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# The Two Faces of Alexander Hamilton

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### The Two Faces of Alexander Hamilton

In 1791, Alexander Hamilton was involved in an extramarital affair with a woman named Maria Reynolds, and when her husband discovered the affair, he posed threats to Hamilton's political career as well as Hamilton's own marriage.<sup>1</sup> Hamilton responded to this threat with a public statement admitting to the affair, permanently damaging his personal life.<sup>2</sup> He was willing to go to great lengths in order to be perceived as honorable and important, and he was constantly concerned that his "character" would be "refuted by evidence and facts which oblige the patrons of them to abandon their support," and he was therefore persistent about guarding the image of his character.<sup>3</sup> After the Reynolds Affair, Hamilton continued to be dynamic in political activities because he had saved his political reputation, but his true honor and morality was forever tainted.<sup>4</sup> He feared that if he did not expose himself publicly, that "corroding whispers" would "wear away the reputations which [he] could not directly subvert."<sup>5</sup>

Hamilton undoubtedly accomplished many remarkable feats during his time as a Founding Father and as one of the United States of America's greatest politicians, but historians

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<sup>1</sup> Chernow, Ron. *Alexander Hamilton*. Penguin Group, 2004, p. 363.

<sup>2</sup> Chernow, Ron. *Alexander Hamilton*. Penguin Group, 2004, p. 533.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Hamilton's publication of "The Reynolds Pamphlet" dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 293.

<sup>4</sup> Chernow, Ron. *Alexander Hamilton*. Penguin Group, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Alexander Hamilton's publication of "The Reynolds Pamphlet" dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 294.

tend to disagree on the motivation behind his accomplishments. There are predominantly two schools of academic thought concerning the character, personality and achievements of Alexander Hamilton. The first of these is that he was a strong, upright and moral political leader with many honorable accomplishments.<sup>6</sup> The second school of thought is that he was a capitalist, greedy and selfish pig with no regard for anyone except himself.<sup>7</sup>

Hamilton's actions through events such as the Reynolds Affair and the duel with Aaron Burr indicated that he valued his reputation. Reputation was important for all influential leaders in the United States during the time of Hamilton's peak, and many were willing to sacrifice other factors in order to maintain a noble reputation, but Hamilton in particular was concerned with his status, as one can see through studying his life and his actions. The political scene of the eighteenth and nineteenth century was overwhelmingly based upon the notion of reputation, and the men involved in this arena were constantly worrying about and trying to protect their public face.<sup>8</sup> Denouncing and attacking a man's honor was the ultimate way to offend a political opponent, and the men on the public stage during this time were aware of all threats to their honor and were therefore willing to do whatever it took to maintain a solid reputation.<sup>9</sup> However, not all of these men were willing to go as far as Hamilton in achieving an honorable reputation.

Alexander Hamilton's private ambitions drove his public masculine assertions. His motivations behind maintaining an honorable reputation stemmed from his selfish desires to surpass his colleagues and gain attention rather than from his wish to truly obtain morality and integrity. Whenever Hamilton's private matters were made public, his main objective was to avoid embarrassment at all costs and to seem honorable, no matter what this would cost him in

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<sup>6</sup> Chernow, Ron. *Alexander Hamilton*. Penguin Group, 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Freeman, Joanne. *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic*. Yale University Press, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Freeman, Joanne B. *Affairs of Honor*. Yale University Press, 2001.

<sup>9</sup> Freeman, Joanne B. *Affairs of Honor*. Yale University Press, 2001.

his private life. He consistently felt the need to compensate for his underprivileged childhood and did not truly care about his relationships with his family or friends, especially if his reputation was in danger. Growing up in a way of life that was drastically different than the luxurious lives of the other Founding Fathers, Hamilton constantly felt the need to offset this social handicap. Whenever Hamilton was put under the public microscope, he put on a façade that was different from his inner feelings about morality and true honor. This factor indicates that he acted differently in public than he did in private, and this does not characterize a man who truly desired morality.

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Born on an island in the Caribbean, Hamilton did not begin his life in the same way as did the other Founding Fathers of the United States. Instead, he grew up in severe poverty while his future colleagues and opponents in the United States grew up in world of luxury where they had many privileges. These men automatically had an advantage in the political arena by being known, and Hamilton was disadvantaged because he was a foreigner when he arrived in the states. Knowing that he would be comparatively anonymous when he entered the political arena of America, he was inspired. Hamilton was instilled with the notion that he could do better in life and he had a strong desire to make a name for himself as well as surpass his opponents. His reasoning behind many of his later actions (such as the Reynolds affair and the duel with Aaron Burr) had been culminating inside him since he was a child. Hamilton was born to a woman named Rachel, who had previously been divorced before she met the man who was Hamilton's father, therefore making Hamilton an illegitimate child (a factor that later affected his life due to the way that his opponents used it against him). His status as an illegitimate child and his

beginnings as a poor boy inspired him to believe that he should compensate for his early misfortunes and earn his way to superiority.<sup>10</sup>

Following his unfortunate childhood, Hamilton used his skill in writing and business to earn a sponsorship that helped him get to the United States, where he could attend one of the country's finest schools and come in contact with many of the powerful political leaders of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>11</sup> Interacting with these powerful men instilled in him a desire to continue to social climb and to make himself known to the world in any way that he could. Serving many positions under George Washington, Hamilton learned the tricks of the trade when it came to controlling the government and those who were in charge of the government.<sup>12</sup> Over the course of Hamilton's life, he was extremely involved in the political arena of the United States and he was overly concerned with maintaining an honorable reputation throughout his career. However, behind the scenes, Hamilton committed some questionable acts that were damaging to his supposed character and honor. In 1780, Hamilton married Elizabeth Schuyler, whom he was extremely fond of as evidenced by many of their corresponding letters. However, in 1791, Hamilton was involved in an extramarital affair in which the result was Hamilton exposing his personal life to the public in order to save his political reputation.<sup>13</sup>

Through his political dealings, Hamilton established relationships with his colleagues and opponents, some of these being beneficial relationships and some of these being quarrelsome relationships. Probably his most petulant relationship was with Aaron Burr, and when Burr eventually challenged Hamilton to a duel, and despite Hamilton's claims that he was opposed to

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<sup>10</sup> Chernow, Ron. *Alexander Hamilton*. Penguin Group, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Chernow, Ron. *Alexander Hamilton*. Penguin Group, 2004, p. 37.

<sup>12</sup> Chernow, Ron. *Alexander Hamilton*. Penguin Group, 2004, p. 87.

<sup>13</sup> Chernow, Ron. *Alexander Hamilton*. Penguin Group, 2004, p. 363.

dueling, he proceeded to participate in order to appear courageous and honorable.<sup>14</sup> In the end, Hamilton was shot and killed. His life was peppered with key moments and events that lend evidence to the difference between his private and public faces.

