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Blackout on Broadway: Affiliation and audience in *In the Heights* and *Hamilton*

ABSTRACT

Lin-Manuel Miranda's In the Heights (2008) and Hamilton (2015) find their inspiration in a generative conflict between individualism and community, freedom and property, whiteness and blackness, and empathy and complicity. The contradictory thematic pressures organizing Miranda's musicals are the product of a complex negotiation with the institution of Broadway and its historic (mis)representation of people of colour. The musicals ambivalently balance a counter-narrative to a history of stereotype on the Broadway stage with the goal of convincing the predominantly white, highly educated tourists in attendance that the other is one of us. The musicals showcase different sets of Others and therefore have divergent goals in educating the audience, with In the Heights focused on counter-ing stereotypes of Latinx criminality and Hamilton on affirming the immigrant's centrality to the American nation. Nevertheless, both musicals display an ambivalence about the efficacy of the affective strategies used to educate the spectator. The stories of In the Heights and Hamilton share an investment in private property as a defining facet of the American Dream and, by extension, national belonging. At the same time, both musicals are fractured by an anxiety about the terms of such belonging, namely, who is silenced or excluded. The themes of acquisition and dispossession in terms of property ownership are fractured by the constant plea for forgiveness, for who gets sacrificed by the purportedly free market in order to facilitate the upward mobility of the rest.

KEYWORDS

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Introduction

What does positing one's writerly self, in the wholly racialized society that is the United States, as unraced and all others as raced entail? What happens to the writerly imagination of a black author who is at some level always conscious of representing one's own race to, or in spite of, a race of readers that understands itself to be 'universal' or race-free?

(Morrison 1992: 4)

In a 2015 *Hollywood Reporter* interview, Lin-Manuel Miranda describes the power of art, pitting it against the work of politics: 'Art engenders empathy in a way that politics doesn't, and in a way that nothing else really does. Art creates change in people's hearts' (DiGiacomo 2015). Miranda frames the ethical obligation of art in terms of emotion and identification, suggesting that art is a productive alternative to political activism. The transformative power of art prompts spectators to empathize with and adopt perspectives different from their own, challenging the more normative affiliations of their 'hearts'. The initial academic response to *Hamilton* (2015) appears to agree with Miranda's approach to art, categorizing the musical as a project of historical fiction that is guided by an educational imperative, 'reminding the audience that history is a constructed and performed enterprise' (Nerenson 2016: 1047) and 'encourag[ing] audiences to explore historical inquiries further' (Carp 2017: 293). The audience is therefore asked to adopt a critical view of historiography as practice and process. One critic goes so far as to say that the musical functions as an essential teaching tool, 'aid[ing] those who study and teach the Revolution by opening up questions about how historians analyze and interpret the past' (Carp 2017: 293). Additionally, the musical's educational impulse is seen as challenging political discourses on citizenship and immigration, such that 'Miranda argues for racial justice and the acceptance of immigrants' (Carp 2017: 292–93). The perception that the musical's narrative can speak to its contemporary moment in order to counter racism and xenophobia was reinforced by the cast's decision to direct a plea to a specific audience member on 18 November 2016: Vice President-Elect Mike Pence. Reading from a prepared text, Brandon Victor Dixon introduced the cast as representative of a 'diverse America' and expressed their 'hope that this show has inspired you to uphold our American values and to work on behalf of all of us' (Lindley 2016). This essay interrogates the 'us' that the musical *Hamilton* imagines speaking both for and to, examining how the transformation of the audience's hearts relies upon a raced and classed articulation of community. Interpreting the border between 'us' and 'you' requires an analysis of how *Hamilton* (2015) inherits an uneasy alliance from *In the Heights* (2008) between the subjects onstage and those in the audience.

Scholarly criticism about the musical is beginning to adopt a more critical tone regarding the intent and ability of *Hamilton* to accomplish a transformation of its audience's ethics and affiliation. Brian Eugenio Herrera has 'registered a noticeable uptick in commentaries reflecting what we might consider #HamCrit's "skeptical turn", in which the accuracy, ethicality or creativity of Miranda's casting conceit bears multipronged critique' (2017: 24). Such critics maintain that the musical's narrative and staging techniques reinforce exclusionary and conservative discourses about American values, history and identity. The audience's assumptions about the American Revolution's heroes are affirmed, as opposed to challenged. The musical is 'designed to reassure the

audience about the righteousness of the American cause and the promise of the new nation (never mind the fate of the enslaved and the dispossessed)' (Carp 2017: 291). Indeed, the founders' original sin of slavery is elided, such that 'the spirit of *Hamilton* allows Americans to overcome their disillusionment with the founders over the embarrassment of slavery' (Isenberg 2017: 298). Critics contend, for example, that the cross-casted depiction of Thomas Jefferson absolves the rest of the founders, Hamilton and by extension the contemporary spectator: 'When the talented Daveed Diggs argues as Thomas Jefferson for the security of the South's slave-holding economy, the actor's blackness distances his performance of racism from Jefferson's whiteness, enabling a (largely white) audience to forget the degree to which they are implicated in the violent, anti-black histories of the United States' (McMasters 2016). The audience's empathy for the founding fathers ends up reinforcing the exclusionary principles upon which the nation was envisioned. The audience does not empathize with the enslaved, such as Sally Hemings, but with Hamilton via his condemnation of Jefferson's hypocrisy. The audience ends up rooting for the founding father with the 'right' ethics for upholding the American values of equality and democracy, rather than wrestling with the more complicated reality of how those values were always sullied by the new nation's dependence upon enslaved labour as well as the genocide and displacement of indigenous peoples.

