Should we #CancelHamilton?

Discourse of the enslaved in the broadway musical *Hamilton*

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to examine how criticism of the Broadway musical *Hamilton* is received and argued about when it comes to the representation of certain characters. The overall research question is *How are discursive productions of historical retelling and identification created by the musical Hamilton?* and it will be answered by dividing the question to *How does the debate surrounding Hamilton affect discourses around enslavement and slave owners?* and *How does the musical represent women of colour?*. The material consists of seven Reddit threads, three articles and tweets. Theoretically, the thesis will analyse how the representation and identification of the musical is viewed and argued about by the audience. Additionally, queer feminist durationality and ambivalence will be used to understand how time and the colonialism affects the relation between the past and the present discourse of slavery. Methodically, the thesis is sectioned after three characters that are central in the debate, and will be analysed after Stuart Hall's writing on Michel Foucault's discourse. The conclusion shows that the musical affects certain historical discourses in how it chooses to represent slavery and which characters gets identified as slave owners, and by the historical Black enslaved woman who does not get represented at all.

Keywords: Hamilton, representation, identificiation, queer feminist durationality, ambivalence.

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1. Introduction

The hit musical *Hamilton* created by Lin-Manuel Miranda took the world by storm in 2015 and its popularity has only increased after the release of a professional movie recording in 2020. The show became known for continuously having a cast of almost exclusively people of colour, and yet again showed that a diverse representation of race is not only wanted, but necessary in cultural production. Recently hitting 1 billion dollars in global revenue, it is not hard to argue for the impact the musical has had both in the United States of America and internationally (Chmielewski 2020). Lin-Manuel Miranda has adapted the story of Alexander Hamilton, who has been named as one of the so-called 'Founding Fathers', to a hip-hop musical. While the focus lies on the rise and fall of this historic figure, the whole musical is imbued with an anti-slavery message. This has caused a discrepancy in relation to the historical facts of the actual people the musical brings to life affecting the history of enslavement in the United States, and in turn stating something about the current discourse in media.

The musical is placed in a special position by being based on historical people and by making a statement about racial representation both on the screen and in musical theatre. Since the opening of *Hamilton* a debate has been initiated about the issue of how the musical talks about enslavement, and after the release of the *Hamilton* movie, the hashtag #CancelHamilton was started. It raised questions about what happens when you turn history on its head. Is it reclaiming a history and changing the narrative, or is it hiding the truth, dishonouring the lives of those who were actual victims of enslavement? This thesis will look at the response to #CancelHamilton and analyse it through the analytical terms identification, durationality, ambivalence, and representation. In addition to this I will make use of historians' understanding of *Hamilton* to further understand what it means when history is represented in new ways. By looking at Black history through a lens of visual culture, I can gain an understanding of how discourses of the past are represented in the present. I take a poststructualist stance and look at an unstable debate on how *Hamilton* represents Black people and people of colour. A queer understanding of time is leading the thesis between the past and present, and an analysis of processes of identification is used to understand how representation affects the discourse of slavery. Postcolonial analysis is a central perspective for the thesis in its treatment of complex relations between the descendants of slave owners and the enslaved, creating ambivalence.

1.1 Purpose and research questions

The purpose of this thesis is to analyse the debate surrounding Hamilton and how it raises questions about historiography, colonial influences in culture, and how slavery is talked about both in the show and outside it in fan forums. I want to contribute by analysing discourses, and how people respond to negative criticism about how the musical handles historical interpretation, representation, and topics like enslavement. Hence my research question will be the following: *How are discursive productions of historical retelling and identification created by the musical Hamilton?*

I will answer my question by dividing it into two analytical questions that highlights the direction I want the question to take: *How does the debate surrounding Hamilton affect discourses around enslavement and slave owners?* and *How does the musical represent women of colour?*

1.2 Empirical material

Around July 2020, the hashtag #CancelHamilton appeared, reigniting debates that started when the musical premiered in 2015. Though the hashtag did not amount to its title, it gathered many responses in opposition to its purpose, and several articles were written on the subject. The material I have chosen to analyse is several posts from Reddit discussions concerning whether *Hamilton* should be cancelled or not, and articles from *NPR*, *Marie Claire*, and *Deseret*, which also engaged tweets about #CancelHamilton. The analysis is structured after three characters, Sally Hemings, Alexander Hamilton, and Thomas Jefferson, since they were the most mentioned in #CancelHamilton. Hence, the characters in themselves are part of the material and integral in order to answer my research questions.

Reddit is a platform in which you can create forums to dedicated subjects, ranging from everything to gardening, politics, and fandoms. I focused on a forum called Hamiltonmusical, which consists of about 95 000 members. Within the forum you can search for threads, and I found relevant material by searching terms like slavery, diversity, people of colour [poc], and #CancelHamilton. My previous knowledge about the debates about *Hamilton* helped me navigate these discussions. My main criteria for selecting what posts to include in my thesis was 1) discussions of casting and the diverse representation and 2) mentioning history, the

past or the present. All in all, seven Reddit threads are used in the analysis, which amounts to ca. 2 A4 pages. The three articles were chosen by searching #CancelHamilton, and one was mentioned by a Reddit user in their post. Some articles were rejected because they used the same material as other articles. The articles I chose were relevant in how they presented different arguments, and because they included tweets on the topic.

The delimitations of the material were mainly done in how I phrased the research questions and what was most frequently talked about in the material. I chose to focus on Black history and slavery because it was in the foreground of the debate, as well as very present in *Hamilton*. Latinx and Indiginious people have their own complex history and discourses which would require a thesis of its own. The historical people are regularly referenced in the discussions of the musical throughout the material. Therefore, historical contextualization will be provided as an addition for understanding how *Hamilton* represents their characters. The thesis will focus on how internet users look at the characters of the musical, but history is often used by them to argue about whether the musical is an accurate representation or not. Hence, I will make use of historical accounts in order to understand the arguments provided by the material.

2. Theoretical frameworks and previous research

The theoretical approach in this thesis is a mixture of visual culture, feminist, and postcolonial theory. With my research questions in mind, the theories are used against visual descriptors that are central in a debate of #CancelHamilton and the visual reimagination of history. For my section on previous research I have chosen to focus on other writings on *Hamilton*.