The humiliation that came along with his status of being born out of wedlock was a large inspiration for many of his later actions. This factor was particularly difficult for Hamilton because his illegitimacy was merely a technicality due to the fact that his mother was not officially married to his father, which made the situation much more frustrating.<sup>15</sup> The characterization of Hamilton as an illegitimate child followed him throughout his life, and he was constantly reminded of the shame that accompanied this classification.<sup>16</sup> His competitors used this status of illegitimacy against him, and he was repeatedly criticized for this factor of his personal history, and he noted that this was a large disappointment of his.<sup>17</sup> In a later letter to fellow secretary to George Washington, William Jackson, Alexander stated, “my birth is the subject of the most humiliating criticism”.<sup>18</sup> It is evident that Hamilton was sensitive to the fact that he was born illegitimate and that he was aware that his opponents would use this factor as a way to work against him and criticize him. This sensitivity was the foundation for Hamilton to try and surpass his opponents because he believed that his opponents had already gotten a head start and surpassed him while he lived on the island separated from the civilized and luxurious lifestyle of the other Founding Fathers. In his letter to Jackson, Hamilton continued by verbally attacking the rest of his colleagues who had grown up in America: “The truth is that on the question who my parents were, I have better pretensions than most of those who in this Country

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<sup>14</sup> Freeman, Joanne. *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic*. Yale University Press, 2001, p. 159.

<sup>15</sup> Chernow, Ron. *Alexander Hamilton*. Penguin Group, 2004, p. 16.

<sup>16</sup> Chernow, Ron. *Alexander Hamilton*. Penguin Group, 2004, p. 16.

<sup>17</sup> Chernow, Ron. *Alexander Hamilton*. Penguin Group, 2004, p. 16.

<sup>18</sup> Letter from Alexander Hamilton to William Jackson dated August 26, 1800. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 328.

plume themselves on Ancestry.”<sup>19</sup> With this sentence, Hamilton was defending his own honor by defacing the ancestries of his colleagues and competitors, therefore making himself seem superior to them and honoring himself.

Alexander’s disappointment with his childhood was one of the main motivators for his attempt to earn a more dignified reputation, and while many of the other Founding Fathers desired this sort of status, Hamilton’s pursuit of this characterization was particularly extreme due to the difference in how he grew up. Privately, in a letter to a close friend from the island named Edward Stevens, Hamilton expresses his embarrassment associated with his status as illegitimate.<sup>20</sup> It is significant to note that this is a private letter, and Hamilton was not willing to make his status public if it had any possibility of harming his future reputation. In the letter to Stevens, Hamilton discussed his plans for his future and how he would accomplish the establishment of a high status in the United States.<sup>21</sup> In the letter, Hamilton stated that his “ambition is prevalent that [he] contemn the grov’ling and condition of a Clerk or the like.”<sup>22</sup> In this statement, Hamilton was acknowledging the lowly status that he currently possessed (as a clerk for a trading company in the Caribbean) and that he had a strong determination to rise above the status of a clerk and ascend into the United States with high importance. This is an inspiring statement, but the next proclamation is the true indicator of Hamilton’s readiness to endure many sacrifices in order to boost his reputation. He declared that he would “willingly risk

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<sup>19</sup> Letter from Alexander Hamilton to William Jackson dated August 26, 1800. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 329.

<sup>20</sup> Letter from Alexander Hamilton to Edward Stevens dated November 11, 1769. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> Letter from Alexander Hamilton to Edward Stevens dated November 11, 1769. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Letter from Alexander Hamilton to Edward Stevens dated November 11, 1769. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 3.

his life” in order to “exalt his station.”<sup>23</sup> This is early evidence that he was going to be ruthless in advancing his position in the world. This assertion is important in analyzing the motivations behind Hamilton’s actions that are aimed at elevating his reputation because it mentions the great sacrifices that he was willing to endure in order to be better than he was as a clerk in the Caribbean.<sup>24</sup> Alexander continued his letter to his friend with the statement, “My Folly makes me ashamed and beg youll Conceal it.”<sup>25</sup> This statement is indicative of his awareness behind the shame that is associated with being an illegitimate child, and he discussed how he does not want this element of his childhood to be made public. This factor is important because it is an indicator his awareness of his situation and of how he wished to keep the most embarrassing parts of his life a secret.

Hamilton also told Stevens that he knew that he was young but that he was determined to find a way to prove himself.<sup>26</sup> This acknowledgement of his age is significant because it is almost as if he was trying to prove that he was going to rise above everyone else despite his age, and he clearly believed that this was an impressive feat. Finally, in the conclusion of this significant letter, Hamilton stated, “I wish there was a War.”<sup>27</sup> Fighting in a war is an extreme way to attempt to prove one’s strength, and Hamilton’s statement declaring that he wishes that there was a war is suggestive that he was willing to give up many important parts of his existence, including his life, in order to prove to the world that he was courageous and strong. Many men were (and are) willing to go to war for their countries, but not many of these men are

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<sup>23</sup> Letter from Alexander Hamilton to Edward Stevens dated November 11, 1796. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Chernow, Ron. *Alexander Hamilton*. Penguin Group, 2004, p. 40.

<sup>25</sup> Letter from Alexander Hamilton to Edward Stevens dated November 11, 1769. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Letter from Alexander Hamilton to Edward Stevens dated November 11, 1769. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> Letter from Alexander Hamilton to Edward Stevens dated November 11, 1769. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 3.



willing to go to war and risk their lives for themselves or to prove that they are better than their opponents. Also, not only is Hamilton *willing* to make sacrifices, he says that he wishes there was a war, indicating that he *wants* to make sacrifices. Hamilton desired to earn proof of his accomplishments, and this aspect indicates that he did not want to truly be moral or honorable, but that he wanted to appear this way to the public.

Alexander Hamilton was involved in one of the country's most famous sex scandals, and the result of this scandal reveals the type of sacrifice that Hamilton was willing to make in order to guard his reputation in the political sense. The Reynolds Affair exposed the fact that the true motivation behind Hamilton maintaining a solid reputation was to seem honorable in the public and political sense and that he did not actually care as much about his personal or private life. Hamilton was willing to sacrifice his closest relationships in order to clear his name of being accused of government fraud, which is a characteristic of a man who is not truly honorable. In the summer of 1791, during the peak of Hamilton's political career, he was living in Philadelphia working as a lawyer when temptation approached him and attempted to take advantage of him. Hamilton had the reputation of being somewhat of a ladies man, and the Reynolds situation is evidence that he never wanted to turn away a woman in need.<sup>28</sup>

Maria Reynolds showed up at the stead of Hamilton and requested a private meeting with him in which she detailed her abusive and neglectful relationship with her husband, James Reynolds.<sup>29</sup> Hamilton stated, "She had taken the liberty to apply to my humanity for assistance."<sup>30</sup> This statement clearly demonstrates the extent to which Hamilton held himself in high-esteem and viewed himself as a person whose reputation people knew to be honorable.

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<sup>28</sup> Chernow, Ron. *Alexander Hamilton*. Penguin Group, 2004, p. 363.

<sup>29</sup> Alexander Hamilton's publication of "The Reynolds Pamphlet" dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 305.

<sup>30</sup> Alexander Hamilton's publication of "The Reynolds Pamphlet" dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 304.

