

ABSTRACT

Thesis Title: "I, TOO, AM AMERICA": HAMILTON, AN AMERICAN MUSICAL

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"I, Too, Am America" is a critical study of Lin-Manuel Miranda's musical phenomenon *Hamilton* (2015), which is currently running on Broadway at the Richard Rodgers Theatre in New York. Through my scholarly analysis of *Hamilton* (that is, through a dramaturgical examination of the musical's book and lyrics, embodied performance, production characteristics, casting practices, and public reception—among other elements), this thesis explores the overarching question: How does *Hamilton* wield the body of its performers to interrogate, disrupt, and reconfigure dominant narratives of American history and identity? Specifically, how does Miranda's musical interrogate the way power is ascribed and/or re-inscribed through representations of race, gender, and nationhood? By engaging with *Hamilton* as a relevant and immediate historical artifact, this interdisciplinary thesis examines the ways in which *Hamilton* interrogates and artfully challenges the cultural power whiteness has in erroneously defining the parameters of American identity.

“I, TOO, AM AMERICA”: HAMILTON, AN AMERICAN MUSICAL

by

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Dedication

For Granny

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To my grandmother, Juanita Mays: I find my strength, tenacity, and work ethic in you. Thank you for standing up for me in more ways than one. Your words of encouragement through this process has been a sustaining life force. I love you!

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Introduction: “Wasn’t Alexander Hamilton white?”

Lights up. A beat drops. A Black man in an 18th century-styled maroon trench coat walks onstage and begins to tell a story (through the means of a mesmeric, even-paced rap) of “A bastard, orphan, son of a whore and a Scotsman.” Strolling in after the aforementioned Black actor is another male actor (who appears to be Latino) wearing a crème colored trench coat. The man in the crème colored coat continues where the first actor left off, rapping about “the ten-dollar founding father, without a father.” After a brief moment, the stage becomes inundated with non-whites bodies. The sea of performers harmonize as the Black man sings the question: “What’s your name man?,” thereby prompting the Latino actor to sing: “Alexander Hamilton.”

[*Pause*] It is at this point that some members of the *Hamilton* audience inevitably ask (as a whispered or internalized query): “Wait a minute—wasn’t Alexander Hamilton *white*?”¹ This question, whether asked rhetorically or with the hope for an illuminating explication, undoubtedly did not cease with the identification of the title character. In fact, throughout the three-hour musical, the audience is introduced to the most influential people in Alexander Hamilton’s life; well known and lesser known figures such as Angelica Schuyler, George Washington, Eliza Schuyler, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison make their appearance in the musical—and *all* of these characters are played by people of color.

[*Pause redux*] “Wait a minute, weren’t *they* all white?”

As one who had the opportunity to see *Hamilton* on Broadway last year, I know that this line of questioning is not only expressed in social media. I also recognize that the

¹ Matthew Rodriguez, “People Wonder Why Alexander Hamilton Wasn’t White in the ‘Hamilton’ Grammys Performance,” *Mic*, February 16, 2016, <http://mic.com/articles/135388/people-wonder-why-alexander-hamilton-wasn-t-white-in-the-hamilton-grammys-performance#.lmofuy1X9>.

casting of *Hamilton*'s characters causes *real, live* audience members to reveal their bewilderment. In pondering questions about Hamilton's racial identity (as presented in history books versus what has recently been seen on the Broadway stage), some confused audience members shared inquisitive murmurs or even nervous laughter, while others looked to their left and right—hoping to catch another spectator's surprised gaze to affirm that they were not alone in their perplexity. The visible and audible reactions of these audience members are representative of the history taught in schools, which uniformly represents Alexander Hamilton and his associates as white. Thus, among the audience members lucky enough to grasp a coveted ticket to *Hamilton* are those who struggle with being confronted with its alternative presentation of history—just as there are those who delight in its incongruities. In both cases, however, *Hamilton* prompts audience members to question the validity of who and what stories have traditionally been “permitted” to represent America.

Further evidence of *Hamilton*'s querying audience is found in the fact that many of the audiences' ruminations were taken to Twitter and other social media platforms after *Hamilton*'s live, satellite-televvised performance on the 58th Annual Grammy Awards program.² Symbolic of *Hamilton*'s commercial success and critical reception, the musical's opening number (“Alexander Hamilton”) was a featured performance—making it one of only eight musical theatre numbers to ever be presented at the Grammy Awards.³

While the national spotlight on the race-conscious casting of *Hamilton* may have prompted some commentary on social media following the Grammy Awards, initially

² Original air date – February 16, 2016

³ Joan Marcus, “‘Hamilton’ To Bring Broadway Back To Music’s Biggest Night,” *Grammy.com*, February 3, 2016, <http://www.grammy.com/news/hamilton-to-bring-broadway-back-to-musics-biggest-night>.

Lin-Manuel Miranda's vision to create a musical in which non-white performers portray white historical figures appeared free of controversy. At least, that *was* the case. Controversy eventually did arise when official *Hamilton* casting calls circulated that specifically asked for non-white performers to audition for future iterations of the musical. Critics of the casting call shouted reverse discrimination, claiming that the casting call privileged people of color over white people. In response to the backlash, the *Hamilton* team⁴ affirmed their casting agenda and purposefully proceeded to cast all the principal roles with actors of color (except for King George) for *Hamilton's* future productions. Centering on the artistic choices, political strategies, and institutional interventions resulting from the decisions made by Lin-Manuel Miranda and *Hamilton's* production team, "I, Too, Am America: Hamilton, An American Musical,"⁵ intends to explore the ways in which *Hamilton* interrogates and artfully challenges the cultural power whiteness has in erroneously defining the parameters of American identity.

As of this writing, *Hamilton* is currently running on Broadway at the Richard Rodgers Theatre in New York. Through my scholarly analysis of *Hamilton* (that is, through a dramaturgical examination of the musical's book and lyrics, embodied performance, production characteristics, casting practices, and public reception—among other elements), I intend to explore the overarching question: How does *Hamilton* wield the body of its performers to interrogate, disrupt, and reconfigure dominant narratives of American history and identity? Specifically, how does Miranda's musical interrogate the way power is ascribed and/or re-inscribed through representations of race, gender, and nationhood? My thesis recognizes Black feminist thought, José Muñoz's theory of

⁴ The Hamilton Team are as followed: Producers - Jeffrey Seller, Sander Jacobs, Jill Furman; Book, Musical, and Lyrics - Lin-Manuel Miranda; Casting - Telesy + Company, Bethany Knox, CSA

⁵ Title inspired by poem 'I, Too, Sing America' by Langston Hughes

disidentification, and *the body as* a meaning-making tool by examining the theatrical interventions utilized by Miranda in an effort to recuperate the lost voices of American history; the voices of the under-acknowledged women and people of color that have contributed to America's story and successes. In doing so, I argue that *Hamilton* questions who is "allowed" to lay full claim to American history, citizenship, and privileges therein. In wielding the power of theatre and performance, I argue that *Hamilton* artfully demands that audiences (within and beyond the world of *Hamilton's* Broadway spectators) revise biased and/or subconscious assumptions about who can claim and represent the American story. Additionally, my thesis explores how *Hamilton* decenters whiteness from American history and long-standing precepts of "Americanness" by questioning the type of bodies that get to lay claim to an American identity.

Theoretical Methodology: Whiteness, Black Feminist Thought, and Disidentification

Whiteness as a category of study has long existed within Critical Race scholarship within the United States and often times this scholarship has focused on how whiteness is conflated with "Americanness." W.E.B. DuBois, the members of the Combahee River Collective, Michael Omi and Howard Winant, David Rodeiger, Patricia Hill Collins and Lisa Lowe, to name a few, are among the scholars and cultural critics that have all taken up questions of whiteness in their writings. Similar to the way these scholars from past and present endeavor to make the amalgamation of whiteness with American identity strange, Lin-Manuel Miranda and the creative team of *Hamilton* capitalize on the possibility that the theatre offers to do the same.

Inspired by the biography titled, *Alexander Hamilton (2004)* by historian Ron Chernow, Lin-Manuel Miranda (the creator, lead actor, and writer of the music, lyrics, and book of *Hamilton*) re-envision the life of Alexander Hamilton, one of America's founding fathers and former United States Secretary of the Treasury. The R&B and hip-hop infused musical positions people of color in the roles of "white" historical figures such as Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, Angelica and Eliza Schuyler, and Alexander Hamilton. The deliberate casting, design, and musical choices simultaneously disrupt whiteness from its assumed neutrality and normalcy. Audience members are confronted consciously or subconsciously with how whiteness operates within history and theatre. Throughout the entire show, *Hamilton* does not acknowledge that the bodies of color representing these historical figures and events are strange; instead the actors of color are taken as authentic representations of America's past.

In this project, I adopt Omi and Winant's racial formation theory as a basis in defining whiteness. For American sociologists Omi and Winant, understandings of race are not only dependent on the process of racialization of the oppressed, but also on the racialization of the dominant group as "natural" or "normal," which, in the case of the United States, is conflated with whiteness. *Racial Formations* presumes that racial categories not only define each other but assist in maintaining the benefits of whiteness as a prerequisite to American identity, which functions through racial formation. Omi and Winant define racial formation theory as the "process by which social, economic and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meaning."⁶ This definition does not exclude whiteness,

⁶ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2 edition (New York: Routledge, 1994), 61.

but rather offers that all bodies that are racialized are not always in subservient positions. Thus, this definition proposes that whiteness is already and always has been racialized, even as it is assumed to be neutral. To this point, whiteness gains its meaning by “othering” blackness and juxtaposing itself *against* blackness, which in turn inherently racializes whiteness as a category of normality.

The failure for some people and institutions to recognize whiteness as racialized speaks to George Lipsitz definition of whiteness. George Lipsitz argues that whiteness serves, “as the unmarked category against which difference is constructed, whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations” even as it is already racialized.⁷ Consequently, white Americans are encouraged to invest in whiteness as a means to protect their resources, power, and opportunity.⁸ Thus, whiteness becomes folded into American identity and becomes a mechanism to a gain easier access to American citizenship. In *Hamilton*, the centralizing of whiteness in American history becomes divested from American identity by the bodies of color, thus marking whiteness’ role in organizing American history and society. My project assumes that whiteness is simultaneously marked and unmarked to varying degrees. Informed by Ruth Frankenberg in the “Mirage of an Unmarked Whiteness,” which argues that “Whiteness, or white people, I suggest, have through history mainly named themselves in order to say “I am not that Other.”⁹ To this point, whiteness is never entirely invisible; it may have moments in which it is partially or occasionally unmarked, but relies on the slippage of white people’s awareness and

⁷ George. Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 1.

⁸ Ibid, vii.

⁹ Birgit Brander Rasmussen et al., *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness*, First Edition (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press Books, 2001), 75.

categorization of itself as not a racial minority. In opposition to this view, the conception of whiteness as unmarked relies on the assumption that white people fail to recognize how their whiteness grants them racial privileges by appearing to be normal. In turn, other racial identities are marked and racialized, in a way that whiteness is not.¹⁰ For film critic and Critical Whiteness scholar Richard Dyer, whiteness is:

...founded on compelling paradoxes: a vividly corporeal cosmology that most values transcendence of the body; a notion of being at once a sort of race and the human race, an individual and a universal [...] in short, a need always to be everything and nothing, literally overwhelmingly present and yet apparently absent, both alive and dead.¹¹

In the above quote, Dyer signals to the contradictory nature of whiteness and whiteness' ability to be invisible and visible; unmarked and marked in everyday life. For *Hamilton*, I conceive that whiteness is illuminated by the non-white bodies in performance and vacillates between being marked or unmarked, thus highlighting the representational power that enables whiteness "to be presented as an apparently attainable, flexible, varied category, while setting up an always movable criterion of inclusion."¹² Consequently, whiteness is able to move back and forth between being visible or hidden, a strategy adopted in the use of *Hamilton's* theatrical elements.

"I, Too, Am America: *Hamilton*, An American Musical," pays particular attention to the intersections of race and gender. In particular, I employ Black feminist thought and José Muñoz's theory of *disidentification* as methodological interventions into discourses of gender and performance. In conversation with whiteness, these theories serve to interrogate casting and whiteness, as well as how women of color fall outside of an

¹⁰ Birgit Brander Rasmussen et al., *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness*, First Edition (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press Books, 2001), 10.

¹¹ Richard Dyer, *White* (London; Routledge, 1997), 39-40.

¹² *Ibid*, 57.

assumed white womanhood. Collectively, these theories intend to illuminate how performance, race, and gender work in tandem to revise and imagine American history.

Black feminist thought is a cornerstone of my study and I lean firmly on the foundational text *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (1990) by Patricia Hill Collins. In *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins explores the intellectual tradition of Black women scholars, non-academics, and artists. Tracing ideas and concepts propelled by Black women, most notably the term “outsider-within,” Collins argues that Black women will always fall outside of “feminist and black social thought” due to the focus on whiteness or maleness. Yet, according to Collins this “outsider within” position produces a knowledge source that is more nuanced than feminist and black social thought.¹³ To this point, Collins proposes a “matrix of domination” which accounts for how different combinations of intersecting oppressions affect the experiences and perspectives of Black women. Additionally, Collins also examines how “controlling images” use imagery to inscribe negative stereotypical perspectives of Black women, such as the mammy, the jezebel, the matriarch, and the welfare queen. Collins defines “controlling images” as repetitive iconography that serves to reinforce Black women as objects and invest in the normalization of their oppression. As she traces the genealogy of these images, Collins argues that these images reproduce “the dominant group's interest in maintaining Black women's subordination.”¹⁴ Collins asserts that these images are resisted by Black women through self-definition. *Black Feminist Thought* reimagines an archive by including fiction, oral history, and poetry alongside scholarship to provide a genealogy of Black feminist thought—and ubiquitous

¹³ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 14-16.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 72.

forms of activism—that considers all societal roles occupied by Black women as a source of knowledge. Through the course of my thesis, the theorizing offered in *Black Feminist Thought* illuminates the way in which an actor’s embodied experience can serve as a critical source of study, aids in disrupting historically stereotypical iconography of Black women, and promotes the concept of intersectionality as vital to disclosing how concepts of whiteness and Americanness are entangled with gender.

