The price of greatness, especially in statecraft, comes high. All the master-builders in the American Enlightenment were tormented by political enemies, wounded by lying or malicious critics, forced to breathe for years on end the withering fumes of political skull-duggery. All of them lived with some awareness that they would be reviewed and most likely re-crucified as future events would inspire fresh controversy. To say of that rare being, a philosopher-statesman, that he is "controversial" is therefore hardly a statement: it is more like a tautology.

Yet the brilliant and troubled life and career of Alexander Hamilton is controversial in a special sense. To him controversy was a way of life, a high adventure. He created it, often, without much regard to later results; he met it with bold and high-handed rebuttals and counter-attacks; and apart from days necessarily consumed by the professional tasks before him, or spent in the adoring society of his family, or among his political lieutenants to whom he imparted the directives of the day, Hamilton came to consciousness as a youth and died on the "field of honor" intensely and peculiarly a combatant. "The Little Lion" found life and politics tame without glory, without the stiff breezes of danger —fancied or real. To live dangerously, to outwit and out-maneuver others, to achieve something grand—no other life was worth playing out. The insatiable passion was pride—not Virgil's "greed of gold," but rather what the eighteenth century knew as "the craving for distinction." Many times Alexander Hamilton laid his life on the line, and won. But even before his unnecessary death at the age of 49, the wheel of fortune had played him out and in the debacle of those last years he doubted even what he had truly achieved.

In his own time, estimates of his character were profoundly tinctured with partisan politics. John Adams, who had been the victim of repeated covert vendettas on Hamilton's part, lashed out at Hamilton as "the most restless, impatient, artful, indefatigable and unprincipled intriguer in the United States, if not in the world." Others saw him as "a little *Alex-*

ander . . . who would be Great," *a "Bonaparte," "chief of a corrupt squadron," "ambitious Cataline," "the greatest Machiavel in America."*

However, the best of his political opponents admitted the marked talents Hamilton possessed. Although he was the classic enemy of Jefferson, the latter did not deny the stature of his antagonist. In the glaring heat of the fight over Jay's Treaty, for example, Jefferson wrote almost despairingly to Madison, "Without numbers, he is an host within himself." Without weakening a shred towards his opponent, Jefferson nevertheless exhibited his portrait at Monticello along with those of other great men of the time. In the 1830's Madison, answering a request for information, wrote of Hamilton: "He possessed intellectual powers of the first order, and the moral qualifications of integrity and honor in a captivating degree . . . If his Theory of Government deviated from the Republican Standard, he had the candor to avow it, and the greater merit of cooperating faithfully in maturing and supporting a system which was not his choice. The criticism to which his share in the administration of it was most liable was that it had the aspect of an effort to give to the instrument a constructive and practical bearing not warranted by its true and intended character."

As for his political friends, *there is no doubt that Hamilton enjoyed intense hero-worship from numbers of them. Federalists in the highest offices under President Adams wrote unashamedly asking his advice. Timothy Pickering, the Secretary of State, lamented: "I wish you were in a situation not only 'to see all the cards', but to play them. With all my soul I would give you* my *hand." On more than one occasion, he was addressed as "Father Confessor." Most important was the esteem Washington held him in, listening willingly to Hamilton's proposals, vesting particular credence in his financial and constitutional views, although not unaware of Hamilton's impetuousness and high-handed style in politics. His last written estimate of Hamilton's character deserves attention. "By some he is considered as an ambitious man, and therefore a dangerous one. That he is ambitious I shall readily grant, but it is of that laudable kind which prompts a man to excell in whatever he takes in hand. He is enterprising, quick in his perceptions, and his judgment intuitively great; qualities essential to a Military character. . . ." After Hamilton's untimely death, no less a man than John Marshall confided his view to Timothy Pickering that Hamilton was "certainly one of the greatest men that ever lived."*

Perhaps the true balance suggested by the views above is that Hamilton's "ambition" was in fact composed of two elements—personal ambition, for his own fame, acknowledged headship over all others in the field, glory (even of the obvious military kind), power (even to do favors, pay scores, punish whomever had offended or obstructed him); and national ambition, for his adopted country. For both, he was on the make, and often the two interests could be advanced together. He was de-

termined to make himself and his country emblematic images of superiority and power.