With this statement, the young lawyer arrogantly admitted that he was known in Philadelphia as a man who exhibited morality and humanity, which he successively counteracted with his next actions. Hamilton, being the charlatan that he was, was intrigued by this woman and agreed to assist her in whatever way that he could, and offered to come to her home later to deliver money to aid her financially.<sup>31</sup> However, when Hamilton arrived at the Reynolds residence, he stated that Maria clearly was not only interested in money, and she led him to a bedroom, where their extramarital affair began.<sup>32</sup> He continued by acknowledging that they continued to meet often, and he said that most of the gatherings were at his house; it is interesting that he thought to include this in his description of the affair because it indicates that he truly had no regard for his personal relationships if he was going to have an affair in his own home and then admit to it.<sup>33</sup>

The beginnings of this secret relationship continued as a private affair, but when James Reynolds began to grow suspicious of the relationship between his wife and Hamilton, Hamilton invited him to a meeting in his office in order to discuss business.<sup>34</sup> Hamilton stated that Reynolds told him that he was going to Virginia and that he requested from Hamilton a job in the public office of the Treasury upon his return, a request to which Hamilton vaguely obliged.<sup>35</sup> It appears that Hamilton was becoming nervous about the situation and how it would affect him if it became public, so he likely agreed to give a job to James in order to obtain the possibility of befriending him and therefore not making his affair public knowledge. Hamilton indicated that when James returned from his time in Virginia, he came to Hamilton requesting the job that he

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<sup>31</sup> Alexander Hamilton's publication of "The Reynolds Pamphlet" dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 305.

<sup>32</sup> Alexander Hamilton's publication of "The Reynolds Pamphlet" dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 305.

<sup>33</sup> Alexander Hamilton's publication of "The Reynolds Pamphlet" dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 305.

<sup>34</sup> Alexander Hamilton's publication of "The Reynolds Pamphlet" dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 305.

<sup>35</sup> Alexander Hamilton's publication of "The Reynolds Pamphlet" dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 305.

had been promised, and that Hamilton replied that he did not have a vacancy in his department to give Reynolds, and that he had never fully promised him the job in the first place.<sup>36</sup> It can be argued that Hamilton is not to be trusted, especially due to the fact that he was having an affair without his wife's knowledge. Hamilton alleges that Reynolds proceeded to file a complaint against him, claiming that Hamilton had "promised him employment and had disappointed him," to which Hamilton began to wonder if he should attempt to gratify Reynolds' request due to the affair that he was having with Maria.<sup>37</sup> This is one of the first times in this account that we see Hamilton begin to worry about how this situation could affect him long term, and he has started to wonder how he can appease James in order to ensure that his affair does not become public.

The affair between Alexander and Maria continued, and while he stated that he had the right mind to end the relationship because of the possibility of it affecting his future, he proceeded seeing her.<sup>38</sup> He clearly was not worried about the publicity enough if he was deciding to continue the relationship, especially after he had been made aware that her husband had growing suspicions. At this point Hamilton began accusing the Reynolds' of the wrongdoing in this situation, and mentioned that he had suspicions that the Reynolds couple was devising a plot against him in order to blackmail him and extort his money.<sup>39</sup> It is interesting that he noted this (and mentioned it many times) because it demonstrates that he was trying to relieve himself from all blame by accusing the Reynolds pair of entrapping him in the situation in order to benefit from him in the future. He apparently did not want to admit that he was entirely wrong in the situation by having intercourse with another man's wife while he himself was also married; he

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<sup>36</sup> Alexander Hamilton's publication of "The Reynolds Pamphlet" dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 306.

<sup>37</sup> Alexander Hamilton's publication of "The Reynolds Pamphlet" dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 306.

<sup>38</sup> Alexander Hamilton's publication of "The Reynolds Pamphlet" dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 306.

<sup>39</sup> Alexander Hamilton's publication of "The Reynolds Pamphlet" dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 306.

would rather pin the blame on James and Maria by assuming that they were devising an evil plan against him. Hamilton said, “My sensibility, perhaps my vanity, admitted the possibility of a real fondness,” and by this statement, he was playing the role of a victim who had been schemed against by his mistress, instead of owning up to his role in the affair.<sup>40</sup> Hamilton was showing his two separate faces in this instance because he was publicly denouncing the Reynolds couple for scheming against him, when privately, he knew that he was participating in the affair with a married woman.

Maria wrote to Alexander on December 15, 1791, revealing that her husband was fully aware of the affair between them and that she had suspicions that her husband had every intention of notifying Hamilton’s wife.<sup>41</sup> Again, Hamilton was unsure if he should believe that there was an actual “discovery” to be made or if this was just another part of their supposed “plot” against him.<sup>42</sup> He continued to attempt to portray himself as the victim in the entire situation, trying to avoid any digs to his character that may have influenced his public reputation if the Reynolds were to follow through with the plan of exposing him to either the general public or to Hamilton’s wife and family. James further informed Hamilton that he did in fact know about the relationship, accusing Hamilton of “depriving” him of everything that was “near and dear” to him, and Hamilton proceeded by inviting James to his office for a meeting to discuss what the following steps would be.<sup>43</sup> <sup>44</sup> During this meeting, Hamilton noted that he neither admitted nor denied the relationship with Maria (probably because he still thought he was being

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<sup>40</sup> Alexander Hamilton’s publication of “The Reynolds Pamphlet” dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 306.

<sup>41</sup> Letter from Maria Reynolds to Alexander Hamilton dated December 15, 1791. *Founders Online*. National Archives, 2018.

<sup>42</sup> Alexander Hamilton’s publication of “The Reynolds Pamphlet” dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 307.

<sup>43</sup> Letter from James Reynolds to Alexander Hamilton dated December 15, 1791. *Founders Online*. National Archives, 2018.

<sup>44</sup> Alexander Hamilton’s publication of “The Reynolds Pamphlet” dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 308.

plotted against and did not want to give in too easily).<sup>45</sup> Hamilton clearly was not ready to pay the price for his actions, and he was going to do everything in his power to not own up to his adulterous crime until he knew exactly how it would affect him in the future. This is an indication of the selfishness and arrogance behind Hamilton's actions. In his account of the meeting, Hamilton discusses that James obviously wanted to be paid off as a form of blackmail in return for him not making the affair public knowledge.<sup>46</sup> It is here that Hamilton's desperation to maintain his reputation in this situation is plainly seen. He said, "It was easy to understand that he wanted money, and to prevent an explosion, I resolved to gratify him."<sup>47</sup> This "explosion" that Hamilton was referring to was likely the possibility that the world as well as his family would hear of his involvement with Maria. Hamilton's referral to gratifying Reynolds indicated that he was ready to pay him monetarily in order to save his name, even though he was still unsure if this was all a ruse or if the threats to his political and personal future were real. Hamilton was attempting to save his public face by privately giving money to Reynolds in order to keep the affair quiet, yet he was not ready to end the affair completely.

Hamilton, being concerned about his reputation but also wary of the Reynolds' intentions, was reluctant to provide them with any sum of money at the start of their requests, but following their first meeting, James was persistent and threatening in his pursuit of Hamilton's compensation for his relationship with Maria.<sup>48</sup> <sup>49</sup> In order to persuade Hamilton, Reynolds posed the request in a form that he likely believed would make Hamilton feel guilty. Reynolds

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<sup>45</sup> Alexander Hamilton's publication of "The Reynolds Pamphlet" dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 308.

<sup>46</sup> Alexander Hamilton's publication of "The Reynolds Pamphlet" dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 308.

<sup>47</sup> Alexander Hamilton's publication of "The Reynolds Pamphlet" dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 307.

<sup>48</sup> Alexander Hamilton's publication of "The Reynolds Pamphlet" dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 307.

