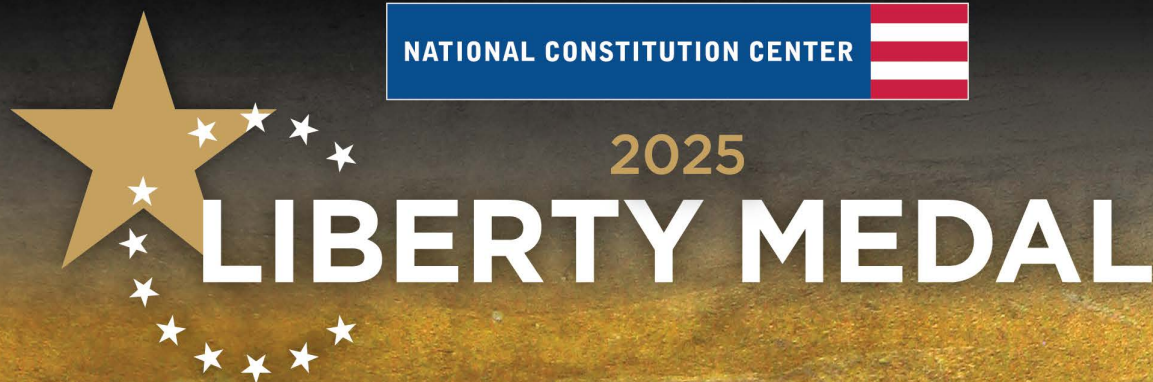




****TRANSCRIPT****

National Constitution Center 2025 Liberty Medal Ceremony
October 17, 2025
National Constitution Center, Philadelphia

0:06:56.8 Speaker 1: Good evening, and welcome. Please welcome the National Constitution Center's Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, Vince Stango.

0:07:14.9 Vince Stango: Good evening, everyone. It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the 2025 Liberty Medal Ceremony honoring the hit Broadway musical Hamilton and renowned historian Ron Chernow. From a small room across the street in Philadelphia, an idea was born, so bold, so human, that it changed the course of human history. That idea, the one of self-government, became the bedrock of our nation's founding charter, the United States Constitution. And here at the National Constitution Center, we carry that idea forward. We are the only place where people from every corner of America and every corner of the world can come together to learn about, to debate, and to celebrate the greatest vision of human freedom ever written. Right here, in the birthplace of our nation, we bring the Constitution to life. And we remind America and the world that its promise endures, that "we the people" means all of us, every person, every family, every generation who believes in the power and the promise of liberty. Because the Constitution isn't just a piece of parchment frozen in history, it's hope. It's an invitation to keep learning, to keep listening, and to keep building that more perfect union our founders imagined.

0:08:40.5 Vince Stango: And that's what drives us every day, to make sure the story of freedom isn't just told, but felt, embraced, and perpetuated. To make sure every visitor, every student, every citizen walks away knowing that they are part of the story. Tonight is especially meaningful because it celebrates the power of storytelling in connecting us to our nation's founding. Ron Chernow, one of our nation's most celebrated historical biographers, inspired the creation of the musical Hamilton that went on to become a global phenomenon, inspiring people worldwide to connect with our nation's origin. Together, they have inspired millions to see history not as something distant, but as a conversation that continues to shape our nation. And as we look forward to 2026, the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, we are proud to invite every American to join us in "Our Story Continues," our national campaign to inspire civic learning, civil dialogue, and renewed engagement in the ideals that unite us as we look to write the next chapters in our nation's history. This evening's celebration is a powerful expression of that mission. On behalf of our president and CEO Jeffrey Rosen and our entire team, I want to thank all of you, our donors, special guests, public officials, and our dedicated Board of Trustees for your support and partnership.

0:10:06.8 Vince Stango: I also want to take a moment to recognize the National Constitution Center's extraordinary staff. Their tireless work and deep commitment to our mission are what make evenings like this and the Center's impact nationwide possible. And to the many friends and supporters of the National Constitution Center whose generosity sustains our mission, many of whom are in the room tonight, we thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in acknowledging National Constitution Center Chair Mike

George, our longtime Chair and supporter of the Liberty Medal, Doug DeVos and his wife Maria, the National Constitution Center's Honorary Co-Chairs Justice Neil Gorsuch and Justice Stephen Breyer, Chairman Emeritus Stradley Ronan and NCC Trustee Bill Sasso, President Citizens Mid-Atlantic Region Dan Fitzpatrick, and Vice Chairman and Head of Commercial Banking and NCC Trustee Don McCree.

0:11:29.9 Vince Stango: Ira Lubert and Pamela Estott. This is Ira and Pamela's 16th year supporting the Liberty Medal Prize, and we are grateful to their commitment. Thank you. Let's thank everybody who made tonight possible. So now I'd like to ask everyone to please silence your mobile devices and refrain from recording the ceremony. We look forward to sharing the video of this program with you in the coming days. Our formal program is about to begin. Please enjoy. Thank you.

0:12:14.4 Speaker 1: Good evening. Welcome to the National Constitution Center and the Liberty Medal Ceremony honoring our 2025 recipients Ron Chernow and Hamilton. Please welcome to the stage President and CEO of the National Constitution Center Jeffrey Rosen and our 2025 Liberty Medal recipient Ron Chernow.

0:13:10.5 Jeffrey Rosen: Hello friends and welcome to the National Constitution Center. It is such an honor to award the 37th Liberty Medal to the Hamilton musical and Ron Chernow. Whenever we convene in this sacred space, I always invite you to begin by gazing at Independence Hall, the room where it happened, where the Declaration and the Constitution were drafted and where the American idea was born.

0:13:50.5 Jeffrey Rosen: Except that Independence Hall wasn't the room where it happened. We know from Ron Chernow and the Hamilton musical that the room where it happened was in Thomas Jefferson's house in Maiden Lane in New York City. That's where Hamilton, Jefferson and Madison met on June 20th, 1790, and over dinner they sealed the deal where Hamilton agreed to move the Capitol from New York to Philadelphia and then to D.C. In exchange for Jefferson and Madison's support for federal assumption of state debts.