Further strengthening my theoretical considerations of race, citizenship, and gender is José Muñoz’s theory of disidentification. A highly influential scholar within the fields of performance studies (with particular interests in critical race and queer theories), Muñoz’s field-altering theory of disidentification builds upon the French linguist Michel Pecheux’s Pecheuxian Paradigm. Among its notable applications, Muñoz’s concept of disidentification refers to the survival strategies employed by minority subjects in the face of dominant spaces and ideologies. Muñoz strives to illustrate the practices of disidentification through queer performance artists, activists, filmmakers, and artists of color. Muñoz argues that to disidentify is to neither assimilate nor reject, but rather to “work on or against dominant ideology.”¹⁵ Working against a binary construction, Muñoz encourages the amalgamation of assimilation and resistance in accordance with survival strategies particular in the realm of performance. My project leans heavily on Muñoz’s disidentification as a strategy employed by Lin-Manuel Miranda in *Hamilton* to work within the expectations of Broadway, while simultaneously using that position to reimagine how non-white bodies can navigate successfully through the space of commercial theatre *and* American history. Notably, by offering its performers roles

¹⁵ José Esteban. Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 11.

outside of their racial and/or gender signifiers, *Hamilton* casts a spotlight on the tremendous talent evidenced in its ensemble of non-white actors, thereby rendering the possibility for more non-white performers to break through the proverbial “glass ceiling” that often limits their rise to greater professional heights.

By studying Lin-Manuel Miranda’s *Hamilton* through the critical lenses of race, nationhood, gender, and sexuality, my project aims to expand, interrogate, and connect *Hamilton* to critical and artistic contributions within the fields of Theatre and Performance studies, Women’s Studies, African American Studies, Cultural Studies, and American Studies. This project examines *Hamilton*’s popularity and ability to garner diverse Broadway audiences and disperse histories of people of color on-stage. To this point, *Hamilton* not only highlights the cultural power of performance and how it can be utilized to subvert dominant ideology and history about people of color, but in doing so it reminds us of the power and influence art has in shaping identities and narratives for both white people and people of color alike. Accordingly, the actors of color that are strategically centered in Manuel’s musical challenge how raced and gendered figures are habitually understood and perceived in American theatre, history, and everyday life.

Chapter One: Staging the (In)Visibility of Whiteness

“There are certain places where it resonates, where I remember, ‘Oh yeah, I’m a part of this.’ Not this production – I know what I bring to the production – but being American. I am a part of it, as opposed to being an afterthought.”

– Paul Tazewell, Costume Designer, *Hamilton the Revolution*

In the 1940s, Black American author Richard Wright was asked by a French reporter about the “Negro Problem” in the United States. Wright responded, “There isn’t a Negro problem, there is only a white problem.”¹⁶ Wright’s response gestures to the often-held assumption that the mere existence of Black people serves as a barrier to the United States’ success as a nation, rather than the fact that anti-black racism is a hindrance and source of strife. The “Negro Problem,” as Wright so pointedly rephrases as a “white problem,” relies on the notion that Black Americans fall outside of the category of citizen.¹⁷ Wright’s retort simultaneously exposes how Black Americans are not seen as bona fide citizens (able to fully engage with the rights, privileges and duties therein) nor does their citizenship afford them the opportunity to express discomfort with the way Black Americans are treated in America. Seventy-five years after Wright’s interview, people of color have still been branded as a problem to overcome. And many times over, a response similar to that of Richard Wright has been given. But most recently, instead of coming to the attention of the American public through a widely publicized interview given by a prominent Black author, the echo of Wright’s response has been embodied by people of color on the Broadway stage. *Hamilton, An American Musical* subverts the historical record that frames people of color as a problem through its re-telling of history. Both Wright’s blunt retort and *Hamilton* invert the expectations of their listeners/viewers

¹⁶ Raphael Tardon, "Richard Wright Tells Us: The White Problem in the United States," *Action*, 24 Oct. 1946. Reprinted in Kenneth Kinnamon and Michel Fabre, *Conversations with Richard Wright*

¹⁷ Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, 369.

by illustrating the often-veiled assumption that American citizenship is synonymous with whiteness.

Just as Wright turned the reporter's question on its head, *Hamilton* disrupts the patterns and expectations that make whiteness seem normal. As mentioned in the introduction, I contend that *Hamilton* adopts numerous strategies to challenge the cultural power whiteness has in erroneously defining the parameters of American identity. In support of my argument, this section of my thesis intends to examine how *Hamilton* interrogates whiteness and American identity through a critical examination of production elements, most notably: 1) the costuming choices for the "founding fathers" and actors of color, 2) the deliberate choice to cast *and consciously mark* the character of King George III (the only white character in the musical that is portrayed by a white actor) *as white*, and 3) the genre and styles of music that suggests cultural affiliations associated with the musical's various characters. Finally, after revealing the ways that *Hamilton* conscientiously challenges notions of whiteness and American identity, I close this section by duly acknowledging—and addressing—some of the criticism *Hamilton* has received on the grounds of potentially reinforcing (rather than combating) traditional, racially biased narratives.

Designing the Revolution of *Hamilton*: Hair

Hamilton markets itself as an "American musical." In doing so, the musical's subtitle recognizes that the story of Alexander Hamilton is an American story while also signifyin(g) that the bodies on-stage rightly lay claim to an Americanness that others may not readily attribute to them. *Hamilton* recalibrates the visual expectations of the

audience and in turn reimagines what our founding American forefathers and foremothers looked like. Case in point: the work of Paul Tazewell (the Tony-Award Winning African-American costume designer of *Hamilton*) makes no effort to reconcile the expectations that some audience members may have had when envisioning an actor of color embodying a famous white historical figure. For example, when asked about the absence of powdered wigs for the founding fathers, he responded, “I didn’t want Chris[topher] [Jackson] to be in a powdered wig as [George] Washington. I wanted to see him for who he was.”¹⁸ For Tazewell, it was of utmost importance that the actor was not lost in the role by a costume piece that interfered with the actor being seen. Tazewell’s design choice demonstrates one of the ways that the whiteness of the *American* characters goes partially unmarked in the show.

Considering the time and place in which *Hamilton* is set (a time in which white men of a certain class or within a certain cultural milieu often donned white wigs), the omission of powdered wigs for the “founding fathers” is particularly noteworthy. The lack of white wigs on the founding fathers may not accurately portray historical accounts, but instead works to abate the shadow of whiteness in the re-telling of American history and America’s present.

Moreover, Tazewell’s choice to elide the use of powdered wigs does not simply result in a lack or absence, but rather it opens the opportunity for alternative design choices and/or new ways of seeing the historical characters in the play. In lieu of using powdered wigs on the greater ensemble, Tazewell chose to either adorn his actors in

¹⁸ Lin-Manuel Miranda and Jeremy McCarter, *Hamilton: The Revolution*, First Edition (New York, NY: Grand Central Publishing, 2016), 113.

natural-styled wigs (such as the wig worn by the African American actress Renée Goldsberry for her portrayal of Angelica Schuyler) or allow the actors to style their own natural hair (as in the case of the African American actor, Daveed Diggs). In fact, in the case of Diggs (who plays Lafayette and Thomas Jefferson), the actor not only wears his 3C curl pattern unapologetically, but he even brushes his afro in the song “Cabinet Battle #1” as a mechanism to illustrate the South’s status and wealth in a rap battle on the financial crisis in America after the war. The choices related to hair and hair-styling not only help underscore the racial and cultural politics that inform *Hamilton*, but they also inform the way that Tazewell attempted to merge signs of the past and present. Similarly, Tazewell’s costume design choices uses the element of costume to destabilize how whiteness is seen on the bodies of color, thus working against the expectations of the audience.

Costuming the Revolution with Bodies of Color

Tazewell’s costume design does not explicitly name whiteness; rather, Tazewell displaces “white racial signifiers” by choosing to subvert, repurpose, and imagine a world in which white racial signifiers are neither the standard, nor desired by the actors of color. By purposefully replicating the clothing worn by these characters in the 18th century, Tazewell allows the costumes to be transformed by the bodies of the actors. One of these important moments is during Act I during the songs, “Right Hand Man,” and “The Battle of Yorktown.” During the performances of these songs the ensemble actors are dressed in blue coats with red trim and brass buttons, thereby replicating the uniforms worn by George Washington’s Continental Army. In an astute observation regarding this moment

during the first preview of *Hamilton*, cultural critic Jeremy McCarter wrote, “That day for the first time, 150 audience members had the mind-altering experience of watching black and Latino actors, young men and women from communities that have seen their freedom infringed for hundreds of years, win freedom for us all.”¹⁹ Building on this observation, the visual representation of bodies of color physically wearing an iconic symbol of freedom serves to revise the narrative of American history that attributes the victories of the American Revolution under the sole proprietorship of white men. By having actors of color present themselves as Continental soldiers, *Hamilton* stages the symbolic resurrection and embodiment of the thousands of unnamed Black soldiers who fought during the American Revolution, yet have been erased from the historical archives.

The wearing of Continental Army uniforms by bodies of color in *Hamilton* illustrates a fairly simple, yet powerful mode of resistance that may not be recognized as an act resistance.²⁰ By having bodies of colors don the garb and enact the fight for American victory, the mere presence of these *revolutionary* non-white bodies on-stage challenge assumptions that people of color were mere bystanders in American history. Nevertheless, the visual presence and embodiment of the men and women of color in this uniform is a complicated one. We do well to remind ourselves that enslaved men were recruited with promises of freedom that never were fulfilled and that those who lost their life in battle did so for a country that did not even recognize them as humans. American history is contentious and the clothing of these uniforms—and all they represent—on people of color illustrate this complicated relationship with identity and the past.

¹⁹ Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton*, 113.

²⁰ Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 19.

As suggested by McCarter, an important effect of the ensemble members wearing the uniform of the Continental Army is the way in which *Hamilton* proposes an alternative perspective that situates people of color as the faces of freedom for the greater American public. A white man often illustrates the iconography of American freedom. However, the musical challenges this by providing an alternative depiction of people of color as the heroes. As the actors of color reenact this monumental historical moment, the audience has to identify freedom with the bodies of color. *Hamilton* invests in a project of possibility that is not concerned with merely recovering history for a historical archive, but instead works to imagine histories that are as fragmented as the identities that they produce, thereby illustrating that precarious relationship of history and identity (one that is influenced by the musical's mantra of "who lives, who dies, who tells your story").²¹ Stuart Hall details the precarious relationship of one's identity and its role in history:

Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they [identities] are subject to the continuous play of history, culture, and power. Far from being grounded in a mere "recovery" of the past, which is waiting to be found and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways in which we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, narratives of the past.²²

To Hall's point: the past is not fixed, it is filled with multiple histories that inform, produce, and shift perceived identities. Further, the reclaiming of history by the actors of color in *Hamilton* does work to achieve a "true history"; it reflects historical truths that are routinely omitted from history books and it helps illuminate the happenings of history (and history-making) by placing the past in conversation with the present. In doing so, *Hamilton's* spectators may be influenced to reexamine how whiteness functions as a

²¹ The name of the final song of the musical and a running theme throughout the show.

²² Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 83.

blindfold to omit the histories, achievements, and experiences of people of color. In addition, the unmarking *and* marking of whiteness in the musical not only brings attention to the excluded narratives of history, but additionally it explicitly reveals the contradictory nature of whiteness as both visible and invisible. This dynamic is revealed primarily in the framing and design choices of King George III.

Marking Whiteness In The Revolution: King George III

Although *Hamilton*'s principal actors and ensemble intentionally call for people of color, the musical actively incorporates the embodied presence of whiteness in the show. These strategic choices to mark and unmark whiteness throughout the show illuminate the ability for whiteness in everyday life, history, and performance to swing between representing the universal, while maintaining notions of individuality. *Hamilton* inverts whiteness' ability to occupy both spheres by appearing to erase whiteness from the historical narrative, only to then magnify the position of whiteness within the musical through the embodiment of King George III. The most noticeable displays of whiteness within *Hamilton* are portrayed through the framing of King George III. As noted previously, King George III is the only white character within the play that is actually portrayed by a white actor, thereby creating a contrasting distinction from the founding fathers (who are represented by actors of color). What is immediately noticeable about Paul Tazewell's design choices for King George III is that King George *does* wear a white powdered wig. Accordingly, the wig becomes an overt sign of whiteness as well as a potent signifier of Eurocentric culture. As a symbol of whiteness, the powdered wig—worn by a character in opposition to the founding fathers—communicates to audiences

that the men of color onstage are not attempting to claim any degree of whiteness.

Miranda emphasizes King George III's whiteness in the show, thereby marking and destabilizing whiteness. By contrasting the character of King George III against the rest of the musical's ensemble of actors, Miranda "others" whiteness and subverts the expectation that whiteness is a prerequisite to American identity, substantiated by the fact that a white identity becomes minoritized amidst the majority cast of color.

While the actor's body and powdered wig mark his character as "white," King George III's whiteness also becomes more pronounced to the audience when his bodily presence on stage is contrasted against the ensemble members of color (who are not entirely visible on-stage). King George III is only on-stage momentarily with the principal actors of color in two scenes. One of these moments is after the song, "I Know Him," when the character of King George III serves as a surrogate audience member watching and dancing from a wooden stool, stage left, before disappearing. The second moment is during the song, "The Reynold's Pamphlet" when King George joins the ensemble and principal actors in mocking taunts to Alexander Hamilton, jeering that Hamilton is, "Never gon' be president now" after he wrote and shared a document ("Reynold's Pamphlet") detailing his marital affair. In these two moments King George III is magnified as an outsider amidst the majority bodies of color. To this point, whiteness registers differently because Broadway audiences are often acculturated to see white actors and characters portrayed more frequently than actors and characters of color. King George's corporeal whiteness becomes hypervisible and is further underscored by the powdered wig, his costume, his musical accompaniment, and characterization, thereby compelling the spectators to fully recognize the presence of whiteness. Working

on both a micro and macro level, whiteness becomes destabilized within the world of *Hamilton*. As Omi and Winant offer, “our ability to interpret racial meanings depend on preconceived notions of a racialized social structure.”²³ In *Hamilton*, the many ways individuals unconsciously understand race becomes visible to the audience, thus magnifying how racial formation is situated both historically and in the everyday.