<sup>49</sup> Letter from James Reynolds to Alexander Hamilton dated December 17, 1791. *Founders Online*, National Archives, 2018.

stated that the provision of this money would be sufficient to “amend his wounded honor.”<sup>50</sup> Appealing to the word “honor” when dealing with Hamilton was clearly the most effective way to get him to oblige to his request, and therefore Hamilton agreed to pay him.<sup>51</sup> By agreeing to submit to this request, Hamilton was acting to essentially protect both his own and James Reynolds’ honor, and this indicates how important honor was to Hamilton.

On January 17, 1792, Reynolds again reached out to Hamilton and requested that he continue to keep a relationship with Maria.<sup>52</sup> Reynolds was claiming that he was acting in his wife’s best interest by keeping her happy, and apparently the extramarital affair with Hamilton was that which was keeping her happy.<sup>53</sup> Hamilton stated that he was reluctant at first to accept the invitation back into the Reynolds home and into the situation, and that his suspicions about the Reynolds’ plans against him continued to grow, however, he once again obliged to the appeal.<sup>54</sup> James wrote again to Hamilton on April 3, 1792 and requested another sum of money, but this request stated that the money would no longer be for emotional compensation for the relationship that ensued between Hamilton and Maria.<sup>55</sup> This time, James wanted Hamilton’s money for something material that would help his family.<sup>56</sup> This letter lent to Hamilton’s continued belief that he was being used as part of a bigger plan (he explicitly called it a

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<sup>50</sup> Letter from James Reynolds to Alexander Hamilton dated December 17, 1791. *Founders Online*. National Archives, 2018.

<sup>51</sup> Alexander Hamilton’s publication of “The Reynolds Pamphlet” dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 308.

<sup>52</sup> Letter from James Reynolds to Alexander Hamilton dated January 17, 1792. *Founders Online*, National Archives, 2018.

<sup>53</sup> Letter from James Reynolds to Alexander Hamilton dated January 17, 1792. *Founders Online*, National Archives, 2018.

<sup>54</sup> Alexander Hamilton’s publication of “The Reynolds Pamphlet” dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 309.

<sup>55</sup> Letter from James Reynolds to Alexander Hamilton dated April 3, 1792. *Founders Online*, National Archives, 2018.

<sup>56</sup> Letter from James Reynolds to Alexander Hamilton dated April 3, 1792. *Founders Online*, National Archives, 2018.

“scheme”) against him and he again grew suspicious of participating in the transactions.<sup>57</sup> However, there are records and receipts from these dealings that indicate that Hamilton did in fact continue to partake in the business with James.<sup>58</sup> His continued involvement in the situation illustrates that he continued to worry about his reputation being sullied and that he was willing to sacrifice money for seemingly meaningless things in order to save his career. This proves his desperation to keep the affair confidential, and it is important to note that he does not mention much of his emotional thoughts during this time and instead mentions only his decisions to pay Reynolds.<sup>59</sup>

After the letter requesting the extra finances for material reasons, the correspondences between Hamilton and Reynolds shifted. On May 2, 1792, James wrote to Hamilton and declared that he no longer wanted Hamilton to continue his relationship with Maria.<sup>60</sup> Following this letter, Hamilton stated that the reasoning behind this request was that James believed that Hamilton was embarrassed of their “friendship” because whenever they would conduct business, Hamilton would ensure that their meetings were private and concealed from the public eye.<sup>61</sup> <sup>62</sup> James was ashamed and offended that Hamilton did not want to be seen with him, but it is obvious that the reasoning behind Hamilton’s opinion and desire to be discreet was that he was concerned about the information being leaked to the public, therefore injuring his name. James stated that Hamilton never used the front entrance of the Reynolds residence, and it is interesting

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<sup>57</sup> Alexander Hamilton’s publication of “The Reynolds Pamphlet” dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 309.

<sup>58</sup> Receipts of transactions between James Reynolds and Alexander Hamilton dated 1792. *Founders Online*. National Archives, 2018.

<sup>59</sup> Alexander Hamilton’s publication of “The Reynolds Pamphlet” dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017.

<sup>60</sup> Letter from James Reynolds to Alexander Hamilton dated May 2, 1792. *Founders Online*, National Archives, 2018.

<sup>61</sup> Alexander Hamilton’s publication of “The Reynolds Pamphlet” dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 310.

<sup>62</sup> Letter from James Reynolds to Alexander Hamilton dated May 2, 1792. *Founders Online*. National Archives, 2018.

that Hamilton was willing to go to the extreme in order to continue this business when he knew that it could ruin his reputation, and this is another indication of his selfishness.<sup>63</sup> Hamilton called this letter from James a “master-piece,” sarcastically demonstrating the frustration that he was feeling, and he consistently used sarcasm as a defense mechanism in the entirety of his recount of this affair.<sup>64</sup>

While James was requesting that Hamilton discontinue the relationship with his wife, it appeared that James and Maria were not in agreement about this decision to end the affair. Exactly one month after James requested the termination of the relationship, on June 2, Maria wrote a letter to Hamilton in which she requested that he visit her again, and Hamilton stated that this was an indication that it was “not her plan yet to let me off,” signifying that he felt as if she still had feelings for him.<sup>65</sup> <sup>66</sup> Hamilton’s statement illustrates that he was pleased and satisfied that she may still have had feelings for him, because he always made her seem as if she were so desperate for his company that she would not have been able to go on without their relationship. This indicates that Hamilton was attempting to justify him wanting to continue the relationship by making it seem that she needed him in her life and that his participation in the affair was to help Maria, not to satisfy himself in the relationship. He even hinted at this when discussing his conversations with James, because he talked about how often James stated that Hamilton was the reason for his wife’s happiness.<sup>67</sup> This is an indication of how Hamilton held himself in high esteem and thought that others were constantly striving for his affection and attention. His

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<sup>63</sup> Letter from James Reynolds to Alexander Hamilton dated May 2, 1792. *Founders Online*, National Archives, 2018.

<sup>64</sup> Alexander Hamilton’s publication of “The Reynolds Pamphlet” dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 308.

<sup>65</sup> Letter from Maria Reynolds to Alexander Hamilton dated June 2, 1792. *Founders Online*, National Archives, 2018.

<sup>66</sup> Alexander Hamilton’s publication of “The Reynolds Pamphlet” dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 309.

<sup>67</sup> Alexander Hamilton’s publication of “The Reynolds Pamphlet” dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 309.



suggestions that he was an honorable man in the eyes of many people insinuated that he was beginning to consider that this affair could go public, and he was trying to remind people that he was still considered to be moral and honorable, even though he had committed an amoral act.

Hamilton was in deep in the Reynolds affair, and while he believed that the entire matter was contained within himself and the Reynolds', he soon discovered that they were not the only ones who knew about the situation and the payments between the two men. Three men, Frederick Muhlenberg, James Monroe, and Abraham Venable, became involved in the matter, questioning the obscure and mysterious relationship between James and Alexander.<sup>68</sup> Hamilton stated that the men approached him, claiming, "They had discovered a very improper connection between [Hamilton] and Mr. Reynolds."<sup>69</sup> He went on to mention how "hurt" he was by this presentation of information, likely because Hamilton considered these men to be colleagues in the political arena and he was unsettled by the fact that they had approached him with such negative news.<sup>70</sup> The three men, detecting Hamilton's defensiveness, corrected him by telling him that their intentions behind conducting an investigation were not to attack her personal character, but that they had discovered an interesting pecuniary connection between he and Mr. Reynolds.<sup>71</sup> They stated that they were actually doing him a favor by appealing to him before conducting their research on the situation because they felt that they owed him the respect of letting him set the record straight for himself.<sup>72</sup> Since they sensed that Hamilton seemed self-protective and cautious, they informed him that the reasoning behind their investigation was to

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<sup>68</sup> Chernow, Ron. *Alexander Hamilton*. Penguin Group, 2004, p. 414.

