

# “Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells [Her] Story”: An Intersectional Analysis of the Women of Hamilton

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The availability of Lin Manuel-Miranda’s *Hamilton* (2015) on Disney+, the official streaming site of The Walt Disney Company, has offered musical theatre fans and other interested parties the ability to revisit the musical or experience it for the first time. *Hamilton*’s rising popularity has influenced the increased concentration on the Black and Latino men at its center, and this is evident in mainstream publications such as *Vox*, *The Undeclared*, *CNN*, and *The New York Times*.<sup>[1]</sup> Even scholars’ and historians’ commentary on the musical, for the most part, has been solely focused on the men represented.<sup>[2]</sup> While these analyses create necessary discourse on the musical’s omission of slavery, erasure of Indigeneity, use of non-traditional casting, and impact in a post-Obama era, so much attention on *Hamilton* has been directed toward the men that it has eclipsed critical attention from the “werk” (to borrow a refrain from the show) that the women do within it.

On the one hand, when the women performers of *Hamilton* have been examined in popular publications, they are celebrated because they acknowledge the presence of women in the historical record.<sup>[3]</sup> On the other hand, academic research has been much more critical of the musical’s inclusion of women, with many scholars interrogating what they see as its hollow feminist politics.<sup>[4]</sup> Both critics and scholars alike tend to overlook the way that race structures how these women’s bodies are read on stage and within the musical libretto, suggesting a universalization of gender that ignores the intersection of race. While I am encouraged by and appreciate the attention to the women of *Hamilton*, apparently the possibility that women of color spectators of the musical construct alternative meanings from the performances of Phillipa Soo, Renée Elise Goldsberry, and Jasmine Cephas-Jones is not considered viable. In this article I complicate previous studies of the musical’s treatment of race and gender, arguing that the actresses’ embodiment in *Hamilton* disrupts normative, white gender constructions while highlighting the labor of women of color in musical theatre.

I contend that the intersections of race and gender are vital to reading and analyzing the women of color performers in the musical and that failing to account for this erases the interconnected, racialized, and gendered histories that the actresses’ bodies bear. Throughout the article, I read *Hamilton*’s casting of these women of color by applying Brandi Wilkins Catanese’s theorization of “colorblind” theatre, and I adopt the concept of “transgression” to “expose the moral limitations of transcendence as a viable strategy for social change by acknowledging the histories of social location that people wear on their bodies and that inform all of our interpretive frameworks.”<sup>[5]</sup> I employ Catanese’s framework in this article as I refuse to read the women of color in the musical through a single-axis framework (i.e., race over gender and/or gender over race). I do so to avoid foreclosing the nuances of women of color’s embodiment in *Hamilton* as demonstrated in its original Broadway cast and production.<sup>[6]</sup>

The various restagings of productions in Chicago, London, New York, Puerto Rico, and the multiple tours running concurrently in the United States illustrate that *Hamilton*'s creative team is committed to continuously casting the show with non-white actresses. For example, I attended a production of the musical at Washington D.C.'s John F. Kennedy Center in which Asian American women portrayed all the principal roles, which facilitated a range of readings of the women characters that might be different from the original Broadway production. Any given theatre piece can be (re)shaped by varied performances; thus, conversations on embodiment remain central in how audiences receive messages in theatre.

Despite the proliferation of global productions of the show, the availability of *Hamilton* via Disney+ has canonized the original Broadway cast as the standard to which all other future productions will be compared. As performance scholar Brian Herrera notes, casting is a term that "describes not only the process through which performers are assessed for and assigned to roles, but also the meanings, effects, and implications that are activated when the selected performers enact those roles."<sup>[7]</sup> Keeping this in mind, one cannot and should not separate these women (and their racialized, gendered bodies) from their roles; to do so maintains a white supremacist paradigm that problematically centers white womanhood as a marker for women of color, thereby erasing the embodied realities produced by the actresses.

I find it more pressing and productive to consider how the bodies on stage affect the musical's ability to engage in feminist work; in the spirit of performance studies scholar Robin Bernstein, I am interested in the musical's *how*, rather than its *what*.<sup>[8]</sup> By leaning into the nuances that the musical offers and recognizing how it actively engages with feminist principles (particularly from women of color feminisms), this article creates space for the existence and exploration for subtleties and contradictions of people of color. I do so, not to propose that *Hamilton* should not be critiqued, but rather to assert that analysis with women of color feminisms allows for new interpretations of the characters which contest the overwhelming whiteness in musical theatre scholarship. I use a Black feminist dramaturgical lens to search the gaps and margins of Lin Manuel Miranda's award-winning Broadway musical *Hamilton* to locate the dormant meaning that is activated through the embodiment of the actresses of color.

### **Black Feminist Dramaturgy**

Black theatre scholar and practitioner Michelle Cowin Gibbs argues that Black feminist dramaturgy "demands an audience to witness and affirm" the various modes of seeing that happen on stage.<sup>[9]</sup> In particular, Black feminist dramaturgy magnifies theatre's interpretive possibilities which disclose the multiple layers of meaning that are activated not only by the bodies on stage, but also by the audience members who watch them. Crucial to Black feminist dramaturgy is the ability to offer analyses of theatre and performance that privilege the "outsider-within" position that Black women often occupy due to a prevalent focus on whiteness and/or maleness.<sup>[10]</sup> Black feminist dramaturgies invite us to search on and through the body of the actresses of color in *Hamilton* for the gap, the break, or the sites where other formations of knowing and being are happening.

