Alexander Hamilton (1757-1804) U.S. Statesman

By
Willie Martin

Alexander Hamilton (1757-1804), U.S. Statesman
From
The Willie Martin Archives

> It may well be that the Jewish side of his family was through his mother, but his wife may also have been a Jewess. He was well connected with bankers and Jews, and may well have been a Jew secretly. The man who killed him was certainly a Jew. **Yours in Christ, Jim The National Debt**

A NATIONAL DEBT, IF IT IS NOT EXCESSIVE, will be to us a national blessing. Alexander Hamilton (1757-1804), U.S. statesman. Letter, 30 April 1781. Later, as secretary of the treasury (1789-95), Hamilton sponsored legislation to pay off the debt of the Continental Congress, and to charter the short-lived Bank of the United States. Hamilton, Alexander Hamilton, Alexander, 1755-1804, U.S. statesman;

b. West Indies. In the **American Revolution** he was Gen. **Washington**'s secretary and aide-de-camp and served brilliantly in the **Yorktown Campaign.** As a delegate (1782-83) to the **Continental Congress**, he pressed for a strong national government. After serving as a New York delegate to the **Federal Constitutional Convention (1787)**, he did much to get the Constitution ratified, particularly by his contributions to The Federalist. As secretary of the treasury (1789-95) under President Washington, Hamilton sponsored legislation to pay off the debt of the Continental Congress and to charter the **Bank of the United States**.

To raise revenue he advocated a tariff on imported manufactures and excise taxes. By these measures he hoped to strengthen the federal government and tie it to persons of wealth. In foreign affairs Hamilton sought close ties with Britain and opposed the **French Revolution**.

Opposition to Hamilton and his supporters, who were known as Federalists, gathered around Thomas **Jefferson**, and the **Federalist Party** was swept under in the election of 1800. Hamilton was killed in a duel by

Aaron **Burr**, whose bids for the presidency (1800) and for New York governor (1804) Hamilton had thwarted. (b. Jan. 11, 1755/57, Nevis, British West Indies--d. July 12, 1804, New York City), New York delegate to the Constitutional Convention (1787), major author of the Federalist papers, and first secretary of the Treasury of the United States (1789-95), who was the foremost champion of a strong central government for the new United States. He was killed in a duel with Aaron Burr.

Hamilton, Alexander(b. Jan. 11, 1755/57, Nevis, British West Indies--d. July 12, 1804, New York City), New York delegate to the Constitutional Convention (1787), major author of the Federalist papers, and first secretary of the Treasury of the United States (1789-95), who was the foremost champion of a strong central government for the new United States.

He was killed in a duel with Aaron Burr. Early life. Hamilton's father was James Hamilton, a drifting trader and son of Alexander Hamilton, the laird of Cambuskeith, Ayrshire, Scot.; his mother was Rachel Fawcett Lavine, the daughter of a French Huguenot physician and the wife of John Michael Lavine, a German or Danish merchant, who had settled on the island of St. Croix in the Danish West Indies. Rachel probably began living with James Hamilton in 1752, but Lavine did not divorce her until 1758.

In 1765 James Hamilton abandoned his family. Destitute, Rachel set up a small shop, and at the age of 11 Alexander went to work, becoming a clerk in the counting house of two New York merchants who had recently established themselves at St. Croix. When Rachel died in 1768,Alexander became a ward of his mother's relatives, and in 1772 his ability, industry, and engaging manners won him advancement from bookkeeper to manager. Later, friends sent him to preparatory school in Elizabethtown, N.J., and in the autumn of 1773 he entered King's College(later Columbia) in New York. Intensely ambitious, he became a serious and successful student, but his studies were interrupted by the brewing revolt against Great Britain.

He publicly defended the Boston Tea Party, in which Boston colonists destroyed several tea cargoes in defiance of the tea tax. In 1774-75 he

wrote three influential pamphlets, which upheld the agreements of the Continental Congress on the non-importation, non-consumption, and non-exportation of British products and attacked British policy in Quebec. Those anonymous publications--one of them attributed to John Jay and John Adams, two of the ablest of American propagandists--gave the first solid evidence of Hamilton's precocity. Revolutionary War service. In March 1776, through the influence of friends in the New York legislature, Hamilton was commissioned a captain in the provincial artillery. He organized his own company and at the Battle of Trenton, when he and his men prevented the British under Lord Cornwallis from crossing the Raritan River and attacking George Washington's main army, showed conspicuous bravery.

