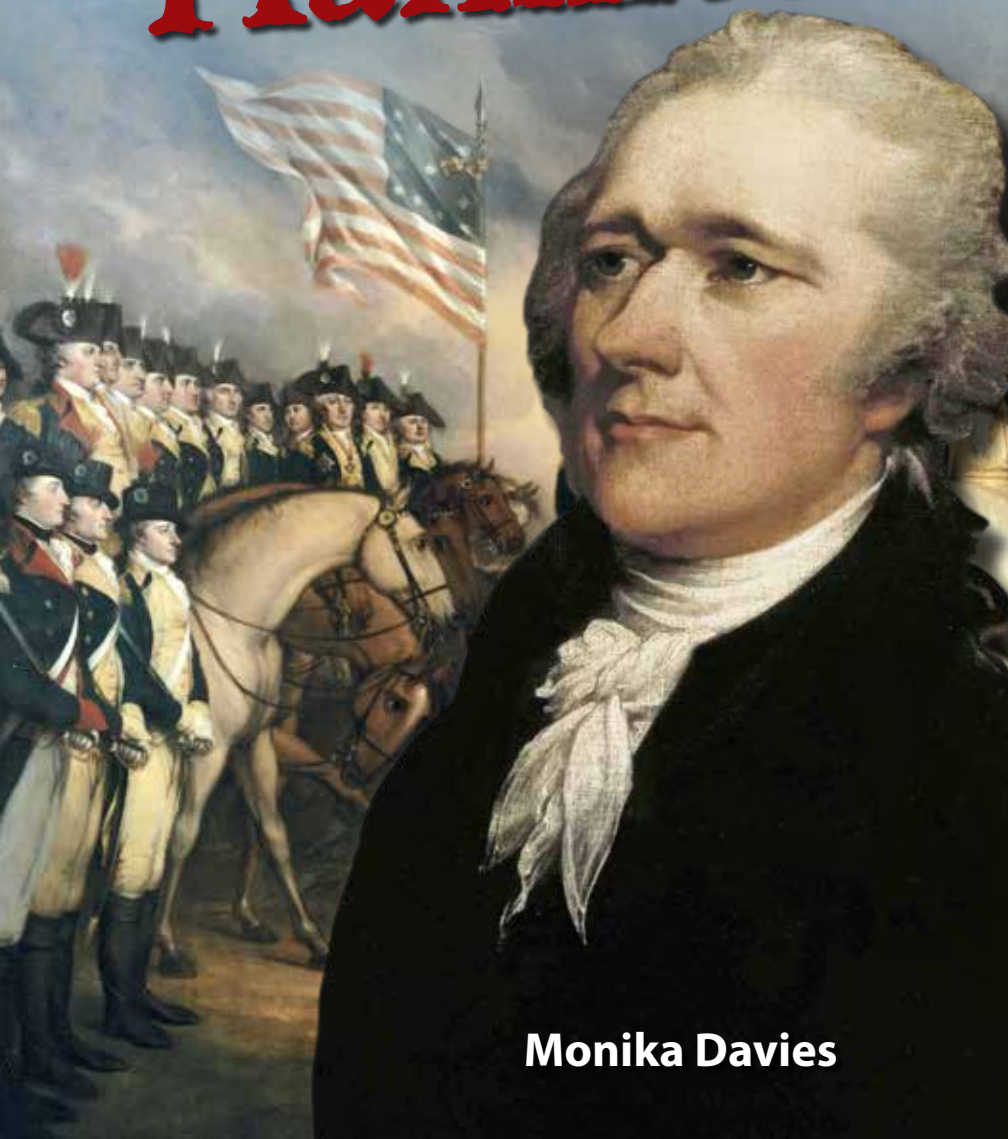
True Life

TIME

Alexander Hamilton



Monika Davies

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Alexander Hamilton

Alexander Hamilton's face may not be the first you'd spot in a gallery of Founding Fathers' portraits. His sensational death (a duel at dawn with pistols!) often clouds his legacy as the architect of America's financial system.

The man was a genius but also a hothead. You could count on him to go toe-to-toe with anyone who challenged him. He knew the power of the written word and used it often. He was a favorite of the ladies and a glory seeker who seemed haunted by how his legacy would be framed.

Hamilton was George Washington's right-hand man and Thomas Jefferson's most notable rival. He was also the beloved husband of Eliza Schuyler and the victim of Aaron Burr's fury.

Based on the sheer number of persuasive essays and letters he left behind, it isn't hard to imagine that Hamilton might have often asked himself, "How will history remember me?"



