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## **DNA AND THE JEWISH ANCESTRY OF JOHN ADAMS, THOMAS JEFFERSON AND ALEXANDER HAMILTON**

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### **Abstract**

This research investigates the ancestry of Presidents John and John Quincy Adams, Thomas Jefferson and patriot Alexander Hamilton. Using ancestral DNA tracing and global DNA data-bases, we show that these four men, critical to the early political and economic development of the United States, were likely of Jewish ancestry. This finding casts doubt on the Protestant, Anglo-Saxon origins of American cultural ideology.

**Keywords:** Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Alexander Hamilton, Genealogical DNA, Jewish Ancestry

### **Introduction**

American history books consistently assume that the country's early leaders were uniformly of British Protestant ancestry – giving rise to an ideology of White Protestant Supremacy that is pervasive in American culture to the present day. The present research calls this central assumption into question by examining the ancestry of three Presidents – Thomas Jefferson, John Adams and John Quincy Adams – and one of the central political thinkers and financial leaders of the early republic – Alexander Hamilton. In all four cases genealogical DNA samples tie these men to recent Jewish ancestors. This calls into question the ideology of White Protestant Supremacy and indicates that early American patriots were of more diverse ethnicity than previously believed.

### **Methodology**

One of the current buzzwords in the social sciences is *disciplinary silos*. This concept draws attention to the insularity of academic disciplines and research approaches which use only one dominant paradigm, method, or vocabulary to study a phenomenon. Over the past few decades, greater strides have been made within and across academic fields when ideas and ways of thinking are imported from other disciplines, rather than using only traditional approaches.

We propose that the same can be said for the discipline of historical studies. Whether examining the last decade, the last century, the last millennium or the origins of human culture, historians have largely depended upon written, carved, printed – and more recently – photographic images to conduct their research. These may be cuneiform symbols inscribed on clay tablets, carvings on rock slabs (e.g., stele), papyrus scrolls, tomb inscriptions, statues, hand-written documents or printed manuscripts.

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Archaeologists and cultural anthropologists, who also study human history, have been more open than traditional historians in adopting recent technologies such as satellite photography, in-ground radar, and magnetic imaging in their research. These have provided novel perspectives to archaeological researchers, permitting them to locate, for example, the outlines of flattened city-walls, which are not visible when a site is only viewed from ground level or excavated downward in a square area. Large-scale geographic features and perimeters become more visible when viewed from high above ground or even from space.

While historical documents may be lost, falsified, or written to be purposely misleading, DNA is what it is – chemical molecules in each and every cell of one’s body. Properly collected, analyzed and compared to other samples, DNA does not lie.

### **Commercial DNA Testing Services**

In 2000, Family Tree DNA (FTDNA.com) was the first company dedicated to direct-to-consumer testing for ancestry research. In 2019, new analysis tools were developed; these included auto-clusters (grouping all matches visually into clusters) and family tree theories (suggesting possible relationships between DNA matches by combining several Myheritage.com trees as well as the Gen.com global family trees). This permits users to track the genetic evolution of their ancestry over time in a fine-grained manner; ancestors’ paths across both time and space can now be viewed, sometimes to within a few hundred years. This same year it was estimated that the major genealogical testing companies had accumulated about 26 million DNA profiles (FTDNA.com). Many companies have now transferred their test results to multiple sites, giving users at each one access to all data collected globally.

A genealogical DNA test is performed on a sample provided by the individual. After following the kit instructions on how to collect the sample, the user returns it for analysis. The sample is then processed using a technology known as DNA microarray to obtain the genetic information requested by the consumer (Bettinger and Wayne 2016).

**Female Line Testing** . Mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) is transmitted from mother to child, thus a direct maternal ancestor can be traced using mtDNA (Bettinger and Wayne 2016). This transmission occurs with very few mutations over time. A perfect match found to another person's mtDNA test results indicates shared ancestry of possibly between 1 and 50 generations ago. More distant matching to a specific haplogroup or subclade may be linked to a common geographic origin, e.g., Southern India, the Baltic Region.

**Haplogroups** Present-day humans descend in their direct female line from a female who most geneticists believe lived in Africa (Bettinger and Wayne 2016). Different branches of this woman’s descendants constitute different haplogroups. Most mtDNA results include a prediction or exact assertion of one's mtDNA haplogroup.