2.1 Representation

In this thesis, I will make use of Stuart Hall's theoretization of representation. Hall argues that things in themselves rarely have one fixed, single meaning. One way of how we give meaning to things is how we represent them, which can be what words we use about something, the associated emotions, how we conceptualize and categorize something, and what images we produce (Hall 1997a:3). Hall furthers this by explaining that language works as a system of representation, meaning we use it to express feelings, thoughts, and ideas in given cultural frameworks (1997a:4). He stresses that meaning evokes both negative and positive, powerful emotions which can put our identities in question. Meaning is inscribed with relations of power, which decides who belongs and who is excluded (1997a:10). Furthermore, Hall states two different meanings of representing: the first, is to depict or describe something that calls it to mind. The other is to symbolize, to stand for something (1997b:16). Another statement made by Hall suggests that the reader is as important as the writer when it comes to the production of meaning, for a meaning has to be interpreted or decoded by the receiver (1997b:33). Representation is a broad term with many ways of application and understanding. Hall's definition of representation is relevant to this thesis since it looks at power, but it also looks at the receiver's position when it comes to producing meaning. In this thesis, the audience of *Hamilton* is a central part of the material, and I argue that they create meaning in how they interpret how history is represented. I categorize the users as readers, and agree with Hall's suggestion that they are important in the production of meaning. Therefore will my usage of representation in the analysis focus on their readings of *Hamilton's* representation.

2.2 Identification and queer feminist durationality

Amelia Jones writes on the subject of seeing art in a different way, and how a feminist, queer way of looking at art can be used against a Western, binary way of thinking. Her book *Seeing Differently* is an acknowledgement of past histories of how we have constructed visuality and subjectivity (2012). Two terms of Jones will be used in the thesis to explore how identification can be a process which happens in the change of our historic visual culture. The first term is identification and Jones describes her book as a model to understand how identification is a reciprocal, ongoing, dynamic process that occurs among visual modes and viewers (Jones 2012:1). Identification differs from identity in that it rejects invisible apparatuses which puts forward a single correct interpretation (2012:225). Hence, identification aims to reject a binary way of thinking, which originally arose in the colonial enterprise of Europe (Jones 2012:6,29). The other term which will be used as an analytical tool is the concept of queer feminist durationality. Jones introduces the term as a potential for linking the interpretations of artworks between the present and the past. Interpretation and meaning-making is something that takes place over time, and it is therefore Jones suggests a durational way of understanding the revival of artistic ideas (Jones 2012:174). She explains the relation between queerness and the durational and why they are used together. Jones cites Carolyn Dinshaw who argues that queer has the possibility of collapsing time by the connection between marginalized people now and then. It can hence be understood as an anamorphic[1] concept (Jones 2012:175). Jones has written mostly about the subject as a way of seeing artworks, but I argue for musicals being an art form that works well with the term, even more so since *Hamilton* is a history musical. By embodying a story and producing it through creative outlets such as acting, dancing, and singing, art becomes alive. Jones' two theoretical terms are suitable for my analysis because they describe processes which involve interpretation and representation in a way that looks at the dynamics of time and identity.

2.3 Ambivalence

In order to understand *Hamilton* and its discourse as a topic within a postcolonial world, I will make use of Homi K Bhabha's explanation of ambivalence. Bhabha argues that ambivalence is what gives the colonial world its currency. It does so by changing historical and discursive notions and works with a concept of truth that is subject to change (Bhabha

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[1] In this context, anamorphic refers to the fact that queerness is used to understand art through a specific lens.

2004:895). Eda Ulus (2004) in "Workplace emotions in postcolonial spaces: enduring legacies, ambivalence, and subversion" does a reading of Bhabha that clarifies the meaning of the term. Ulus describes ambivalence as the experience of having both positive and negative emotions about something, and this might occur unconsciously (Ulus 2015:892). It is particularly used in postcolonial theory to examine complex feelings between the coloniser and the colonised. What Ulus remarks is that by exploring this unconscious process, for example identifying with an aggressor, it is a way to analyse psychological damage that has been made by colonialism (Ulus 2015:893). The usage of ambivalence in this thesis will follow identification and queer feminist durationality to understand how the postcolonial exists within discourses of slavery and how it is represented.

2.4 Relevance of theories

In this thesis Hall's theory of meaning and representation will be used to look at the relationship between what is represented, how the audience reads the representation, and what the representation symbolizes. The heart of the debate in #CancelHamilton is about whether it is right for Black people to portray white slave owners, and hence becomes a question of representation. In order to touch upon the relationship the audience has with the representation on stage, I will look at the identification. This term captures that dynamic process and can both be applied at an individual or collective basis, as well as affecting the reading of how something is represented. Queer feminist durationality is relevant not only in how it handles art in relation to time, but also in how queerness can disrupt hegemonic understandings of art. The application of queerness on a subject like slavery is rewarding due to the way it handles marginalization and distortes power. In order to fully be able to analyse the material, the term ambivalence is needed to understand the complex dynamics that colonialism has created by still influencing media and art.

2.5 Previous research on *Hamilton*

Due to its incredible popularity, *Hamilton* has become a subject of many academic articles. They explore musicality, politics, immigration and enslavement, and representation. My thesis will contribute to what has already been written about the musical in the sense that I will focus on how people react to the visual impact it has made by its casting choices in relation to time and identification. I provide a way of understanding of how history is represented and how the audience of *Hamilton* views this.

One author who focuses on the music of *Hamilton* in relation to race is Loren Kajikawa in her article "'Young, Scrappy, and Hungry': Hamilton, Hip Hop, and Race". Kajikawa discusses how the music in *Hamilton* "sounds a colorized US national identity by playing contemporary popular music—most often hip hop and R&B—against music coded as European and white" (Kajikawa 2018:470). The article takes up several songs and lyrical moments which indicate certain messages, while also addressing concerns regarding how the history of the real life figures are represented. Kajikawa takes into consideration the matter of how slavery is talked about in the musical, pointing out how Hamilton's opponent Thomas Jefferson are the only one who is singled out as a slave owner. This makes it seem like slavery is only mentioned when it can make the lead character Alexander Hamilton look good. This is in contrast to the references Kajikawa makes to the historian Edward Baptist who means that Alexander Hamilton's Federalist Party profited from slavery, and his creation of the Wall Street system provided the funds to expand the slavery business (2018:475). Kajikawa counters this by expressing how more fans of the show seem to be inspired by how *Hamilton* writes people of colour into the story of the Revolutionary War (2018:467). Quoting director Oskar Eustis "By telling the story of the founding of the country through the eyes of a bastard, immigrant orphan, told entirely by people of color, he is saying, 'This is our country. We get to lay claim to it'", Kajikawa puts emphasis on the reading of the show as an intervention to support marginalized groups in the USA (Kajikawa 2018:471). I hope to follow and engage Kajikawa's nuanced analysis, but what my thesis will do differently is also focusing on women's representation in the analysis. Due to the nature of the material discussing a musical, some lyrics will be relevant to include.

