

## THE TIMELINESS OF *HAMILTON: AN AMERICAN MUSICAL*

“This is a story about America then, told by America now,” Tommy Kail said of Lin-Manuel Miranda’s not-yet famous musical in its pre-publication stages; in 2019, Kail and Miranda have not given up this claim (Miranda & McCarter 33). Miranda, the writer and original star of the 2015 Broadway musical hit, *Hamilton: An American Musical*, entertained a vision that would be both historically true to the life of an American Founding Father, and an honest representation of the modern America that Alexander Hamilton helped form (32). After reading Ron Chernow’s biography *Alexander Hamilton* in 2008, Miranda knew he wanted to develop a concept album centered around the titular historical figure—and the genre would be rap and hip-hop (10). Miranda did not know until 2012 that his *Hamilton Mixtape* project would ultimately be formed into a Broadway show (46), the first rap and hip-hop display to ever make it big on the famous New York City stage (Viagas).

When *Hamilton* premiered at The Public Theater in 2015, everyone knew this production was something special. Not only was this musical a tremendous display of talent, it seemed to speak emotional volumes to the viewers; performers and audience alike were in tears (Miranda & McCarter 113). Later, when matinee shows for school children became available, inner city kids who had never seen a musical and never cared about the founding of America suddenly could not stop talking about this new show centered around a mostly-forgotten Founding Father (157).

*Hamilton: An American Musical* became an unprecedented pop culture sensation, with the Original Broadway Cast Recording (OCR) album ranked as #2 on the “*Billboard* 25 Best Albums of 2015” (Viagas). Presidents visited the theater. Cast members performed at the White House (Miranda & McCarter 15). The U.S. Treasury Department even renounced their decision to remove Alexander Hamilton from the \$10 bill (Paulson).

When a revolutionary (pun intended) production like *Hamilton* sweeps the nation, the question immediately raised is: Why? Why this musical and not the plethora of others on Broadway? Why this unprecedented success of rap and hip-hop on the Broadway stage? What makes *Hamilton* so special? I suggest that the reason *Hamilton: An American Musical* has been received with overwhelming positivity by everyone from Barack Obama to Dick Cheney to “Weird Al” Yankovic (Hayes & Gale 42-43) is its perfectly placed rhetorical situation. It is difficult to say whether, in another time and place, this Broadway smash hit, with its “mostly black cast [that] ‘turns the tables on the practice of using white actors to portray ethnic characters,’” would have succeeded—or if it could have been created at all (Yankovic qtd. in Hayes & Gale 42). After all, the makers of art are the products of their time; could someone like Lin-Manuel Miranda, the son of an immigrant, even have conceived something like *Hamilton* fifty years ago? The exigence of *Hamilton* created the kairos of the production. Put simply, America was ready for *Hamilton*.

Michael Harker, in his article “The Ethics of Argument: Rereading *Kairos* and Making Sense in a Timely Fashion,” suggests that a functional definition of kairos has been largely omitted “as a key term in composition studies” (79). Drawing on many scholars and rhetoricians, Harker proposes that kairos should not be understood merely as “saying the right thing at the right time”; rather, this Greek word implies the *perfect* time, the *right* time, the *fullness* of time, “a significant season...poised between beginning and end” (Kermode qtd. in Harker 81). In the critically acclaimed song, “My Shot,” Hip-Hop Hamilton raps about the American Revolution, saying, “This is not a moment, it’s the movement, where all the hungriest brothers with something to prove went” (Miranda, *Hamilton OCR*). Like the Revolution of the historical

Alexander Hamilton, Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton* came to realization in the fullness of time, when the moment was right to begin a cultural movement.

In this paper, I will examine the rhetorical elements of *Hamilton*, particularly its exigence and kairos, exploring the needs that drove this production, the manner in which the show answers those needs, and the impact of saying the right thing at the right time. *Hamilton* is an extremely self-aware and highly philosophical production, addressing the issues of "post-racial" America through intentional cross-cultural casting, a wide variety of musical styles, and an emphasis on the role of immigrants in the American founding. Being "a story about America then, told by America now," *Hamilton* creates a radical juxtaposition between the colonial America of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and the diverse colors, cultures, and music of America today (Miranda & McCarter 33). Since premiering in 2015, between the last term of America's first black president and an upcoming push against immigration by the Trump administration, *Hamilton* continues to exist in a space that correlates with the tension of the American people.