As many theatre scholars and practitioners are aware, dramaturgy encompasses many elements; however, it typically refers to the comprehensive study and understanding of a play's historical, theatrical, and intellectual contexts.<sup>[11]</sup> My theorization of Black feminist dramaturgy is also significantly influenced by Black dramaturg and theatre scholar Faedra Chatard Carpenter's dramaturgical orientation and practice. While "dramaturgical concerns" cover a range of different aims and interests when applied to the inner

workings of a performance piece, among these concerns is the need and desire to design and guide the interpretative possibilities associated with a particular production. Accordingly, these considerations are also inclusive of the rationale behind specific casting choices. Carpenter proposes that one must acknowledge a play's "time and context" and the site of production which informs how the play will be received by audiences. In addition, Carpenter notes that the awareness of "the embodied and enacted text, beyond its literary form" is vital to the dramaturgical process. In other words, the interpretative possibilities increase dramatically when performance is activated by bodies rather than remaining stagnant on the page. Further, Carpenter pays close attention to the audience, suggesting that the "consideration of audience reception and impact of artistic framing" is an important dramaturgical task; a dramaturg must predict how the audience will understand and read the bodies of the women on stage in tandem with the artistic elements, or else the framing could distract or create unintended interpretive themes.<sup>[12]</sup> To this point, Black feminist dramaturgy traces how the presence of racialized and gendered bodies on stage may reverberate beyond it.

Furthermore, José Muñoz's theory of disidentification expands the theoretical consideration of Black feminist dramaturgy. Muñoz's theory of disidentification (a survival strategy he traces through the art, activism, and lives of queers of color) monitors "the ways in which identity is enacted by minority subjects who must work with/resist the conditions of (im)possibility that dominant culture generates."<sup>[13]</sup> Disidentification attempts to rewrite the dominant script by maneuvering within dominant ideology and spaces in an effort to subvert it from the inside.<sup>[14]</sup> Muñoz's insightful theorization also identifies a core component of how I situate Black feminist dramaturgy and how it challenges dominant ideological underpinnings. In the case of *Hamilton*, this means considering how the performances by women of color in the musical can (to a certain extent) disrupt racialized and gendered expectations. Therefore, Black feminist dramaturgy illuminates the way in which an actor's embodied experience serves as a critical source of study, aids in disrupting historically stereotypical iconography, and promotes intersectionality as a concept that is vital to the entanglement of gender with whiteness and Americanness. Put another way, to apply a Black feminist dramaturgical lens to Lin Manuel-Miranda's *Hamilton* is to magnify and complicate the analysis of the women of color in the musical.<sup>[15]</sup>

### **Act One: Angelica Schuyler and Black Feminist Potential**

Angelica Schuyler, portrayed by Renée Elise Goldsberry in the original Broadway production of *Hamilton*, was the oldest child of Phillip Schuyler, a wealthy general in the Continental Army.<sup>[16]</sup> In Miranda's musical, Angelica is depicted as a woman who is intellectually on par with (and even beyond) her male counterparts. Miranda describes her as the smartest character in the show, who demonstrates her intellectual prowess by reciting the most intricate raps.<sup>[17]</sup> In the musical, we first meet Angelica alongside her two sisters in the song "The Schuyler Sisters." While it may be easy to classify Angelica as merely a source of inspiration for the men who actually *do things* in history, her character takes on additional significance when played by a Black woman. As a result, she is a character who is deemed equal in intelligence to men while overturning representations of Black women as innately promiscuous.

In examining Goldsberry's physical body within live theatre, it is important to also consider "flesh," which Hortense Spillers, Black feminist scholar and cultural critic, differentiates from the body. Spillers asserts, "Before the 'body' there is the 'flesh,' that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography. . . . If we think of the 'flesh' as a primary narrative, then we mean its seared, divided, ripped-apartness, riveted to the ship's

hole, fallen, or ‘escaped overboard.’”[18] To this point, Goldsberry’s flesh serves as a witness to the wounds and scars experienced by Black people in American history. As she performs a show about the birth of America, her flesh carries the trauma of slavery that for hundreds of years this country maintained and from which it profited and built its economic foundation. Miranda makes visible her “flesh” within this story and in doing so, he signals the subversive potential that challenges spectators to consider how power and meaning function in the creation of gender for the Black body. This interpretation runs counter to scholars’ essays which have critiqued *Hamilton* for “whitewashing” the travails of Black Americans by failing to directly address the issue of American slavery in the show. While these critiques are necessary and should be addressed, I contend that the outright dismissal of *Hamilton*’s effort to disrupt and destabilize whiteness is overlooked.[19] The musical’s casting choice disrupts the notion of white normative gender constructions as the primary way to understand Goldsberry’s embodiment of this white historical figure. Theorizing the flesh (à la Spillers) in theatre and performance leads to conceptualizing Goldsberry’s racial and gendered embodiment serves as an entryway to further engage with her actions in the musical that supersedes a white female subject position and/or gaze.