In tandem with racial markers, the music accompanying certain characters also signals to make visible the resistance enacted by bodies of color against the white hegemonic state. For example, King George III has his own genre of music that signifies his whiteness. The genre of British pop utilized (reminiscent of the Beatles) functions to juxtapose an upbeat rhythm with the violent lyrics he recites within the musical.²⁴ Moreover, the music associated with King George III serves as a sonic distinction between representations of the monarchy of King George III and the revolutionaries (the latter utilize hip hop and R&B as their musical forms). The sonic dynamic established by Miranda aurally underscores the idea that the revolutionaries—embodied by men of color—are attempting to divest from the authority and domination of a regime that is explicitly marked by and with whiteness. King George III stands as a symbol of Eurocentricity, one that attempts to display white hegemony over non-white bodies. This sentiment is further underscored when King George III threatens the revolutionaries, saying that “I will kill [their] friends and family” and “send a fully armed battalion/To remind you of my love!”²⁵ In the aforementioned lyrics, the spectators are cleverly confronted with the legacies of colonialism and violence embodied by King George III. As the representative of Eurocentricity in the musical, King George III does not merely

²³ Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 59.

²⁴ Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton*, 34.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 57.

signal to a history that omits people of color, but also to the erasure in the historical record of violence enacted on people of color by their white counterparts.

Despite the many ways in which *Hamilton* questions the privileging of whiteness and purposefully disrupts troubled narratives related to American history and citizenship, the musical has also received substantial criticism from those who insist that it doesn't do "enough." Among the critiques waged are the assertions that *Hamilton* invests in assimilation rhetoric, ignores the systemic barriers faced by people of color in the United States, and, ultimately, "whitewashes" the travails of Black Americans by failing to directly depict the issue of American slavery in the show.

Critiquing the Revolution: Does *Hamilton* do Enough?

Scholars, historians, and critics have increasingly been more critical of *Hamilton*, and their critiques often address two notable issues. The first issue is the musical's omission of any pointed consideration or representation of American slavery. The second concern is the troublesome "bootstraps model" trope that some viewers identify as being fundamental to the musical's narrative. Taking up the criticisms posed by cultural critics Lyra Monteiro, Jason Allen, and James McMaster, I hope to engage further with how the musical—while subverting whiteness—also rehearses the normalization of systems that are grounded in white hegemony. While these issues should be critically explored and addressed, I do believe that the outright dismissal of *Hamilton*'s efforts to disrupt and destabilize whiteness and redefine the parameters of American identity is unreasonable.

Among the most notable criticism *Hamilton* has received on the topic of American slavery came from a platform created by the National Council on Public

History (NCPH). The NCPH provided an online forum for chosen historians and scholars to respond to a critical essay written by historian Lyra Monteiro about the show. In the first NCPH essay (out of four essays written by four different scholars), Lyra Monteiro argues that it is problematic to cast actors of color as “great white men” without acknowledging that these actors would be excluded from these freedoms of America.²⁶ As a point of correction, Monteiro proposes that *Hamilton* would have been better served by depicting the enslaved on-stage rather than avoiding any physical representation of American chattel slavery. In response and in agreement with Monteiro, Jason Allen, a museum and non-profit consultant, begins his piece with the premise that cultural narratives have been used to conceal the truth of the horrors faced by enslaved people. Allen asserts that *Hamilton* is a product of a white cultural narrative in which the African American actors are celebrated for erasing the account of their ancestors.²⁷

While there is little recognition of slavery and no explicit representation of slavery on the stage in *Hamilton*, the reference to this “peculiar institution”—albeit minimal—is not absolutely absent. When the issue of American slavery does arise it is either to illustrate Thomas Jefferson’s lack of a moral compass (as in the song “Cabinet Battle #1”), or to bring attention to John Lauren’s abolitionist tendencies. Also of note is the fact that from the first song, *Alexander Hamilton*, Miranda does establish that this world is a world in which slavery exists. In fact, earlier versions of the musical actually included a cabinet battle on the subject of slavery, but Miranda decided to cut it because, “watch[ing] all these men be hypocrites and do nothing, and then continue with our story,

²⁶ Lyra D. Monteiro, “Review Essay: Race-Conscious Casting and the Erasure of the Black Past in Lin-Manuel Miranda’s *Hamilton*,” *The Public Historian* 38, no. 1 (February 1, 2016): 89–98, doi:10.1525/tph.2016.38.1.89.

²⁷ Jason Allen, “A Color-Blind Stockholm Syndrome,” *National Council on Public History*, accessed September 19, 2016, <http://ncph.org/history-at-work/a-color-blind-stockholm-syndrome/>.

it stopped the show cold.”²⁸ Miranda’s quote highlights a conundrum faced by artists who must decide between presenting an “authentic and truthful” depiction when creating their work, versus making choices that may lead to a more dynamic show that serves to theatricalize the narrative. Thus, the creator has to decide if it is better to have a super successful show that does activist work or a show that depicts a truthful account of slavery, but may fail to garner attention. Miranda had considered the issue of slavery throughout the creation process, but was unable to find a suitable moment for it in the musical. As revealed in a *New York Times* interview, Miranda notes that, “[slavery] was a constant conversation between me and Tommy [Kail]” but “there’s only so much time you can spend on [slavery] when there’s no end result to it.”²⁹ This is not to dismiss the critique that the musical lacks a direct engagement with slavery. Rather, the act of exposing and lamenting this omission is an appropriate response—yet it is a response that must also be tempered with recognizing what *Hamilton* does achieve.

I would also like to offer that the requirement that slavery must be a part of any story depicting American history by creators of color is an unfair one. This requirement does not merely limit the possibility for creators of color to imagine something outside of oppression, but this is rarely asked of white creators who take up issues of American history. If the issue of slavery was directly addressed in the musical, as Monteiro suggests it should have been, I question whether or not that inclusion would have been sufficient enough for *Hamilton*’s critics. If slaves were shown as marginal, unnamed characters (since the show is not about the enslaved, but rather about Alexander

²⁸ <https://www.iheart.com/news/hamilton-mixtape-song-meanings-revealed-by-15352062/>

²⁹ Rob Weinert-kendt, “Lin-Manuel Miranda and Others From ‘Hamilton’ Talk History,” *The New York Times*, February 5, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/08/theater/lin-manuel-miranda-and-others-from-hamilton-talk-history.html>.

Hamilton), then what work would this have done to inform the musical or its audience on the history of slavery? If slavery was centered on *Hamilton*, it would have been an entirely different play. Further, these critiques do not acknowledge or recognize that *Hamilton's* creators were fully aware of what was at stake in their storytelling; they were not only cognizant of the raised concerns, but their eventual choices reflected a great deal of deliberation. These concerns, in fact, even extended to the actors who have also had to acknowledge and grapple with the “founding fathers” involvement and/or lack of investment in abolishing slavery.

Many of the men of color who embodied the roles of the founding fathers every night have spoken about their own inability to reconcile the historical record with the show. This illustrates how slavery may not have been depicted in the show, but how it has always been a point of consideration in the preparation for actors, director, and creators. The men of color who embody Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, and James Madison have all been asked how they deal with playing characters who owned slaves or did nothing about it. For example, Christopher Jackson, the actor who played George Washington in the Broadway debut, was asked about George Washington’s legacy. Acknowledging George Washington’s role in preserving slavery. Jackson stated, “It's something I spent a lot of time and a lot of angst trying to figure out how I reconcile being in this man's skin [...] As a black man, I just couldn't put it together.”³⁰ Likewise, Daveed Diggs, the actor who played Thomas Jefferson in the Broadway debut, shares a similar sentiment, saying: “It’s tricky with Jefferson because there are so many things about him that I disagree with [...] I think if you embrace all of his contradictions, you

³⁰ Katey Rich, “George Washington Never Mentions Slavery in Hamilton, but the Actor Who Plays Him Does,” *Vanity Fair*, accessed December 9, 2016, <http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2016/04/christopher-jackson-hamilton-interview>.

can end up with a lot of things about him that are great—but you still have to remember that he was a slave owner.”³¹ For these two actors of color, portraying these slave owners and founding fathers illustrates the experience and actual embodiment of “double consciousness”—a term and theory coined by W.E.B. DuBois in his foundational text *The Souls of Black Folks*. DuBois describes double consciousness as:

This sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on it amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.³²

To DuBois’ point: double consciousness describes the duality of identity with which people of color in the United States are often confronted. The reflections of Diggs and Jackson reveal the conflict they experience in trying to resolve their knowledge and pride of their Black identity with that of the knowledge and pride associated with American identity. Seemingly at odds is an American identity that can celebrate the success and history of America, and the racial identity that recognizes that if they were to exist during Jefferson or Washington’s period, they would be slaves.

Hamilton attempts to sit within this contradiction. The actors wrestle with how blackness, historically and to this present day, falls outside of an Americanness that assumes whiteness as the basis of membership. Therefore, I contend it would be one-sided of critics and spectators to assume that Miranda is trying to get audiences to make peace with the legacy of slavery. That being said, the absence of a direct engagement with slavery is an issue that I, too, have not been able to reconcile with my own celebration of the musical. Yet and still, similar to Christopher Jackson and Daveed

³¹ Ashley Ross, “Daveed Diggs of ‘Hamilton’ Talks Thomas Jefferson’s Troubling Legacy,” *Time*, April 13, 2016, <http://time.com/4287773/hamilton-daveed-diggs-jefferson/>.

³² W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 1903.

Diggs, I commend the musical's ability to place bodies of color on-stage in a historical narrative to which people of color are often not allowed to lay claim. Furthermore, the conundrums activated by *Hamilton* invite audiences to reflect deeply about the contradictory foundation and essence of America. Thus, spectators are presented with the opportunity to interrogate how history is told and who is included or erased from the record.

While scholars have offered due criticisms regarding the absence of slavery in *Hamilton*, the “bootstraps model” narrative has been criticized for its prominent place in the show. One of the first critiques was presented by James McMaster (a Performance Studies doctoral student at New York University), who penned a guest blog on HowIRound (an online blog forum for theatre artists, scholars, and theatre lovers to engage in dialogue about the various issues within the fields of Theatre and Performance Studies), critiquing *Hamilton's* celebration of the “bootstraps model.” McMaster contends that *Hamilton* suffers from a “bootstraps model” (the “bootstraps” trope refers to the insistence that one should be able to independently “pull themselves up by their bootstraps” and achieve success regardless of the systematic oppression faced). McMaster writes that the bootstraps narrative in *Hamilton* “neglects and obscures the material obstacles and violences imposed on racialized immigrants within the United States.”³³ McMaster goes on further to proclaim that presenting this biased vision of the American Dream implies that immigrants who have failed to reach a designated point of success are to blame, while the systemic challenges that prevent their prosperity remain unattended.

³³ James McMaster, “Why Hamilton Is Not the Revolution You Think It Is,” *HowIRound*, February 23, 2016, <http://howlround.com/why-hamilton-is-not-the-revolution-you-think-it-is>.

At the top of *Hamilton*—before the character of Hamilton even enters the scene—the character of John Laurens (portrayed by Anthony Ramos) introduces us to the title character, rapping, “Got a lot farther by working a lot harder/ By being a lot smarter/ By being a self-starter.”³⁴ These lyrics establish the through line of Hamilton’s story according to Miranda’s musical; a thematic trajectory that celebrates Hamilton’s immigrant beginnings and his self-determination to climb the proverbial ladder—from his working-class roots to acquiring the status of an upper-class man. As dramatized in the musical, Hamilton takes steps to achieve a higher social position by marrying into a wealthy family, leading a troop in the war, and securing a cabinet position in George Washington’s administration. His success, the audience is to believe, is all based on his own prowess and hard work. Neither his maleness nor his perceived whiteness is a part of the conversation. Alexander Hamilton, played by Puerto Rican Lin-Manuel Miranda, is able to assimilate into a fictional whiteness and enjoy the rights and privileges therein. Thus, the “bootstraps model,” as Omi and Winant argue, is “limited by an unwillingness to consider [...] [the] special circumstances which racially defined minorities encounter in the U.S.”³⁵ The pitfall of the way this “bootstraps model” rhetoric seems implicated in the play is that the musical could be used to erroneously suggest that perceptions of race (or lack of) do not have material consequences. As McMaster asserts in his critique of the musical, the story of an immigrant successfully assimilating into the fabric of America as told in *Hamilton* could easily serve as an example of the possibility for *all* immigrants to be welcomed in America. This fallacious notion overlooks the history of America, a history built on the genocide of native population, enslavement of Black people, and the

³⁴ Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton*, 16.

³⁵ Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 22.

labor of Asian and Latino immigrants. In addition, it does nothing to reconcile the lived realities of immigrants, past and present, who are often given less money for the laborious work that many American citizens are unwilling to do. In Miranda's musical, however, Hamilton stands as the model immigrant; one who chose assimilation and wanted so deeply to blend into the fabric of America.

If Miranda intended for *Hamilton* to present a politically radical perspective, the musical may have been better served if it exhibited a more nuanced perspective on American citizenship by acknowledging how the non-white immigrant often falls outside of the whiteness needed to achieve the level of success reached by Alexander Hamilton. However, through my analysis of the musical, I am proposing that we find the nuances and look to see how these stories and embodiments open new discourses that may not have been activated.

As I have argued in this chapter of my thesis, *Hamilton* is invested in actively contesting and subverting how whiteness is seen, in order to challenge its cultural power and redefine the parameters of American identity. By adopting a number of dramaturgical and design strategies (for example, the absence of powdered wigs on actors of color, encouraging the actors of color to wear their textured hair, the costuming of the ensemble of color in replica Continental Army uniforms, the framing of King George III as a white character, and the genre and style of music attached to the particular characters in the show) this chapter has illustrated how whiteness goes unmarked and marked throughout the show. The artistic choices of Lin-Manuel Miranda, Paul Tazewell, and the ensemble of *Hamilton* challenge the presumed neutrality of how whiteness moves in history. By emphasizing the presence of people of color in the musical (and, thereby, in America),

Hamilton denounces the privilege and authority of whiteness; thereby questioning who is allowed to narrate American history and what such narratives should include, say, and do.

