John Trumbull, Portrait of Alexander Hamilton (1805). City Hall, New York City, Source: Wikimedia Commons

Saving Face Over Family: Hamilton and the Reynolds Affair

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In the time of the Early Republic, many in power felt that their private actions and persona should not affect their public character. A husband's infidelity, for example, should not tarnish his reputation in public service. The idea of honor was deeply ingrained in colonial America and persisted in the fledgling nation after the Revolution. Most citizens of this era spent their entire lives fostering their reputation and honor, working tirelessly to sculpt a legacy that would be revered by posterity. As democracy progressed and the general population became more involved in politics, the separation between leaders' private lives and their public personas became increasingly blurred, much to the chagrin of those in power. It was only a matter of time before the private life of a Founding Father was put on display for public consumption.

As the head of the Federalist Party, Alexander Hamilton was at the peak of his political career in 1791.[1] While serving as the Secretary of the Treasury, his work on the national stage had not only helped mold the young country, but also played a significant role in defining what the United States stood for as a nation.[2] Alexander Hamilton was born in St. Croix, a bastard son of a Scottish nobleman. He spent his much of his life working his way out of the Caribbean and into public life in the American colonies, and was resolved to preserve the honor and

[1] Andrew S. Trees, *The Founding Fathers and the Politics of Character* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

[2] On Hamilton, see Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004).

reputation that he had spent years assembling. This steadfast determination eventually led him to participate in a duel with Aaron Burr that would cost him his life in 1804.

In the summer of 1791 Alexander Hamilton made a decision that would culminate in the greatest threat to his honor and legacy he would ever face: he began a yearlong affair with a young woman named Maria Reynolds. When Reynolds' husband, James, became aware of the affair, he blackmailed Hamilton, extorting thousands of dollars from him over the course of the year. After the relationship ended and James Reynolds was arrested for an unrelated crime, the disgruntled husband tried to use the last weapon that remained in his arsenal to avoid jail time: he accused Hamilton of conspiring in corrupt business dealings while serving as Treasury Secretary. When these allegations were leaked to the public, Alexander Hamilton published a text titled *Observations on Certain Documents Contained in No. V & VI of "The History of the United States for the Year 1796," In which the Charge of Speculation Against Alexander Hamilton, Late Secretary of the Treasury, is Fully Refuted*. This 95-page text became known as the Reynolds Pamphlet.

In an attempt to avoid the label of corruption and the loss of the reputation that he had cultivated since arriving in America, Hamilton confessed to his affair with Maria Reynolds, but categorically denied charges of misuse of public office.[3] Though he was not the first prominent politician to have strayed from his marriage, the Reynolds Affair became infamous in the United States as the first nationally publicized sex scandal. Hamilton's decision to expose his adultery to the world was shocking for many Americans. In the context of 18th-century American society, the idea of a man of status having an extramarital affair may not have been uncommon, but it was not something that was openly discussed. The role of honor culture within American society from the outset of its foundation made Alexander Hamilton risk his family and all that he had achieved since his orphaned childhood in the West Indies in order to retain his fame, honor, and future legacy.

Honor in the Early Republic

During the 17th and 18th centuries, honor culture was brought to the New World from Europe and implemented into the lives of American colonists within the British sphere of influence. Joanne B. Freeman states:

> "A collection of beliefs and rituals with long-lived roots in civilizations past, the culture of honor [...] [shows] that the American republic did not spring to life from the brow of Washington, fully formed. There were cultural and political rites, traditions, and assumptions that Britain's North American colonists inherited and adapted on a distant stage."[4]

The Founding Fathers, though thoroughly intent on separating themselves from their European predecessors, continued to live by the rigid guidelines put in place by honor culture and the perceived morality at its root. This system set forth a precedent in which men were made to feel as if their honor and reputation were their most valuable assets. Should either of them be damaged, the social, political, and economic standing of the individual could be put in jeopardy. Though potentially explosive, the presence of honor culture during the emergence of the American democracy brought men into the political arena and drew them to civil service. The majority sought the validation that they would receive in the public sphere.