The very first moment the audience encounters Angelica in the musical, she is standing by her sisters—not by a man. The character demonstrates her intellectual prowess in the song “The Schuyler Sisters.” She raps:

I’ve been reading *Common Sense* by Thomas / Paine. / Some men say that I’m intense or I’m insane. / You want a revolution? I want a revelation / So listen to my declaration. / We hold these truths to be self-evident / That all men are created equal.’ / And when I meet Thomas Jefferson, / I’m ‘a compel him to include women in the / sequel![20]

As the only woman who raps in the musical, Angelica demonstrates and asserts a (Black) feminist position and shows she is intelligent and just as politically savvy as the men. In addition, she goes further to explain that she influences policy by manipulating men. Though this could be read as a promise of Angelica’s intellectual prowess—one that is never fulfilled—the use of hip hop provides a subversive inscription of the representation of Black women. As hip-hop feminists have argued, “Hip hop culture and rap music hold radical and liberating potential. . . hip hop provides a space for young black women to express their race and ethnic identities and to critique racism. Moreover, hip hop feminists contend that hip hop is a site where young Black women begin to build or further develop their own gender criticism and feminist identity.”[21] Therefore, hip hop serves as a practice of taking ownership of one’s underprivileged position. Furthermore, hip hop is a way Black women can own their stories and retell histories that have historically erased them. Angelica navigates her position, which she doesn’t let limit her ability to improve her status. Indeed, she disidentifies by “working on and against” her subservient role, to which she sometimes conforms, but also subverts by manipulating men into serving her own agenda. [22]

Angelica’s relationship with Hamilton is influenced profoundly by that of circumstances, even as they both share equal affection for one another. As performed by Goldsberry, Angelica is “a headstrong society woman who loves Hamilton, but loves her sisters even more.”[23] In a similar vein, Angelica understands that she is limited by the demands placed on her as the eldest daughter, singing in “Satisfied,” “I’m a girl in a world in which / My only job is to marry rich. / My father has no sons so I’m the one / Who has to social-climb for one.”[24] Angelica is aware that if she wanted Hamilton, she could

have him. However, her status in society requires her to “marry rich.” At the end of “Satisfied,” Angelica does *not* choose a sexual relationship with Hamilton, even though she desires him. Angelica explicitly performs and expresses sexual desire for Hamilton, but she does not pursue a physical relationship with him out of commitment to her sister Eliza. Angelica’s denial of her feelings for Hamilton takes on a new meaning in Goldsberry’s Black female body. This denial of romantic longing provides a counternarrative to the stereotype that Black women are overcome by their insatiable desire of sex. The expression of Angelica’s sexuality, embodied by Goldsberry, gestures towards historical embodiment of the Black female body, which Miranda subverts by reframing Angelica as simultaneously intelligent and sexually desirous.

Notably, Miranda manages this subversive representation while avoiding oversexualizing or desexualizing Angelica, releasing the Black female body from “controlling images.” Thus, Goldsberry’s body serves as a host and traitor to American history and stage representations of Black femininity. Her character does not indulge in her desire for Hamilton nor is she relegated to the domestic sphere. Rather, Goldsberry embodies a character who is able to influence politics from her position yet is still seen as a woman who is sexually desirable. Notably, most critics have not weighed in on the alternative modes of labor inscribed by Angelica in the musical, the refusal of ontological categorization of Black women as asexual or hypersexual, and the recalibration of the Black woman as intelligent and desirable within a model of marriage. Additionally, *Hamilton*’s casting of Goldsberry and other women of color continues to challenge spectators of *Hamilton* to reconsider who can be a part of American history and what role they may play in it.<sup>[25]</sup> That the casting notice for Angelica Schuyler does not specify that the role be played specifically by a Black woman, but generally by a non-white actress, highlights the commitment of the *Hamilton* creative team to place dynamic and complex depictions of women of color on stage.

### **Act Two: Maria Reynolds’s Deviant Possibility**

In “Say No to This,” Hamilton raps about his affair with Maria Reynolds, and the song is juxtaposed with Maria’s R&B influenced vocality as she provides her perspective of the events. As the affair progresses, her husband James extorts money from Hamilton; the men make a deal, ensuring that the affair is kept secret. Jasmine Cephas Jones, the mixed-race (Black and white) actress who originated the role of Maria, says, “On the page, her affair with Hamilton could be a mere scheme of extortion, a trap she sets because it’ll help her survive in her marriage. What makes ‘Say No to This’ interesting is the possibility that she’s also falling in love with him.”<sup>[26]</sup> Even though Jones’s claim that Maria is also falling in love is possible, Stacy Wolf observes that this position is not actually supported by the lyrics of the song.<sup>[27]</sup>

Even though Jones’s interpretation of Maria’s feelings for Hamilton are not supported by the lyrics, Maria’s character is still more complex than she seems. Scholars such as Wolf may read Maria as falling into the jezebel trope (a controlling image derived from slavery that portrays African American women as having excessive sexual appetites), but this argument overlooks the ways that Jones’s embodiment of Maria subverts the trope. Put another way, categorizing Maria in this way obscures the power of Jones’s performance to upend audience assumptions about the sexuality of Black women as always already deviant.

Maria, in Jones’s racialized body, utilizes the only capital she has—her body—to navigate her troubled life. Jones’s embodiment of Maria allows her to recalibrate and challenge the simplistic characterization of Maria, and Black women in general, as sexually deviant. Borrowing from Uri McMillian, the role of

Maria reveals how performance allows “black women performers [to make] meaning within problematic representation structures.”<sup>[28]</sup> Performance, therefore, aids in addressing the construction and malleability of categories structured by race and gender. Rather than figuring Maria as deprived or framing her as simply a “whore,” Jones’s embodiment of Maria subverts expectations by illustrating how deviance can be a liberatory site, one where Maria harnesses a survival strategy, financial viability, and love. To gain insight into Maria Reynolds, I employ Black queer studies scholar Cathy Cohen’s politics of deviance as a means to examine “deviant practices and behaviors as productive...potential for resistance” for those who fall outside of the white heterosexual male, upper class position, particularly poor Black women.<sup>[29]</sup> Politics of deviance locates the agency of Black women who are deemed outside of normative sexual politics. Cohen proposes that poor Black women neither conform fully, nor wholly reject, the possibility of deviance as a strategy to improve their material conditions. Similarly, Maria may be seen as a “whore” and more complexly interpreted.