Elissa Harbert focuses her article "Hamilton and History Musicals" on *Hamilton*'s genre and how musicals handle the subject of history by both entertaining and educating the audience. Harbert structures her article by first considering where to place musicals on the spectrum between fictionalization and historical credibility. Then she considers the balance between theatricality and dramatic realism, before ending by discussing how composers of history musicals rely on modern-day music styles to engage the audience but use imitations of period music to establish a setting. By doing this, Harbert makes visible the "question of how popular entertainment genres use and change the past" (2018:413). Harbert also takes note of how history musicals are never solely about history, but are ways to make cultural commentary on the present day. Here she uses *Hamilton* as an example for how the act of

casting people of colour in the role of white historical figures makes a statement on inclusion and relations of race (Harbert 2018:414). Harbert links one of the musical's ways of discussing history with the repeated lyrics "Who lives, who dies, who tells your story?", proposing that this encourages the audience to think like historians and makes them aware of our position when we look back at the past (2018: 417). Miranda, the writer of the musical, based the musical on Ron Chernow's biography on Alexander Hamilton, and hired him to be a historical advisor, stating that he wanted historians to take the musical seriously (Harbert 2018:419). Harbert addresses some worries about how *Hamilton* handled history, quoting historian Joanne Freeman, who states that historians are concerned that the musical will set back the decades of scholarship that insists that America was not founded by elite white men. Freeman does point out however that the absence of a problematic past in the musical is part of its appeal, and a powerful message that reflects the current identity crisis of America (2018: 419). Harbert accounts for different ways of understanding how the format of a musical affects the presentation of different subjects, something this thesis will show by presenting different arguments and viewpoints of the audience. These tensions will be relevant in the analysis, and in the following chapter the material will treat aspects of Harbert's considerations concerning the musical's usage of history.

3. Method: representation and discourse

The analytical section of the thesis will be methodically divided into four sections, each examining arguments about #CancelHamilton that mentions the representation of three different characters, and which together in the conclusion will address the research questions. I position this thesis within a poststructuralist tradition. The thesis treats history and culture as unstable subjects. This does not mean that I question the history of slavery, but rather the way we use and understand history in the present. Readings of history are not predetermined, and change according to relations of power and time. As Stuart Hall argues, interpretations are followed by more interpretations, meaning the notion of a definite meaning is never finalized (Hall 1997b:42).

For the purpose of this thesis, I use Hall's account of Michel Foucault's discourse. Hall presents Foucault's term as a production of knowledge through language. Humans understand themselves in a certain way at different times in history, and discourse is a way to understand how the different productions of knowledge creates this understanding (Hall 1997b:43). Hall himself points out that Foucault uses representation in a much narrower way than his own usage of the word, and in this thesis representation is crucial to understand the material (Hall 1997b:42). It is one of the primary reasons why Hall's understanding of Foucault is chosen instead of going to the source material. Hall's description of discourse will be present in how I apply my theoretical terms to my material and in how I follow Foucault's approach to subject-positions: meaning I position the analysis after the subject which in this thesis this will be those who participate in the *Hamilton* debate (Hall 1997b:56). This thesis views the discussions on *Hamilton* as a way of producing knowledge in a cultural sphere about slavery and historical figures. I have chosen to use discourse as a methodological tool instead of a theoretical term because the theories I use are different ways of approaching a discursive production. My method of discourse will be implemented in how I utilize my theory on the material. I have done the analysis by focusing on the representation throughout the text. This was done by looking and presenting users' descriptions of characters and by historians accounts of the historical people. As Hall himself does in *The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power*, I use my method of discourse as a way to understand how a group of statements provides a way of talking about a particular kind of knowledge, and it turn, creates the truth of that knowledge and constructs the collection of statements as a topic (Hall 1992:291). This

means I look at text to see what meaning is created and what knowledge of history becomes constructed through Hall's (1997b) emphasis on representation.

3.1 Ethics

In my work with ethics, there have been many factors that have needed consideration when it came to gathering material online. I went from thinking that internet users have agency over what level of anonymity to have, to realising that my role as a researcher means that I have to protect their identity, especially since I have chosen not to reach out to each individual. In my analysis, I have chosen to work with chapter 2 on potential harm and anonymization from *The Ethics of Online Research: Volume 2*. In the chapter, Matthew L. Williams, Pete Burnap, Luke Sloan, Curtis Jessop and Hayley Lepps mentions different schools of thought about informed consents. I have chosen the one that considers data, in open spaces which does not require membership or passwords to take part of the content, to be in the public domain. For research purposes, this means I don't need informed consent from users (Williams et al. 2017:32). Matthew et al. discuss anonymity and the hardships social media brings with it. As shown by a study on social media users' thoughts on being used in research referenced by Matthew et al., over 90% of respondents answered that they would like to be anonymous in publications. This was understood by them as not having their name or username in the research (Williams et al. 2017:46). In my thesis, I will therefore be using codenames made up by me to give the users some anonymity. I have implemented this by simply calling them 'user' followed by a letter between A - I. Direct quotations can be traced back to its source using search engines, which makes complete anonymity impossible (Williams et al. 2017:33). Matthew et al. cites Annette Markham, who recommends altering quotes in order to prohibit digital means of finding the source (Williams et al. 2017:34). I followed this recommendation and changed the posts to anonymize them while still keeping the same sentiment and meaning the user intended.

3.2 Self-reflexivity

For this thesis it is imperative that I reflect on how my social position and identity influences what questions I ask the material, my literature and reading, and my analytical approach. As a genderqueer transgender man I have personal experiences of navigating situations where gender and sexuality are negotiated, and while this will not be central in my thesis, I use my

experiences as a way to understand my theories and method. As a white person there are perspectives I cannot provide; I do not have personal experiences of racism, nor the cultural context of being a person of colour. Experiences of being transgender and queer can not be equated to experiences of race and ethnicity, but it can share an understanding of being in a marginalized group. As a researcher approaching a subject of many nuances and power dynamics, I aim to assess how my position can both be an advantage but also how it will affect my analysis and conclusion. Power in the position of a researcher is dynamic and complex, and my post-structuralist position aligns with my aim to present my material and the conclusion as a result which provides one aspect of a complex picture when it comes to representing race. How I present the material and execute the analysis will affect how I represent the discourse of the enslaved. My background is both in art history and gender studies, and this has influenced my choice of topic, material, and theories. My understanding of my own position in relation to my research is influenced by both fields. My Swedish nationality means that I have an outsider's perspective of North American history, and I view this as an advantage. I do however have an advantage in my familiarity of the musical, as I have seen the movie twice and listened to the music.

