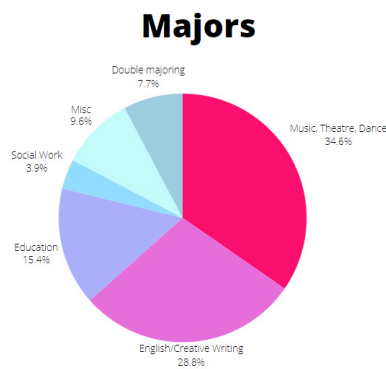
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## Survey Results

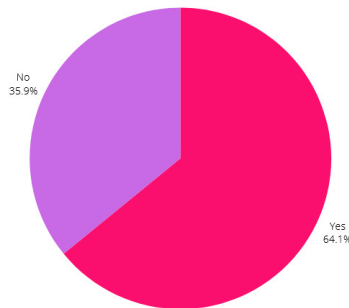
The first question was asking students what their major is. Of the respondents, 37.7% were majoring in Music, Theatre, and Dance (MTD) in some way, 30.2% were majoring in English/Creative Writing, 18.9% were majoring in some form of Education, 5.7% were majoring in History, 3.8% were majoring in Social Work, and 9.4% of the responses were from respondents whose majors did not match with any other respondents, and these were Political Science, Criminal Justice, Film Studies, Management, and Psychology. It should also be noted that 7.6% of the respondents were double majoring, which is why the previous percentages add up to a little over 100% and why it exists as a separate category entirely on the pie chart below. Of those that were double majoring, two were majoring in MTD with one also majoring in Creative Writing, while the other was also majoring in Exercise Science. The remaining two double major respondents were both double majoring in Secondary Education and History. It should also be noted that there was one person that listed a minor, and while this person was majoring in Management, their minor was Dance.



The second question asked about the respondent's involvement in theatre. Of the respondents, 64.2% had been involved in theatre at some point and 35.9% had never been involved in theatre.

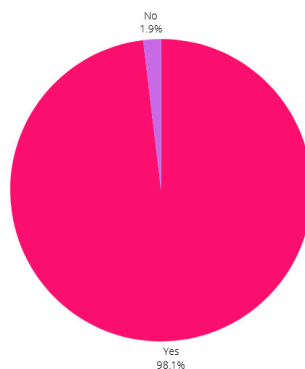


### Involved in Theatre?



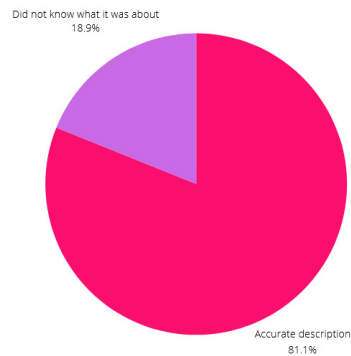
The third question asked if the respondent had ever heard of *Hamilton* before. There were two people that checked the box that they never had before, but one of those respondents was also able to name Lin-Manuel Miranda as who wrote the show. This leads me to believe that the respondent misunderstood the question and had actually heard of the show before, so I included them in with the people that had heard of it. The other respondent that claimed they had not heard of the show before answered the rest of the questions as if they really had not, so I have given them the benefit of the doubt in that they have not.

### Heard of Hamilton?



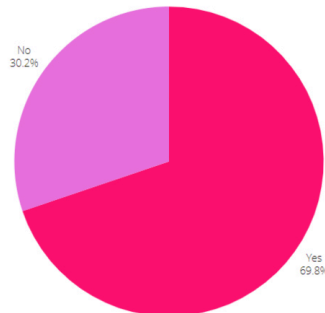
The fourth question asked respondents to give some sort of plot description of the show in order to see if they knew what it was about. Of the respondents, 81.1% were able to give an accurate description, while 18.9% were not.

### Plot Description



The fifth question asked the respondents if they had listened to or seen the show before. Of the respondents, 69.8% stated that they had listened to or seen the show before, while 30.2% stated that they had not done either.

### Listened/Seen It?



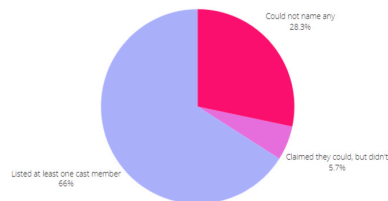
The sixth question asked the respondents if they could name any of the Original Broadway Cast (OBC) members from the show. Of the respondents, 28.3% were unable to name any members of the OBC, 5.7% claimed they could list members but did not list any, and 66% were able to list at least one member of the OBC.