<sup>69</sup> Alexander Hamilton's publication of "The Reynolds Pamphlet" dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 311.

<sup>70</sup> Alexander Hamilton's publication of "The Reynolds Pamphlet" dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 311.

<sup>71</sup> Alexander Hamilton's publication of "The Reynolds Pamphlet" dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 311.

<sup>72</sup> Alexander Hamilton's publication of "The Reynolds Pamphlet" dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 311.

provide for the public duty, not to demean Hamilton's honor, indicating that Hamilton was a man with a reputation for caring about his reputation.<sup>73</sup> Hamilton immediately responded by indicating that he would reveal everything about the transactions, demonstrating that he was about to completely reveal his adulterous behavior to these men, and he showed no sign of caring for the damage that this was going to do to his personal relationship, or at least he did not mention this yet in his recount of the affair.<sup>74 75</sup> He stated that when he was done with his explanation, two of the men (Muhlenberg and Venable) seemed satisfied, and that Monroe still seemed suspicious.<sup>76</sup>

In a further attempt to ensure that his political reputation was not in danger, Hamilton released to the public all of this information that he included in his recount of the affair, and he entitled it, "The Reynolds Pamphlet."<sup>77</sup> It includes his entire telling of the story as well as attachments of the correspondence between him and the Reynolds' and between him and the three men investigating him.<sup>78</sup> In releasing this document to the public, Hamilton was exposing his entire affair and also his personal life with the sole purpose of saving his political career. However, he was also accepting a hit to his true honor, but wanted to make sure that his political honor was upheld. This is evidence that he cared much more about his political representation than his true morality, and it also proves that he had no regard for the feelings of his family members. Having the two separate public and private faces was a common theme that Hamilton encompassed, and the Reynolds Affair was a strong indicator of his true motivations.

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<sup>73</sup> Alexander Hamilton's publication of "The Reynolds Pamphlet" dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 311.

<sup>74</sup> Chernow, Ron. *Alexander Hamilton*. Penguin Group, 2004, p. 416.

<sup>75</sup> Alexander Hamilton's publication of "The Reynolds Pamphlet" dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 312.

<sup>76</sup> Alexander Hamilton's publication of "The Reynolds Pamphlet" dated August 25, 1797. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 312.

<sup>77</sup> Chernow, Ron. *Alexander Hamilton*. Penguin Group, 2004, p. 533.

<sup>78</sup> Chernow, Ron. *Alexander Hamilton*. Penguin Group, 2004, p. 533.

Hamilton's participation in the Reynolds Affair was characteristic of his focus on maintaining a strong reputation while also committing acts privately in which his true personification was present. His private actions during the affair indicated that he had no regard for other people, even his family, if it meant that he may lose the image of having a noble reputation. This hypocrisy is common in many elements of Hamilton's life, and he clearly had a hard time reconciling between his public and private matters. This continued throughout his life and reached an apex when he became involved in a fatal duel with one of his political opponents. His public actions and expressions differed from how he privately felt and acted, and again this was the cause of much turmoil in his life.

Being such a strong guard of his reputation and demonstrating many defensive as well as offensive qualities, Hamilton was naturally a political rival of many men in the government of America, and the most prominent of these enmities was between Hamilton and Aaron Burr.<sup>79</sup> They were lawyers in New York at the same time, had many of the same colleagues, and generally worked together frequently as important men on the American political stage.<sup>80</sup> About their relationship, Hamilton stated, "We set out in the practice of the law at the same time and took opposite political directions. Burr beckoned me to come with him and I advised him to come with me. We could not agree."<sup>81</sup> The fact that Hamilton said the word "advised" indicates that he felt that he were superior to Burr and thought that he had good advice to give him, and this was likely another reason that the two men did not get along, besides the political disagreements. Hamilton clearly wanted to be placed on a pedestal whenever he was in competition with other political actors, and this relationship shows how this feeling could culminate into a fatal situation rather than a mere political disagreement.

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<sup>79</sup> Freeman, Joanne. *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic*. Yale University Press, 2001, p. 159.

<sup>80</sup> Freeman, Joanne. *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic*. Yale University Press, 2001, p. 162.

<sup>81</sup> Chernow, Ron. *Alexander Hamilton*. Penguin Group, 2004, p. 191.

In 1804, Burr finally had enough of the arguing and criticizing from Hamilton, due to an action that Hamilton committed against him.<sup>82</sup> Burr was attempting to further his political career after being removed from the office of the Vice President and he was trying to earn his way back into the important levels of government when a newspaper article was released in which Hamilton had reported on his feelings towards Burr and his political abilities.<sup>83</sup> In the report, Hamilton stated that the government was not the place for Burr and that Burr was inept at handling important political issues, and then the reporter mentioned that Hamilton had also included “something more despicable,” but that the reporter decided that it was bad enough that he should leave it out of his final published article.<sup>84</sup> Hamilton’s feelings about Burr and his involvement in government came from his idea that he had worked hard to earn a solid reputation and that he had been a huge actor in making America the way it was.<sup>85</sup> He felt that Burr was a threat to the government and therefore a threat to all of his hard work.<sup>86</sup>

Aaron Burr had finally had enough of the arguing with Hamilton and was tired of Hamilton defacing him in the public eye, so he wrote him a letter on June 18, 1804, in which he pointed out how Hamilton had wronged him and how he wanted to proceed following this years-long feud.<sup>87</sup> The newspaper article may have seemed as if it were just a small insult that many political leaders often threw at each other in times of disagreement, but Burr wanted to fight back at Hamilton, and this article gave him the perfect window of opportunity.<sup>88</sup> In Burr’s letter, he started by calling the article a “malignant attack which my character has sustained,” and by including this statement in the first sentence of his letter, he was letting Hamilton know

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<sup>82</sup> Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 351.

<sup>83</sup> Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 351.

<sup>84</sup> Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 351.

<sup>85</sup> Freeman, Joanne. *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic*. Yale University Press, 2001, p. 161.

<sup>86</sup> Freeman, Joanne. *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic*. Yale University Press, 2001, p. 161.

<sup>87</sup> Letter from Aaron Burr to Alexander Hamilton dated June 18, 1804. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 353.

<sup>88</sup> Freeman, Joanne. *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic*. Yale University Press, 2001, p. 163.

immediately that this was going to be a letter full of confrontation.<sup>89</sup> Burr, knowing well that Hamilton was a strict defender of his public honor, continued the letter by telling Hamilton that his words in the article were “dishonorably obtruded on the public.”<sup>90</sup> By appealing to Hamilton’s honor in his attack, he was attempting to provoke emotion from Hamilton and hopefully earn an apology since Hamilton was such a firm protector of his status in the public eye. Burr also mentioned that fact that the author of the article had pointed out that Hamilton had included the “despicable” information that was not deemed publishable.<sup>91</sup>

Hamilton’s response to Burr’s declaration of Hamilton’s wrongdoings against him included, of course, a strong defense and a justification for his actions, which he believed would satisfy Burr.<sup>92</sup> Hamilton started the letter by stating that he had “maturely” reflected on the situation and that after pining over a solution, he had decided that he “could not, without manifest impropriety, make the avowal or disavowal which [Burr] seemed to think necessary.”<sup>93</sup> By beginning his letter in this way, Hamilton was attempting to make himself seem like he was the better person and that he was more mature than Burr when handling these types of situations. Hamilton was also prefacing a reaction that may ensue if Burr were to continue pursuing an action against Hamilton in order to get him to apologize; by being stubborn, he was foreshadowing how he would respond to such a condition.

