

Hamilton's America, Then and Now: Hamilton's Failure to Rescue a White Supremacist American Founding Narrative

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"Our cast looks like America looks now. . . It's a way of pulling you into the story and allowing you to leave whatever cultural baggage you have about the founding fathers at the door."

—*Hamilton* writer and star Lin-Manuel Miranda¹

"'Hamilton' is the best and most important Broadway musical of the past decade. Why important? Because it. . . enlists the [contemporary] musical language of hip-hop in the service of a patriotism that is at bottom as old-fashioned as skyrockets on the Fourth."

—*Wall Street Journal* drama critic Terry Teachout²

HAMILTON: AN AMERICAN MUSICAL has been the hottest ticket in New York theater since its off-Broadway debut in January 2015.³ While Broadway shows are notoriously risky investments, as of April 2016, *Hamilton* was averaging more than \$500,000 in weekly profit.⁴ Telling the story of founding father and first U.S. Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton's life largely through hip-hop, the show has received almost universally positive reviews from mainstream theater critics, as well as praise from public figures across the political spectrum.⁵ That same month, Lin-Manuel Miranda received the Pulitzer Prize in Drama. In fact, the most common criticism of the show has been that, at nearly three hours in its current form, *Hamilton* might be a bit too long.

Beyond being a terrific musical—and it absolutely is a terrific musical—*Hamilton* is presented by its creators and viewers as a major step in allowing audiences of color to reclaim the popular narrative around the founding of the United States. "*Hamilton* is a story about America, and the most beautiful thing about it is. . . it's told by such a diverse cast with a [*sic*] such diverse styles of music," Renée Elise Goldsberry, the actor who originated the role of Hamilton's sister-in-law Angelica Schuyler, told *Time* in December 2015. "We have the opportunity to reclaim a history that some of us don't necessarily think is our own." Much of the ensuing mainstream commentary has adopted Goldsberry's perspective. "The theatrical, corporeal point, which can't be conveyed by the script or score alone," Alisa Solomon similarly writes, "is that America's history—and its future—belong to men and women of color as profoundly as to anyone else."⁶

But is *Hamilton* an effective vehicle for the message that "America's history. . . [belongs] to men and women of color?" In framing the show as conveying precisely this message, its creators join

¹Michael Paulson, "'Hamilton' Heads to Broadway in a Hip-Hop Retelling," *New York Times*, July 12, 2015, A1, New York edition.

²Terry Teachout, "'Hamilton' Review: The Revolution Moves Uptown," *Wall Street Journal*, August 6, 2015, web.

³Ben Brantley, "Review: In 'Hamilton,' Lin-Manuel Miranda Forges Democracy through Rap," *New York Times*, February 17, 2015, C1, New York edition.

⁴Michael Sokolove, "The C.E.O. of 'Hamilton' Inc.," *New York Times Magazine*, April 5, 2016, MM34; Ben Steverman, "Investing in a Broadway Show Is a Fun Way to Lose a Lot of Money," *Bloomberg*, June 3, 2015, web.

⁵Adam Perez, Ashley Ross, and Salima Koroma, "Why History Has Its Eyes on Hamilton's Diversity," *Time*, December 15, 2015, web.

⁶Alisa Solomon, "How 'Hamilton' Is Revolutionizing the Broadway Musical," *The Nation*, August 27, 2015, web.

social commentators in claiming that *Hamilton* subverts white supremacist aspects of the founding narrative by making actors of color the storytellers and utilizing music associated with numerous cultures, particularly those traditionally beyond the scope of musical theater. Mainstream theater critics and journalists are not historians, and it would be strange to find nuanced academic historical criticism in the arts section of a mainstream media outlet. However, to the extent that *Hamilton* is a (tremendously) popular portrayal of crucial events in American history, that portrayal is subject to the scrutiny of those willing to offer an assessment. In this paper, I explore *Hamilton*'s supposed subversion of a white supremacist founding narrative and suggest that, despite mainstream media suggestions to the contrary, the show does not rescue the United States founding narrative.

Theoretical Framework

On April 11, 2016, Jennifer Schuessler wrote a *New York Times* cover story outlining the burgeoning academic dialogue about the treatment of racial issues in *Hamilton*. Schuessler cites historian David Waldstreicher as having initiated the discussion in September 2015 with a comment on *The Junto*, a group blog on early American history, introducing the “founders chic” phenomenon.⁷ Rutgers University professor Lyra Monteiro wrote an essay in *The Public Historian* that remains at the center of this discussion, extending Waldstreicher's line of thinking and arguing that *Hamilton* adopts this uncritical reverence for the Founding Fathers and erases black people from the revolutionary narrative.⁸ Her discussion of the absence of the slave Cato who was “owned” by Hercules Mulligan and the imprecise portrayal of Alexander Hamilton's abolitionist views, among other examples, set the stage for further analysis.

