

Alexander Hamilton: The Persistence of Myth



Contemporaries

- “Jefferson and Madison were convinced that through administrative sleight of hand Hamilton was “monarchising” the Constitution with the ultimate goal, as Jefferson wrote, of “worming out the elective principal.” 12
- “In the South the response was often favorable to Aaron Burr, while . . . mourning for Hamilton was at its strongest in New England and the Middle Atlantic states.” 14-15



Jacksonian Era

- “The popular image of Hamilton as an un-American monarchist was solidified.” 27
- “Jackson was a natural outgrowth of Jefferson's efforts to champion the common man and to move the American polity in a more populist direction.” 29
- After the bank was destroyed by Jackson and the panic of 1837 ensued, many placed the blame on Hamilton's deviation from his founding colleagues, in particular modeling the BUS after the the Bank of England. 32



Civil War

- “The Civil War ushered in an era that saw Alexander Hamilton eclipse Thomas Jefferson as a revered figure in the minds of most Americans, at least in the North.” 47
- “The abolitionist Senator Charles Sumner predictably admired Hamilton for his assertive nationalism and his apparent hostility to states’ rights.” 53
- “The South persisted as a stronghold of support for the principles of Jefferson and Jackson.” 60



Gilded Age

- “The nation had survived the Civil War and was experiencing unprecedented economic growth, at the same time, this wealth was being concentrated in fewer hands, and the gap between rich and poor was growing. . . It was a head time for admirers of Hamilton and a low point for those few scholars who sought to promote the legacy of Thomas Jefferson.” 67
- Dissenters like H. Adams would question Hamilton's anti-democratic streak” 73



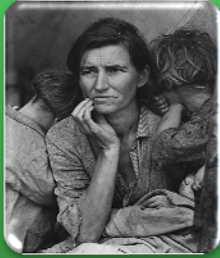
Progressive Era

- “Teddy Roosevelt, revived the “Hamiltonian ideal of constructive national legislation” without the undemocratic trappings of Hamilton.” 91
- As prominent historian, Herbert Croly argued, it became Hamiltonian means for Jeffersonian ends. 98
- “Hamilton remained to [many democrats] the pawn of the prosperous and the slanderer of the little man.” 99



1920s

- Warren G. Harding "when it was needed, there arose the greatest genius of the Republic, Alexander Hamilton. Without Hamilton there would be no American Republic today, to astonish the world with its resources and its progress." 105
- "The Republican Party was applying Hamilton's philosophy to the problems of the 1920s, Coolidge claimed." 110



Depression and the New Deal

- Claude G. Bowers, an influential partisan historian, argued that "Hamilton believed that governments are created for the domination of the masses . . . There is not a major evil of which the American people are complaining now that is not due to the triumph of the Hamiltonian concept of the state."
- "At times FDR's quest to connect himself with Jefferson' legacy bordered on the absurd." 120



World War II

- "Often expressed sentiment of the era that [Hamilton] was a fascist." 136
- "In *The People's Front*, [Earl Browder] argued that Hamilton possessed "dictatorial ambitions." 136
- With the prevailing popular and academic opinion of the time relegating Hamilton to a status slightly above Tokyo Rose, his defenders were reduced to attempt to convince the American public that he probably would have opposed Hitler." 138



Cold War

- "Supporters of American involvement in NATO tended to embrace Hamilton's position that in the event of an outbreak of hostilities the president could respond without waiting for congressional action." 143
- Hamilton's financial plans for infant American could be applied to a new union consisting of the US, seven European democracies , and the six members of the British Commonwealth." 144



Conservative Resurgence

- "Reagan invoked Hamilton's maxims less frequently but referred to him while criticizing welfare programs or assailing an activist judiciary. " 190

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Oftentimes what people say tells us just as much about themselves as the content of their message. As you saw in the previous handout, Hamiltonianism ebbed and flowed with the major periods of US history. As good historians, we must ask ourselves why? You are to use the previous handout, our timelines of US II, and the text to see what you can infer about each period from its characterization of Hamilton.



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Jacksonian Era



Civil War



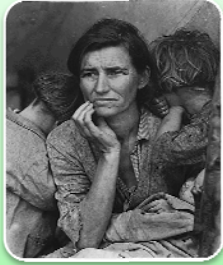
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