In February 1777 Washington invited him to become an aide-de-camp with the rank of lieutenant colonel. In his four years on Washington's staff he grew close to the General and was entrusted with his correspondence. He was sent on important military missions and, thanks to his fluent command of French, became liaison officer between Washington and the French generals and admirals .Eager to connect himself with wealth and influence, Hamilton married Elizabeth, the daughter of Gen. Philip Schuyler, the head of one of New York's most distinguished families. Meantime,having tired of the routine duties at headquarters and yearning for glory, he pressed Washington for an active command in the field. Washington refused, and in early 1781 Hamilton seized upon a trivial quarrel to break with the General and leave his staff. Fortunately, he had not forfeited the General’s friendship, for in July Washington gave him command of a battalion.

At the siege of Cornwallis' army at Yorktown in October, Hamilton led an assault on a British stronghold. Early political activities. In letters to a member of Congress and to Robert Morris, the superintendent of finance, Hamilton analysed the financial and political weaknesses of the government. In November 1781, with the war virtually over, he moved to Albany, where he studied law and was admitted to practice in July 1782.

That same month he became receiver of continental taxes for the state of New York, a post he gave up a few months later, after the New York

legislature elected him to the Continental Congress. Between July 1781 and July 1782 he wrote six essays for the New York Packet under the pen name of The Continent list, in which he argued for a strong central government. In Congress from November 1782 to July 1783 he worked for the same end, being convinced that the Articles of Confederation were the source of the country's weakness and disunion.

In 1783 Hamilton began to practice law in New York City. He defended unpopular Loyalists who had remained faithful to the British during the Revolution in suits brought against them under a state law called the Trespass Act. Using the pseudonym Phoeion, he published two pamphlets in 1784 pleading for moderation and justice in the treatment of Loyalists, and in 1786, partly as a result of his efforts, state acts disbarring Loyalist lawyers and disfranchising Loyalist voters were repealed.

In that year he also won election to the lower house of the New York legislature, taking his seat in January 1787. Meanwhile, the legislature had appointed him a delegate to the convention in Annapolis, Md., that met in September 1786 to consider the commercial plight of the Union. Hamilton suggested that the convention exceed its delegated powers and call for another meeting of representatives from all the states to discuss various problems confronting the nation.

He drew up the draft of the address to the states from which emerged the Constitutional Convention that met in Philadelphia in May 1787. After persuading New York to send a delegation, Hamilton obtained a place for himself on the delegation. Hamilton went to Philadelphia as an uncompromising nationalist who wished to replace the Articles of Confederation with a strong centralized government, but he did not take much part in the debates.

He served on two important committees, one on rules in the beginning of the convention and the other on style at the end of the convention. In a long speech on June 18, he presented his own idea of what the national government should be. His model was the England of George III: a government of three departments--legislative, executive, and judicial. The legislature would consist of an assembly, or lower house, elected for three

years by free male citizens and of a senate chosen indirectly by electors for life. The president, who also would hold office for life and was to be selected by a double set of electors, would have an absolute veto over the legislature. The central government would appoint the state governors, who would have an absolute veto over state legislation. The judiciary would consist of a supreme court whose justices would have life tenure. Although the states were to be preserved, they would have virtually no power. Under this essentially monarchical plan, the national government would have unlimited sovereignty.

Hamilton's plan had little impact on the convention; the delegates went ahead to frame a constitution that, while it gave strong power to a federal government, stood some chance of being accepted by the people. Since the other two delegates from New York, who were strong opponents of a Federalist constitution, had withdrawn from the convention, New York was not officially represented, and Hamilton had no power to sign for his state.

Nonetheless, even though he knew that his state wished to go no further than a revision of the Articles of Confederation, he signed the new constitution as an individual. Opponents in New York quickly attacked the Constitution, and Hamilton answered them in the newspapers under the signature Caesar. Since the Caesar letters seemed not influential, Hamilton turned to another classical pseudonym, Publius, and to two collaborators, James Madison, the delegate from Virginia, and John Jay, the secretary of foreign affairs, to write The Federalist, a series of 85 essays in defence of the Constitution and republican government that appeared in newspapers between October 1787 and May 1788. Hamilton wrote at least two-thirds of the essays.

