

The Hamilution of *Hamilton*:

How A Little Musical That Could Managed to Change the Face of a Generation

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“*Hamil-wha?*” is what no one with a heartbeat will ever say. It’s practically impossible to not notice the Broadway behemoth that is *Hamilton* simply because of its omnipresent force. Racking up a record-breaking 16 Tony nominations, selling out the Richard Rogers Theatre for the foreseeable future, and bolstering more buzz than all the bees on the planet could boast, *Hamilton* is undoubtedly a phenomenon. That much is certain. What is not so cut and dry is its current and future impact on society, history, education, and culture in general. Despite its vocal critics, the show is an outstanding artistic accomplishment which has brought history to the masses in an unconventional, intoxicating, rallying manner. It has transformed the simple story of one of the lesser-known Founding Fathers into an all-American immigrant tale that *all* Americans can relate to. Resoundingly, *Hamilton* is a revolutionary musical because of how it has broken boundaries, subverted the norm, and impacted the sociocultural landscape of our nation.

This musical has broken boundaries on myriad fronts, from carrying an eclectic hip-hop score, bringing Broadway to a new audience, casting minorities to represent historically white figures, and transforming a musical into a bona fide phenomenon. That is not to say that *Hamilton* is perfect – nothing is. There are hordes of critics, many accomplished scholars and historians, who believe *Hamilton* is not so revolutionary after all. Yet, despite the criticisms and areas where there could be improvement, the musical is still overwhelmingly impactful and inspirational.

Hamilton’s popularity draws concerns about how our youth generation, and subsequent generations after that, will learn about history because of its narrative framing and artistic choices concerning authenticity. There is a long-standing precedent concerning public perception and creative presentation, for we as a people often remember the version that art espouses. For example, we more often envision Richard III in Shakespeare’s gaze as a ruthless, power-hungry, murderous psychopath who is deformed inside and out as opposed to the perhaps more historically-accurate version of a vicious monarch who was pushed to the brink by exterior circumstances (Delman 2015). *Evita* was transformed from a complicated though beloved Argentinian idol to a manipulative, morally-questionable force in the musical adaptation of her life. What will people think of Alexander Hamilton with this musical in their minds?

The show's mastermind Lin-Manuel Miranda, who wrote, composed, and stars in the show as the titular character, never intended to muck up Alexander Hamilton's history. On the contrary, he approached this work from a place of love and empathy because he was inspired by and related to Hamilton's life story, so he felt a need to reliably relay this tale. "I felt an enormous responsibility to be as historically accurate as possible, while still telling the most dramatic story possible," Miranda explains (Delman 2015). He incorporated background research ranging from H.W. Brands' book *The Heartbreak of Aaron Burr* to Joanne Freeman's novel *Affairs of Honor* into his creative process, but as the main source material for the show is Ron Chernow's biography of the historical figure, digressions from reality are inevitable (Delman 2015).

Every artist is bound to interpret and present their work with some sort of a bias due to unconscious beliefs and conscious creative choices, but Miranda specifically attempted to tell Hamilton's story genuinely, noting that, "my job as a writer is to give you the most interesting and dramatic tale possible, and Hamilton's life affords a unique opportunity for me to do that without straying from the historical record" (Delman 2015). By straying from the time-honored Broadway mold, the musical overtly works to make the material as accessible as possible, for Miranda proclaims, "This is a story about America then, told by America now, and we want to eliminate any distance between a contemporary audience and this story" (Delman 2015).

Therefore, *Hamilton* attempts to communicate a truthful story to the masses but to present it in such a way that marginalized audiences can identify with it. The unique, contemporary blend of music rooted in hip-hop and the purposefully multi-racial physical representation on stage is not included for exotic intrigue or flippant frills (James 2015; Sutherland 2016). Rather, it allows minorities, who are all too often relegated to the outskirts of history, to find themselves in the narrative (Sutherland 2016). Daveed Diggs, for example, who plays both Marquis de Lafayette and Thomas Jefferson, demonstrates that "it feels important, because it allows us to see ourselves as part of history that we always thought we were excluded from" (Mead 2015).