3.3 Definitions

My thesis will be attentive in which terms and names I use when and where. The term 'people of colour/POC' will only be used for statements which can be applied to all people of colour, and when talking about specific experiences, opinions, etc. I will make sure to state whom it concerns.

Relevant to clarify in my thesis will be the way I use the term enslaved instead of slaves. Journalist Lindsey Norward interviewed several people on the meaning of the word, one being Dr Jamie Thomas, who means that using the word enslaved helps us acknowledge the life people had before being dehumanized. Dr Deborah Willis points out that the condition of the enslaved person is not a choice, and hence describing someone as a slave gives them that as an identity and informs how we think of their lives (Norward 2020). In the thesis, I will therefore use enslaved instead of slave when talking about those who have experienced being enslaved. I will however still use slavery and slave owner. One reason being that it is the words used by people in the empirical material and in the literature, and the other reason

being that the words as concepts are very loaded and I want the gravity of being a slave owner to come across.

Another clarification is the term Founding Fathers and the "founding of America". What I mean when I use those words is not implying that the United States was 'created' when it was split from British rule. Whether American or British, the country was stolen from its indigenious people. The usage of Founding Fathers and founding of the United States works here as a reference to the creation of the myth that is the start of another era in North American history.

4. Analysis

The first section will function as an introductory analysis and will touch more broadly upon the reception of #CancelHamilton and the musical overall. From there I will move on to analysing how Sally Hemings is perceived and work with the representation of women in the musical. Alexander Hamilton is then looked at before I move on to examine Thomas Jefferson. All three characters will be analysed through the chosen theoretical terms, which then will lead to an answer to my research questions in the conclusion.

4.1 Re-reading history

In my work with the material, three characters in the musical were clearly forthcoming and were the focus of arguments and debates about *Hamilton*. This has informed my research questions and in turn the structure of the analysis. One of these was about women in the musical and in particular Sally Hemings. In #CancelHamilton Hemings is the only woman who is mentioned regularly, but mostly in discussions of Thomas Jefferson. I found it necessary to delve deeper in the representation of Hemings in order to understand how she as a Black woman is portrayed and seen by the audience. The second section of the analysis will focus on Alexander Hamilton and the third section Thomas Jefferson since they are the most talked about when it comes to how slavery is represented in the musical. To contextualize these discussions, I shall look at some articles to gain an overview of #CancelHamilton.

Several articles have followed #CancelHamilton and tried to explain why it started and what arguments are being used both for and against the musical. Valerie Jones in "#CancelHamilton? Lin-Manuel Miranda speaks out after *Hamilton* faces heavy criticism for this issue" starts by stating that some people claim that the musical glorifies the Founding Fathers without properly showing what role they had in slavery. Jones inserts several tweets in her article, including a tweet Miranda himself responded to:

> *Hamilton* the play and the movie were given to us in two different worlds and our willingness to interrogate things in this way feels like a clear sign of change. I am late with the criticism of *Hamilton* and I am biased but I really like that this conversation is happening.

What the Twitter user refers to is the fact that the *Hamilton* movie awoke these conversations by being released five years after the play premiered, but it is unclear what 'two different'

worlds refers to. Is it the fact that Barack Obama was president when Hamilton started, and was a fan of the show, inviting them to perform at the White House, and later Donald Trump became president and criticised the show? Miranda responded by saying:

> Appreciate you so much. All the criticisms are valid. The sheer tonnage of complexities & failings of these people I couldn't get. Or wrestled with but cut. I took 6 years and fit as much as I could in a 2.5 hour musical. Did my best. It's all fair game.

Miranda positions himself as open towards criticism, but avoids responsibility by stating that he did his best. Jones cites Black feminist writer Roxana Gay, who tweeted she had a lot of thoughts on the way *Hamilton* idealizes the founders, and dangerously elides the realities of slavery. Gay also says that the show can handle critical engagement. By looking at the sheer amount of negative response to #CancelHamilton, it might be that while the show can handle it, the fans cannot. User A started a thread on Reddit exclaiming that *Hamilton* is anti-Black. They argue that it is insulting to Black culture to have Black actors play historical roles of people involved in slavery, and that surely it is not the only musical that Black actors can play in. They express that we live in 2021, and that someone should write a musical with a Black cast that doesn't involve slavery or racism. Furthermore, they mean that:

> In the musical, they frame Hamilton cheating on his wife as the worst thing, when in reality he traded slaves for his father. Because of slavery, millions of Black people's names and origins were completely destroyed. Families were ripped apart because of Hamilton. He doesn't need to be celebrated that much, none of the characters do. They were certainly kind of brave but there are lots of other idols you can worship that didn't have anything to do with slavery who helped shape America.

They raise an argument that there are other people we can celebrate that was not involved in slavery. The musical frames Alexander Hamilton's personal issues, but dismiss how many people were affected by slavery. User A also makes a point that Lin Manuel Miranda is not Black, but even if he was, it would be wrong since the musical does not have what they call a "legitimate conversation about slavery". They understand it as Miranda is whitewashing Black culture to make it enjoyable for white people, and to make rap music for those who don't listen to rap.

When it comes to the identification of *Hamilton*, there are some different ways in which the audience identifies themselves with the musical. A majority seem to think that it is wrong to identify Alexander Hamilton and other characters as slave owners, since they are identified as not white. It is argued that this creates a separation from the real slave owners. Some argue that because this was in the past, we can't measure their bad deeds to the same standard we have today. The fact that a racially diverse cast represents these figures means that it is not only about identity, but also about making a new interpretation. The viewer is in a process of identification, meaning they take active part in choosing and rejecting parts of the characters that are represented. This means that they can choose to identify with, for example, being black, with the personality showcased, with the singing, even the historical setting, but what they reject is the relation to slavery, treatment of women, and advancement in society that was only possible due to someone's gender and race. Questions that are raised in these conversations are what it means to reject certain parts of history. To interpret it in a new way? Is this identification process something that reclaims a past and gives people of colour the power to reshape it?