The Federalist was widely read, had a great influence on contemporaries, became one of the classics of political literature, and helped shape American political institutions. In 1788 Hamilton was reappointed a delegate to the Continental Congress from New York. At the ratifying convention in June, he became the chief champion of the Constitution and, against strong opposition, won approval for it. Hamilton, Alexander Hamilton’s financial program. When President Washington in 1789

appointed Hamilton the first secretary of the Treasury, Congress asked him to draw up a plan for the "adequate support of the public credit." Envisaging himself as something of a prime minister in Washington's official family, Hamilton developed a bold and masterly program designed to build a strong union, one that would weave his political philosophy into the government. His immediate objectives were to establish credit at home and abroad and to strengthen the national government at the expense of the states.

He outlined his program in four notable reports to Congress (1790-91).A result of the struggle over Hamilton's program and over issues of foreign policy was the emergence of national political parties. Like Washington, Hamilton had deplored parties, equating them with disorder and instability. He had hoped to establish a government of superior persons who would be above party. Yet he became the leader of the Federalist Party, a political organization in large part dedicated to the support of his policies. Hamilton placed himself at the head of that party because he needed organized political support and strong leadership in the executive branch to get his program through Congress.

The political organization that challenged the Hamiltonians was the Republican Party created by James Madison, a member of the House of Representatives, and Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson. In foreign affairs the Federalists favoured close ties with England, whereas the Republicans preferred to strengthen the old attachment to France. In attempting to carry out his program, Hamilton interfered in Jefferson’s domain of foreign affairs.

Detesting the French Revolution and the egalitarian doctrines it spawned, he tried to thwart Jefferson's policies that might aid France or injure England and to induce Washington to follow his own ideas in foreign policy. Hamilton went so far as to warn British officials of Jefferson's attachment to France and to suggest that they bypass the Secretary of State and instead work through himself and the President in matters of foreign policy. This and other parts of Hamilton's program led to a feud with Jefferson in which the two men attempted to drive each other from the Cabinet. When war broke out between France and England in February

1793, Hamilton wished to use the war as an excuse for jettisoning the French alliance of 1778 and steering the United States closer to England, whereas Jefferson insisted that the alliance was still binding. Washington essentially accepted Hamilton's advice and in April issued a proclamation of neutrality that Republicans said favoured England. In that month an emissary from republican France,

Edmond-Charles Genet, in trying to advance the cause of his own country, violated American neutrality by arming privateers in U.S. ports. Hamilton in June began a series of articles under the name "Pacificus" in defence of the neutrality proclamation and in August another series under the name "No Jacobin" that condemned Genet's activities and eventually led to Genet's recall in 1794.

At the same time, British seizure of U.S. ships trading with the French West Indies and other grievances led to popular demands for war against Great Britain, which Hamilton opposed. He believed that such a war would be national suicide, for his program was anchored on trade with Britain and on the import duties that supported his funding system. Hamilton persuaded the President to send John Jay to London to negotiate grievances.

Hamilton wrote Jay's instructions, manipulated the negotiations, and defended the unpopular treaty Jay brought back in 1795, notably in a series of newspaper essays he wrote under the signature Camillus; the treaty kept the peace and saved his system. Out of the Cabinet. Lashed by criticism, tired and anxious to repair his private fortune, Hamilton left the Cabinet on Jan. 31, 1795. His influence, as an unofficial adviser, however, continued as strong as ever. Washington and his Cabinet consulted him on almost all matters of policy. When Washington decided to retire, he turned to Hamilton, asking his opinion as to the best time to publish his farewell. With his eye on the coming presidential election, Hamilton advised withholding the announcement until a few months before the meeting of the presidential electors.

Following that advice, Washington gave his Farewell Address in September 1796. Hamilton drafted most of the address, and some of his

ideas were prominent in it. In the election, Federalist leaders passed over Hamilton's claims and nominated John Adams for the presidency and Thomas Pinckney for the vice presidency. Because Adams did not appear devoted to Hamiltonian principles, Hamilton tried to manipulate the electoral college so as to make Pinckney president.

Adams won the election, and Hamilton's intrigue succeeded only in sowing distrust within his own party. Hamilton's influence in the government continued, however, for Adams retained Washington's Cabinet, and its members consulted Hamilton on all matters of policy, gave him confidential information, and in effect urged his policies on the president. Early in 1797 James T. Callender, a Republican hack, published a History of the United States for the Year 1796, in which he accused Hamilton of corruption in connection with an affair that Hamilton had had six years earlier with Maria Reynolds.