Over the past 250 years, the concepts of fame and honor have dramatically changed within the United States. In order to understand honor culture during the 18th and 19th century, one must first fully grasp what exactly honor and fame meant to men like Alexander Hamilton. Throughout the early days of the Republic, "fame embraced both the present and the future, referring to immediate celebrity as well as future renown; earned through great acts of public service, it carried a virtuous connotation that many related terms lacked." [5] Today, fame and

[3] Ibid., 68-370 and 533-536.

[4] Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 2002), 286.

[5] Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, xx.

celebrity are usually connected to the entertainment industry or to physical beauty, but not necessarily to public service. The honor culture during Hamilton's time determined that it was not enough to be well known while you were alive; in order to be respected, a person had to have a lasting and positive impact on society. It was necessary for a person to have honor in order to achieve this antiquated version of fame. A man of honor in the 18th century "had an exalted reputation that encompassed qualities like bravery, self-command, and integrity—the core requirements for leadership." [6] One of the defining characteristics is the incorporation of morality into both honor and fame. In order for a person to have an established place in society, the general population had to believe they exhibited behavior that was appropriate fora gentleman who prioritized the welfare of the majority over the advancement of the few.

Since public service was unofficially required to obtain fame and honor, many men involved in the politics of the Early Republic started their political careers during the Revolution. As the United States developed as a nation, honor culture became imbedded in both politics and society. In the words of historian Joanne Freeman, "the full story of early national politics cannot be told without the culture of honor, a shared body of assumptions and rituals that framed the bustle and confusion of the national political world." [7]

The notions put forth by these long held ideals guided every aspect of a politician's life, leaving them constantly focused on protecting the reputation they had carefully sculpted and viewing any threat to that façade as life or death. Since the Founding Fathers were operating within an untested democratic system that had not been successfully implemented since the Ancient Greeks, "honor culture was a natural product of a politics of reputation that blended personal identity, public office, and political experimentation in a volatile mix". [8] For many, the fate of the democracy hinged on the idea that those in power were inherently "good" and moral men who could be trusted with the fate of the nation. They should be able to act in good faith for the sake of bettering the country and have ideals that would help them navigate the problems facing a young and deeply endangered nation.

In the Early Republic, some aspects of honor culture could appear to modern observers as paradoxical. The concept of a person's honor allowed for the acceptance of varying personas in the public and private spheres. In the eyes of those serving to help move the country forward, "public service depended on public virtue - the ability to resist the common passion of self-interest and the corrupt influences of others. Public actions, those that sacrificed the self, determined virtue while private matters veiled the true self". [9] The unraveling of a public figure's "honor" would discredit him in the public sphere and ruin his legacy, but this would only occur when his conduct compromised his ability to serve the public or brought into question the perceived ethical standards of his approach to his political duty. As long as a person's private persona did not affect their job performance, it was not considered relevant. This rationalization may seem strange in today's political world where the private actions of public servants are just as important as their public actions. Many would even argue that it is easier to overcome the political hurdle of corruption allegations than a private indiscretion, such as a sex scandal. When one considers the double standard set forth by honor culture during Hamilton's time and the willingness of the public to believe in the morality of the Founding Fathers, the multi-sphered dynamic of their society becomes significantly more feasible.

Thirst for Fame

Even in colonial times, America was thought to be the land of opportunity. A man did not have to come from a good family to build a reputation and establish himself as a member of society. Young Alexander Hamilton felt that the Americas held for him something the West Indies did not: the chance to prove himself. As bastard son of a woman of Huguenot decent and a man of Scottish nobility, Hamilton struggled throughout his childhood to rise out of poverty and shame. Despite the hardships he faced - the desertion of his father, the death of his mother,

[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid., 286.
[8] Ibid., 287.
[9] Jacob Katz Cogan, "The Reynolds Affair and the Politics of Character," *Journal of the Early Republic* 16, no. 3 (1996): 389-417, at 394-95.

and the suicide of his cousin - Hamilton captured the attention of the rich and powerful on St. Croix, which allowed him to quickly gain not only their favor, but also their respect.