Historian Annette Gordon-Reed has an extensive bibliography on the topic of the Founding Fathers and slavery, and has critically commented on how the musical handles the topic. She mentions that only Jefferson is shown as a slave owner, even though George Washington and James Madison were as well. The musical is described as a simplification of history, and as more palatable to a modern audience. Gordon-Reed argues that while artists have the right to create, historians have the right to critique. She remarks that if anyone wants to know who the real Hamilton is, one should not look towards Broadway (Mineo 2016). Another Twitter user proclaimed that "That's why I don't look to art for my history. I study history". What is being put in question here is whether or not art has a responsibility to represent history in a certain way, or if art should have artistic license over how it uses history. This would imply that history as a subject should be separate from art to make sure that facts and research are credible. What must be considered here is the outreach both art and history possess. It is a logical estimate that more people know about the character Alexander Hamilton from the musical than from historical accounts, especially if we look at the younger generations. Music has another outreach than, say, the history of the United States. It then becomes an issue of what responsibility historical musicals have towards its audience.

4.2 Sally Hemings

Four women have both names and lines in the musical, one being Eliza Hamilton (who is married to Alexander), Angelica Schuyler (Eliza's sister and another love interest of Alexander), Maria Reynolds (Alexander's lover), and Peggy Schuyler (the sister of Eliza and Angelica). The two latter are played by the same actress. As for racial representation, Eliza is played by Chinese-American actress Philipa Soo, Angelica is played by African-American actress Renee Elise Goldsberry, and Maria/Peggy is played by American actress Jasmine Cephas Jones. In 2016, user B started a thread where they posted a critical review of *Hamilton*. While they wrote an extensive report that touched upon many areas of the musical, one part that stood out was how they wrote about the women's role in the musical, both on stage and off stage.

> They keep emphasizing throughout the musical that Hamilton was the "young, scrappy and hungry" "bastard son of a whore" "immigrant" who rises to be a Founder of a new nation by his wits and hard work. But I could not help thinking that if that bastard child of a whore was Black person, a woman or Native, their chances of social climbing in the United States in 1776 would have been non-existent, no matter how brilliant or hard working they were. In other words, much of Hamilton's success is owed to his racial and gender cultural entitlement, something that might have been considered important to point out in a musical that claims to be "revolutionary".

This quote from user B reflects how *Hamilton* positions Alexander Hamilton in the musical, which in turn makes a statement on how the women of the musical gets positioned in the story. User B points out that the musical attributes Alexander Hamilton's success of his intelligence and hard work, while also emphasizing things that are against him: his immigrant status[2], age, and being a "bastard". It is reminiscent of the American Dream: if you work hard enough, you can achieve your dreams and rise up. But as user B says, if this was a Black person, a Native or a woman, it would not matter how brilliant they were. The musical fails to make a statement on the fact that Hamilton could achieve everything he did thanks to his gender and race. They remind us that at the end of the musical, Hamilton is portrayed as a victim because history forgot about this so-called "immigrant bastard son of a whore". But is it true that a man who is memorialized on the $10 bill is a victim of history?

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[2] At that place and time many people were immigrants, it was more a question of where they came from. In the musical however, being an immigrant is portrayed with the meaning it has today.

The real victims of history are all the Natives, women, and Black people whose stories never get told and just included as props to our White Male Saviors. Who will tell their story?

User B states something important in that many marginalized groups don't get to tell their own story in the cultural sphere. They describe the women of the musical as obsessed with "sex, romance, keeping their man, or keeping him in line". They add song lyrics into their argument to understand how the women are portrayed; Eliza Hamilton sings that it would be enough if Alexander 'came home at the end of the day'. Angelica Schyuler is 'thankful to even have Alexander's eyes in her life'. Maria Reynolds begs Alexander to stay. As of the women backstage, they are described by user B**:**

If you read the program you will learn that the director, the writer, music supervisor, scenic designer, sound designer, choreographer, author of the book the musical is based on, costume designer, lighting designer, and even the wig designer are all male. *Hamilton* looks like a cliche example of the worst kind of gender exclusion. Women are literally an afterthought on stage and off.

How do you rewrite the representation of historical women when women are not there to create it? One woman who has awakened a lot of debates and criticism of *Hamilton* is Sally Hemings. The name Sally is mentioned once in the musical, and her name is continuously brought up in the criticism of *Hamilton*.

[JEFFERSON]
There's a letter on my desk from the President
Haven't even put my bags down yet
Sally be a lamb, darlin', won'tcha open it?

The representation of Sally Hemings in the musical is discussed both in terms of the character, the historical figure, and the casting choices made. User C describes how it was a dream come true to finally watch the original cast perform after listening to music. But in the song "What Did I Miss" when Jefferson asks Hemings to open his letter for him, they describe it as "She smiles. She dances sexily next to him. They practically rub butts. The actress is clearly depicted as being into him.". The user adds that Hemings was 16 years old in this scene, and Jefferson was 46, and that she was sexually abused, making Miranda's

depiction of her as a woman who is into him historically questionable. Hemings is not a casted character, but is temporarily played by one of the ensemble.[3] It is relevant to reflect on the fact that the only person mentioned who actually was a black woman is not given her own narrative, which is something the musical repeatedly argues should be given to those that are forgotten by history. Following Hall's argument that meaning is inscribed with relations of power, Hemings position as a minor character says something about her role. If representation is the production of meaning, what meaning was given to Hemings in the musical? The way the actor represents her is closer to the way historian Mia Bay describes how some people read Hemings and Jefferson's relationship as romantic (Bay 2010:191). But as user C says, Sally Hemings was not a fictional character, but an actual human person who was enslaved by Jefferson, a man who has been put on the 2 dollar bill. User C admits that they assumed the play was real due to being "based on a true story".

> I feel shameful for not listening to valid criticism for so long and I am heartbroken by this revelation. *Hamilton* has explicit sex slavery apologia, but it also ignores the slavery of our Founding Fathers, save Jefferson who is arbitrarily chosen as "the bad one". They also over emphasizes the extent to which Hamilton opposed slavery.

The one-line mention of Hemings in *Hamilton* does not voice the complexity of the matter, and arguably it erases the chance for Hemings own narrative. Who wants to identify as invisible Sally Hemings when you can identify with powerful, sassy Angelica, or the gentle, caring Eliza? The identification process is in a way formed by the musical, affecting who we see ourselves in. The audience celebrates the diversity of the cast, and according to Jones, identifying is a way of navigating art (Jones 2012:8). By visually seeing representation as a casting choice on the stage, an identification is created. In a way, the audience affects how the character is seen by continuously identifying and navigation their relationship with the character. This might be why Hemings has a minor part in the musical and is used as an argument by internet users to what the show does wrong. By not giving Hemings a proper representation, the identification by the audience cannot be developed.