Implicit in this disagreement over the musical's relationship to its audience is a consensus concerning the (often parenthetical) composition of those in attendance at a Broadway show. Critics draw different conclusions about the spectators' affiliation with the characters in the musical, but it is understood that the 'universal' term of 'the audience' refers to a specific and privileged demographic. I open this essay with an epigraph from Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* (1992) because it references the unique challenges facing a writer of colour, burdens that are ignored when the assumption about the universal reader or audience member goes unarticulated. While the 'unraced' audience of Broadway 'understands itself to be "universal" or race-free', attendance statistics tell another story (Morrison 1992: 4). According to the Broadway League, the demographics of Broadway audiences during the 2015–16 season, when *Hamilton* premiered, were as follows: 63% tourist, 67% female, 77% white, 80% college educated and 40% with advanced degrees. Not much had changed since the 2008–09 season when Miranda's first musical *In the Heights* premiered; by comparison, audiences were 63% tourist, 66% female, 74% white, 73% college educated and 36% with graduate degrees. Broadway audiences became slightly whiter, significantly better educated, an elite cohort that was not representative of either New York City or broader national demographic trends. The institution of Broadway configures what kinds of stories can speak to its audiences and such attendance statistics indicate that Broadway finds itself catering to an increasingly homogenous population in terms of class and race. Such demographics are not reflective of a 'diverse America'. When thinking about which stories create feelings of affiliation, these demographics point to the limits of emotional appeals. Who is being asked to care shapes the parameters of the story.

I share an interest with prior critics regarding how the staging, music and dialogue of Miranda's work encourage the audience to identify with specific subjectivities and their struggles. The conflicting interpretations of *Hamilton*, wherein the musical either challenges its audience to identify with marginalized racial Others or reinforces an exclusionary nationalist logic, reproduce

the creative tension informing both *Hamilton* and *In the Heights*. These musicals find their inspiration in a generative conflict between individualism and community, freedom and property, whiteness and blackness, and empathy and complicity. The contradictory thematic pressures organizing Lin-Manuel Miranda's musicals are the product of a complex negotiation with the institution of Broadway and its historic (mis)representation of people of colour. The musicals ambivalently balance a counter-narrative to a history of stereotype on the Broadway stage with the goal of convincing the predominantly white, highly educated tourists in attendance that the 'other' is one of 'us'. The musicals showcase different sets of Others and therefore have divergent goals in educating the audience, with *In the Heights* focused on countering stereotypes of Latinx criminality and *Hamilton* on affirming the immigrant's centrality to the American nation. Nevertheless, both musicals display an ambivalence about the efficacy of the affective strategies used to educate the spectator. The symbolic conflict between the value of 'us', of community solidarity, and that of property becomes articulated using literal and rhetorical references to blackness. The dynamics of choosing profit over people within the geopolitical locale of New York City ultimately trouble the work of creating community and audience affiliation within Lin-Manuel Miranda's *In the Heights* and *Hamilton*.

Trafficking in Latinx stereotypes

In contrast to the Good Neighbor era, the latter half of the twentieth century saw the equation of Latinx residents and immigrants with criminality on the Great White Way following the success of *West Side Story* (1957). As Frances Negrón-Mutaner notes in *Boricua Pop* (2004), the musical is a foundational fiction that defines 'Puerto Ricans as criminals (men) and victims (women)' (Negrón-Mutaner 2004: 62). The legacy of *West Side Story* is such that its narrative 'remains a constitutive site for American ethno-national identifications' by incorporating Puerto Ricans as a US ethnicity (Negrón-Mutaner 2004: 58). Negrón-Mutaner argues that the musical 'can be dubbed the diaspora's trauma' because Puerto Ricans are forced to wrestle with the shame and valorization associated with the musical's portrayal (Negrón-Mutaner 2004). Brian Eugenio Herrera expands upon her analysis in *Latin Numbers* (2015) by explaining how the film version consolidated the stereotype of criminality, 'creat[ing] a template for the Latino gang member as a stock character in US popular performance' (Herrera 2015: 121). The transition from stage to screen magnified an ethnic-specific stereotype into a pan-Latinx one. That 'racialized stock character' (Herrera 2015: 127) would serve as a measure by which to usher and interpret Latinx creative work on Broadway. In *José, Can You See?* (1999), Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez reveals that the spectre of criminality haunted the first US Latinx-authored plays on Broadway: *Short Eyes* in 1973, *Zoot Suit* in 1979 and *Cuba and His Teddy Bear* in 1986. While each portrayed a different Latinx population (Nuyorican, Chicano and Cuban-American, respectively), the reception by 'general audiences' construed the dramatic works as 'embodiment[s] of derogatory stereotypes of US Latinos/as' (Sandoval-Sánchez 1999: 115). Broadway as a gatekeeping institution placed a 'burden of representation' upon US Latinx theatre to reproduce the depiction of *West Side Story*, from its urban setting to the focus on working-class populations engaged in illicit or illegal activities (Sandoval-Sánchez 1999: 115). The productions of the first Latinx dramatic works to cross over to the Broadway stage therefore 'easily perpetuate[d] the stereotyping of US Latinos

as delinquents, gang members, criminals, drug users' (Sandoval-Sánchez 1999: 115). The expectation that a Latinx dramatic performance address limited facets of 'ghetto life' in order to claim any cultural authenticity and be seen as a viable investment for a Broadway production inevitably led to the reinforcement of a white audience's prejudices.

Lin-Manuel Miranda, who describes himself as steeped in the musical traditions of Broadway, often refers to how the staging of stereotypes about Latinidad shapes his understanding of himself as a Latinx artist. Miranda points to a specific formative experience in high school that inspired *In the Heights*, the 'perfect storm' of directing *West Side Story* at the same time that the musical *Capeman* made its debut on Broadway (Brown 2015). Miranda recalls the marketing of *Capeman* as the show that was 'going to be the great brown moment in musical theater' and his disappointment that 'it was us as gang members in the '50s, again' (Brown 2015). The confluence of staging *West Side Story* while witnessing the floundering of *Capeman* 'fueled' Miranda's 'creative fire' with the ethical imperative of portraying Latinx characters 'onstage without a knife in our hand', of creating a 'show with Latino people where we aren't gang members and drug dealers, because that's been super well represented already' (Brown 2015). The racial and class politics of *In the Heights* are shaped by this desire to focus on alternative narratives of Latinidad, moving away from the depiction of poverty and working-class populations. Miranda emphasizes his hope that 'this musical will correct' the stereotypes of the 'knife fight' and 'drug deal' by making the case that 'You know, these people are just like you, and they're getting priced out of Manhattan just like you are, and we're all just trying to get by' (Anon. 2007). The work of cultural translation aims to educate the audience, to undermine the inherited stereotype about Latinx criminality, by drawing spectators into an affective identification with the middle class US Latinx characters depicted in *In the Heights*.

