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Alexander Hamilton as Immigrant

Musical Mythology Meets Federalist Reality

— ◆ —

PHILLIP W. MAGNESS

A Hamiltonian revival is currently under way in American politics, exhibiting both a resurgence of interest in the life of the first U.S. Treasury secretary and, to some degree, a renewed enthusiasm for his peculiar brand of economic nationalism. Celebratory biographical depictions have played no small role in this pattern, with Lin-Manuel Miranda's hit Broadway musical *Hamilton* serving as a prominent popularizer of Alexander Hamilton's life story. Miranda's depiction falls short of hagiography, displaying certain complexities of his notoriously quarrelsome yet politically industrious lead character. The musical is nonetheless an endorsement of its subject matter against his contemporaries and a contributing factor to Alexander Hamilton's ongoing rehabilitation.

Miranda notably uses his production to cultivate a laudatory personal dimension in his portrayal of its historical subject matter. Throughout the production, he emphasizes the story of Hamilton as a self-made immigrant who rose to political preeminence despite his own low birth. The immigrant Hamilton, born out of wedlock on the Caribbean island of Nevis, stands in marked contrast to his high-born rivals Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and Aaron Burr, each of them descendants of old Virginia and New England aristocracy. Hamilton's comparatively low status

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becomes a source of his internal drive and the results that follow. His background story emerges as a mechanism to introduce adversity into the plot, which Hamilton ultimately conquers through self-reliance rather than through the inherited privileges held by his main adversarial peers. The very basis of praise for Hamilton's character is derivative of and contingent upon his being a bastard immigrant in a world disposed to high-born inheritance.

The resulting production is a shockingly rose-colored depiction of Hamilton's immigrant identity that politely and carelessly overlooks several uglier dimensions of Hamilton's views on nationality and birth status. In particular, the musical sidesteps his assumption of a deeply nationalistic and elitist political outlook by the end of his life. The historical Alexander Hamilton made a number of outwardly baffling yet thoroughly attested turns against the same liberal immigration beliefs that Miranda seeks to illustrate with his character. From the early 1790s until his death in 1804, Hamilton's politics were marred by his alarmingly habitual deployment of nativist character attacks upon his own foreign-born political opponents. By the end of his life, his political beliefs actually placed him among the leading advocates of immigration restrictions in the Founding generation.

The resulting portrayal services a broad mythology as the primary basis for extending acclaim to its titular subject matter. As a stage production, the musical necessarily employs artistic license with its subject matter. Given the prominence of the immigrant theme to the story it tells, its factual oversights cultivate a deeply problematic historical image of Hamilton that scholars of the Founding era will likely have to contend with—and correct—for many decades to come.

The Hamilton Immigrant Legend

The immigrant dimension of Miranda's Hamilton enters the audience's consciousness in the musical's opening scene and remains a central point of reference until the curtain is closed. In the title song, the eventual killer of Hamilton, Aaron Burr, announces Hamilton's arrival in New York City from the hurricane-ravaged Caribbean:

BURR: The ship is in the harbor now

See if you can spot him.

MEN: Just you wait.

BURR: Another immigrant

Comin' up from the bottom.

COMPANY: Just you wait.

BURR: His enemies destroyed his rep

America forgot him.

(Miranda and McCarter 2016, 17).¹

1. Quotes from the musical come from a later work put together by Lin-Manuel Miranda and Jeremy McCarter, *Hamilton: The Revolution* (2016), which I subsequently cite by page number only.

Though Hamilton was technically an internal migrant of the British Empire, his self-made “immigrant” status is repeatedly put forth in the musical as a defining characteristic of his life as well as a primary virtue of his legacy. The references to this status are numerous and persist throughout the production. In the moment of American triumph at the battle of Yorktown, Hamilton joins the Marquis de Lafayette in chorus to announce “Immigrants: We get the job done!” (121). Hamilton’s place of birth becomes a differentiating point between him and his political adversaries.

Aaron Burr, himself the scion of old New England Puritan stock, makes use of every opportunity to remind the audience of his rival’s low birth, making it a major plot device for the tension between the two characters. Hamilton is accordingly introduced as the “bastard orphan, immigrant decorated war vet” (152) upon his appointment as secretary of the Treasury. When Hamilton enters into the “room where it happens” to confer with George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, an increasingly jealous and excluded Burr reminds the audience, as if for a punchline setup, that “[t]wo Virginians and an immigrant walk into a room.” In testament to Hamilton’s negotiating skill, Burr grouses, “The immigrant emerges with unprecedented financial power / A system he can shape however he wants” (186).