Hamilton: An American Musical

Hamilton's story has recently been resurrected in cultural and historical conversations. This is a direct result of the immense popularity of Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton: An American Musical*, a fun and bright hip-hop retelling of Hamilton's life. In 2016, this Broadway smash won a Grammy® Award and 11 Tony Awards®! Miranda was also the 2016 Pulitzer Prize® Winner in Drama.



From left to right: Henry Knox (seated), Thomas Jefferson, Edmund Randolph (facing away), Alexander Hamilton, and George Washington

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The Hurricane

Hamilton was always a battle-ready scholar. Diving into his childhood, it is clear how he developed the **grit** and determination that would characterize his legacy.

Born **out of wedlock**, Hamilton had his trials set before he was born. His mother, Rachel Fawcett Lavine, was still married when she left her husband for James Hamilton, a Scottish immigrant.

His **rootless** father would later abandon the family when Hamilton was only 10. However, Rachel was a **resilient** woman and found ways to keep poverty at bay, such as selling groceries for income.

Sadly, the first chapters of Hamilton's life story are heavy with tragedies. Rachel died from a devastating fever that nearly took Hamilton's life as well. Left without a penny to his name, Hamilton and his brother moved in with a cousin who would later take his own life.

Facing this list of woes, an ordinary person might have waved the white flag of surrender. But it wasn't enough to stop Alexander Hamilton. This was a man who, with very little formal education, began working as a clerk. He devoured countless books, hungering for more knowledge. He had big dreams of escaping the confines of his residence in St. Croix.

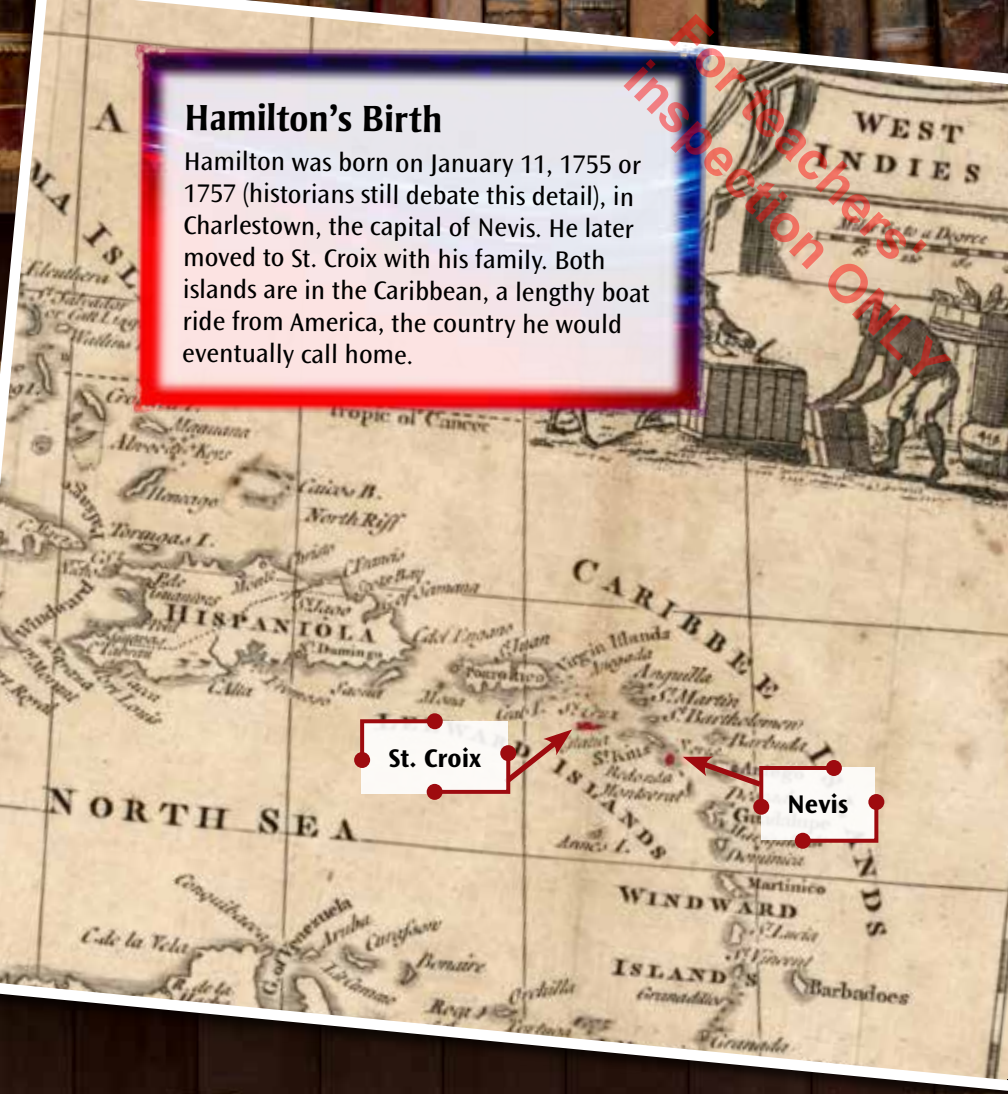
Then the hurricane struck.

