

Alexander Hamilton, writer of many of the *Federalist Papers*, believed in a strong federal government. We are reminded of his legacy, as an American Founding Father, every time we look at an American \$10 bill. **

But ... what do we really know about Hamilton, the man (other than the notorious way his life ended in a duel with Aaron Burr)? Here are a few interesting facts:

- He was born on Nevis, a Caribbean island, in 1755 (or 1757);
- His parents never married;
- He worked as a clerk on the Caribbean island of St. Croix (which, at the time, was controlled by Denmark) and spoke French fluently;
- In 1772, while still a teenager, he wrote a story about the massive destruction St. Croix endured after a hurricane hit the island on August 31, 1772;
- His essay was published in the *Royal Danish-American Gazette*;
- Local leaders were so impressed by the young man's thoughtful writing that they raised enough funds to send him to school in pre-revolutionary America;
- In the fall of 1772, he became a student at Elizabethtown Academy (in New Jersey);
- About five years later, Hamilton became an aide to General George Washington;
- He was slender, good-looking, fair-skinned, quick-tempered and had beautiful eyes;
- A persuasive writer, he penned many of the *Federalist Papers*;
- Known as the "Father of American Finance," he became the new country's first Secretary of the Treasury;
- After the duel with Aaron Burr, *** Eliza Hamilton (his wife) wore the black clothes of a mourning widow for fifty years;
- Ron Chernow published a major biography on Hamilton in 2004, two hundred years after his death; and
- His image on the \$10 bill was updated, in 2005

His life story is the subject of this work by rap-artist Lin-Manuel Miranda.

In short ... an American Founding Father, who's been gone more than two centuries, has a modern fan club. And his words, about a deadlocked vote for President (in 1800), sound like they could have been spoken in 2016:

In a choice of Evils . . . take the least — Jefferson is in every view less dangerous than Burr . . . Mr. Jefferson, though too revolutionary in his notions, is yet a lover a liberty and will be desirous of something like orderly Government — Mr. Burr loves nothing but himself — thinks of nothing but his own aggrandizement . . . No compact, that he should make with any passion in his breast except Ambition, could be relied upon by himself — How then, would we be able to rely upon any agreement with him? (See History of the Republic of the United States of America, as Traced in the Writings of Alexander Hamilton and of His Contemporaries, edited by John Church Hamilton, Volume VII, at page 438.)

** On September 2, 1789, Congress created a permanent institution for the management of government

finances. President Washington appointed Alexander Hamilton as the country's first Secretary of the Treasury on September 11, 1789. Hamilton held that position until January 31, 1795.

*** Aaron Burr, the sitting U.S. Vice President when he mortally wounded Hamilton in the duel, thought he'd benefit his career by the event. He was wrong. The two men had longstanding political disagreements and shared personal animosity, but the duel (then an outlawed-in-New-York way of resolving differences with pistols) ended badly for both. Burr was charged with murder; Hamilton died the next day.

Credits:

Writer and star of the Broadway musical "In the Heights," Lin-Manuel Miranda performs "The Hamilton Mixtape" at the White House Evening of Poetry, Music, and the Spoken Word on May 12, 2009. He is accompanied by Alex Lacamoire.

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See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Alexander-Hamilton-and-His-21st-Century-Popularity>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Alexander-Hamilton-and-His-21st-Century-Popularity>

Questions 2 Ponder

Can Rap Help Us to Understand and Remember History?

Today we know that Alexander Hamilton's picture is on the \$10 bill, but until Lin-Manuel Miranda wrote and performed a rap about him, other facts about Hamilton seemed lost to history.

Art often helps us to better understand (and remember) history. Does the same concept apply to this rap by Lin-Manuel Miranda? Why, or why not?

Select one of the facts about Alexander Hamilton's youth and explain how it helped him to become one of America's Founding Fathers.

How Does Daring to Get Noticed Help Us Succeed?

Before Alexander Hamilton became a U.S. Founding Father, he was a teenager living on St. Croix. His mother was dead; his father was living on St. Kitts (another Caribbean island).

Without parents to support him, Alexander experienced a catastrophic hurricane that massively damaged many Caribbean islands on August 31, 1772. He described the awful events in a September 6, 1772 letter to his father. This is an excerpt of that letter:

Honored Sir,

I take up my pen, just to give you an imperfect account of one of the most dreadful hurricanes that memory or any records whatever can trace, which happened here on the 31st ultimo at night.

It began about dusk, at north, and raged very violently till ten o'clock. Then ensued a sudden and unexpected interval which lasted about an hour. Meanwhile the wind was shifting round to the south west point, from whence it returned with redoubled fury and continued till nearly three in the morning.

Good God! what horror and destruction - it's impossible for me to describe - or you to form any idea of it. It seemed as if a total dissolution of nature was taking place. The roaring of the sea and wind - fiery meteors flying about in the air - the prodigious glare of almost perpetual lightning - the crash of falling houses - and the ear-piercing shrieks of the distressed were sufficient to strike astonishment into Angels.

A great part of the buildings throughout the island are leveled to the ground - almost all the rest very much shattered - several persons killed and numbers utterly ruined - whole families wandering about the streets, unknowing where to find a place of shelter - the sick exposed to the keenness of water and air - without a bed to lie upon - or a dry covering to their bodies - and our harbors entirely bare. In a word, misery, in its most hideous shapes, spread over the whole face of the country ... (Quoted in: "The Virgin Islands Our New Possessions and the British Virgin Islands," by Theodoor De Booy and John T. Faris, Philadelphia, J. B. Lippincott Company, 1918, at pages 205-206.)

A copy of Hamilton's letter to his father somehow found its way into the hands of Hugh Knox who thought the public-at-large would enjoy reading it. At first, Alexander didn't want the letter published but, after some persuasion, he changed his mind.

The whole letter was published on October 3, 1772, in a newspaper called the *Royal Danish American Gazette*. It was an essay which "got noticed," thereby changing Alexander's life.

Had Hamilton not written his essay about hurricane-caused destruction on St. Croix, he likely would never have become the man he became. Does daring to get noticed by, among other things, publicly (and intelligently) expressing our opinions in writing, help us to succeed?

Hamilton was a teenager when he wrote, and published, his attention-getting story. Do you think teenagers today are willing to express their written opinions in a public, adult-respected forum? Explain your answer.

After Hamilton published his letter, local leaders living in St. Croix were impressed by the teenager's intelligence and used their financial resources to send him to a great school in pre-revolutionary America. Do you think such a thing is still possible in the 21st-century? Explain your answer.

To make it more likely that teenagers could reap such benefits, in the 21st century, what would young people have to do to get noticed?