Chapter Two: “Non-Traditional” Casting Practices in American Theatre & Hamilton

As mentioned earlier, the creators of *Hamilton* initially received very little criticism on their intentional choice to cast people of color in the principal roles for the show. For the most part, early observations celebrated the musical for its revolutionary casting practices. That was until the production circulated an official casting call that reiterated the production intent to continue to cast “non-white men and women” (see appendix 1.1) in the principal roles. This led to Randolph McLaughlin of the New York Commission on Human Rights, along with other critics of the casting call, to shout “reverse discrimination” and claim that the casting call privileged people of color over white performers. In response to Randolph’s accusation, a *Hamilton* representative was quoted on CBS as having said that the wording of the casting call had been approved by Actors Equity Association (AEA)—although this was later denied by the AEA in the following statement:

The *Hamilton* call on their website is inconsistent with Equity's policy. All of our calls have the following language: ‘Performers of all ethnic and racial backgrounds are encouraged to attend.’ We also have strong language in our Production Contract agreement which states, ‘The parties hereto affirm their commitment to the policy that employment hereunder shall be without discrimination on the basis of sex, race, color, creed, national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression or political persuasion or belief. Consistent with the foregoing and with the procedure set forth in Rule 5(E)(4), it is the intention of the parties that the casting of productions will be conducted in a manner which provides equal and fair consideration to all Actors including, but not limited to: Actors with disabilities, ethnic minorities, seniors and women.’³⁶

³⁶ Robert Viaga, “Civil Rights Attorney Slams Hamilton for Casting Notice — AEA Responds,” *Playbill*, March 20, 2016, <http://www.playbill.com/article/civil-rights-attorney-slams-hamilton-for-casting-notice-aea-responds>.

On March 30, 2016, in response to the cited discrepancies, *Hamilton* producer Jeffery Seller released a statement on the *Hamilton* team's behalf, declaring that the focused casting of non-white bodies "is essential to the storytelling of *Hamilton* [and] that the principal roles –which were written for non-white characters (excepting King George) – be performed by non-white actors."³⁷ Seller concludes the statement by stating "the casting will be amended to also include language we neglected to add, that is, we welcome people of all ethnicities to audition for *Hamilton*." In the amended casting call, the language was changed to specify "non-white characters" (see appendix 1.2). Thus, the *Hamilton* team affirmed their casting agenda, purposefully proceeding to cast all the principal roles with actors of color (except for King George) in *Hamilton's* future productions.

In the previous section, I ruminated on how the bodies of color onstage disrupt the normalization of whiteness through the various design and production elements as well as by the positioning of King George as the only white character in the musical. In addition, I also explored how *Hamilton* has received substantial criticism for "whitewashing" history. This section will continue to explore how *Hamilton* disrupts whiteness, with a specific focus on Miranda's casting practices. I assert that Miranda's artistic strategy illuminates the histories of under-acknowledged communities, making them visible and present in order to rectify the way in which America's past and present are imagined. Thus, a central focus of this section is to illustrate how *Hamilton* relies on the actor's actual *bodies* to displace whiteness and disentangle it from Americanness. Further, this section will engage directly with the casting choices of *Hamilton*. I will address

³⁷ The *Hamilton* Team are as followed: Producers - Jeffrey Seller, Sander Jacobs, Jill Furman; Book, Musical, and Lyrics - Lin-Manuel Miranda; Casting - Telesy + Company, Bethany Knox, CSA

contemporary casting terminology and propose “non-white” as a more appropriate alternative to casting terminology that names and displaces whiteness as the center.

Entering this discourse is inherently a difficult process; how does one analyze and theorize about a show that is still in-progress and still creating its own narrative? The immediacy of *Hamilton* stems just as much from the bodies onstage and off-stage, as it does from the identities, narratives, and experiences each actor or audience member carries with them—all of which informs audience understanding. Thus, I employ Harry J. Elam Jr.’s historiographical theory of “playmaking” as a vital tool to examine what work these bodies do on and beyond the stage. In Elam Jr.’s own words, playmaking serves “as a form of historiography and how identity operates as a critical source of meaning.”³⁸

Elam situates the playwright (in this case, Lin Manuel-Miranda) as a stakeholder in the history that he is constructing by striving to uncover the past while simultaneously participating in its construction. Further, Elam asks historians to consider the complexity of staging racialized oppression, writing that the historian “must situate the artwork in history and the history that is in the art. We also need to examine our own positionality and how it impacts on how we interpret these events and how we give them meaning in the present.”³⁹ Elam’s rumination brings attention to how historiography, narrative, and identity intersect, inform, and serve as foundations of knowledge.

Of course, focusing on “identity” leads us to another question: what *is* identity? I utilize Paula Moya’s definition in her introduction of *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory*

³⁸ Harry J. Elam Jr, “The High Stakes of Identity: Lorraine Hansberry’s *Follow the Drinking Gourd* and Suzan-Lori Parks’ *Venus*,” in *Representing the Past Essays in Performance Historiography*, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010), 283.

³⁹ Harry J. Elam Jr, “The High Stakes of Identity: Lorraine Hansberry’s *Follow the Drinking Gourd* and Suzan-Lori Parks’ *Venus*,” in *Representing the Past Essays in Performance Historiography*, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010), 299.

and the Predicament of Postmodernism. Moya writes that identities “can be politically and epistemically significant, on the one hand, and variable, nonessential and radically historical, on the other.”⁴⁰ To this point, identity is not static, but unstable, and thus simultaneously able to be both innate and constructed. This is the identity I am interested in exploring in *Hamilton*; the musical carves out a space for the non-white bodies and identities to reinsert their stories into American history. Accordingly, my application of playmaking asks “how does narrative and identity intersect in the representations of figures onstage?”

Theatre has historically been a site that has offered minority subjects limited opportunity to support or subvert the status quo.⁴¹ I argue that *Hamilton* subverts conventional expectations and troubles “whiteness” through dramaturgical intervention of casting. The casting practices employed in *Hamilton* rely on the strategy to cast Alexander Hamilton and company as people of color. Moreover, this dramaturgical approach queries who can tell American history and what American history should aim to say. Further, I contend that Lin-Manuel Miranda asks theater-goers to consider his casting of Black, Latino, and Asian actors as a dramaturgical intervention that influences how audiences understand the play. Dramaturgy encompasses many things; however, it commonly refers to the comprehensive study and understanding of a play’s historical, theatrical, and intellectual context.⁴² While “dramaturgical concerns” cover a range of different aims and interests when it comes to the inner-workings of a performance piece, among these concerns is the need and desire to design and guide the interpretative

⁴⁰ Paula M. L. Moya, “Introduction,” in *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2000), 12.

⁴¹ Elam, Jr., “The High Stakes of Identity: Lorraine Hansberry’s *Follow the Drinking Gourd* and Suzan-Lori Parks’s *Venus*,” 292.

⁴² Bert. Cardullo, *What Is Dramaturgy?* (New York: P. Lang, 1995), 3.

possibilities associated with a particular production. Accordingly, these considerations are also inclusive of the rationale and reasons behind specific casting choices.

To further explain this point, I adopt some thoughts (offered by dramaturg and theatre scholar Faedra Chatard Carpenter) that I see as being vital to casting conversations. Carpenter proposes that one must acknowledge the “time and context” of a play, as well as when and where it will be produced. This inquiry informs how the play will be received by audiences. In addition, Carpenter also notes that the awareness of “the embodied and enacted text, beyond its literary form” is vital to the dramaturgical process. In other words, Carpenter emphasizes the exploration of the interpretative possibilities of a text once it is activated by bodies versus when it is merely read. Further, Carpenter also situates the audience, suggesting that the “consideration of audience reception and impact of artistic framing” be seen as an important dramaturgical task. To this point, it is important to consider how the audience will understand and read the bodies on stage in tandem with the artistic elements, i.e., if the framing will distract or create unintended interpretive themes.⁴³

These dramaturgical ruminations are, as Angela Pao argues, offered with the intention to blend reality with a theatrical fiction that

force[s] spectators to become aware of the concrete materiality of the actor’s body rather than leaving them free to focus on the illusion of the character’s physical and psychological qualities therefore does not merely require a re-encoding of the signifying functions assigned directly to the actor; any such shift instigates a realignment that traverses the entire semiotic system of a production.⁴⁴

Provoking theater history, *Hamilton* exercises strategies of playmaking and casting as forms of historiography that aid in the problematizing of whiteness. Examining history

⁴³ Faedra Chatard. Carpenter, *Coloring Whiteness: Acts of Critique in Black Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 13.

⁴⁴ Pao, *No Safe Spaces Re-Casting Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality in American Theater*, 28.

through a dramaturgical frame offers historians the ability to reenvision the theoretical work of theatre practitioners, which often uses art as a method to speak about history and society. As Elam argues, “playwrights have blended fiction and history to reenvision past relations and conditions in ways that impact our perceptions and even our possible actions in the present.”⁴⁵ Accordingly, both fictional and historical narratives have consequences and affect audiences.

Situating *Hamilton* in the Casting Debates

From Joanne Akalaitis’ 1984 staging of *Endgame* at the American Repertory Theater to the 1990 casting of a Caucasian actor in *Miss Saigon*, casting has always held tension within theatre.⁴⁶ Casting practices and the fight over casting terminology (terms such as non-traditional casting, color-blind casting, or conceptual casting, to name a few), have long been sources of discourse and controversy. The strategies of integrated casting were utilized in order to challenge Eurocentric conceptions of American society and culture in theatres dedicated to a Eurocentric view.⁴⁷ In this section, I briefly examine the history of casting practices in American theatre. In doing so, my aim is to position *Hamilton* within a genealogy of non-traditional casting practices, specifically examining Lin Manuel-Miranda’s ultimate creation of “non-white characters” by casting white historical figures

⁴⁵ Harry J. Elam, Jr., “The High Stakes of Identity: Lorraine Hansberry’s *Follow the Drinking Gourd* and Suzan-Lori Parks’s *Venus*,” 292.

⁴⁶ During the staging of *Endgame* in 1984, JoAnne Akalaitis cast and designed the show with little consideration for Samuel Beckett’s (the playwright) stage directions. The matter was taken to court, but the show was still allowed to continue, under the condition that they would include a playwright’s note in the program. In 1990 *Miss Saigon* received criticism for casting Jonathan Pryce, a white actor as an Eurasian/Asian character. In the production, Pryce wore eye prosthetics and bronzing cream to appear Asian. After controversy, the Actors’ Equity in New York announced that it would bar Jonathan Pryce from acting in the Broadway production of the show

⁴⁷ Angela Chia-yi. Pao, *No Safe Spaces Re-Casting Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality in American Theater*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 2.

with “non-white performers.”⁴⁸ I also adopt the specific wording of “non-white casting” as a means to implicate whiteness within the discourses of race in theatre and American social politics. Further, I hope to parse out how this framing allows for a broader investigation of the meaning-making potential for the non-white bodies on stage in terms of how it situates the audience’s reception, capitalizes on the embodied knowledge of *Hamilton*’s audience and actors and, more broadly, potentially influences other “non-white” casting decisions.

A Brief History of “Non-Traditional” Casting

The New York Shakespeare Festival, Arena Stage in DC, and Los Angeles Inner City Cultural Center were the first companies to implement color-blind casting, their goal being to cast actors solely based on merit with no consideration of race or ethnicity.⁴⁹ Their artistic policies essentially called for a race-neutral method that divorced race from the casting and hiring practices of these institutions.⁵⁰ This *color-blind* approach, introduced in the 1970s, began losing currency with the introduction of the Non-Traditional Casting Project (NTCP) in the 1980s. The publication of the 1986 four-year study by Actor’s Equity Association “revealed that over 90 percent of all the professional theater produced in this county – from stock and dinner theatre, to the avant-garde, to Broadway—was staged with all-Caucasian casts.”⁵¹ A month after this report was published, Actor’s Equity Association helped to co-found the NTCP under the leadership

⁴⁸ This is the language used in the casting call referenced earlier in the paper.

⁴⁹ Pao, *No Safe Spaces Re-Casting Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality in American Theater*, 3.

⁵⁰ Pao, *No Safe Spaces Re-Casting Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality in American Theater*, 3.

⁵¹ Harry Newman and Clinton T. Davis, eds., *Beyond Tradition: Transcripts of the First National Symposium on Non-Traditional Casting*, 1st edition (Non-Traditional Casting, 1988).

of Harry Newman and Clinton Turner Davis.⁵² The mission statement of NTCP further illustrates the project's intent:

NTCP works to increase the participation in theater, and television of artists of color—African American, Asian American, Latino, and Native American; female artists; Deaf and hard-of-hearing artists; and artists with disabilities—ambulatory disabled, blind and low vision. Our principal concerns are that ethnic, female and disabled artists are denied equitable professional opportunities; that this lack of participation is not only patently discriminatory, but a serious loss to the cultural life of the nation and has resulted in a theater that does not reflect the diversity of our society.⁵³

NTCP works to achieve an increase in this “participation” by offering national and regional conferences, forums, seminars, roundtables on casting and diversity, and the *New Traditions* journal publication.⁵⁴ Recently, NTCP has changed its name to Alliance for Inclusion of the Arts,⁵⁵ but still maintains casting practices as one of its primary goals. Reinforcing casting practices as a primary concern for the NTCP, Davis and Newman has devoted time to further expanding the terminology used for casting in the theatre.

In addition to “non-traditional casting,” Davis and Newman created four subcategories of casting practices:

Societal Casting: ethnic, female, or disabled actors are cast in roles they perform in society as a whole.

Cross-Cultural Casting: the entire world of the play is translated to a different cultural setting.

Conceptual Casting: an ethnic, female, or disabled actor is cast in a role to give a play greater resonance.

Blind Casting: All actors are cast without regard to their race, ethnicity, gender, or physical capability.

⁵² Pao, *No Safe Spaces Re-Casting Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality in American Theater*, 5.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁵ There is no language specify the history of the NTCP on the website, even though they do recognize that their organization began in 1986.