### **Wait for It**

Lloyd F. Bitzer defines *exigence* as "an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be" (qtd. in Miller 111). While exigence is "something waiting to be done," Arthur B. Miller argues that the rhetorical situation must be rightly timed (kairos) in order for that thing to be effectively received by the listeners. In other words, the need must speak to the constraints of the hearers for it to function as exigence (Miller 117). If the need is not perceived as relevant to the audience, Miller claims, then the constraints of the speaker and hearer do not agree, and the phenomenon of exigence does not occur (117).

While exigence is “something waiting to be done,” this does not mean that the material or concepts which prompts an exigent work must be new or unique in nature. The thing that is waiting to be done may sleep until the constraints of the audience are prepared to receive that idea or concept. The story of Alexander Hamilton was certainly not new when *Hamilton* hit the Broadway stage in 2015; in fact, it was largely forgotten by the American public. Neither was Ron Chernow’s biography, *Alexander Hamilton*, particularly new when it fell into Lin-Manuel Miranda’s hands in 2008. Rap and hip-hop were not new, having been a popular music form for decades. What, then, about this combination of nothing-new elements (and a historically unreceptive audience) creates rhetorical exigence for *Hamilton*?

Despite its popularity, hip-hop had had little success in musical theater up to the time of *Hamilton*’s release. According to John Bush Jones in *Our Musicals, Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical Theater*, this may be owed in part to the fact that Broadway ticket prices have soared in recent decades; musical theater is produced with an audience in mind, and for the last several decades, that audience has been older, wealthier, and whiter (3). Jones writes:

Therefore, with certain ethnic and “radical” exceptions (such as *Hair*), socially relevant shows have mirrored the concerns and lifestyles of middle Americans, their primary audience. The reality of commercial theater dictates that, no matter how brilliant or artistic, if a show doesn’t interest or entertain its audiences, it won’t run long enough to make back its investment. (3)

Drama critic Jeremy McCarter, who would eventually partner with Lin-Manuel Miranda in the early days of the *Hamilton Mixtape* project (Miranda & McCarter 10), advocated for years

before *Hamilton* that “hip-hop can save the theater.” While acknowledging that the older, wealthier, whiter Broadway audience did not exactly match the typical hip-hop audience, McCarter recognized that this was the music of American youth, and it had the power to make theater accessible and relevant again (“Straight Outta Broadway”). For decades, the appearance of rap and hip-hop on Broadway was relegated almost exclusively to musicals *about* rap and hip-hop. Before *Hamilton*, Lin-Manuel Miranda mixed hip-hop, salsa, and ballads in his first musical, *In the Heights*, in a way that astounded McCarter; Miranda had, without precedent, written a hip-hop musical “[telling] a story that had nothing to do with hip-hop—using it as form, not content.” McCarter proposes that *Hamilton* is a long-awaited answer to current American culture, utilizing history and hip-hop to offer both a reflection and a preview of American diversity. McCarter calls the show a “revolution...a musical that changes the way that Broadway sounds, that alters who gets to tell the story of our founding, that lets us glimpse the new, more diverse America rushing our way” (Miranda & McCarter 10). *Hamilton* came at the right time, when the nation was ready to receive a musical that reflected its changing culture.

### **It Must Be Nice to Have Washington on Your Side**

“Sometimes the right person tells the right story at the right time, and through a combination of luck and design, a creative expression gains new force,” Miranda and McCarter write of the first time Miranda performed at the White House Poetry Jam in 2009. Although Miranda was invited to perform because of the success and cultural implications of *In the Heights*, he chose the occasion to perform, for the first time in public, a song from the *Hamilton Mixtape* project. The video of his performance now has over one million views on YouTube and features a standing ovation from President Barack Obama (15).