Academic criticism's 'skeptical turn' often contrasts Miranda's *In the Heights* with *Hamilton* in this regard, arguing that *Hamilton* is on the opposite end of an ideological continuum with regard to its relationship with the audience. These readings configure *Hamilton* as affirming the politically conservative, racist and/or simplistic assumptions of white spectators while positioning *In the Heights* as more progressive, resistant, diverse and/or complex. For example, historian Lyra Monteiro explains that she 'was super skeptical of the concept of *Hamilton*, because it seemed like a really weird choice for somebody who had done something that I thought was so revolutionary in *In the Heights*, in terms of talking about non-white immigrants in New York today. To go from that to doing really mainstream founding fathers history just seemed weird' (Onion 2016). Monteiro draws a contrast between *Hamilton* and Miranda's previous Broadway show on the grounds that they depict populations with differing relationships to racial privilege and dominant historical narratives. While Monteiro maintains that *Hamilton*'s racial politics and cross-casting reinforce conservative notions of nation building, she views the representation of Latinx neighbourhood in *In the Heights* as groundbreaking because it directly undermines Latinx stereotypes. Performance studies scholar James McMasters also argues that the musicals are at odds with each other in terms of how they depict immigration and property ownership. McMasters finds it

puzzling to say the least, that Miranda would propagate this typical bootstraps narrative after producing such a triumphant, complicated portrait of diasporic life with *In The Heights* [...] While *Hamilton*

celebrates settler-colonists as patriots for stabilizing stolen land into a new nation, *In The Heights* is a *critique* of the violence of gentrification – an ongoing urban process of displacing black and brown people from their homes, colonization by another name.

(McMasters 2016, original emphasis)

The incongruity that Monteiro and McMasters see between the two musicals inspires me to make the case for how Miranda's depiction of a contemporary community in Washington Heights sets the stage for his vision of the historical leadership behind the American Revolution. The content of the musicals may seem at odds with each other, due to distinctly different historical contexts and figures for audience identification – Usnavi the resident Latinx and Hamilton the Caribbean immigrant. Even so, there are parallels to be found beyond the setting of Manhattan. The stories of *In the Heights* and *Hamilton* share an investment in private property as a defining facet of the American Dream and, by extension, national belonging. At the same time, both musicals are fractured by an anxiety about the terms of such belonging, namely, who is silenced or excluded. The themes of acquisition and dispossession in terms of property ownership are fractured by the constant plea for forgiveness, for who gets sacrificed by the 'free' market in order to facilitate the upward mobility of the rest. The academic criticism on Miranda consequently reiterates the binary oppositions that are within the musicals without connecting these to the context of cultural production, the institution of Broadway and its audience.

By discussing how these two musicals similarly depict property ownership as the site for audience identification, I correlate *Hamilton's* depiction of immigrants and blackness with the representation of Latinidad and gentrification by *In the Heights*. In both works, the audience is asked to empathize with the struggles of a model citizen defined by his relationship to property. The individualistic freedom of the protagonists, what Toni Morrison would interpret as code for universal whiteness, is constructed in relation to a disavowed community of Others. Both musicals are marked by a desire to counter Broadway stereotypes of working-class Latinidad (for example, *West Side Story* and *The Capeman*) that conflate racial otherness and non-white subjects with criminality and unassimilable foreignness. *In the Heights* posits the US Latinx business class as a normative ideal even as the song 'Blackout' references the underlying violence that necessitates such an erasure. The blackout's literal blackness in *In the Heights* is a precursor to the rhetorical blackness in *Hamilton*. The origin story of the American Revolution in *Hamilton* allows Miranda to map thematic concerns about Broadway as an institution. The embodiment of the founding fathers with a multicultural cast alludes to how the emplotment of the musical necessitates the silencing of certain voices from the narrative. Close readings of the songs 'Alexander Hamilton', 'Right Hand Man', 'My Shot', 'Non-stop', 'What'd I Miss', 'Cabinet Battle #1' and 'In the Room Where it Happens' reveal how the musical inherits a model for audience affiliation as well as an ambivalence regarding representation and staging from *In the Heights*.

Unruly offstage others in *In the Heights*

The song 'Blackout' from *In the Heights* is an important precursor to *Hamilton's* depiction of a Caribbean immigrant as model citizen. Aiming to produce empathy for the Latinx experience, Miranda stakes a claim in the universalism of a white middle class experience in order to transform the 'you' of the

audience into a 'we' bonded by struggle. *In the Heights* articulates the shared concern of property loss by opening with Usnavi lamenting the neighbourhood's gentrification and rising living costs. The blackout scene that concludes the first act of *In the Heights* and the loss of electricity in the barrio serves to mark a pivotal shift in the musical's class hierarchy. The musical's desire to counter the Broadway stereotypes of criminality translates into the invisibility of such bodies during the blackout and the play as a whole – we never see the population attacking the bodega and other businesses onstage. The song 'Blackout' expresses the concerns of the business-class Latinx population, inviting the spectators to identify with the emotional turmoil generated by the blackout's challenge to property ownership. The absence of the bodies perpetrating the violence is paired with the transformation of the criminal and working poor characters, Graffiti Pete and Abuela Claudia. We witness the conversion of Graffiti Pete from a thug violating personal property to an artist employed by the bodega to paint a mural (Machado Sáez forthcoming). Meanwhile, Abuela Claudia gives her lottery winnings to Usnavi for safekeeping and then promptly passes away. Since the Latinx working-class population has historically been depicted as inherently criminal, the musical cannot imagine a space for the working poor on the Broadway stage that does not reinforce such stereotypes. The blackout's literal blackness acts as temporal break in the musical's upward mobility trajectory and invokes the spectre of the unruly poor in order to position the middle class as the truly disempowered population. Graffiti Pete ultimately resolves the tension of the class competition and reverts the narrative back to the more comfortable emotional terrain of heteronormative romance.

