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Mr. Canino

Hamilton's Rhetoric through Rap

Lin Manuel Miranda's upbringing set up his success and foreshadows the creation of the musical *Hamilton*. Growing up with two hard working immigrant parents from Puerto Rico in New York City listening to Broadway cast albums and reading at the age of three, it is no wonder he felt connected and compelled to write a musical about an immigrant who rose from nothing and shaped America. After his first hit musical about a Hispanic-American neighborhood in New York City, *In The Heights*, Miranda picked up a biography of Hamilton to read on vacation for fun. Although he did not intend to be reading his inspiration for his next hit, as he said in an interview with Stephen Colbert, he immediately thought "[This is] a hip-hop story, an immigrant's story." (Colbert) The story of the founder of America's financial system remained relatively unknown to the common citizen prior to the mega-hit musical *Hamilton*. People would ask "which president is on the \$10 bill?" and after a debate and finally realizing that it's Alexander Hamilton, they then don't realize he was never really a president. Most people did not know the compelling nature of his life story nor did they know all that he accomplished. Miranda then took his ambition to make Alexander Hamilton's story known and combined it with his creative talents to begin a six-year journey of writing the musical that challenged the standard style of a musical and educated American citizens on the seemingly forgotten founding father.

The first, and most obvious way, that Lin-Manuel Miranda made Hamilton's story alluring to contemporary audiences was by telling the story through contemporary musical

stylings such as rap, hip-hop, and R&B. However, Miranda first struggled with how to make aspects and events of Hamilton's story, for example, the meeting between Hamilton, Madison, and Jefferson where Hamilton proposed to move the capitol in exchange for votes for his debt plan, into a captivating musical number. Miranda utilized the contemporary musical stylings of rap in order to merge the history of the musical with Hamilton's truly American life story for the modern-day audiences. In order to depict the arguments about the American financial system between Jefferson and Hamilton, Miranda set up their arguments in the form of rap battles. This helped relate the seemingly foreign and uninteresting disputes between Jefferson and Hamilton about banks and finances from nearly 300 years ago to the contemporary audience's interests. Both seeing those numbers on stage and hearing the soundtrack, you can hear bystanders' reacting as Hamilton and Jefferson were having a heated argument with each other, making the historical facts seem almost modern. The rap/hip-hop style also embodied the spirit of Alexander Hamilton. Alexis Petridis mentions in an analysis on the music of *Hamilton*, that "Indeed, the one jarring thing about the *Hamilton* cast recording is how much verbal information the listener is required to take in, which is perhaps fitting, given the title character's oft-remarked-on propensity for going on a bit." (Petridis). People knew Hamilton for talking densely, each speech being packed with information and passion, therefore, when rapping, Miranda best embodies Hamilton's intellectual and fiery spirit. Because of the musical styles that Miranda utilized, Hamilton's story became more universally known. Students began to understand his motives and background in their American history classes, everyday people can now name the person on the \$10 bill and know that he did not hold the position of president but rather created the entire American financial system that has lasted up to this day.

Lin Manuel Miranda helped gather a following beyond the musical theatre crowd by having contemporary artists to create their own cover of each songs. By doing so, he not only merged the gap between the past setting and the present style of the musical, but he also merged two different genres of music and their perspective audiences. Lin-Manuel Miranda created a whole different media that did not exist prior. No one has ever created an entire album of a musical, covered by artists of another genre. This groundbreaking musical innovation expanded interest in the show created a one of a kind aspect of musical theatre. Miranda decided to wait until the musical itself reached the Broadway stage and gained traction there before asking other popular artists to cover their songs. Jon Carmanica mentions in a *New York Times* article how this marketing move demonstrated how “‘The Hamilton Mixtape’ serves as a proxy for how ‘Hamilton’ has entered the wider popular imagination.” (Carmanica). Lin Manuel Miranda’s invitation towards artists outside his artistic genre to collaborate on his project reached beyond what the typical cast album does. It challenged artists in other fields to expand their creative abilities and dared them to make a popular Broadway hit into a cover and adding their own style to it. By doing so, the “Hamilton Mixtape” made people beyond the Broadway community aware of the show and peaked their interests in the music. These songs became more than just a Broadway sing a long in the car or the shower. These songs began to play on the radio and in workout classes as well as other settings. Miranda’s musical gained traction from people outside his primary audiences through the daring of other artists to put their own spin on his musical.

Another way that Lin Manuel Miranda tailors the historical story to the modern-day audiences is through color-conscious casting. Miranda believed having the cast look like America looks today instead of how America looked hundreds of years ago held much importance. The diverse casting allowed for the divide between the past and present to blur. The

story of Hamilton forming the foundation for America as an immigrant with other immigrants became story of immigrants in today's America. Hamilton's story's ability to relate to modern day America directly lead to its success and appeal to audiences. Jeff Macgregor discusses in his article in the *Smithsonian* how "The success of *Hamilton* is precisely embodied in the fact that it is convincing everybody of the need to see this nation as a nation of immigrants—the need to see people of color as central to owning the nation. I think the show is actually going to move the needle on how we think about immigration precisely because it is reaching people."

(MacGregor). *Hamilton* premiered during a time in America where political views became extremely polarized. In the debate of taking in Syrian refugees and border control, one side wanted immigrants to be prevented from entering the States while the other understood that America started as a country of immigrants, thus America now needs to keep the same sentiment. *Hamilton*, embodying the founding spirit of acceptance in America, becomes a catalyst for the discussion and mindset of how immigrants founded and currently run this country. Through the color-conscious casting, Lin Manuel Miranda creates a visual representation of how immigrants have shaped the country as a whole rather than the audience being blinded by the ignorant mentality of white men being the only group that makes a change.

Lin Manuel Miranda created change in his community through the creation of *Hamilton*. He merged styles and ideals from different centuries together in one harmonious piece of art. By doing so, he had the ability to show how similar people are of all generations and backgrounds. He had a man of color in the 2010's, tell the story of a white man from the 1700's, that people had seemingly forgotten about, through rap and hip hop and it became the biggest Broadway hit of the time. This format of the story allowed the deeper meaning and true human emotion to resonate with the issues at the time. He diversified his audience from the typical theatre crowd by

inviting other singers to cover his songs on a completely ground-breaking, one of a kind album cover of *Hamilton* after the musical became a hit. Through these tactics and combination of styles and stories that do not seemingly match, Lin Manuel Miranda created a musical that challenged the typical style of a Broadway musical, the standard visual of American history, and expanded his audience through collaboration with other artists.

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