Each of these terms, as Brandi Wilkins Catanese argues, “produces an ideologically fluid spectrum that alternately uses race to Say Something, to Reflect Truth, and at the extreme, to Say Something, By Saying Nothing.”⁵⁶ I reason that the three subcategories of non-traditional casting: *societal casting* (when an actor is chosen to play a character who historically could have been of the same race, consequently mirroring societal realities), *cross-cultural casting* (when the casting choice emphasizes the play’s movement to a different cultural context), and *blind casting* (ignoring any markers of difference, instead casting the individual best for the part) are all insufficient when speaking of the casting practices of *Hamilton*. Conceptual casting might be suitable for categorizing the casting practices employed by Miranda, but I choose to forgo this term for the use of “non-white casting,” which I assert consciously marks and defamiliarizes whiteness as neutral category and cultural force. Before I proceed in expanding on the use of “non-white casting,” however, I would like to briefly situate *Hamilton* within the discourse of non-traditional casting in theatre.

Non-traditional casting has a vast history, and the productions that consciously employ non-traditional casting challenge many of the dominant societal and cultural values shaped by white Americans and Europeans. In *Beyond Traditions*, Clinton Turner Davis and Harry Newman define non-traditional casting as, “the casting of ethnic, female, or disabled actors in the role where race, ethnicity, gender, or physical capability are not necessary to the characters’ or plays development.”⁵⁷ Based on this definition, the question posed may be “Is Lin-Manuel Miranda doing anything different?” Miranda certainly builds on many principles of non-traditional casting, so at first glance the

⁵⁶ Brandi Wilkins Catanese, *The Problem of the Color(blind) Racial Transgression and the Politics of Black Performance*, (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 12.

⁵⁷ Newman and Davis, *Beyond Tradition*.

answer to the aforementioned question would be “no.” However, it is important to consider *Hamilton* as an original production that—from conception—was created with the intent of casting non-white bodies to perform the roles of white historical figures.⁵⁸ Thus, perception of non-white bodies is necessary to the characters and the story. In fact, race is essential. In “Racial Actors, Liberal Myths,” Josephine Lee suggests non-traditional casting is a device that seeks first to acknowledge and then eradicate difference; thus, it is “de-politicizing the racialized body, imagining race as a superficial quality that had to be transcended in order to ascertain the true merits of the actor.”⁵⁹ Lee underlines the dismissal of race within casting practices, which often appeals for integrationist models and is used to avoid valuable conversations about race by theatre companies, organizations, and goers.

Categorizing the casting practices of *Hamilton* as “non-traditional” attempts to refute the importance and work of the body in performance. For Miranda, the actors’ abilities were vital to the development of each character. For example, Miranda cast Renée Goldsberry as Angelica Schuyler due to her own personal velocity in which she read and spoke.⁶⁰ Thus, Goldsberry’s qualities are essential to her character. Another story that Miranda shared was that he created Marquis de Lafayette’s rap in *Guns and Ships*⁶¹ to challenge Daveed Diggs, a rapper turned actor. Throughout the development of *Hamilton*, Miranda saw the identity of his actors as cornerstones in the development of his work. “Non-traditional” does not seem to describe the casting of *Hamilton* because

⁵⁸ Michael Paulson, “‘Hamilton’ Producers Will Change Job Posting, but Not Commitment to Diverse Casting,” *The New York Times*, March 30, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/31/arts/union-criticizes-hamilton-casting-call-seeking-nonwhite-actors.html>.

⁵⁹ Josephine D. Lee, “Racial Actors, Liberal Myths,” *XCP: Cross Cultural Poetics*, no. 13 (2003): 95.

⁶⁰ Lin-Manuel Miranda and Jeremy McCarter, *Hamilton: The Revolution* (New York, NY: Grand Central Publishing, 2016) 79.

⁶¹ The fastest sang or rapped lines in musical theatre history.

race matters in its inception and future productions. The recognition of race in casting counters a progress narrative that assumes that race has been adequately dealt with in the casting practices of the theatre. This post-racial rhetoric does nothing to expose or challenge the centrality and privileging of whiteness in casting specifically, or theatre broadly. Casting as a point of interest or controversy is not new in American theatre. When it has been explored it is often through the situating of non-traditional casting. Thus, non-traditional casting becomes a stand in for “non-white actors” in white roles.⁶²

A number of scholars have taken up issues of casting through the exploration of play productions that were not the *original* productions. In her book, Brandi Wilkins Catanese further interrogates casting practices, arguing, “Nontraditional casting practices not only provide opportunities to challenge how we understand the nation as implicitly raced, they also risk acquiescing to a hierarchy of valuation, suggesting that their only function is to improve people of color. White theatre and white texts are affirmed as the pinnacle of artistic opportunity in practices that assume that escaping non-whiteness is the true task of color-blind social progress.”⁶³ I am in agreement with Catanese: when non-traditional is wielded, it is often presumed that everything that is outside of whiteness is not traditional. Embedded within each of the above terms is a standard that diverges from the original, which doesn’t take into account “non-traditional casting” in an original production. Going further, the above terms inherently equate whiteness as the standard, tradition, and origin. It appears that many scholars and artists are afraid of naming whiteness when they speak of casting. In an attempt to adopt a more nuanced

⁶² Brandi Wilkins Catanese, *The Problem of the Color(blind) Racial Transgression and the Politics of Black Performance*, (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 12.

⁶³ Brandi Wilkins Catanese, *The Problem of the Color(blind) Racial Transgression and the Politics of Black Performance*, (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 17.

perspective to casting, Brandi Wilkins Catanese calls for the alternative casting terminology of *nonconforming casting*. While I agree with the principles of this term, I choose not to use it in relation to *Hamilton* because I believe that naming whiteness and specifically referring to the strategies employed by this casting practice marks the conscious destabilization of whiteness. I embrace “non-white casting” as terminology for future conversations about casting practices that are akin to, and reach beyond, *Hamilton*.

“Non-white casting,” provides necessary language to avoid hierarchical categorization implied in the other casting terminology. When one uses “non-traditional” one has to define, what lies within the traditional, or conventional. Whiteness is the central marker in defining who can lay claim to neutrality and normativity. Some may argue that “non-white casting” is exclusive; my use of the term is not meant to deny the difference that is present in those who can claim whiteness, but rather to engage with how whiteness in casting has been able to stay hidden, while blackness (for example) has been explicitly marked. Calling forth whiteness, as Miranda does in his open casting call, leads to knowledge that allows us to address and dismantle its power. In order to do so, we must ask ourselves the following questions: How is whiteness still privileged within common U.S. casting practices? How do we dismantle, mark, and make “strange” theatres that equate Americanness with whiteness? For me, it signals towards the need to re-theorize casting and to rethink how casting is crucial to meaning-making in theatre.

As mentioned earlier, many of the critics of *Hamilton*'s casting call have expressed that Miranda and the producers insist on continuing to cast actors of color is the majority of the principal roles is “reverse discrimination.” This criticism has failed to acknowledge and consider that the show's casting practices are vital to the intent of the

show. Moreover, these critiques have failed to further explore how non-traditional casting is underwritten by the premise that casting should be non-traditional only if the casting is not vital to the message of the show. This is highlighted by the earlier quoted definition of non-traditional casting by Clinton Turner Davis and Harry Newman in *Beyond Traditions* which define non-traditional casting as, “the casting of ethnic, female, or disabled actors in the role where race, ethnicity, gender, or physical capability *are not necessary to the characters’ or plays development* [emphasis mine].”⁶⁴ I choose to conjure the words of Davis and Newman to bring attention to what is important and “necessary to the characters’ or plays development.” In the case of *Hamilton*, I assert that non-white casting is vital to the layered meanings of the play. Thus, any notion that *Hamilton* is discriminatory because it chooses to bypass white actors fails to take into account how the *bodies* of the actors are important to understanding the world of the play. Further, I propose that if we ask ourselves a few dramaturgical questions regarding *Hamilton*, then we are reminded that the casting is vital to the show.

In the spirit of Carpenter’s dramaturgical inquires, I pose a few questions with the casting of *Hamilton* in mind: (1) How does the time and context of a production inform casting? (2) What role does the body play in the enactment and embodiment of a character? (3) How does the audience’s own experiences inform the reception and impact of the actor’s body? These questions provide a foundation from which one can reconsider casting not merely as a choice of what bodies to put onstage, but as a greater dramaturgical question that considers the implications of casting in production. These questions further animate significant dialogue regarding representation, identity, and narrative. *Hamilton* is asking all of us questions: What does it mean to be white? How is

⁶⁴ Newman and Davis, *Beyond Tradition*.

“race” and “whiteness” positioned in relation to shifting social dialogue? How is “whiteness” interrupted and remediated? Similarly, just as Miranda wielded the knowledge of the actors of color in developing the show, Miranda’s own embodied experiences shaped the development of the play, further highlighting that *bodies*—and the experience of those bodies—matter.

Embodied Experience: Lin Manuel Miranda and the “Founding Fathers”

Hamilton is a musical about what happened in history just as much as it is about the bodies that make history. In an effort to position Miranda’s own identity as a critical source of meaning, as Harry J. Elam Jr.’s playmaking asks, I would like to briefly engage with Miranda’s biography as an influence on the dramaturgical interventions made in casting. Next, I take up the figure of Alexander Hamilton and the narrative within the musical that positions him as an immigrant, similar to that of Miranda’s parents. In addition, I explore the other actors of color and their embodiment in these white historical roles as a means to position their own identities as another source of meaning and instrument to deconstruct whiteness.

Prior to *Hamilton*, Lin-Manuel Miranda, a composer, lyricist, and actor, was best known for co-creating and starring in the Tony-Award Winning Musical *In the Heights*.⁶⁵ Miranda was born to Puerto Rican parents who immigrated to the mainland United States after his father, Luis A. Miranda, Jr., had graduated college before turning eighteen.⁶⁶ Influenced and encouraged by his father’s blessing to pursue writing instead of staying employed as a part-time English teacher, Miranda embarked on a writing career and was

⁶⁵ “Lin-Manuel Miranda,” *Lin-Manuel Miranda*, accessed May 3, 2016, <http://www.linmanuel.com/>.

⁶⁶ Rebecca Mead, “All About the Hamiltons,” *The New Yorker*, February 9, 2015, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/02/09/hamiltons>.

rewarded with the success of his first Broadway musical. After the success of his first musical, Miranda went on vacation in Mexico and began to read Ron Chernow's biography of Alexander Hamilton, during which time he was occupied by a single thought: that "Hamilton reminded him of his father."⁶⁷ From the inception of the show, Miranda "cast" his father, a Puerto Rican body, onto the history of Alexander Hamilton, thereby interpreting the story through his father's body and experience.

Similar to Alexander Hamilton, Luis Miranda, Jr. had served in politics, including serving as a special adviser on Hispanic affairs for Mayor Ed Koch. He later founded his own advising firm, in which Lin-Manuel Miranda worked during his summers.⁶⁸ Taking inspiration from his father, Miranda utilizes his own identity to interrogate Americanness. Building on his own critical memory and embodied experience served Miranda's ability to liken and reimagine the story of Alexander Hamilton as a familiar story – his father's story. This technique, identified as playmaking, understands that, "All history depends on the location and identity of the narrator telling that history and therefore inherently involves reconstruction."⁶⁹ As Lin-Manuel Miranda notes, "Ron tells you a story and he's the star of the story. I tell you a story and I'm the star of the story. History is entirely created by the person who tells the story."⁷⁰ Thus, regardless of one's attempt to withhold one's bias or experiences, one is always influenced by the personal when telling of the past.

In his writing of the book and music, Miranda builds on the immigrant roots of his family and uses his own embodied memory as a source of meaning-making. In the

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Elam, Jr., "The High Stakes of Identity: Lorraine Hansberry's *Follow the Drinking Gourd* and Suzan-Lori Parks's *Venus*," 299.

⁷⁰ Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton*, 33.

opening number, titled “Alexander Hamilton,” Miranda locates the inception of Hamilton’s story in his Caribbean roots. Through the positioning of Hamilton as an immigrant (and Caribbean immigrant, specifically), Miranda is able to challenge current discourses surrounding immigration in the United States by making explicit and implicit connections through (and due to) his own immigrant roots. Miranda juxtaposes Hamilton’s story with those of Latino/Latina descent who reside and work in America—and who are often erroneously lambasted by American politicians for taking jobs away from U.S. citizens. Furthermore, Miranda’s bodily presence—as one who is visibly recognized as Latino—is onstage portraying a “white” historical figure without any markers to call to Hamilton’s whiteness. This questions the normalizing qualities of European white immigrants who are often given easier paths to American citizenship and who are depicted as helpful to the United States economy based on their ability to blend in and assimilate into white American culture. *Hamilton* subverts this by calling to the artificiality of whiteness and the normalizing attributes often associated with it by not adapting the racialized body to mimic whiteness through production elements. Instead, by casting Alexander Hamilton as non-white in all present and future iterations of the show, Miranda uses performance to challenge institutional and cultural American anxieties and expectations surrounding race.

Just as Harry J. Elam, Jr.’s concept of playmaking asks us to position the playwright’s identity within analysis of their work, I expand this concept by positioning the other principal actors who embodied the “founding fathers” as meaning-making bodies within *Hamilton*. The inclusion of the actors’ body into the discourse surrounding whiteness is best summarized by Angela Pao, who states, “More than any other single element, the

actor's physical presence on stage controls the production of meaning as his or her body becomes the most arresting point of intersection for visual, auditory, sociocultural, and ideological codes.”⁷¹ To this point, the bodies of the actors are subjected to the signifiers of their race by spectators. The performances that utilize bodies of color have the potential to challenge whiteness and the audience assumption of American identity, as these non-white bodies choose to either enact racialized expectations or subvert them. Thus, performance serves as a subversion method. As Catanese contends, “Performance offers the opportunity for both gendered and racial subversion by allowing social and theatrical actors the opportunity to “restyle” the body and attempt to gain momentum that will cause repetitions of this restylization to spread from their local bodies to broader cultural sites.”⁷² For the actors, performance provides the opportunity to intervene in a broader representational reading of their bodies that lives beyond the stage. Furthermore, the presence of the racialized body may reverberate beyond the stage, impacting the spectator.

