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
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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 horserace aspects of politics.

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 II, the present volume, is broken into four parts that follow Hamilton’s political thought from his service as the nation’s first secretary of the treasury up through his political retirement and to the time of his death. Part 1: Financial Founding Father: 1789–1792 presents the most important works that Hamilton produced in order to construct and defend his financial program for the infant republic. Here the reader will encounter Hamilton’s great state papers—his Report on the Public Credit, Report on a National Bank, Report on Manufactures, as well as his Opinion on the Constitutionality of a National Bank. We have also included his written defenses of his program in response to the criticisms of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, notably Hamilton’s 1792 letter to Edward Carrington and his “Objections and Answers Respecting the Administration,” prepared for George Washington.

The later part of Hamilton’s tenure as secretary of the treasury was consumed with problems of foreign policy. Materials relevant to this period of his public life are contained in Part 2: The Challenges of Foreign Policy: 1793–1795. Here we have included letters and other documents Hamilton wrote regarding the leading diplomatic difficulty the country faced: the proper American response to the wars arising out of the French Revolution. The second section of the volume also presents a considerable portion of the newspaper articles Hamilton produced defending the administration’s foreign policy and criticizing the French Revolution, including the entirety of his famous Pacificus series.
In 1795 Hamilton left the Washington administration and returned to his private law practice. He remained, however, deeply involved in national politics, acting as the de facto leader of the emerging Federalist Party, in opposition to the Republican Party led by Thomas Jefferson. During this time Hamilton wrote copious amounts of newspaper commentary and advised President Washington almost continually. After Washington was succeeded by John Adams, Hamilton continued to advise and influence Adams's cabinet. Part 3: Federalist Party Leader: 1795–1800 traces this stage of Hamilton's public career. In the realm of foreign policy, Hamilton wrote the majority of essays entitled The Defense, a series of articles in support of the Jay Treaty, some of which are presented here. He also continued and sharpened his public critique of the French Revolution, and returned to the army in the context of the quasi-war with France. In domestic politics, Hamilton acted a seemingly strange and memorable part. He wrote a letter arguing that his fellow Federalist, John Adams, was unfit to continue as president of the United States. Then, when the Electoral College failed to produce a winner and the election was thrown into the House of Representatives, Hamilton argued strenuously that Federalists should support the election of Hamilton's bitter rival, Thomas Jefferson. Although he disagreed with Jefferson politically, Hamilton thought he was a far better and safer choice than the alternative, Aaron Burr, who Hamilton viewed as an unprincipled adventurer. Writings pertaining to these and other matters of interest are offered in Part 3.

Part 4: Elder Statesman: 1801–1804 presents writings from the final years of Hamilton's life, when he was politically marginalized in the wake of the Republican triumph of 1800 but still following national politics closely and commenting on it frequently. Here, perhaps not surprisingly, Hamilton re-emerged as a sharp critic of Thomas Jefferson, the man he had helped elect to the presidency. Hamilton penned another newspaper series, The Examination, in which he criticized Jefferson's policies as president, laying particular emphasis on the constitutional questions raised by the repeal of the Judiciary Act. Later he also wrote in criticism of Jefferson's handling of the Louisiana Purchase. These and other materials are presented in this final part of the collection, the last few entries of which concern Hamilton's final public act: his fatal duel with vice president Aaron Burr.

We have also included an appendix to the work, “Hamilton's Death and Legacy.” This section includes some firsthand accounts of Hamilton's last hours, as well as some appreciations of his life, character, and career offered by other American statesmen who knew him well.

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*. 