Standing before America's half-Kenyan, first black president, the then-29-year-old Nuyorican rapped, "How does a bastard, orphan, son of a whore and a Scotsman, dropped in the middle of a forgotten spot in the Caribbean by providence, impoverished, in squalor, grow up to be a hero and a scholar?" (The Obama White House). Variations on this refrain are reiterated many times throughout the published version of *Hamilton*, describing the adverse conditions of Alexander Hamilton's early life, and his defiance of circumstance to become the first U.S. Secretary of the Treasury. At a turning point in America's history, the election of the nation's first black president, a cultural shift in the minds of American citizens began to be realized, making room for the immigrants of our nation's narrative. Terming Hamilton as "another immigrant comin' up from the bottom," Miranda speaks of this American Founding Father in terms that are relatable to people like Miranda's own father, President Obama's father, and a plethora of other American citizens (Miranda, "Alexander Hamilton," *Hamilton OCR*). In Miranda's eyes, Alexander Hamilton, the bastard, orphan immigrant, "embodies hip-hop," the music of an American generation (The Obama White House).

Another three years would pass before the idea of the *Hamilton Mixtape* went from concept album to musical theater production. As individual numbers turned into ensemble performances, one thing that became clear was the need for diverse voices to appropriately express the rap and hip-hop genres Miranda employed. Ron Chernow, who acted as a historical adviser to Miranda for *Hamilton*, was taken aback the first time he saw a preview performance of Act I, when he realized that the men playing America's Founding Fathers were all black and Latino. Like Miranda and Kail, Chernow quickly became a "'militant' defender of the idea that actors of any race could play the Founding Fathers" (Miranda & McCarter 33). As America's

first black president sat in the White House, the black first president took the stage in New York (284).

### **A Plot Blacker Than the Kettle Callin' the Pot**

Alexander Hamilton and all of the American Founding Fathers were, of course, white males. However, this is not what the audience sees and hears when they witness a performance of *Hamilton*. Asserting that “history is entirely created by the person who tells the story,” a prominent theme in *Hamilton*, Miranda believes that part of the beauty of the show is that it changes who has the right to tell the American story (Miranda & McCarter 33). The historical Hamilton was an immigrant, and, “although the Founding Fathers were white, the fact that they were colonial subjects marked them as inferior; they were marginalized and did not enjoy the same rights British citizens had” (“Young, Scrappy, and Hungry,” Rabinowitz & Arp, eds. 175). For Miranda, the Founding Fathers represent the marginalized peoples of America’s history. In modern America, those marginalized peoples are best represented by people of color, women, and other minority groups. As part of this vision to tell the story of the “young, scrappy, and hungry,” *Hamilton* utilizes intentional cross-cultural casting, with little or no regard to race and gender.

Miranda’s choice to intentionally cast non-white actors as the Founding Fathers also gained some legal pushback in 2016, when a casting call for “non-white” actors for the show’s national tour was called discriminatory by a New York lawyer (Kornhaber). Among discussions of “reverse racism” and “black privilege” (Kornhaber), the producers of *Hamilton* adamantly defended the casting call as legal, and true to the intentions of the author (Deerwester). Miranda fully intended for the main characters to be played by people of color as part of the message of the play, and to open avenues for minority performers. The realm of musical theater is white-

dominated, and creators like Miranda have particular goals in mind to produce opportunities for non-white actors. Without intentionality regarding casting, a show like *Hamilton* can easily end up with a mostly white cast in later iterations. This had already happened in Miranda's previous musical, *In the Heights*, for which one Chicago theater cast a white actor of Italian descent to portray the show's main character, Usnavi, who is Dominican (Greene). Determined to end this cycle, the decision for non-white casting in *Hamilton* has been upheld by its creators, and the only main character portrayed by a white performer is King George III (Deerwester).

Though not without controversy, Miranda's diverse casting choice for *Hamilton* is an overwhelmingly celebrated decision. Historian Ron Chernow extolled Chris Jackson's performance as George Washington, and Miranda said of the tall, athletic, black first president, "Chris is so sure of his instrument and has this kind of moral authority onstage...He's just f---ing majestic" (Miranda & McCarter 59). The strategy for costumes in *Hamilton* is "period from the neck down, modern from the neck up" (113). This leaves Chris Jackson making his grand entrance as George Washington looking very different from the man on the dollar bill, and yet commanding every bit of the Revolutionary General's authority. This unprecedented move during the Obama administration, a time when America was receptive to the idea of a black president, still leaves performers and audience alike prepared to declare at Jackson's appearance, "Here comes the general" (Miranda, "Right Hand Man," *Hamilton OCR*).

