

AP ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION
SECTION II
Total Time - 2 hours

Question 1

Whitewashing is the act of glossing over or covering up vices, crimes or scandals or exonerating by means of a perfunctory investigation or through biased presentation of data. While *Hamilton*, the smash Broadway hit, has been praised as a diverse, ground-breaking work of art, it has also been criticized as the latest, greatest installment of whitewashed, revisionist history.

Assignment:

Read the following sources. In a well-developed essay that synthesizes three of the arguments, take a position that defends, challenges, or qualifies the claim that *Hamilton* whitewashes history.

Sources:

Source 1: Binelli

Source 2: Kennedy

Source 3: Sandwell

Source 4: "Hamilton is..."

Source 5: Keller

Source 6: "'Hamilton': Lin-Manuel..."

Source 1 (Binelli)

Binelli, Mark. "Lin-Manuel Miranda: The Rolling Stone Interview." *Rolling Stone*, Rolling Stone, 9 July 2020, www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/hamilton-creator-lin-manuel-miranda-the-rolling-stone-interview-42607/.

...“When you’re developing your voice as a rapper, you figure out your cadence – your swag – and that’s how you write,” Diggs [the actor playing Lafayette and Jefferson] says. “Lin managed to figure that out for *all* of these different characters – everyone has their own swag, and it feels germane to them. And that’s really impressive. Hercules Mulligan [a Hamilton pal who spied on the loyalists during the American Revolution] raps exactly like a dude named Hercules Mulligan!”

Even more radical than the catholic musical approach is *Hamilton*’s reckoning with our country’s creation myth. There’s an almost indescribable power in seeing the Founders, in an otherwise historically rigorous production, portrayed by a young, multiracial cast. “It is quite literally taking the history that someone has tried to exclude us from and reclaiming it,” says Leslie Odom Jr., who comes close to stealing the show with his turn as Hamilton killer Aaron Burr. “We are saying we have the right to tell it too.” If every presidential administration gets at least one mass-cultural moment it deserves, then *Hamilton* has become the Obama era’s *Wall Street*, its *24*, its *Spice World* – even more so, perhaps, because the show has actually managed to fulfill candidate Obama’s promise to bridge the divide between Red and Blue America. Fans of *Hamilton* include Mitt Romney, Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders, Dick Cheney and the president himself.

Christopher Jackson, *Hamilton*’s towering George Washington, has known Miranda the longest of any of the major cast members, having previously starred in *In the Heights*. “Lin told me about his idea for *Hamilton* a few days after that fateful vacation,” Jackson recalls. “We were actually onstage doing *Heights*. He said, ‘I’ve got the next thing. It’s about the Treasury secretary!’ And then he paused, and before I could say, ‘What?!’ the music started and we had to do ‘96,000.’ When Ron Chernow came to see *Heights*, I had never seen Lin that nervous. He said, ‘Ron Chernow’s here!’ I said, ‘What does that mean?’ And he said, ‘The show needs to go *well* today.’”

Odom first saw a workshop version of *Hamilton* at Vassar and found himself responding, almost viscerally, to “The Story of Tonight,” an early number in which Hamilton and three friends (Mulligan, the Marquis de Lafayette and John Laurens) boisterously drink together in a tavern on the eve of the Revolution. “That’s the one that made me a puddle, because it was four men of color onstage singing a song about friendship and brotherhood and love, and I had never seen that in a musical,” Odom says. “I had seen white guys do it, in *Jersey Boys*, in *Les Miz*. Never seen a black guy. So I was a mess, and from that point, I was along for the ride.”

Phillipa Soo, who makes her Broadway debut as Hamilton’s wife, Eliza, says that she had to figure out her relationship to her stage husband, to answer questions like, “Who is this man to

me, and why do I love him?" In the end, she realized her "research was already here for me. It became less about finding facts about Eliza and Alexander Hamilton and more about just watching Lin. I remember him coming into the rehearsal room in his slippers, because he'd been across the street writing. And I was like, 'Oh, my God, this guy is nonstop!' Kind of like Hamilton."

Over the course of a two-hour conversation, Miranda spoke about the kinship he feels with Hamilton – and more broadly, the task of liberating some of history's most revered figures from their own legend. "I really don't accept the premise that we lionize any of these dudes," he says. "I think our goal is to present them as human, and not just the five facts you know about them from our history books. Nobody gets off scot-free in our show."...

Source 2 (Kennedy)

Kennedy, Mark. "Historians Irked by Musical 'Hamilton' Escalate Their Duel." *AP NEWS*, Associated Press, 4 Feb. 2019, apnews.com/article/db3c9d7573334b55a651d7ceba4dc66b.