Even though Miranda espouses the authenticity of the show, historian Lyra Monteiro finds the content disturbingly inaccurate and distortedly skewed, inquiring, "Is this the history that

we most want black and brown youth to connect with - one in which black lives so clearly do not matter?” (Onion 2016). Rather than telling the tale of actual minority lives at this time, the show decides to view the lives of historical figures through a minority lens. Monteiro argues that this creates, ““a politically dangerous narrative, because it has the tendency to obscure the ways in which so many people are blocked from those kinds of opportunities”” (Onion 2016).

Critics also refer to how blacks living in this time are talked about – or are not. Slaves are mentioned, but often in off-the-cuff remarks or to emphasize that Thomas Jefferson held slaves and to make him the villain (Onion 2016; Monteiro 2016). There is no note that Washington too held slaves, so the selective inclusion of details on this serious matter seems to some to be strategically used to portray characters in a certain light. Moreover, there are multiple mentions of slavery, but only in the context of Alexander Hamilton being against it (Onion 2016).

To further muck up the slavery problem, the Schuyler family was known to have held slaves, as was Alexander through a “hiring out” process where he effectively “rented” slaves or contracted them from their owners (Onion 2016). Before the Revolution, Hamilton was poor, and critics argue that this was the reason he was slave-less, rather than his moral indignation for the condemnable practice. Later in his life, he did fight for anti-slavery causes, but some still argue that there is no way to know how he felt towards slavery as a child growing up in the West Indies and working on a slave ship. Because slavery was his means of livelihood as a child, historians like Monteiro believe he did find its value, at least back then (Onion 2016).

Taking any qualms with historical representation into account, Miranda is not telling the tale of slavery here. He intended to place minorities in the historical positions of power to empower youth here and now and show them that they are just as worthwhile as these old, white men who wrote the history books. The final song in the show, “Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story?,” is a self-reflective look at our relationship to history and understanding of it. By depicting this version of Hamilton and declaring in the end that it was Eliza and Angelica who communicated Alexander’s legacy to the world, Miranda is issuing a call to action for us all to fight for our places in history and ensure that we write ourselves into the narrative (Wolf 2016).

Miranda spoke about the historically limited opportunities for people of color across the board, but specifically in the entertainment industry. “When I get called in for stuff for Hollywood, I get to be the best friend of the Caucasian lead,” Miranda admits. “If I want to play the main guy, I have found, I have to write it” (Mead 2015). And so he did. No, he did not follow the literal lives minorities lived in Hamilton’s era because that is not what he set out to do. He planned to push minorities from the outskirts to the starring positions, and this meant elevating them to the powerful positions whites held. Thus, for those who falsely believe they cannot find themselves in this American story, this musical uncovers how universal all of our stories are. By representing white history via human diversity, *Hamilton* gives us a human tale. Not a black, white, Hispanic, Chinese, immigrant, America, or whatever story, but a human one.

Monteiro takes issue with *Hamilton* saying “it is everybody’s story,” since, “It’s still white history. And no amount of casting people of color disguises the fact that they’re erasing people of color from the actual narrative” (Onion 2016). She too denounces the fact that Ron Chernow, a white historian and writer of the book that started this all, acted as the show’s historical consultant because it could potentially bias the historical representation on stage (Onion 2016). Though a diverse collection of research is beneficial when creating anything, the musical is ostensibly spawned from this book, so using the author himself as a historical expert is astute.

Pertaining to the characterization of these famous figures, Monteiro also worries about the “Founders Chic” syndrome the musical has, since it “represents the founders as relatable, cool guys,” which clouds audiences regarding the facts surrounding these historical icons (Onion 2016; Monteiro 2016). Miranda’s characters may feel relatable because they are; at the core, we all have the same drives and fears, and this similarity is precisely what the show taps into.

It is necessary to make the story dramatic, enticing, and compelling, which the inclusion of plot points like Hamilton’s affair and duels allows for, but Miranda does not do this gratuitously. Hamilton’s story is inherently exciting and thrilling in its actual tumultuous twists and turns, so creative license is not too often needed; on the contrary, he took painstaking steps to ensure nothing was changed without merit. Some degree of creative malleability is necessary for

purposes of plot and dramatic structuring of course. For instance, in order to write Burr as Hamilton's foil, some exaggeration of personality traits may have been necessary to amplify their contrast and serve the story (Freeman 2015). Further, Hamilton is depicted quite true to life by some estimations, but Jefferson's depiction seems much more pointed in order to pit him as the slave-supporting, pastoral-leaning villain and Hamilton as the enlightened hope of the nation (Freeman 2015).