Within *Hamilton*, the actors are not expected to submerge their own identity for that of the character. Popularized in the Method Acting style, this acting technique requires the actor’s voice to be submerged beneath the character, leading to the actor appearing to cede ownership of their own body for the duration of a performance.⁷³ In the case of *Hamilton* the actor is unable to fully submerge themselves under the character. To a certain extent, non-white bodies playing (supposedly) white characters can never be completely separated from their race, as audience members place their own meaning onto

⁷¹ Pao, *No Safe Spaces Re-Casting Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality in American Theater*, 27.

⁷² Catanese, *The Problem of the Color(blind) Racial Transgression and the Politics of Black Performance*, 19.

⁷³ Pao, *No Safe Spaces Re-Casting Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality in American Theater*, 25.

these bodies based on the actor's visual presence. Lin-Manuel Miranda places these racialized bodies on stage and the spectator unconsciously or consciously, whether willingly or otherwise, cannot divorce the race of the body from the performer. The spectator may see Thomas Jefferson, yes, but they also see a Black man playing Thomas Jefferson. The corporeal race of the actors will, to a certain extent, always fall outside of the presumed whiteness of the characters. While the casting intentionally marks whiteness as strange, it also works to challenge how the visual, in this case racial signifiers, impedes the ability for the actor to be subsumed by the character.

Miranda utilizes his actors' identities to serve as destabilizing forces. This is particularly exemplified by Daveed Diggs, who plays Lafayette in Act I and Thomas Jefferson in Act II. Diggs comments that seeing a Black man play Jefferson or Washington while he himself was younger might have changed his life, and remarks, "A whole lot of things I just never thought were for me would have seemed possible."⁷⁴ Okieriette Onaodowna, starring in the roles of Hercules Mulligan and James Madison, echoes this point; he is hyperconscious about the roles he takes. For him, Madison has been a godsend: "I'm a black man playing a wise, smart, distinguished future president."⁷⁵ For Diggs and Onaodowna, their presence onstage is a recuperative signal that not only gives them national pride, but also provides other racialized bodies not onstage the opportunity to see themselves in American history in a way that does not subjugate them or cast them in the role of the subordinate.

As unlikely stars of the story of the birth of America, Miranda places non-white bodies, bodies that are often left out of the conversation, onstage. He does not ask the

⁷⁴ Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton*, 77.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

audience to ignore the races of these brown and Black bodies onstage; instead, he forces spectators to see the often-forgotten people pushed to the margins of society and history.

Pao further engages this point:

Rather than seeking to understand race in terms of the dynamics of other categories or concepts, we must posit race as a fundamental structuring and representational element of society. Instead of approaching race as a "problem" that should eventually and ideally be done away with, it should be seen as "an element of social structure rather than as an irregularity within it . . . as a dimension of human representation rather than an illusion."⁷⁶

To this point, Pao proposes that instead of seeing race as a hurdle that needs to be defeated, it needs to be reframed as an entity that structures how one exists within society. In the case of *Hamilton*, audiences may be better off noticing race as present and working in their perceptions of the bodies and show, instead of maintaining that race is obsolete in their experience of the musical. Lin Manuel-Miranda's representation of the white founding fathers in the bodies of people of color actively embraces the complexity and the contradictions that cause the audience to repeatedly interrogate themselves, as well as the history of oppression in the United States.

In this section, I have engaged with the ways in which the casting of *Hamilton* explicitly uses perceptions of identity, particularly as portrayed by the racialized bodies onstage, to disrupt notions of "whiteness." Utilizing the foundation that Harry J. Elam, Jr. has implemented with playmaking, I underscored the dramaturgical significance of casting practices. Ruminating on vital dramaturgical questions posed towards casting provides an avenue through which to explore broader questions that expand discourses surrounding the body within (theatre) history. Thus, just as Harry J. Elam, Jr. proposes that we engage with the identity of the playwrights, I expand this to include the presence

⁷⁶ Pao, *No Safe Spaces Re-Casting Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality in American Theater*, 62.

of the actors' bodies. This dramaturgical intervention within theatre historiography broadly, and within *Hamilton* specifically, is useful when engaging with the racialized body, as both a singular body and a marker for race that signals to/for other similarly raced bodies in that race is both a "product and process of our social imagination."⁷⁷

Returning to the premise of this chapter that race is a part of casting practices in American theatre, there should not be a push to claim that race doesn't matter in a creators' intention or an audiences' perception of a show. Rather, *Hamilton* proposes that we engage with the fallacies of "whiteness" by reimagining casting not merely as the bodies onstage themselves. Miranda challenges the "power and privilege to define dominant social and cultural values that had been assumed and protected as the exclusive privilege of white Americans or Europeans" by literally placing racialized bodies in roles assumed to be white.⁷⁸

Just as a spectator cannot leave their race or experiences at the door, neither can the actors. *Hamilton* allows race to be the gateway to conversation and reimagining whiteness as a race. When the producers call for "non-white performers" or "non-white characters," it is because the embodiment of the actors are fundamental to the script and its impact on the spectators. As *Hamilton* is produced all over the world, "non-white" is expansive. To this point, future reiterations open space for silenced historical stories and histories that may potentially be activated by *Hamilton*. Who knows? Maybe the next Alexander Hamilton will be Indian, Native American, or Korean.

⁷⁷ Carpenter, *Coloring Whiteness*, 13.

⁷⁸ Pao, *No Safe Spaces Re-Casting Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality in American Theater*, 15.

“We Know Our Founding Fathers, but Our Mothers are a Mystery”⁷⁹

“...I am a Black woman in a world that defines human as white & male for starters. Everything I do, including survival is political.”

--Audre Lorde, “What I Do When I Write”

Many publications have taken to their websites to celebrate and critique the casting of *Hamilton*, but few have solely focused on the musical’s female characters, instead choosing to group these women along with their male counterparts as “people of color,” thereby ignoring their *femaleness*. This chapter continues to address how the casting employed in *Hamilton* is a mechanism to disturb and displace whiteness as a “measuring stick” in American theatre. As a point of expansion, this chapter takes an intersectional approach to investigating and complicating the examination of the women of *Hamilton* as presented by Stacy Wolf, while also nuancing the arguments of other critics who have ignored the intersections of race and gender in their analyses. Accordingly, I argue that the embodiment of the racialized actresses in *Hamilton* disturbs white normative gender constructions while simultaneously solidifying the importance of women of color in American history. It is my hope that by further examining the host of journals, magazines, and blogs that focus on the women of the play, this thesis will serve to complicate previous readings of the female characters through a deep consideration of their races and ethnicities.

For the most part, early publications of the women of *Hamilton* have celebrated the embodied presence of these women in the show, and in turn the historical record. One

⁷⁹ Taken from cyber freestyle rap by Renée Goldsberry of *Hamilton*

review, written by Smart Girls⁸⁰ Aly Semigran, provides a short exposé on the actresses of *Hamilton* and praises the musical. Semigran exclaims, “They aren’t the women behind the Founding Fathers in this critical chapter in American history, they are the ones standing at their side, all the while standing up for themselves and making history all their own.”⁸¹ Another text titled “The Women of *Hamilton*,” written by Michael Schulman of *The New Yorker*, also praises the show, stating: “Miranda has placed a pair of vividly imagined female characters”⁸² in the musical. However, Schulman then asks if *Hamilton* is feminist, and answers himself, “Almost.” He contends that Hamilton reiterates “that men do history, and women just tell it.”⁸³ However, Schulman later retreats somewhat, giving Miranda recognition for positioning women of the musical alongside the men, and not behind them.

Building off of Schulman’s observation of the “almost feminist” message of *Hamilton*, James McMaster (whose critiques are previously discussed in this thesis) further interrogated the absent feminism in his guest blog on HowlRound. In regards to the interests of this chapter, McMaster argues that the female characters’ desires, fears, hopes, and plans within *Hamilton* exist only in relation to the character of Alexander Hamilton. Following McMaster’s critique, Stacy Wolf, a prominent musical theatre scholar, penned a guest blog on *Feminist Spectator* in which she argues that each significant female character in the musical is an archetype, categorizing Angelica Schuyler (Sister-in-law of Hamilton) as the muse, Eliza Schuyler (Hamilton’s wife) as

⁸⁰ An online publication co-founded by actress Amy Poehler and producer Meredith Walker.

⁸¹ Aly Semigran, “The Women of ‘Hamilton’: Making Herstory On Broadway,” *Smart Girls*, March 7, 2016, <http://amysmartgirls.com/the-women-of-hamilton-making-herstory-on-broadway/>.

⁸² Michael Schulman, “The Women of ‘Hamilton,’” *The New Yorker*, August 6, 2015, <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-women-of-hamilton>.

⁸³ Aly Semigran, “The Women of ‘Hamilton’: Making Herstory On Broadway,” *Smart Girls*, March 7, 2016, <http://amysmartgirls.com/the-women-of-hamilton-making-herstory-on-broadway/>.

the wife, and Maria Reynolds (the woman with whom Hamilton has an affair) as the whore.⁸⁴ Wolf does praise the musical, and even momentarily considers the subversive potential of some of its moments, but asserts that *Hamilton* is not feminist. While Stacy Wolf offers no definition of how she is quantifying what is deemed feminist, I frame my understanding of her charge while adopting Patricia Hill Collins' assertion that feminism requires the resisting and dismantling of intersecting systems of power.⁸⁵

As one who was initially inspired by Stacy Wolf's commentary, yet struck by the omission of intersectional analysis of the musical, I intend for this chapter to complicate Wolf's reading of *Hamilton* (and the likeminded readings of others)—readings that fail to consider the intersectionality of the women in their analyses. Intersectionality, coined by critical legal theorist Kimberlé William Crenshaw, converges “black and feminist critical issues within a paradigm that factors in both components and replaces what she has referred to as monocausal paradigms that can only consider blackness at the expense of feminism or vice versa.”⁸⁶ Inspired by Crenshaw's intersectionality, José Muñoz's theory of disidentification (a survival strategy he traces through the art, activism, and lives of queers of color) is one that monitors “the ways in which identity is enacted by minority subjects who must work with/resist the conditions of (im)possibility that dominant culture generates.”⁸⁷ As mentioned previously in this thesis, disidentification attempts to rewrite the dominant script by maneuvering within dominant ideology, spaces, and

⁸⁴ Stacy Wolf, “Hamilton,” *Feminist Spectator*, February 24, 2016, <https://feministspectator.princeton.edu/2016/02/24/hamilton/>.

⁸⁵ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 43.

⁸⁶ José Esteban. Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 8.

⁸⁷ Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 6.

identities in an effort to subvert it from the inside.⁸⁸ *Hamilton* utilizes practices of disidentification *and* intersectionality. As Miranda reimagines American history with raced bodies on Broadway (a.k.a. “The Great White Way”), he must operate both within and against dominant space, due to the confinement of Broadway that privileges shows that are deemed profitable and worthwhile. Simultaneously, Miranda works to challenge dominant ideology regarding history, race, and gender. Employing the theories of disidentification and intersectionality in my analysis of *Hamilton*’s female characters and actresses of color, this section examines how and why gender *and* race matter when we analyze the roles of women in *Hamilton*.

I assert that one must situate the intersectional identities of each female actor of color; failing to do so erases the interconnected racialized and gendered histories of their bodies. Returning to commentary by Stacy Wolf, I assert that Wolf engages in a universalizing of gender that overlooks race as a significant contribution to the meaning-making of the bodies of these women. By ignoring intersectionality, Wolf overlooks the transformative potential of the political activism of *Hamilton*. Wolf’s analysis reiterates past feminist discourse (such as that of Simone De Beauvoir’s *Second Sex*) in assuming a white Western female subject that is in opposition to “man,” relying on this struggle with man to achieve the marker of woman.⁸⁹ Wolf’s argument claims that the stories of the women in the musical are only told in relation to Alexander Hamilton, which is thus illustrative of its non-feminist discourse.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 23.

⁸⁹ Norma Alacorn, “The Theoretical Subject(s) of This Bridge Called My Back and Anglo-American Feminism,” in *Making Face, Making Soul = Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Foundation Books, 1990), 360

I contend that one cannot and should not separate these women (as racialized, gendered bodies) from their roles, as to do so maintains a phallogentric and/or white womanhood perspective that erases the embodied realities of these women of color. To this point, the musical *Hamilton* produces the potential for Black feminist interventions into representations of women of color. To explicate my positioning, this chapter examines the three archetypes (the wife, the muse, and the whore) that Stacy Wolf discusses in her response to *Hamilton*. In addressing Wolf's work, I intend to complicate her reading of each archetype by considering how the presence of the female actors' racialized, gendered bodies enact subversive meaning-making interventions. I argue that to qualify *Hamilton* as being non-feminist fails to consider the physical bodies in performance that produce the potential for disruption of the dominant society by "hosting dissonant narratives of both history and self-making."⁹⁰ This is not an attempt to claim that *Hamilton* is a feminist text, but rather I hope to broaden the conversation regarding the women in this musical in order to signal how the physical bodies are entangled by the intersections of race and gender.

Act One: The Muse

Angelica Schuyler,⁹¹ played in the Broadway debut by Renée Goldsberry, is the oldest child of Phillip Schuyler, a wealthy general in the Continental Army. Angelica Schuyler is depicted as a woman who is intellectually on par with those of her male counterparts. Miranda describes her as the smartest character in the show, one who demonstrates her

⁹⁰ Catanese, *The Problem of the Color(blind) Racial Transgression and the Politics of Black Performance*, 137.

⁹¹ The *Hamilton* casting call describes Angelica Schuyler as a mix of Desiree Armfeldt and Nicki Minaj.

intellectual prowess by having and reciting the most intricate raps.⁹² In the musical, we first meet Angelica Schuyler alongside her two sisters in the song “The Schuyler Sisters.” For Wolf, Angelica “does nothing but pine for Alexander after arranging the match between him and her beautiful and vacuous sister, Eliza.”⁹³ Wolf later adds, “Angelica simply doesn’t have much to do in the musical. In the end, she plays the role of the muse, the supportive sister, the intellectual equal of Hamilton who plays no overt role in the country’s formation.”⁹⁴ Wolf classifies Angelica as a character that merely inspires the men around her, in this case Alexander Hamilton, even though the musical illustrates her as an intelligent and savvy character. According to Wolf, she serves as the muse, the source of inspiration for the men who are the actual ones who *do things* in history. I propose that this reading can be challenged and complicated by considering Miranda’s choice in casting a Black woman in this role—a character who is intellectually on par with the men in the musical, and one who maintains her own sexual appeal. I further argue that Goldsberry’s embodiment and enactment of Angelica Schuyler serves not merely as a symbol of female intellectual power, past and present, but her role reinterprets representations of Black women as overtly sexual and unintelligent.