Annette Gordon-Reed, a historian who has extensively studied the relationship between Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson, responded in support of Monteiro's thesis in a post for the National Council on Public History. “Imagine *Hamilton* with white actors,” she offers. “Would the rosy view of the founding era grate?”⁹ While academics have begun to ask questions about racial identity in *Hamilton*, the topics of mixed-race identity and racial ambiguity are still absent from the discussion. Relatedly, these questions of mixed-race identity and racial ambiguity are among the crucial ones Miranda fails to address in *Hamilton*.

Robert Jensen defines a white supremacist society as one “whose founding is based in an ideology of the inherent superiority of white Europeans over non-whites.”¹⁰ In his book *Antiracist Teaching*, Robert Amico defines the related concept of white privilege as “a form of domination, hence it is a *relational* concept. . . It is a concept of racial domination that enables us to see this relationship from the perspective of those who benefit from such domination” (emphasis original).¹¹ Combining these definitions and considering Jennifer Ann Ho's concept of racial ambiguity, I will define white supremacy as the systematic preservation of those identified as white as the dominant racial group over all others designated as non-white. All three major points—the superiority of whites, the relational nature of white supremacy, and the perspective of the beneficiaries—are crucial to the concept of white supremacy relevant to this paper.

⁷David Waldstreicher, post on *The Junto*, September 4, 2015, <https://earlyamericanists.com/2015/08/31/hamilton-art-history-and-truth/#comment-69277> (accessed June 5, 2016). The concept comes from: H.W. Brands, “Founders Chic,” *The Atlantic*, September 2003, web.

⁸Lyra D. Monteiro, “Race-Conscious Casting and the Erasure of the Black Past in Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton*,” *The Public Historian* 38.1 (2016): 89.

⁹Annette Gordon-Reed, “*Hamilton*: The Musical: Blacks and the founding fathers,” *History @ Work: The NCPH Blog*, <http://ncph.org/history-at-work/hamilton-the-musical-blacks-and-the-founding-fathers/>.

¹⁰Robert Jensen, *Heart of Whiteness* (San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 2005), 4. Cited in: Will Smith, “Race and Prejudice in America Today: A Series – White Supremacy and White Privilege,” *Daily Kos*, December 28, 2012, web.

¹¹Robert P. Amico, “What Is White Privilege?” *Antiracist Teaching*, (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 1.

My discussion of the perpetuation of a white supremacist narrative of the American founding in *Hamilton* revolves around three aspects of the show: the problematic treatment of Alexander Hamilton's and others' mixed, ambiguous racial identities, the presentist portrayal of Hamilton's abolitionist political leanings and white supremacist language, and the erasure of narratives of non-white and specifically mixed-race individuals, particularly slaves. After a brief discussion of the show's potentially positive role in making early American history more accessible to people of color, I will explore some of the consequences of the white supremacist narrative and its perpetuation, particularly in contemporary politics. Despite the advertised intentions of its creators and reception by popular media, Hamilton's attempted subversion of the white supremacist founding narrative is incomplete. It perpetuates the whitewashing of the mixed-race identities of numerous characters and actors, reinforcing the black-white racial binary and perpetuating the white supremacist language, behavior, and institutions that facilitate oppression of people of color using the language of patriotism.

Notes on the Argument

Before addressing the core argument of this paper, I must begin to address two issues that hover over this analysis: first, how does one account for the medium of Miranda's writing in studying his lyrics? In other words, must we cut Miranda slack, because he wants his words to rhyme and his music to fit certain styles, all presumably in the name of art and/or capitalism? Writing from an academic perspective, I adopt the goal in my writing of striving for absolute truth. Mr. Miranda should strive for the same but more likely, as a creator of popular theater, aims to present a (more) palatable version of a popularly problematic narrative. He also seeks to sell tickets to his shows. This discrepancy between my goals and his illuminates the question, which I will address towards the end of this paper, whether the narrative in *Hamilton* constitutes progress and whether we should be satisfied with that progress. In his commencement address at the University of Pennsylvania in May, Miranda began, "I am the writer of *Hamilton*: An American Musical. Every word in the show—and there are over 22,000 words in the show—were chosen and put in a really specific order by me."¹² Those 22,000 words that he wrote are the ones heard eight times a week by audiences at the Richard Rodgers Theatre and every day across the world by those of us who listen to the musical's soundtrack, and they constitute the show's narrative. That reality leaves no room for slack; rhyming lyrics or otherwise, Miranda is responsible for the lyrics he wrote and the story *Hamilton* tells.