Hamilton's story is fit for a narrative presentation because the character is a complicated, flawed individual filled with contradictions; for example, the "characteristics that allowed him to rise also insured his fall" (Mead 2015). Critics fire away that this interpretation of the man glazes over his countless contradictions since he was an immigrant wary of immigrants, a rebel who favored law and order, and a vocal politician who strayed from the boisterous cries of the people (Freeman 2015). However, the musical frames Hamilton's story as an immigrant tale to communicate something to the audience in the overall production. Centering the story on Hamilton's fierce spirit and drive to thrive is primary, which forces other nuanced details to be presented with deference to the bigger picture.

Due to its pro-immigration message, scholars like Joanne Freeman note that Hamilton's actual mixed feelings over immigration prove problematic for the musical's message. "Every day proves to me more and more that this American world was not made for me," Hamilton lamented in 1802 after years of advocating for the antithesis (Freeman 2015). After the Republican Party won the 1800 election, he feared the impact of immigrants on the neophyte nation even though he had previously supported their work in building this land. To boot, he protested immigrants' path to citizenship when then President Thomas Jefferson proposed it, believing it would lead to the "corruption of national character" and even claiming that Jefferson would have lost the election if only "native citizens" had voted (Freeman 2015).

Hamilton's true take on immigration seems at odds with the musical's overwhelming celebration and declaration of immigrants' importance. But really, who cares? Again, *Hamilton* never claims to be a history, but rather a hip-hop historical musical. Miranda set out to tell a story

and say something with his art, which he does by presenting a galvanizing cry to relish our uniqueness and the nation's diversity. Exemplifying biases the Founding Fathers had or presenting the facts unfettered in all their muddled, messy glory would merely tell history and say nothing about who we are as a people. Many critics applaud the musical for how much real history it crams into its crevices, from incorporating parts of Washington's Farewell Address to detailing the Neutrality Proclamation of 1793 (Freeman 2015). But this is not meant to be a history lesson. It is meant to be entertainment that happens to be educational, not the other way around.

Ultimately, critics have griped incessantly and dissected exceedingly the exact changes the musical makes compared to reality, including compressing time, showcasing major figures in events as opposed to the minor ones who actually were involved (e.g. those who brought about Hamilton's 1798 adultery confession), and invented events (e.g. John Adams firing Hamilton) (Freeman 2015). All in all, this is beyond the paper's scope and is rather inconsequential because the precise historical accuracy does not correlate with the musical's present and future prowess.

What does matter is that this debate is raging on. The very popularity of this musical is causing people from all levels of society to scrutinize *Hamilton* because it has the potential to change not just musical theatre but our entire sociocultural landscape. What it says is having a massive impact on masses of people, so the message audiences are getting is critically important. The musical is revolutionary because its inspirational nod to this immigrant-born nation gives us all something to believe in. No, not every fact was followed to the "T," but the show is making waves because of what it communicates to audiences, not because it is a perfect history. Besides, this controversy serves as a prime educational opportunity to have students debate the differences between historical fact as presented by history books and by the show. This topic can be part of the educational discussion that develops in schools where *Hamilton* has provided teachers with an alternative teaching mechanism and allowed students to see history in a new light.

There is an issue for women too. Performance studies scholar James McMaster mentions that the musical utterly fails to pass the Bechdel test (or the Bechdel-Wallace test), which is a measure of whether a fictional narrative features at least two women who talk about something

other than a man (“The Bechdel Test for Women in Movies”). This concept originates from Allison Bechdel’s comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For* in 1985; her 2006 graphic memoir *Fun Home* is also the inspiration for the musical of the same name which chronicles a young lesbian’s coming-of-age story. Accordingly, the show’s three main female characters – Eliza, Angelica, and Maria – all revolve around the Alexander and function to serve him (Wolf 2016).

Feminist scholar and professor Stacy Wolf praises *Hamilton* for its accomplishments, but bemoans its stereotypical representation and relegation of women to the sidelines (2016).

Ultimately, “the three women in the musical occupy the most conventional and stereotypical roles—muse, wife, whore—which is all the more troubling since *Hamilton* goes such a long way to dismantle stereotypes of race and masculinity” (Wolf 2016).