Annette Gordon-Reed discusses the relationship Sally Hemings had with Jefferson, and the different interpretations on it made by both white and Black people (Gordon-Reed 2000: 173). Hemings was an enslaved woman on Jefferson's plantation; their relationship spanned

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[3] This is an observation of my own and merits further thought in future writings on *Hamilton.*

over 20 years, and she bore many of his children. Many white people have contested Jefferson's involvement with a Black woman, which many read as a hesitation to accept that a Founding Father was involved with a woman who wasn't white. Gordon-Reed proclaims that Black people view it as the very common procedure of the time that white slavers used enslaved people for sexual and emotional services. In 1998, a DNA test from Hemings and Jefferson's descendants showed that it was in fact true that they had children together (Gordon-Reed 2000:173). Gordon-Reed's article on the subject was released in 2000, which means that Hemings and Jefferson's relationship has become more documented today. What is debated now is rather the nature of the relationship, and whether an enslaved person can possibly consent in that situation. Mia Bay's extensive research discusses how the DNA results have been seen as evidence of a consensual relationship (Bay 2010:191-192). By seeing Hemings as a founding mother, it is possible to redeem Jefferson, and save his reputation. Bay asserts that at the time, enslaved African Americans had no right to think of themselves as individuals with autonomy, and a slave owner's sexual interest in enslaved women were more a matter of power than desire. Bay also argues that even if there was evidence of a relationship with love, it does not mean it is redemptive. As she states, love can coexist with brutal exercises of power, and "love may not redeem or deny slavery; it may not even change it" (Bay 2010:192). Furthermore, Bay notes that Hemings was about thirteen or fourteen years old when the sexual relationship began with Jefferson, who was in his mid-forties (2010:197).

Another Black woman you see on stage is the character of Angelica, who gets plenty of time on the stage. This contrasts against how the Black historical woman who was a real person is represented. This says something about how time has affected how we visually represented Black people in the past in difference to how we represent today. Contemporary representations are not bound by "accuracy". We have artistic license, and both the power and means to create visual narratives that previously were lacking. As Jones stated, in order for marginalized people to connect visually to a past (most often taken by colonizers) time needs to be collapsed. Queer feminist durationality in this context emphasizes the way in which media today navigates the representation of people of colour. *Hamilton* is complex in its choice of who it represents, and when looking at the criticism, it is not that *Hamilton* does wrong in how it distorts time, but in the choices it does within that unique opportunity to uplift the history of Black women. Sally Hemings accentuates where *Hamilton* fails to acknowledge the lived experience of a Black woman who was present in the times of

Jefferson, Hamilton, and Washington. This is where the representation of women of colour leads to a moment of ambivalence. Bhabha argues for colonialism changing historical notions and changing truth (Bhabha 2004:95). *Hamilton* can be seen as changing history, but it does so in order to make a statement against white history. It creates a complex relation where the act of rewriting history has several consequences. The criticism of *Hamilton* about how Sally Hemings is represented is a way to understand the ambivalence the show creates. By mentioning Hemings name, she is put into existence in the universe of the musical, and by casting a Black woman as Angelica Schuyler, the audience has at least one Black woman to identify themselves with. When historical facts of Sally Hemings life emerges, it threatens the image of Black women that the show has created thanks to its casting.

4.3 Alexander Hamilton

On Reddit, there have been discussions about Hamilton and its issues for a while, and even more once #CancelHamilton appeared. One Reddit thread was opened by user D who wonders why some want to cancel the show, despite it 'not promoting slave owning':

> What do you think about the fact that some people think that *Hamilton* needs to be cancelled for "glorifying slave owners"? People who are not fans of something popular will make up any excuse to cancel it and this makes me angry. *Hamilton* does not show slavery in a positive light and does absolutely nothing to promote it.

The quote shows confusion over the fact that someone thinks that the musical glorifies slave owners. Their confusion is warranted if we consider the fact that Alexander Hamilton's stance on slavery in the musical showcases him as an abolitionist, which we can see for example in lyrics such as:

> [HAMILTON]
> A civics lesson from a slaver. Hey neighbor
> Your debts are paid cuz you don't pay for labor
> "We plant seeds in the South. We create."
> Yeah, keep ranting
> We know who's really doing the planting
>
> [HAMILTON]
> Laurens is in South Carolina, redefining brav'ry

[HAMILTON/LAURENS]
We'll never be free until we end slavery!

As mentioned previously, Hamilton is framed by the musical as "bastard, orphan, son of a whore", repeatedly emphasizing that he came from an unprivileged position. The representation of him awakens the sympathy of the audience. Furthermore, it affects the identification process of the audience. The way that the musical portrays him makes the audience bond with his character, and the fact that he is the protagonist of the show says something about the show's intent on how they want the audience to view him. When he then is identified by people as a slave owner and/or complicit in slavery, it creates a disturbance for those who sees themselves in Alexander.

In the Reddit thread created by user D, a conversation is sparked between user E and user F. Their debate is mostly on whether the real Hamilton was a slave owner or not, but their discussion relates to how Hamilton in the musical should be represented. User E argues that the "people who qualify him (Hamilton) as a slave owner are either distorting history to the point where it's unrecognizable or just straight up lying". The categorization they made here is a strong statement against having an opinion on a historical matter. What user E suggests is that there exists one history of Alexander. One the other end, user F responds that "if you think he was an abolitionist and not a white supremacist, that would be distorting history". What user F does is to turn the statement around. It raises a question: what does distorting history mean? What are the consequences of doing it? As stated by Harbert, history musicals balance historical moments with important statements from the present (Harbert 2018:414). In accordance with queer feminist durationality, both of the users speak against the possibility of collapsing time when it comes to representing historical people. User E continues the discussion by stating that:

> Hamilton was demonstrably not a white supremacist and did advocate for abolition. You can make the argument that he did not do enough, but that's not the same thing as calling him a racist and a slave owner. Those are distortions, misrepresentations, or falsehoods.

User F responds by saying:

> I'm letting you know right now, slavery is literally my ancestry. My ancestors in the 1700s were born slaves and died slaves. No one did shit to help them until the 1800s, where even

afterwards they were still racially discriminated against. Do not explain to me my ancestry and apologize for those who didn't do anything to stop it.

