

# Hamiltons crusade essay



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When the revolutionary war was over, the American colonists found themselves free of British control. Now that they were free, they wanted to create their own system of government where the tyranny and the arbitrariness of the British monarchy of old, would be diminished. Originally, The Articles of Confederation thinly united the thirteen states. This document had given the central government no power to do what was needed. The central government had no power to tax they only had the power to ask the states for money. They also had no money to pay for an army to settle domestic disputes or fight off invaders. These weaknesses and others in The Articles of Confederation caused the people to consider amending the Articles that would correct these wrongs and at the same time protecting the interests of the states. So in 1787, the states sent delegates to a convention in Philadelphia to amend the Articles. It did not take long for the delegates to scrap the Articles and to start writing a new document, the Constitution. Even this new document created controversy. The American people were divided into two groups: the federalists, with Alexander Hamilton as the leader, and the anti-federalists or Jeffersonians because they were led by Thomas Jefferson. The federalists believed that the Constitution itself was good enough where as the Jeffersonians thought that it would not protect the rights of the people. But both however decided that the government should be based on the principles of federalism. The Bill of Rights was added to the Constitution, to help the ratification of it and to insure the rights of the people. The Federalist, a series of papers, was written to get support of the Constitution in New York. These papers were written under the pseudonym, Publius. The papers were actually written by three men: Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay. Hamilton was the leader of these three for he

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had written 51 of the 85 The Federalist papers. Through their efforts the New York legislature ratified the Constitution. Even after the Constitution was ratified, the two factions remained divided for several reasons. One reason was the creation of a national bank. Hamilton was very supportive of a national bank and Jefferson was against the idea of a national bank. The descendants of these first two factions are seen today in the Democrats and the Republicans. Alexander Hamilton accomplished many great things for the United States including: calling for a stronger central government, setting up a national bank and a plan for economic growth and inadvertently starting the two-party system.

#### Alexander Hamilton the Revolutionary and the Pater Familias

Alexander Hamilton was born on January 11, 1755 (or 1757 according to Hamilton) on the West Indies Island of Nevis in the town Charleston. He was born out of wedlock to Rachel Faucitt Lavien and James Hamilton, who would later abandon the family in 1765. A local clergyman, Reverend Hugh Knox, raised funds to send Alexander away to school in 1773. He entered Kings College (Columbia University) in 1774. At the age of 19 he wrote a pamphlet, A Full Vindication of the Measures of Congress. This was in response to a Torys pamphlet that called the Continental Congress a parcel of upstart lawless Committee-men. 1 Alexander defended in his pamphlet that the Congress was an august body of men famed for their patriotism and abilities.

In the Revolutionary War, he distinguished himself in the eyes of General Washington, and in 1777, Washington asked him to be one of his six aide-de-camps (secretaries) with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Hamiltons main job

was to, as Washington said, think for me, as well as execute orders. He rode beside Washington in the battles at Brandywine, Germantown and Monmouth.

Alexander married Elizabeth Schuyler in 1780, with whom he had eight children. Hamilton had just wanted to lead a simple life and care for his family or in his words retire a simple citizen and good pater familias (father of the family.) Sometimes Alexander Hamilton would have a hard time in accomplishing this, as he was always away from home fighting for a new cause.

Alexander turned to law at the end of the war to support his new family. The New York Supreme Court passed an order in January of 1782 saying that those who had to cease their studies because of the war did not have to have three years of clerkship. In October of 1782, he was admitted to the bar association. However, since he was a delegate to Congress, he did not start to practice law until November of 1783. At this time he moved his family into a house on Wall Street and opened up his first law office.

In the beginning the majority of cases that Hamilton represented were the ones in which he represented Tories. Hamilton represented Tories because they were experienced businessmen and had money. He believed that if they were to be driven off due to harsh laws, the nation could lose several hundred thousand dollars and their experience, which the young nation badly needed. In February of 1784, he wrote the charter for and became a founding member of the Bank of New York, the states first bank. This experience would later help Hamilton in setting up the nations first bank. The

following year, he and his friend, John Jay, founded the Society for Promoting the Manumission (freeing) of Slaves. The primary purpose of the society was to create a register of freed slaves to make sure that they were not deprived of their liberties. In 1786, the society petitioned the state legislature to put an end to the slave trade. Alexander Hamilton tried to stay out of public issues but this would not happen because of his stance on these issues.

### Alexander Hamilton at the Constitutional Convention

In May of 1786 Alexander Hamilton was elected to the state assembly. He had been asked to run several times before, but the positions did not offer enough money he needed to support his growing family. He was soon asked to be a delegate to the Annapolis Convention in Maryland. The convention was called to discuss interstate commerce only. The convention itself was viewed as a failure since only five states were there. Hamilton was determined not to leave the convention without accomplishing something. He was a leader to draft a proposal to have another convention in Philadelphia the following year. He wanted to have the convention to have a broader agenda other than just interstate commerce. Hamilton said that the convention should devise such provisions as shall appear necessary to render the constitution of the Federal Government adequate to the exigencies of the Union. The convention was significant to Hamilton in the respect that he was reunited with James Madison. Both were determined to fight for a strong federal government.