0:14:22.1 Jeffrey Rosen: Lin-Manuel Miranda set the meeting to music and "the room where it happened" has become such an iconic phrase that many American history lovers, including me, now mistakenly use it to describe the most sacred constitutional space in Philadelphia, even though Lin-Manuel Miranda coined it to describe a boozy dinner party in Manhattan.

0:14:44.8 Jeffrey Rosen: That's just one example of the transformative impact that the Hamilton musical and Ron Chernow's books have had on the way Americans think about the Constitution, the Declaration, and the legacy of the founders. Through riveting storytelling and a remarkable ability to make the most complicated historical topics dramatically compelling, Ron Chernow's biographies have transformed the way Americans view Hamilton, Washington, Grant, and more. And with its catchy tunes and memorable lyrics, the Hamilton musical has inspired millions in theaters, homes, classrooms, and beyond to love American history and to learn about our founding ideals. Together, Hamilton the musical and Hamilton the book show the power of history in shaping American culture and sparking civic imagination. The play and the musical have also transformed the way Americans think about Alexander Hamilton himself. As it happens, my new book, *The Pursuit of Liberty*, explores how the initial battles between Hamilton and Jefferson over national power and states' rights and liberal and strict construction of the Constitution have shaped American politics, law, and culture ever since. And in writing the book, I was so struck that although nationalist presidents like Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt and William Jefferson Clinton transformed the Constitution along Hamiltonian lines, they've tended to invoke Jefferson as their patron saint.

0:16:21.9 Jeffrey Rosen: That's because, thanks to an incredibly successful opposition campaign that Jefferson launched, Hamilton was regarded as something of an alien figure for long stretches of American

history. He was denigrated from the beginning, as Ron Chernow shows so memorably, as the champion of aristocratic and financial elites who conspired to subvert democracy by resurrecting a corrupt version of the British crown. The exception was during the period from the Civil War to the Progressive Era, when Republican progressives and conservatives, from James Garfield and Theodore Roosevelt to Calvin Coolidge, invoked Hamilton as the father of Reconstruction and American capitalism. "The reputations of the founders operate like a stock market among readers. When Jefferson is down, Adams and Hamilton go up." That's from David Waldstreicher and Jeffrey Pasley, who write in *Hamilton: Historians on Hamilton: How a Blockbuster Musical Is Restaging America's Past*. In the 20th century, Franklin Roosevelt was inspired by a book called *Hamilton versus Jefferson* to reinvent Jefferson, the libertarian sage of Monticello, as the improbable champion of the New Deal administrative state. At the turn of the 21st century, though, Hamilton's stock had crashed again and Jefferson was riding high.

0:17:51.6 Jeffrey Rosen: Ronald Reagan said he left the Democratic Party because it had abandoned Jefferson's principles of limited government, and William Jefferson Clinton arrived at his first inaugural after making a pilgrimage to pay tribute to his hero and namesake at Monticello. Ron Chernow just told me that he decided to write the biography in 1998 because no one knew about Hamilton. His reputation at that point was at its nadir, and there were few, if any, Hamilton fans in national politics when his book came out in 2004. But then, President George W. Bush recommended the book as soon as it came out, and then Lin-Manuel Miranda transformed it into a cultural phenomenon, blockbuster musical that resurrected Hamilton once again in the popular imagination.

0:18:45.8 Jeffrey Rosen: Thanks to the musical, the man once reviled as a closet monarchist is now seen as a striving immigrant who wrote his way out of poverty, a rapping champion of the American dream. President Obama hosted a workshop for the musical at a White House poetry jam, welcomed the cast to the White House after opening night, and invoked Hamilton's vigorous vision of federal power to justify the Affordable Care Act. Today, thanks to the book and the musical, Hamilton is such a bipartisan icon that Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson came to the NCC to talk about her love of the musical just before she was nominated to the court, and Justice Amy Coney Barrett had a selection from the musical played at Justice Jackson's welcome party. As this survey of American history shows, Hamilton and Jefferson's roles in American popular consciousness have been centrally shaped by just a handful of best-selling books, including Ron Chernow's biography, and it's been championed by many deep readers of history from our presidents and Supreme Court justices to ordinary citizens.

0:19:59.5 Jeffrey Rosen: *Hamilton* the book and *Hamilton* the musical are among the most influential works of American history in all of American history, and that's why it's such an honor for all of us at the National Constitution Center to honor Ron Chernow and the musical he inspired.

0:20:16.3 Jeffrey Rosen: This Liberty Medal ceremony comes at an exciting time for the National Constitution Center. We are launching "Our Story Continues," which is a nationwide awareness campaign about the Declaration, the Constitution, and the American idea for 2026 and beyond. Our core curriculum can be found in our *America at 250 Civic Toolkit*, which includes an amazing new interactive Declaration of Independence. We've convened some of America's greatest historians to write about the big ideas of the Declaration, including Robbie George on liberty, Danielle Allen on equality, Gordon Wood on government by consent. Akhil Amar has annotated the entire Declaration of Independence clause by clause, and it includes questions for teachers and learners of all ages from eight to eighty. We're taking the Civic Toolkit on the road. It will be published as a paperback by Simon & Schuster, and we're convening conversations about the toolkit across America in rural bookstores, public libraries, presidential libraries, and community centers. Thanks to the excitement about American history that *Hamilton* continues to spark on its 10th anniversary, we can't wait to convene these constitutional and civic conversations throughout 2026 and beyond. Our goal always is to spark curiosity about the American idea, to inspire new generations of

readers of history and lovers of the musical who will educate themselves and learn more. It's now my honor to introduce a special video that highlights one of the most powerful legacies of Hamilton, its extraordinary impact on young people.

0:22:02.7 Jeffrey Rosen: From its earliest days, Hamilton has been more than a musical. It's been a movement for civic education. Thanks to the Gilder Lehrman Institute's Hamilton Education Program, or EduHam, tens of thousands of students from public schools across America have had the chance to study the founding, create their own essays, poems, and songs, and then see Hamilton performed on stage. In this video, you'll see the remarkable impact of Hamilton and the EduHam program on students across the country. And after the video, we'll all have the great pleasure of hearing one of the students who you're about to see, Heather Sanchez. And I'm thrilled also to share that Hamilton's portion of the Liberty Medal Prize will go to support these efforts at reaching more young people through EduHam. Friends, please enjoy this look at Hamilton's continuing legacy of education and inspiration.