As a young boy born into less than desirable circumstances, the idea of gaining respect and prestige through noble actions would have sounded like a dream. It is for this reason that Hamilton constantly searched for opportunities to prove himself to those around him. Hamilton did not receive what most would consider a formal education but he was able to supplement his lack of schooling with his insatiable thirst for knowledge. His primary source of education was his mother's 34-book library, every book in which he studied extensively.[10] Though the exact contents of the collection remain unknown, Hamilton biographer Ron Chernow assumes that "the poetry of Alexander Pope must have held an honored place, plus a French edition of Machiavelli's *The Prince* and Plutarch's *Lives*, rounded off by sermons and devotional tracts".[11] Hamilton's exposure to these great works helped fuel his grandiose ideas of government, fame, and honor.

In his earliest surviving correspondence from 1769, Hamilton writes to his childhood friend Edward Stevens about his thirst for a life better than the one he had in the West Indies:

> "To confess my weakness, Ned, my Ambition is prevalent that I contemn the grov'ling and condition of a Clerk or the like, to which my Fortune &c. condemns me and would willingly risk my life, tho' not my Character to exalt my Station. Im confident, Ned that my Youth excludes me from any hopes of immediate Preferment nor do I desire it, but I mean to prepare the way for futurity. Im no Philosopher you see and may be jus[t]ly said to Build Castles in the Air. My Folly makes me ashamd and beg youll Conceal it, yet Neddy we have seen such Schemes successfull when the Projector is Constant. I shall Conclude saying I wish there was a War."[12]

From an early age, Hamilton understood his role in society. For an illegitimate son with no status there were few opportunities to rise above his station. He yearned for any possible way to escape the islands and establish himself as a man of fame. Hamilton's letter shows a side of him that was often concealed in his later writings: the young man was desperate for the fame and honor that he spent years reading about in his mother's library. The significance of this letter cannot be overstated, as it even foresees the event that would allow Hamilton to rise in American society, the Revolutionary War. This thirst for fame would lead a bastard from the West Indies to become one of the most influential men to ever take part in American politics.

The Reynolds Affair

What we learn in school about the Revolutionary War, the Founding Fathers and the origin of the Nation are mostly names, dates, and major events. Those who founded the county are depicted as great heroes and almost mythical beings but are rarely depicted in their humanity and as ordinary men who did extraordinary things. Alexander Hamilton was no exception. In the summer of 1791 he became enthralled with a woman who was ten years younger, Maria Reynolds. He indulged in a year-long affair that threatened to ruin both his public and private life. Though he confessed this transgression to the public, we do not know what exactly happened between Hamilton and Reynolds even though Hamilton wrote two separate accounts of the events.[13]

In the Reynolds Pamphlet of 1797, Hamilton, at that time Secretary of the Treasury, described how Maria Reynolds came into his life in the summer of 1791. He claimed that the young woman arrived at his doorstep with a sad tale of a husband who abandoned her for another woman. She claimed that she needed money to get back to her family in New York.

[10] Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 24.
[11] Ibid.
[12] "Letter to Edward Stevens, 11 November 1769," in Alexander Hamilton, *Writings*, ed. Joanne B. Freeman (New York: The Library of America, 2001), 3.
[13] Thomas J. Fleming, *The Intimate Lives of the Founding Fathers* (New York: Harper, 2010), 234.