Hamilton attacked Burr in his mentioning of the word “despicable” and Hamilton made sure to defend his use of the word, and he said “Between Gentlemen, *despicable* and *more*

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<sup>89</sup> Letter from Aaron Burr to Alexander Hamilton dated June 18, 1804. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 353.

<sup>90</sup> Letter from Aaron Burr to Alexander Hamilton dated June 18, 1804. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 353.

<sup>91</sup> Letter from Aaron Burr to Alexander Hamilton dated June 18, 1804. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 354.

<sup>92</sup> Letter from Alexander Hamilton to Aaron Burr dated June 20, 1804. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 355.

<sup>93</sup> Letter from Alexander Hamilton to Aaron Burr dated June 20, 1804. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 355.

*despicable* are not worth the pains of a distinction.”<sup>94</sup> In using this statement, Hamilton was again attempting to place himself above Burr and to make him feel as though his argument against Hamilton had no grounds or substance. He called Burr’s argument “vague” and declared that since Burr’s letter was vague, Hamilton’s response would also be vague.<sup>95</sup> With this statement, Hamilton proved that he would be difficult to work with in this situation, but also that he would be relentless, again foreshadowing the actions that would follow.

The following few correspondences between Burr and Hamilton consisted of a mixture of respectful statements and attacking, offensive statements in which the men were trying to come to an agreement when they both likely knew that they would not be able to compromise their differences, especially via letters. Burr made a strong declaration against Hamilton that follows: “Political opposition can never absolve Gentlemen from the necessity of a rigid adherence to the laws of honor.”<sup>96</sup> This statement indicates that Burr was completely ready to defend his honor and make any sacrifices that he deemed necessary, and he did not believe that political opposition was a good enough reason to abandon your honor. He was ready to challenge Hamilton to a duel. “Thus, Sir, you have invited the course I am about to pursue.”<sup>97</sup>

This letter declaring a course of action from Burr is the last of the direct correspondence between Hamilton and Burr, and the rest of the information regarding the duel is communicated by friends of Hamilton William P. Van Ness and Nathaniel Pendleton. Pendleton’s expression of Hamilton’s feelings about the duel detailed the fact that Hamilton was prepared to defend himself and explain all of his courses of action against Burr, but that he would not answer to a

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<sup>94</sup> Letter from Alexander Hamilton to Aaron Burr dated June 20, 1804. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 356.

<sup>95</sup> Letter from Alexander Hamilton to Aaron Burr dated June 20, 1804. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 356.

<sup>96</sup> Letter from Aaron Burr to Alexander Hamilton dated June 21, 1804. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 357.

<sup>97</sup> Letter from Aaron Burr to Alexander Hamilton dated June 22, 1804. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 359.

“general and abstract enquiry, embracing a period too long for any accurate recollection, and exposing him to unpleasant criticisms from...any and every person, who may have understood him in an unfavorable sense.”<sup>98</sup> This illustrates how Hamilton was ready to go against Burr but that he would not admit to doing anything wrong in their relationship. This is an absurd thought of Hamilton’s because it shows to the public how stubborn he was and how he cannot always be trusted, which is ironic considering he wants the public to believe that he is an upright and noble man of honor.

Having accepted Burr’s challenge to duel, Hamilton wrote to Eliza and expressed his feeling about the sacrifices he was about to make at her expense. He wrote to his wife and stated, “If it had been possible for me to have avoided the interview, my love for you and my precious children would have been alone a decisive motive. But it was not possible, without sacrifices which would have rendered me unworthy of your esteem.”<sup>99</sup> By stating that withholding these sacrifices was not possible, he was not putting his family at the top of his priority list, therefore demonstrating the selfishness that he possessed and that he expressed in many of his actions. When he stated that avoiding the confrontation with Burr would make him unworthy of her affection, he was elevating her in order to make her feel more comfortable with the drastic decision that he was about to make. Hamilton continued this love letter by stating, “I need not tell you of the pangs I feel, from the idea of quitting you and exposing you to the anguish which I know you would feel. Nor could I dwell on the topic lest it should unman me.”<sup>100</sup> This proclamation is extremely characteristic of Hamilton’s personality in many ways. He realized

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<sup>98</sup> Nathaniel Pendleton’s remarks about Alexander Hamilton and the duel dated July 19, 1804. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 371.

<sup>99</sup> Letter from Alexander Hamilton to Eliza Hamilton dated July 4, 1804. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 363.

<sup>100</sup> Letter from Alexander Hamilton to Eliza Hamilton dated July 4, 1804. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 363.

that he had a choice to make. He could either sacrifice his wife and family's lives and put them through turmoil and exposure to the public through their pain and suffering, or he could follow through with the duel and "unman" himself. He admitted that he was aware of the sacrifice that not only he, but also his family, would have to endure if he were to die in the duel against Burr. However, he also indicated that he believed that if he did not go through with the duel, it would ultimately dishonor him, and a lack of honor during this time was characterized by a lack of manliness. Hamilton's desire for manhood was a firm motivator in his decision to sacrifice his family's emotions and feelings for himself in order to maintain his status as a man, even if he were to terminate his life.

In another letter to Eliza that he sent before he went to duel, he explained more of his reasoning for participating in the duel. "But you had rather I should die innocent than live guilty."<sup>101</sup> This statement put Eliza in a difficult place by asking her if she would rather keep her husband alive or have him die an honorable man, and Hamilton's decision to make this statement is yet another example of the selfishness he encompassed. Rather than apologize or discuss in more detail the loving feelings that he had for his wife, he put her on the spot by basically making sure that she knew that he was going to make this decision and that she should be satisfied with the thought of her husband risking his life in order to prove that he was honorable in the eyes of society. In this final letter to his wife, he continued by calling her to remember that she was a "Christian woman," and by doing this, he was attempting to prepare her for his death by telling her to remember that one day they would be reunited in Heaven.<sup>102</sup> In mentioning this factor to his wife, he was again preparing her for his possible death, which is an expression of

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<sup>101</sup> Letter from Alexander Hamilton to Eliza Hamilton dated July 10, 1804. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 367.

<sup>102</sup> Letter from Alexander Hamilton to Eliza Hamilton dated July 10, 1804. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 367.



love and comfort in a way, but in another way, this message can be construed as a way to prepare his wife for his death which he likely knew was inevitable.