Cohen’s politics of deviance is useful as it offers a theoretical lens to locate “the limited agency available” that Maria uses to “secure small levels of autonomy in [her] life.”<sup>[30]</sup> This is demonstrated in “Say No to This” when Maria, from the outset, informs the audience of her life, singing, “My husband’s doin me wrong / Beatin’ me, cheatin’ me, mistreatin’ me. / Suddenly he’s up and gone / I don’t have the means to go on.”<sup>[31]</sup> As the lyrics demonstrate, Maria is unfulfilled by her marriage and, as a married woman, she is unable to work to provide for herself; therefore, she must create an alternative way to survive. Maria reconfigures herself within her marriage, superseding the sexuality prescribed to white women of a certain class and position. Maria approaches Hamilton for her own financial and emotional needs with the means available to her as a woman in the eighteenth century.

Classifying Maria as a sexual object, a body that is a tool used for sexual pleasure, inscribes the racialized female body as available solely for male consumption. However, Jones’s embodiment of Maria can be understood as a performance of disidentification, in which sexuality and desire are used as viable methods to shift power. Maria’s agency provides an alternative prescription for how Black women’s bodies can be read, especially in matters of sexuality. Racialization influences how sexuality is circulated and performed in *Hamilton*; the musical counters this reading by positioning Maria as a figure in the historical record without faulting her for Hamilton’s downfall, and instead places the onus on Hamilton and her husband.

Ultimately, Maria is not the reason for Hamilton’s eventual political downfall. Rather, Aaron Burr, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison use Hamilton’s affair to undermine him. This begins when Burr, Jefferson, and Madison accuse Hamilton of committing treason, and in an effort to clear his name, Hamilton informs them of the affair and his extortion by James Reynolds. Hamilton’s downfall is not due to Maria and her seductive prowess; instead, Burr, Jefferson, and Madison’s goal to prevent Hamilton from becoming president leads Hamilton to implicate himself by revealing his affair. Maria, as a minor character, is merely a pawn used in the political machinations to facilitate Jefferson and Madison’s overthrowing of Hamilton. It is important to note that none of the characters in the musical blame Maria for the affair: Hamilton never places the blame on her; Angelica Schuyler, once she learns of the affair, blames Hamilton *not* Maria; and even Eliza Hamilton, when she sings of the affair in her ballad “Burn,” does not blame her for what happened, but, rather, focuses on Hamilton’s domestic betrayal and failure.

Reading Maria as the culprit of Hamilton’s political misfortune overlooks the musical’s narrative as a reputable source that informs the spectator, and instead, chooses to lean on Reynolds’s categorization of

his wife as a whore. Accepting Reynold's words—"You can keep seeing my *whore* wife/ If the price is right"—is siding with her abuser and discrediting her in the process.<sup>[32]</sup> Adopting this categorization offered by Reynolds, a figure that the musical establishes as a disreputable character, in effect, prioritizes the sentiments and worldview of Reynolds over Maria's own account which troubles easy and judgmental assumptions about her sexuality and choices.

### Act Three: Eliza Schuyler's Re-telling

Phillipa Soo, a Chinese American woman, originated the role of Eliza Schuyler, the second oldest of the Schuyler sisters.<sup>[33]</sup> As Eliza spends the majority of the play in a marriage with Hamilton, Stacy Wolf has criticized the musical for Eliza's lack of agency in the show, describing her as "more passive than active at every turn," rendering her only as a romantic and domestic partner of Hamilton.<sup>[34]</sup> Eliza may seem to be the most submissive character in the musical due to her confinement in the domestic sphere after her marriage to Hamilton. Some could read this confinement of Eliza as reflecting a lack of desire to move beyond the expectations of women during the eighteenth century. It is important to note that reading Eliza in this way makes an assumption that mothers and wives cannot engage in feminist praxis. By doing so, this overlooks the socio-political work and labor that is done in the domestic sphere.

Instead, I propose that Eliza embraces her role as a mother and wife while simultaneously subverting her position within the home to negotiate, as Muñoz proposes in *Disidentifications*, a "phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform."<sup>[35]</sup> Eliza must navigate her position and status as a woman to elude consequences for more outward displays of non-conformity. For instance, when Eliza writes to George Washington that she is pregnant in order to prevent him from sending Hamilton into battle, she *writes* the narrative that then affects the rest of Hamilton's political career. This moment is illustrative of how Eliza maneuvers the space given to her; rather than writing a letter to Hamilton, she writes to George Washington, the General of the Army. In doing so, Eliza sidesteps the patriarch of the family to achieve her own desires and needs.