Out of sympathy Hamilton offered to bring the money to her residence in Philadelphia where she seduced him.[14] Though there is nothing to dispute this sequence of events, many historians find it difficult to believe that Alexander Hamilton was enticed by a woman he had never met before. Thomas Fleming speculates that "[Maria] and her husband, who was a stock speculator, had managed to inject themselves into some part of Hamilton's social life in New York or Philadelphia, where she had attracted his amorous attention."[15]

This initial encounter led to an affair that lasted for several months, even after Hamilton's wife Elizabeth had returned from Upstate New York, where she had spent the summer with her children on her father's estate. It is likely that James Reynolds knew about his wife's extramarital affair from the beginning but he did not take action until December 15, 1791. Hamilton wrote that he "received [a letter] from Mr. Reynolds [...] by which he inform[ed Hamilton] of the detection of his wife in the act of writing a letter to [the statesman], and that he had obtained from her a discovery of her connection with [Hamilton], suggesting that it was the consequence of an undue advantage taken of her distress."[16]

After meeting with Reynolds, Hamilton agreed to pay him $1,000, the equivalent of $25,000 today, for his silence and permission to continue seeing Maria. Payments of smaller amounts continued into 1792, keeping one of the most powerful men in the United States dependent on a low-level crook. Reynolds repeatedly bragged to friends and colleagues, such as Jacob Clingman, about his power over the Secretary and spread rumors that Hamilton took part in corruption while in office. In May of 1792 Hamilton ended the affair with Maria Reynolds, not because of the recent birth of his fifth child, but because he realized its political ramifications.[17]

Though the relationship ended, James Reynolds continued exploiting his wife's former lover. Later in 1792 Reynolds and Clingman were arrested for defrauding the United States government. "In an attempt to free themselves, they concocted a story that they possessed information that proved Hamilton had been deeply involved in illegal speculations while Secretary of the Treasury".[18] The two men "posed as executors of the estate of a supposedly deceased war veteran, Ephraim Goodenough, who had a claim against the government" .[19] When it was discovered that Mr. Goodenough was, in fact, still alive, the conspirators were charged with fraud and Reynolds sought Hamilton's help in dropping the indictments against him and Clingman. Hamilton ignored this request for help and, though the two felons struck a deal and were released, Reynolds continued spreading rumors of Hamilton's corruption. Though Hamilton would eventually release a detailed rebuttal of these accusations, from an outsider's perspective the evidence against him was strong. The correspondence between Reynolds and his wife's lover, combined with the two men's testimony, the unexplained sums of money, and the unsavory reputation of Reynolds himself would led many to believe that Hamilton was in fact guilty of conspiring to defraud the very federal department he helped create.

The allegations voiced by Clingman and Reynolds quietly worked its way through intimate political back channels and ultimately landed in the lap of Pennsylvania Representative Frederick Muhlenberg, Virginia Representative Abraham Venable, and Virginia Senator James Monroe. After careful consideration, "the three men decided to confront Hamilton directly - a decision to handle the matter among gentlemen and to leave the public out of it, in recognition of the danger of allowing elite reputations to become subject to the whims of unsubstantiated gossip." [20] When the three congressmen brought the issue before Hamilton, however, they received a very different confession than the one they had expected. Hamilton admitted everything about his affair with Maria Reynolds to his Republican constituents and even provided them with letters and evidence supporting his claims. Since his infidelity did not affect his ability to execute his job within the

[14] Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 364.
[15] Fleming, *The Intimate Lives*, 231.
[16] "The Reynolds Pamphlet," in: Hamilton, *Writings*, 897.
[17] Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 412.
[18] Trees, *The Founding Fathers and the Politics of Character*, 47.
[19] Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 413.
[20] Trees, *The Founding Fathers and the Politics of Character*, 47.

public sphere, the men accepted Hamilton's word and agreed to maintain his secret.

Almost five years passed without a scandal arising from the quiet whispers of Hamilton's opponents taking place behind closed doors. In June of 1797, however, a journalist by the name of James Callender published a series of pamphlets in which he accused the Secretary of misconduct while holding office, as well as adultery, putting forth the testimony of Reynolds and Clingman as proof. Born in Scotland, "Callender had emigrated [to the United States] from England in 1793 in order to escape charges of sedition for his radical tract *The Political Progress of Britain*."[21] His attacks against the British Parliament and its constitution made him a hero into the Republican political sphere after his arrival in the United States. Though he would eventually fall out of favor with the Republican Party and publish the rumors of Thomas Jefferson's affair with Sally Hemmings, Callender's initial entrance into American politics largely consisted of attacks against Federalist leaders, including Alexander Hamilton.[22]