**Y chromosome (Y-DNA) testing.** The Y-Chromosome is one of the 23rd pair of human chromosomes. Only males have a Y-chromosome, because women have two X chromosomes in their 23rd pair. A man's test results are compared to another man's results to determine the time frame in which the two individual may have shared a most recent common ancestor (MRCA) in their direct paternal line (Bettinger and Wayne 2016). Women who wish to determine their direct paternal ancestry may ask their brother, father, grandfather, or a paternal uncle's son (their cousin) to take the test for them. There are two types of paternal DNA testing one can order: STR and SNP.

**STR markers.** The most common type of testing is performed using STR (short tandem repeat). A certain section of DNA is examined for a pattern that repeats basic chemical components of the DNA. The number of times it repeats is the value of the marker. Typical tests examine between 12 and 111 STR markers. STRs mutate fairly frequently, which permits different branches of paternal ancestry to be charted. The results of two individuals are then compared to see if there is a match. DNA companies will usually provide an estimate of how closely related two people are, in terms of generations or years, based on the difference between their results (Bettinger and Wayne 2016).

A person's male ancestral haplogroup can often be inferred from STR results, but can be proven only with a Y-chromosome SNP test (Y-SNP test). A single-nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) is a change to a single nucleotide in a DNA sequence. Typical Y-DNA SNP tests examine about 20,000 to 35,000 SNPs. Getting an SNP test allows a much higher resolution of one’s male ancestry than STRs. It can also be used to provide additional information about the relationship between two individuals and to confirm one’s ancestral haplogroup.

In the present study we use both STR and SNP genealogical data to link John Adams, John Quincy Adams, Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton to contemporary Jewish persons in global DNA databases.

### John Adams and John Quincy Adams

John Adams, the man who became the second President of the United States, was born on October 30, 1735, to John Adams, Sr. and Susanna Boylston. He had two younger brothers, Peter (1738-1823) and Elihu (1741-1775), and a sister, Jerusha (1748-1810). Notably, two of his siblings had distinctly Hebrew given names. All were born on the family farm in Braintree, Massachusetts. John's mother was from a physician's family in Brookline, Massachusetts. His father was a deacon in the Congregational Church, a farmer, a shoemaker, and a lieutenant in the local militia. Adams's great-great-grandfather Henry Adams immigrated to Massachusetts from Braintree, Essex, England, around 1638.



Henry's son, Joseph Adams (1626-1691) married Abigail Baxter of Boston in 1650; they were the parents of a second Joseph (1654-1705) who married Hannah Bass (1662-1705), the daughter of John and Ruth Alden Bass of the Mayflower/Plymouth Colony. Earlier research has documented the Plymouth colonists to be of Jewish ancestry (see Hirschman, Vance and Harris 2018). Joseph and Hannah Bass Adams were the parents of John Adams, Sr., often called Deacon John, the father of President John Adams (Diggins 2003)

In 1764, John married Abigail, the daughter of Reverend William Smith and his wife Elizabeth Quincy Smith. She was born in Weymouth, MA, in 1744, where her father was a Congregationalist minister. Abigail's mother, Elizabeth Quincy, was born in 1721 in Braintree, MA, the daughter of John Quincy and Elizabeth Norton. John Quincy was Speaker of the Massachusetts Assembly and part of the Governor's council (Ellis 1993).

Abigail Adams gave birth to six children, four of which grew to adulthood. One son, John Quincy (1767-1848) became the sixth U.S. President.

Because of their famous ancestral lineage, the Adams DNA Project (FTDNA.com) has several descendants of Henry Adams, the Adams family progenitor from England. Two of these participants have had advanced testing of their haplotype. These indicate that the Presidential Adams haplotype is in group: R-S14328 and subgroup R-FGC23887.