### **Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story**

It has not gone unnoticed by academics, however, that *Hamilton* has the potential to continue contributing to the "Founders chic" phenomenon—the tradition of painting the American Founding Fathers with a more appealing brush than reality might warrant (Owen 512). Despite the show's efforts to paint a diverse America, Jackson's majestic portrayal of



Washington makes no mention of his status as a slave owner. Indeed, the only mentions of slavery in the production are a passing comment about Sally Hemmings, and generous portrayals of Alexander Hamilton and John Laurens as abolitionists (a portrayal which stretches the truth). While the musical is clearly designed to appeal to a modern, diverse American audience with urban connections in ways that have not been attempted previously, some historians question the message the show really sends (515).

In general, the appeal to Founders chic or otherwise revised history has been criticized as a way of editing the unpleasant parts of America's past, particularly in relation to minority groups (Arnett 8). Kyle Mays, a fellow at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, reflects on the nature of mainstream history, claiming that his own black and Native American background was not well represented in the history books of his childhood. However, revised history texts do little to improve this negligence, and might prove to do more harm than good. Rather than addressing the real accomplishments of minority groups in a white dominated history, critics claim this type of retelling downplays the role of racism, sexism, and white supremacy. Textbooks tell the stories of white men like George Washington and Thomas Jefferson without explaining that their society systematically suppressed people of color and other minorities. Mays laments, "Revisionist history underscores a culture of White supremacy that exists in this country" (qtd. in Arnett 8). In consequence, rather than knowing why their non-dominant ancestors are not represented in history books (as a result of racism, etc.), non-dominant students are left thinking "that they just weren't smart or talented enough to make significant contributions" (May qtd. in Arnett 8).

Along the same lines of Miranda's assertion that "history is entirely created by the person who tells the story" (Miranda & McCarter 33), sociohistorian James W. Loewen records a brief

history of race in American textbooks in his essay, “Who Controls the Past Controls the Future” (a nod to George Orwell’s dystopian novel, *1984*). Loewen notes that our understanding of history is affected not only by our textbooks and school lessons, but by media, film, television, and even public policy (8). If this observation is true, then it follows that a major production like *Hamilton* could potentially be a misleading influence on our perception of history. “The story of America then told by America now” certainly places an emphasis on the “America now,” with strides toward representation that tell a different story than that of the actually-very-white Founding Fathers. Some are left asking if Alexander Hamilton, the white “Creole bastard” (Miranda, “Adams Administration,” *Hamilton OCR*) is enough of a connection to create a story that drives concepts of diversity and immigrant influence in early America.

The stories that make up history are always “told” by someone, but *Hamilton* begs the questions, “Who has the right to tell our story? Does the story change with the teller?” Existential philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre explores the idea of understanding history as story in his novel, *Nausea*, creating a character who cannot reconcile that history exists primarily through the lens of the storyteller (“Redemptive Rapping,” Rabinowitz & Arp, eds. 131). Separating history from art, Sartre’s historian protagonist lives with the dilemma that he cannot accurately record history, and instead pursues music, believing that music has a type of perfection history can never obtain (130). However, while there is foundation for the dilemma described by Sartre, it is possible that merging art and history can serve a purpose of its own when creators and audiences are, like Lin-Manuel Miranda, willing to “[accept] history as story” (130). If history, for artistic purposes, is viewed as story, the lens through which that story is viewed serves the purposes of the storyteller and the rhetorical situation.

Although semi-critical, historian Kenneth Owen does acknowledge that despite the appeal to Founders chic, *Hamilton* takes a different approach to the issue (511). While historical giants like Washington and Jefferson are traditionally presented as untouchable figures with impeccable character, Miranda chooses to humanize the Founding Fathers. Hamilton's rivalry with Thomas Jefferson is the subject of two rap battles in the second act, in which Hamilton calls out Jefferson for endorsing slavery (Miranda, "Cabinet Battle #1," *Hamilton OCR*); John Adams is portrayed as a pitiful character who is laughed at by Hamilton ("The Adams Administration") and King George III ("I Know Him"). Alexander Hamilton is depicted as "young, scrappy, and hungry" ("My Shot") while the other, older Founding Fathers are depicted as men with real emotions, agendas, and flaws. Only Washington's integrity is largely protected, but even he is depicted as a vulnerable and struggling leader, rather than an indestructible automaton ("Stay Alive").