In examining Renée Goldsberry’s physical body within live theatre, I offer that it is important to also consider “flesh,” which Hortense Spillers, a Black feminist scholar and cultural critic, differentiates from the body. Hortense Spillers asserts, “Before the ‘body’ there is the ‘flesh,’ that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography [...] If

⁹² Lin-Manuel Miranda and Jeremy McCarter, *Hamilton: The Revolution* (New York, NY: Grand Central Publishing, 2016), 79.

⁹³ Wolf, “Hamilton.”

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

we think of the ‘flesh’ as a primary narrative, then we mean its seared, divided, ripped-apartness, riveted to the ship’s hole, fallen, or ‘escaped overboard.’”⁹⁵ To this point, Goldsberry’s flesh serves as a witness to the wounds and scars faced by black flesh in American history. As she performs a show about the birth of America, her flesh carries the captivity of slavery that this country maintained, and from which it profited and built its economic foundation for hundreds of years. By Miranda showcasing her “flesh” within this story, he signals to the subversive potential that challenges spectators to consider how power and meaning function in the creation of gender for the Black body. Furthermore, this casting disrupts the notion of white normative gender constructions that attempt to inscribe Goldsberry within this standard, such as Wolf has attempted to do in her analysis. By theorizing the flesh, it conceptualizes the racial and gendered embodiment of Goldsberry, and serves as an entryway to further engage with her actions in the musical that supersedes a white female subject position or gaze.

The very first moment that the audience encounters Angelica Schuyler within the musical, she is standing alongside her sisters—not a man. The character demonstrates her intellectual prowess in her rap in the song “The Schuyler Sisters.” She raps:

I’ve been reading *Common Sense* by Thomas / Paine. / So men say that I’m intense or I’m insane. / You want a revolution? I want a revelation / So listen to my declaration. / 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!⁹⁶

As the only woman who raps in the entire show, Angelica demonstrates and asserts a feminist position in the above verse that she is intelligent and just as politically savvy as the men with whom we have already become acquainted. In addition, she goes on further

⁹⁵ Hortense J. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 67.

⁹⁶ Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton*, 44.

to explain that her ability to influence policy is through manipulating the men. Angelica is not unaware of her status as a woman in society, nor is she attempting to downplay her ability to influence political choices in the public sphere; instead she highlights that she must find alternative ways to shape politics. Though Wolf reads this moment as one that highlights Angelica's promise that is never fulfilled, I offer that hip hop provides a subversive inscription of the representation of Black women. As hip hop feminists have argued, "Hip hop culture and rap music hold radical and liberating potential [...] hip hop provides a space for young black women to express their race and ethnic identities and to critique racism. Moreover, hip hop feminists contend that hip hop is a site where young Black women begin to build or further develop their own gender critique and feminist identity."⁹⁷ To this point, hip hop serves as a practice of taking ownership of one's unprivileged position. Furthermore, hip hop is a site where Black women can own their stories, and retell the history that has often located them outside of it. Angelica maneuvers herself within the confines of her position, which one should not assume limits her ability to improve her status. Instead, Angelica Schuyler disidentifies with her role, in which she partially identifies with mainstream expectations, but then subverts her position by influencing the men within it to serve her own needs.

Angelica's relationship with Hamilton is influenced profoundly by that of circumstances, even as they both share equal affection for one another. As attributed by Goldsberry, Angelica is "a headstrong society woman who loves Hamilton, but loves her sisters even more."⁹⁸ In a similar vein, Angelica understands that she is limited by the

⁹⁷ Whitney Peoples, "'Under Construction': Identifying Foundations of Hip-Hop Feminism and Exploring Bridges between Black Second Wave and Hip Hop Feminisms," in *No Permanent Waves Recasting Histories of U.S. Feminism*, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 404.

⁹⁸ Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton*, 2.

demands placed on her as the eldest daughter, singing in her song “Satisfied,” “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.”⁹⁹ Angelica is aware that if she wanted Hamilton, she could have him. However, her status in society requires her to “marry rich.” Furthermore, Angelica expresses sexual desire outside of the confines of marriage with Hamilton, even as she does not physically act on them. At the end of “Satisfied,” Angelica does *not* choose a heterosexual relationship with Hamilton, even though she desires him. To this point, Angelica explicitly performs and expresses heterosexual sexuality, but she does not choose it. Instead, Angelica forgoes a heterosexual relationship out of her commitment to her sister Eliza. Angelica’s denial of her feelings for Hamilton, takes on a new meaning in the Black female body of Goldsberry. This denial of heterosexuality, provides a counter narrative that Black women are overcome for their insatiable desire of sex. The expression of Angelica’s sexuality, embodied by Goldsberry, gestures towards historical embodiment of the Black female body, which I offer Miranda subverts through the reframing of Angelica as simultaneously intelligent and a character who embraces her sexual desires.

Notably, Miranda manages this subversive representation while avoiding over-sexualizing or desexualizing Goldsberry’s character, thus rescuing the Black female body from “controlling images” such as the jezebel, the mammy, and the matriarch.¹⁰⁰ Thus, Goldsberry’s body serves as a host and traitor to American history and stage representations of Black femininity, as her character is one that does not indulge in her desire for Alexander Hamilton, nor is she regulated to the domestic sphere in the play.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 82.

¹⁰⁰ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*.

Rather, Goldsberry embodies a character that is able to influence politics from her position, yet she is still portrayed as a woman who is sexually desirable. When Wolf analyzes Angelica's role in the musical as not having feminist implications, it is because she is employing a white feminist perspective that positions whiteness as the norm. Wolf does not notice the alternative modes of labor inscribed by Angelica in the musical, the refusal of ontological categorization of Black women as asexual or hypersexual, and recalibration of the Black woman as intelligent and desirable within a model of marriage. Additionally, Miranda's casting of Angelica and the other women of color continues to challenge the spectators of *Hamilton* to reconsider who can be a part of American history and what role they may play in it. As the casting notice for Angelica Schuyler does not specify that the role should be played by a Black woman, but instead a non-white actress, it highlights the commitment of the *Hamilton* creative team to place dynamic and complex depictions of women of color on stage.

Miranda also challenges the popular imagination of his spectators (who are susceptible to prescribing racialized roles to women onstage), by introducing the complexities of the histories that are illuminated by their flesh and body—of not only Angelica Schuyler—but *all* the women in the musical. The casting of Goldsberry, specifically, offers a transgressive reading of the Black female body in American history and theatre, one that is “rational” and intelligently capable of responding to politics. The way Goldsberry's body performs intellect and sexuality is subversive, as it challenges the audience's expectations of the Black female body in theatre. Thus, the feminist work is in challenging racist and sexist norms that have historically restricted the Black female body in society.

Act Two: The Whore

In “Say No to This,” Hamilton raps about his affair with the character Maria Reynolds, juxtaposed with Reynolds’s R&B influenced ballad giving her perspective of the events. As the affair progresses, James (Maria Reynolds’ husband) shows up to extort money from Hamilton; a deal is made between the two men, and thus Hamilton ensures that the affair be kept secret. Jasmine Cephas Jones, the mixed-race (Black and white) actress who plays Maria Reynolds, says, “On the page, her affair with Hamilton could be a mere scheme of extortion, a trap she sets because it’ll help her survive in her marriage. What Makes ‘Say No to This’ interesting is the possibility that she’s also falling in love with him.”¹⁰¹ Opposing Jones, Wolf categorizes Reynolds as the whore, arguing, “Hamilton’s destruction —is caused by a woman. Again, this narrative is far too culturally familiar. His downfall is his weakness for a woman’s seductive power, the weakness of sexual desire, which the musical portrays as understandable.”¹⁰² I offer that Maria Reynolds is not such a simple figure, as Wolf argues, and agree more with Jones; I propose that Reynolds is a more complex character than just one who is meant to cause the downfall of Hamilton’s career.

Performance serves as frame to imagine how Reynolds navigates a troubled life—which includes a violent marriage—through the raced body of Jones. Uri McMillian argues that performance serves “black women performers [in] making meaning within problematic representation structures.”¹⁰³ To this point, performance aids in addressing

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 175.

¹⁰² Wolf, “Hamilton.”

¹⁰³ Uri McMillian, *Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance*, (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 24.

the construction and malleability of categories structured by race and gender. In an effort to gain insights into Maria Reynolds, I employ Cathy Cohen's politics of deviance as a means to examine, as Miller-Young offers, "deviant practices and behaviors as productive...potential for resistance."¹⁰⁴ Politics of deviance operate to locate the agency of those who are deemed outside of the normalization of dominant ideology.

In an effort to complicate Wolf's categorization of Maria Reynolds as a whore who causes Hamilton's downfall, I argue that she overlooks Reynolds' agency within the role and how her deviant behavior can be reimagined as resistance. Cohen's politics of deviance is useful, as it offers a theoretical lens to locate "the limited agency available [that Reynolds] secures small levels of autonomy in [her] life."¹⁰⁵ This is demonstrated in "Say No to This" when Reynolds, from the onset, informs the audience about the circumstances of her life, singing, "My husband's doin me wrong / Beatin' me, cheatin' me, mistreatin' me. / Suddenly he's up and gone / I don't have the means to go on."¹⁰⁶ As evidenced by the lyrics, Reynolds is unfulfilled by her marriage and, as a married woman, she is unable to work to provide for herself; therefore, she must create an alternative way to survive. Reynolds reconfigures herself within her marriage, superseding the sexuality prescribed to white women of a certain class and position. Reynolds chooses to approach Hamilton for her own financial and emotional needs within the confinements of Eighteenth century parameters. Reynolds wields her body as a mechanism of agency; thus, the way her body is read by Wolf is insufficient and overlooks her agentive choices.

¹⁰⁴ Mireille Miller-Young, "Preface: Confessions of A Black Feminist Academic Pornographer," in *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography* (Durham; Duke University Press, 2014), x.

¹⁰⁵ Cathy J. Cohen, "Deviance as Resistance: A New Research Agenda for the Study of Black Politics," *Du Bois Review* 1, no. 1 (2004): 27-45, 30.

¹⁰⁶ Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton*, 176.

Wolf classifies Reynolds as a sexual object, a body that is a tool used for sexual pleasure, thus inscribing the racialized female body as available for the consumption of man. I contend, however, that Jones' embodiment of Reynolds can be understood as expressing disidentification, in which sexuality and desire are used as viable methods to shift power. Reynolds' agency provides an alternative prescription of how the raced body can be read, especially when it encounters matters of sexuality. Racialization influences how sexuality comes into being in *Hamilton*; Miranda counters this reading by positioning Maria Reynolds as a figure in the historical record without faulting her for Hamilton's downfall, but instead placing the onus on the men.

Wolf is fundamentally wrong in positioning Reynolds as the culprit in Alexander Hamilton's downfall. Rather, Jefferson and Madison use Hamilton's affair to undermine him politically. This begins when Jefferson and Madison accuse Hamilton of committing treason, and in an effort to clear his name, Hamilton then informs them of the affair and his extortion by James Reynolds. Hamilton's downfall is not due to Maria Reynolds and her seductive prowess, as Wolf argues; instead, Jefferson and Madison's goal to prevent Hamilton from becoming president leads Hamilton to implicate himself. Maria Reynolds, a minor character, is merely a pawn used in the political landscape in which Jefferson and Madison's overthrow of Hamilton. Wolf overlooks the musical as a reputable source that informs the spectator, and instead chooses to lean on the categorization by James Reynolds of his wife.

Maria Reynolds is only onstage three times in the entire musical—at the opening number, during the affair, and after Hamilton released "The Reynolds Pamphlet," informing the world of their affair. Wolf reads her deviant behavior not as limited agency

in an abusive marriage, but rather sides with her abuser, who tells Hamilton, “You can keep seeing my *whore* wife/ If the price is right.”¹⁰⁷ Wolf adopts this categorization offered by James Reynolds, a figure that the musical has established as a disreputable character. Taking the word of a fictional character, Wolf fails to address the way the show reads Maria Reynolds and dismisses how Reynolds views herself. We should be suspicious of Wolf’s reading and look to the musical as a critical source to seek feminist subversion that Wolf argues does not exist. The musical suggests women should be viewed as feminist political historical figures, an oversight that Wolf makes in her analysis of the women in the musical. In addition, R&B has served as a vehicle of political agency by Black women, another component that Wolf ignores in her analysis.

Act Three: The Wife

Phillipa Soo, a Chinese-American woman, plays Eliza Schuyler, the second oldest of the Schuyler sisters. As Eliza spends the majority of the play in a marriage with Hamilton, Miranda has received criticism, specifically from Wolf, about Eliza’s lack of agency by arguing that she is “seemingly not very bright” and is merely a wife in the musical.¹⁰⁸ It is important to note that Wolf makes an assumption that mothers and wives cannot engage in feminist praxis. By doing so, she overlooks the work and labor that is done in the domestic space. Further, I propose a “feminization of political practices” as a means to read Eliza’s agency within the musical. Adopted from Ramón Grosfoguel and Frances Negrón-Muntaner, they define “feminization” as a political strategy practiced by oppressed subjects that “refers to a positive resignification, generalization, and extension

¹⁰⁷ Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton*, 177.

¹⁰⁸ Wolf, “Hamilton.”

of political strategies such as seduction, ambiguity, and negotiation.”¹⁰⁹ To this point, “feminization” is not meant to establish a binary of masculine or feminine, but rather to re-think agency within a system of power that recognizes unorthodox tactics as a means to achieve political impact. To incorporate this feminization into the reading of Eliza, one must situate the majoritarian ideals as a means to locate how her character functions within them.