The other outstanding issue is that of my own position. As a white-identifying person and someone who has enjoyed the privilege of whiteness throughout my life, it might seem inappropriate for me to determine whether a show written by a person of color sufficiently transcends a white supremacist narrative. Given this juxtaposition, the language of subversion and rescuing the narrative, rather than reclaiming it for a specific group, is crucial. While some might view my presentation as a white person as an impediment to understanding what it means to rescue a white supremacist narrative, I feel more comfortable making this argument than I would making the argument that *Hamilton* has succeeded or failed to reclaim the founding narrative for a specific racial or ethnic group. In writing this paper, I view myself as *contributing* to a burgeoning literature, creating space for further analysis, discourse, and nuance rather than comprehensively and conclusively answering the questions I have posed above.

¹²Lin-Manuel Miranda, Commencement Address, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA. May 16, 2016, transcript accessed via <http://motto.time.com/4337719/lin-manuel-miranda-grad-speech/>.

Characters in *Hamilton*

Though Alexander Hamilton is often popularly conceived of as white, his mother was a mixed-race woman from the British West Indies, and his father, who abandoned the family when Hamilton was young, was Scottish. Hamilton grew up middle-class on the island of St. Croix, where his mother owned a store, though the primary industry on the island was agriculture; black slaves constituted over ninety percent of the population.¹³ Though his racial identity was clearly ambiguous, in St. Croix and in the colonies when he would arrive, Hamilton was generally treated as white, as he continues to be viewed and presented by the majority of historians today.

The musical *Hamilton* does not completely ignore Hamilton's mixed-race identity or racial ambiguity, but the references in the show are exclusively disparaging. In the opening words of the show and again about halfway through Act I, Aaron Burr refers to Hamilton as a "bastard, orphan, son of a whore and a Scotsman."¹⁴ In Act II, Burr narrates that then-president John Adams called Hamilton "creole bastard."¹⁵ These instances constitute the show's only recognition of Hamilton's ambiguous racial identity, and both come from language originally used by Adams.¹⁶

In allowing Adams' words to define Hamilton's racial identity in the show, Miranda fails to add nuance where reframing and revisionism are sorely needed. In her book *Racial Ambiguity*, Jennifer Ann Ho argues, "Ambiguity, specifically racial ambiguity, is the only truly productive lens through which to view race because race itself is so slippery."¹⁷ Reframing her thesis, she writes, "Ambiguity... is an important act of resistance."¹⁸ By neglecting to offer a portrait of Hamilton's racial identity that embraces or even accepts ambiguity, Miranda effectively reinforces the black-white binary, forcing Hamilton into a socially constructed racial category and robbing him of a crucial means of resistance against an oppressive racial hierarchy.

That hierarchy, however, seemed not to oppress Hamilton; by making him white, the black-white binary might actually have benefited him. Ho examines this notion through the example of Asian American adoptees: "The racial ambiguity of Asian American adoptees allows them to become blank slates for the projections of white adoptive parents, seemingly without the historical baggage of race that is the legacy of white supremacy in the United States."¹⁹ Hamilton did not enjoy the privilege of parents for most of his life; two years after his mother died, making him an orphan, he moved to the American colonies. But in the way that Ho describes Asian American adoptees as "blank slates for the projections of white adoptive parents," Hamilton was a blank slate for the historians and institutions responsible for the erasure of his racially ambiguous identity in favor of a whitewashed narrative that "allowed" Hamilton to be politically powerful, financially successful, and racially superior.

¹³James Oliver Horton, "Alexander Hamilton: Slavery and Race in a Revolutionary Generation." *New-York Journal of American History* (Spring 2004): 16.

¹⁴Lin-Manuel Miranda, "Alexander Hamilton," *Hamilton (Original Broadway Cast Recording)* (New York: Atlantic Records, New York, 2015), lyrics accessed via <http://genius.com/Lin-manuel-miranda-alexander-hamilton-lyrics>.