While *Hamilton* is remarkable for its historical content, there is no denying that great liberties are taken in this portrayal of the Founding Fathers. Broadway is, after all, entertainment. The success of *Hamilton* and positive reception by a modern American audience is found in the combination of form and content. Even though Miranda released the critically acclaimed musical *In the Heights* in 2008, a story which also follows a young, determined immigrant and combines traditional Broadway musical style with salsa and hip-hop, that musical never had the popularity achieved by *Hamilton: An American Musical*. *Hamilton*'s bold retelling of the American Revolution, combined with the hip-hop form, was the note that struck the American audience. As suggested by "Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story," the final song in the show, Miranda's approach to Alexander Hamilton is largely tied to the question of who is allowed to tell the story of the American Founding (Owen 514). This approach does endorse personality

over character and actions, however, leaving some questioning the message of Hamilton's legacy, and wondering whether art and history can be effectively combined.

### **This is Not a Moment, It's the Movement**

“The production itself was just so alive,” says Anthony DeCurtis of *Rolling Stone* magazine. “You go there, and you walk out and you're flying” (qtd. in *Hamilton: One Shot to Broadway*). *Hamilton* was an “overnight sensation” on Broadway, and instantly became a landmark production. Not only did the show introduce hip-hop and rap on Broadway in ways never seen before, it also opened incredible new avenues for performers of color (*Hamilton: One Shot to Broadway*). In a workshop at The Miracle Center of Chicago, Miranda said of his first musical, “I started writing *In the Heights* because I wanted to make a way for myself.” As a Puerto Rican American, Miranda admits that there are very few leading roles available in the Broadway canon for men like himself—men of color who are not ballet dancers and who have rock voices, rather than operatic voices (*Hamilton: One Shot to Broadway*). This goal of creating spaces for minority performers and increasing minority representation is not unique to Miranda or *Hamilton*, however; rather it is a piece of a larger movement in western popular culture.

In the 2010s, the exigence of representation is coming to a head, while there has been a significant influx of minority roles and casting choices in popular media. From the Marvel Universe developing ethnic and minority versions of popular heroes (Miles Morales as a black/Latino Spider-Man, Kamala Khan as a Pakistani-American Muslim Ms. Marvel, and even a female iteration of *Thor: Goddess of Thunder*) to John Krasinski's choice to cast Millicent Simmons, a deaf actress, in the role of a deaf character (*A Quiet Place*), conscious cultural effort is being made for representation and the creation of space for minority performers. Shipla Davé, in her 2017 article “Racial Accents, Hollywood Casting, and Asian American Studies,”

comments on the struggles of “nonwhite actors [deciding] to take the [racially characterized acting] job in the hope it will lead to a successful series with good money and exposure or wait for (or create) another role that allows for some variety and flexibility” (143). Miranda is one of many such non-white actors who chose to create new roles for people of color, rather than letting racial characterization determine their careers.

Despite its apparent suddenness, the sweeping phenomenon of hip-hop, rap, *In the Heights*, and ultimately, *Hamilton*, did not spring up out of nowhere. By the time *In the Heights* premiered on Broadway in 2008, musical theater “was ready for a shakeup.” The majority of Broadway shows at that time were “jukebox” musicals, which used the pre-existing music of well-known artists (think *Mamma Mía!*), and the creative aspect of the industry was failing (*Hamilton: One Shot to Broadway*). Musical theater was ready for something new, and performers like Lin-Manuel Miranda were ready for new opportunities in theater. This exigence, this “imperfection marked by urgency...something waiting to be done” (qtd. in Miller 111) was answered first by Miranda with *In the Heights*, and was later culminated in *Hamilton: An American Musical*. Walking on paths created by musicians, writers, and performers before him, Miranda, like Alexander Hamilton, “picked up a pen, [and] wrote [his] own deliverance” (Miranda, “Hurricane,” *Hamilton OCR*).

### **Immigrants—We Get the Job Done!**

The meaning of “kairos” as a rhetorical device has been debated, simplified, and reimagined over the years, with an attempt by some scholars to return to the earlier roots of this Greek word. In Greek mythology, Kairos is depicted as a god personifying opportunity, poised for action at the right moment. Pythagoras conceived of kairos as “a means of coordinating the situation with response in such a way that the consequence is not simply one of propriety, but

also justice” (Crosby 263). This idea of *kairos* correlates with Lloyd F. Bitzer’s concept of *exigence* as “an imperfection marked by urgency,” in which *kairos* results in justice for the imperfections of *exigence* (qtd. in Miller 111). Richard Benjamin Crosby proposes in his article “*Kairos as God’s Time in Martin Luther King Jr.’s Last Sunday Sermon*” that *kairos*, rather than being used merely as a tool of rhetoric, is an independent philosophical concept upon which rhetoric stands. For *Hamilton*, this understanding of *kairos* suggests that Lin-Manuel Miranda’s production achieved such success, not only because of intentional choices to say the right thing at the right time, but also because it steps into a space where *kairos* was already present, entering an ideal rhetorical situation.

