

Center *for the Study of the* American Constitution

NO. 5: ALEXANDER HAMILTON (1757-1804)

Born out of wedlock on Nevis, one of the Leeward Islands in the British West Indies, Alexander Hamilton came to the mainland colonies of British America in 1772. He entered King's College (Columbia) in 1773 and, while there, became involved in the imperial struggle with Great Britain, writing pamphlets and newspaper essays favoring independence in 1774 and 1775.

Commissioned by New York to command an artillery company in 1776, Hamilton served under General Washington at the Battle of Trenton. From 1777 to 1781 he served as an aide-de-camp to Washington with the rank of lieutenant colonel. In 1780 he married Elizabeth Schuyler, daughter of the wealthy Albany manor lord, Philip Schuyler. Hamilton, eager for combat, obtained a field command and led the attack on a redoubt at Yorktown in 1781. After Yorktown, Hamilton left the army and moved to Albany, where he studied law. He was admitted to the bar in 1782 and served in the Confederation Congress in 1782-83 and again in 1788. In 1783 he moved to New York City, where he practiced law. In 1784, using the concept of judicial review, Hamilton argued the case of *Rutgers v. Waddington*, the first of over seventy cases in which he defended the rights of former Loyalists. In the same year he co-founded the Bank of New York, thus strengthening his political alliance with the Schuylerites—the staunch aristocratic opponents of Hamilton's former close friend, Governor George Clinton.

Hamilton represented New York at the Annapolis Convention, where he wrote that body's report calling for a general convention of the states to alter the Articles of Confederation, a measure he had advocated in 1780. As a New York assemblyman in 1787, he unsuccessfully promoted the adoption of the Impost of 1783, which would have given Congress an independent source of revenue. Hamilton served as one of three New York delegates to the Constitutional Convention but was always out-voted by his colleagues. Left alone at the Convention by his fellow delegates, Hamilton was unable to cast a vote for the Convention's remaining two months. (The Convention required that a minimum of two delegates be present to form an official delegation.) Despite this rule, Hamilton signed the Constitution for New York on the last day of the Convention.

Starting in July 1787, while the Constitutional Convention was still in session, Hamilton wrote newspaper articles favoring the Constitution and criticizing its opponents. After the Convention, he conceived the idea of *The Federalist*, which became eighty-five serialized essays written, with James Madison and John Jay, under the pseudonym "Publius." Hamilton was one of the most important delegates to the New York Convention that ratified the Constitution in July 1788.

President Washington named Hamilton as the country's first secretary of the treasury. Some people at the time, and later, felt that Hamilton had set the policy agenda of the Washington administration; the president was merely a figurehead. During his tenure, 1789-1795, Hamilton's economic plans for paying the federal and state public debt, creating a national debt, and subsidizing manufactures greatly divided the country and gave rise to political parties. As the leader of the Federalist Party Hamilton opposed Jefferson, Madison, and other Democratic-Republicans.

During the quasi-war with France in 1798, President John Adams (at the insistence of Washington, who Adams named as commander in chief) appointed Hamilton as second in command of the new provisional army. When Washington died, Adams refused to appoint Hamilton as commander in chief. During the presidential election of 1800, Hamilton wrote and published a fifty-page pamphlet showing that Adams was temperamentally unsuited to be president. Maligning the incumbent president discredited Hamilton in the eyes of many of his political adherents.

Hamilton opposed Aaron Burr's re-election as a U.S. senator from New York in 1797, his bid for the presidency in 1801, and his election as governor in 1804. In 1804, these and other disputes caused Burr, then vice president of the United States, to challenge Hamilton to a duel. Hamilton was mortally wounded at Weehawken, New Jersey, on 11 July and died the following day. ■

QUOTATIONS

Alexander Hamilton to John Laurens, Middlebrook, N.J., 22 May 1779

I hate money making men.

