

Alexander Hamilton Americas' First Rags to Riches Story

1755-1768---Hamilton was born on the island of Nevis the exact date is not know as he was an illegitimate child whose father left he, his brother and mother at an early age. To support her children she opened a store and put Alexander in charge of the books where he learned a great deal about finances which he carried throughout his life. They lived on the bottom of a very stratified society on the island and he was very aware that anything he got in this life he would have to work very hard to obtain. It was a driving force throughout his life.

1768-1773---After the death of his mother Hamilton had several mentors who actually improved his standing considerably. The first was a businessman named Nicholas Cruger who put him in charge of his business on the island of St. Croix where Hamilton learned the intricacies of world wide financial matters and dealt with businessman from all over the world. It was also where his hatred of slavery and the slave trade were born having witnessed it first hand. Another mentor who helped along the way was the Reverend Hugh Knox who taught young Hamilton that his life was not pre-destined. This undoubtedly appealed to him. After several years the two mentors got enough money together to send young Alexander to the colonies for an education.

1773-1777---Hamilton was to attend Kings College (now Columbia) and was set to study medicine. His benefactors supported the revolution against England and so as he did with most things he went to Boston to find answers for himself and came back to his adopted state of New York to pen a pamphlet entitled "A Full Vindication of the Measures of Congress" which earned him notoriety with revolutionaries and loyalist a like. When hostilities broke out at Lexington and Concord Hamilton he and some friends formed a drilling company and studied the art if artillery. He impressed Henry Knox who was the artillery commander of the continental army.

1777-1781---During this time period Hamilton became aide-de-camp to General George Washington and earned high praise and complete trust of the general. He was sent to General Horatio Gates to obtain troops to help in the south after Gates' win at Saratoga and Gates tried to give Hamilton a brigade that was inexperienced and half the size of a real brigade. Hamilton spent the winter with the troops and Valley Forge and it was there that he began to see the need for a strong central government to oversee the nation as a whole. With congress members worried about their respective states more than the nation as a whole Hamilton could see the need for a strong central entity that could act with one purpose instead of many.

1781-Constitutional Convention---During the war Hamilton met and fell in love with one Elizabeth Schuyler whose family from New York was very wealthy. Her father was a general and was taken with the young penniless Hamilton and thought it was a good match so they wed.

It was at this time that Hamilton had a falling out with Washington and moved out of headquarters and into the Schuyler home. With the war now over Hamilton moved to New York and embarked on a career as an attorney. Robert Morris of New York appointed him receiver of taxes for the state of New York. He tried to stay out of politics but found it impossible.

Constitutional Convention--- Governor Clinton appointed Hamilton as one of the states delegated to the convention and was the only delegate from the state to sign the document upon its completion. In order to get the constitution ratified Hamilton took his pen and wrote 50 of the famous Federalist Papers in an effort to convince the American public to back the plan. He knew New York with its large financial resources and population was essential for the implementation of the constitution. With the help of James Madison and John Jay they were obviously successful.

Trouble Within The Administration---After the election of Washington and Hamilton's appointment as Secretary of the Treasury infighting with Thomas Jefferson soon began. As a devout federalist who had always pushed for a strong central government Hamilton had constant arguments with Jefferson, who was just as devout an antifederalist, about policies within the fledgling new country. This war of words was waged with the newspapers each man had under his control. It went so far that Jefferson brought impeachment charges against Hamilton and sent them to Congress where they were soundly defeated. The mutual dislike for each other ended with Jefferson stepping down as Secretary of State.

The Adams Administration---John Adams never liked Hamilton and believed he had worked against him in his bid for the presidency. (I personally believe that Hamilton was pushing Charles Pinkney to get federalist support in the south and had nothing against Adams) This caused great consternation between the two men. Adams had made Hamilton inspector general and it reminded him of his time trying to get money for the army during the war. He hated it.

The End---It is hard to sum up Alexander Hamilton's life in a short paragraph. He was not very well liked by two presidents-Adams and Jefferson, and still had a major impact on the country as we know it today. His son Philip was mortally wounded in a duel (defending his fathers' honor) and his daughter Angelica fell into "madness" upon learning of her brothers demise. He had been found out as an adulterer and admitted it even though what his wife thought of the affair no one knows as she destroyed all her correspondence with her husband upon his death. And finally the duel—Having scorched Aaron Burr mercilessly Burr finally challenged Hamilton to a duel at the same place his son had died. Burr shot Hamilton and paralyzed him and he died at a friends house from internal bleeding. For all the accusations that had been hurled at him over the years of mismanaging public funds for his own use he died broke. Hamilton was, I believe the very first "rags to riches" American story.