Including race in an analysis of Eliza's agency shows how women of color feminisms, and specifically Asian American feminism, are uniquely different than those of white women *and* Black women. Soo's race in the original Broadway cast serves as a means to grapple with Asian American women's relationship to American citizenship and subvert stereotypical tropes of Asian American womanhood.<sup>[36]</sup> As literary scholar Traise Yamamoto explains, "The experiences of Asian American women have either been defined as identical to that of Asian American men or subsumed within the experiences of white women; both moves attest to the failure of representing Asian American women as sites of the complex intersections of race, gender, and national identity."<sup>[37]</sup> Historically, Asian femininity has been portrayed as an idealized femininity. Since the politically insurgent feminist movement in the 1960s, images of Asian women circulated depicting them as hypersexual, de-vocalized, and subservient to white men.<sup>[38]</sup> At first glance, one might believe that the musical capitalizes on the stereotypical imagery of an Asian woman by pushing Soo's character to the home and because of her performance of docility for Hamilton.<sup>[39]</sup> However, the musical counters potential readings of her body as hypersexual and submissive. When Eliza tells Hamilton that she wrote a letter to George Washington in the song "That Would Be Enough," Hamilton immediately replies "No," marking his disapproval with her action.<sup>[40]</sup> Nonetheless, Eliza is steadfast in her choice; in singing to Hamilton, "I'm not sorry," she declares her own active participation in their life, even if she must go against societal norms. When Miranda speaks about this song, he gestures to a conversation with *Hamilton* director Tommy Kail during the workshop

of *Hamilton*, where Kail challenged him to make “Eliza more active” in this moment instead of just having her express the sentiment to Hamilton.[41]

Eliza literally and figuratively writes herself into history, not in an effort to resist her husband, but as a means to construct a narrative of legacy in which she is simultaneously an active participant and author. The recurring narrative-inscription motif woven throughout the musical further illustrates Eliza’s agency: she asks to be included in, removes herself from, and places herself in the narrative of Hamilton’s life. This motif is first represented in the song “That Would Be Enough,” in which Eliza announces to Hamilton that she is pregnant, singing, “Let me be a part of the narrative / In the story they will write someday.”[42] In Eliza’s second-act solo song “Burn,”[43] she learns of Hamilton’s affair with Maria Reynolds and sings, “I’m erasing myself from the narrative / let future historians wonder how Eliza reacted.”[44] This moment in the musical, described by Stacy Wolf as *the* moment of agency for Eliza, is when she decides to leave Hamilton and obscure her own thoughts about the affair.[45] This moment signifies a rejection of the stereotype that Asian women are submissive. The musical motif comes full circle in the final song, “Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tell Your Story,” in which Eliza sings, “I put myself back in the narrative.”[46] In arguably the most powerful agentive moment in the entire show, Eliza reinserts herself back into the story, becoming an activist speaking against slavery, founding New York City’s first private orphanage, and raising funds to memorialize the men Hamilton fought beside.

Alexander Hamilton may be the subject of *Hamilton*, but Eliza is the author. Eliza plays an active role in the construction of this narrative, a narrative that is as much hers as it is his. As the author, Eliza uses Hamilton’s legacy for her own political purpose; she makes the choices of what is deemed important or not. In the closing musical number, the lyric states that Eliza devotes the next fifty years of her life to sharing Hamilton’s legacy, but also to claiming her own place in it. Eliza, in tandem with Angelica, sings, “We tell your story,” referring to Hamilton’s history.[47] A few moments later, Eliza questions, “Will they tell *our* story?”[48] and the company queries, “Will they tell *your* story?” (emphasis mine).[49] In this moment, Eliza actively places herself in the narrative by making her retelling of this history a telling of her history, too. The ambiguity of the “your” sung by the company can be interpreted either as contemplating whether the world will tell Eliza’s story, or as a gesture toward a collective story that still needs to be told. Regardless of how one reads these lyrics, the ambiguity of who the company is singing about suggests that the individual story is indistinguishable or inseparable from the collective story. At the end of the musical, Hamilton and Eliza, along with the company, emphasize that Eliza’s story is just as important as Hamilton’s story. Eliza is not merely a teller of history, but a *maker of history* who was pushed to the margins because of her gender and race. As the musical questions if the audience will remember Eliza, *Hamilton* engages in a feminist mode of history writing and meaning making.

This begs the bigger question of *Hamilton*: are the bodies that tell history just as important as what happens in history? Eliza’s story provides a resounding “yes.” The character of Eliza, who many claim has the least amount of agency, is the character who documents not only her husband’s story, but her own. This is particularly resonant because Soo’s Asian American body, as Karen Shimakawa theorizes, is marked by its constant oscillating relationship to American citizenship.[50] Placing Soo literally and figuratively within the nation-state, a site of tension for Asian American people, the musical encourages us to think about the limits of American citizenship. As Shimakawa reminds us, Americanness itself is defined by the “positioning of Asian Americans, as foreigners/outside/deviants/criminals or as domesticated/invisible/exemplary/honorary whites.”[51] Miranda recognizes the importance of Asian American women as central to America by positioning Eliza, embodied by Soo, a Chinese American

actress, center stage to tell history from her perspective. *Hamilton* also challenges popular depictions of Asian American women on stage that only exist to serve the needs, desires, and journey of a white male character. Soo's embodiment of Eliza is not merely an imitation of past stereotypical representations of Asian American women in theatre, such as in the musicals of *Miss Saigon* and *The King and I*. Instead, she is in control, wielding her own pen in her theatrical presentation, moving away from how musical theatre has scripted Asian American womanhood.