Wolf thoroughly dissects how each of the three main female characters could potentially play important roles, but fall flat and passively fail to impact history. Angelica Schuyler is presented as a highly intelligent, determined, forward-thinking woman you exclaims, “We hold these truths to be self-evident / That all men are created equal. / And when I meet Thomas Jefferson, / I’m ‘a compel him to include women in the / sequel!” She’s a self-aware woman who knows, “I’m a girl in a world in which / My only job is to marry rich. / My father has no sons so I’m the one / Who has to social-climb for one” (Wolf 2016). In the end, she merely supports her sister and Alexander from afar, so “she is introduced as a remarkable, powerful and potentially ground-breaking character but ultimately occupies a familiar gender stereotype” (Wolf 2016).

Eliza is depicted as a dim, helpless woman who becomes a devoted wife and mother, and eventually (as is quickly summed up in the final song), a powerful force (Wolf 2016). Though she is increasingly viewed in a positive light because she wishes to bring her family together and get Alexander to “take the summer off and go upstate” for starters, she ends up as the stereotypical loyal wife. At the end, she outlives Hamilton by 50 years and eventually becomes an activist against slavery who founds “the first private orphanage in New York City” (Wolf 2016). With Hamilton’s letters, she and Angelica “try to make sense of your thousands of pages of writing,” by writing his story and keeping his legacy alive, which essentially gives the women the authorship.

To add, Maria is the mere seductress who, short of becoming a full-fledged villain, turns into a tool in her husband's blackmail scheme; she essentially becomes the pawn of two men (Wolf 2016).

Wolf argues that no musical is perfect but that *Hamilton* could have done better for women, but does it need to (2016)? This musical is about *Hamilton*, which necessitates that the other players will be people who interact with and influence him. No, women were sadly not Founding Fathers or the powerful political figures who played roles in government dealings at this time, so any women in Hamilton's story would be the women he was personally involved with. Miranda set out to be as truthful as possible, and in this vein, the women are reliable representations of the real people. Wolf took issue with their minor roles in relation to a man, but the musical is about this man, which includes the women in his life but does not tell their stories independently of his. If a woman's story is needed next, as Angelica would say, we can make that the sequel!

Even more, Miranda himself has excitedly supported cross-gender casting after the rights are released for amateur productions since “no one's voice is set” (Wolf 2016). He explains, “I'm totally open to women playing founding fathers once this goes into the world. I can't wait to see kick-ass women Jeffersons and kickass women Hamiltons once this gets to schools” (Wolf 2016). Women may have played second fiddle for narrative purposes and within the framework of what this show set out to do, but women in later iterations can do what racially diverse casting is currently doing on Broadway by placing the underrepresented in the roles of these history icons.

This story of Hamilton does have a pointed emphasis on his immigrant roots and ironically relatable exemplification of the American Dream, even espousing, “Immigrants / We get the job done” (James 2015). From the opening lines, it is clear that this is a classical rags to riches story: “How does a bastard, orphan / son of a whore and a Scotsman / dropped into the middle of a / forgotten spot in the Caribbean / by Providence, impoverished, in squalor / grow up to be a hero and a scholar?” (James 2015).

The son of a Puerto Rican immigrant who made a name for himself in U.S. politics, these issues hit close to home for Miranda, who specifically states, “Immigrants have been present and necessary since the founding of our country” (Delman 2015). He finds it necessary to speak to

the fact, “that three of the biggest heroes of our revolutionary war for independence were a Scotsman from the West Indies, named Alexander Hamilton; a Frenchman, named Lafayette; and a gay German, named Friedrich von Steuben, who organized our army and taught us how to do drills” (Delman 2015). This real-life drama depicts diversity, perseverance in the face of daunting odds, tenacity at overcoming adversity, and making one’s mark in this newfound land of opportunity. Miranda is not manipulating us or putting forth an immigrant agenda, but rather, he is taking a story that oozes with the spirit of this young nation and all the virtues the Founding Fathers built America on, and he is opening the world’s eyes to it.

This is nothing new, as it is an oft used reference that America is a melting pot, cultural salad, gumbo, etc. The controversy comes given that immigration is a hot button issues, particularly in the contentious landscape of this current presidential campaign where some would-be Commanders-in-Chief assert that they would build walls and deport millions of hard-working, good-intentioned families (here’s looking at you, Trump). Many forget that this is a country of immigrants; unless you are a Native American, you come from immigrant blood.