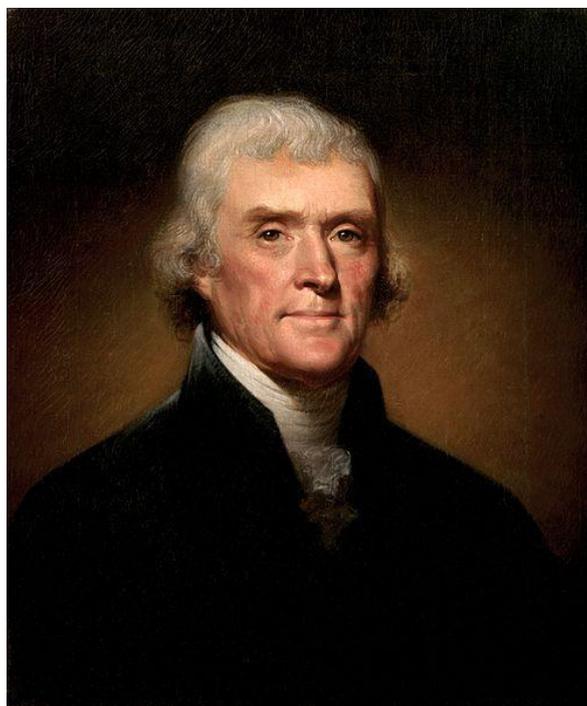
When compared this to others having this same refined DNA SNP pattern, the following surnames were found in the Jewish Heritage Project which contains DNA entries from persons of known Jewish ancestry (Familytreedna.com) -- Lorenzini (Italy), Goethals (Belgium), Kanbier (Netherlands), Koch (Germany), Merket (Germany), and Montonari (Ferrara, Italy). These surnames are suggestive of both Ashkenazic (Eastern European) and Sephardic (Spanish) Jewish ancestry and may indicate that the Adams progenitor was a very early adherent to Judaism, possibly coming from the Mediterranean or Middle Eastern region.

Given that the surname Adams is, itself, Hebrew in origin and that his great grandfather married one of the Plymouth Colony descendants (see Hirschman, Vance and Harris 2018 and see also [Allied Families \(Y-DNA\) - Mayflower DNA R-p312 matches for Alden](#)), we believe a strong presumption can be made that the Adams family was ancestrally Jewish and likely aware of that when choosing marriage partners.

### **Thomas Jefferson**

Now we turn to an American polymath: Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson was one of the greatest statesmen produced on American soil. His primary political accomplishments include drafting the Declaration of Independence and serving as the third President of the United States. He played a key role in the Continental Congress and was governor of Virginia during the American Revolutionary War (EncyclopediaVirginia.org). And notably for our present purposes, Jefferson authored the Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom. An excerpt from this is given below:

*We the General Assembly of Virginia do enact [Be it enacted by the General Assembly] that no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burthened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer, on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities.*



**Thomas Jefferson**

Prior to the Revolutionary War, Jefferson succeeded George Washington as a delegate to the Second Constitutional Congress. During this time, he drafted the Declaration of Independence, which Congress adopted on July 4, 1776. After the Revolutionary War, Jefferson served as a Virginia delegate to the Congress of the Confederation. In 1785, he was appointed as the U.S. Minister to France by the Congress of the Confederation, a role in which he succeeded Benjamin Franklin. He served as the first Secretary of State under George Washington from 1790 to 1793 and was the second vice president of the United States under John Adams, who we have just discussed (EncyclopediaVirginia.org).

During his presidency, Jefferson completed the Louisiana Purchase from France and funded the Lewis and Clark Expedition to the Pacific coast in 1804. He also oversaw the Second Barbary War, initiated the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and attempted to annex Florida from Spain (EncyclopediaVirginia.org).



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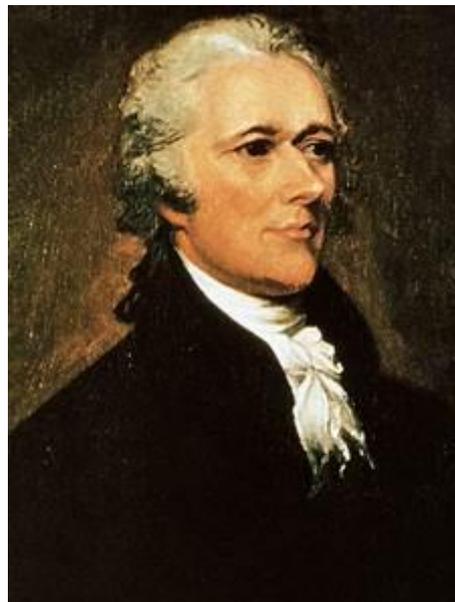
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1840

These DNA scores indicate that Jefferson's ancestry was likely Sephardic Jewish by way of Italy, France and Portugal. (Intriguingly, Jefferson was visiting Italy when he obtained the family crest belonging to the Sephardic Jewish Talliaferro family, who were friends of his and early settlers in Virginia).