Alexander Hamilton to John Laurens, Morristown, N.J., 8 January 1780

I am a stranger in this country. I have no property here, no connections. If I have talents and integrity (as you say I have), these are justly deemed very spurious titles in these enlightened days, when unsupported by others more solid.

Alexander Hamilton to John Laurens, New Windsor, N.Y., 4 February 1781

A politician My Dear friend must be at all times supple—he must often dissemble.

Alexander Hamilton to the Marquis de Lafayette, Albany, N.Y., 3 November 1782

I have been employed for the last ten months in rocking the cradle and studying the art of fleecing my neighbors. I am now a Grave Counselor at law, and shall soon be a grand member of Congress. The Legislature at their last session took it into their heads to name me pretty unanimously one of their delegates. I am going to throw away a few months more in public life and then I retire a simple citizen and good paterfamilias. I set out for Philadelphia in a few days. You see the disposition I am in. You are condemned to run the race of ambition all your life. I am already tired of the career and dare to leave it.

James McHenry to Alexander Hamilton, Princeton, N.J., 22 October 1783

The homilies you delivered in Congress are still recollected with pleasure. The impressions they made are in favor of your integrity and no one but believes you a man of honor and republican principles. Were you ten years older and twenty thousand pounds richer, there is no doubt but that you might obtain the suffrages of Congress for the highest office in their gift. You are supposed to possess various knowledge, useful—substantial—and ornamental. Your very grave and your cautious—your men who measure others by the standard of their own creeping politics think you sometimes intemperate, but seldom visionary, and that were you to pursue your object with as much cold perseverance as you do with ardor and argument you would become irresistible. In a word, if you could submit to spend a whole life in dissecting a fly you would be in their opinion one of the greatest men in the world.

William Pierce: Sketches of Members of the Constitutional Convention, 1787

Colo. Hamilton is deservedly celebrated for his talents. He is a practitioner of the Law, and reputed to be a finished Scholar. To a clear and strong judgment he unites the ornaments of fancy, and whilst he is able, convincing, and engaging in his eloquence the Heart and Head sympathize in approving him. Yet there is something too feeble in his voice to be equal to the strains of oratory;—it is my opinion that he is rather a convincing Speaker, than a blazing Orator. Colo. Hamilton requires time to think—he enquires into every part of his subject with the searchings of philosophy [i.e., science], and when he comes forward he comes highly charged with interesting matter, there is no skimming over the surface of a subject with him, he must sink to the bottom to see what foundation it rests on.—His language is not always equal, sometimes didactic like Bolingbroke's at others light and tripping like Stern's. His eloquence is not so defusive as to trifle with the senses, but he rambles just enough to strike and keep up the attention. He is about 33 years old, of small stature, and lean. His manners are tinctured with stiffness, and sometimes with a degree of vanity that is highly disagreeable.

***New York Journal*, 20 September 1787**

I have also known an upstart attorney, palm himself upon a great and good man, for a youth of extraordinary genius, and under the shadow of such a patronage make himself at once known and respected; but being sifted and bolted to

the [brann?], he was, at length, found to be a superficial, self-concerted coxcomb, and was of course turned off, and disregarded by his patron.

New York Journal, 5 December 1787

What in nature, observes a correspondent, is more despicable than a FOP, — — — The Fop, says a modern poet, most resembles the gay mushroom; — as,
From his own dunghill lately sprung,
So buxom, debonair, and young;

Yet on his brow sits empty scorn, —
“He hates mechanics, meanly born.”
Stranger to merit — genius — sense —
He owes his rise to impudence,
With strutting self-importance fraught,
Free — from each particle of thought;
He’ll not debase himself to think, —
“ ’Tis too damn’d low,” — but he will drink.

From his own lips his praises flow,
With — “Damme! I did so and so! —
I’ve e’en in paths of honor trod;
I’d soon, go to hell! — by God! —
Than lose my honor!” — yet his genius
Consists in blasphemy and meanness;
In what true honor interdicts,
And in diverting little tricks.