While some of the narrative and lyrical elements of *Hamilton* were of course intentional, others were happy accidents. The emphasis on Alexander Hamilton as immigrant was done purposefully, but one of the most iconic lines from *Hamilton*, “Immigrants—We get the job done!” (“Yorktown”), was a surprise hit for Lin-Manuel Miranda. In his notes on the libretto, Miranda remarks that he simply thought the line was funny. The audience reaction was completely unexpected. “I never anticipated that the audience response would drown out the next few lines every night,” Miranda writes, explaining that bars had to be added to the song in order to accommodate the inevitable applause (Miranda & McCarter 121). Miranda goes on: “Why does it get such a delighted response? Because it’s true” (121). Without meaning to, the show struck a chord with the audience because it spoke to their existing rhetorical situation. The 2015 American audience was already prepared for the themes and content of *Hamilton*, giving the show influence and success that could not have been achieved decades before.

Caroline Miller, discussing the *kairos* of the rhetorical situation, asserts that “an opening can be created as well as discovered” (qtd. in Crosby 265), indicating that a rhetor might venture

into territory where kairos exists already. In addition to Miranda's unprecedented casting decisions, the kairos of *Hamilton* steps into modern political conversation by focusing on Hamilton's status as an immigrant. Portraying Hamilton as a self-made immigrant from the Caribbean (a description fairly consistent with his early history but neglecting Hamilton's later political stances) makes his character "contingent upon his being a bastard immigrant in a world disposed to high-born inheritance" (Magness 498). While the historical Hamilton did have a "comparatively low status" next to the other Founding Fathers (487), this portrayal is more closely connected to Miranda's rhetorical choices and the conversation surrounding modern immigration. *Hamilton* launched in 2015, when a black president sat in the White House, and before the push against immigration that began with the Trump presidential campaign of 2016.

"In New York you can be a new man," the *Hamilton* chorus sings as young Alexander arrives on the American shore (Miranda, "Alexander Hamilton," *Hamilton OCR*), "a stranger in a strange country...[with] no property here, no connexions" (Hamilton qtd. in Miranda & McCarter 13). By 2016, American demographics were changing, with a surge of multiethnic influence and immigration, and *Hamilton* emerged as "the greatest artistic expression that young, multi-racial, urban America [had] yet produced" (Kasinitz 69). The appeal of 2016 presidential candidate Donald Trump was largely related to the discomfort of an older, whiter generation of Americans who struggled with the changing face (and skin) of the America that *Hamilton* represents. On the same day that *Hamilton: An American Musical* was officially nominated for sixteen Tony Awards, Donald Trump won the Indiana Republican Primary, the last major rung on his climb to presidency (69).

### **No More Mr. Nice President**

The kairos of a production like *Hamilton* is not limited to its influence on musical theater, or even American history; if we are to understand kairos as a philosophical construct as imagined by Richard Benjamin Crosby, then kairos can create responses that generate justice, as well as mere timeliness. Crosby writes, “[Kairos] is also a tool for social change—a way to alter the trajectory of time itself” (265). *Hamilton* did in fact become such a tool and altered the trajectory of theater and popular culture; the show generated avenues for minority performers and gave voice to the immigrants of America’s past. Miranda’s masterpiece was praised by celebrities, critics, laymen, and presidents from both sides of the aisle. However, the positive endorsement of *Hamilton* from the White House of 2015 would not last in the new administration.