When Hamilton denied the allegations of corruption and accused Callender of misrepresenting the facts, Callender responded by saying, "So much correspondence could not refer exclusively to wenching. [...] No man of common sense will believe that it did. [...] Reynolds and his wife affirm that it respected certain speculations."[23] In an effort to salvage his public reputation and preserve his honor, Hamilton decided to publish the Reynolds Pamphlet, though many strongly advised against it. He explained that his payments to Reynolds were not evidence of corruption within the Treasury, but that they were meant to keep his affair with Reynolds' wife concealed. Hamilton frankly stated:

> "The charge against me is a connection with one James Reynolds for purposes of improper pecuniary speculation. My real crime is an amorous connection with his wife, for a considerable time with his privity and connivance, if not originally brought on by a combination between the husband and wife with the design to extort money from me."[24]

In the wake of the pamphlet's publication, politicians, journalists, and even the public spoke out fervently against Hamilton and his decision to expose his private extramarital affair to the world. In Hamilton's mind, however, the decision to risk his relationship with his wife and his family was vastly outweighed by his need to preserve his honor and legacy.

The Reynolds Pamphlet

Hamilton was a prolific writer and master of persuasive rhetoric. Throughout his political career, he proved time and time again to be a worthy opponent in any debate. He vigorously defended the validity of American Independence and the U.S. Constitution. So, when James Callender published his series of pamphlets in 1797, Hamilton responded with an editorial in the *Gazette of the United States*, a Federalist newspaper, in which he admitted that, though the papers published by the journalist were in fact real, they did not provide evidence of political corruption. He announced that he himself would release a full explanation of the documents soon after.[25] Many close allies of Hamilton strongly urged against him responding to Callender's allegations. One of them said:

> "You will judge for yourself, but in my opinion it will be best to write nothing at least for the present [...] I think you may be certain that your character is not affected, in point of integrity & official conduct. The indignation against those who have basely published this scandal, is I believe universal."[26]

As a man who feared the loss of the reputation that he had coveted since his youth, Hamilton could not let such defamation of his honor stand.

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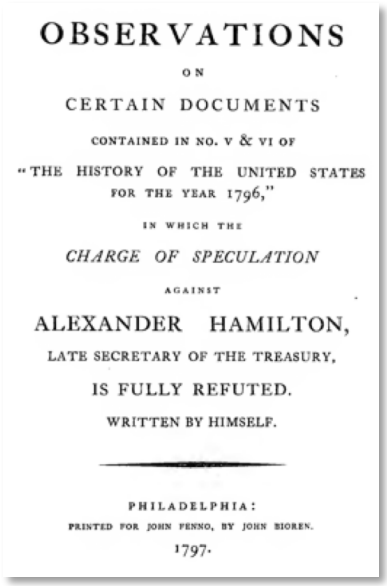
[21] Ibid., 396.
[22] Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 529.
[23] Ibid., 530.
[24] "The Reynolds Pamphlet," in: Hamilton, *Writings*, 888.
[25] Cogan, "The Reynolds Affair," 397.
[26] Trees, *The Founding Fathers and the Politics of Character*, 48.

This led to the publication of the Reynolds Pamphlet on August 25, 1797. The Pamphlet caused scandal and shock, but no one could argue that it was not well structured and well written. Hamilton opened his defense by claiming that the accusations by Callender and the Republican Party were a defamatory tactic meant to slander those who had done nothing but try to unite and solidify the United States since the Revolution.[27] This strategy allowed him to divert the tone of the discussion from an attack on himself to an attack on the well-being of the nation as a whole. He then went on to refute the charges of corruption by confessing to his extramarital affair with Maria Reynolds. From there he addressed Callender's arguments one by one and skillfully tore them apart.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PHILADELPHIA:
PRINTED FOR JOHN FENNO, BY JOHN BIOREN.
1797.