An illegitimate child, born in the West Indies, Alexander Hamilton had been thrown on his own resources in his early teens and vowed to win identity and achieve distinction for himself. Even when he was a lonely, castoff youngster, working for his own keep in a shipping firm on the island of St. Croix, Hamilton symbolically prepared "for futurity." One of his earliest letters is suffused with longing for a life grander, less "contemptible," than that of a mere clerk. The urgency with which he dreamed of the turns of fortune, the ardor with which he came round, at the end of the letter, to the theme of heroic escape by means of war ("I wish there was a war") are startlingly prophetic of the stormy drama ahead.

Through his own enterprise and brains, Hamilton had arranged to borrow sufficient passage money for the migration to the American colonies. Shortly after his arrival, he appeared in New Jersey to study at an academy; soon he tried to arrange a speed-up course for himself, one year shorter than the regular period, at Princeton College. He made his request in person, in an interview with President Witherspoon, who firmly said no. A little later, he studied for a short time at King's College in New York. These meager details provide the short foreground of his preparation for the role of "Alexander, Hero."

In the spring of 1775, he was a member of one of the militias of the gathering revolutionary struggle. At that early time, too, Hamilton demonstrated his command in the field of argument and debate. Important men noticed the clever and cogent youth as he talked up in political meetings. At the precocious age of a college sophomore, he displayed his literary powers by contributing two forceful pamphlets to the literature of colonial protest against the encroachments of Parliament. In these he rehearsed arguments that had achieved intercolonial currency by that time, but he made them arresting, and he evoked a grand vision of future economic power for North America. Some division of feeling may nevertheless have existed in him, to put the brake of law and orderly process on a movement that he found rife with mob violence, the flaunting of property rights, and disrespect for authority. These conservative impulses became greatly accentuated after the Revolution, when Hamilton became prominent as legal counsel for British and Loyalist litigants, and incidentally created the basis of his later political support on the part of conservative and well-to-do citizens in the New York area.

The Reverend Dr. Myles Cooper, Anglican President of King's College and a Tory propagandist, knew a different young scholar, a volatile blue-eyed, auburn-haired lad, to whom he was grateful for a warning that he believed had saved his life. Hamilton, who always responded to position, rank, and authority (and thus knew from the start that he would not settle for less than the highest), loathed the rash actions of crowds of *incensed men. Learning that a band of New Yorkers were planning to attack the President's house, he dashed ahead to warn the scholar, and accompanied him in his flight from the college grounds to the banks of the Hudson where a thoroughly terrified Reverend Doctor managed to board a British vessel. Hamilton, who was so intensely partisan in his political conduct when he was a great man of power in national affairs, could not abide "Tory-baiting."*

Just as Hamilton had intimated in his prescient letter peeping into "futurity," he found his war. Soon after the Cooper episode, he became a captain of artillery and held off British troops at White Plains long enough for Washington's ragged troops to withdraw to New Jersey. Hamilton quickly rose to the position of lieutenant colonel in the Revolutionary Army via importunate requests to General Washington, whom he had served ably as an aide-de-camp at headquarters. There, in an inexcusable peeve, Hamilton manufactured the occasion for a quarrel with the beleaguered Washington in order to force his way clear to an active command. His early yearning for military glory was under no circumstances to be ignored for the mundane tasks of a military scribe.

From the early days when Hamilton, a youth in his twenties, joined General Washington's intimate family in the Revolutionary War, he discovered within himself the dynamism of personal influence. Without benefit of a "How to" manual, he influenced people and made friends —wealthy young men, powerful older men, foreigners of rank and importance who had come to assist in the military management of the American try for independence—Layfayette, for one, Baron Steuben for another. From his youthful taste of success, Hamilton developed the habit—for it did become automatic and reflexive—of drawing other ambitious men to his side as aids, abettors, confidants, and associates, many of them grateful to come within the radius of a talented personality who knew how to command.