The staging of the blackout aligns the perspective and positionality of the audience and the middle class Latinx people onstage via the threat of enveloping darkness. In the scene leading into the blackout, Usnavi, Benny, Vanessa and Nina are out at a club when the revelry suddenly escalates into violence. A character, Club Guy, grabs the two women who were previously dancing with Usnavi, Vanessa and Club Girl 2. The stage directions describe the Club Guy 'add[ing] insult to injury' by 'dipping and spinning' both women at the same time (Miranda and Hudes 2013: 86). Benny finishes the contest over women's bodies by punching Club Guy. As the fight over heteronormative intimacy escalates, the staging and choreography create an anonymous blur of bodies, preparing the audience for the great equalizer of the blackout. The club dance scene becomes 'intense, crazy' and the dancing transforms into a 'whirlwind of movement, a release of stress, when suddenly: the power goes out in Washington Heights' (Miranda and Hudes 2013). The stage is plunged into 'complete darkness' (Miranda and Hudes 2013). The performers onstage and the spectators in the audience temporarily find themselves downwardly mobile, navigating the absence of light. The gaze of the audience eventually becomes oriented on the individual faces that emerge out of the blackness, with the characters in the club illuminated by 'cell phone light' while a 'flashlight comes on in the dispatch booth' of the Rosario Car service where Benny usually works (Miranda and Hudes 2013) and at the bodega, showing Sonny 'outside, holding a baseball bat, protecting the storefront' (Miranda and Hudes 2013: 87). Via these spotlights, the audience adopts and empathizes with the perspective of the Latinx business class as they face the threats to their upward mobility posed by the blackout and concurrent vandalism.

The lyrics of 'Blackout' also articulate the concerns of the barrio businesses and how the blackout jeopardizes their profitability. Piragua Guy is the first

to sing 'Oye Que Pasó' (Miranda and Hudes 2013: 86) with Usnavi responding 'Blackout, Blackout!' (Miranda and Hudes 2013: 87). The power struggle in the club over women's bodies is transferred to the urban landscape. At Usnavi's bodega, Sonny declares that 'I gotta guard the / store make sure / that nothing's / going wrong' (Miranda and Hudes 2013: 88). Sonny's voice joins that of Kenny and Camila, the owners of the Rosario Car service, and the Piragua Guy to sing 'We are powerless!' (Miranda and Hudes 2013: 89). The blackout's concealment of chaotic bodies is paired with the temporary downward mobility of the US Latinx business class. Graffiti Pete responds to the chorus of concern by warning about 'people lootin' / and shootin'" (Miranda and Hudes 2013). Previously described by Usnavi as a 'punk' who needed to be 'chase[d] away' in order to protect the bodega (Miranda and Hudes 2013: 1), Graffiti Pete is enlisted by Sonny during the blackout to defend Usnavi's property. Graffiti Pete offers 'a couple of roman candles' to 'distract the vandals' (Miranda and Hudes 2013: 90). The explosion of fireworks also distracts the middle class chorus of singers, providing them and the audience with an upwardly mobile gaze. Usnavi, Nina, Vanessa, Daniela, the Piragua Guy and others repeat, 'Look at the fireworks / Light up the night sky' (Miranda and Hudes 2013: 90, 92, 93, 94). The vision of the characters and the audience is reoriented, so that the glow of Graffiti Pete's fireworks can reframe the attack on businesses as backdrop for a romantic kiss between Benny and Nina by the song's conclusion. The (dis)articulation of class conflict is a central concern of *In the Heights*, with the song of 'Blackout' foregrounding the tension between the business class onstage and the criminal hoards offstage.

In narrating this power struggle over representation and visibility, the musical clearly weighs in on the side of the property owners over that of the have-nots, but it nevertheless acknowledges the legacy of class and race stereotype on Broadway. During the penultimate scene of Act 2, the musical situates a financial exchange between Sonny and Graffiti Pete in 'a shady alleyway' (Miranda and Hudes 2013: 146). Since 'Sonny whispers into Graffiti Pete's ear', the audience is not explicitly told why Sonny is sharing his lottery winnings with Graffiti Pete (Miranda and Hudes 2013). Sonny explains that 'no one knows about this but you and me', so the audience is left to imagine the parameters of the 'business proposition' (Miranda and Hudes 2013). The reason for such a veil of secrecy is open to interpretation, including the possibility that Sonny's lottery winnings are shared with Graffiti as part of an illicit or illegal arrangement. The encounter invokes the stereotype of Latinxs as 'gang members and drug dealers' (Brown), which is corroborated by Usnavi in the final scene of the musical. Usnavi responds to Graffiti Pete's reappearance by reminding Sonny of his previous warning regarding 'this punk' (Miranda and Hudes 2013: 150). Sonny counters by stating, 'You have to commission an artist while his rate is good' (Miranda and Hudes 2013: 150). Sonny resolves the troublesome implications of a covert payment in the barrio, with the translation of Graffiti Pete from a property-destroying punk to a 'legitimate', as in commissioned, artist. Graffiti Pete is transformed from a street artist outside the capitalist economy to wage labour once he is paid to complete a 'huge graffiti mural of Abuela Claudia that says *Paciencia y Fe*' (Miranda and Hudes 2013: 150).