He’ll, all at once, start from his chair,
Twirl his whip and sing an air,
Dance, to show his grace and shape,
Brisk and sprightly as an — Ape.

To the glass he often goes,
There adjusts his stock and clothes,
Meets his image with a glance,
Of the sweetest complaisance.

He’s first, — and oft the only one, —
To laugh at his own jest or pun.
Suppose it is wond’rous witty,
But men of sense will — smile and pity.
Such is the hero of my poem,
Readers — you must surely know him.

James Kent to Nathaniel Lawrence, Poughkeepsie, N.Y., 21 December 1787

You may praise who you please & I will presume to say that I think Publius is a most admirable writer & wields the sword of Party dispute with justness, energy, & inconceivable dexterity. The Author *must be* Hamilton who I think in Genius & political Research is not inferior to Gibbon, Hume or Montesquieu.

A Citizen, and real Friend to Order and good Government, New York *Daily Advertiser*, 21 March 1788

The publications of Col. Hamilton, in defense of the liberties of America previous to the late war, when a youth in the college of New York; his great military services, and the confidential line in which he stood with that good and great man General Washington, during that war, are indubitable proofs of his virtue. As a lawyer, a politician, and a statesman, Col. Hamilton is certainly great; as a public speaker he is clear, pointed and sententious; he excels most men in

reply, being possessed of the powers of reasoning in an eminent degree, and he is endowed with a most benevolent and good heart.

David S. Bogart to Samuel Blachley Webb, Poughkeepsie, N.Y., 14 June 1788

. . . Mr. Hamilton, the American Cicero. . . .

Samuel Blachley Webb to Catherine Hogeboom, Poughkeepsie, N.Y., 27 June 1788

We have been entertained for upwards of two hours this morning by Colonel Hamilton in one of the most elegant speeches I ever heard. He is indeed one of the most remarkable genius's of the Age, his Political knowledge exceeds, I believe, any Man in our Country, and his Oratorical abilities has pleased his friends and surprised his Enemies.

Melancton Smith to Nathan Dane, Poughkeepsie, N.Y., 28 June 1788

Hamilton is the champion, he speaks frequently, very long and very vehemently—has, like Publius, much to say not very applicable to the subject—

Richard Platt to Winthrop Sargent, New York, 8 August 1788

Little Hamilton shines like a Star of the first magnitude. Think how great his Victory in our Convention when with only 19 Federalists opposed to 46 most violent Anti's with Clinton, Yates, Lansing, Smith & Jones at their head, after six or seven weeks, he triumphed & gave us the Constitution.

Alexander Hamilton to Isaac Ledyard, Jamaica, N.Y., 18 February 1789

In Politics as in war the first blow is half the battle.

Abraham Clark to Jonathan Dayton, March 1789

I feel myself out of all patience with Col. Hamilton. He really appears to be, what I have some times thought him, a shim sham politician. He must needs soon run himself aground. His politics are such as will not stand the test. He will soon refine them to nothing.

Fisher Ames to John Lowell, New York, 13 September 1789

I think so highly of Col. Hamilton's moral & intellectual qualities that I consider his appointment to the head of the Treasury as an auspicious event.

John Fenno to Joseph Ward, 10 October 1789

Great things are anticipated from Hamilton. I think that he considers his fame as much at stake as ever a General of an Army did—and I think further, that he is one of those sort of men that consider wealth as less than nothing and vanity contrasted with Honor & reputation—These things being so—it appears to me that now is the time for a stroke—but your penetrating eye may see dangers in Ambush which escape me.

Oliver Wolcott, Sr., to Oliver Wolcott, Jr., Litchfield, Conn., 8 February 1790

The gentleman at the head of the department, with whom I am most acquainted, I have always known to be a man of strict integrity and honor.

John Trumbull to John Adams, 30 March 1790

Is our Hamilton a great politician or only a theoretical genius. He has great abilities but I doubt his knowledge of mankind. I have never spoken my sentiments on his report but I really fear some parts of his plan are too complicated and perhaps at this period too impolitic as well as impracticable.