Of those that were able to list OBC members, 22.9% only listed one, 25.7% listed two, 11.4% listed three, 5.7% listed four, 11.4% listed five, 8.6% listed six, 5.7% listed seven, 5.7% listed eight, and there was one person that listed ten OBC members, which was the most listed.

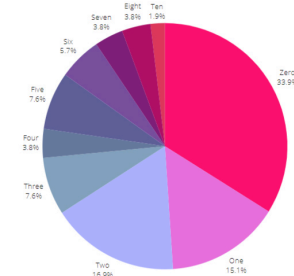
Additionally, almost everyone named Lin-Manuel Miranda aside from one person who listed only Phillipa Soo. Everyone that did list Lin-Manuel Miranda was also able to identify him as the person that wrote *Hamilton*.

Aside from Lin-Manuel Miranda, there were many other OBC members that were frequently listed. Of those that listed OBC members, 45.7% listed Phillipa Soo, 42.9% listed Daveed Diggs, 40% listed Jonathan Groff, 40% listed Leslie Odom Jr., 34.3% listed Anthony Ramos, 17.1% listed Renée Elise Goldsberry, 17.1% listed Christopher Jackson, and 14.3% listed Jasmine Cephas Jones. Okieriete Ono-Adowan and Ariana DeBose were both listed only once, but for DeBose the respondent was unable to name her and only identified her by the joke made by Bella Ramsey at the Golden Globes about her.

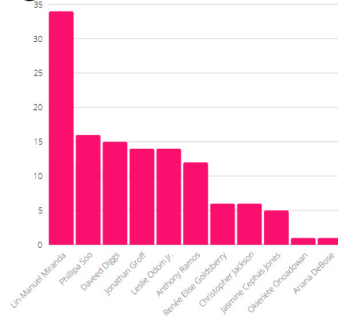
**Original Cast Members Listed**



**Number of Cast Members Listed**

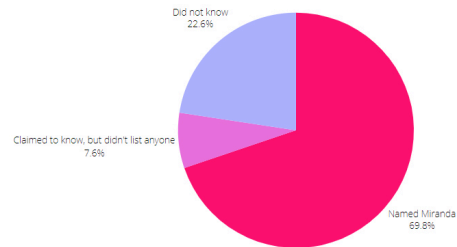


**Original Cast Members Listed**



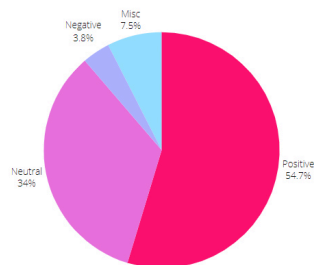
The seventh question asked the respondents to name who wrote *Hamilton*. Of the respondents, 69.8% were able to name Lin-Manuel Miranda, 7.6% claimed they knew who wrote it but did not name Miranda, and 22.6% did not know who wrote the show.

### Name Who Wrote the Show



The eighth question asked the respondents whether their feelings on the show were positive or negative. Of the respondents, 54.7% stated that their feelings on the show were positive, 34% said their feelings on the show were neutral, 3.8% said their feelings were negative, and the remaining 7.5% wrote in their own answers for how the show made them feel. One of these respondents stated they had mixed feelings, another that they were not a rap fan, one that they liked the music and that was it, and one respondent said that they did not know what their feelings on the show were, but that they had heard it was cringe.

### Feelings on the Show



The remaining two questions were long form questions that asked the respondents what their general opinion on *Hamilton* is and if the show had impacted their life at all. With these being entirely opinion-based long form questions, every answer was different. However, there were certain patterns I noticed.