During the war, Hamilton married, according to a plan he had playfully but with serious undertones recommended to a friend, a lovely and very rich wife of the highest social standing—Betsy Schuyler, one of the daughters of the aristocratic New Yorker, Philip Schuyler. This marriage was blessed by eight children and was marred by the sordid affair that Hamilton had with the illiterate and vulgar Mrs. Reynolds, acting as decoy for her extortionist husband—an affair that rivalled the sensationalism of the Profumo scandal in our own day, though the love nest was located on Philadelphia's Market Street. Hamilton's curious psychology, as he chose to publish a detailed confession of this episode rather than tolerate baseless accusations against his public conduct as Secretary of the Treasury, remains an enigma.

In the 1780's Hamilton was greatly concerned with the economic problems of the Confederation, and with the attendant problems of insufficient energy, authority, and control over the states. His powers as a draftsman *had sharpened and his mind, though neither learned nor nourished by broad humanistic study, was incisive, realistic and constructive. He had a twofold drive: to argue for a stronger continental government, and to develop his views of the economic supports that might oil and power the machinery of more effective government. In these years, he and Madison were without doubt the two foremost men—both young—directing the moves that led to the Constitutional Convention. Yet in that assembly of talented men from every state in the Confederation, Hamilton's political position represented the extreme right of the spectrum of belief. The majority of delegates, and the people whose approval they knew they would have to seek, were committed to the ideal of a new form of republicanism. Hamilton's frank admiration of the British monarchy, his wholesale distrust of self-government, his unqualified belief that "the goodness of a government consists in a vigorous execution," led him to recommend sweeping national powers and central authority "toned . . . as high as possible." This undemocratic political philosophy prevented him from making any significant contribution to the formation of the Constitution in 1787, although he decided to return to the Convention to sign the document and to work for its ratification. "No man's ideals were more remote from the plan" than his own, he said: "but is it possible to deliberate between anarchy and convulsion on one side, and the change of good to be expected from the plan on the other?"*

In this spirit, Hamilton made an immeasurable contribution to the ratification of the Constitution, leading the fight in the hostile New York Convention and writing masterly expositions of the meaning and implications of the proposed constitutional system for The Federalist. *The latter contribution, authorship of fifty of the 85 essays and probably joint authorship with Madison of three more, is in itself a major and lasting contribution to American political thought.*

Shortly afterwards, Hamilton accepted the Secretaryship of the Treasury in the new government under George Washington. From that position of broad power, he developed his greatest service to his country. The heart of his contribution can be identified with faith in and formulation of the vast potentialities for economic development in the United States. Three fundamental propositions unified his series of financial reports and measures. First, Hamilton himself appreciated the role of private capital in winning economic gain for the nation, and therefore urged the development of private capital. Second, he caught up with the technological implications of the Industrial Revolution then in its infancy in England, and was trying to provide a theoretical defense of it appropriate to the national development of the United States. He understood the need to create the positive conditions for economic growth, and clearly explained the responsibility of the government in this regard. Many of his appeals to a supposedly preferred economic class—the moneyed men—are the result of his understanding that the interest of *the state and private property must be linked in order to assure increasing productivity. Third, Hamilton made an unprecedented contribution by working out a detailed and systematic program for the Federal Government to promote national economic growth and private capital. His measures included a tariff on imports; an excise tax on domestic products; a funding system to assume the outstanding debts, and issue interest-paying bonds in their place; the establishment of a Bank of the United States to create a free flow of currency, stimulate business and provide a pool from which the Government could borrow when necessary; the encouragement of manufactures by bounties; a protective tariff, and subsidiary government activities. All these measures were successfully put into operation under Hamilton's guidance, with the exception of his forward-looking proposals in the brilliant* Report on Manufactures.