¹⁵Lin-Manuel Miranda, "The Adams Administration," *Hamilton (Original Broadway Cast Recording)* (New York: Atlantic Records, New York, 2015), lyrics accessed via <http://genius.com/Lin-manuel-miranda-the-adams-administration-lyrics>.

¹⁶Despite belonging to the same party, Adams and Hamilton were political foes for much of their respective careers. Hamilton opposed Adams' presidential reelection campaign in 1800, and Adams "earned handsome fees as legal counsel for slaveholders in cases against the enslaved," so it seems unsurprising that Adams' rhetoric around Hamilton's racial identity would have been considered racist at the time, as it would be now. For more, see: Mead, Rebecca, "All About the Hamiltons," *New Yorker*, February 9, 2015, web; and Gerald Horne, *The Counter-revolution of 1776: Slave Resistance and the Origins of the United States of America* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 19.

¹⁷Jennifer Ann Ho, *Racial Ambiguity in Asian American Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 4.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 51.

Miranda's response to claims of his lack of nuance has been to point to the show's attempt to humanize the characters. "I really don't accept the premise that we lionize any of these dudes. . . I think our goal is to present them as human," he told *Rolling Stone* in an interview published earlier this month.²⁰ However, as Monteiro argues drawing on the concept of "founders chic," humanization often fails to overcome the glorifying narrative we tend to teach. The consequence, she writes, is the perpetuation of the impression that "the only people who lived during this period—or the only ones who mattered—were wealthy (often slaveowning) white men."²¹ Ultimately, it is insufficient to present these figures as humans with thoughts and emotions. The failure in *Hamilton* to recognize and grapple with Hamilton's racial identity constitutes a failure to completely humanize him, resulting in a portrayal that largely ignores and otherwise disparages his ambiguous racial identity.

The problem is even greater regarding the portrayal of other characters with mixed and ambiguous racial identities. Hamilton's mother is called a whore in the partial mentions of Hamilton's racial identity, and her death is mentioned later in the opening number. By virtue of Hamilton's mixed racial identity, his children are also mixed-race, yet that aspect of their identities is never mentioned.²² The erasure of the mixed racial identities of the members of Alexander Hamilton's family perpetuates the black-white binary that robbed Hamilton of his means of racial resistance and has allowed commentators and historians to project white supremacist socio-racial "norms" onto his identity for two centuries.

White Supremacy and Abolitionism in *Hamilton*

Hamilton does address themes of white supremacy through the colonists' relationship to Britain and the loyalists, but the conflation of historical and contemporary race relations reinforces a narrative that erases slavery and the presence of slaves and mixed-race people. The number "Farmer Refuted" is a back-and-forth between Hamilton and loyalist Samuel Seabury, played by Thayne Jasperson, a light-skinned actor who reads as white.²³ In the song, Seabury's argument and language rely heavily on respectability politics. The clear distinction between the light-skinned Jasperson and the darker Miranda (well known in popular culture at this point as Puerto Rican) surrounded by the black and Latino actors who play Hamilton's group of friends—Daveed Diggs as Marquis de Lafayette, Okieriete Onaodowan as Hercules Mulligan, and Anthony Ramos as John Laurens—encourages the audience to connect Seabury's language and white supremacy or contemporary racial hierarchy.

This connection, however, conflates people of color in contemporary American society with the revolutionaries, slaveholding white men. While Americans of color face discrimination and a racial hierarchy in contemporary society that stems in large part from attitudes and behaviors that facilitated black slavery, the men presented as revolutionaries actually facilitated and perpetuated this institution of slavery.²⁴ Instead of "revolutionaries," Gerald Horne calls many of these figures "counterrevolutionaries." Horne describes a feeling among colonists that he calls the "Black Scare," whereby the impetus to rebel against Britain was seen largely as a necessary measure in order to

²⁰Mark Binelli, "'Hamilton' Creator Lin-Manuel Miranda: The Rolling Stone Interview," *Rolling Stone*, June 1, 2016, web.

²¹Monteiro, 89.

²²*Hamilton* and Elizabeth Schuyler's oldest son Philip Hamilton is the only one of their children that appears in the show. His racial identity is never discussed.

²³Seabury and King George are the only characters in the show that support the British or loyalist cause, so it seems reasonable—especially to an audience member—that they are both played by white or white-presenting actors.