In 2016, Vice President-elect Mike Pence attended a showing of *Hamilton*. There was something unusual in store for this performance however; the timeliness of *Hamilton* in the wake of the 2016 presidential election resonated with audiences that night, with “many lines [landing] quite differently” due to Pence’s presence in the auditorium. Show stopping lines like “Immigrants—we get the job done!” and various quips about Vice President John Adams throughout the show held a different energy (Lee & Konerman). Finally, as the vice president-elect departed the auditorium, the *Hamilton* cast read him a message:

We are the diverse America who are alarmed and anxious that your new administration will not protect us, our planet, our children, our parents, or defend us and uphold our inalienable rights, sir. But we truly hope this show has inspired you to uphold our American values. We truly thank you for sharing this show, this wonderful American story told by a diverse group of men and women of different colors, creeds, and orientations. (qtd. in Lee & Konerman)



Vice President-elect Pence, who was booed by audience members when he entered the theater (an action discouraged by the *Hamilton* cast), stated later that week that he understood the cast's message and was not offended by it, even conceding that the boos from the audience were "what freedom sounds like" (Bradner).

However, this attitude was not perpetuated by President-elect Trump, who took to social media the day after the performance. Trump's "anti-*Hamilton* tweets" demanded an apology from the cast and triggered #BoycottHamilton. *Hamilton*, however, remained sold out, and fans of the show responded to the twitter barrage with #NameAPenceMusical (Bradner). *Hamilton: An American Musical* and its supporters grasped the kairos that had been "discovered" by Lin-Manuel Miranda and continued to intentionally "create" kairos of their own (Miller qtd. in Crosby 265).

When *Hamilton* was written, and even at the time of its early performances, Lin-Manuel Miranda was not yet aware of the outcome of the 2016 election or the pending pushback on immigration in America. This demonstrates a combination of intentional rhetorical choices on Miranda's part as well as the type of kairos explained by Caroline Miller, in which an opening for kairos is "discovered" rather than created (qtd. in Crosby 265). Kelly A. Myers suggests that *kairos* does not usually appear alone, but is often accompanied by *metanoia*—another Greek artifact representing the sorrow of those who miss opportunity (2). *Hamilton: An American Musical* has both discovered kairos and taken advantage of metanoia by seizing the opportunity available (exigence). Through such an endeavor, made at the opportune time, makers of art "[remind] the audience of their responsibilities as American citizens...to fight against the ills of

society...[creating] a reinvigorated interest in history and social change” (“Redemptive Rapping,” Rabinowitz & Arp, eds. 130).

### **I Am Not Throwing Away My Shot!**

In the face of the American Revolution, Hip-Hop Hamilton looks to his friends and peers, Hercules Mulligan, Marquis de Lafayette, John Laurens, and the infamous Aaron Burr, and poses the question:

What are the odds the gods would put us all in one spot, / poppin’ a squat on  
conventional wisdom, like it or not, / a bunch of revolutionary manumission  
abolitionists? / Give me a position, show me where the ammunition is! (Miranda,  
“My Shot,” *Hamilton OCR*)

Even within the world of the play (and reflecting some of the real attitudes of the historical Hamilton) Alexander takes action, acknowledging that the elements at hand (exigence) have been brought together purposely for the right time (kairos). The gods, he suggests, have “put us all in one spot.”

Kairos, the Greek god of opportunity, is often depicted as “[balancing] on a ball or wheel to illustrate his unpredictability and [carrying] a razor to warn of the sharp nature of his entrances and exits” (Myers 1). This balancing act of *kairos*, or opportunity, and the *metanoia*, the sorrow of missed opportunity (2), requires a perfect timeliness, the act of launching the words, the idea, or in this case, the play, at the opportune moment. Hip-Hop Hamilton raps of his refusal to “throw away [his] shot” (Miranda, “My Shot,” *Hamilton OCR*). Even declaring, “I wish there was a war! Then we could prove that we’re worth more than anyone bargained for,” the young

upstart Hamilton is poised for the chance to prove his worth and create his legacy (“Aaron Burr, Sir”). While Alexander Hamilton (both Hip-Hop and Historical) chose to seize the moment of the American Revolution, Lin-Manuel Miranda and supporters of *Hamilton: An American Musical* are using this unique shot to promote representation and American unity.

In her BYU thesis on rhetoric and theater, Anna Sanford Low argues “that the best way to understand the impact and influence of a play is not by examining the artifact directly but the public and its discourse in response to the experience of encountering the play” (Abstract). Not only does *Hamilton* enter a rhetorical situation which allows the production to encourage social change, the kairos of the play also directly impacts audience reception of the content. Despite the White House backlash in 2016 and #BoycottHamilton, *Hamilton: An American Musical* has had an oddly unifying effect on the American public in a time of extreme political polarity (Low 15).