Categorizing Eliza as merely a wife is limiting as it does not consider how the musical subverts and recalibrates Eliza's role to incorporate the actress's own embodiment. It also overlooks the importance of the wife's role in male political figures' lives and in politics in general. If one measures women of color to this standard of white womanhood, they will fall short every time. While women of color and white women may have some shared experiences of oppression, one must avoid generalizing in scholarly analysis to signal solidarity. Doing so erases the specific voices, experiences, and trauma of women of color. *Hamilton* combats this not only by positioning a woman as the final voice at the end of the musical, but a woman of color. Eliza's act of *writing* history and telling Hamilton's story—Hamilton *and* Eliza's story—appeals to a feminist telling of history; as she tells her own story, she is simultaneously telling the story of the family, the nation, and, most importantly, of women of color.

Even when Soo stands in the spotlight at the conclusion of *Hamilton*, she is not alone, nor is her presence divorced from the women who have shared the musical with her. It is noteworthy that in "The Schuyler Sisters," when the three women are first introduced, they are identified as a collective. Also, of note: the actual song "The Schuyler Sisters" (which Miranda described as a "Destiny's Child-esque" song) builds upon familiar "girl group" images, such as coordinated outfits and harmonies signaling a communal goal. Alongside the content of the song, "The Schuyler Sisters" illustrates how these three women, who bring different but equally important vocal styles, skills, and prowess to the musical number, are working together for the collective good.

Our introduction to these women creates a purposeful contradistinction to the introduction of John Laurens, Marquis de Lafayette, and Hercules Mulligan. In "Aaron Burr, Sir," the men are also introduced as a trio. But unlike the women, they all try to "one-up" each other during the hip-hop cypher. The hip-hop cypher, by definition, is simultaneously communal and competitive as rappers enter the space to illustrate their linguistic and performative prowess over one another, while also working to outlast the rest of the rappers in the circle.<sup>[52]</sup> In the musical, Hamilton is the one who is victorious in the cypher, which ultimately crowns him as the group's leader. The format of the song, the staging of "Aaron Burr, Sir," and the transition to "My Shot" demonstrate the deeply competitive nature of the men, who are overly concerned with individual legacy, and who almost exclusively work together to achieve their own personal goals. By contrast, the women ask us to consider the importance of sisterhood and investing in collective consciousness.

*Hamilton*'s grouping of the three principal actresses and their characters demonstrates a revolutionary call for women of color feminist collaboration. It asks that audiences consider how these women invest in modes of care for one another and challenges the role that patriarchy has in determining how they see each other. This is the major feminist work that the musical does. The collective investment in women of color's coalition that the musical models, reiterates Chicana feminist Cherríe Moraga's call for women of color to "create bridges of consciousness" by imagining women of color working together among, across, and in spite of difference.<sup>[53]</sup> It is these women of color's embodiment on stage that signals women of

color's coalition building. Even if the musical does not always abide by this principle, the unified presence of Goldsberry, Soo, and Cephas-Jones and their laboring bodies on stage (as characters and as actors) urge us to consider the “work,” or “werk,” that women of color have done in the face of violence and erasure.

*Hamilton* imagines and conceives white female historical figures as women of color, and while I have argued that Miranda's casting subverts dominant racial and gendered expectations, I also recognize the limits of casting as a strategy in addressing the calls of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) in theatre. While *Hamilton* is not the first show to use casting to address dominant societal and cultural values, it arguably sparked a resurgence of Broadway producers and fans celebrating Broadway revivals that adopt non-traditional casting methods to signal a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.<sup>[54]</sup> This trend relies on casting to fix the systemic issues that displace marginalized theatre artists from the Broadway stage. Miranda's (and his creative team's) casting choices differ in critical ways; the musical from its inception intentionally cast non-white performers in the roles of white historical figures.<sup>[55]</sup>

The meanings from these choices may be read differently, but the casting choices are anything but circumstantial. In fact, the identities and bodies of the actors are central to performance meanings. Beyond *Hamilton*, casting choices made in theatre should not simply function as ornamentation to obscure the racist and sexist meanings of a show. Instead, dramaturgs must explore how the corporeality of performers change characters and stories. When theatrical production and, arguably, theatre criticism, critically examine the corporeality of actors as a meaning-making practice, we can destabilize whiteness in our theatrical imagination. In the case of *Hamilton*, audiences may be better off noticing the impact of raced and gendered bodies in their perceptions of shows, instead of maintaining that race and gender is irrelevant to their experience of the musical. *Hamilton's* representation of women of color attempts to embrace the complexity and the contradictions that cause the audience to repeatedly interrogate themselves, as well as the history of racial and gender oppression in the United States.

[1] See Aja Romano, “*Hamilton* is Fanfic and, Its Historical Critics Are Totally Missing the Point,” Vox Media, <https://www.vox.com/2016/4/14/11418672/hamilton-is-fanfic-not-historically-inaccurate>; Ed Morales, “The Problem with the *Hamilton* Movie,” CNN Worldwide, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/05/opinions/hamilton-movie-mixed-messages-black-lives-matter-morales/index.html>; Stephanie Goodman, “Debating *Hamilton* as it Shifts From Stage to Screen,” *The New York Times*, 10 July 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/10/movies/hamilton-critics-lin-manuel-miranda.html>; and Soroya Nadia McDonald, “Five Years Ago, *Hamilton* Turned a Revolution into a Revelation – what now?” ESPN Enterprises, <https://theundefeated.com/features/five-years-ago-hamilton-turned-a-revolution-into-a-revelation-what-now>.