John Adams to John Trumbull, New York, 25 April 1790

Our Secretary [of the Treasury] has however I think good Abilities and certainly great Industry. He has high minded Ambition and great Penetration.—He may have too much disposition to intrigue.—If this is not indulged I know not where a better Minister for his Department could be found. But nothing is more dangerous, nothing will be more certainly destructive in our Situation than the Spirit of Intrigue.

William Maclay: Journal, 28 June 1790

Hamilton has a very boyish giddy Manner. Our Scotch Irish People would call him a Skite.

Alexander Hamilton to Edward Carrington, Philadelphia, 26 May 1792

As to my own political Creed, I give it to you with the utmost sincerity. I am affectionately attached to the Republican theory. I desire *above all things* to see the *equality* of political rights exclusive of all hereditary distinction firmly established by a practical demonstration of its being consistent with the order and happiness of society.

As to State Governments, the prevailing bias of my judgment is that if they can be circumscribed within bounds consistent with the preservation of the National Government they will prove useful and salutary. If the States were all of the size of Connecticut, Maryland or New Jersey, I should decidedly regard the local Governments as both safe & useful. As the thing now is, however, I acknowledge the most serious apprehensions that the Government of the United States will not be able to maintain itself against their influence. I see that influence already penetrating into the National Councils & perverting their direction.

Hence a disposition on my part towards a liberal construction of the powers of the National Government and to erect every fence to guard it from depredations, which is, in my opinion, consistent with constitutional propriety.

As to any combination to prostrate the State Governments I disavow and deny it. From an apprehension lest the Judiciary should not work efficiently or harmoniously I have been desirous of seeing some rational scheme of connection adopted as an amendment to the Constitution, otherwise I am for maintaining things as they are, though I doubt much the possibility of it, from a tendency in the nature of things towards the preponderancy of the State Governments.

I said, that I was affectionately attached to the Republican theory. This is the real language of my heart which I open to you in the sincerity of friendship; & I add that I have strong hopes of the success of that theory; but in candor I ought also to add that I am far from being without doubts. I consider its success as yet a problem.

It is yet to be determined by experience whether it be consistent with that stability and order in Government which are essential to public strength & private security and happiness. On the whole, the only enemy which Republicanism has to fear in this Country is in the Spirit of faction and anarchy. If this will not permit the ends of Government to be attained under it—if it engenders disorders in the community, all regular & orderly minds will wish for a change—and the demagogues who have produced the disorder will make it for their own aggrandizement. This is the old Story.

If I were disposed to promote Monarchy & overthrow State Governments, I would mount the hobby horse of popularity—I would cry out usurpation—danger to liberty &c. &c.—I would endeavor to prostrate the National Government—raise a ferment—and then “ride in the Whirlwind and direct the Storm.” That there are men acting with Jefferson & Madison who have this in view I verily believe. I could lay my finger on some of them. That Madison does *not* mean it I also verily believe, and I rather believe the same of Jefferson; but I read him upon the whole thus—“A man of profound ambition & violent passions.”

Abigail Adams to John Adams, Quincy, Mass., 10 May 1794

I have ever thought with respect to that Man, “beware of that spair Cassius—” this might be done consistent with prudence, and without the illiberal abuse in many respects so plentifully cast upon him. The writers however discover too plainly that envy, Pride and malice are the Sources from whence their opposition arises, instead of the publick good.

George Washington to Alexander Hamilton, Philadelphia, 2 February 1795

After so long an experience of your public services, I am naturally led, at this moment of your departure from office—which it has always been my wish to prevent—to review them.

In every relation, which you have borne to me, I have found that my confidence in your talents, exertions and integrity, has been well placed. I the more freely render this testimony of my approbation, because I speak from opportunities of information which cannot deceive me, and which furnish satisfactory proof of your title to public regard.

Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, Monticello, 21 September 1795

Hamilton is really a colossus to the antirepublican party. Without numbers, he is an host within himself. They have got themselves into a defile, where they might be finished; but too much security on the Republican part, will give time to his talents & indefatigableness to extricate them. We have had only middling performances to oppose him. In truth, when he comes forward, there is nobody but yourself who can meet him. His adversaries having begun the attack, he has the advantage of answering them, & remains unanswered himself. . . . For god's sake take up your pen, and give a fundamental reply to Curtius & Camillus.

George Cabot to Timothy Pickering, Brookline, Mass., 17 November 1798

I lament with you the misfortune of Knox on his own account, and, I am sorry to add, on that of the public; for already he begins to intimate, though obscurely, that Hamilton is a man of insatiable ambition and not to be trusted.

Alexander Hamilton to Henry Knox, New York, 14 March 1799

. . . my heart advises otherwise and my heart has always been the Master of my Judgment.

John Beckley to Ephraim Kirby, 25 October 1799

The turbulent and intriguing spirit of Alexander Hamilton, has again manifested itself, in an insidious publication to defeat Mr. Adams's election, and in a labored effort to belittle the character of the president, he has in no small degree belittled his own. Vainly does he essay to seize the mantle of Washington, and cloak the moral atrocities of a life spent in wickedness and which must terminate in shame and dishonor. His career of ambition is passed, and neither honor or empire will ever be his. As a political nullity, he has inflicted upon himself the sentence of "*Aut Caesar, aut Nullus* [either Caesar or nothing; either first or nothing]."

Philadelphia Aurora, 1 March 1800

. . . after he became governor Mr. [Henry] Lee in his free suavid mode soon forgot his political enmity—Hamilton *never* forgets.

James McHenry to Alexander Hamilton, War Department, Washington, D.C., 31 May 1800

[Recollections of a conversation between Secretary of War McHenry and President John Adams on 5 May 1800] President Adams: Hamilton is an intrigant—the greatest intrigant in the World—a man devoid of every moral principle—a Bastard, and as much a foreigner as Gallatin. Mr. Jefferson is an infinitely better man, a wiser one, I am sure, and, if President, will act wisely. I know it, and would rather be Vice President under him, or even Minister Resident at the Hague, than indebted to such a being as Hamilton for the Presidency.

James McHenry to Alexander Hamilton, Baltimore, Md., 4 September 1800

I sincerely believe that there is not one of your friends who have paid the least attention to the insinuations attempted to be cast on the legitimacy of your birth, or who would care or respect you less were all that your enemies say or impune on this head true. I think it will be most prudent and magnanimous to leave any explanation on the subject to your biographer, and the discretion of those friends to whom you have communicated the facts.

George Cabot to Alexander Hamilton, Brookline, Mass., 29 November 1800

I am *bound* to tell you that you are accused by respectable men of Egotism, & some very worthy & sensible men say you have exhibited the same *vanity* in your book which you charge as a dangerous quality & great weakness in Mr. Adams.

John Adams to Dr. Ogden, Washington, D.C., 3 December 1800

This last pamphlet [Hamilton's attack on Adams] I regret more on account of its author than on my own, because I am confident it will do him more harm than me. I am not his enemy, and never was. I have not adored him, like his idolaters, and have had great cause to disapprove of some of his politics. He has talents, if he would correct himself, which might be useful. There is more burnish, however, on the outside, than sterling silver in the substance.

Robert Troup to Rufus King, New York, 24 August 1802

No mortal can yet calculate the present state of public opinion. Federalism is looking up. At the last 4th of July the toasts everywhere given prove that Hamilton is regaining that general esteem and confidence, which he seems to have lost, and his standing is very much our political thermometer.

Rufus King to Christopher Gore, New York, 20 November 1803

Hamilton is at the head of his profession, and in the annual receipt of a handsome income. He lives wholly at his house 9 miles from town so that on an average he must spend three hours a day on the road going and returning between his house and town, which he performs four or five days each week. I don't perceive that he meddles or feels much concerning Politics. He has formed very decided opinions of our System as well as of our administration, and as the one and the other has the voice of the country, he has nothing to do but to prophesy!

