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What is Effective National Government?

By Richard Spencer, Ph.D.

A major part of the mission that CRI has taken upon itself is dedicated to the measured improvement for individual liberty and personal fulfillment of each Delawarean. That can be largely accomplished through expanding the personal and economic freedoms for each of us. One would think that would be easy and that it was always the history of the country. It turns out that it isn't easy and it wasn't the history. So, what is the history?

In my earlier essays published by CRI I refer to the ordinary citizens from ordinary backgrounds that have stepped forth upon the National stage to defend or to ultimately play a major role in the development of our Country, I now turn to my favorite founder of America, Alexander Hamilton.

The major reason I turn to Hamilton is that his early political and economic theories led to the United States becoming the richest, most powerful, and freest nation in the history of the world. Each of us owes our richness of life to him alone as he struggled with his dream of allowing every citizen the freedom and chance to be all that one could be. Winning that struggle created the framework for this historic phenomenon we have with so many citizens from ordinary origins rising to such greatness in the Nation.

Forrest McDonald, as he likes to say, spends his life in the 18th Century. As a professor of history at the University of Alabama, he has authored numerous texts about America's gestation and among those was *Alexander Hamilton: A Biography*. Many consider it the definitive treatise about Hamilton. McDonald's main interest in doing so was because of his surprise at Hamilton's treatment by other historians who professed neither expertise nor interest in the areas of Hamilton's greatest contributions: economics, finance, and the law. Also, all had failed to delve into the development of Hamilton's intellectual life that led to his prescient national and worldview.

How did Hamilton come to dream the dream about an effective and enduring national government that would set its citizens free to act in their own best personal and economic interest but retain the desire to defend the country with their last full measure of devotion? McDonald notes our early history was failing to reward man's individual industry as status came from personal relations, family connections, ownership of land, and birthright. Hamilton had none of these and felt it was inherently unjust for those citizens in our Republic to be encumbered by such a social order.

Hamilton's genius was to devise an economic system based upon money as money is blind and is the ultimate, neutral, impersonal arbiter that stimulates growth, change, prosperity, and national strength. Here, the fruits of one's labor would justly reward industrious citizens, as money would become the universal measure of the value of things.

Hamilton accomplished this miracle in the face of severe resistance, especially from Jefferson and his followers. McDonald vividly describes the efforts by Jefferson, the Jefferson heirs, and the Jacksonian

Democrats to destroy effective national government in order that each state could make its own rules. Those in the South adopted Jeffersonian rules and their society rested upon the land, upon slavery, and upon the exercise of force without the impartial restraint of law. Others adopted Hamiltonian rules and their society rested upon the market, free labor, contractual relationships, and law. The Civil War brought about the triumph of Hamilton's way leaving the Jeffersonian South in disrepair for decades.

More so today, Hamilton's one-man mission would seem an unlikely and impossible task; but, it is the early history of our country and it was the success of his personal leadership and intellect. McDonald notes that the American nation reached the peak of its Hamiltonian greatness in the middle of the twentieth century and after that it became increasingly Jeffersonian. He further notes we became governed by coercion and the party spirit, our people increasingly more dependent and less self-reliant, our decline candy – coated with rhetoric of liberty and equality and justice for all.

Hamilton would have “cried for his country” as his dream was slowly destroyed by modern political parties seeking power through a strategy that would institutionalize massive federal government largess rather than continuing with the limited, but effective, federal role that provided a fluid and orderly society open to merit. National elections have now become a focus to redistribute the levied wealth that was personally earned through the industry of its citizens further empowering political parties.

I believe that the underlying intent of many of our think tanks, such as CRI, is to return us to many of Hamilton's most cherished beliefs. Such a public return to these values would strengthen the confidence of American society in both their state and federal governments.

Today's deviation from the original principles of Hamiltonian theories that were designed to provide an orderly society through a limited federal role to defend the country, to provide for interstate commerce, and to negotiate international affairs of State has presently divided the country to the extent that it borders upon political paralysis. Currently, our federal Congress is the least trusted of any of our major political and national institutions. If Hamilton's vision is forever denied, what replaces it? After all Hamilton was one who came from “America's golden age, the likes of which we shall never see again”.

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