0:23:42.5 Speaker 4: Very rarely has a book gripped me as Ron Chernow's account of Hamilton that made me think, how has no one turned this story into a musical yet? And I'll always be grateful to Ron for that.

0:23:55.4 Speaker 5: When Hamilton went insane, when you couldn't get tickets...

0:24:00.0 Speaker 4: We realized in our brief time off-Broadway that if students of American history don't get to see this show, that will be a real shame.

0:24:08.2 Speaker 6: Then in the spring of 2016, we had two Hamilton matinees where students in New York City came, engaged with the show. Those two matinees were enormous successes.

0:24:17.5 Speaker 7: Lin-Manuel Miranda, Thomas Kail, and I all knew that education would be essential to our existence.

0:24:25.9 Speaker 4: We decided to create a curriculum with Gilder-Lehrman Institute to not only bring history students and high school students to Hamilton, but also create a curriculum around it. I think the greatest legacy we'll have as a theater production is EduHam.

0:24:41.6 Speaker 6: Wanting to be on the stage where it happens is all part of the EduHam program. For a lot of these students, it is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

0:24:48.4 Speaker 6: My dream was actually fulfilled today.

0:24:50.3 Speaker 8: I want a student, first and foremost, to be inspired by the possibility that they can make a better country. I want to thank you for the Liberty Medal this year. Thank you so much for honoring our production. Thank you so much for honoring our friend Ron Chernow, who I know is with you this evening. I wish I could be there next to him, but we are so thrilled and humbled by this recognition. And thank you so much.

0:25:49.3 Heather Sanchez: We have settled in Valley Forge, PA, winter of 1777 through 1778. As a leader, I'm concerned. We are in need of supplies. So, with this concern, I write three letters to Congress, yet they do not reply. Letter one, December 23rd. My army is dying right in front of me, starving, sick, living in snow, and hey, they sleep and struggle, they withhold. To this I commend the men, but I do not condone the deaths we must behold. Congress did not do, did not do a thing. They want to win a battle, but an army of dead bodies, they ask me to lead. I see it in their eyes, they're fighting for their lives. Their hearts are screaming, why fight for a land that won't provide? 29th of December, I write a second letter. I speak of a

crisis and I write with compassion, compassion towards the troops. I plead for clothes and food. 1778, February 16th, it's been a year of struggle, without strength it's hard to proceed. Every breath's a miracle, they train and train and train, running through the snow that soon becomes their grave. A question as a leader, a dilemma I must solve, how must I lead an army of broken bones?

0:27:47.5 Heather Sanchez: I see it in their eyes, they're fighting for their lives. Their hearts are screaming, why fight for a land that won't provide? For a land that won't provide.

0:28:36.8 Speaker 1: Please join us in acknowledging Heather Sanchez, EduHamparticipant.

0:29:08.1 Jeffrey Rosen: So inspiring to hear that beautiful performance and to see an incredibly talented young woman inspired by the history and bring it to life through music so incredibly.

0:29:20.7 Ron Chernow: What an absolutely gorgeous voice, what a thrilling moment that is, congratulations.

0:29:32.7 Jeffrey Rosen: Ron, we have so much to talk about, including the musical and your books, but let's start with the musical. Describe how you met Lin-Manuel Miranda first and did you have any sense in the early days that the project would become an international sensation?

0:29:51.7 Ron Chernow: Describe how I met Lin, so this carries us back to the fall of 2008. I was out walking in my neighborhood of Brooklyn Heights one day, I ran into my old friend Gar and I said, "Gar, what's new?" He said, "What's new? His daughter had gone to Wesleyan with Lin." He said, "What's new? My daughter and I know this hip hop guy Lin who has read your Hamilton book and become obsessed with it and he would love to meet you." Now Lin was still starring on Broadway in his first show, which was called In the Heights, so he invited me to a Sunday matinee. Luckily I liked him, luckily I liked the show, and then I said to him backstage, I said, "So I gather my book made a big impression on you." He said, "Ron, I was reading the book on vacation in Mexico and as I was reading the book, hip hop songs started rising off the page." I said to him, "Really?" It was not a typical reaction to one of my books at all. Then he said to me, very earnestly, he said, "You know, Hamilton's life is a classic hip hop narrative."

0:30:58.6 Ron Chernow: I'm thinking to myself, pal, I have no idea what you're talking about here, you know? And he asked me to be the historical consultant to this as yet non-existent show. So I laughed and I said, you want me to tell you when something is wrong? And he said with great fervor, he said, yes, I want the historians to take this seriously. Well, at that point, I had to make a confession to him. I said, Lin, you're talking to a world-class ignoramus about hip-hop. I know nothing about it. And he said, well, I'm going to educate you. And he pointed out that with hip-hop, you have rhymed endings, you have internal rhymes, you have wordplay. And we signed on. And really, I didn't think that this was ever going to be a big cultural phenomenon. I think his invitation to join the development of the show brought out a certain Mickey Rooney side of my personality. You know, wouldn't this be fun to put on a show together? I was a lifelong theater goer. And so I said yes. But Lin and I worked together on the show for seven years.

0:32:08.4 Ron Chernow: And every single person that I met during that seven-year period, when I told about the show, either said outright or else they were thinking, this has to be the single silliest idea I have ever heard in my life, you know, a hip-hop musical about Alexander Hamilton.

0:32:13.0 Ron Chernow: And it took me time to figure out what it was about the equation of Hamilton and hip-hop. And I think what it is is that, number one, the hip-hop music has a kind of driving, propulsive quality, which actually matches Hamilton's personality. Hamilton is like a character that shot out of a cannon. And the music has that kind of rhythmic excitement to it. The other thing is that since so much of

Hamilton's life revolved around his use of words, hip-hop, the lyrics are so dense that the show is almost three hours long. It's really a six-hour show.

0:32:53.9 Ron Chernow: Actually, we calculated at one point that Hamilton has more lines than Hamlet.

0:32:56.9 Ron Chernow: And Hamlet is the longest part in Shakespeare. So the linguistic density of hip-hop perfectly suited this person who wrote his way out of poverty and obscurity in St. Croix.

0:33:27.5 Jeffrey Rosen: Remarkable. And you were saying, you know, initially you didn't know whether or not it would work, but the early reaction suggested that you really did have something special.