Hamilton met the attack by writing a pamphlet in which he confessed the "irregular and indelicate amour" and printed the blackmailing letters that the woman's husband, a confidence man, had sent to him but denied any corrupt dealings with him.

Although Hamilton successfully defended his integrity as a public man, he subjected his private life to a bitter humiliation. When France broke relations with the United States, Hamilton stood for firmness but agreed with the president's policy of trying to re-establish friendly relations. After the failure of a peace mission that President Adams had sent to Paris in 1798, followed by the publication of dispatches insulting to U.S. sovereignty, Hamilton wanted to place the country under arms. He even believed that the French, who had embarked on an undeclared naval war, might attempt to invade the country. Hamilton sought command of the new army, though Washington would be its titular head.

Adams resisted Hamilton's desires, but in September 1798 Washington forced him to make Hamilton second in command of the army, the inspector general, with the rank of major general. Adams never forgave Hamilton for this humiliation. Hamilton wanted to lead his army into Spain's Louisiana and the Florid as and other points south but never did.

Through independent diplomacy, Adams kept the quarrel from spreading and at the order of Congress disbanded the provisional army.

Hamilton resigned his commission in June 1800. Meantime Adams had purged his Cabinet of those he regarded as "Hamilton's spies." In retaliation, Hamilton tried to prevent Adams' re-election. In October 1800 he privately circulated a personal attack on Adams, The Public Conduct and Character of John Adams, Esq., President of the United States.

Aaron Burr of New York, the Republican candidate for vice president and Hamilton's political enemy, obtained a copy and had it published. Hamilton was then compelled to acknowledge his authorship and to bring his quarrel with Adams into the open, a feud that revealed an irreparable schism in the Federalist Party. Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr won the election, but, because both had received the same number of electoral votes, the choice between them for president was cast into the House of Representatives. Hating Jefferson, the Federalists wanted to throw the election to Burr.

Hamilton helped to persuade them to select Jefferson instead. By supporting his old Republican enemy, who won the presidency, Hamilton lost prestige within his own party and virtually ended his public career. Hamilton, Alexander The Burr quarrel. In 1801 Hamilton built a country house called the Grange on Manhattan island and helped found a Federalist newspaper, the New York Evening Post, the policies of which reflected his ideas.

Through the Post he hailed the purchase of Louisiana in 1803, even though New England Federalists had opposed it. Some of them talked of secession and in 1804 began to negotiate with Burr for his support. Almost all the Federalists but Hamilton favoured Burr's candidacy for the governorship of New York state. Hamilton urged the election of Burr's Republican opponent, who won by a close margin, but it is doubtful that Hamilton's influence decided the outcome.

In any event, Hamilton and Burr had long been enemies, and Hamilton had several times thwarted Burr’s ambitions. In June 1804, after the

election, Burr demanded satisfaction for remarks Hamilton had allegedly made at a dinner party in April in which he said he held a "despicable opinion" of Burr. Hamilton held an aversion to duelling, but as a man of honour he felt compelled to accept Burr's challenge.

The two antagonists met early in the morning of July 11 on the heights of Weehawken, N. J., where Hamilton's eldest son, Philip, had died in a duel three years before. Burr's bullet found its mark, and Hamilton fell. Hamilton left his wife and seven children heavily in debt, which friends helped to pay off.

Bibliography

Hamilton's public and private life is examined by **Nathan Schachner,** ***Alexander Hamilton*** (1946, reissued 1961), well-balanced and readable; **Broadus Mitchell,** ***Alexander Hamilton***, 2 vol. (1957-62), a scholarly study; **John C. Miller,** ***Alexander Hamilton:*** Portrait in Paradox (1959,reprinted 1979), strong on his public career; and **Forrest McDonald,** ***Alexander Hamilton (1979),*** a re-examination of his political philosophy. **Jacob Ernest Cooke,** ***Alexander Hamilton(1982);*** and **Marie B. Hecht,** ***Odd Destiny: The Life of Alexander Hamilton (1982),*** are political biographies.

THE NEW CHRISTIAN CRUSADE CHURCH

CALLING THE PEOPLE OF BRITAIN

At last the bible makes sense!

At last we know its meaning.

Its the book of the RACE