The heaviest population saturation of the T-M70 haplotype, however, is in Kuwait, Oman and Saudi Arabia (FTDNA T-M70 Project). Given this, we propose that Jefferson's ancestors originated in the Middle East and then migrated outward as Jews, with descendants affiliating with both the Sephardic and Ashkenazic branches of Judaism.

**Alexander Hamilton**



Alexander Hamilton was born in Charlestown, Nevis, British West Indies. He and his older brother James Jr., were the illegitimate sons of Rachel Faucette, a married woman of British and French Huguenot descent, and James A. Hamilton, a Scotsman who was the fourth son of Alexander Hamilton of Grange, Ayrshire. It is not certain whether Hamilton was born in 1755 or 1757 (Ambrose and Martin 2006; Chernow 2005).

Hamilton's mother had been married previously to Johann Michael Lavien, a Danish or German merchant, on St. Croix in the Virgin Islands, then ruled by Denmark. Note that Lavien is a common Jewish surname, i.e., Levine. They had one son, Peter Lavien. In 1750, Faucette left her husband and first son and traveled to Saint Kitts where she met James Hamilton. Hamilton and Faucette moved together to Nevis, her birthplace, where she had inherited a seaside lot in town (Ambrose and Martin 2006, Chernow 2005).

James Hamilton later abandoned Rachel and their two sons, James Jr. and Alexander, allegedly to "spar[e] [her] a charge of bigamy... after finding out that her first husband intend[ed] to divorce her under Danish law on grounds of adultery and desertion." Rachel moved with her two children to St. Croix, where she supported them by keeping a small store in Christiansted (Ambrose and Martin 2006, Chernow 2005). Rachel contracted yellow fever and died on February 19, 1768, leaving her sons orphaned. In probate court, Faucette's first husband seized her estate. Many items were auctioned off, but a friend purchased the family's books and later returned them to Alexander (Ambrose and Martin 2006, Chernow 2005).

Alexander became a clerk at Beekman and Cruger, a West Indies import-export firm that traded with New York and New England. He and James Jr. were briefly taken in by their cousin Peter Lytton; however, Lytton took his own life in July 1769, leaving his property to his mistress and their son.

The Hamilton brothers were subsequently separated. James apprenticed with a local carpenter, while Alexander was taken-in by Nevis merchant Thomas Stevens (Ambrose and Martin 2006; Chernow 2005).

Hamilton wrote a detailed letter to his father describing the hurricane that devastated the island on August 30, 1772. Hugh Knox, a minister and journalist, published the letter in the *Royal Danish-American Gazette*. The essay impressed community leaders, who collected a fund to send Hamilton to the American colonies for his education (Ambrose and Martin 2006; Chernow 2005). However, the Church of England denied education in the church school to both Alexander and his brother, because their parents were not legally married. Notably, they attended classes in a private school organized by a Jewish headmistress (Ambrose and Martin 2006; Chernow 2005).

Alexander then travelled to New York City, where he stayed with Hercules Mulligan, a trader whom he assisted in selling cargo to pay for his education and support. In 1773 Hamilton took courses at the Elizabethtown (New Jersey) Academy, a preparatory school run by Francis Barber. Here he came under the influence of William Livingston, a leading intellectual and revolutionary, with whom he lived for a time (Ambrose and Martin 2006; Chernow 2005).

Alexander joined the local militia as the American Revolutionary War began. In 1777, becoming a senior aide to General Washington in the new Continental Army. After the war, he was elected as a representative from New York to the Congress of the Confederation. He resigned this post to practice law and later founded the Bank of New York. Shortly after, he decided to re-enter politics (Ambrose and Martin 2006; Chernow 2005).