The source of his inspiration, in addition to money, is Abuela Claudia, who acts as the primary working-class character and embodies an earlier generation of Latinx-Caribbean immigration, arriving in New York in 1943 (Miranda and Hudes 2013: 62). During the blackout, Abuela Claudia entrusts Usnavi

with the lottery winnings she has kept secret up to this point, asking him to 'please promise me you'll guard this with your life' (Miranda and Hudes 2013: 92). When the neighbourhood next bonds together in song during Act 2's 'Carnaval Del Barrio', Abuela Claudia is no longer part of this community. Through her sudden death, her legacy of lottery winnings passes onto Usnavi and by extension Sonny, thus securing this generation's ownership over the Washington Heights barrio, in the face of gentrification and rising living costs. Even though Abuela Claudia's death provides the funds that allow for Graffiti Pete's artistic rendering and Usnavi's change of heart at the end of the musical, the emotional valence of the community's loss is centred on Usnavi, not Abuela Claudia. The members of the barrio mourn Abuela Claudia with the song 'Alabanza', but she is ultimately a vehicle for the reintegration of Usnavi into the neighbourhood, so that he can stake his claim of property ownership in the face of gentrification. The audience is encouraged to identify with his troubles and the community's fear that he too will move up and out. Abuela Claudia's death is ultimately a positive development, whereas Usnavi's planned abandonment of the bodega and migration to the Caribbean is equated with the true death of the barrio. Regardless of whether they end up reformed or eliminated, working-class characters have no future in the musical's Washington Heights – only those who contribute to the market(ability) of the neighbourhood can combat stereotype and embody hope on the Broadway stage.

Ghostly presence of the enslaved in *Hamilton*

The working-class character of Abuela Claudia is translated into Alexander Hamilton, with Miranda's second musical dedicated to highlighting the struggles of a Caribbean immigrant. With this shift in protagonist, *Hamilton* has a different educational imperative, to make the case for the centrality of the immigrant to the American nation-building enterprise. The show counters the stereotype of the unassimilable immigrant with the characterization of Hamilton as a model citizen. In order to frame Alexander Hamilton as a working-class Caribbean immigrant, the musical must create a contrast with the forced movement of enslaved people. The coded language about freedom and slavery evokes the tension between the imaginary of the white patriarchs of the American Revolution and the black and brown actors who embody them. As Toni Morrison argues in *Playing in the Dark*, 'Africanism is the vehicle by which the American self knows itself not enslaved, but free' (Morrison 1992: 52). The historical reality of people as property shadows the characterization of *Hamilton's* Hamilton. In Act 1, slavery is explicitly acknowledged as a system defining the boundaries of freedom and enslavement. The sentimental appeals to freedom are framed as the rationale for the American Revolution, aligning the US colonies and their leaders with the enslaved. In Act 2, the successful declaration of the American nation's independence shifts the function of slavery as a context. The emotional valence of oppression is abandoned, with slavery humorously invoked to position Thomas Jefferson as a foil to Alexander Hamilton. The comedic performance of Jefferson's hypocrisy emphasizes the contradiction between his democratic ideals and the profit he derives from enslavement. The audience's laughter releases them from considering their own complicity with the objectification of humanity. Slavery is made to work as comic relief; invoked and then safely regarded as a problem of the past as opposed to a historical legacy that continues to shape American identity and

values. The metaphorical invocation of blackness haunts the musical's project of historical revisionism and bespeaks the limits of whose stories get 'fleshed out' and can appeal to the spectator for empathy and affiliation. The cross-casting the white patriarchs of the American Revolution with black and brown bodies is one way in which the musical acknowledges Broadway as an institution that marginalizes the voices of people of colour. *Hamilton* therefore inherits the ambivalence from *In the Heights* about the efficacy of its own corrective project of representation and education.

The opening song of Act 1, 'Alexander Hamilton', memorably introduces its main character as a mystery of upward mobility: 'How does a bastard, orphan, son of a whore and a / Scotsman, dropped in the middle of a / Forgotten spot in the Caribbean by providence / Impoverished, in squalor / Grow up to be a hero and a scholar?' (Miranda and McCarter 2016: 16). The musical offers its narrative as an answer to this question, suggesting that it rectifies a historical silence about 'how' Hamilton's journey from periphery to centre in terms of physical migration and class status was accomplished. Hamilton is framed as representative of the American Dream, a 'self-starter' (Miranda and McCarter 2016: 15) and 'Another immigrant, / comin' up from the / bottom' (Miranda and McCarter 2016: 16), crediting his initiative and drive for his transformation from illegitimate outsider to the architect of American democratic capitalism. Slavery is depicted as an important inspiration for Hamilton's ambition and upward mobility. The song explains that Hamilton 'struggled and kept / his guard up' while 'slaves were being / slaughtered and carted / away across the waves', implying that seeing this injustice created a divide between his public and private self (Miranda and McCarter 2016: 15). His struggle over the morality of human enslavement remains interior since it does not get articulated in the song. Instead, Hamilton's individualistic desire to belong is conveyed to the audience: 'Inside he was longing for something to be / a part of' (Miranda and McCarter 2016). The audience is tasked with valorizing Hamilton's embodiment of a marginalized underclass, of empathizing with his desires to overcome his illegitimate background and poverty. At the same time, Hamilton makes sense of his individualism as a white male through a contrast with the enslaved's violent objectification. The depiction of Hamilton as an abolitionist has troubled critics of the musical, for example, Lauren Isenberg juxtaposes this representation with contradictory historical evidence: 'Though it is clear that Hamilton purchased slaves, and his father-in-law, Phillip Schuyler, owned as many as twenty-seven slaves, his northernness, his Caribbeanness, is somehow conflated with abolitionism' (Isenberg 2017: 298). This conflation of Caribbeanness with the values of abolition implies that Hamilton would empathize with the enslaved because he was born in the Caribbean, that his outsider status to the US mainland would provide him with the perspective necessary to identify with the enslaved. Affiliation and empathy are the conceptual link in the musical that 'somehow' characterizes Hamilton as an abolitionist.