On the ninth question, asking respondents about their general opinion on *Hamilton*, 5.7% of respondents did not answer the question. 69.9% of respondents commented on the show positively overall and 15% stated that they were completely neutral on the show. 16.9% of respondents commented on the phenomenon of the show negatively, stating that the show was overhyped or that they believed it to be cringe. 5.7% of respondents brought up the fact that the cast is a majority of actors of color and 18.9% mentioned how the musical changed and impacted Broadway. 11.3% of respondents mentioned discussing the show with friends or family. 17% of respondents commented on the historical aspect of the show, though there was a divide in whether it was positive or negative - 66.7% of those respondents commented positively, commenting that it made learning history fun or that they believed it to be historically accurate, while 33.3% of those respondents commented negatively, stating that it was glorifying and sanitizing the actions of the Founding Fathers.

On the tenth question, asking respondents if the show had any impact on them, 17% of respondents did not answer this question. While 34% of respondents stated that the show had no impact on them, 22.2% of those respondents were able to list things that entertained them in some way regarding the show - one respondent stated that they enjoyed the show and that it helped them make friends in the theatre world, one stated that they found *Hamilton*'s story to be moving, and two respondents stated that they admired Lin-Manuel Miranda specifically. 20.8% of respondents stated that it impacted their field of study in some way, with 63.6% of these respondents being MTD majors, 18.2% being English/Creative Writing majors, and 18.2% majoring in Education - two of these respondents were also double majoring, one in Creative Writing and MTD, and the other in Secondary Education and History. 11.3% of respondents stated that *Hamilton* got them into musical theatre to some degree - and 66.7% of those

respondents were majoring in MTD. 17% of respondents talked about it impacting their interest in history and/or politics. Lastly, 7.6% of respondents mentioned the cast being a majority of actors of color, with half of those respondents stating that they themselves were people of color and that it inspired them.

## Annotated Bibliography

Dent, Mark. "The economics of Broadway shows." *The Hustle*, 20 November 2021.

<https://thehustle.co/the-economics-of-broadway-shows/>.

This article explains the economics of Broadway, both before, during, and after the pandemic. It helped to give me a better understanding of what it takes for a show to survive on Broadway, what makes it successful, and even details how *Hamilton* specifically has been successful. It put into perspective for me just how successful *Hamilton* truly was in comparison to the average Broadway show.

Grein, Paul. "Before You Watch 'Hamilton' on Disney+, First Catch Up on 10 Chart & Award Records the Show Has Set." *BillboardPro*, 30 June 2020,

<https://www.billboard.com/pro/hamilton-chart-award-records/>.

This article provides a list of *Hamilton*'s successes, such as awards, charting records, and records the show set. It provided me with greater insight into the success that the show reached and the milestones it was able to hit.

Hamiltontickets.org. "Hamilton Education Program (EduHam)." Accessed 7 November 2023.

<https://hamiltontickets.org/guide/education-program-eduham/>.

This website details the EduHam program. It provides a description on what the program is, how it works, and what its goal ultimately was. It gives me a better understanding as to what the program was and how it truly impacted the American education system.

Harbert, Elissa. "*Hamilton* and History Musicals." *American Music*, vol. 36, no. 4, 2018, pp.

412–28. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/americanmusic.36.4.0412>.

This article explains challenges that all history musicals face and how *Hamilton* specifically has dealt with those challenges. It provides context for the specific challenges that the show faced as a history musical and how it even gained the attention of actual historians. It also explains the specific historical inaccuracies within the show.

Herrera, Patricia. "Hamilton, Democracy, and Theatre in America." HowlRound, 13 May 2016, [www.howlround.com/hamilton-democracy-and-theatre-in-america](http://www.howlround.com/hamilton-democracy-and-theatre-in-america).

This article discusses how *Hamilton* uses its music and cast to include people of color in American history and how it opens the playing field for people of color in musical theatre. It also explains how Nuyoricans, or Puerto Ricans from New York, have developed their own culture and style of music, which was incorporated into *Hamilton*.

Hsu, Hua. "In 'The Haunting of Lin-Manuel Miranda,' Ishmael Reed Revives an Old Debate." *The New Yorker*, 9 January 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/in-the-haunting-of-lin-manuel-miranda-ishmael-reed-revives-an-old-debate>.

This article breaks down Ishmael Reed's *The Haunting of Lin-Manuel Miranda*, which was Reed's response to *Hamilton*. It gave me insight into Ishmael Reed and his criticisms of the show, and allowed me to see what the show's biggest critics were saying.