Hamilton devoted himself to strengthening the weak central government under the Articles of Confederation, chairing the Annapolis Convention of 1786, which called for a Constitutional Convention. He helped ratify the Constitution by writing 51 of the 85 installments of *The Federalist Papers*; these are still used as important references for Constitutional interpretation (Ambrose and Martin 2006; Chernow 2005).

Hamilton next organized the Treasury Department as a member of President Washington's first Cabinet. He successfully argued that the implied powers of the Constitution provided the legal authority to fund the national debt, to assume states' debts, and to create the government-backed Bank of the United States (Ambrose and Martin 2006; Chernow 2005). Alexander's political views formed the ideological basis of the Federalist Party, which opposed the Democratic-Republican Party led by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. He opposed recognition of the French First Republic in 1798–99 under President John Adams due to its tyrannical policies, and then became Commanding General of the U.S. Army (Ambrose and Martin 2006; Chernow 2005).

Hamilton's opposition to John Adams' re-election helped defeat the Federalist Party in 1800. When Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr tied for the presidency in the Electoral College, Hamilton worked to defeat Burr and elect Jefferson. He was a vocal critic of the international slave trade (Ambrose and Martin 2006; Chernow 2005). When Vice President Aaron Burr later ran for governor of New York State in 1804, Hamilton campaigned against him. Burr then challenged him to a duel on July 11, 1804. Burr shot and mortally wounded Hamilton, who died the following day (Ambrose and Martin 2006; Chernow 2005). His views on human liberty and the rights of all men, regardless of race or birth status, surely grew out of his own life experiences and serve to instruct us in the present day.

The Hamilton Surname DNA Project presents the results of Y-DNA testing of four males who are directly descended from John C.A. Hamilton, the grandson of Alexander Hamilton. All four individuals match at 37 of 37 markers. The results suggest that Alexander Hamilton belonged to Y-DNA Haplogroup I-M253. This is confirmed by the very large number of entrants in the Hamilton DNA Project who carry this same haplotype (HamiltonDNAProject.FamilyTreeDNA.com) and are named James or Alexander.

The I-m253 haplogroup has a dense concentration in both Scandinavia and the Balkan Region, e.g, Croatia, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria. Among those matching the Hamilton DNA markers are several other persons from Scotland, Northern Ireland and Central Appalachia. Notably, the surname Robertson has almost as many entries in the Hamilton DNA Project as the Hamiltons, indicating that these two surnames were genetically inter-related, perhaps overlapping in Scotland.

But perhaps the most instructive entry is that of Friedrich Rothfuss, who is also listed in the Jewish Heritage Project (FamilyTreeDNA.com). Friedrich was born in Germany in 1824 and died in 1882. It is likely that Friedrich was of Ashkenazic (not Sephardic) origin. His high resolution DNA match to the Hamiltons indicates they were likely of Ashkenazic ancestry as well.

If one were a speculating person, one might speculate that the surname Hamilton originated in the village of Hamel in northern France, which was under Norman rule for several centuries. And one might further note that it was from this area that the Norman ruler who became William I of England brought many Ashkenazic French Jews to England in 1066 (Golb 1998). Given the already documented strong Jewish ancestry among the settlers of Central Appalachia who also immigrated from Scotland and Northern Ireland (Hirschman, Vance and Harris, 2019), we believe this speculation is likely to be verified in later research.

### Closing Comments

At the present moment in American history, we confront a cross-roads of cultural identity. On the one hand are those who fervently champion what they believe are the Protestant, White, Anglo-Saxon roots of the United States. Within their ideology, persons of color, non-Protestants and those with non-British ancestry are deemed less valuable – and even potentially threatening – to the survival of the nation as they believe it should be.

On the other hand are the voices and claims to legitimacy as fully-vested Americans of those who arrived in conditions of enslavement, or as impoverished immigrants during the 1800s from Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean, or during the late 1900s and early 2000s from Latin America and the Middle East. What is missing from both sides of this bi-furcated ideology is a fuller recognition that the United States was **never** the WASP culture that the first group imagines. DNA research articles, such as this one, are making it clear that North America was colonized by an ethnically diverse – and frequently Jewish-descended – set of refugees from Europe, Central Asia, and North Africa.

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