User F tells us something very personal, and in a previous reply to another comment, they stress that what is important is to separate *Hamilton* from actual history, and that "It's okay to like the musical, but I think what a lot of fans are forgetting the difference. Musical Hamilton is played by a POC, when in actuality he was white and a slave owner.". What they do in their reply to user E is another way of using an identification process, but this time it is to identify against the cast of *Hamilton*.

Historian Michelle DuRoss suggests that Alexander's view on slavery was more complex than what certain biographers think. DuRoss argues that Alexander's life-goal was to rise higher in society, and while he was not an advocate of slavery, he chose to pursue his personal goals rather than opposing it. When he did oppose it, it was more so for practical reasons than thinking it was immoral (DuRoss 2019:para. 1). DuRoss brings up his marriage to Elizabeth Schuyler and the fact that he married into a slaveholding family. Even this is portrayed as a stepping-stone for Alexander towards wealth (DuRoss 2019:para. 2). On behalf of his in-laws and in his military duties, Alexander conducted purchases and transfers of slaves, one example being in 1784 when Elizabeth's sister Angelica wrote that she wanted "her slave Ben returned". Alexander arranged this, and in turn chose relations over the opposition of slavery (DuRoss 2019:para. 3). In the first act of *Hamilton*, one of the characters present is John Laurens, whose main role in the musical is to be Alexander's closest friend. Laurens is historically famous for wanting to enlist black people into the army, with the promise that they would gain freedom. DuRoss points out that scholars use Alexander's support of Laurens as proof of his abolitionist stance. She states however that the reason for Alexander's support was because it was in the best interest of America, and not because he wanted the slaves to be free (DuRoss 2019:para. 4). No matter what he does, the musical frames him as someone we must root for, a so-called 'bastard orphan', a father, a husband, the man who sacrificed a lot to start America's bank.

In an interview by journalist Terry Gross, Miranda is asked about the way Hamilton fits into the country's current conversation about systemic racism and the legacy of slavery. Miranda confesses that while Hamilton voiced anti-slavery beliefs, he remained complicit in the system. He motivates the way slavery is discussed in Act 2 of the musical by stating that not

much was done in that period of time, and that no one of the characters did enough. Miranda ends his answer by explaining that a real reckoning of how you uproot an original sin is happening. Jones' queer feminist durationality applies here as this term emphasizes the need to not view art as a fixed, unmoving subject. Past, present, and future have a relationship with the interpretation that takes place. A repeated line, and the title of the final song, asks us "Who lives, who dies, who tells your story". Jones suggests that by 'engaging the durational', it is possible to open a work to the process of interpretation and meaning making. Miranda does as Jones suggests, the work in this case being Alexander Hamilton and the founding of the States. But as Jones reminds us, while this can empower the interpreter, it can and often exposes the interpreter's own projections and desires (2012:174). Miranda as the interpreter creates his own version of Alexander Hamilton, thus engaging history, but at the same time he idolizes Hamilton by representing him as a fallen hero forgotten by time. Miranda's portrayal of Hamilton exposes his intent.

The representation of Alexander creates a different sort of ambivalence than Hemings and Jefferson does. While Alexander is played by a person of colour (Lin-Manuel Miranda), he is not played by a Black person. Yet, his complex relation to slavery is not mentioned while some of the audience are aware of the historian's research on the subject. The ambivalence is created from conflicting interpretations of Alexander's history. One one hand, he is a penniless, highly intelligent and ambitious immigrant, and on the other hand, he is yet another man who did not do enough to help enslaved people. There is also the fact that Alexander is the protagonist, the hero of the story, and he is just like any other main character meant to spark our sympathy, to make us identify with his character and his struggles, or at least have some sort of respect for him.

4.4 Thomas Jefferson

The third character frequently discussed in both Reddit and tweets, Thomas Jefferson, has been partially contextualised in the section about Sally Hemings, but a majority of people refer only to Jefferson and does not mention Hemings or other enslaved people. *Hamilton* positions Jefferson as pro-slavery, and Alexander Hamilton as anti-slavery, and the musical uses the hate they have towards each other as a tool to put make Jefferson the antagonist and Alexander the protaganist. Jefferson is played by African-American actor Daveed Diggs and is present all the way through the second act. Reddit user G, in the discussion about

#CancelHamilton, wants people to understand that the show is historical fiction. They admit that they thought it was bad of Miranda to ignore the slave trading of Jefferson and Washington, but that the show is about Alexander Hamilton.

> The show is about Hamilton and it is already 2 hours and 40 mins. If he started talking about ALL the horrific things Jefferson did, the show would be very very long because he was a truly awful man. However I do think that Jefferson was slightly glorified in the show, because Daveed (who I love) made him seem really cool which may be misleading.

Jefferson is the only character who gets associated with slavery, but what is notable is that only Hamilton is the one who makes these statements against Jefferson, which positions Hamilton as an abolitionist. The show does nothing else to give the audience a message about Jefferson's history of slavery. Instead, he has his own upbeat song, participates in many numbers in act 2, and gets a lot of laughs out of the audience with his lines and gestures. When searching Jefferson in forums, it is hard to miss his status as a fan favourite. In one thread, a user states that "Thomas Jefferson is the best character in the show (...) his stage presence and character is the best. He is so confident and works great as comic relief". User H has a more critical approach:

> People need to remember that Jefferson is a rapist and racist, and Daveed Diggs portrayal of him does not change that fact.

What they are implying is that people need to separate the actor from the real Jefferson. User I has another perspective on how the show handles Jefferson's less charming moment:

> To me, the good that Hamilton the show does outweighs the damage it may cause. The fact that Laurens and Hamilton are glorified for being manumissionists outweighs any glorification of Jefferson asking Hemings to open his letter.

User I recognized that the show promotes a certain image of its characters as anti-slavery, and that this goes against the historical reality. They argue however that the good the show does outweighs the damage. They use the line about Sally Hemings as an example of what the show did badly, but means that the portrayal of Alexander and John Laurens makes up for this. According to this user, the fact that these characters are seen as manumissionists has a

greater positive impact than the one-line mention of an enslaved woman. This statement says something about the power relations of the characters. The fact that the actions of Hamilton and Jefferson are seen as more valuable, says something about the show represents them.