Shays rebellion was a key factor in the states wanting to have the convention. Many people were still against the convention fearing that they

might lose control. One of these people was George Clinton, governor of New York. The New York State assembly granted Hamilton the five man federally minded delegation that he wanted. Clinton supporters in the senate decide on a three-man delegation: Alexander Hamilton, John Lansing and Robert Yates. Lansing and Yates were two of the biggest Clinton supporters around; the senate did this to keep Hamilton in check. The convention opened with three major propositions: the Virginia Plan, calling for a stronger federal government; the New Jersey Plan, asking to retain states sovereignty; and the Hamilton Plan, which was presented by Alexander Hamilton. He made this presentation in a five hour long speech on June 18, which was the longest of the convention.

States practically lost all of their power under his plan. He believed that the continuance of state governments would always hinder the federal governments progress. He had the idea of getting rid of the Articles totally since state sovereignty was deeply embedded in it. Hamilton wanted the convention to establish a new more powerful central government. He wanted the new government with decisive power, in short with complete sovereignty. Hamilton went on to say that the British system of government was the best in the world and he wanted Americas system of government to be patterned after the British. His legislative branch resembled the British parliament in many ways. Everybody would vote for the assembly and the rich could only vote for the Senate. The Senate was modeled after the British House of Lords. For the executive branch, Hamilton proposed what was soon to be termed an elected king. Hamilton was against the idea of terms for the Governor, because he felt that the incumbent would spend his time in office

creating a political machine to ensure his reelection instead of working full-time in his duties. To get rid of this, Hamilton proposed no set limits and that the executive should serve during good behavior. The judiciary would compose of a Supreme Court and such additional United States courts, as the legislature should decide to create. Hamiltons basic plan of government looked like this:

Two legislatures consisting of an assembly, directly elected by the people to a three-year term; and a senate, chosen by electors from senatorial districts to serve during good behavior.

A judiciary consisting of twelve justices to serve during good behavior. The judiciary would have to be both original and appellate jurisdictions.

An executive Governor, whose election is made by electors chosen by the people from the senatorial districts, to serve during good behavior.

After his speech, many of the delegates felt that Hamilton had gone too far and labeled him an extremist. Much of what Hamilton proposed in his speech would end up in the Constitution such as the prohibitions on ex post facto laws, bills of attainder, grants of nobility, religious tests for government positions, and the establishment of any religion. The executive being the commander-in-chief of United States forces, being able to appoint heads of departments and make treaties and pardons with the Senates consent and the idea of having electors to vote for the executives head office are also in the Constitution. The day after Hamilton made his speech, the delegates voted on the Virginia Plan to be the basis of the government.

Lansing and Yates did a good job of keeping Hamilton in check. He grew frustrated and soon left to resume his law practice. In August some of the delegates had left in disgust including Lansing and Yates. Upon hearing this, Hamilton returned to the convention to cast his vote and to sign the Constitution. Hamilton was still skeptical of the Constitution, but he felt that it was better than nothing. Hamilton said in his last speech that, No mans ideas were more remote from the plan than his were known to be; but is it possible to deliberate between anarchy and Convulsion on one side, and the chance of good to be expected from the plan to the other. Hamilton still felt that it should give more power to the federal government and less to the states. He was the only one to sign the Constitution for New York.

#### Alexander Hamilton and the Federalist

Alexander Hamilton still had a long way to go before the Constitution could be ratified. Governor Clinton had started as early as July to form a defense against Hamilton and the Constitution. He started to write a series of essays entitled the Federalist. He wrote the essays under the pseudonym of Publius. The Clintonian/Anti-federalists had a majority over the Federalists everywhere but in Manhattan, Hamiltons district. Hamilton called on his friends John Jay and James Madison to help him out on the essays. John Jay would only write four because he grew sick. The first Federalist appeared on October 27, 1777 and the last one appeared on May 28, 1788. The purpose of the essays was to gain support of the Constitution by explaining it. The Federalist is still considered one of the greatest works written on a constitutional government. Even Thomas Jefferson (the future rival of



Hamilton) claimed the Federalist to be the best commentary on the principles of government which ever was written.

New York held its Constitution convention on June 17, 1788. The Anti-federalists out numbered the Federalists two to one. Hamilton called upon his power of persuasion to reverse the minds of the Anti-federalists. The Federalists decided to hold out as long as they could so they went over every piece of the Constitution. After more than a month of debating, the convention ratified the Constitution by a 30-27 vote. New York did not need to ratify the Constitution since ten states already did, but New York had a geographical, commercial and population importance.