Before the duel actually took place, Hamilton released a statement in which he addressed the many parts of the duel and how he felt about the action of dueling, as well as how he regarded his complicated relationship with Burr.<sup>103</sup> He began with his first point, stating that his “religious and moral principles are strongly opposed to the practice of dueling.”<sup>104</sup> It is interesting that Hamilton began his statement with this because he was a man who liked to do what he wanted, and if he were so opposed to the practice of dueling, then he must have had a strong reason for following through anyways, which he did. It was considered cowardly to turn down a challenge to a duel, even if you had no intention of firing at your opponent.<sup>105</sup> Since Hamilton was a man who usually did exactly as he pleased, his statement indicates that he did not truly feel opposed to dueling, because otherwise he would have found his own way to talk (or, in Hamilton’s case, write) himself out of this situation. By denouncing the practice of dueling, Hamilton was perhaps attempting to persuade Burr to feel the same way and possibly persuade him to not fire at Hamilton. In performing this scheme, Hamilton discreetly demonstrated that he was not in fact courageous, but that he actually wanted no part in the duel because he was afraid, not because he was honorable and brave.

Hamilton’s next declaration in his statement regarding the duel is a statement about how much he cared for and loved his family, and by using this statement, he was attempting to make himself seem honorable when he knew that he was ready to sacrifice his family in order to prove

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<sup>103</sup> Alexander Hamilton’s statement regarding the duel with Aaron Burr dated July 10, 1804. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 364.

<sup>104</sup> Alexander Hamilton’s statement regarding the duel with Aaron Burr dated July 10, 1804. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 364.

<sup>105</sup> Freeman, Joanne. *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic*. Yale University Press, 2001, p. 163.

his honor in the public eye by dueling against Burr.<sup>106</sup> The proclamation that stands out the most in this statement is when Hamilton stated, “I am conscious of no ill-will to Col. Burr, distinct from political opposition, which, as I trust, has proceeded from pure and upright motives.”<sup>107</sup> Again, Hamilton was attempting to defend his honor by stating that he had no hard feelings towards Burr, and basically insinuating that the duel was entirely Burr’s idea and that Hamilton was only going along with it in order to seem courageous and to appease Burr. It seems that Hamilton was trying to make Burr seem weak because Hamilton was essentially saying that Burr was the one with hard feelings in the situation, and that Hamilton’s poor feelings about Burr were not personal, when it can be seen from their relationship that their feelings were definitely personal. By making Burr seem weak, Hamilton was again putting himself above his colleague in order to seem as though he were the better man.

Hamilton began the conclusion of his statement by discussing his plan for how he would handle the duel. He claimed that he would “reserve and throw away” both his first and second shot.<sup>108</sup> This meant that he had no real intention of firing at Burr in the duel although he had agreed to participate.<sup>109</sup> In saying this, Hamilton was attempting to accomplish two things: one was to make the statement in order to prove that he was too honorable to fire at his political opponent, and two was that he was trying to persuade Burr to also not shoot. Hamilton was trying to prove his honor and bravery by stating that he would throw away his shot, and he believed that he could accomplish this by attempting to seem like he was too upright and respectable to actually shoot and kill his opponent in a politically based duel. By making this

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<sup>106</sup> Alexander Hamilton’s statement regarding the duel with Aaron Burr dated July 10, 1804. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 364.

<sup>107</sup> Alexander Hamilton’s statement regarding the duel with Aaron Burr dated July 10, 1804. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 364.

<sup>108</sup> Alexander Hamilton’s statement regarding the duel with Aaron Burr dated July 10, 1804. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 365.

<sup>109</sup> Freeman, Joanne. *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic*. Yale University Press, 2001, p. 164.

statement, he was attempting to persuade Burr to not shoot; he thought that if he made a public declaration that he was not going to shoot, then Burr would decide that it was ultimately pointless to try and shoot him unless he wanted to seem dishonorable. By doing this Hamilton was using the notion of honor against his opponent in order to shame him for declaring the duel in the first place, and Hamilton knew that honor played a huge part in the practice of dueling. At the end of the portion of the statement about Hamilton throwing away both of his shots, he said, “I have thoughts even of reserving my second fire—and thus giving a double opportunity to Col. Burr to pause and to reflect.”<sup>110</sup> This is a direct indicator that Hamilton was attempting to persuade Burr to throw away both of his shots as well and to let both men continue their political careers. Hamilton was essentially attempting to make Burr feel guilty if he were to have been thinking about actually shooting Hamilton in the duel. During this time, it was fairly rare for the opponents in duels to actually shoot and kill each other, and Hamilton was trying to show Burr that he himself was too honorable to actually shoot Burr, but that he was also brave and would not turn away from a challenge, especially a challenge in which he fought Burr.<sup>111</sup>

In the final portion of conclusion of his statement, Hamilton addressed the public and the citizens who questioned his participation in the duel following his denouncing of the practice.<sup>112</sup> He knew that people were wondering why he would continue to participate in dueling when he had made it known that he was against it. To this Hamilton stated, “I answer that my relative situation, as well in public as private aspects, enforcing all the considerations which constitute what men of the world denominate honor, impressed on me a peculiar necessity

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<sup>110</sup> Alexander Hamilton’s statement regarding the duel with Aaron Burr dated July 10, 1804. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 365.

<sup>111</sup> Freeman, Joanne. *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic*. Yale University Press, 2001, p. 167.

<sup>112</sup> Alexander Hamilton’s statement regarding the duel with Aaron Burr dated July 10, 1804. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 364.

not to decline the call.”<sup>113</sup> This section of the letter exemplifies Hamilton’s personality in that it shows that he always felt the need to justify himself to the public, and that these justifications almost always had to do with honor and seeming honorable in the public eye. He went above and beyond in this statement because he was addressing a public that had not yet reached out to him asking about why he chose to participate in the duel. The way that Hamilton handled this situation lends to the fact that he felt that he needed to make sure that his reputation was secure, even during times in which it may have seemed unnecessary to do so.

Hamilton was willing to make many sacrifices in order to engage in a duel against a man who clearly disliked him in order to seem courageous. He was only thinking about the sacrifice he was making of his life, but he forced his family to make the same sacrifices, all to preserve his honorable reputation. The justification statement that he provided is evidence that he felt the need to compensate for many of his actions in order to make the public understand his motives. William P. Van Ness and Nathaniel Pendleton gave notes about the duel after it was concluded, and they both said that they truly believed that Hamilton had no intention of shooting Burr with either of his shots because Hamilton thought that this action would both prevent Burr from shooting and also to better preserve his own memory and honor should he die, which he did.<sup>114</sup>

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The experiences that Hamilton had as a child were a strong element of motivation for his later actions. His embarrassment from being an illegitimate and poor child invoked in him a sense of needing to surpass his opponents and to rise in the ranks of society at remarkable

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<sup>113</sup> Alexander Hamilton’s statement regarding the duel with Aaron Burr dated July 10, 1804. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 366.

<sup>114</sup> William P. Van Ness’s remarks about Alexander Hamilton and the duel dated July 21, 1804. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 372.

<sup>115</sup> Nathaniel Pendleton’s remarks about Alexander Hamilton and the duel dated July 19, 1804. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 369.

speeds. His lowly status before he arrived in the United States made him immediately want to be in the company of the most powerful men of the country so that he could promote himself as well as take control of the government through these powerful men. He knew that if he earned the trust of the leaders of the United States, he could vicariously control the political affairs of the country through these men.