Ever since the historical musical "Hamilton" began its march to near-universal infatuation, one group has noticeably withheld its applause — historians. Many academics argue the portrait of Alexander Hamilton, the star of our \$10 bills, is a counterfeit. Now they're escalating their fight.

Ishmael Reed, who has been nominated twice for a National Book Award, has chosen to fight fire with fire — collecting his critique of Lin-Manuel Miranda's acclaimed show into a play.

Reed's "The Haunting of Lin-Manuel Miranda" is an uncompromising take-down of "Hamilton," reminding viewers of the Founding Father's complicity in slavery and his war on Native Americans.

"My goal is that this be a counter-narrative to the text that has been distributed to thousands of students throughout the country," said Reed, who teaches at the California College of the Arts and the University of California at Berkeley and whose latest novel is "Conjugating Hindi."

Reed, whose play had a recent reading in New York and who is raising money for a four-week production in May, is part of a wave of "Hamilton" skeptics — often solitary voices of dissent amid a wall of fawning attention — who have written journal articles, newspaper op-eds and a 2018 collection of essays, "[Historians on Hamilton](#)."

Miranda's glowing portrayal of a Hamilton who celebrates open borders — "Immigrants, we get the job done!" — and who denounces slavery has incensed everyone from professors at [Harvard](#) to the [University of Houston](#) to [Rutgers](#).

They argue that Miranda got Hamilton all wrong — the Founding Father wasn't progressive at all, his actual role as a slave owner has been whitewashed and the pro-immigrant figure onstage hides the fact that he was, in fact, an anti-immigration elitist.

"It's a fictional rewrite of Hamilton. You can't pick the history facts that you want," said [Nancy Isenberg](#), a professor of American history at Louisiana State University who has written a biography of Aaron Burr and is the author of "White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America."

It's not just the portrait of Hamilton that has drawn fire. Critics also say Miranda's portrait of Burr is horribly distorted and argue that Hamilton's sister-in-law, Angelica Schuyler, was in no way a feminist, as she is portrayed in the musical. Reed considers "Hamilton" so problematic that even edits to it wouldn't help. "I think the corrective would be to close the show," he said.

Reed's own play borrows from Charles Dickens in portraying a naive Miranda being visited by a succession of ghostly slaves, Native Americans and indentured servants — people Reed argues never made it into the Tony-, Grammy-, and Pulitzer-winning musical. "What I tried to do was to cover the voices that were not present onstage," Reed said.

Reed, who has not seen "Hamilton" but read it, criticizes the musical as just the latest piece of entertainment that is sympathetic to slave owners. "I say this is a successor to 'Gone With the Wind,'" he said. "But at least in 'Gone With the Wind,' Hattie McDaniel had a speaking part."

In Reed's play, Hamilton is unmasked as a slave owner who once worked for a slave trading firm in St. Croix. "You've been up to your blue eyes in the slave trade from the time you were a child," he is told. A slave tells Miranda that the Schuyler family, which Hamilton married into, were brutal slave owners and life under them was "no damned musical comedy."

A horrified fictional Miranda is eventually convinced by the evidence. "I have to undo the damage that I have done," he wails at the end. "Because of me, thousands of school children are trapped intellectually in the same lies as I was."

Source 3 Sandwell

Sandwell, Ian. "Hamilton Star Explains How the Musical Addressed Slavery in Final Song."

Digital Spy, Digital Spy, 14 July 2020, www.digitalspy.com/movies/a33296123/hamilton-slavery-criticism-george-washington/.

Below: The character of George Washington looks on in shame as Eliza sings, "I speak out against slavery..."



Source 4 (Hamilton is...)

“Hamilton' Is Diverse, but Is Its Audience?” *ELDORADO*, www.eldo.co/hamilton-is-diverse-but-is-its-audience.html.

How Many People Have Seen *Hamilton*?

Off-Broadway & Broadway | Previews Included | Estimates thru Feb

Assumes eight shows per week, 100% sell-outs, and no one's seen it more than once

	Days Running	Shows Per Day	Total Shows	Seating Capacity	Total Audience
Off-Broadway	104	1.14	119	288	34,272
Broadway	232	1.14	265	1,319	349,535

384,000



Produced by eldo.co

Sources: See Footnotes

The Demographics of the Broadway Audience

Broadway audiences are disproportionately white, affluent, and educated



Source 5 (Keller)

Keller, Kate. "The Issue on the Table: Is 'Hamilton' Good For History?" *Smithsonian.com*, Smithsonian Institution, 30 May 2018, www.smithsonianmag.com/history/issue-table-hamilton-good-history-180969192/.

Even if it hadn't won big at the [2016 Tony Awards](#), Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton: An American Musical* would remain a theatrical powerhouse and a fixture of contemporary American culture. It's likewise been seen as a champion of U.S. history, inspiring Americans young and old to learn more about their founding fathers, particularly the "forgotten" Alexander Hamilton.