As Hamilton’s relationship with the other characters assumes an increasingly adversarial role, his political opponents quickly seize on his birth as a point of detraction, derision, and even dismissal. In one chorus, Burr, Jefferson, and Madison register their disdain:

Oh!
 This immigrant isn’t somebody we chose.
 Oh!
 This immigrant’s keeping us all on our toes. (200)

In the play’s depiction of Hamilton’s confrontation over the Maria Reynolds sex scandal, Burr announces his suspicions of “[a]n immigrant embezzling our government funds” (229). When Hamilton tilts the presidential election of 1800 toward his longtime rival Thomas Jefferson over Burr, the latter can similarly only stomp around in disgust at the actions of this “immigrant, orphan, bastard, whoreson” (266).

On the precipice of the famous duel that ends his life, Alexander Hamilton is given the final word on the meaning of immigrant identity, bringing full clarity to Miranda’s intended message. Hamilton dreams of a legacy in which other refugees, migrants, and low-born persons might come to enjoy the promises of self-made success in the country he helped to found:

It’s planting seeds in a garden you never get to see.
 I wrote some notes at the beginning of a song someone will sing for me.
 America, you great unfinished symphony, you sent for me.
 You let me make a difference.

A place where even orphan immigrants can leave their fingerprints
and rise up.

I'm running out of time. I'm running, and my time's up. (274)

Hamilton and Immigration as History

The musical's concluding sentiments attach an appealing lesson to the title character's life. As biography, though, the celebration of Hamilton's migrant story obscures the darker reality of his political career. Measured in three dimensions—his use of political attacks on immigrant contemporaries, his role in the Alien and Sedition Acts, and his adoption of an aggressive anti-immigration position at the outset of the Jefferson presidency—Alexander Hamilton's political career might legitimately be characterized as a sustained drift into nationalistic xenophobia. To witness an anti-immigrant turn in the beliefs and political actions of a prominent immigrant is both ironic and tragic, yet it also historically tempers the celebratory acclaim that often accompanies mistaken beliefs about this same feature of his life.

In late 1801, Thomas Jefferson asked Congress to revise the U.S. immigration laws, which at the time imposed an onerous fourteen-year waiting period upon naturalization. Jefferson's own position mirrored that which Miranda incorrectly ascribes to Hamilton, as seen in the third president's plea, "Shall oppressed humanity find no asylum on this globe?" (Jefferson 1854, 14). Writing pseudonymously in his co-owned newspaper the *New York Evening Post*, Hamilton raged at the suggestion:

The impolicy of admitting foreigners to an immediate and unreserved participation in the right of suffrage, or in the sovereignty of a Republic, is as much a received axiom as any thing in the science of politics, and is verified by the experience of all ages. Among other instances, it is known, that hardly any thing contributed more to the downfall of Rome, than her precipitate communication of the privileges of citizenship to the inhabitants of Italy at large. And how terribly was Syracuse scourged by perpetual seditions, when, after the overthrow of the tyrants, a great number of foreigners were suddenly admitted to the rights of citizenship? Not only does ancient but modern, and even domestic history furnish evidence of what may be expected from the dispositions of foreigners, when they get too early footing in a country.²

Hamilton's aggressive stance carried no small irony given his own background, and his adversaries in the political world of the early 1800s seldom hesitated to remind him of that fact. It also marked a stark reversal in his own views. A little more than a decade earlier, Hamilton had used his perch in the Treasury Department to lend

2. *The Examination* 7 (January 7, 1802), in Hamilton 2011, 25:491.

support to a relatively liberal immigration policy for the fledgling republic. In his famous *Report on Manufactures* in 1791, he had called on Congress to recruit and subsidize the “emigration of artists, and manufacturers in particular branches of extraordinary importance” to the United States and to adopt measures to encourage an inflow of population. He soured on immigration not long thereafter, however, and largely for reasons of political animosity.