0:33:37.0 Ron Chernow: Yeah, we had certain opportunities to really test the material. One, there was an American songbook series at Lincoln Center. Lynn was asked to lead it off. He came out on stage. He was there with two or three other singers. Now, this was not staged. It was not choreographed. There was no scenery. There was no costumes. And Lynn just came out and he said, I'm working on this concept album about Alexander Hamilton. You could hear titters in the audience when he said that. So they sang maybe nine or ten songs from the show. The show is actually 46 songs altogether. And I was with Oscar Eustis, the head of the public theater, and we were sitting there. And at the end, it was mostly the audience, people in their 20s and 30s. At the end, they jumped to their feet and they were cheering and screaming. And I turned to Oscar and said, oh, my God, if they're having this reaction to just a piece of the show and a piece that wasn't staged or costumed or anything, imagine when they see the entire thing. They're going to go absolutely crazy, which is what happened.

0:34:41.9 Ron Chernow: And then also I remember another time when I had that same reaction. There was a summer theater festival at Vassar called the Powerhouse Theater Festival. It was a black box theater. They performed songs from the first half of the show, just actors standing in front of music stands. And when they finished, I looked across the audience and every single person in the audience was crying. And I was sitting next to my friend Margo Lyon, great independent theater producer, who was always very politically involved. And she said to me, Ron, this is real patriotism. You know, this is not fake patriotism. But everyone in the theater was crying. So Lynn has this kind of pipeline into people's hearts. He can connect with the audience emotionally. I was saying backstage, Jeffrey, I've not only seen the show here and in London and across the country, I saw it last year, the premiere in Abu Dhabi, and they were on their feet screaming. So this show, beyond the politics, it seems to deal in a universal set of emotions. And I've spent a lot of time, Jeffrey, actually thinking about why first the book and then the show were so popular.

0:36:03.4 Ron Chernow: And I think that one of the reasons is that Hamilton's achievements were so extraordinary that you could admire him, but his flaws were so grave that you could identify with him at the same time. I think that people have liked the idea, because it always seemed like the founders were goody goodies, but suddenly there was this founder who was so brilliant and productive, but he also was a bad boy at times. So I think that it gave people kind of emotional entryway into the story. But also I think that I was very lucky, and then Lynn with the musical was lucky, that Hamilton's story is a perfectly structured tragedy. This isn't something that I imposed on his life. It's not something that Lynn imposed on his life. But if you look at the story, Hamilton goes from strength to strength to strength, and then about three quarters of the way through book, musical, and life, there suddenly is a dying fall. And as in a Greek tragedy, all the qualities that powered his rise suddenly then produce his downfall. And so if you were inventing the story, that's exactly, but exactly where you would want to have the tragic fall.

0:37:15.6 Ron Chernow: But it just was this beautifully structured life. You know, I've often said to people, there'll probably never be a great biography of James Madison because it peaks too early. Then it kind of rattles on through Secretary of State and two-term president. Whereas with Hamilton, there was this

extraordinary character, dramatic character at the center of it, but in this perfectly structured life for storytelling.

0:37:45.1 Jeffrey Rosen: That's so remarkable. The previous biographies of Hamilton had painted a caricature. There was a book, Gertrude Atherton's *Hamilton*, a true story of romance. It was a fictionalized biography, 1902. It's an international bestseller, the *Hamilton* musical of its day, and it leads Theodore Roosevelt to create a big *Hamilton* revival, but it paints him as this heroic, manly, sort of virtuous guy against the fae Jefferson. It doesn't show the nuance. Say more about how capturing him in all of his complexity made him a hero for a divided age.

0:38:24.5 Ron Chernow: Well, I should say, you know, when I started the book in 1998, Alexander Hamilton was fading into obscurity. I mean, it seems strange now, but most people had never heard of him before. If they had heard of Hamilton, they knew one of two things, that he was on the \$10 bill and that he had died in a duel. Maybe they knew that the person who shot him was Aaron Burr, but the knowledge of him was that limited. And I started reading about his life. Number one, it was clear that just from a personal point of view that this was far and away the most dramatic life of any of the founders, a completely self-invented figure. It's just the most astonishing story of this kid who's an autodidact who comes out of nowhere, he comes to North America just with a handful of introductions. He's effectively orphaned, although in the play he's described as an orphan. He actually had a brother who was a carpenter in St. Thomas, and he had a kind of ne'er-do-well father who drifted down to the Grenadines, an island called Bequia. But for all intents and purposes, he was an orphan.

0:39:29.6 Ron Chernow: In fact, when he married Eliza, neither his brother nor his father came. So it was like this person was really all alone in the world, and just by dint of the most extraordinary intelligence created this dazzling intellect, this massive intellect. But part of the fascination of the story, which counts for this tragic quality, is that this dazzling intellect is on top of a very kind of fragile and unstable ego, psyche, if I can put it that way. Hamilton was illegitimate under the terms of his mother's divorce from an earlier man. She was not allowed legally to remarry, so he was illegitimate. It's hard for us today to imagine what illegitimacy meant in the 18th century. He was extremely, extremely sensitive on this subject. He once wrote, he said, my birth has been the subject of the most humiliating criticisms, and particularly like John Adams called him the bastard brat of a Scotch peddler. This was not funny for Hamilton. And so what would happen because beneath the tremendous intellect there was this very, rather kind of brittle psyche because of his background. If he was attacked, he would always counter attack and often over react to it.

0:41:02.1 Ron Chernow: I mean, I know Lynn said to me the line that got him interested when he was reading the book was I wrote that Hamilton as a teenager had written this hurricane letter in the local newspaper in St. Croix, and then the local merchants recognized his genius and paid to educate him in North America. And I wrote Hamilton didn't realize it, but he had just written his way out of obscurity. And he was someone at any moment in his career, he fell back on the most powerful weapon in his arsenal, which was really words. But what happened with the Reynolds scandal, the Jeffersonians thought that he was paying James Reynolds the money because they were engaging in illicit treasury speculation together, and it was really, as you all know, because of the adultery. Well, when those charges came out about his having paid this money to James Reynolds, Hamilton felt obliged, again, to resort to his facility with language. And the Reynolds pamphlet, you don't get a sense of this in the show, it was 95 pages long. And so in one of the ways that I kind of identified with or kind of understood Hamilton was as a writer because people, you know, his friends at the time when he published the 95-page Reynolds pamphlet all said to him, you know, a delicately worded paragraph or two would have done the trick. You know, so it's like, why did you go on?