A rhetoric of excess labour also defines Miranda's Hamilton; the worth of his work enables this immigrant subject to be equated with the new nation. The portrayal of Hamilton as a working-class immigrant from the Caribbean is first developed in 'My Shot' and 'Right Hand Man'. The discourse of class struggle is intertwined with the metaphor of blackness to narrate a white founding father's migration and his American Dream of capitalist individualism. In 'My Shot', Alexander Hamilton stakes his claim on Americanness by arguing that 'I'm just like my country / I'm young, scrappy and hungry' (Miranda

and McCarter 2016: 26). The musical positions Hamilton as a working-class subject with the drive for upward mobility, making him both the author and representative of an authentic American identity. The problematic implications of this 'bootstraps immigration narrative' are made clear by James McMasters when he comments on how the musical 'present[s] an *exceptionally* successful immigrant [...] as a model of historical precedent and possibility for contemporary immigration discourse' (McMasters 2016). The emphasis of the musical on the exceptionality of Hamilton as the basis for his legitimacy as a US citizen 'neglects and obscures the material obstacles and violences [...] imposed on racialized immigrants within the United States in order to celebrate the (false) promise of the American Dream and the nation-state. This is the familiar and fallacious narrative that founds the logic of mainstream, immigration-unfriendly politicians on the right (Trump's wall) and on the left (Obama's exceptional dreamers)' (McMasters 2016). The contemporary resonances found in the construction of Hamilton as a model immigrant are indicative of the musical's effort to speak directly to the values of the mainstream white audience on Broadway. The characterization of Hamilton as an uber-immigrant who would empathize with others like himself is necessarily a fiction. As Isenberg points out, the historical Hamilton and his Federalist party advocated an 'unrelenting anti-immigrant policy' (Isenberg 2017: 302). Hamilton's politics and advocacy regarding immigration are 'largely absent from the score so as to allow Hamilton – born a British subject, like nearly everyone else in the founders' circle – to be the immigrant-made-good' (Isenberg 2017).

The discourse of slavery is used to position Hamilton-the-immigrant as the embodiment of the ideal American, invoking the very humanity that is excluded from that universality. In 'My Shot', Hamilton describes the American Revolution as 'not a moment' but a 'movement' that will engender a male community with the same desires (Miranda and McCarter 2016: 29). After Laurens sings, 'When you're living on / your knees, / you rise up' (Miranda and McCarter 2016: 27), Hamilton asks 'where all the hungriest brothers with / something to prove went' (Miranda and McCarter 2016: 29). Bodies in labour, in servitude, are called to rise and rebel, but the song does not explicitly racialize this community. In 'Right Hand Man', the call to rise is repeated and tied again to Hamilton's upward mobility: 'As a kid in the Caribbean I wished for a war. / I knew that I was poor, / I knew that it was the only way to / Rise up!' (Miranda and McCarter 2016: 60). Rapping with the Marquis de Lafayette, Hercules Mulligan and John Laurens in 'My Shot', Hamilton conflates the project of independence with that of abolition, labelling the group 'a bunch of revolutionary manumission abolitionists' (Miranda and McCarter 2016: 27). Hamilton and Laurens use the same vocabulary of freedom fighting to describe independence and revolution. Hamilton declares the necessity of independence, by stating that King George 'ain't ever gonna set his descendants free / so there will be a revolution in this century' (Miranda and McCarter 2016: 26). Laurens proclaims that 'we'll never be truly free / until those in bondage have the same rights / as you and me' (Miranda and McCarter 2016: 27). The concern for equality, however, is not a question of social justice but a matter of economic freedom from England's empire. Hamilton asks the million-dollar question: 'If we win our independence? 'Zat a guarantee of freedom for our descendants?' (Miranda and McCarter 2016: 29). The securing of freedom is limited to the status of the new nation state: 'We need to handle our financial situation' (Miranda and McCarter 2016). The slippage from human bondage to economic independence makes clear that the 'we' of the nation does not refer

to the enslaved. Rather, the unbroken lineage of white patriarchy traces itself from King George to Alexander Hamilton to the Broadway audience, rather than the ancestral lineage of the actors onstage.

The metaphor of blackness references slavery as a relevant context while also discursively redefining the historical Alexander Hamilton's whiteness as a model for multiethnic Americanness. In 'My Shot', Hamilton explains that despite his lack of middle class respectability, having 'no polish', he has the brains and voice for authorizing the birth of a new nation (Miranda and McCarter 2016: 26). As 'a diamond in the rough, a shiny piece / of coal', Hamilton's persona takes on the guise of metaphorical blackness, embodying shiny black coal, in order to offer a core identity of American whiteness, the diamond that is formed from applied pressure (Miranda and McCarter 2016). This immigrant is transformed from outsider to insider by invoking the descriptive language applied to those actually excluded from American citizenship and belonging, the African enslaved. Similarly, the project of independence is articulated in terms of blackness and darkness. After Hamilton boasts of the 'unimpeachable' power of his speech, he describes his goal in terms of 'fan[ning] this spark into a flame' (Miranda and McCarter 2016). The obstacle of the night and its darkness presents itself – 'But damn, it's getting dark, so let me spell / out the name' (Miranda and McCarter 2016). The plan for rebellion, to 'hatch a plot blacker than the kettle callin' the pot' (Miranda and McCarter 2016: 27) translates into 'roll[ing] like Moses, claimin' our promised land' (Miranda and McCarter 2016: 29). Abolitionist discourse structures the imaginary of American anticolonialism, but ultimately the musical is not concerned with the rebellion of the enslaved black and brown colonial subjects. During the last song in Act 1, 'Non-stop', Hamilton announces that he has moved on to different concerns following the end of the American Revolution: 'I've seen injustice in the world and I've corrected it. / Now for a strong central democracy' (Miranda and McCarter 2016: 137–38). With the moral imperative of independence fulfilled, Hamilton argues that the next important project is comprised of the intellectual work, largely devoid of emotion, necessary to establish the political and economic structure of the nation. Even as Act 2 delves into the personal trials and tribulations of Hamilton – his extramarital affair, the death of his son – the shift from the cause of abolition to that of governance entails a divorcing of emotion from nationalist politics.