Hamilton likely began resorting to antforeigner posturing during the political fallout from the Whiskey Rebellion—a revolt against his federal excise tax system in the western counties of Pennsylvania. Hamilton championed an aggressive federal response, consisting of judicial indictments against some sixty nonpaying distillers that would drag them across the state to a federal courtroom in Philadelphia. As federal warrants for the tax evaders were announced, Pennsylvania congressman William Findley moved to deescalate the situation with a bill to transfer their cases into the local courtrooms of the state judicial system. The ensuing events remain controversial among historians, with Hamilton’s critics contending that he pushed to issue the summonses to Philadelphia’s courtroom, despite the passing of Findley’s bill, for the purpose of provoking an armed confrontation that would consolidate and strengthen the federal government’s power. Regardless of his true intentions, the service of the Philadelphia subpoenas pushed the tax resisters into armed revolt and elicited George Washington to call up the militia in response. The whiskey rebels’ ragtag army collapsed with little resistance by the end of October 1794 in the face of Washington’s military advance, though the federal government also backed away from its efforts to enforce the majority of the tax-evasion warrants.

The Whiskey Rebellion’s political legacy is sidestepped in Miranda’s musical even as it remains a controversial feature of the historical Hamilton’s larger political agenda. With respect to his disposition toward foreigners, though, it forged a lingering and deeply personal animosity between him and the Irish-born Findley. Curiously, both men shared a common background. Like Hamilton, Findley had immigrated within the British Empire to North America as a young man, served in the revolution, and had entered politics, albeit as an antirratification delegate at Pennsylvania’s state convention on the Constitution of 1787. Amid their contending positions in the whiskey dispute, Findley charged Hamilton with intentionally inflaming the tax resistance with the Philadelphia warrants to provoke a desired military confrontation. Hamilton responded, curiously, by assailing Findley’s place of birth as a reason to question the Pennsylvania congressman’s motives.

In 1796, Findley recorded Hamilton’s berating of him for the “crime” of offering to mediate with persons deemed “traitors” by the Federalists in the national government. As Findley recalled, Hamilton “expressed much surprise and indignation at” the tax resisters for “reposing so much confidence in foreigners.” Hamilton then charged that “Gallatin and I were both foreigners and therefore not to be trusted,” expanding his attack to Pennsylvania’s Swiss-born U.S. senator Albert Gallatin, who similarly supported Findley’s de-escalation efforts (Findley 1796, 243).

Gallatin's own immigration status was a long-standing bugaboo for the Federalist Party, which used his foreign birth to block his continuance in the Senate even though his presence in the United States dated to the early 1780s. Findley's case is even more striking, though, because he arrived in North America in 1763, preceding not only American independence but also Hamilton's own arrival by a decade. Findley recorded Hamilton's continued intransigence at being reminded of these facts: "When it was answered, that I had been in the country from my youth, &c. and that Mr. Gallatin had come into it very young and had been a citizen a competent length of time, to be legally qualified for trust, that we were both sensible men, and had a sufficient stake in the country, to secure our interest, he persisted in saying, that we were bad hearted men and dishonest politicians" (Findley 1796, 243). The entire exchange made for a stunning display of Hamilton's cognitive dissonance, and Findley immediately recognized as much: "To those who know the Secretary's own history, his objecting to a man for being a foreigner" was nothing short of astonishing (Findley 1796, 245).

Such antiforeigner outbursts became an oddly common feature of Hamilton's political feuds with the Democratic-Republican opposition in the late 1790s. The fallout from the French Revolution, to which some Jeffersonians had lent their early sympathies, provided a recurring occasion for the Federalists to stoke nativist politics. Calling up the specter of the Jacobin terror in Paris and linking the Jacobins to more proximate diplomatic machinations in the United States over the status of Edmond-Charles Genet, Hamilton was able to cultivate a growing political belief that foreign-born persons posed an imminent threat to the domestic security of the United States.

Nativist sentiments reached a fever pitch in the summer of 1798 against the backdrop of the undeclared naval "quasi-war" with France. With majorities in Congress, the Federalist Party adopted a four-part legislative package known as the Alien and Sedition Acts to forestall the emergence of alleged "subversive" movements on the American home front. The package is known today mostly for its notorious Sedition Act, a measure of dubious constitutionality that allowed the imprisonment and prosecution of opposition newspaper editors who published content maligning the Federalist administration of John Adams. The package's other three components concerned themselves with the matter of immigrants to the United States and foreign-born persons residing on U.S. soil. The Naturalization Act established the aforementioned fourteen-year residency period for obtaining American citizenship, nearly tripling the existing five-year requirement. The Alien Enemies Act established sweeping federal powers to imprison or forcibly deport noncitizens who hailed from any country with which the United States was in a declared state of war—a provision that potentially included long-term residents, who lost their naturalization status to the newly required fourteen-year waiting period. The Alien Friends Act granted the president sweeping authority in times of peace to order the detention or deportation of any foreigner he deemed "hostile" to the United States and to impose restrictions on the duration that specific foreigners could remain in the country.

