

Introduction

Alexander Hamilton continues to hold an unassailable place in the first rank of the American founders. To most minds, Hamilton belongs with that handful of men – such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, James Madison, and Benjamin Franklin – whose contributions to establishing the American republic are most worthy of our remembrance and our study. Thanks to many fine biographies – and, more recently, a very popular Broadway musical – the general contours of Hamilton’s meteoric career are well known: orphan immigrant to the North American colonies, aide de camp to General Washington during the revolutionary war, framer of the Constitution, organizer and lead author of *The Federalist*, the nation’s first secretary of the treasury, leader of the Federalist Party, victim of Aaron Burr’s bullet in their infamous duel of 1804.

Hamilton’s contribution as a political thinker, however, is less appreciated than it should be. To be sure, there have been numerous scholarly studies – both books and articles – of his political thought. The output here, however, has not been as great as it might be, given the massive amount that Hamilton wrote about politics, and his almost invariable recurrence to fundamental principles whenever he examined a political question. Hamilton rarely addressed an issue that came to his attention without relating it to some enduring aspect of human nature, some fundamental political principle, some axiom or maxim of conduct – even as he also reminded his readers of the role of prudence in statesmanship by emphasizing that such principles and maxims often admitted of exceptions in particular circumstances.

It is with a view to fostering greater interest in and study of Hamilton’s political thought and statesmanship that we offer this two-volume collection of his political writings. Of course, we recognize with respect and gratitude earlier Hamilton collections. We believe this work, however, makes a unique contribution insofar as it is both more comprehensive than some of the earlier collections and more focused than others. On the one hand, there have been volumes that have offered either a relatively small number of Hamilton’s most famous works from across his lifetime or a handful from some specific period of his career. On the other hand, there are Joanne B. Freeman’s Library of America collection of Hamilton’s writings and Harold C. Syrett’s *Papers of Alexander Hamilton*. The former will remain useful for historians and a popular audience interested in Hamilton’s life, but for that very reason it includes a good deal of

Hamilton's personal correspondence and therefore necessarily has to exclude many writings of enduring political interest. The latter, a masterful achievement, will remain essential to Hamilton specialists, but it is so comprehensive – twenty-seven volumes – that it cannot offer the convenience of this work. And by including everything that Hamilton wrote, and much that was written to him, Syrett's *Hamilton Papers* present a large body of material that is not of direct interest to the student of politics. In contrast to these earlier works, then, we have striven to include *all* that is of enduring political interest but *only* what is of enduring political interest. By bringing these political writings together in a single two-volume work, and thus making them easier and more convenient of access, we hope to encourage more students of political theory and statesmanship to turn their attention to Hamilton's political thought.

We say we have *striven* to include all that is of enduring political interest because we admittedly have only imperfectly succeeded in doing so. Hamilton wrote so much about politics that it is impossible to include everything of interest while keeping the compilation to a reasonable and manageable size. Our primary principle of selection has been to include whatever touches on matters of principle – political, philosophic, legal, and constitutional – and its application to practice. We have therefore excluded the vast archive of Hamilton's writings in the daily conduct of administrative duties and in commenting to political allies on the horseshoe aspects of politics.

Our most notable omission, however, was not informed by this principle. It will be regarded by many as our most disappointing exclusion, but we believe it will appear, upon reflection, as most justifiable: we have not included Hamilton's contributions to *The Federalist*. These writings, on which a substantial portion of Hamilton's political fame will always rest, were left out of the present volume not because they are not of enduring political interest – obviously they are – but because they are so readily available in other convenient sources, including an edition by Cambridge University Press. By omitting them we were able to include a wealth of other less well known but very valuable material. The result is that whoever owns a copy of the present work as well as a copy of *The Federalist* will have everything he or she needs to begin the serious study of Hamilton's political thought.