The second half of the musical is more concerned with absolution than abolition, with a conditional release from identification and affiliation with the marginalized. In Act 2, the project of nation-building becomes disconnected from abolitionism, with slavery only invoked in relation to Thomas Jefferson. In the original Broadway production, Jefferson is played by Daveed Diggs, a self-described biracial actor, of Jewish American and African American heritage. The casting of Diggs as Jefferson emphasizes the distance between Jefferson's democratic ideology and racial politics, maintaining a tension between the ideal founding father and the staging of his body. Ariel Nerenson observes that, 'Casting and lyric heighten, rather than erase, the troubling racial legacy Jefferson left behind' (2016: 1047). The songs 'What'd I Miss' and 'Cabinet Battle #1' depict Jefferson as ignorant of the contradiction between his articulation of freedom and position as slave owner. Upon his return from an ambassadorship in France, Jefferson gazes 'at the rolling / fields' of his plantation and exclaims 'I can't / believe that we / are free' (Miranda and McCarter 2016: 152). Jefferson's 'rolling' landscape is also reminiscent of Hamilton's

description of the ‘promised land’ of freedom (Miranda and McCarter 2016: 29). The invisible bodies labouring on the plantation are given a ghostly presence; the ensemble dancers mimic the actions of domestic slaves, for example, wiping the floor. One member performs the role of Sally Hemings, the sole enslaved person named in *Hamilton*. The audience is not encouraged to empathize with her position or view her as a subject. Rather, Hemings is an object of humorous critique. This temporal vision of Hemings does not speak and her body is merely relevant in relation to Jefferson as a means of poking fun at his hypocrisy. Jefferson finds ‘a letter from the President’, which prompts him to ask, ‘Sally be a lamb, darlin’, won’tcha open it?’ (Miranda and McCarter 2016: 152). The Hemings-persona follows Jefferson’s request and showcases the imaginary letter to him and the audience, so that the spectators are aligned with his gaze as slaveholder. After Jefferson informs the audience that the letter ‘says the President’s assembling a cabinet’, the Hemings actress returns to the ensemble cast to become one of many dancing bodies (Miranda and McCarter 2016). The staging evokes the anonymity of the blackout from *In the Heights*, since the ensemble member is dressed in the same uniform as the rest of the dance cast, rendering her interchangeable.

The indictment of Jefferson during Act 2 is the vehicle by which the musical can symbolically resolve its silencing of the enslaved, the ghost of slavery haunting the birth of the nation. The critique levelled at Jefferson liberates the musical from the ethical obligation it articulates at its start – that the independence of the nation and its subjects are intertwined – and assuages the liberal guilt of the audience as well. During ‘Cabinet Battle #1’, Jefferson’s demand that Hamilton not ‘tax the South cuz we got it made in / the shade’, in other words that the region should not be punished for being financially profitable. Hamilton responds by highlighting that such profit is derived from an unjust system of production: ‘A civics lesson from a slaver. Hey neighbor, / Your debts are paid because you don’t pay for / labor’ (Miranda and McCarter 2016: 161). In the libretto’s sidebar footnote to ‘Cabinet Battle #1’, Miranda confesses, ‘I cannot tell you how cathartic it is to get to express this to Jefferson every night. The audience’s reaction is similarly cathartic’ (Miranda and McCarter 2016). The release is tied to the acknowledgement of how people are enslaved as property: ‘we know who’s really doing the planting’ (Miranda and McCarter 2016). The tension between empathy for the marginalized and identification with Hamilton is ultimately resolved. Hamilton is not the enslaved, but he is tasked with speaking for them and deconstructing the authority of Thomas Jefferson. The audience is given an emotional release from the burden of identifying with a corrupt founding father by offering Hamilton as an enlightened critic of the Enlightenment. At the same time, the audience is released from affective affiliation with the marginalized enslaved. The troublesome ghost that haunts the foundational fiction of freedom can be put to figurative rest, since it has been acknowledged in a light-hearted, comedic manner. The visibility of enslaved bodies is solely paramount to the cross-casting of the founding fathers duelling onstage; the emphasis is primarily on the ‘we’ that aligns Hamilton with the audience in the critique of Jefferson’s economic politics and his opposition to the creation of a national debt. The enslaved are rhetorically excluded from that community, even as the bodies of the actors function as symbols for those who have been silenced in American history.

Additionally, the imagery of blackness almost disappears during Act 2. The most noteworthy mention of darkness is from in ‘The Room Where it Happens’, which centres on a moment that is inaccessible in regard to the

historical record. Ariel Nerenon argues, for example, that this 'song foregrounds the production's Company as a stand-in for the public at large, with Burr and the Company musing on their limited access to policymaking' (2016: 1053). The meeting between Jefferson, Madison and Hamilton is only understood through the lens of what emerged out of the negotiations. While the song highlights the status of Washington, DC as the nation's capital and Hamilton's role in establishing the national debt, it is primarily dedicated to the problematic vacuum of historical knowledge. Burr emphasizes that 'no one really knows how the game is played' because 'no one else was in / the room where it / happened' (Miranda and McCarter 2016: 186). It appears that Burr's concern is an individual one, that his ambition has been thwarted because he has not been invited to be one of the power brokers. However, the audience becomes aligned with Burr, bonded in a shared ignorance about the 'art of the trade' (Miranda and McCarter 2016) because 'we'll never really know what got discussed' (Miranda and McCarter 2016: 187). The political compromise and negotiation is deemed a 'trade', with the audience excluded from exchange of knowledge as capital. What the contemporary spectators of the musical inherit from the founding fathers is a legacy of decontextualization, knowing what happened but not how. The affective alliance between the spectators and Burr is based on the desire to access this 'how' as well as the secrets of historiography, how we come to know 'what' happened. The affiliation between the audience and Burr nevertheless assumes that the audience would not be in danger of being traded, of being categorized as property.