John Adams signed the measures into law somewhat hesitantly, following Congress's lead in their creation. They continue to rank among the major blemishes of his presidential legacy, although Adams proved personally reluctant to deploy the powers granted to him in the Alien Friends Act. This discretionary restraint, exercised against his cabinet's prodding, almost single-handedly constrained what was otherwise the most far-reaching of the anti-immigrant provisions.

Miranda's musical avoids the touchy subject matter of Hamilton's involvement in the Alien and Sedition Acts. It is not difficult to see that this avoidance, though ultimately an artistic decision, follows from Hamilton biographer Ron Chernow on this point. Chernow's largely celebratory biography goes to extreme lengths to cast Hamilton's support for the Alien and Sedition Acts as a regrettable position that he acquiesced to with "tacit approval" only to maintain Federalist Party unity. The real culprits, Chernow maintains, were unnamed persons in the "Federalist-dominated Congress during his tenure" and, curiously, Adams for allowing the blunderous package through despite his later disavowals of responsibility (2005, 571). Chernow's assessment is an intended retort to Adams himself, who bitterly placed the blame for the Alien and Sedition measures squarely on Hamilton's political scheming.

Later in life, Adams repeatedly identified Hamilton as the acts' progenitor and implied that Hamilton guided the measures through Congress, forcing them upon Adams's desk at a time when deteriorating relations with France prompted his acquiescence to a signature. Adams spoke of the entire episode with bitterness and contempt for Hamilton's role. Writing privately to Benjamin Rush in 1806, he tore into "Hamilton's projects of raising an army of fifty thousand men . . . and his projects of sedition Laws and Alien Laws and of new taxes to support his army"—all products, he mused, of "a superabundance of secretions which he could not find whores enough to draw off."³ Adams made reference to a claimed memorandum in 1797 in which Hamilton reportedly laid out the entire scheme, though this document no longer exists.⁴ Substantial portions of Hamilton's papers were lost or destroyed after his death, though, making this memo's absence from his surviving works a weak argument against Adams's recollection.

Hamilton's fingerprints are thoroughly visible in the congressional adoption of the Alien and Sedition Acts. Congress drafted the measures in early 1798 and brought them up for votes in late June and early July. On March 25, Speaker of the House Jonathan Dayton wrote Hamilton in a now lost letter that likely informed him of the status of the measures and solicited his approval of their text. Hamilton's surviving

3. John Adams to Benjamin Rush, November 11, 1806, in Biddle 1892, 118.

4. Adams referred to this memorandum repeatedly in his private correspondence, describing it again to Rush as a "Letter which produced the Army, the Sedition Law &c., in which he [Hamilton] recommends an Army of fifty thousand men, ten thousand of them Horse." The recurring specificity of detail as well as Adams's apparent belief that the document would soon be published in an anticipated biography of Hamilton in 1808 lend credence to the authenticity of his claim. The memorandum has never been found, though, suggesting it was lost with the destruction of a large number of Hamilton's personal papers after his death. See Adams to Rush, June 23, 1807, and July 25, 1808, in Biddle 1892, 148, 189–90.

reply signaled his specific approval of the immigration measures. “I agree that the President ought to have power to send out of the country suspected foreigners,” he answered Dayton, noting only that the law should provide an exception for “merchants who have six months by Treaty.” Hamilton further consented that “the suspension of the naturalization act will also be prudent”—a reference to the existing five-year residency requirement that the Federalists wished to extend to fourteen years. “I always wished that our naturalization acts had distinguished between the right to hold property & political privileges,” he added.⁵

Hamilton monitored the bills’ progress as they advanced toward a vote. On June 7, 1798, he appended a short note to Secretary of State Timothy Pickering to a longer inquiry about reports of a British frigate operating near Charleston. “If an alien Bill passes I should like to know what policy in execution is likely to govern the *Executive*.” Pickering was one of Hamilton’s primary loyalists on the Adams cabinet and had involved himself in guiding the measures through Congress. Hamilton offered his opinion that “the mass ought to be obliged to leave the Country” under the Alien Acts, though he urged Pickering to clarify the exemptions for merchant treaties and include “exceptions of characters whose situations would expose them too much if sent away & whose demeanour among us has been unexceptionable.” Neither should the bills be “cruel or violent.”⁶ Pickering offered assurances that these concerns would be seen to: “I wish they may really provide for the public safety.”⁷

Hamilton’s surviving letters actually reveal his stronger support for the immigration measures than for the more famous Sedition Act. When the latter was up for consideration, he wrote a hasty letter to Adams’s Treasury secretary Oliver Wolcott, noting its “highly exceptionable” provisions and expressing concern that they “may endanger civil War.”⁸ It is difficult to determine the precise objections from the short letter, and Hamilton indicated he would convey them verbally the following day. Although several historians have read into this letter his misgivings about the entire package, this is clearly not the case.⁹ Hamilton had already informed Dayton and Pickering by this point that he approved of the alien and naturalization measures, and he confined the aforementioned comments only to the sedition bill’s text as reported in the newspapers.