As stated by Jones, identification is a dynamic process which can be put in our relation to visual arts (Jones 2012:1). Our bodies are positioned in the world and we can examine the ways in which they are identified (Jones 2012:6). *Hamilton* makes active choices to enable an identification among the audience that reaches out to its audience of colour. Jefferson pushes the concept of queer feminist durationality to its limits, creating a time line where a black man owns hundreds of slaves, and becomes the third president of the United States. It is this that also creates another moment of ambivalence in the show. The audience views Jefferson as a likeable, charming character with a narcissism that comes off as charming. Those who are critical of the portrayal of Jefferson sees the man who enslaved and sexually abused a 13 year old Sally Hemings. The people who like his character and identify with him clearly try to separate this person from the person portrayed in *Hamilton*. As Eda Ulus described, ambivalence can be the experience of having both negative and positive emotions about something, and this can be an unconscious feeling (Ulus 2015:892). Jefferson embodies this concept, and it might be therefore he is mentioned in the criticism against *Hamilton* more than any other character.

5. Conclusion

In this thesis, I have analysed two questions in order to examine how discursive productions of historical truth and identification are created by *Hamilton* by working with Hall's theory of representation, Jones' identification and queer feminist durationality, as well as Bhabha's ambivalence. With using discourse in relation to representation as a method, I have seen how knowledge creates a way of speaking of history.

The first question I will answer in this conclusion is: How does the debate surrounding *Hamilton* affect discourses around slavery and slave owners? The debate surrounding *Hamilton* raises several different arguments, and opinions about the existence of #CancelHamilton seems to be settled into three main categories. One that questions why it exists and is opposed to 'cancel culture', one that encourages the debate and finds that *Hamilton* can be enjoyable and problematic at the same time, and one who sees the musical as anti-Black and dishonest in how they represent slavery. Both internet users and historians argue for a separation of art and history, stating that we cannot view a musical as holding any truth, and that gaining knowledge of history should be looked for in actual history. This does, however, raise a question of accessibility and academic elitism - who can afford history lessons outside those who are provided by schools? Other users see *Hamilton* as an artistic interpretation, but still remains that its choices have consequences, and particularly when it comes to enslavement. The worries that they express can be explained as fear of how the discourse of Black history becomes affected. The character Alexander Hamilton bleeds into the historical Alexander Hamilton, and the character Thomas Jefferson merges with the real Thomas Jefferson, and this has consequences for how people look at the founding of the United States. Similarly, those who agree with #CancelHamilton and even before the hashtag were critical of the musical, raise arguments that are in line with the same worry. The purpose of their response towards others is based around historical facts and educating people on the real history behind the show. A major issue for many is how Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton are represented in the musical. By making Jefferson 'The Slaver', it positions the other characters as morally better and as abolitionists. This distorts history by letting people believe that is the case, when in reality, all Founding Fathers had enslaved people. By using views on slavery as a character trait to position the characters, it questions whether or not the show actually cares about the subject. Even so, the character of Jefferson is a likeable character according to fans, and is played by a Black man. By casting Jefferson as Black, the

musical allows for an identification which changes the power dynamics of the portrayal of slavery. Once again, this becomes an issue for some since it can potentially influence the way we view the real Jefferson. The way the audience views Hamilton and Jefferson results in an ambivalence. The negative connotations of the historical figures mix with the positive connotations from the musical, and this affects how we speak of the past in the present.

However, many historians and internet users see what the show does right, and argue that the racial representation says something about our history, as well as the situation today for people of colour. To explain this I suggest the term anachronistic identification, a combination and evolution of Jones terms feminist queer durationality and identification. The audience identifies with what they are seeing and hence can insert people of colour into positions of power in history. By reimagining the past, it is possible to create a new narrative. In the case of *Hamilton*, we can see how the foundation of the musical lies in mixing history with the modern, which is seen in the style of music, the mix of historical dress with modern, certain words, choreography, etcetera. One might suggest that the purpose of the musical is to destroy linear time, and to add complexity in how we think about time and in turn, history. Anachronistic identification makes it possible to use art influenced by history as a way to state something about the power relations we experience today in politics, media, culture, and society in general. It questions if it is wrong that historical figures get a new interpretation that can reflect how we wish the past looked like.

The second analytical question was: How does the musical represent women of colour? Four female characters played by three actors have defined roles with both plot, lines, and songs. Out of the four characters in the musical, three of them has romantic or sexual relations with Alexander, and two of those are played by women of colour. Most of the character's songs and lines are about Alexander, whether it is about loving him or being upset with him. These four female characters are not the focal point in #CancelHamilton, but has been talked about critically over the years since the premiere. One way of seeing Miranda's writing in combination with the casting is that the racial representation of the women hides the fact that they have no agency in the musical. The fact that the musical actively goes against racial boundaries should mean that it could do the same when it comes to how gender is represented. Then there is the fact that the audience creates an identification process with the characters, and since Black and Asian-American representation in musicals is limited, *Hamilton* creates a special bond for those who see themselves in the characters. This creates

ambivalence, and arguably even more so than the male characters do. By providing representation but in a limited capacity gives the audience what they want, but distracts any negative emotion we might have about the space Black women are given on stage.

Sally Hemings however, is part of the hashtag precisely because she is not a character in the musical. Her status as a Black enslaved woman that existed in real life is portrayed for a few seconds by an ensemble member who looks happy to serve Thomas Jefferson. What becomes notable for those who disagree with the portrayal of Hemings is that the musical does not in any way signal or inform the audience of her existence, when in reality Hemings was 13 years old and Jefferson was 46 at the start of his enslavement of her. It becomes a sort of discrepancy in the representation that women of colour play the roles of white historical women, and the real Black woman is neglected and erased from the narrative. Hemings' role in the debate disrupts the image *Hamilton* creates with their representation of women, because it proves that Black women do not need to play white women, but can in fact portray the narrative of someone who is representative of African-American history.

In conclusion, I can surmise that *Hamilton* affects discursive productions of history by how they represent the characters and their relation to slavery. The musical changes part of the discourse in how they portray Thomas Jefferson, Sally Hemings, and Alexander Hamilton. The existence of the debate, however, proves that *Hamilton's* representation is not uncontested. Audience members and historians meet the musicals with historical research and with an awareness of what parts of history have been changed by artistic licensing. The argument is created in the different approaches they have towards what the production of history means for people of colour today. Future research could explore an intersectional perspective on the role of the women in the musical, as well as how the sexuality of the women is portrayed. Indigenous people are completely erased from the narrative of *Hamilton*, and it should be considered what that means in the history of their people. The incredible popularity of *Hamilton* and its effects culturally means that we must continue to scrutinize the musical to understand how history is affected by how we represent it today.

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