0:42:34.3 Ron Chernow: But I understood as a writer, I could feel it as I was reading the pamphlet, you

know, with rereaders, any piece of writing takes on a life of its own. And so you could see that he starts telling it almost as a picaresque novel. Somewhere I Reynolds comes to his home, you know, one night here in Philly, and Eliza was off in Albany with her father and the kids. So he was alone. She came knocking on the door. She claimed she'd been abandoned by her husband, could he help her out financially? And he said that he would bring money to her room, which was just a few blocks away. And then he writes the Reynolds pamphlet. And when I arrived, she was standing at the top of the stairs. And when I climbed up the stairs, she let me know that more than pecuniary consolation would be acceptable. Now, this is really, it's quite hilarious. You could see he's sort of having fun on some level. He's having fun narrating this. And as a writer, he can't help himself in terms of narrating this in this very kind of humorous way. Of course, for Eliza, it was not funny.

0:43:40.9 Ron Chernow: And there's that great scene in the show where she's burning the letters. But we owe to Hamilton's facility with language, we owe both the best and the worst of him. When he was writing the Federalist Papers, as you all know, there were 85 of them. He wrote 51 over a six-month period. He was writing at least two or three a week. Twice he wrote five in one week. One week, he wrote six in one week. And he had a full-time legal practice. He was writing them such white heat that we have anecdotal evidence that the printer would be sitting in the outer office waiting for him to finish it off. And both he and Madison talked about beautifully organized and well-stocked minds. They were writing this under such time pressure. There wasn't time to go and do any research. They were completely writing this out of their head. In fact, I was very surprised to learn that even though Hamilton had originated the Federalist Papers, was supervising it, very often he didn't see Madison's essays until they were already in print. And yet we read this and the Federalist Papers not only played a role in terms of the ratification of the Constitution, but I remember at the time that I wrote the book, the figure was that it had been, the Federalist Papers had been cited by the Supreme Court more than any other document or set of documents.

0:45:11.2 Ron Chernow: This was around 2000, had been cited 300 times by the Supreme Court. And this was something that these three men, there was also John Jay did five of the essays. When you think about the time pressure they were doing and how extraordinary their achievement was and how kind of beautifully furnished their minds were that they were able to literally whip these things off and that they have stood the test of time.

0:45:38.6 Jeffrey Rosen: It's so great to see Hamilton as a writer on deadline.

0:45:43.1 Ron Chernow: Yeah, and what a deadline.

0:45:46.1 Jeffrey Rosen: And what a deadline. And as you said, it was that one sentence in your book, Hamilton didn't realize it, but he'd just written his way out of poverty that convinced Lin-Manuel Miranda to write the musical. The rap against Hamilton by his greatest antagonist, Jefferson, was that he was a closet monarchist, a crypto Caesar conspiring to resurrect monarchy in America. It all came back to a dinner where Hamilton had blurted out when Jefferson said the three greatest men in history were John Locke, Francis Bacon, and Isaac Newton, Hamilton blurted out the greatest man that ever lived was Julius Caesar. And Jefferson records this proves that Hamilton is a closet monarchist. You say that Hamilton was probably joking because he had worried about a Caesar at the head of Shays' Rebellion and he feared Caesarism as much as Jefferson. And yet he did favor a president elected for life and even his friend Gouverneur Morris wasn't sure whether he yearned to resurrect monarchy. So how devoted was he?

0:46:45.2 Ron Chernow: You know, I noticed in your book you have a couple places where he cites Julius Caesar where he's criticizing someone, you know, as a Caesar or a proto-Caesar. Okay, what happened? So he goes to the Constitutional Convention. His role is extremely important there because the governor of New York, Clinton, believe it or not, he was quite the boss.

0:47:04.5 Ron Chernow: In fact, it was sort of governors like Clinton that Hamilton and Madison had in mind in terms of strong central government that would correct some of the abuses of the state. And George Clinton sends three delegates to the Constitutional Convention, but he was, Governor Clinton was so afraid of any kind of centralizing tendency that might limit his power that two of his appointees, Lansing and Yates, actually left the Constitutional Convention in the middle, never signed it. So Hamilton is the only New York delegate there. So he's a kind of a very, very important figure, and he kind of signs it in his personal name. Okay, there is one moment during the Constitutional Convention where Hamilton gets up and mentions, talks for six hours. It's referred to in the show that someone says that he got up there and talked in the convention was listless. They don't really talk about what the content of the speech was. So Hamilton, as the show says, created his own form of government. And what it would be was essentially an elective monarchy, that the president would serve for life and senators would serve for life.

0:48:24.1 Ron Chernow: There would be a house that would be elected by universal suffrage, at least as defined at the time. Now, a couple of points to make. Hamilton was never in favor of a hereditary aristocracy or hereditary monarchy or anything like that. He also always pointed out in terms of this form of government that he presented at the Constitutional Convention. Number one, it would be an elected president. It would not be hereditary president. Number two, that it would be a president who would be serving on good behavior. So he could be impeached and recalled. So it was not just, do I think that was a great idea? No, to state the obvious. But I think that Hamilton's fear was that the great weakness of the new republic was going to be what he called the lack of energy in the executive branch. He was very afraid that when you've gone through many years of revolution, as we had, the spirit of defiance of authority has become so strong, it's difficult to turn it off. There was Shays' rebellion. There were different kind of popular outbreaks that seemed to him to confirm his theory. Now, he wanted a strong executive, and this was a real kind of ideological split with Jefferson.

0:49:44.4 Ron Chernow: Hamilton claimed that the best safeguard of liberty would be a strong executive. Jefferson felt that the greatest threat to liberty would be a strong executive. Obviously, two very, very different views. But since I had actually might ask you about it, I just wanted to read a couple of things that Hamilton wrote, because actually he was perhaps our greatest prophet of populist demagogues. If I may read a couple of things. In Federalist No. 1, he wrote, of those men who have overturned the liberties of republics, the greatest number have begun their career by paying an obsequious court to the people, commencing as demagogues and ending as tyrants. Another time he warned of the advent of a man unprincipled in private life, desperate in his fortune, and someone who was unprincipled in private life, who would foment chaos and ride the storm and direct the whirlwind. You know, because Hamilton made that speech, Hamilton, I think, had more of a role in calling the Constitutional Convention and getting the Constitution ratified, certainly in New York and explicated through the Federalist Papers. He thought that the Constitution would not stand the test of time, that indeed that that would be a fatal weakness, the lack of executive power.