When Adams signed the Alien and Sedition Acts in late June and July, Hamilton began pressing for their use, including on political lines against his old “foreigner”

5. Alexander Hamilton to Jonathan Dayton, March 30, 1798, in Hamilton 2011, 27:17.

6. Hamilton to Timothy Pickering, June 7, 1798, in Hamilton 2011, 21:495.

7. Pickering to Hamilton, June 9, 1798, in Hamilton 2011, 21:501.

8. Hamilton to Oliver Wolcott, June 29, 1798, in Hamilton 2011, 21:522.

9. Casual efforts to absolve Hamilton entirely of responsibility for the Alien and Sedition Acts are a long-standing feature of the biographical literature and persist in the present day, as in Chernow 2005. James M. Smith (1954a) showed more than half a century ago, though, that these conclusions are reached from a deeply incomplete engagement of the historical evidence.

enemies. The administration deployed the sedition laws against a handful of newspaper editors, though Adams proved reluctant to use the deportation powers of the Alien Friends Act and rebuffed prodding from Pickering to extend the act's powers to the State Department (Smith 1954b).

Both the Jeffersonian outrage over the Alien and Sedition Acts and John Adams's negotiated de-escalation of the Quasi War severely strained Hamilton's political agenda. By late 1799, he could hardly conceal his anger that the deportation provisions were being underutilized. "But what avail laws which are not executed?" he complained rhetorically to Dayton. He directed specific ire against two anti-Federalist newspaper editors—the Irish-born John D. Burk and the Scot James T. Callender, the latter of whom had been responsible for publicizing Hamilton's sexual affair with Maria Reynolds some two years earlier. Railing to Dayton, he openly wondered why Adams did not act to expel these men from American soil: "Renegade Aliens conduct more than one of the most incendiary presses in the U. States—and yet in open contempt and defiance of the laws they are permitted to continue their destructive labours. Why are they not sent away? Are laws of this kind passed merely to excite odium and remain a dead letter? Vigour in the Executive is at least as necessary as in the legislative branch. If the President requires to be stimulated those who can approach him ought to do it."¹⁰

A recurring feature of Hamilton's engagement with these and other political adversaries is not simply the illiberal nature of his position but also his insinuation of foreign political allegiances. Hamilton trumpeted an unabashed nationalism when mounting his defense of the Alien and Sedition Acts, and immigrant status served as his delineation point for "security." These features are consistent with his anger over the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, which lodged formal protest against the measures on constitutional grounds. It is "probably the intention of these proceedings," Hamilton countered, "to encourage a hostile foreign power to decline accommodation and proceed in hostility. The Government must [no]t merely [de]fend itself [bu]t must attack and arraign its enemies." In crafting a congressional response, he urged his Federalist colleagues to differentiate the people of Virginia from their political "Chiefs"—that is, Jefferson and Madison—charging that the latter group sought only "to expose [the people] to the enterprises of a foreign power." Concluding, Hamilton saw no cause for the repeal of the alien and sedition laws, though he conceded they might fairly be amended to strengthen their "precautions against abuse."¹¹

Invoking France and the French Revolution became one of Hamilton's favorite rhetorical tools, usually to paint opponents with the imagery of a radical foreign danger. During the election campaign of 1800, he charged the Democratic-Republicans

10. Hamilton to Dayton, c. October or November 1799, in Hamilton 2011, 23:599.

11. Hamilton to Theodore Sedgwick, February 2, 1799, in Hamilton 2011, 22:452.

with seeking to import “Revolution after the manner of Buonaparte.”¹² In 1802, he denounced two entire congressional districts in New York for being “absorbed in Jacobinism.”¹³ In 1803, he denounced a pending New York Assembly bill to expand suffrage rights as “a jacobin scheme, and averred that property was unsafe where republicans ruled.”¹⁴ The immigrant “threat” always lurked behind these charged attacks, whether Hamilton was invoking the Reign of Terror from a decade earlier and a continent away or assailing democratization of the franchise.