Eliza may seem to be the most passive character within the musical due to her confinement to the domestic sphere after her marriage to Hamilton. Some could read this confinement of Eliza as demonstrative of her lack of desire to move outside the expectations of women during the eighteenth century. Instead, I propose that Eliza embraces her role as a mother and wife while simultaneously subverting her position within the home in order to negotiate, as Muñoz proposes in *Disidentifications*, a “phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform.”¹¹⁰ Eliza must navigate her position and status as a woman to elude consequences for more outward displays of non-conformity. For instance, when Eliza writes to George Washington that she is pregnant in order to prevent him from sending Hamilton into battle, she *writes* the narrative that then affects the rest of Hamilton’s political career. This moment is illustrative of how Eliza maneuvers within the space given to her; instead of writing a letter to Hamilton, she writes one to George Washington, the General of the Army. In doing so, Eliza sidesteps the patriarch of the family in order to serve her own desires and needs.

¹⁰⁹ Frances. Negrón-Muntaner and Ramón. Grosfoguel, “Introduction,” in *Puerto Rican Jam: Rethinking Colonialism and Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 29.

¹¹⁰ Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 4.

Complicating Eliza's agency further by incorporating Soo's race as a visual marker of expectations for the spectators of the musical, Soo's body, for the spectators, signals to a generic Asianness, and overlooks her mixedness; her body is rendered as a symbol for the collective imagination of Asian in the white imagination. Including race in my analysis of Eliza's agency identifies how women of color feminisms are uniquely different than those of white women. Soo's race serves as a symbol to subvert stereotypical imagery of Asian American women. Historically, Asian femininity has been portrayed as the ideal femininity, since its responsive roots of the feminist movement in the 1960s, as images of Asian women circulated depicting them as hypersexual, de-vocalized, and subservient to white men.¹¹¹ At first glance, one might believe the musical is capitalizing on the stereotypical imagery of an Asian woman by pushing Soo's character to the home and her performance of docility for that of a hypothetical white man. However, Miranda subverts this by providing agency within her role. By doing so, Miranda counters any subjection of her body as hypersexual and submissive. When Eliza writes that letter to George Washington, she is aware that societal norms demand that she should not be doing so, but even when she is later confronted about it by Hamilton, she refuses to apologize. Eliza literally and figuratively writes herself in history, not in an effort to resist her husband, but as a means to construct a narrative of legacy.

Eliza's agency is further illustrated by a motif weaved throughout the musical; a motif in which she asks to be included in, removes herself from, and places herself within the narrative of Hamilton's life. This motif is first presented in the song "That Would Be Enough," in which Eliza announces to Hamilton that she is pregnant; she sings "Let me

¹¹¹ Yen Le Espiritu, *Asian American Women and Men: Labor, Laws and Love*, (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1997), 34. Espiritu – Asian American women and men: labor, laws, and love pg 34

be a part of the narrative / In the story they will write someday.”¹¹² The next moment this motif shows up is in the second act of the musical, in Eliza’s solo song “Burn,”¹¹³ Eliza has learned of the affair Hamilton had with Maria Reynolds, and sings “I’m erasing myself from the narrative / let future historians wonder how Eliza reacted.”¹¹⁴ This moment in the musical, attributed by many as the moment of agency for Eliza, is when she decides to not stay with Hamilton. Finally, the motif is completed at the end of the musical after Hamilton has died, in the song “Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tell Your Story,” in which Eliza sings, “I put myself back in the narrative.”¹¹⁵ In arguably the most powerful moment of agency of anyone in the entire show, Eliza chooses to reinsert herself back into the story, becoming an activist speaking against slavery, founding New York City’s first private orphanage, and raising funds to memorialize the men Hamilton fought beside.

This begs the bigger question of *Hamilton*: are the bodies that tell history just as important as what happens in history? Eliza’s story is used to answer “yes.” The character of Eliza, who many attributed as having the least amount of agency, is the one who cements not only her husband’s story, but her own. Wolf challenges this reading; she asserts that the musical “can’t rescue Eliza or women in the musical from their inconsequential role” by concluding the show with a woman re-telling the history.¹¹⁶ I argue that Eliza, as an Asian-American woman standing onstage as the unlikely author of Hamilton’s legacy and the unlikely author of the birth of America, stands as a symbol of

¹¹² Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton*, 110.

¹¹³ There is no historical record of Eliza Schuyler reaction to finding out about the affair, Miranda’s take imagines what this reaction would be like in this song. Ibid, 238.

¹¹⁴ Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton*, 238.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 280.

¹¹⁶ Wolf, “Hamilton.”

historical violence practiced on women of color. They, embodied by Soo, stand literally center stage to tell history from their perspective.

Alexander Hamilton is the subject of *Hamilton*, but Eliza is the author. Eliza plays an active role in the construction of this narrative, a narrative that is as much hers as it is his. As the author, Eliza uses Hamilton's legacy for her own political purpose; she makes the choices of what is deemed important or not. In the closing musical number, Eliza devotes the next fifty years of her life to telling Hamilton's legacy, but also to claiming her place within that history. Eliza, in tandem with Angelica, sings "We tell your story," gesturing towards telling the history of Hamilton.¹¹⁷ A few moments later, Eliza sings "Will they tell our story"¹¹⁸ as the company sings "Will they tell your story."¹¹⁹ In this moment, Eliza has actively placed herself within the narrative by including her retelling of this history as a telling of her history. The ambiguity of the "your" sung by the company can be interpreted as either querying if the world will tell Eliza's story, or as a motion towards a collective. Regardless of how one may read these lyrics, their ambiguity suggests that the individual story is not distinguishable or separate from the collective. The final time the question is posed, Eliza sings "Will they tell my story?" as the company, including Hamilton, sings "Will they tell your story?"¹²⁰ At the end of the musical, Hamilton and Eliza, along with the company, emphasize that Eliza's story is just as important as Hamilton's story. Eliza is not merely the teller of history, but a *maker of history* who was pushed into the margins of the retelling of history by her gender. As

¹¹⁷ Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton*, 280.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, 281.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 281.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 281.

Miranda questions if the audience will remember Eliza, he illuminates a feminist mode of history writing and meaning-making.

Wolf's categorizing of Eliza as merely a wife is limiting to say the least, as it does not consider how Miranda subverts and recalibrates Eliza's role as a wife to incorporate the actress' own historical representation. It is also erroneous of Wolf to diminish the importance of the wife's role in male political figure's lives and in politics in general. If one measures women of color to this standard of white womanhood, they will fall short every time. This is not to propose that women of color and white woman do not have any shared experiences of oppression; rather, I propose, one must not focus on generality in scholarly analysis in order to signal towards solidarity. By doing so, it erases the voices, experiences, and trauma of women of color. Miranda combats this not only by placing a woman as the final voice at the end of the musical, but a woman of color. Eliza's act of *writing* history and telling Hamilton's story, Hamilton and Eliza's story, and her *own* story appeals towards a feminist telling of history; as she tells her own story, she is simultaneously telling the story of the family, the nation, and of women.

Hamilton has received tremendous acclaim for placing people of color on the Broadway stage and for telling the American story with these bodies. Scholarship and media publications have failed to explore, and are long overdue in exploring, the women of *Hamilton*'s racial and gendered identities in critical engagement. In this chapter, I establish an intersectional analysis between race and gender that decentralizes white womanhood or men at the center of discourse. Instead, I propose that the body is vital to centering the embodied knowledge and experience as a critical source of meaning. In addition, I have explored how each of these women disidentify with the majority culture

in order to enact agency for their own political and personal means. As each of these women work “on and against” the dominant culture, the audiences ascribe their performing bodies with racial meaning.¹²¹ The bodies of the women of color also disidentify with American history, as their bodies are physical reminders of their absence in dominant history. My analysis in this chapter responds to Stacy Wolf’s resistance to centering the body in her discourse of the women of *Hamilton* and her proclamation that *Hamilton* is not feminist. I assert that *Hamilton* does feminist work in its effort to complicate racial and gender representations and questions who should be seen as a reliable historical narrator, thus advocating for a collective feminist history.

Each woman in the musical does feminist work and subverts dominant expectations. Angelica Schuyler, who Wolf called “the muse,” challenges the racist and sexist expectations of the Black female body through the performance of intellect and sexuality. Maria Reynolds, named by Wolf as the “whore,” is an agentive individual who functions in the musical to illuminate how women should be considered as reliable political historical figures. Finally, Eliza Schuyler, who Wolf categorized as “the wife,” disrupts a male centered history by *writing* and telling a collective feminist history. These women collectively produce history through their bodies, centering their race and gender. By failing to center race and gender in her critique, Stacy Wolf overlooks the feminisms of color and solidarity these women share with one another, as their physical bodies stand for more than just themselves.

In thinking about writing about *Hamilton*—and consuming it as a fan—I argue that the women intervene in telling history through signaling to the bodies onstage. As my body as a Black woman exists in an ocean of white bodies sitting in the Richard

¹²¹ Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 6.

Rodgers theatre on a Wednesday evening, I don't look upon the stage and just see actresses performing their roles; I see myself. My story.

Conclusion

Miranda disrupts the normalization of whiteness by subverting the expectations set through the telling of American history, thereby forcing audiences to consider historical racialization and/or the power afforded or denied to gendered identities throughout American history. My study of *Hamilton* sheds light on how Miranda's musical disrupts the unwarranted power of whiteness, recuperates the histories of people of color, and champions diverse representation in the arenas of theatre and performance. Moreover, I hope that "'I, Too Am America': *Hamilton*, An American Musical" has illustrated how Lin-Manuel Miranda has crafted *Hamilton* to work within the expectations of Broadway, while simultaneously using that position to reimagine how non-white bodies can navigate successfully through the space of commercial theatre *and* the annals of American history.

On November 18, 2016, eleven days after the election that resulted in Donald Trump becoming the President Elect, Vice President Elect Mike Pence attended a performance of *Hamilton* at the Richard Rodgers Theatre. After entering the theatre among boos and cheers from other patrons, Pence enjoyed the rest of the show without any interruption. After the conclusion of the curtain call, African-American actor Brandon Victor Dixon, who had replaced Leslie Odom, Jr. in the role of Aaron Burr, read a statement directed towards Pence on behalf of the cast of *Hamilton*. It read:

Thank you so much for joining us tonight. You know, we had a guest in the audience this evening. And Vice President-elect Pence, I see you're walking out but I hope you will hear us just a few more moments. There's nothing to boo here ladies and gentlemen. There's nothing to boo here, we're all here sharing a story of love.

We have a message for you, sir. We hope that you will hear us out. And I encourage everybody to pull out your phones and tweet and post because this message needs to be spread far and wide, OK?

Vice President-elect Pence, we welcome you and we truly thank you for joining us here at *Hamilton: An American Musical*, we really do. We, sir, we are the diverse America who are alarmed and anxious that your new administration will not protect us — our planet, our children, our parents — or defend us and uphold our inalienable rights, sir. But we truly hope that this show has inspired you to uphold our American values and to work on behalf of all of us. *All* of us.

Again, we truly thank you for sharing this show. This wonderful American story told by a diverse group of men [and] women of different colors, creeds, and orientations.¹²²

No immediate comment was made by Pence after the reading of this statement, but the following Saturday President-Elect Donald Trump took to Twitter to voice his anger at the statement, tweeting, “Our wonderful future V.P. Mike Pence was harassed last night at the theater by the cast of Hamilton, cameras blazing. This should not happen! The Theater must always be a safe and special place. The cast of Hamilton was very rude last night to a very good man, Mike Pence. Apologize!”¹²³ Circulating in the news cycle for a few days, Donald Trump’s reaction is illustrative of the contentious relationship that America currently finds itself in again, one that intends to silence citizens who challenge racist, sexist, homophobic, ablest rhetoric in disguise of patriotism. As Dixon, an African-American man, pleads that the new administration not forget people of color,

¹²² Christopher Mele and Patrick Healy, “‘Hamilton’ Had Some Unscripted Lines for Pence. Trump Wasn’t Happy,” *The New York Times*, November 19, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/19/us/mike-pence-hamilton.html>.

¹²³ Christopher Mele and Patrick Healy, “‘Hamilton’ Had Some Unscripted Lines for Pence. Trump Wasn’t Happy.” *The New York Times*, November 19, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/19/us/mike-pence-hamilton.html>.

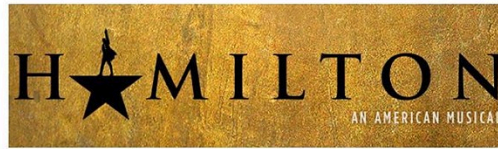
immigrants, the LGBT community, women, and countless others, he stands as the representative voice of millions of Americans who fall outside of the confines of whiteness, which Donald Trump has solidified in his campaign as exemplifying the “true Americans.” Under the slogan of “Make America Great Again,” Trump’s erases the American history that relies on the bodies he so ignorantly refers to as “bad hombres” and “the blacks.” For the next four years, non-white American citizens, marginalized white citizens, and all their allies must remind Donald Trump that “history has it eyes on you”¹²⁴ and that non-white American citizens will continue to use performance to respond to the continued erasures of our histories and contributions to America.

¹²⁴ Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton*, 253.

Appendix

Figure 1.1

OPEN CASTING CALL IN NEW YORK CITY



HAMILTON is holding OPEN AUDITIONS for SINGERS who RAP!

Seeking NON-WHITE men and women, ages 20s to 30s,
for Broadway and upcoming Tours!

****No prior theater experience necessary****

NEW YORK CITY - Tuesday, May 3rd, 2016

Chelsea Studios
151 West 26th Street, 6th Floor
OPEN CALL @ 11:00am - 2:00pm
****Sign In begins at 10:00am****

WHAT TO BRING

1. Sheet music for a pop/rock song, an accompanist will be provided.
2. A picture and resume that includes your contact information.

If you can't audition live but are interested in the show,
follow instructions at HamiltonBroadway.com/auditions

Source: "Open Casting Call for 'Hamilton' Causes a Little Ruckus." 2016. *Mail Online*. March 31.
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3516409/Open-casting-call-Hamilton-causes-little-ruckus.html>.

Figure 1.2



HAMILTON is holding OPEN AUDITIONS for SINGERS who RAP!

Seeking men and women, ages 20s to 30s,
for the non-white characters as written and conceived for the currently
running Broadway production and upcoming Tours of HAMILTON!

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