²⁴John Laurens is a noted abolitionist, and Lafayette eventually freed his slaves at Laurens' urging. Mulligan, however, kept slaves, as did most of the other figures in the show that fought for the Revolution. See: Siobhan Fitzpatrick, "John Laurens," *Mount Vernon Ladies' Association*, <http://www.mountvernon.org/digital-encyclopedia/article/john-laurens/>.

protect against a slave uprising. Specifically, he names the Virginians—including Thomas Jefferson and George Washington—as being especially powerful politically and using that power to design a governing structure that served their interests; slavery was central to their economic interests, and they acted accordingly.²⁵

While colonists rebelled against British institutions that they felt were oppressive, slaves were rebelling against a racial hierarchy that they found to be oppressive. The colonists won; the slaves lost and paid a heavy price. “The decision to rebel [against soon-to-be-America], though festooned in the finery of freedom, wound up depriving a countless number of Africans of the liberty that the 1776 revolt has been thought to have provided,” Horne writes.²⁶ It is clear that the “Farmer Refuted” number in *Hamilton* makes a powerful point about contemporary race relations and recognition of respectability politics as a means of oppression. However, accepting Horne’s argument, Miranda’s conflation of the oppressors and the oppressed seems to absolve the Founding Fathers of responsibility for the centrality of preserving slavery as an impetus for founding the United States.

A discussion of the portrayal of slavery in *Hamilton* is incomplete without acknowledging the complete erasure of Cato, a slave “owned” by Hercules Mulligan, and the effective erasure of Sally Hemings.²⁷ In “Yorktown (The World Turned Upside Down),” Mulligan sings, “A tailor spying on the British government! I take their measurements, information and then I smuggle it!”²⁸ This telling of the story, however, ignores the role of Cato, who risked his life delivering the information Mulligan retrieved to members of the Continental Army.²⁹ Monteiro succinctly articulates the shortcoming of this telling: “Mulligan sings about these accomplishments as if they were his alone.”³⁰ History has proven that they were not.

Sally Hemings’ name is mentioned once in *Hamilton*. “Sally be a lamb, darlin’, won’tcha open it,” Diggs sings as Thomas Jefferson in “What’d I Miss,” asking about the letter from then-president George Washington asking him to serve as the United States’ first Secretary of State. Hemings was mixed-race, and the nature of her sexual relationship with Jefferson has been the source of much scholarship, but some commentators are satisfied that Miranda “even finds a way to mention Jefferson’s slave mistress, Sally Hemings.”³¹ On the contrary, we should be able to maintain a higher standard for inclusion and substantive discussion of these individuals; they contributed meaningfully to the founding of the United States and to the lives and work of the white men at the center of *Hamilton*, but they are virtually ignored in the show.

Conclusion

Hamilton ends with a question: “Who tells your story?” This framing reinforces the show’s adoption of the position that the storyteller matters. This position is valid and important yet, when the

²⁵Elias Isquith, “White supremacy and slavery: Gerald Horne on the real story of American independence,” *Salon*, 30 May 2014, web.

²⁶Horne, 20.

²⁷The *Hamilton* Mixtape, an album of covers and unreleased songs from *Hamilton* released in December 2016, includes a demo of an unreleased track (“Cabinet Battle 3”) in which *Hamilton* and Jefferson debate the merits of slavery. The relationship between this track and my argument requires further analysis, but the argument as I have presented it reflects the current version of *Hamilton* as audiences have seen it for nearly two years.

²⁸Lin-Manuel Miranda, “Yorktown (The World Turned Upside Down),” *Hamilton (Original Broadway Cast Recording)* (New York: Atlantic Records, New York, 2015), lyrics accessed via <http://genius.com/Lin-manuel-miranda-yorktown-the-world-turned-upside-down-lyrics>.

²⁹Paul R. Misencik, *The Original American Spies: Seven Covert Agents of the Revolutionary War* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2014), 110–22, cited in Monteiro, 91.

³⁰Monteiro, 95.

³¹Solomon.

storyteller is nearly 250 years removed from the story's subject, insufficient. A story's substance matters *at least* as much as its teller. The exclusively disparaging rhetoric used in reference to Hamilton's racial identity, the erasure of narratives of slaves and people of mixed-race, and the presentist portrayal of white supremacy and race relations together constitute a failure of the creators of *Hamilton* to meet the bar set by themselves and others of rescuing the popular white supremacist American founding narrative. The effect of reinforcing this narrative is the same as one Ho describes: "The elision of the term 'white' with 'American,' reinforcing hegemonic notions of white superiority and a conflation of nationality with race."³²