Alexander Hamilton the Secretary of Treasury

On September 11, 1789, Alexander Hamilton became the first secretary of the United States. He has a major task of setting up the nations economy before him. Part of his workload was the 54 million-dollar deficit from the Revolutionary War. Hamilton based his system after the British system, which uses a national credit. He felt that, To be able to borrow upon good terms, it is essential that the credit of a nation should be well established by good faith, by a punctual performance of contracts. This Hamiltons plan that contained three basic provisions for the handling of the debt:

As mandated by the Constitution, the foreign debt and interest would be paid in full according to the terms initially agreed to.

The principle of the domestic debt would be paid at par to the current bearers.

The federal government would assume state debts with interest payments deferred until 1792.

When he announced his plan to Congress in his Report on Public Credit, many were opposed to the ideas. One of them was Hamiltons friend James Madison. Madison felt that the people who originally bought the bonds would be mistreated since they later sold the bonds for a much lower value for cash. He also felt that those bought the bonds at a low value would be making a huge profit. Madison was against the idea of assumption of the states debts too. Madisons home state, Virginia, had already paid off most of its debt and he thought that his constituents should not have to pay for the other states debts. A deal was made between Madison and Hamilton.

Madison would get votes in Congress from Virginia and Maryland, if Hamilton would locate the capital on the Potomac in Virginia and Maryland. Hamilton also called for the first Bank of the United States. Congress approved and on February 25, 1791 it was established with a twenty-year charter and \$10,000,000 limit. This led to more conflict with Madison and Jefferson. They were against it because the Constitution did not give the power to set up a national bank to Congress. While Congress was still debating the bank, Hamilton presented them with his report, On the Establishment of a Mint. In his report he called for a bimetallic standard for the currency, coinage based on the decimal system, and the establishment of a mint in Philadelphia. Hamilton was very successful as the Secretary of Treasury. He accomplished everything he set out to do: redeem the credit of the United States, increased revenues, expand the supply of capital, and establish a standard currency.

## Alexander Hamilton and the Republicans

In the summer of 1787, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison created a political party, Democrat-Republicans. They both did not like factions, but they felt that something needed to be done stop Hamilton. They thought that Hamilton was exerting too much federal power and was infringing on the states. Their main argument was the national bank. The Republicans thought that it was unconstitutional and Hamilton felt that it was in Congress implied powers. Over the years the rivalry grew harsher as both Jefferson and Hamilton attacked each other newspapers and throughout Washington, who wished that the two would get along. Another topic of debate between the two factions was foreign policy. Jefferson wanted to be aligned with France and Hamilton with Great Britain. Hamilton won his case with Washington when he sent John Jay to Great Britain and the Jay treaty was signed. There was opposition to it, but again Hamilton did what he did best, persuade. The pro-French movement suffered a major setback due to the scandalous X, Y, Z affair. Hamilton soon turned away from his own party. In 1800, the Federalists nominated John Adams for president. Hamilton did not like Adams because he did not seek his advice on important issues as president. The election of 1800 ended up being a tie between Aaron Burr and Thomas Jefferson. The Federalist House wanted to vote for Burr since Jefferson was their main antagonist. Alexander Hamilton hated and did not trust Burr and urged Federalists to vote for Jefferson. The state and national elections of 1800 was the end of the Federalists in power.

## Alexander Hamilton and the Infamous Duel

Aaron Burr decided to run for governor of New York in 1804. He had asked for the Federalists support, but Hamilton refused to give him any and the Republican candidate soundly defeated Burr. Burr blamed his defeat on Hamilton and demanded Hamilton to apologize for his comments about him. Hamilton refused and the date was set for a duel on July 11, 1804. The place was Weehawken, New Jersey, where dueling was still legal. Burr shot Hamilton in the abdomen and Hamilton shot in the air. Hamilton suffered the same fate as his son did three years earlier and on the following day he died.

There was an immense outpouring of public grief at the news of Hamiltons death. He had meant so much to the United States as it meant so much to him. He had created an economic system that would make the United States a global power in a short time. He was the first one to use the Constitutions extended powers in order to set up the national bank. He was one of the first to defend the freedom of the press (*People v. Croswell* 1804.) Hamilton kept a positive approach on America as he built for the future. Jefferson even admitted, We can pay off his debt in 15 years: but we will never get rid of his financial system. He often felt that his efforts fell short for his country:

Mine is an odd destiny. Perhaps no man has sacrificed or done more the present constitution than myself Yet I have the murmurs of its friends no less than the curses of its foes for my reward. What can I do better than withdraw from the Scene? Every day proves to me more and more that this American world was not made for me.

For doing what he did America owes much of its existence to a, as John Adams described Hamilton, bastard brat of a Scottish peddler.

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