0:51:08.7 Ron Chernow: But throughout his life, you know, he contended that he had been, he saw the Constitution that he has a sort of beautiful, but idealistic and unrealistic. He thought that time would prove him, you know, correct about that. But he did not try to subvert the Constitution. He made an interesting statement two years before he died. He said, mine is an odd destiny. Perhaps no man in the United States has done more for the present Constitution than myself. And contrary to all my anticipations of its fate, as you know from the very beginning, I'm still laboring to prop the frail and worthless fabric.

0:51:49.1 Ron Chernow: Yet I have the murmurs of its friends no less than the curses of its foes for my rewards. What can I do better than withdraw from the scene? Every day proves to me more and more that this American world was not made for me. So he was kind of very, very hurt by that idea that he had tried

to subvert the Constitution. It's interesting when Jefferson is Secretary of State and Hamilton is Secretary of the Treasury, at first Washington does not fathom the degree of personal and ideological hostility between the two men.

0:52:28.9 Ron Chernow: But then when he does, Washington being a great president, wanted actually to have the interplay of different ideas. He did not want to have a monolithic cabinet at all. And he wrote a letter to Jefferson because Jefferson kept saying that Hamilton was behind this monarchical plot in the United States. And Washington writes him a letter saying as to the idea of a monarchical plot, he said, I don't think that there are 10 men in America whose opinions are worthwhile who believe that to be true. Now, Washington was in the best position to know if there had been any plot. But I spent five or six years working on that book. And while Hamilton's views on the elective monarchy and everything we're talking about, he didn't hide that. He was open about it. But I could never find a single letter where he was conspiring with someone else in a plot. In fact, I felt because before I started doing the book, I read all these previous books. And Hamilton was often described as this kind of intriguing designing character. The deeper I got into his life, he was almost excessively honest and open about his views.

0:53:49.4 Ron Chernow: Every view he held, he would write at voluminous length. Hamilton was never content on any issue just to write one essay. He would write a series of five or 10 or 20. He was not the sort of personality who could engage in a plot. He was very much a kind of, you know, look at me, a character.

0:54:11.2 Jeffrey Rosen: He's invoked on behalf of so many constitutional positions today. The unitary executive theory is attributed to his Pacificus letters. And he was the champion of the liberal construction that John Marshall used to uphold the constitutionality of the Bank of the United States and which broad supporters of national power have invoked ever since. We're here at the Constitution Center gazing at Independence Hall. What would you sum up as Hamilton's greatest constitutional contributions?

0:54:44.1 Ron Chernow: Well, let me just first mention what he created in his life. Because again, when I started the book, I felt, you know, kind of whatever his flaws, personally or politically, what this man managed to create was extraordinary. Even before he became Treasury Secretary, of course, he had written the appeal for the Constitutional Convention, had written Federalist Papers, and had to be ratified in New York. He spoke 26 times in six weeks. New York was one state where it looked like it would not be passed. Hamilton got it passed in New York, which was very clear. He then, even before he becomes Treasury Secretary, creates the Bank of New York, first private bank in New York City. He then becomes Treasury Secretary and restores American credit with his funded debt. He creates the first central bank, the Bank of the United States. He creates the first mint. He creates the first Coast Guard. He creates the first customs service, on and on and on and on. This man really forged the federal government. So I think that he was somebody, there were kind of three sides to Hamilton's contribution. One was kind of on the level of politics and ideology.

0:56:08.5 Ron Chernow: One was in terms of his concrete contributions. And then also very important... And one of the reasons that I think Washington appointed Hamilton as his treasury secretary was that everything was setting precedent. Here they had this constitution, which was beautiful, but it was very brief and very general in terms of what this would actually translate into. And so Washington, who was at great pains to make sure that everything that he did was consistent with the constitution, knew that Hamilton, as a lawyer, and Hamilton, who had attended the Constitutional Convention and was a great lawyer, that Hamilton would make sure that everything that was done during his two terms as president would fit into the constitutional framework. So I think that his contributions were really quite extraordinary. And when I started writing the book in 1998, I just felt he was so villainized and so caricatured. And it just seemed like a shame that a man who had made such immense contributions to the creation of our government should have become this forgotten figure. So it's kind of funny now because I

see in surveys Americans are asked to name their favorite founder, and this founder whom no one knew anything about suddenly is everyone's favorite.

0:57:33.0 Ron Chernow: And I'll just tell you one last story, Jeffrey, that after the show opened, see, Obama administration, Jack Lew was the treasury secretary, and he announced one day that he was dropping Hamilton from the \$10 bill, and he was going to replace Hamilton with Harriet Tubman. Okay, I love Harriet Tubman, but I wanted to keep Hamilton.

0:57:57.3 Ron Chernow: After Jack Lew made that announcement, there was a hue and cry against it, and he came to the theater one night, and I saw him in the audience, and I said, would you like to come backstage and meet Lin-Manuel Miranda? So we went backstage, and he told us. He didn't say that he was going to revoke his opinion. He just said, I think you're going to be pleased when you hear the call. But he admitted to us, he said, the one thing that he had not reckoned on was the power of the musical. Actually kept Hamilton on the \$10 bill, and we had it straight from the mouth of the treasury secretary.

0:58:46.4 Jeffrey Rosen: Well, from saving Hamilton on the \$10 bill to resurrecting his reputation throughout American history, you've shown in an electrifying way the extraordinary power of history to change American culture. One last question about the show. After, I'm about to award you the Liberty Medal, which I'm so looking forward to doing, and then we're going to hear a performance of Satisfied by Angelica. I gather she's one of your favorite characters. Tell us why you like the song.