Since Hamilton was so concerned with his reputation and since he worked so hard to maintain his honor in the public's opinion, he caught the eye of many important political leaders.<sup>116</sup> Hamilton's skill as a writer and as a soldier earned him the attention of many powerful men.<sup>117</sup> One of the most important of these leaders was president George Washington.<sup>118</sup> Washington sent Hamilton a letter in 1777 asking him to join his staff, and Hamilton was immediately promoted to the position of lieutenant colonel.<sup>119</sup> However, even this did not satisfy Hamilton because he had to sit at a desk while other men were out fighting in the war.<sup>120</sup> He could never be satisfied. He immediately took control of Washington's staff and would attempt to act in his place whenever he was absent.<sup>121</sup> Hamilton served as Washington's aide de camp when he was beginning his military career, and his strength and persuasive abilities influenced many of Washington's opinions and decisions during this time.<sup>122</sup> Hamilton had worked so hard to maintain an honorable reputation that Washington viewed him as a man of honor and therefore was quick to trust his judgment. Washington happened to not be good with

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<sup>116</sup> Chernow, Ron. *Alexander Hamilton*. Penguin Group, 2004, p. 88.

<sup>117</sup> Chernow, Ron. *Alexander Hamilton*. Penguin Group, 2004, p. 88.

<sup>118</sup> Chernow, Ron. *Alexander Hamilton*. Penguin Group, 2004, p. 88.

<sup>119</sup> Letter from George Washington to Alexander Hamilton dated January 20, 1777. *Founders Online*, National Archives, 2018.

<sup>120</sup> Chernow, Ron. *Alexander Hamilton*. Penguin Group, 2004.

<sup>121</sup> Chernow, Ron. *Alexander Hamilton*. Penguin Group, 2004, p. 90.

<sup>122</sup> Chernow, Ron. *Alexander Hamilton*. Penguin Group, 2004, p. 90.

his words, so he had practically no choice but to listen to Hamilton, the skilled orator and writer, when working on written and spoken matters.<sup>123</sup>

Hamilton used the notion of reputation against Washington in order to assert his power over Washington and to convince him to perform political tasks that Hamilton thought were fitting in many situations. In a letter to Washington in 1788, Hamilton was attempting to persuade Washington to continue to serve as president (likely because Hamilton knew he could control him and therefore control the government).<sup>124</sup> In this letter, Hamilton says, “A regard to you own reputation as well as to the public good, calls upon you in the strongest manner.”<sup>125</sup> In this statement, Hamilton related Washington’s reputation to the public good of the United States, and during this time, the public good was the most important element in politics.<sup>126</sup> Hamilton’s concern with his own reputation was reflected onto Washington, and therefore Hamilton was able to control Washington by threatening a blow to his reputation if he were to not listen to Hamilton’s advice. In another letter to Washington, Hamilton advised him on how a president should act, and so he was acting as a political advisor and was using his skill with the written word in order to influence him.<sup>127</sup> Hamilton’s way with words was undeniably impressive, and therefore he was able to use this skill in order to influence important men such as Washington.

Hamilton sent Washington a draft of a farewell address in order to preserve Washington’s future reputation.<sup>128</sup> In this draft, Hamilton included a remark in his opening portion of the letter

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<sup>123</sup> Chernow, Ron. *Alexander Hamilton*. Penguin Group, 2004, p. 90.

<sup>124</sup> Letter from Alexander Hamilton to George Washington dated September 1788. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 161.

<sup>125</sup> Letter from Alexander Hamilton to George Washington dated September 1788. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 162.

<sup>126</sup> Freeman, Joanne. *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic*. Yale University Press, 2001.

<sup>127</sup> Letter from Alexander Hamilton to George Washington dated May 5, 1789. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 165.

<sup>128</sup> Alexander Hamilton’s draft of George Washington’s farewell address dated July 30, 1796. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 273.

that stated, “I do not see how any part can be omitted.”<sup>129</sup> In this statement, Hamilton showcased his arrogance by demonstrating that he felt that he was confident enough in his farewell address for the president that he immediately stated that there should not be any changes to his draft. Hamilton clearly had a lot of control over Washington’s actions because a farewell address is an incredibly important step in leaving a presidential office, and Hamilton was the one who got to not only provide this draft but also he got to tell Washington that basically it should not be changed.

It is interesting that Hamilton used the notion of reputation as well as his close relationship with Washington in order to persuade him to do things for the government with Hamilton’s close supervision, and this proves that Hamilton was willing to go to great lengths in order to get the government to do what he wanted. The drastic and positive change in his life that occurred when he moved from the islands to the United States, and then the change when he became George Washington’s close confidant planted in him the urge to social climb. He enjoyed attempting to influence the thoughts of Washington by talking a lot about how his actions would affect his reputation, and this is an indication of the importance that Hamilton placed on his own reputation.

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While there are two main schools of thought and theories behind the motivation behind Hamilton’s impressive accomplishments and actions, the true provocation came from the fact that he was a selfish man who only cared about how he was viewed in the public eye. In analyzing scholarship that has been published about Hamilton, the notion that he was a selfish man insinuates that he did not deserve the honor of being a noble man even though he

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<sup>129</sup> Letter from Alexander Hamilton to George Washington dated July 30, 1796. Freeman, Joanne. *The Essential Hamilton: Letters and Other Writings*. The Library of America, 2017, p. 273.

contributed many elements to our government in the form of policies and ideas.<sup>130</sup> He was willing to endure many sacrifices personally in order to achieve this notion of reputation on the political scene. When Hamilton was involved in the Reynolds affair, he not only had extramarital relations with another married woman, but he also exposed himself publicly in order to save his reputation politically, giving no thought to how this would affect his family or his personal life. His selfishness is exposed along with his infidelity, and this illustrates his priorities and his obsession with maintaining the status that he believed that he had. His selfishness was again exposed in his participation in the duel with Aaron Burr. Having stated that he was opposed to the practice of dueling, he proceeded to be involved in order to seem courageous in the public eye, giving up his life as well as essentially his family's lives. All of his selfish motivations stemmed from his early life and how he grew up. Since he grew up on a small island in poverty while the rest of his future colleagues and opponents grew up in the wealthy United States, he automatically was instilled with the idea that he needed to exceed everyone who he came in contact with in order to feel important and influential. With the idea of surpassing his opponents politically, he made a strong effort to be noticed by influential actors in the political world, which is where he became involved with George Washington. Hamilton used his writing and speaking skills to take advantage of Washington by using the notion of reputation in order to motivate Washington to do what Hamilton thought was best for the government.

Hamilton's obsession with his reputation and manliness lead him to become an incredibly selfish man who had no regard for anyone other than himself. He did not actually want to be an honorable person, but he wanted the public and his opponents to believe that he was honorable, and he used their opinions and views of him to his advantage. His actions in private were distinct from his actions in public, and whenever his private matters became public knowledge, he

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<sup>130</sup> Chernow, Ron. *Alexander Hamilton*. Penguin Group, 2004.



sacrificed his personal and private aspects of his life in order to save himself from being publicly humiliated or accused of being dishonorable politically. The way that he interacted with those with whom he had a relationship is a testament to how he did not truly care about his colleagues or even his family members if his reputation were at risk. He always chose his reputation over his true morality. Merely analyzing Hamilton's political achievements may invoke the idea that he was honorable and beneficial to the United States government, a deeper understanding of Hamilton's private actions as well as his public promotion of his image can lend to the idea that he was amoral and selfish. It is easy to admire the general image of Hamilton, but a closer look into his motivations behind his achievements proves that he was in fact not venerable.

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