Men who disagreed with his political goals and with the methods he employed to reach them, found it hard to distinguish between the man and his national ideals. They fought him as a "Caesar" who would ride roughshod over the people. They found him callous about the liberties, interests and pride of the many—the farmers and the workers; and correspondingly persuaded of the special prerogatives and superior value of the moneyed interests, whose alliance with the government he had judged indispensable and worth courting above all. It was this betrayal of the democratic ethic that Jefferson and Madison and their followers opposed, and it was doubtless a compound of the man and his thorough program. For Hamilton's program was certainly not confined to fiscal and monetary affairs. Hamilton wished to ensure an energetic national government centered in the Federal administration; a strong growing economy was naturally required, but so was an army, and some of the symbols of authority similar to those of the English monarchy, a ruling class of the "wealthy, well-born and wise." His favorite word for this vision of a powerful United States that would not be subservient to European powers but would in time out-distance their power, was Empire. For an empire, vigorous action was the lifeline. Consequently clear, unswerving opposition had to be forth-coming against those who would oppose the dictates of government. Thus he seized upon the Whiskey Rebellion in Pennsylvania (in 1794) as an opportunity for the government to vindicate its strength. He himself thought it essential to play the chief role in the suppression of the opposition by the farmers to the whiskey tax. Similarly, when Virginia and Kentucky issued the Resolution of 1798 against the government's Alien and Sedition Acts, he found reinforcement for his conviction that the large states could not safely be permitted to co-exist with the central government, and advocated their subdivision into smaller, more manageable units. As a first response, he had moved, characteristically, to threaten Virginia and other "refractory" Southern states with the United States Army.

If to men like Jefferson and Madison the thrust of Hamilton's political *economy was "adverse to the principles of liberty," making the consolidation of all powers into the Federal structure a death-warrant for the powers of the states and indeed for any popular center of loyal opposition to central government, there were others who were less plagued by his "principles" and more by his conduct and character as a man. John Adams, an honored potentate in the same party that Hamilton sought to rule as "King of the Feds," saw in the man with his power plays and intrigues, the embodiment of evil—even though he shared some of his political philosophy and was in accord with some of his program. There is no doubt that John Adams* had *been singled out for rough handling. Hamilton never wanted Adams elevated by the Federalists to the second in public position after Washington. Among other hostile moves, he schemed to defeat Adams of an honest share of electoral votes in the Presidential contest of 1796; and he went to extremes of implacable and irrational egotism in strafing Adams' character to destroy his chances of re-election in 1800.*

It must be said that in political contests which he regarded as tests of his power, Hamilton was sometimes unbelievably reckless and on one occasion at least flagrantly lawless. The occasion was the move that climaxed his last-ditch maneuvers in New York to circumvent a Republican victory at the polls in 1800. Infuriated that Burr had brought off a Republican victory in the New York City elections, he penned a hurried letter to John Jay, Governor of New York, urging that the Assembly reverse the election laws and undo the results of the legal election. It was a conscious proposal of a coup d'etat, *argued for on the ground that "in times like these in which we live, it will not do to be over-scrupulous." John Jay would have no part of this deed—he merely endorsed the back of Hamilton's letter with the honorable words: "Proposing a measure for party purposes, which I think it would not become me to adopt."*

On the other hand, Hamilton had far-seeing vision and grasp of the subsidiary details to construct a viable program out of his dream for a populous, thriving and powerful nation. In short, his capacity to provide energetic direction and clear-minded definition for his program persuaded men like Washington, John Marshall, Rufus King, John Jay, to rank him as super-statesman among his contemporaries. Tribute would be rendered him for one or another of his many significant contributions: Washington could rely on him for economic "intelligence" and for the quick, intuitive political judgments that so often proved to be penetrating and adroit. Marshall, whose own course as Chief Justice borrowed the Hamiltonian portion on judicial review, valued the strong unionist who paved the way for implied powers and judicial supremacy. And of course some of his admirers were simply attached to the man who could be very tolerant of his friends, loyal to them even when they were foolish or flagrant in business speculations. Men could not help responding to his confident and brilliant conversation, his social conviviality and *charm. The ladies saw all this, of course, in heightened terms and fancied in addition his easy chit-chat, the courtly compliments he paid, and a certain insouciance.*