Kajikawa, Loren. "'Young, Scrappy, and Hungry': *Hamilton*, Hip Hop, and Race." *American Music*, vol. 36, no. 4, 2018, pp. 467–86. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/americanmusic.36.4.0467>.

This article discusses how hip hop is used in *Hamilton*, how race and class are discussed, and how the response to the show changed during Obama's presidency compared to Trump's. This article gives greater context for the use of hip hop and how the musical



was received over time. It gives insight into the casting, musical, and political impact of the show.

Madison, Katherine S. “‘Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story’: The Use and Representation of Records in *Hamilton: An American Musical*.” *The American Archivist*, vol. 80, no. 1, 2017, pp. 53–81., <https://doi.org/10.17723/0360-9081.80.1.53>.

This article explains how records are used in the show as props, subjects, and to give the show historical authority. It gives me a better understanding of where the musical is historically accurate and where it deviates for story purposes and to get across its message.

Mead, Rebecca. “All About the Hamiltons.” *The New Yorker*, 2 February 2015, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/02/09/hamiltons>.

This article gives background about how the show was created, all the way from when Lin-Manuel Miranda had the idea for it and presented what would become the opening number at the White House. It explains Miranda’s motivations for the show and why he took it in the direction that he did.

Meermann, Eric. “Giving Original Cast Members Credit - And Cash.” Palisades Hudson Financial Group LLC, 1 March 2019, <https://www.palisadeshudson.com/2019/03/giving-original-cast-members-credit-and-cash/>.

This article explains how for a long time, actors didn’t receive anything for helping shows get on their feet and didn’t share in the success of the show, but how Actors’

Equity went on strike in order to change this. It also explains how *Hamilton* became a part of this change because the Original Cast of *Hamilton* petitioned to get a piece of the royalties for the show, and Miranda agreed.

Miranda, Lin-Manuel. "Hamilton: An American Musical." New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2016.

The entire basis for my thesis, the show itself. I watched it both live at the Richard Rodgers Theatre, and have watched the recorded Disney+ version a few times in order to understand the source material better.

Monteiro, Lyra D. "Review Essay: Race-Conscious Casting and the Erasure of the Black Past in Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton*." *The Public Historian*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2016, pp. 89–98., <https://doi.org/10.1525/tph.2016.38.1.89>.

This article discusses both the positives and negatives that came with casting all actors of color in the show. It discusses the way it erases actual characters of color, while putting actors of color in the roles of historically white people. It also critiques the way slavery is not acknowledged a lot in the show, and helps me better understand the good and bad things that come with the casting and the way the story is told.

Nathans, Heather S. "Crooked Histories: Re-Presenting Race, Slavery, and Alexander Hamilton Onstage." *Journal of the Early Republic*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2017, pp. 271–78. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/90006298>.

This article talks about how the casting of *Hamilton* helps to open doors for actors of color and brings attention to the role Black Americans played in the founding of our

country. It also provides some historical information about playwrights who have tried to portray slavery in the past.

Oxford, Clay. "Broadway Goes Mainstream (Again)." *Harvard Political Review*, 6 June 2019.

<https://harvardpolitics.com/broadway-goes-mainstream-again/>.

This article discusses the rise, fall, and then the second rise of Broadway in mainstream media. It explains how Broadway gained popularity and then lost it over time, and how it came back into popularity recently via musicals like *Dear Evan Hansen* and *Hamilton*.

Quiñónez, Ariana. "The cultural significance of 'Hamilton's' diverse cast." Hypable, 10 Oct.

2015, [www.hypable.com/hamilton-diverse-cast/](http://www.hypable.com/hamilton-diverse-cast/).

This article discusses how the casting of the show allows people of color to see themselves in the story of the Founding Fathers and how emphasizing Hamilton's immigrant upbringings allows immigrants today to relate to it.

Umehira, Kylie. "All Hammed Up: How *Hamilton: An American Musical* Address Post-Racial Beliefs." *Journal of the CAS Writing Program*, no. 9, 2017, pp. 101–113.,

<https://www.bu.edu/writingprogram/files/2017/08/Issue-9.pdf#page=106>.

This article discusses the national discussion of race that was sparked by *Hamilton*. It argues against the idea that we are living in a post-racial society and how the response to *Hamilton* proves that, both in how it was originally received, and how the response changed during the Trump era.