

URCO Final Report

Impact Statement:

"Go there. Hold it. Measure it. Film it. Touch it. Draw it. Feel its heft. The things of the world. That is what we write about." This is the advice my academic mentor, Jennifer Sinor, gives to aspiring writers about research in her interview with *Mudseason Review*. Having the opportunity to travel to New York, to stand in the places where Hamilton stood, and to do actual living research, has helped me grow as a creative writer and as a researcher. Before receiving funding for this grant, I had never spent much time doing any research, but as I read, traveled, interviewed, and wrote, I realized that research is so much more than sitting in the archives. Although the archival work is necessary, through this grant I was able to see and understand the equal necessity of living research; finding and experiencing "the things of the world."

Final Report:

For my project, I was able to travel to New York City over Spring Break. My first day in New York, I spent the morning and afternoon traveling between museums. I started that morning in the New York Public Library, where I was able to research the copies of some of the documents Hamilton composed, including "The Reynolds Pamphlet" and a few of the essays contained in "The Federalist Papers." These were particularly important for me to research, because I focused my research on the ways that writing can both create and destroy shelters. "The Reynolds Pamphlet" tied into this research, because it demonstrates how writing can destroy shelters, particularly how Hamilton's writing about his extramarital affair destroyed his domestic shelter. "The Federalist Papers" demonstrated the ways in which Hamilton's writing could create shelters, his essays being used to defend the constitution to the citizens of the newly formed United States of America.

I was able to start my research traditionally in the archives, and from there I moved to the New York Historical Society, to see an exhibit that they had opened on Alexander Hamilton. There I was able to find the melding between living research and archival research, reading the information the museum presented while simultaneously being able to examine the objects that Hamilton interacted with during his life. While at the New York Historical Society, I was able to see imitation works of the pistols that Alexander Hamilton used in his duel with Aaron Burr, and see original copies of paintings of Burr, Hamilton, and Hamilton's wife, Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton. Because my research was focused on the ways that writing can both create and destroy shelters I was fascinated by the way that the New York Historical Society used writing to form a new shelter for Hamilton's life, creating a place where people can learn the history of Hamilton's life.

I finished my first day in New York by attending a production of Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton: An American Musical*. While at the musical, I was struck by the way that even creative writing can create shelters for people. Miranda did his research to compose and stage *Hamilton*, yet the writing is certainly creative. In crafting a Broadway show based on the life of Alexander Hamilton, Miranda was able to create a new shelter for Hamilton's life that has created a popular interest in Alexander Hamilton's life.

My second day in New York was dedicated to the living research, standing in the places where Alexander Hamilton stood. I started that morning riding a bus across the Hudson River to spend the early morning hours in Weehawken. Although the actual dueling grounds where Hamilton was killed have been covered by a train track, there is a park named Hamilton Park, where they have placed the stone that Hamilton died on. It was important to go to Weehawken

in the morning, because the duel happened at dawn, and I wanted to get as close to that experience as I could.

After Weehawken I traveled to Hamilton Grange, the only home that Hamilton ever owned. As I continued my research on the ways writing can build shelters, I felt that it would be important to stand in Hamilton's literal shelter. The basement of the Grange has been transformed into a museum, which showed another way that writing can create shelters. The information that the Grange presented about Alexander Hamilton's life avoided any mention of Hamilton's affair and the damage it caused to his domestic sphere, even though the Grange was his domestic space. In this way, the writing of those who created the museum inside the Grange shelters Hamilton from his guilt in the extramarital affair.

I finished the day in New York's Financial District. My first stop there was Trinity Church, where Alexander Hamilton is buried. After dedicating the past months to researching Hamilton, words fail to explain how it felt standing next to Hamilton's final literal shelter. From there I traveled to the museum of National Finance to see the final museum exhibit on Hamilton. I finished my trip in Federal Hall, which wasn't originally a part of my plan, but as I walked the streets of New York, and spent the day standing in the places where Hamilton had stood, I thought it would be important to stop in at Federal Hall, knowing that Hamilton had stood there during George Washington's inauguration.

Although my time in New York was short, the amount of archival and living research I was able to conduct demonstrated so many ways in which writing had played both a creative and destructive role in Hamilton's life. With all of these different examples, composing my braided essay became a challenge, it became a matter of deciding which scenes and moments from Hamilton's life I wanted to construct my braided essay around. In the writing, I decided to focus

in on his composition of "The Reynolds Pamphlet," because it felt similar to my own experience with writing, and in the braided essay I could lay "The Reynolds Pamphlet" and my own experience of coming out through email side by side, demonstrating how writing can act as a destructive force.

After several revisions of my braided essay, I presented the work at the English Symposium this semester, sharing the experience of being in New York, and the significance that Hamilton's writing still holds today, not only as a foundation for our current political system, but also as an example of the power and importance of writing.