Miranda describes how he was inspired by Hamilton’s story and identified with him, but that he did not set out to create a political propaganda musical (Delman 2015, Sutherland 2016). That being said, he is very aware of the political implications and how relevant *Hamilton*’s themes are right here and right now. For example, he adds that, “‘immigrant is used as a dirty word by politicians to get cheap political points,’ [but] I think it’s also a nice reminder that any fight we’re having right now, politically, we already had it 200-some odd years ago” (Delman 2015). These parallels drawn between politics of yesterday and politics of today show us that we can all find ourselves in the story of America’s birth, but it also tells us that we have not changed much.

Putting aside the hateful rhetoric and combustible politics of the campaign climate, Miranda’s vision of the future is optimistic and chooses to have a hopeful outlook on America because “‘we’re still working on it” (Delman 2015). *Hamilton* helps illuminate our history and educate the youth, which can prevent us from making the same mistakes our Founding Fathers did,

but also give us some “comfort” since it reminds us that there is a “more perfect union we’re always working towards” (Delman 2015).

Hamilton does not become merely a tragic tale witnessing a man’s slow fall from grace until he ultimately dies dueling since it highlights the hope in this story by showcasing a man who rose from nothing to become something extraordinary. With the lyrics, “I’m just like my country / I’m young, scrappy and hungry / and I’m not throwing away my shot,” we can all recognize the galvanizing cry our country espouses in that assiduous efforts will lead to fruitful outcomes (Mead 2015). In this “bootstrap narrative,” Hamilton’s mental prowess and fighting spirit allow him to succeed, for he, “Got a lot farther by working a lot harder / By being a lot smarter / By being a self-starter” (Onion 2016; Mead 2015). This is the American Dream in a nutshell.

And what is more American than diversity. Breaking the mold again, the mainly old, white men represented historically in the musical are brought to life onstage by people of color. By visually juxtaposing significant figures in American history with minority performers, diverse audience members who often do not have historical figures to literally relate to can find themselves in this inclusive story (Sutherland 2016). If audiences relate to a narrative that has “nothing directly to do with their own ancestors, . . . then you’ve got a history that can act as a unifying force, [and] that can help turn a population into a people” (Reifowitz 2015).

As Michael Lind asserts, “Americans share common national ancestors, whatever their genetic ancestors. Even if our genetic grandparents came from Finland or Indonesia, as Americans, we are all descendants of George Washington — and his slaves” (Reifowitz 2015). This “diverse yet unified” message the musical sends is vital at a time when differences are dividing us and ‘otherness’ is dangerous. In this vein, many claim that *Hamilton* is more about our future than our past (Reifowitz 2015).

Parallels are continuously made between the musical’s inspirational, oft rebellious, notions and that of contemporary controversial topics. For instance, the Black Lives Matter movement comes to mind with lyrics like, “and though I’ll never be truly free / until those in bondage got the same rights as you and me”; some lines even sound like they are straight out of a Bernie Sanders

rally, like “They tax us unrelentlessly / Then King George turns around and has a spending spree” (James 2015). Yes, the show’s themes can be interpreted to comment on current society, but that is merely because the story is timeless and deals with universal human passions and failings.

The atmosphere of political pugnaciousness is highlighted in the musical because of its very content. For instance, the extremely contentious election season of 1800, which marked the commencement of our modern campaigning era, seems like eerie foreshadowing for what may be to come in this 2016 presidential election, where many are claiming they must pick the lesser of two evils (Mead 2015). The powerfully potent lyrics tell the tale to two divided sides: “Southern mother fucking Democratic-Republicans!” (“Washington On Your Side”). Through Burr’s realization that, “The world was wide enough for both Hamilton and me,” it could be surmised that one of the show’s themes is forgiveness to reach ultimate peace, even against your opponents or deemed enemies (“The World Was Wide Enough”). Politicians, take note.

More importantly, the show’s revolutionary underbelly speaks to rampant police brutality that has taken too many African Americans from the face of the earth, from Michael Brown to Trayvon Martin. “We’re screaming ‘Rise up,’ and a lot of people are feeling that way,” Miranda notices (Mead 2015). The tale is that much more relevant when taking into account its similarities with our own current president, who too was a “fatherless son of an immigrant, born in the country’s island margins” (Mead 2015). *Hamilton* is so powerful because it is our collective past and our future.