The long-awaited window for representation and unity *Hamilton* provides is celebrated by liberals and conservatives alike (Low, Abstract). Lynne Cheney, wife of former republican Vice President Dick Cheney, claims that she and her husband both loved the show, describing *Hamilton* as “a play about human beings who achieved greatly” (qtd. in Hayes & Gale 43). Former President Barack Obama even jokes that *Hamilton* “is the only thing that Dick Cheney and I agree on” (Obama). With Alexander Hamilton, “the bastard, orphan, son of a whore and a Scotsman” (Miranda, “Alexander Hamilton,” *Hamilton OCR*), fighting to better his country as an immigrant alongside Marquis de Lafayette, “America’s favorite fighting Frenchman” (“Guns and Ships”), *Hamilton* reframes America’s roots, emphasizing the role of immigrants and imagining that anyone can succeed with the right determination (Obama). But what about this musical is allowing these polarized groups to see more eye to eye?

Alexander Hamilton and his musical counterpart often considered the impact of legacy, using time wisely, speaking at the right time, and protecting personal history for posterity. The historical Hamilton got the war he so desired and the opportunity to make a name for himself. However, he died before his time, allowing his “enemies [to destroy] his rep [and] America [to forget] him” (Miranda, “Alexander Hamilton,” *Hamilton OCR*). His contemporaries did not know that, at the right time, America would remember Hamilton in a new way. While the historical Hamilton often shied away from his lower-class immigrant status, Lin-Manuel Miranda uses this in another time and place as a source of pride and unity. By combining a variety of musical styles and appealing to many tastes, *Hamilton* allows “members of a diverse audience [to] feel connected to the story...[opening them] to new and disparate ideas being promoted” (Low 16). Developing “a new rhetorical understanding” of the American founding and the role of diversity in America is thus connecting groups of people who would not otherwise have encountered one another (Low 16). Those disparate groups who encounter *Hamilton: An American Musical* together can sing along with the Schuyler Sisters: “Look around, look around at how lucky we are to be alive right now!” (Miranda, “The Schuyler Sisters,” *Hamilton OCR*).

### **What Is a Legacy?**

“What is a legacy?” Hip-Hop Hamilton asks in the potent number, “The World Was Wide Enough” (Miranda, *Hamilton OCR*). This theme, reiterated from Hamilton’s youth until the moment of his fatal duel, expresses much of the underlying purpose of *Hamilton*. The question of merit and legacy, at a time when America was open to a new understanding of leadership and opportunity, gives this musical the emotional impact that resonates so deeply with

audiences. In the final moments before his on-stage death, Hamilton sings acapella a frantic, impassioned soliloquy:

Legacy. What is a legacy? / It's planting seeds in a garden you never get to see. / I wrote some notes at the beginning of a song someone will sing for me. / America, you great unfinished symphony, / you sent for me. / You let me make a difference. / A place where even orphan immigrants can leave their fingerprints and rise up. ("The World Was Wide Enough")

The historical Hamilton wrote in *The Federalist No. 36*, "There are strong minds in every walk of life that will rise superior to the disadvantages of situation and will command the tribute due to their merit..." (qtd. in "Megalomaniacs or Megalopsychos?", Rabinowitz & Arp, eds. 44). *Hamilton: An American Musical* has come to the Broadway stage at a time when society is striving to achieve that very aim, opening opportunities for the determined but historically disadvantaged of our time.

Little could the historical Alexander Hamilton have known that his legacy would be written by a "young, scrappy, and hungry" Nuyorican centuries after his fatal duel with Vice President Aaron Burr. A man with a history not unlike Hamilton's own tells of that legacy, sung and rapped on a New York City stage in a Broadway sensation that wrecked the musical world. Hamilton's legacy, and the success of *Hamilton: An American Musical*, is owed not only to the quality of the content, but to its exquisite rhetorical situation. The rhetorical choices of *Hamilton's* creative team, framing Hip-Hop Hamilton as a scrappy young immigrant rapping his way through the Revolution, combined with the exigence of the musical world and the kairos of

American politics ensured success with the American audience. If *kairos* can be described as the precise moment of opportunity, then with *Hamilton*, Lin-Manuel Miranda has not thrown away his shot.

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