[2] See Renee C. Romano and Claire Bond Potter, eds., *Historians on Hamilton: How a Blockbuster Musical Is Restaging America's Past* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2018). This anthology weighs the pros and cons of the *Hamilton's* representation of history. Notably, out of the fifteen essays included in the anthology, only two give critical attention to the women of *Hamilton*: Allgor's ““Remember...I'm Your Man”: Masculinity, Marriage and Gender in *Hamilton*” and Patricia Herrera's “Reckoning with America's Racial Past, Present, and Future in *Hamilton*.”

[3] See Aly Semigran, “The Women of *Hamilton*, Making Herstory on Broadway,” *Legendary Entertainment*, 1 September 2016, <https://amysmartgirls.com/the-women-of-hamilton-making-herstory->

on-broadway-e507820a319. Semigran's review provides a short exposé on the actresses in *Hamilton* and praises the musical. Semigran exclaims, "They aren't the women behind the Founding Fathers in this critical chapter in American history, they are the ones standing at their side, all the while standing up for themselves and making history all their own." See also Michael Schuman, "The Women of *Hamilton*," *The New Yorker*, 6 August 2015, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-women-of-hamilton>. Schulman also praises the show, stating: "Miranda has placed a pair of vividly imagined female characters" in the musical. However, Schulman, then questions if *Hamilton* is feminist, and ultimately answers himself: "Almost." He contends that *Hamilton* reiterates "that men do history, and women just tell it." However, Schulman later retreats somewhat, giving Miranda recognition for positioning women in the musical alongside the men and not behind them.

[4] See James McMaster, "Why *Hamilton* Is Not the Revolution You Think It Is," Emerson College, 23 February 2016, <https://howlround.com/why-hamilton-not-revolution-you-think-it>. James McMaster interrogates the absent feminism in an essay for HowlRound. McMaster argues that the female characters' desires, fears, hopes, and plans within *Hamilton* exist only in relation to Hamilton. See also Stacy Wolf, "*Hamilton*," *The Feminist Spectator* (blog), 24 February 2016, <https://feministspectator.princeton.edu/2016/02/24/hamilton>. Shortly after the publication of McMaster's essay, Wolf penned a guest blog on *The Feminist Spectator* in which she argues that each main woman in the musical is an archetype, categorizing Angelica Schuyler (sister-in-law of Hamilton) as a muse, Eliza Schuyler (Hamilton's wife) as a wife, and Maria Reynolds (the woman with whom Hamilton has an affair) as a whore. For a more developed version of this argument, see Wolf, "*Hamilton's* Women," *Studies in Musical Theatre* 12, no. 2 (June 2018). Here, Wolf contends that *Hamilton* epitomizes a paradox for the feminist spectator, one that is structured by a love/hate relationship, or what she calls "dissonant pleasure." Throughout this article, Wolf examines the choreography, musical numbers, and narrative arc of the women characters, arguing that *Hamilton* illustrates the potential of the women as socially and political engaged citizens, but ultimately fails in fulfilling this promise. See Indebted to Wolf's critical engagement with *Hamilton's* women, in her chapter from *Historians on Hamilton*, "Remember...I'm Your Man': Masculinity, Marriage, and Gender in *Hamilton*," Catherine Allgor reiterates Wolf's sentiment about the positioning of women on the periphery in *Hamilton*. Allgor examines how gender operates in the musical alongside the historical record, noting that *Hamilton* fails to illuminate how gender is a significant organizing principle. For Allgor, this oversight hides the subordinate legal status that women faced and perpetuates the belief that women only played minor roles in history. Allgor ends by noting that *Hamilton's* revolution relies on its attempt to "decenter history" and that this can inspire others to build upon Miranda's work.

[5] Brandi Wilkins Catanese, *The Problem of the Color(Blind) Racial Transgression and the Politics of Black Performance* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 22.

[6] It is important to note that this article focuses on the original principal actresses of *Hamilton's* Broadway production (performers that reprised their roles of Eliza, Angelica, and Mariah for the Disney+ version of the musical) and how the racial and gender identity of these performers influence potential readings of their respective characters.

[7] Brian Eugenio Herrera, "Looking at *Hamilton* from Inside the Broadway Bubble," in *Historians on Hamilton: How a Blockbuster Musical Is Restaging America's Past*, eds. Renee C. Romano and Claire Bond Potter (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 230.

[8] Robin Bernstein, “Dances with Things: Material Culture and the Performance of Race,” *Social Text* 27, no. 4 (2009): 69.

[9] Michelle Cowin Gibbs, “Playing the Dozens: Towards a Black Feminist Dramaturgy in the Work of Zora Neale Hurston,” *The Journal of American Drama and Theatre* 33, no. 2 (Spring 2021).

[10] See Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990). Collins explores the intellectual tradition fostered by Black women scholars, non-academics, and artists. Tracing ideas and concepts propelled by Black women, most notably the term “outsider-within” and “matrix of domination,” Collins argues that Black women will always fall outside of “feminist and black social thought” due to their focus on whiteness or maleness. Yet, according to Collins this “outsider within” position produces a knowledge source that is more nuanced than feminist and Black social thought.

[11] Bert Cardullo, *What Is Dramaturgy?* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 3.

[12] Faedra Chatard Carpenter, *Coloring Whiteness: Acts of Critique in Black Performance* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 13.

[13] José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 6.

[14] *Ibid.*, 23.

[15] While my primary analysis is through Black feminism, I recognize that women of color feminisms are distinct and different. Utilizing other women of color feminisms will also magnify new interpretative possibilities for the musical.

[16] The *Hamilton* casting call describes Angelica Schuyler as a mix of Desiree Armfeldt and Nicki Minaj.