Hamilton remained aware of and late in his life was even defensive about his own origins, responding in self-deprecation regarding the “dark work of the *alien* Secretary of the Treasury” after Adams derided him as “a Bastard, and as much a foreigner as Gallatin.”¹⁵ Yet he almost immediately reverted to his pattern of attacking his adversaries on account of their birth. When Jefferson named Gallatin his secretary of the Treasury, Hamilton resumed his assault on the Swiss-born politician’s origin, impugned his nationality as a source of malevolent intentions, and bombastically likened him to Napoleon Bonaparte on account of nothing more than their respective foreign births: “Who wields the sceptre of France, and has erected a Despotism on the ruins of a Republic? A foreigner. Who rules the councils of our own ill-fated, unhappy country? . . . *A foreigner!*”¹⁶

Time and again, politics proved to be Hamilton’s Achilles’ heel on matters of immigration and foreigners. With the Whiskey Rebellion, the Alien Acts, and his final criticism of the Jefferson administration, his own immigrant story took a subordinate position to the utility he derived from crude nativistic political appeals. In the last example given in the previous paragraph, he went on to charge Jefferson with opening his cabinet to nefarious foreign influences, with inviting the political extinction of Anglo North America along the same lines that “savages of the wilderness” had been displaced by the Americans’ own forefathers, and even with effectively stealing the election of 1800 through importation of immigrant voters.¹⁷

In stark contrast with the musical’s concluding scene, Alexander Hamilton died with a profoundly pessimistic outlook where immigration to the United States was concerned. He deployed his newspaper’s editorial weight to block the repeal of the Naturalization Act, but without success. Hamilton’s final word on the subject expressed his deep anxieties about an immigrant boom in the wake of Jefferson’s policy. “In the infancy of the country, with a boundless waste to people, it was politic to give a facility to naturalization,” he observed, “but our situation is now changed.”

12. Hamilton to John Jay, May 7, 1800, in Hamilton 2011, 24:465.

13. “Speech on a Congressional Election,” April 21, 1802, in Hamilton 2011, 25:610.

14. “Speech to the Federalist Nominating Convention,” in Hamilton 2011, 26:115.

15. “Letter from Alexander Hamilton, Concerning the Public Conduct and Character of John Adams, Esq. President of the United States,” October 24, 1800, in Hamilton 2011, 25:202, emphasis in original.

16. *The Examination* 7 (January 7, 1802), in Hamilton 2011, 25:495, emphasis in original.

17. *Ibid.*

With a population increase of approximately one-third between the 1790 and 1800 census, he commented, “it will be quite apparent that the natural progress of our own population is sufficiently rapid for strength, security and settlement.” Hamilton stopped himself short of calling for a prohibition of foreigners, angling instead for a position that carefully regulated the inflow of persons in which five years might represent a minimum restriction. “But there is a wide difference between closing the door altogether and throwing it entirely open; between a postponement of fourteen years and an immediate admission to all the rights of citizenship. Some reasonable term ought to be allowed to enable aliens to get rid of foreign and acquire American attachments; to learn the principles and imbibe the spirit of our government; and to admit of at least a probability of their feeling a real interest in our affairs.”¹⁸

Hamilton lost that particular fight. On April 14, 1802, Jefferson signed a new immigration law restoring the previous five-year residency requirement. Two years later Congress supplemented the measure with further corrective legislation to exempt those immigrants who came to the country during the Alien and Sedition Acts period from a residency-declaration requirement. These newly liberalized statutes remained the basis of American immigration policy until anti-Chinese and other outwardly xenophobic political movements produced a series of increasingly restrictive and prejudicial immigration laws in the 1870s.

For a brief historical moment, the United States withdrew from its anti-immigrant turn of 1798, but it was actually the bitter rivals of the “bastard orphan immigrant” who brought about this change. His party expelled from power and his own political reputation in decline, Alexander Hamilton could only watch helplessly as the immigration restrictions he helped to instigate in 1798 fell by the wayside. Defeated, the once optimistic immigrant looked at America’s future and could only see the foreboding signs that a decade of xenophobic political bickering had inculcated in him: “To admit foreigners indiscriminately to the rights of citizens, the moment they put foot in our country . . . would be nothing less, than to admit the Grecian Horse into the Citadel of our Liberty and Sovereignty.”¹⁹

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