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Hamilton's Birth

Hamilton was born on January 11, 1755 or 1757 (historians still debate this detail), in Charlestown, the capital of Nevis. He later moved to St. Croix with his family. Both islands are in the Caribbean, a lengthy boat ride from America, the country he would eventually call home.

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The Clerking Years

As a teenager, Hamilton clerked at Beekman and Cruger, an import/export business that was instrumental in schooling him on the ins and outs of economics. He was in charge of accounting and kept track of a variety of currencies and an inventory that ranged from rice to mules. This was no doubt an influential education for the man who would create the financial system of the United States.

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1772

The hurricane's destructive force wreaked havoc across St. Croix. Tall trees were yanked from their roots, houses were mangled, and furniture was found strewn miles away.

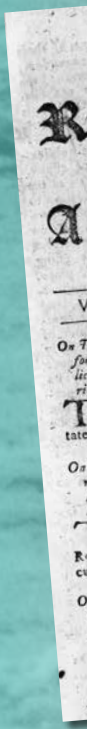
Hamilton, then around 17, was horrified by the storm's impact. He wrote to his father (they had remained in touch despite his abandonment), trying to paint a portrait of the hurricane with his words: *The roaring of the sea and wind, . . . and the ear-piercing shrieks of the distressed, were sufficient to strike astonishment into Angels.*

The stirring letter was first printed anonymously in the *Royal Danish American Gazette*. Hamilton's way with words captured the attention of the public, who demanded to know the author. After word spread, a fund was put together to send the fiercely intelligent young man to America for an education.

A Rewritten Future

Hamilton ached to move beyond the **provincial** life of St. Croix. He rarely wrote or spoke of his childhood as an adult. It was complicated at best, but there's no doubt his hardships fueled his strong will and ambition.

It is incredible to consider how Hamilton rewrote his uncertain circumstances into a new future. Hamilton not only worked hard but also had the smarts to back up his work. He was en route to new opportunities—to America, the country he would help build.



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A Secretive Past

Throughout his life, Hamilton was not one to trumpet about his sad past. Instead of reliving his childhood, Hamilton focused on being a forward thinker. Because of this, biographers have had to rely on extensive research to piece together the beginning of Hamilton's life.


THE

OYAL AMERICAN DANISH GAZETTE.

GLORIA EX ALTIORIBVS PETITA

OL. III. WEDNESDAY, October 7, 1772. No. 235.

I THE underwritten, in behalf of the heirs and representatives of the Estate Major B. P. de Nully deceased, do hereby desire all persons who might have any demands against said Estate to bring in their accounts, on or before the 5th day of January next, in order to have them adjusted and settled, as no notice will be taken after the above-mentioned time of any old unacknowledged accounts.

P. H. de NULLY.

the Prince's Coronet on his head, was mounted on a very fine white horse, which was a present to his Majesty from the King of Denmark: his Majesty rode under a canopy born by several presidents, &c. and followed by a great number of officers of state, senators, military officers, &c.

Then came the procession of the Queen, preceded by two kettle drummers and four trumpeters on horseback, and followed by a great number of heralds, senators, officers, &c.

The Queen was in the Coronation-coach, magnificently adorned, and drawn by eight most beautiful dappled Danish horses, the reins were

Who Had the Letter Published?

The hurricane letter was likely shown to Hugh Knox, a minister and mentor to Hamilton. Knox probably encouraged Hamilton to have the letter published in the *Royal Danish American Gazette* (above), where Knox was occasionally an editor.

Reader's Guide

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1. What was Alexander Hamilton's greatest contribution as a Founding Father?
2. Most Founding Fathers have multiple biographies dedicated to them. Why might people be less aware of Hamilton's accomplishments?
3. What most surprises you about Hamilton's life story?
4. Hamilton had complex relationships with people in both his political and personal lives. Which relationship most shaped the course of his life? Why?