Hamilton breaks the mold on all sides by creating “‘the ‘first authentic hip-hop show,’ according to Questlove, who produced the cast album” (James 2015). Not all of the show’s magical ingredients are entirely revolutionary, but they are blended in a manner which brought about something entirely new. For example, the 2014 *Les Mis* revival cast minorities from Haitian, Persian, and Maori descent in the leading roles, but the staging and structure of the show remained Eurocentric (James 2015). Non-Broadway music is nothing new with the slew of jukebox and experimental shows that have broken out, from the glam rock music of *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* to the R&B, gospel, and soul stylings of *Dreamgirls*. Even musicals on history are not unheard of.

Musicals on this exact time period are even old news: *1776*, which chronicles events surrounding the signing of the Declaration of Independence won the Tony for Best Musical in 1969 (James 2015)!

So, why is *Hamilton* deemed so revolutionary when many of its ingredients are tried and true? Everything is new until it is done again, and then it just becomes part of the ever-broadening norm. Shows that push past musical theatre conventions exist, but many of them do not stand the test of time or do not change the fabric of history itself. Case in point, the first certified “hip-hop musical” is said to be the 2014’s *Holler if Ya Hear Me*, a jukebox musical featuring the songs of Tupac Shakur. It closed after six weeks (Mead 2015). Evidently, it didn’t resonate like *Hamilton*.

Miranda’s preceding endeavor *In the Heights* was also close to his heart, as he starred in and wrote music and lyrics for this semi-autobiographical piece (Mead 2015). By mixing hip-hop and rap with merengue, salsa, and more traditional musical theatre stylings, Miranda started a new trend in redefining what music makes up a musical. Winning four Tony awards, including those for Best Musical and Best Original Score, it seems that the fresh formula worked (Mead 2015).

Miranda immediately approached the chronicle of Alexander Hamilton from the standpoint that he is ““someone I think embodies hip-hop”” (Mead 2015). His story about starting from the bottom, his vivacious determination to make a name for himself, his unorthodox communicative means, his eloquently poetic language – all seemed to coincide with what hip-hop is and represents. Being “the ten-dollar Founding Father without a father / Got a lot farther by working a lot harder / By being a lot smarter / By being a self-starter,” this story needed to be told from a raw, truthful, youthful voice (Mead 2015). By rooting the story also in a genre which emerged from African American culture, *Hamilton* is rhythmically representing a group of people who have readily existed quite separate from Broadway.

Miranda incorporated influences from 90s pop into the work, as well as nods to Notorious B.I.G., the New York rapper Christopher Wallace who died at age 24 in 1997 from a gunshot wound (Mead 2015). Hamilton himself reminded Miranda of Tupac Shakur, the West Coast rapper who was shot to death in 1996; his nuanced, socially-conscious lyrical content spoke to

Miranda and are found within the licks and lyrics of the musical (Mead 2015). Beyond the hip-hop lies a litany of other musical genres for Hamilton includes R&B, pop, jazz, reggae, gospel, Tin Pan Alley, and contemporary Broadway sounds. According to President Obama, this mixture of forms reflects the show's overall multi-level "constant cross-pollination" (Reifowitz 2015). Even its music is culturally inclusive.

Harkening back to hip-hop's roots, this "spoken word has emerged as youth culture's most active and accessible response to verbally engage *political consciousness* (Chang 2006). As a distinct element of hip-hop culture, it is the aesthetic bridge to a *reaffirmed free speech*. The form and its adherents engender conversation of *resistance*, spoken in the vernacular of young urban people" (emphasis added) (Chang 2006). For a musical surrounding revolution and reforming government, hip-hop seems like the only language that can be used to convey the voice of a young nation asserting their rights and fighting for a new way of life.

"What Lin is doing is taking the vernacular of the streets and elevating it to verse," Oscar Eustis, artistic director of the Public Theatre, understands (Mead 2015). "That is what hip-hop is, and that is what iambic pentameter was. Lin is telling the story of the founding of his country in such a way as to make everyone present feel they have a stake in their country" (Mead 2015). Likening him to the Bard, Eustis continues, "In heightened verse form, Shakespeare told England's national story to the audience at the Globe, and helped make England England—helped give it its self-consciousness. That is exactly what Lin is doing with 'Hamilton'" (Mead 2015). Only time will tell if Miranda's *Hamilton* becomes the voice of a new generation or stands the test of time in the way Shakespeare has, but its lyrical prowess and rhythmic complexity bring historical material to life in a way no other musical has done before.