Professional historians are no exception to getting wrapped up in the excitement created by *Hamilton*, and they've begun to wonder what impact the show will have on history as an academic discipline. Though Miranda has said in [interviews](#) that he "felt an enormous responsibility to be as historically accurate as possible," his artistic representation of Hamilton is necessarily a work of historical fiction, with moments of imprecision and dramatization. The wide reach of Miranda's work begs the question of historians: is the inspirational benefit of this cultural phenomenon worth looking past its missteps?

Historians Renee Romano of Oberlin College and Claire Bond Potter of the New School in New York capture this debate in their new volume *Historians on Hamilton: How a Blockbuster Musical is Restaging America's Past*, a collection of 15 essays by scholars on the historical, artistic and educational impact of the musical. Romano, who hatched the idea for the book, says she was inspired by "the flurry of attention and conversation among historians engaging with [*Hamilton*], who really had very divergent opinions on the quality, the work it was doing, the importance of it, the messages it was sending."

"There's a really interesting conversation brewing here that would be great to bring to a larger public," says Romano.

While none of the book's contributors question the magnitude of *Hamilton* as a cultural phenomenon, many challenge the notion that the show singlehandedly brought about the current early American history zeitgeist. In one essay, the City University of New York's David Waldstreicher and the University of Missouri's Jeffrey Pasley suggest that *Hamilton* is just one more installment in the recent trend of revisionist early American history that troubles modern historians. They argue that since the 1990s, "Founders Chic" has been in vogue, with biographers presenting a character-driven, nationalist and "relatable" history of the Founding Fathers that they criticize as overly complimentary. The "Founders Chic" genre, they say, came into its own in 2001 with the publication of *John Adams* by David McCullough, and *Founding Brothers* by Joseph Ellis, the latter of which they especially criticize for inflating the moral rectitude of their subject and "equating the founding characters with the U.S. nation-state."

America has gone "Hamilton" crazy. Lin-Manuel Miranda's Tony-winning musical has spawned sold-out performances, a triple platinum cast album, and a score so catchy that it is being used to teach U.S. history in classrooms across the country. But just how historically accurate is "Hamilton?" And how is the show itself making history?

According to Potter, this increased focus on early American history stemmed from worries about current political turbulence. "By the 1990s, politics in the United States are actually kind of falling apart," she says. "We have the culture wars, we have the shift of conservatives into the Republican Party. There is increasing populism in the Republican party and increasing centrism in the Democratic party. In other words, politics are really in flux."

"One response to that is to say, 'What is this country about?' And to go back to the biographies of the founding fathers," she explains.

Author William Hogeland similarly observes the current bipartisan popularity of the Founding Fathers, as intellectuals from the left and the right find reasons to claim Hamilton as their own. According to Hogeland, the intellectual Hamilton craze can be traced back to buzz in certain conservative-leaning political circles in the late '90s, with various [op-eds](#) at the time lauding Hamilton's financial politics as the gold standard of balanced conservatism. Hamilton's modern popularity surged with the Ron Chernow biography that ultimately inspired Miranda, but Hogeland says that Chernow, and in turn Miranda, fictionalize Hamilton by overemphasizing his "progressive rectitude."

Source 6 (Hamilton: Lin-Manuel...)

“Hamilton!: Lin-Manuel Miranda Calls Criticism of Whitewashing ‘Valid.’” *NME Music*

News, Reviews, Videos, Galleries, Tickets and Blogs | NME.COM, 8 July 2020,

www.nme.com/news/film/lin-manuel-miranda-says-criticism-of-hamilton-whitewashing-is-valid-2703116.

Lin-Manuel Miranda has responded to criticisms of whitewashing in *Hamilton* and has acknowledged them as “valid”.

Quote-tweeting [the initial criticism](#), which pointed to the way “hamilton the play and the movie were given to us in two different worlds & our willingness to interrogate things in this way feels like a clear sign of change”, Miranda began by saying, “All the criticisms are valid.”

The original thread said: “i totally get the frustration about it being a play about slaveholders that is not about slavery. ive felt that in lots of things i watch, but i flex the same muscle i use when i listen to hip hop as a black woman. we enjoy problematic things all the time.”

In his reply, Miranda explained, “The sheer tonnage of complexities & failings of these people I couldn’t get. Or wrestled with but cut.

“I took 6 years and fit as much as I could in a 2.5 hour musical. Did my best. It’s all fair game.”

The initial thread also added nuance on the details that needed to be made clear in such a conversation. “after reading the critiques i would have appreciated more context about hamilton & slavery,” they said. “but to lump it in with statues of columbus and robert e lee denies this conversation the nuance it deserves & we’re capable of giving it that.”