The song's final dialogue between the company and Burr associates this marginalization with darkness, the blackness of death. The company declares that the vulnerability of the contemporary audience lies in the appeal of heroism, of expecting a historical narrative where 'our leaders save the day' and provide a 'dream of a brand new start' (Miranda and McCarter 2016: 190). However, this new start, the birth of a new nation, is indebted to or facilitated by a historical silencing. Because 'we don't get a say in what they trade / away' in order to produce this dream of American exceptionalism, of heroic revolutionaries fighting for freedom, the audience is told that 'we dream in the dark for the most part / dark as a tomb where it happens' (Miranda and McCarter 2016). Burr asks Hamilton to reveal 'what did they say to you to get you to sell New York City down the river' (Miranda and McCarter 2016: 188). What is unknown or unfathomable is how Hamilton balanced his self-interest with that of the city that made him anew, giving him the opportunity to thrive and rise up. New York is personified as an enslaved subject via the expression of 'being sold down the river' (Miranda and McCarter 2016). The NPR CodeSwitch podcast researched the etymology of this phrase, finding that it refers to a shift in the US slave trade after importation of Africans ceased in 1808, when enslaved persons were sold and shipped down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to endure the hard labour of cotton plantation work in the Deep South (Ghandi 2014). So while the expression is used to 'signify a profound betrayal' (Ghandi 2014), it is born out of a very specific historical context, American slavery's betrayal of humanity. Hamilton faces Burr to confess, 'God help me and forgive me / I wanna build something that's gonna / Outlive me' (Miranda and McCarter 2016: 188). Acknowledging that ambition ultimately outweighed his moral compass, Hamilton expresses an emotional apology on behalf of the Revolutionary Fathers. Hamilton's political success and history's enshrinement of Revolutionary leadership are dependent upon the support of slavery's immoral enterprise and a vacuum

of empathy and identification. The rise of American capitalism is indebted to the unpaid labour of those enslaved Africans. The dark trade of negotiation obliquely references slavery as the original sin that must be erased, forgotten and silenced in order to maintain the purity of the American Dream: the immigrant who through hard work achieved class mobility – or at least his face on the ten-dollar bill.

Conclusion

Miranda's ethical imperative of translation and emotional affiliation, as it informs and is developed in *In the Heights*, becomes embodied in the cross-casting of black and brown actors in *Hamilton*. Miranda acknowledges how cross-casting is a tool of cultural translation, explaining that, 'we're telling the stories of old, dead white men but we're using actors of color, and that makes the story more immediate and more accessible to a contemporary audience' (DiGiacomo 2015). Accessibility, empathy and identification are framed as artistic goals. However, the task at hand is how to translate the canonical historical figures of American history, the patriarchy of white leadership, into a relevant context for the present and presence of the Broadway audience. The idea that 'putting an actor of color in a role that you would think of as default Caucasian' would 'excite people' and 'draw them in' implies that the audience is not used to seeing brown and black bodies onstage (DiGiacomo 2015). Of course, moving the marginal to centre stage could provoke as well as thrill the audience, which is why the emotional work of empathy is integral to Miranda's artistic approach. Affective affiliation is necessary to assuage the audience of its privilege and power while making an appeal to the relevance of people of colour to American cultural production and history. The non-normative embodiment of white historical figures from the American Revolution is not only a way to make anew the nation's origin story. The browning of Broadway renders visible the bodies and stories that often do not get staged in this institutional space. In *Hamilton*, those silenced histories are also referenced via a metaphorical deployment of blackness, which evokes slavery's treatment of people as property, the ghost haunting freedom's imaginary.

Hamilton closes with the song 'History Has Its Eyes on You', which warns that, 'You have no control / Who lives, who dies, who tells your story' (Miranda and McCarter 2016: 280). The 'you' is explicitly framed as Alexander Hamilton, the figure who the musical's revisionist history seeks to recover. Nevertheless, *Hamilton* suggests that it is equally concerned with the 'you' who listens to this story and how the presence of a specific audience shapes the storytelling. Within *In the Heights*, the meditation on property focuses on fears of gentrification and poverty, twin forces that challenge the articulation of a middle-class Latinidad. Usnavi closes the musical by asserting his primacy as translator, as the one who 'illuminate[s] the stories of the people in the street' (Miranda and McCarter 2016: 151) and 'keeps our legacies' (Miranda and McCarter 2016: 152). He apologizes to the spirit of a deceased Abuela Claudia for locating home in Washington Heights rather than the Caribbean, explaining that Manhattan is true home because of its capitalist institutions. Usnavi declares 'It's a wonderful life that I've known – Merry Christmas, you ol' building and loan! / I'm home!' (Miranda and McCarter 2016: 153). Referencing the 1946 movie *It's A Wonderful Life*, Usnavi identifies the debt economy as central to his new appreciation for Washington Heights as a space of belonging. The uncanny resemblance between Usnavi and Hamilton centres upon this valorization of American individualism

in relation to the US banking industry. Ultimately, the approach to counter stereotypes of the Latinx resident and immigrant relies upon a neo-liberal logic that defines the American Dream as the pursuit of life, liberty and property. The rags-to-riches prototype makes the figures of Usnavi and Hamilton palatable to a predominantly white audience as well as figures for identification and empathy. The rhetorical moves the musicals make in order to facilitate the dynamic of audience affiliation are fractured by the burden of representation, the voices and bodies that cannot be assimilated into such neat narratives.

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