0:59:21.3 Ron Chernow: Yeah, no, absolutely. In the show, Eliza meets Hamilton. She has this beautiful song, Helpless. And then you have Angelica sings this song, Satisfied. And basically, both songs are about their feelings about Hamilton. And Eliza, being younger, is looking at Hamilton through the eyes of innocence, and that Angelica is looking at Hamilton through the eyes of experience. And incidentally, one bit of dramatic license in the show, when Hamilton meets the Schuyler sisters, both Schuyler sisters are single. But in fact, in reality, Angelica was married, and her husband, John Barker Church, was a member of parliament in England. But Lin said, and I understood dramatically why he did this, that having Hamilton meet both of the sisters together certainly injects a lot of drama in terms of which sister he would choose. But it's actually, I think, not only the great moment in the show, but maybe in musical theater, because what Lin does, for those of you who remember the show, Angelica brings Hamilton over to meet Eliza. And he says, "If it took a war for me to meet you, then it was worth it."

1:00:32.8 Ron Chernow: Then you see the same scene. It's kind of redone. It's rewound. And he again goes over a second time. You have the same scene. But in the meantime, Angelica has given us this really much more realistic and even cynical interpretation of Hamilton as someone who would never be satisfied, and that much as Eliza loved Hamilton, that this was not going to be an easy marriage for him. And I asked Lin, because I so love that sequence and the repeating the scene, I said, "Where did you get that idea?" Because they do the scene, and then you hear the chorus saying, "Rewind." Well, Lin had a hip-hop improv group called Freestyle Love Supreme. And what they would do, they would ask the audience to throw out different words. And from the words that the audience threw out, the five hip-hop people would create a story. Amazing, but they would do it. And then he said what they would do when they finished creating a story from the words thrown out from the audience, one of the five would say, "Rewind." And they would do the same story but with a different ending. And that's where he got the idea. Just extraordinarily ingenious that he would have thought of doing it. But I love the song. And Lin always used to say that the smartest person in the show was Angelica. Hamilton was pretty smart, too. But there's no question that Angelica was quite extraordinary.

1:01:58.7 Ron Chernow: There are certain things in the show that are so perfect that you think they must be invented, but they're not. And I remember when I was going through Eliza's papers at Columbia, I saw

this little handwritten note in a very fine penmanship. And I pulled it out, and it was the note that Angelica had written to Eliza after the disclosure of the Reynolds affair, after the Reynolds pamphlet, when Eliza would, of course, have been completely shattered. And she writes to Eliza, "In marrying our Hamilton, you married an Icarus, and he has flown too close to the sun." Now, that's in that beautiful song that Eliza sings when she's burning the letters. She says, "You know what Angelica said? " And talks about Hamilton being this Icarus who flew too close to the sun. I'm sure 99% of the people, 99.9% of the people who see the show think that that must be an invented line, but that was actually something that Angelica did write to Eliza. And I can remember feeling a chill going down my spine when I came upon that letter. But it was such a sophisticated observation as well as an accurate observation about Hamilton, that he climbed and climbed and climbed, and then he flew too close to the sun, and his wings melted.

1:03:49.5 Jeffrey Rosen: Ron Chernow, you show us that history is storytelling and that the role of the historian can be dramatic, exciting, and even heroic. I can't tell you how much you are one of my heroes among historians. I was inspired to write about Hamilton, reading your description of his financial plan and seeing the clarity with which you took the technical complications and made them dramatic, inspired me to want to try to achieve a fraction of that much clarity. And in the process, your historical writing, not only Hamilton, but Washington, Grant, and more, has transformed a nation's understanding of history and inspired new generations of history lovers.

1:04:23.8 Jeffrey Rosen: And that's what's so beautiful about that gorgeous performance we just heard and all of those kids going to EduHam and all of them, just that curiosity sparked and having their passion for learning about history ignited by the marvelous storytelling that you have shared with us. Please join me in thanking Ron Chernow.

1:05:09.6 Ron Chernow: Thank you. And please read Jeffrey's book on Hamilton and Jefferson.

1:05:14.5 Jeffrey Rosen: No, no, no. What we're now going to do is present you with the Liberty Medal, which I am so honored to do. And you don't have to say anything. You do in a moment, but not while I present you the medal. All right, here we go. Ron Chernow, you have illuminated the lives of America's founders and leaders through biographies of depth, dramatic detail, and narrative sweep. As one of America's greatest historians, you have sparked curiosity about the American founding and inspired citizens to learn about history and explore its lessons for today. Your portraits of American heroes have deepened our understandings of the triumphs and challenges of American democracy, reminding us that we must always pursue the ideals of liberty, equality, and self-government. For inspiring Americans to learn about the past so they can understand the present and shape the future, it is a great honor for the National Constitution Center to award you the 2025 Liberty Medal.

1:07:14.6 Ron Chernow: Thank you, Jeffrey. Those beautiful words. What a terrific leader you have. And what a beautiful event on this magnificent evening in this magnificent hall. So thank you so much for coming out to honor me and the show. You know, as a biographer, I've been very lucky to have followed in the footsteps of Alexander Hamilton. He issued the appeal to the Constitutional Convention, perhaps did more than anyone else to secure its ratification. And then I was lucky enough to follow in the footsteps of George Washington as he presided over the Constitutional Convention and forged a federal government fully consistent with its principles.

1:07:38.4 Ron Chernow: So I can't help but feel a small tingle at being here in Philadelphia, birthplace of the Constitution, and receiving this award at the National Constitution Center. The work of honoring and explicating the Constitution, begun by Hamilton, Madison, and Jay in the Federalist Papers, is now gallantly carried on at the Center by Jeffrey Rosen and his excellent staff. So bless you all for your contributions to the Constitution. We need to keep it alive.

1:08:27.8 Ron Chernow: Now, at the very first performance of Hamilton back in January 2015, people started drifting over to me at the end of the performance, and they all said the same thing. "Ron, I love this show, but as I was watching it, I was embarrassed by how little I knew about the history of my own country." I kept hearing this again and again. Perhaps the musical's foremost achievement is that we've gotten millions of Americans, both adults and schoolchildren, reading American history with gusto for the first time. You know, between the publication of my Hamilton biography in 2004 and my first meeting with Lin-Manuel Miranda in 2008, my book was optioned three times for a feature film in Hollywood, and nothing ever happened. They didn't know what to do with it. We kept hearing from producers that American history was boring, nobody cared about it, and that no mass audience existed for a drama about a founding father. Poor fools who might have thought otherwise. In the wake of Hamilton, I'm happy to report, American history is not only popular on stage and screen, but it is hip, cool, and even trendy.