Monteiro speculates in her article whether Miranda "would have been able to write a play that downplays race and slavery to the extent that this one does," if he had included an historian of color on his staff.³³ A comment from Ron Chernow, whose biography of Hamilton inspired Miranda to write the show and who serves as the show's historical consultant, lends merit to Monteiro's speculation. Chernow tells the story of being invited to an early rehearsal and instinctively questioning the choice to cast exclusively actors of color in the lead roles. "But after a minute or two I started to listen and forgot the color or ethnicity of these astonishingly talented young performers," he told the *New York Times*. Judy Rosen, "The American Revolutionary," *New York Times Style Magazine*, July 8, 2015, web. This response—along the lines of the adage "I don't see race"—suggests ignorance, not awareness, of the issues of racial identity at the core of *Hamilton* and my critique. Including one historian of color as a consultant to the show likely would not have led Miranda to preemptively address each criticism I and others have offered, but such a person could have challenged the creative team to think more deeply about aspects of the popular founding narrative that the show perpetuates.

In criticizing *Hamilton*, I must also acknowledge one area in which it constitutes progress on issues of inclusion. *New York Times* theater reporter Michael Paulson called *Hamilton* "a turning point for the art form," particularly in the number and prominence of parts written explicitly for people of color.³⁴ Furthermore, the show could engage audience members, particularly those of color, with the historical material in a new and more meaningful way. "It feels important, because it allows us to see ourselves as part of history that we always thought we were excluded from," Diggs told the *New Yorker*.³⁵ People of color have been taught for two and a half centuries that the narrative of the American founding does not belong to them. Providing a mechanism for audiences of color to claim their rightful ownership over that narrative is *Hamilton*'s greatest accomplishment, and it unequivocally deserves recognition.

Miranda seems to hope that this feeling of empowerment could extend to the contemporary political arena. "The fights we're having right now politically are the same fights we've been having since six months after we became a country," he said in August 2015.³⁶ In the wake of the instances of police brutality involving Eric Garner in New York City and Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, Miranda said, "We're screaming, 'Rise up,' and a lot of people are feeling that way."³⁷

At the same time that Miranda hopes to impact contemporary political discourse through a message of empowerment for immigrants and people of color, the narrative *Hamilton* perpetuates could be having precisely the opposite impact Miranda would want. "Our cast looks like America now," he says frequently. Paulson, A1. This statement, though valuable, ignores the presence of people of color and immigrants in America then. Using the past to explore the present, without

³²Ho, 31.

³³Monteiro, 96.

³⁴Paulson, A1.

³⁵Mead.

³⁶Frank DiGiacomo, "'Hamilton's' Lin-Manuel Miranda on Finding Originality, Racial Politics (and Why Trump Should See His Show)," *The Hollywood Reporter*, August 12, 2015, web.

³⁷Mead.

considering the inverse of that relationship, leaves the past undefined, allowing others to project their own biases onto historical narratives.

Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign was grounded in language and a narrative of American history that conflates, as Ho warns, "white" with "America."³⁸ As a result, he attracted the support of angry white people who felt left behind by economic and socio-racial developments in American society and have latched onto Trump's nationalist and white supremacist rhetoric. This campaign, by no means unique in its eventual success, tapped into the white supremacy that continues to be reinforced by our white-centric popular founding narrative.

In *A People's History of the United States*, Howard Zinn wonders why working-class whites celebrated the passage of the Constitution, a document designed to limit their potential for socio-economic mobility. Citing Staughton Lynd, he writes, "What Lynd found was that these mechanics, while opposing elite rule in the colonies, were nationalist."³⁹ The nationalism that drove white mechanics to accept a document that reinforced their racial superiority at the expense of their prospects for economic mobility is the same nationalism Trump taps into when he animates the white anger of his supporters. That nationalism is in service of this country, which Gerald Horne demonstrates was founded in part upon the preservation of the institution of slavery. And it is the same as the "patriotism" that tells us to leave our cultural baggage at the door, which Terry Teachout described in his *Wall Street Journal* review of *Hamilton*: "As old-fashioned as skyrockets on the Fourth."⁴⁰ Lin-Manuel Miranda and *Hamilton* are not responsible for this narrative and the power it holds in American collective memory, but Teachout reminds us, perhaps unintentionally, that they are complicit in its perpetuation.

³⁸Ronald Brownstein, "Trump's Rhetoric of White Nostalgia." *The Atlantic*, June 2, 2016, web.

³⁹Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States: 1492-Present* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), 99.

⁴⁰Teachout.