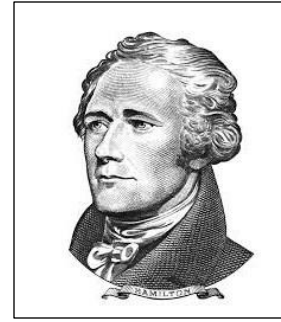


Alexander Hamilton



Though he never attained the highest office of his adopted country, few of America's founders influenced its political system more than Alexander Hamilton (1755-1804). Born in the British West Indies, he arrived in the colonies as a teenager, and quickly embarked on a remarkable career. He was a member of the Continental Congress, an author of the Federalist Papers, a champion of the Constitution and the first secretary of the Treasury, where he helped found the first national bank, the U.S. Mint and a tax collection bureau that would later become the U.S. Coast Guard. Troubled by personal and political scandals in his later years, Hamilton was shot and killed in one of history's most infamous duels by one of his fiercest rivals, the then Vice President Aaron Burr, in July 1804.

Born in the West Indies, Hamilton moved to the mainland in 1772 and entered King's College (now Columbia University) the following year. By 1774 he was speaking at public meetings and writing revolutionary essays, and in 1776 he became a captain of artillery. After taking part in the Battle of Long Island and the retreat from New York City, he joined Washington's staff in 1777, where he remained until February 1781. He commanded a battery of artillery at the Battle of Yorktown.

Did you know? Alexander Hamilton's beloved first-born son, Philip, was killed in a duel in 1801 while attempting to defend his father's honor against attacks by New York lawyer George Eacker. Philip's death devastated the Hamiltons, and many historians believe it led to Hamilton's own reluctance to fire directly at Aaron Burr during their legendary duel just three years later.

In 1780 he married Elizabeth Schuyler, daughter of the major general and Hudson Valley landlord Philip Schuyler. He was already close to the Livingston family, and the marriage cemented his social position and his political, elitist point of view. He argued throughout the 1780s for strengthening the national government in The Continentalist essays, the two Letters from Phocion, and The Federalist, written with James Madison and John Jay. He

served in Congress and the New York state legislature and was a delegate to the Federal Convention of 1787. Although he had been central to the movement that led to the convention, his role was relatively minor and he was privately critical of the Constitution it produced. He nonetheless devoted his full energy to ratification in 1787 and 1788.

As secretary of the treasury Hamilton's great achievement was funding the federal debt at face value, which rectified and nationalized the financial chaos inherited from the Revolution. But he accomplished still more. He was responsible for creating the First Bank of the United States on the model of the Bank of England, and his Report on Manufactures fostered commercial and industrial development in the new nation. He also played a significant role in generating the Washington administration's policy of unfriendly neutrality toward the French Revolution and in establishing a rapprochement with Britain.

Hamilton's policies and actions provoked intense opposition, led by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. Just as Hamilton and Madison had collaborated in the Federalist movement during the 1780s, so Jefferson and Madison now collaborated against Hamilton's Federalist party in the 1790s. The result was division, both within the Washington administration and in the country as a whole. After Hamilton left the Treasury in 1795 to practice law, he continued to be active in Federalist politics, but he was deeply critical of the presidency of John Adams. Nonetheless, at Washington's insistence, he was made inspector general of the army during the Quasi War with France in 1798.

Despite his personal and political dislike of Jefferson, Hamilton was instrumental in securing his victory over Aaron Burr in the presidential election of 1800. That and his subsequent opposition to Burr's bid to become governor of New York led to his death at Burr's hands in a duel in 1804.

Also included in on this page are several videos about Alexander Hamilton. The link is <https://www.history.com/topics/american-revolution/alexander-hamilton>

Article compliments of:

Broadus Mitchell, Alexander Hamilton, 2 vols. (1957, 1972); Clinton Rossiter, Alexander Hamilton and the Constitution (1964).

Edward Countryman

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Burr's Election to Senate in 1791 fueled his rivalry with Hamilton, who began to actively work against him.

The more ideologically principled Hamilton grew then more he deeply distrusted Burr, who he saw as an opportunist who would shift his political beliefs and allegiances to advance his career. As Sedgwick says, "There is such a thing as Hamiltonianism, there's Jeffersonianism. There isn't Burrism. Burr was not an ideologist. He was a total opportunist, who would go whichever way proved the greatest advantage to him. And to Hamilton, that was absolutely unconscionable."

The relationship worsened in the swirl of electoral politics when Burr defeated Hamilton's father-in-law Philip Schuyler in the U.S. Senate race in 1791. Eight years later, Hamilton helped engineer Burr's defeat in the presidential election of 1800, advising his fellow Federalists to vote for Thomas Jefferson instead of Burr.

Hamilton may have hated Jefferson's politics, but he distrusted Burr more. Burr became vice president, but when he was dumped from the ticket before the election of 1804, he decided to run for governor of New York. His fellow New Yorker, Hamilton, once again manipulated his defeat, and Burr lost by a large margin.

Fed up with Hamilton attacking his character, Burr demanded an apology. After his gubernatorial defeat, Burr learned of Hamilton's remarks about his character and demanded his apology for every slanderous thing ever said about him. Hamilton refused to apologize, and the pair exchanged a series of letters which eventually culminated in arrangements for a duel.

Though the events of the duel are unclear, Burr received the brunt of the blame. The actual events of the Burr-Hamilton duel have been mired in controversy for more than 200 years. Some historians believe Hamilton never intended to fire at Burr, or to "throw away his shot." Some believe Burr fully intended to kill Hamilton, others disagree.

What is known, is that Hamilton traveled across the Hudson River to Weehawken early on the morning of July 11. New Jersey was chosen as the location because even though dueling was illegal there, officials were less likely to prosecute duelists than in New York. No one else actually saw the duel, as others present turned their backs to maintain deniability about their involvement and later disagreed over who fired first and when.

What is known is that Burr's shot mortally wounded Hamilton, who was rowed back to New York and died 36 hours later.

American statesman Alexander Hamilton (1757 – 1804), principal author of 'The Federalist' collection of writings. An engraving after the original painting by Chappel. (Credit: Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

After killing Hamilton, Burr's career never recovered.

Burr returned to New York City expecting a hero's welcome for defending his honor. Instead, he faced public outcry for killing Hamilton. Facing potential murder charges, he fled to the South. With the help of his powerful friend, the charges were dropped, and he returned to Washington to finish his term as vice president.

In 1807, he faced treason charges for conspiring to plan the succession of several western states. He fled to Europe, returning to New York after his acquittal. His professional and personal life remained in tatters until his death in 1836.

More than 200 years since duel, Hamilton's complicated legacy has been positively restored, most notably through the award-winning musical, "Hamilton." Also his reputation was, in a large part, helped by the vast amount of writing he left behind, while Burr only left two small volumes. Many of the personal writings that could have saved his reputation were lost in an 1813 shipwreck.

Burr's political achievements are largely overshadowed by his duel with Hamilton.

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