Reynolds Pamphlet, Title Page. Source: Wikimedia Commons

As the Secretary of the Treasury, Hamilton had access to copious amounts of money and connections to the most powerful individuals across the country. When the Pamphlet was published, Hamilton had already retired from public service but continued to practice law in New York. He was also still the informal head of the Federalist party. Based on these facts, Hamilton argued that, should he have gone through with such a plan to defraud the government, wouldn't he have picked a more powerful accomplice and acquired larger sums of money? He wrote:

> "It is very extraordinary, if the head of the money department of a country, being unprincipled enough to sacrifice his trust and his integrity, could not have contrived objects of profit sufficiently large to have engaged the co-operation of men of far greater importance than Reynolds, and with whom there could have been due safety, and should have been driven to the necessity of unkennelling such a reptile to be the instrument of his cupidity."[28]

Hamilton also scoffed at the sums that he had been accused of stealing from the government. Would a man with access to millions of dollars in federal funds have chosen to risk his reputation and honor for a few hundred dollars here or there? The sums mentioned in the letters, he insisted, made much more sense in the context of a low-level crook blackmailing his wife's lover, rather than in an insidious plot to defraud the United States government.

While addressing a number of other claims put forth by Callender in his pamphlets, Hamilton also turned on the journalist himself, blaming Callender and his likes for putting his wife through the pain of this scandal. Heatedly, Hamilton wrote, "With such men, nothing is sacred. Even the peace of an unoffending and amiable wife is a welcome repast to their insatiate fury against the husband."[29] This argument has been used by many public figures when entrenched in scandal. However, Hamilton's attack on the honor of those men accusing him of adultery and corruption falls short since he did in fact have an affair with another woman while his wife Eliza was pregnant.

In a rare moment of humility, the former Treasury Secretary acknowledged that his affair with Maria Reynolds was a grave mistake that he would have to atone for:

> "This confession is not made without a blush. I cannot be the apologist of any vice

[27] Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 533.
[28] "The Reynolds Pamphlet," in Hamilton, *Writings*, 889.
[29] Ibid., 884.

> because the ardour of passion may have made it mine. I can never cease to condemn myself for the pang, which it may inflict in a bosom [Eliza] eminently intitled to all my gratitude, fidelity and love."[30]

Despite this heartfelt apology to his wife, he continues to justify the writing of the Pamphlet to save his honor. For a man as powerful as Alexander Hamilton who came from nothing, the thought of losing reputation and honor was more terrifying than losing his family, friends, and allies.

Fame above Family

-After the American Revolution, the need for strong, moral leaders to step up and take charge of an unstable Nation set the perfect stage for upward mobility within the Early Republic. For men like Alexander Hamilton, that need to be recognized and validated could become an obsession, placed above everyone and everything else in his life. By writing the Reynolds Pamphlet, Hamilton essentially decided to sacrifice his private life for his public one. In order to save his legacy and his honor, he decided that he would be willing to risk his family and his marriage. Hamilton stated about Eliza's embarrassment and disgrace:

> "that bosom will approve, that even at so great an expence, I should effectually wipe away a more serious stain from a name, which it cherishes with no less elevation than tenderness. The public too will I trust excuse the confession. The necessity of it to my defence against a more heinous charge could alone have extorted from me so painful an indecorum."[31]

In Hamilton's mind, his wife would understand just how important his legacy was and the ferocity with which he would protect it, even if it brought her discomfort.

Ralph Earl (1751-1801), Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton, circa 1787, Museum of the City of New York (source: Wikimedia Commons)

Unlike other prominent political couples, the Hamiltons were husband and wife, but never equals. In a letter to Eliza from 1801, Hamilton writes, "Indeed, my dear Eliza [...] your virtues more and more endear you to me and experience more and more convinces me that true happiness is only to be found in the bosom of one's own family".[32] It seems as if Hamilton confesses that for the first twenty years of his marriage up to this point, he did appreciate neither her virtues nor herself. Prominent couples such as the Adams and the Washingtons frequently voiced their devotion and often relied on each other for advice on dealings on the national stage. Hamilton's letter shows that Eliza and Alexander Hamilton never entered that dimension of their relationship.[33] In the end, it was fame, not Eliza, which brought the most joy to the Hamilton.