Hamilton's music is special for much more than its hip-hop roots. Since it is sung through, there is never a moment when hip-hop rap is not the language of these characters. "This is the only way that people know how to talk to each other," Daveed Diggs claims, according to Mead. "Rap is the voice of the people of our generation, and of people of color, and just the fact that it

exists in this piece, and is not commented upon, gives us a sense of ownership” (Mead 2015).

Instead of being a novelty, hip-hop becomes the normative communicative vehicle of the show.

Critics, however, have commented upon the classical musical theatre structuring inherent in the work, which some declaim as a cop out (Mead 2015). Though Miranda uses musical motifs, repeated rhythms, catchy phrasing, and dense lyrics to unify the musical’s themes and better relay the information to the audience, some argue this deflates the revolutionary leanings of the show (Wolf 2016). With elements that seem reminiscent of his mentor Steven Sondheim stylistically, scholars argue the show is too rooted in time-honored Broadway traditions to be subversive (Mead 2015). There are also numerous nods to past Broadway shows woven into the work, from *Les Mis* to *The Pirates of Penzance*, which further emphasizes the show’s affinity for Broadway (Wolf 2016).

That being said, the way the musical is structured does clearly differentiate between and comment upon characters through the music, casting, and content covered. For instance, many musical motifs and lyrical calling cards are used to identify characters, integrate recurring themes, foster moods, and juxtapose ideas (Wolf 2016). However, the connotations of these motifs have been called into question since the only lead played by a white actor, King George III, is an overarching villain who is against the revolutionaries, and consequently, sings in an ironically peppy, bubbly manner akin to British pop. Monteiro observes that Angelica, played by African American actress Renée Elise Goldsberry, sings in a more R&B motif style, which could be read as stereotypical (2016). On the other hand, Eliza, played Chinese American Phillipa Soo, sings in the more standard Broadway ballad-based fashion; Monteiro declares that this exemplifies how “she definitely reads as white, and I think that is not a coincidence” (Onion 2016; Monteiro 2016).

Due to its mass popularity and efforts to represent the historically underrepresented, *Hamilton* is said to introduce Broadway to a new, broader audience – but there are holes in this theory. The audience composition is a hotly debated arena, for critics like Stacy Wolf contend that the audience got whiter and older as the tickets got pricier (2016). Thus, “at upwards of \$300 a ticket, *Hamilton* sits in a strange space where it’s repping a group of people who can’t necessarily

afford to come out and see it” (James 2015). By releasing the original cast recording *for free* a week before it became available for purchase, *Hamilton* went above and beyond what other Broadway shows traditionally have done (James 2015). Nevertheless, it feels like you’ll never be able to see the show unless you are a celebrity or can pay scalpers exorbitant fees.

True, there is a lottery system which is live for Wednesday matinees and digital for all other shows where ten dollar tickets are available if one is randomly chosen (“Lottery”). The problem is that the time window to apply is so short and the notification window even shorter, so practically speaking, only people already in New York City, and even those with flexible schedules, could really hope to see the show this way.

Moreover, the theatrical medium itself is far less accessible than other widespread entertainment sources of this time, like movies and television, which calls into questions problems with accessibility of theatre is general. I will not argue the merits of theatre compared to other artistic mediums here, or debate whether or not *Hamilton* must exist on the stage to have the most potent impact, because these issues are way beyond the scope of this paper.

However, I will note that this show is at a pivotal turning point where its mystique will begin to dim, or at least ding up, especially when its perfect formula is tainted. For example, since it is sold out through traditional means until at least January, anyone who must wait to grab a ticket will most likely miss out on seeing the Original Broadway cast perform, but most strikingly, Miranda himself (“Ticket Update”). The show will just not be the same when creator, composer, lyricist, and star Miranda steps off the Great White Way. Yes, his understudy Javier Muñoz already plays the part at least once a week, but does *Hamilton* lose much of its magic without the man who started it all performing as the face of the show? Who is to know?