Hamilton's retirement from public office in January, 1795 was never expected to be permanent. Wishing to repair his financial position which had suffered by the $3,500 salary that his Cabinet position then carried, Hamilton resumed the practice of law in New York, engaged in land speculation, had a hand in various commercial ventures, and continued to be active as a Federalist party boss. However, his dire move against John Adams in 1800 lost him ground with his own Federalist circle and no sooner had he measured his declining influence, than he opened a new round of warfare with Aaron Burr. Hamilton was becoming more violent in his enmities and less skillful in his political plans and intrigues with each passing year. The loss of self-control all seemed to stem from the fateful turn of the century, when his illustrious protector, George Washington, died; and when President Adams took surprisingly stubborn command of his own Cabinet and frustrated Hamilton's last chance for a career of military glory on a continental scale.

In these various depredations on his reputation, his political prospects, and his self-confidence Hamilton had been injured in his most cherished aspirations. He had no deep fund of internal resources that could carry him over these hurts to his amour propre. *A gloomy Cassandra-note sounds in many of the private letters of this period. Democracy is a "poison," the American world "is not made for me," his unrecognized supreme services for the strengthening of the Constitution oppressed him and alienated him further. From his childhood he had sought a way to win identity and cure the pangs of alienation; for these ends he had struggled to the top of the cliff and reached the sunlight. Now he felt his fall to be precipitous.*

Disenchantment already had him in its grip when the crushing affliction of his eldest son's death in a duel, fought to protect his father's name from slander, fell upon him. The son, Philip, died in his early twenties of a gunshot wound inflicted by a young Republican lawyer on "the field of honor" at Weehawken. An intimate friend of Alexander Hamilton, Robert Troup, wrote: "Never did I see a man so completely overwhelmed with grief as Hamilton has been." This deadly encounter took place on July 4, 1801. Three years later, in the same month, on the same heights of Weehawken, the father took Aaron Burr's fire and on July 12, 1804 he died.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, Hamilton's reputation was in temporary eclipse, partly because of the disintegration of the Federalist Party and the transition from Jeffersonian to Jacksonian democracy. Post Civil War America was another matter; for with the transformation of America into an industrial society and with currents of aggressive nationalism running strong, historians and statesmen turned enthusi-

astically to Hamilton as a symbol. From that time to our own, the symbol has been repeatedly revised and re-shaped at the hands of conservatives, financiers, businessmen, romantic and not-so-romantic nationalists, and all admirers—native and foreign—of a dashing, energetic "doer," and administrative genius who could keep a governing finger on the remotest customs clerk at the same time that he could control Congress, advise the President and act as the chief of the Federalist Party.

Today Hamilton's reputation is at a higher peak than it has been for over a century. Leaders of the rising new nations who desire accelerated economic growth and national power read and quote Hamilton. Meanwhile, at home, biographies, administrative studies, and monographs on his contribution to the "living Constitution," or on "the founder of the American nation," or on his realistic understanding of the American "national interest" add their share to the burgeoning revival of the past decade.

Woodrow Wilson tried once to sum Hamilton up by saying he was "a great man, but not a great American." Senator Arthur Vandenburg, as though to reply, subtitled his book on Hamilton, "The Greatest American." The controversy continues. For men of different temperaments can hardly be expected to see the multiform content of the American Experiment in identical ways, nor will they be drawn with equal attachment to the principles and life styles of Hamilton and Jefferson. But as we learn more about these two great men we realize that their complementary play and very different views and abilities had much to do with the durability of the American Experiment. For these reasons there can be no serious disagreement with Walter Lippmann's assertion that "to be partisan, as between Jefferson and Hamilton, is like arguing whether men or women are more necessary to the procreation of the race."

This insight is caught in Rosemary and Stephen Vincent Benet's verse:

Jefferson said "the Many!"
Hamilton said "the Few!"
Like opposite sides of a penny
Were these exalted two.
If Jefferson said "It's black, Sir!"
Hamilton cried "It's white!"
But 'twixt the two, our Constitution started working right.