

**ALEXANDER  
HAMILTON: A  
HISTORICAL STUDY**

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Alexander Hamilton: A Historical Study by George Shea

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**GEORGE SHEA**

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*TO THE READER:*

*The following Part, complete in itself, is now published, and in this form, in advance of the other three Parts of the proposed volume, with an intent to facilitate the success of an existing project to raise a public memorial, in the city of New York, to ALEXANDER HAMILTON, by diffusing in this way a more popular and a full knowledge of the man, his genius, and the scope of his labors.*

PART I.

*THE INDIVIDUAL.*



## PART I.

### THE INDIVIDUAL.

MORE than three-score years and ten have passed since Alexander Hamilton died. Men then thought and spoke of his death as untimely for himself and his country. History will give no such judgment. For himself, for his peace of mind and the simple grandeur of his fame, the time of his death must be esteemed fortunate; for the Republic, now as we look back upon the course of events, the sacrifice appears to have been desirable. He was not doomed to outlive his usefulness; nor to live into those days when doctrines which he feared and opposed, and when personal solicitation for office, were to gain ascendancy in the administration of the government. Nor was his heart to be embittered, as many others have been, by ephemeral contentions, in which the honors of his pitched and decisive battles might be dimmed and degraded.<sup>1</sup> He had laid the foundation, broad

<sup>1</sup> "Jefferson and Madison were brought forward by caucus nominations. . . . The first year [1821] of Mr. Monroe's second term had scarcely passed away before the political atmosphere be-



and deep, of a republic for the people. He had secured, by potential constitutional bulwarks, the frame of its government from the changes and chances of ordinary mutability, decay, and violent revolution. It was, by its written word, self-adjusting and self-remedial. It contained, within itself, the means of improvement, derived from the Confederation, but now made practicable and vital; and, like the adaptive nature of the common law, capable of falling in with each phase in the progress of true civilization and national expansion. Revolution by force was to be without excuse henceforth. The winds and the waves may now come and beat upon the house. It was not built in the sands of an ever shifting popular feeling, but on the fixed and durable rock of a constitutional Republic. A "fierce democratie" meant, in his understanding, as enlightened by the philosophy taught by historical examples, license, not law, and ultimate anarchy: a republic meant that "democratie" under the regulation of a supreme law.

This discriminating idea concerning a form of pure republican government was one entertained, at that early day, by a few forward men, who seem to have been unwilling to openly proclaim it.

came inflamed to an unprecedented extent. The republican party, so long in the ascendant, and apparently so omnipotent, was literally shattered into fragments, and we had no fewer than five republican presidential candidates in the field."—*President Van Buren's Political Parties*, p. 3.

Mirabeau ventured once, and only once, to utter the thought; and then at that private meeting of friends, so fatal in its immediate consequences to himself and to France. Lafayette, "too republican for the genius of his country," was denounced in the National Assembly, his arrest decreed, and emissaries sent to carry the decree into effect. The annihilation of the constitutional party and the commencement of the Reign of Terror, were concurrent events. Hamilton was unreserved in all places where discussion was appropriate. Never untimely intrusive, yet, when he spoke, it was fully and without reserve. He acted under the influence of opinions which had been honestly formed, and in the correctness of which he confided to the end; opinions which, he hoped, would in the sequel prove acceptable to the majority, but to which he felt it his duty to adhere, whatever might be the consequence to himself of his perseverance. That he favored a monarchy is an absurd prejudice. If he had favored it he knew quite well that a commonwealth was the old beaten highroad that leads to royalty.<sup>1</sup> Many too sincerely believed that he

<sup>1</sup> Napoleon III. observed and spoke of the familiar "tendency of the democracy to personify itself in one man." Franklin declared, in the Constitutional Convention, that there is "a natural inclination" in the masses of mankind to kingly government, "as it gives more the appearance of equality among citizens; and that they like." — *Madison's Debates*, vol. 2, p. 773.

The emperor, in a conversation with Colonel Vaudrey, related in

did; and suspicion detected as proof that which reason should place to a different account. He knew human nature better than to attempt to superinduce upon American civilization, peculiar and sensitive as it was, a system already rejected, and alien to the genius of its origin and development.<sup>1</sup> To be sure, the war for independence was an assertion and vindication of the rights claimed by the colonists as British subjects. The denial of those rights by a British ministry was officially avowed as the adequate cause for resistance, and, when persisted in, of final complete separation from the crown.<sup>2</sup> The object of the Revolution

the preface to the English edition of his *Idées Napoléoniennes*, said: "France is democratic, not republican. By democracy, I mean the government of an individual by the will of all; by a republic, I mean the government of a number, in obedience to a certain system."

<sup>1</sup> "The idea," writes Hamilton, "of introducing a monarchy or aristocracy into this country, by employing the influence and force of a government, continually changing hands, towards it, is one of those visionary things that none but madmen could meditate, and that no wise man will believe."—*Hamilton's Works*, vol. 4, p. 271.

<sup>2</sup> In the closing pages of his autobiography, Mr. Jefferson tells us that he called upon Franklin in Philadelphia in 1790, and only a few weeks before his death (which occurred April 17, 1790), when Franklin placed in Jefferson's hands a full account of his negotiations with the British ministry in London, through Lord Howe. "I remember," continues Jefferson, "that Lord North's answers were dry, unyielding in the spirit of unconditional submission, and betrayed an absolute indifference to the occurrence of a rupture; and he said to the mediators, at last, that 'a rebellion was not to be deprecated on the part of Great Britain; that the confiscations it would produce would provide for many of their friends.' This