The Political Writings of Alexander Hamilton is divided into two volumes, and each volume is further divided into parts that correspond to the main periods of Hamilton's political career. Volume I, the present volume, is broken into three parts that follow Hamilton's political thought through the ratification of the Constitution and the preparations for the launching of the new government it had called into being. Part 1: Young Revolutionary: 1769–1782 brings together Hamilton's writings on the struggle for American independence. Most prominent among these are his early pamphlets written in defense of the Continental Congress, such as the *Full Vindication of the Measures of the Congress*, *The Farmer Refuted*, and his two shorter works on the Quebec Act. Also included are his first letters under the name of Publius, in which he excoriated Samuel Chase for trying to profiteer on the buying and selling of supplies for the army, and his

Continentalist series, in which he first put before the public his criticisms of the government established by the Articles of Confederation. Part 1 also contains numerous other writings of Hamilton's – primarily letters – in which he commented on the challenges the nation faced in prosecuting the revolutionary war.

Part 2: *Budding Statesman: 1783–1787* presents writings connected to Hamilton's service in the Confederation Congress and the New York Assembly after he had left the Continental Army. In the former capacity, he had to grapple with the problem of Congress's failure to pay the nation's soldiers and the disobedience this fostered among the troops, including the possibility of mutiny against the Congress. During his time in Congress, he also took up themes with which he would become famously associated later in the founding period: the need to provide for the nation's war debt, the related need for the government of the Union to have an adequate ability to raise taxes, and, more generally, the need to reform the Articles of Confederation so as to establish a government equal to the needs of the Union. As a member of the New York Assembly, Hamilton labored to ensure that the state of New York would observe the provisions of the peace treaty with Great Britain, and in general would conduct itself as a good member of the Union, respectful and supportive of the general government. These writings and records present Hamilton's thinking on these questions, as well as his efforts to navigate the political and legal questions raised by the New York legislature's debate over recognizing the independence of Vermont.

Material relating to Hamilton's efforts to erect a new government in place of the Articles of Confederation is offered in Part 3: *Framer and Defender of the Constitution: 1787–1789*. Here we include Hamilton's most important proposals and interventions at the Constitutional Convention, as well as his speeches in defense of the Constitution at the New York Ratifying Convention. We have also included Hamilton's writings making the case to George Washington that the latter's service as president of the United States would be essential to the success of the new government, as well as his advice to Washington on the proper line to be taken regarding the dignity of the presidential office. Finally, we provide Hamilton's arguments that George Clinton's opposition to the new Constitution should have precluded him from being reelected as governor of New York.

We have made some light modifications to Hamilton's original texts in order to ease the task of the contemporary reader. Our most extensive intervention has been to modernize Hamilton's punctuation. He generally used far more commas and semicolons than we do today, although he also sometimes omitted them where we would find them necessary. Our aim here has always been to preserve his meaning while also making it more immediately evident to the modern reader. Put another way, we wanted to save the reader the mental effort involved in "translating" Hamilton's punctuation, so that the reader's mind could instead be occupied wholly with following the train of Hamilton's thought and appreciating the eloquence of his expression. We have also modernized Hamilton's spelling and capitalization, although we have left the latter

undisturbed when Hamilton capitalized a whole word with the intention of emphasizing it. Likewise, italics are retained for words that Hamilton himself chose to emphasize.

We have generally followed the editors of *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton* in supplying the missing letters from obviously incomplete words and in supplying missing words. In order to make the text more readable, however, we have omitted the various brackets that they used. Where Hamilton supplied a later list of errata to a published work we have simply made the corrections in our text itself without noting them. We have filled out Hamilton's abbreviations in cases in which they would have been confusing. Occasional blank spaces left in the text are Hamilton's own.

Our preference has been to include whole works, but in some cases it has been necessary to omit passages that were not of sufficient interest but were taking up valuable space. We have generally indicated in the entry title when we have excerpted a work, although we have simply dropped irrelevant postscripts from some letters.

Footnotes are always Hamilton's own. Any editorial remarks we thought necessary to add have been placed in numbered endnotes.

We are grateful to Columbia University Press for allowing us to use *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton* as the source for most of the documents included in our volumes. Readers interested in the contexts of and references in Hamilton's writings would do well to consult the editorial notes in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*.