This fall, PBS will bring audiences a behind-the-scenes look into this phenomenon in “Hamilton’s America,” a documentary within the “Great Performances” series (Wagmeister 2016). Executive produced by Miranda himself, the documentary is meant to help those who have not been able to snag a ticket have the *Hamilton* experience without, say, bootlegging a copy, a practice which Miranda has vehemently denounced. This too acts as an interesting collaboration

between mediums for it offers up a chance for television to shed light on Broadway and make use of its larger audience to offer access to a Broadway show without outright streaming it on TV or making a “live” version of it (can anyone say, *Hamilton: Live?*).

The artists know the limitations Broadway has in bringing this show to the masses without compromising its integrity and transforming it into something it was not meant to be just to deliver it to people in a different format. “This is one of the rare experiences in our current digital age that can only be seen in its entirety, in one theater in one city, and that runs counter to much of the ubiquity of the digital-sharing age that we live in,” executive produced Sirulnick expresses (Wagmeister 2016). It aims to offer those who haven’t seen it somewhat of a consolation prize, or at least tide them over.

However, the *Hamilton* cast gives back and attempts to bring the show to everyone with #HAM4HAM, street shows occurring right outside the stage doors on Wednesdays and Saturdays two hours prior to the evening shows (Wickman 2015). Since the night of its first preview when 700 fans fought for coveted lottery tickets in an almost unprecedented pre-show turnout, *Hamilton* has been bringing a morsel of the show’s magic to audiences outside the Richard Rogers Theatre and to worldwide audiences via the internet (Wickman 2015). Broadway has never been brought to the people like this, and audiences have never interacted with a show or cast in such an intimate, innovative way.

There is no precedent for #HAM4HAM, and almost none for even the lottery, which was inaugurated by *Rent* in the mid-1990s (Wickman 2015). The lottery particularly helps lower-income or young audiences in the NYC area, but #HAM4HAM is for everyone. Even more, these street shows represent the very pillars that *Hamilton*’s themes and hip-hop score esteem, from fostering community, collaboration, generosity, and good will within the Broadway world and within the wider one. By reaching the “Faniltions” in a way no other show has ever done before, *Hamilton* is changing the game again by heralding in a brand new era of audience engagement.

Another effort to bring young, diverse audiences to see the show and educate the masses involves a \$1.46 million grant provided by The Rockefeller Foundation and Gilder Lehrman which

will allow 20,000 NYC public high school students to experience *Hamilton* (“Hamilton: The Musical”). Beyond bringing the city’s children into the theatre, *Hamilton* is now being integrated into curricula and used in the classroom as a way to teach history. Even just the cast album is being used on the large scale to teach youths far and wide about history (Wolf 2015).

This new model of educational entertainment could prove revolutionary in the future regarding arts integration, arts appreciation, arts education, and eclectic teaching platforms. People are beginning to appreciate *Hamilton*’s ability to teach those who all too often fall through the cracks and actually get kids interested in history again.

There is no question that *Hamilton* is popular. If you doubt this, just try to get a ticket online. Yet, this show is popular with fans and critics alike, for it has won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, a Grammy Award for Best Musical Theater Album, a Kennedy Prize for Drama Inspired by American History, a George Washington Book Prize - and the list goes on (Piepenburg 2016). Miranda himself is a Tony, Emmy, Grammy and MacArthur Fellowship “genius grant” winner, but awards alone do not ensure success, nor do they correlate with an artwork’s lasting cultural impact (Sutherland 2016). *Hamilton*’s future is bright because it’s not going anywhere soon. It is sure to stay on Broadway for some time, but it is already spreading its wings: an open-ended run is set for Chicago in the fall, as is a separate national tour in 2017 (Piepenburg 2016).

This show is such a phenomenon that it could “single-handedly be the thing to keep the man himself on the ten dollar bill” (Sutherland 2016). Given that “one of the play’s many achievements is its blend of an inclusive present with a historical past that is rooted in fact,” *Hamilton* deals with the persistency of the human condition over time and how our present universe relates to our historical one (Freeman 2015). It only seems fitting that the musical’s impact on history will remain unknown until time has ticked along. As of right now, though, I have a feeling that *Hamilton*’s not going to waste its shot at changing the face of musical theatre, representation for minorities, arts education, audience interaction, and creative story-telling anytime soon. So, “look around, look around.” The “Hamil-ution” is upon us!