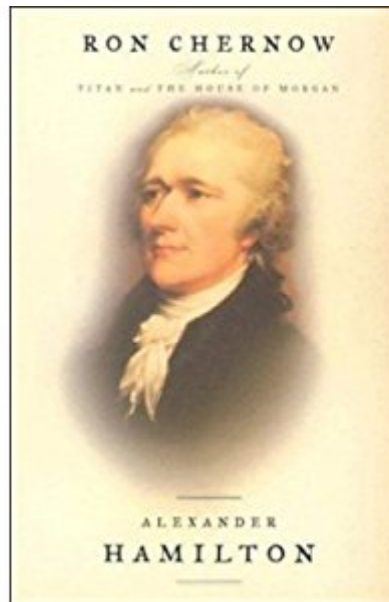


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# Alexander Hamilton



## Synopsis

Ron Chernow, whom the New York Times called "as elegant an architect of monumental histories as we've seen in decades", now brings to startling life the man who was arguably the most important figure in American history, who never attained the presidency, but who had a far more lasting impact than many who did. With masterful storytelling skills, Chernow presents the whole sweep of Hamilton's turbulent life: his exotic, brutal upbringing; his brilliant military, legal, and financial exploits; his titanic feuds with Jefferson, Madison, Adams, and Monroe; his illicit romances; and his famous death in a duel with Aaron Burr in July 1804. Alexander Hamilton was one of the seminal figures in our history. His richly dramatic saga, rendered in Chernow's vivid prose, is nothing less than a riveting account of America's founding, from the Revolutionary War to the rise of the first federal government.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

It's hard to add anything new to the praise other readers have offered here, but...1. This book is FUN to read. You will become emotionally involved with the people, and privy to their thoughts and motives. You will cheer for some and hope others lose. I'm reminded, in a way, of Puzo's The Godfather. The characters are at least as vivid.2. Although a couple of people here have given the book single star ratings, reflecting their own current political points of view, I find that the central antagonists of this book, Hamilton and Jefferson, cannot easily be fit into today's liberal and conservative ranks.3. Today's political junkies will find many of these 18th century battles

remarkably familiar, although there are no exact analogues to today's political players.<sup>4</sup> If you're like me, you won't be able to keep quiet about the book. You'll find yourself reading passages to your spouse and telling stories about Hamilton to your friends. This is a thoroughly involving book. It is long, yes, but so is a good NFL game with a couple of overtimes. Unless you're a scholar of the period, you'll learn a great deal about what made America what it is today. And you'll wish, at least for a moment, that you were alive when Hamilton was and that you could have shared a dinner with him.

This is an excellent biography on Alexander Hamilton, a formidable and sometimes controversial figure among our Founding Fathers. He is best known for being one of the main contributors to the Federalist Papers and being the first Secretary of the Treasury of the United States. There is a lot to like and be in awe about Alexander Hamilton. There is also quite a bit to dislike. Was he a visionary and a genius? Or a power hungry and greedy autocratic figure reminiscent of the British the U.S. fought away at the time. Through the past decades his place in history has gone through several incarnations of both positive and negative revisionism. Ron Chernow is undoubtedly on the sides of the Hamilton fan. However, even though his portrayal of Hamilton may not be totally objective. It is nevertheless fascinating due to its breadth, and depth. Hamilton comes across as a brilliant individual sometimes centuries ahead of his time. Chernow develops a convincing case that Hamilton was without peers in his developing the necessary financial and economic infrastructure of what was going to become the modern U.S. If Adam Smith was the Scottish genius who invented modern economics, Hamilton was his American counterpart who actually applied modern economics principles in the governing of a new nation. His understanding in such matters far surpassed his more famous political opponents such as Madison and Jefferson. Chernow mentions several examples of Hamilton's unique foresight. One was Hamilton's successful defeat of the discrimination bill. This was a nonsensical concept that proposed that capital gains on sales of treasury securities should flow back to the original investor. Hamilton quickly saw that such a concept was operationally unworkable and would prevent the development of a liquid market in tradable government securities. It would affect the U.S. ability to issue new bonds and finance both government operations and other upcoming wars. He made his case convincingly and the discrimination bill was defeated 36 to 13. Another bold move by Hamilton was to enforce the assumptions of all States' debt by the Federal Government. Thus, the fragmented portfolio of U.S. debt formerly backed by the weak credit of each specific State was now fully backed by the U.S. This reassured foreign investors, and allowed the Treasury to refinance some of the bonds with

much longer terms and at lower interest rates. This prevented the U.S. to become bankrupt under the mountain of debt it had amassed as a result of its wars to fight for its independence. After reading this book, you will feel that we would be only so lucky as to have a Secretary of the Treasury of Alexander Hamilton's caliber and genius. He loved to tackle challenging, abstract financial problems that few others could conceive. He would have been a heck of a mind to apply towards resolving our potential fiscal crisis associated with the retirement of the Baby Boomers. Chernow's book is a rich addition to the other already excellent biographies on Alexander Hamilton, including the ones written by Stephen Knott, Willard Sterne Randall, and Forest McDonald.

If I were able to give this book greater than 5 stars, I would. Here is why: Chernow writes a complete biography, which while covering an immense amount of ground, still manages to be thoroughly interesting and provide numerous anecdotes and tidbits of information. Though we all know the result, Chernow's treatment of the duel with Aaron Burr offers readers many "can not put the book down" moments which would explain the dark circles under my eyes one morning at work. Still more amazing is Chernow's attention to the the (until now) little talked about repercussions to the life of Aaron Burr (who was indicted for murder and on the lam while Vice President) and others around Hamilton including his seemingly amazing wife, Eliza. Besides being a supreme story on the life of the man who literally shaped this country's financial and trading system (despite strong opposition from Jefferson and his Federalist Paper co-hort Madison), Chernow reveals Hamilton's talents as an attorney and his exploits as a revolutionary war hero. What was also startling was how much Washington relied on Hamilton's talents and advice during the war and thereafter to the point where Washington began to view Hamilton as his equal. Further, Hamilton's push for the adoption of the US Constitution is clear despite opposition from many of those in this country including Jefferson himself who viewed this country as an agricultural society (which would have always doomed the US to always be Britain's dark sheep) and would have left the strongest powers with the states and not a central government. What was particularly amazing is how dirty and bruising politics was back in the late 18th and early 19th century. When reading about American History in school, the Founding Fathers always seemed like a fairly cohesive group which was above the rough and tumble of politics. To the extent that this exists in your head (as it did in mine), it is dispelled once and for all. Many of the attacks against Hamilton dealt with the fact that he was a "bastard" born in the West Indies. Some politicians also, without proof, sought to spread rumors that Hamilton was, in fact, part Creole. Chernow's book is expansive (going back in detail to Hamilton's childhood in the

West Indies to the death of his wife Eliza on the eve of the Civil War who survived him by nearly 50 years), yet concise and does not dwell on any part of Hamilton's life for too long; giving sufficient detail without overwhelming the reader. To me, it reads much like a fictional novel though it is packed with facts, details and quotations. All of Chernow's assertions and facts are seemingly backed up with authority. Indeed, one would have a hard time conjuring up a life as interesting as Hamilton's. He was clearly one of the brightest stars this nation ever had and we are all lucky that he decided to call America his home and lucky to have this biography to illustrate it so well. P.S.: Anyone who thinks Hamilton should be removed from the \$10 bill, should be required to read this book first.

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