Though Hamilton was certain that his wife would forgive him, the question of whether the public would absolve him from his discretion was an entirely different matter. Hamilton apologized in his Pamphlet to his friends and colleagues who advised him against the publication. He argued, in the words of Andrew Trees, that "because his political peers

[30] Ibid., 888.
[31] "Letter to Elizabeth Hamilton, October 25, 1801," in Hamilton, *Writings*, p. 888.
[32] Fleming, *The Intimate Lives*, 245.
[33] Ibid.

were involved, his 'public' as he defined it, [he] felt that he had to defend himself publicly or risk losing his honor and political influence." [34] Many of his friends were shocked by Hamilton's reckless decision to publish the Pamphlet, calling it ill-judged and degrading. The political press of opposition parties, especially the Republicans, published story after story mocking Hamilton as having little else on his mind than his sexual adventures. In correspondence with other Virginia politicians, the circumspect Jefferson said that Hamilton's "willingness to plead guilty to adultery seem[ed] rather to have strengthened than weakened the suspicions that he was in truth guilty of the speculations." Madison's reaction was more perceptive: "The publication [...] is a curious specimen of the ingenious folly of its author. Next to the error of publishing it at all is that of forgetting that simplicity and candor are the only dress which prudence would put on innocence".[35]

Overall, Hamilton's mission to clear his name of the corruption allegations merely led him down a road of further ridicule in the public eye and gave his opponents fuel to continuously tear down his accomplishments within the American government.

Conclusion

Even though Hamilton's arguments in the pamphlet are sound, his version of what transpired seems suspect. Why would one of the most powerful men in the United States of America be seduced by a woman who simply appeared at his house one night? The sequence of events of the Reynolds Affair lends to the suspicion that the politician told a version of the truth in which he remained as honorable as possible. Hamilton's greatest pride lay with the honorable and moral reputation that he had developed over the years. He had many enemies in Congress and the federal government, but he was always known to accomplish his goals and responsibilities with good intentions. His dedication to public service was undeniable and the love he had for his country was unparalleled. The thought that an accusation of corruption could bring all of these accomplishments tumbling down was more terrifying to Hamilton than anything else which he could imagine. Even with the power he amassed, Hamilton always felt like the little boy from the West Indies who needed to prove his value to society.

Throughout his political career, Alexander Hamilton had one priority: his legacy. Throughout his childhood, Hamilton prayed for a chance to pull himself out of the gutter and escape to the British colonies to make his name. A young man of many gifts, Hamilton was able to work his way through college and establish himself as part of the New York and New Jersey elite. Just as Hamilton had predicted in his youth, the Revolutionary War arrived, which carried him to the top ranks of the American military. All of the decisions Hamilton made throughout his life, including his choice to publish the Reynolds Pamphlet, were based on the ultimate goal of cementing his place in history. The prioritization of his political career above his wife and family is made plain by his decision to expose his affair to the world. He could not stomach the idea that his honor could be destroyed by those he viewed as beneath him.

Following the Reynolds Affair, Hamilton's political opponents wasted no time attempting to dismantle his reputation, which continued after his death. Many of his adversaries tried to diminish his role within the Early Republic and denied his instrumental role in establishing the United States government as it is known today. His wife Eliza, however, made it her life's mission to ensure that he husband's legacy remained intact. After Hamilton's death, she commissioned multiple biographers to write the story of her husband's life.[36] Despite everything that she had been through, despite the shame and the humiliation, Elizabeth Schuyler loved Alexander Hamilton until the day she died. In the end, Hamilton's legacy was preserved through the woman that he had wronged.

[34] Trees, *The Founding Fathers and the Politics of Character*, 48.

[35] Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 535.

[36] Ibid., 2.