1:09:36.2 Ron Chernow: We're separated from the founding era by a cultural barrier. Those folks talk differently. They dress differently. Hamilton miraculously obliterates that distance and it tells the story of our past in the style of today. History is no longer the dry recitation of facts and dates, but the story of brilliant, passionate, and complex personalities who managed to be both visionary and fallible at once. And it always saddens me when people tell me that when I ask them about history in school and they say that it was the most boring subject. That's criminal liability. You know, history should be the most exciting and passionate of all the subjects.

1:10:29.8 Ron Chernow: Now, from the time I started working with Lin-Manuel in 2008, he would send me via email each song as he wrote it. I remember when he sent me the first George III song, "You'll Be Back," actually sitting at my desk just howling with laughter. Then one day in 2012, he told me he would be working with actors for the first time and he wanted me to see it. I went to a very small rehearsal studio in the garment district in Manhattan on a Monday afternoon. I gingerly pushed open the door and there indeed stood Lin and six other actors. They were just standing in front of music stands. And when I saw them, I confessed my embarrassment. I thought to myself, "Oh my God, they're all black and Latino." I really had not given much thought to the casting.

1:11:15.8 Ron Chernow: Yeah, I had seen Lin's first show "In the Heights" where it was a black and Latino cast, but that was a realistic representation of that neighborhood. But I decided that when this rehearsal was over, I would take Lin aside and convince him that this casting was a dreadful mistake. After all, we were talking about the founding fathers of the United States. Then I sat down, I remember it was just me and Tommy Kail, our director, and Jeffrey Seller, our producer. I sat down and the seven actors began to sing, and it was simply glorious. They infused the lyrics with such rich spirit that I thought, "But of course, revolutions are made by young people full of idealism, by outsiders who would like their fair share of society." A multiracial, multicultural cast suddenly seemed like an ingenious idea. Well, this was happening like in five minutes in my head. It seemed like the highest fulfillment of a constitution that never mentioned the word slavery, but that clearly, if reluctantly, condoned it. Those who were edited out of the story would now be edited back into it. Like many historians, I'm constantly asked, "What would the founders have thought of this or that?" And I always replied, the founders were not a monolithic block of people. They were indeed fighting over the same issues that animate us today. Federal versus state power, strict construction versus a liberal interpretation of the Constitution, etc. Please don't be misled by the quaint costumes of the 18th century, the powdered hair and buckle shoes. These people were militant and contentious and never shied away from a good fight.

1:13:02.2 Ron Chernow: The very future of the country was up for grabs, and they were not going to muzzle their opinions. Their opinions were very strongly held. Alexander Hamilton was a flawed genius who could admire his soaring achievements even if we deplore some of his personal weaknesses. In embracing

the musical, audiences, I think, have shown that they don't want history that debunks our country's past, but neither do they want history that exaggerates or sanitizes it. The audience reactions have been very mature. Hamilton invites audiences to grapple with our nation's complicated origins and thereby makes our early struggles feel urgent and vital and, yes, all too contemporary. Thank you again to Jeffrey and all you folks for bestowing on me this marvelous honor. I think that I'll go to bed with this hanging around my neck tonight. Thank you.

1:14:09.6 Speaker 1: Please welcome Broadway and Hamilton star, Philadelphian Terea Campbell. Congratulations, Ron.

1:14:31.3 Terea Campbell: Thank you for coming to my sister's wedding. A toast to the groom. To the bride. From your sister who is always by your side. To your union and the hope that you provide. May you always be satisfied. I remember that night. I just might regret that night for the rest of my days. I remember those soldier boys tripping over themselves to win our praise. I remember that dream like candle light Like a dream that you can't quite blaze. But Alexander, I'll never forget the first time I saw your face. I have never been the same. Intelligent eyes in a hunger pang frame. And when you said hi, I forgot my dang name. Set my heart aflame Every part of flame. This is not a game. So, so, so. So this is what it feels like to match wits with someone at your level. What the hell is the cat shit's the feeling of freedom, of seeing the light. He's Ben Franklin with the key and the kite. You see it, right? The conversation lasted two minutes, maybe three minutes. Everything we said in total agreement is a dream. And it's a bit of a dance, a bit of a posture, it's a bit of a stance.

1:16:05.1 Terea Campbell: He's a bit of a flirt, but I'mma give it a chance. I asked about his family. Did you see his answer? His hands started fidgeting, he looked askance. He's penniless. He's flying by the seat of his pants. Handsome boy. Does he know it? Peach fuzz. And he can't even grow it. I want to take him far away from this place. Then I turn and see my sister's face. And she is. And I know she is helpless. And her eyes are just. And I realize three fundamental truth at the exact same time. I'm a girl in a world in which my only job is to marry rich. My father has no son. So I'm the one who has the social climb for one. Cause I'm the oldest and the wittiest. And the gossip in New York City is insidious. Alexander is penniless. That doesn't mean I want him any less. He's after me cause I'm a spider sister. That elevates the status. I have to be naive to set that aside. Maybe that is why I introduced him to Eliza. Now that's his bride. Nice going, Angelica. He was right. You will never be satisfied. I know my sister like I know my own mind.

1:17:13.8 Terea Campbell: You will never find anyone as trusting or as kind. If I tell her that I love him, she'd be silently resigned. He'd be mine. She would say I'm fine. She'd be lying. But when I fantasize at night, it's Alexander's eyes. Is that romantic? What it might have been if I hadn't sized him up so quickly. At least my dear Eliza's his wife. At least I keep his eyes in my life. To the groom. To the bride. From your sister who is always by your side. To union in the hope that you provide. May you always be satisfied. And I know she'll be happy as his bride. And I know he will never be satisfied. I will never be satisfied.

1:19:26.7 Jeffrey Rosen: Friends, thank you for joining us for a superb evening. Thanks to Ron Chernow and Hamilton for reminding us that it is urgently important, engaging, and exciting to learn about history and the ideas that defined America. All of us at the National Constitution Center are so looking forward to our work together, bringing the American story to life throughout 2026 and beyond. Good night, everyone.