



New York Historical Society

*New Yorkers pull down the statue of King George III on July 9, 1776.*

## Law & Government: Hamilton vs. Hobbes

Jan. 3—Between late 1774 and early 1775 an exchange of five public letters took place between Alexander Hamilton and an individual who wrote under the pseudonym A. W. Farmer (A Westchester Farmer). At the time, A. W. Farmer’s identity was unknown, but it was later revealed as Samuel Seabury, a prominent Anglican clergyman and a devoted loyalist to Britain during the American Revolution. Seabury later became the first American Episcopal bishop.

In three widely circulated public missives—“Free Thoughts on the Proceedings of the Continental Congress,” “The Congress Canvassed,” and “A View of the Controversy between Great Britain and her Colonies”—Seabury proclaimed not only his irrevocable

loyalty to the British Crown, but in the last of the three documents, he is explicit in his demand that the colonies must submit to the “rule of law,” i.e., they must obey the legal dictates of the British Crown and Parliament.

Hamilton wrote two replies to Seabury (A. W. Farmer), and it is in the second of those replies, titled “The Farmer Refuted,” that the then eighteen-year-old Hamilton strikes directly at the foundation of oligarchical law.

Written in February of

1775, two months prior to the battles of Lexington and Concord, “The Farmer Refuted” goes beyond Hamilton’s first response to Seabury, wherein he had argued for the right of the newly formed Continental Congress to resist oppressive measures emanating from London; rather, in “The Farmer Refuted” Hamilton goes to the very heart of the matter at hand, i.e., the actual nature of law and government itself. Addressing “A. W. Farmer” directly, Hamilton says:

There is so strong a similitude between your political principles and those maintained by Mr. [Thomas] Hobbes, that, in judging from them, a person might very easily mistake you for a disciple of his. His opinion was, exactly, coincident with yours, relative to man in a state of nature. He held, as you do, that he was, then, perfectly free from all restraint of law and government. Moral obligation, ac-

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