[17] Lin-Manuel Miranda and Jeremy McCarter, *Hamilton: The Revolution* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2016), 79.

[18] Hortense J. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 67.

[19] See Lyra D. Monteiro, “Race-Conscious Casting and the Erasure of the Black Past in Lin-Manuel Miranda’s *Hamilton*,” National Council on Public History, 10 June 2016, <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/its-not-just-a-musical>; Annette Gordon-Reed, “*Hamilton*, the Musical: Blacks and the Founding Fathers,” 6 April 2016, <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/hamilton-the-musical-blacks-and-the-founding-fathers>; and Ishmael Reed, “*Hamilton*, the musical: Black Actor Dress Up like Slave Traders...and It’s Not Halloween,” CounterPunch, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2015/08/21/hamilton-the-musical-black-actors-dress-up-like-slave-tradersand-its-not-halloween> for their essential critiques of the musical’s erasure.

[20] Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton*, 44.

[21] Whitney Peoples, "'Under Construction': Identifying Foundations of Hip-Hop Feminism and Exploring Bridges between Black Second Wave and Hip-Hop Feminisms," in *No Permanent Waves Recasting Histories of U.S. Feminism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 404.

[22] Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 6.

[23] Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton*, 2.

4.y of Minnesota Press, 1997), 29.ect. istorical embodiment of the black female body, that I offer Miranda subverts through th

[24] Ibid, 82.

[25] In the essay, "On the Perfect Union of Actor and Role with Allusion to Renée Elise Goldsberry" in *Hamilton: The Revolution*, Miranda speaks about the first time that Goldsberry auditioned for the musical and how she was the perfect person for the role. Not only does this essay provide further insight into how character and actor are central to the musical, but it also highlights Miranda's role in casting of the show.

[26] Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton*, 175.

[27] Stacy Wolf, "Hamilton's Women," *Studies in Musical Theatre* 12, no. 2 (June 1, 2018): 176.

[28] Uri McMillan, *Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 24.

[29] Mireille Miller-Young, "Preface: Confessions of A Black Feminist Academic Pornographer," in *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography* (Durham, NC; Duke University Press, 2014), x.

[30] Cathy J. Cohen, "Deviance as Resistance: A New Research Agenda for the Study of Black Politics," *Du Bois Review* 1, no. 1 (2004): 27–45, 30.

[31] Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton*, 176.

[32] Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton*, 177.

[33] Phillipa Soo's racial ambiguity had led some historians to read her as white, specifically Annette Gordon-Reed who asserts that Phillipa Soo is read and coded as white. While the audience may have difficulty fitting her into a racial category, I do not read Phillipa Soo's embodiment of Eliza Schuyler as white.

[34] Wolf, "Hamilton's Women," 169.

[35] Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 4.

[36] As a reminder, because the casting breakdown specifies that a “non-white” actress should play the role, Eliza has been played by other non-Asian women of color; therefore, the meaning of the performance can and has changed depending on who portrays her. I analyze Soo’s performance because it has undoubtedly influenced later productions and it allows me to highlight that a generic (i.e., white) analysis will not serve the various meanings conjured by the bodies of the women of color who will embody this role in the future.

[37] Traise Yamamoto, *Masking Selves, Making Subjects: Japanese American Women, Identity, and the Body* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1999), 67.

[38] Yen Le Espiritu, *Asian American Women and Men: Labor, Laws and Love* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997), 34.

[39] For most spectators of the musical, Soo’s body signals a generic Asian-ness or mixedness, thus rendering her representative of all Asian Americans and denying her the particularities of her Chinese American identity. I refer to her as Asian American throughout the paper to point out how the United States’ systems of racial classification require Soo’s body to be easily consumable for the American public. In this way, Soo comes to stand in for the diverse population of Asian Americans, despite her desire or choice too.

[40] Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton*, 110.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

[43] There is no historical record of Eliza Schuyler’s reaction to finding out about the affair; Miranda’s imagines what her reaction would be in this song.

[44] Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton*, 238.

[45] Wolf, “*Hamilton*’s Women,” 175.

[46] Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton*, 280.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid, 281.

[49] Ibid, 281.

[50] Karen Shimakawa, *National Abjection: The Asian American Body Onstage* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2002), 3.

[51] Shimakawa, *National Abjection*, 3.

[52] H. Samy Alim, *Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip-Hop Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 97.

[53] Cherríe Moraga, *This Bridge Called My Back, Fourth Edition: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1981, reprint 2015), 16.

[54] For example, the recent Broadway revival of the Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* cast the female lead as a Black woman.

[55] Michael Paulson, "Hamilton Producers Will Change Job Posting, but Not Commitment to Diverse Casting," *The New York Times*, 30 March 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/31/arts/union-criticizes-hamilton-casting-call-seeking-nonwhite-actors.html>.

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**Table of Contents:**

- “The Mysterious Murder of Mrs. Shakespeare: Transgressive Performance in Nineteenth-Century New York” by Mia Levenson and Heather S. Nathans
- ““What Will Be Changed?”: Maxwell Anderson and the Literary Legacy of Sacco and Vanzetti” by Dan Colson
- “Theatre of Isolation: America, 1970s” by Madeline Pages
- ““A Certain Man Had Two [Kids]’: Tragic Parables, ‘The Prodigal Son’ and Albee's *The Goat*” by Michael Y. Bennett
- ““Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells [Her] Story’: An Intersectional Analysis of the Women in *Hamilton*” by Leticia L. Ridley

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