Benjamin Rush: Commonplace Book, 12 July 1804

Died of a wound received in a duel the day before from Col. Burr, Alexander Hamilton, Esq., the Aid of Washington in the field and his principal councillor in the Cabinet while President of the United States. He was learned, ingenious, and eloquent, and the object of universal admiration and attachment of one party, and of hatred of the other party which then constituted the American people. He was greatly and universally lamented. Funeral orations were delivered in honor of him in New York and Boston, and funeral sermons were preached upon his death in many churches. Mourning was worn for him by many of the citizens of the principal cities and towns in the United States.

George Cabot to John Lowell, Boston, 18 July 1804

Newspapers of the day . . . will announce and explain to you the public misfortune experienced here by the untimely death of Hamilton. You know how well his friends loved him, and all esteemed him. You can therefore judge of the general sensibility at his death. I have always thought his virtues surpassed those of other men almost as his talents. His errors, unfortunately for the country, were conspicuous, and diminished his influence, which otherwise would have been irresistible, and was always directed to the noblest purposes. All reflecting men seem now to be sensible that he was our *hope* in the crisis to which our affairs necessarily drive us.

John Adams: Autobiography

Of Hamilton, when he came into the General's Family I need say nothing. For my Part I never heard of him till after the Peace, and the Evacuation of the City of New York. The World has heard enough of him since. His Petulance, Impertinence and Impudence, will make too great a figure in these memories hereafter.

John Adams to Benjamin Rush, 23 August 1805

You say that Washington and Hamilton are idolized by the Tories. Hamilton is; Washington is not. To speak the truth, they puffed Washington like an air balloon to raise Hamilton into the air. Their preachers, their orators, their pamphlets and newspapers have spoken out and avowed publicly since Hamilton's death what I very well knew to be in their hearts for many years before, viz: that Hamilton was everything and Washington but a name.

Gouverneur Morris to Aaron Ogden, 28 December 1805

Our poor friend Hamilton bestrode his hobby [i.e., a monarchical government], to the great annoyance of his friends and not without injury to himself. More a theoretic than a practical man, he was not sufficiently convinced that a system may be good in itself and bad in relation to particular circumstances. He well knew that his favorite form was inadmissible, unless as the result of civil war, and I suspect that his belief in that which he called an approaching crisis arose from a conviction that the kind of government most suitable, in his opinion, to this extensive country, could be established in no other way.

John Adams to Benjamin Rush, 25 January 1806

Although I read with tranquility and suffered to pass without animadversion in silent contempt the base insinuations of vanity and a hundred lies besides published in a pamphlet against me by an insolent coxcomb who rarely dined in good company, where there was good wine, without getting silly and vamping about his administration like a young girl about her brilliants and trinkets, yet I lose all patience when I think of a bastard brat of a Scottish pedlar daring to

threaten to undecieve the world in their judgment of Washington by writing an history of his battles and campaigns. This creature was in a delirium of ambition; he had been blown up with vanity by the Tories, had fixed his eyes on the highest station in America, and he hated every man, young or old, who stood in his way or could in any manner eclipse his laurels or rival his pretensions.

William Plumer Memorandum, 15 March 1806

That Hamilton was a great man—a great lawyer—a man of integrity—very ambitious—& was very anxious to effect, that ruinous measure, a *consolidation of the States*.

John Adams to Benjamin Rush, 25 February 1808

At the time of Hamilton's death, the Federal papers avowed that Hamilton was the soul and Washington the body, or in other words that Washington was the painted wooden head of the ship and Hamilton the pilot and steersman.

Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Rush, Monticello, 16 January 1811

I received a letter from President Washington, then at Mount Vernon, desiring me to call together the Heads of departments, and to invite Mr. Adams to join us in order to determine on some measure which required despatch; and he desired me to act on it, as decided, without again recurring to him. I invited them to dine with me, and after dinner, sitting at our wine, having settled our question, other conversation came on, in which a collision of opinion arose between Mr. Adams and Colonel Hamilton, on the merits of the British constitution, Mr. Adams giving it as his opinion, that, if some of its defects and abuses were corrected, it would be the most perfect constitution of government ever devised by man. Hamilton, on the contrary, asserted, that with its existing vices, it was the most perfect model of government that could be formed; and that the correction of its vices would render it an impracticable government. And this you may be assured was the real line of difference between the political principles of these two gentlemen. Another incident took place on the same occasion, which will further delineate Mr. Hamilton's political principles. The room being hung around with a collection of the portraits of remarkable men, among them were those of Bacon, Newton and Locke, Hamilton asked me who they were. I told him they were my trinity of the three greatest men the world had ever produced, naming them. He paused for some time: "the greatest man," said he, "that ever lived, was Julius Caesar." Mr. Adams was honest as a politician, as well as a man; Hamilton honest as a man, but, as a politician, believing in the necessity of either force or corruption to govern man.

James McHenry to Timothy Pickering, near Baltimore, Md., 23 February 1811

Mr. Adams, for reasons best known to himself, endeavors to represent General Hamilton as a man without fair pretensions to sound judgments or useful talents, a visionary politician consumed by indelicate pleasures and a censurable ambition. . . . As to their minds abstractly considered, Hamilton's was profound, penetrating, and invariably sound, and his genius of that rare kind which enlightens the judgment without misleading it; the mind of Mr. Adams, like the last glimmering of a lamp, feeble, wavering, and unsteady, with occasionally a strong flash of light, his genius little, and that little insufficient to irradiate his judgment.

John Adams to the Printers of the *Boston Patriot*, June 1812

The Truth is, that Hamilton's soul was corroded by that mordant sublimated Spirit of Ambition, that subjugates every Thing to its own Interest; and considers every Man of superior Age and merit, or who had the reputation of superior merit, as its Enemy.

John Adams to the Printers of the *Boston Patriot*, June 1812

This was so precisely the Character of Hamilton, that every Man above him, every man on a line with him, and every man below him, who could be suspected by him of a possibility of a competition with him for the highest Power, was sure to be blasphemed blasted and persecuted by himself and his Friends.

John Adams to the Printers of the *Boston Patriot*, June 1812

Hamilton had no more gratitude than a Cat. If you give a hungry famished Cat a slice of meat, she will not accept it as a Gift; she will snatch at it by Force, and express in her countenance and air, that she is under no obligation to you; that she got it by her own cunning and activity, and that you are a fool for giving it to her.

John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, Quincy, Mass., 12 July 1813

. . . a bastard Bratt of a Scotch Pedlar. . . .

John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, Quincy, Mass., 15 October 1822

Hamilton's hobby was the Army.

James Kent: Memoirs

Colonel Hamilton was indisputably pre-eminent [at the bar]. This was universally conceded. He rose at once to the loftiest heights of professional eminence by his profound penetration, his power of analysis, the comprehensive grasp and strength of his understanding, and the firmness, frankness, and integrity of his character.

He generally spoke with much animation and energy and with considerable gesture. His language was clear, nervous [i.e., strong, powerful], and classical. His investigations penetrated to the foundation and reason of every doctrine and principle which he examined, and he brought to the debate a mind filled with all the learning and precedents applicable to the subject. He never omitted to meet, examine, and discover the strength or weakness, the truth or falsehood of every proposition with which he had to contend. His candor was magnanimous and rose to a level with his abilities. His temper was spirited but courteous, amiable and generous, and he frequently made pathetic [i.e., emotional] and powerful appeals to the moral sense and patriotism, the fears and hopes of the assembly, in order to give them a deep sense of the difficulties of the crisis and prepare their minds for the reception of the Constitution.

