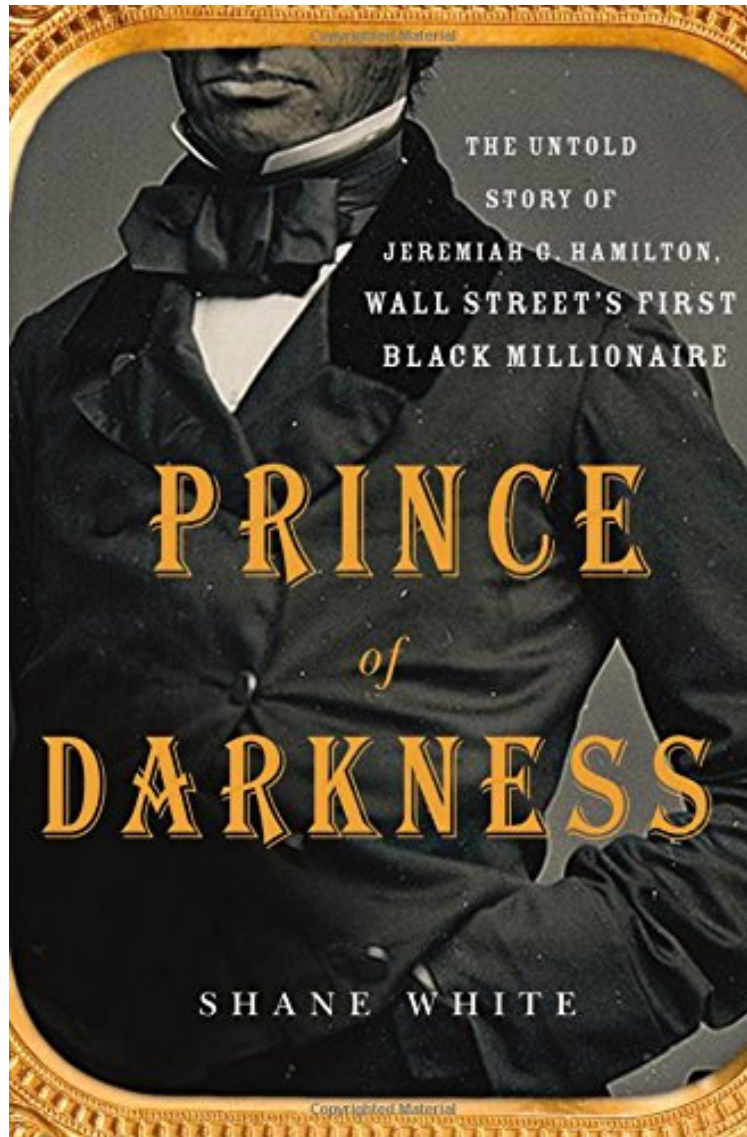


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## Prince of Darkness: The Untold Story of Jeremiah G. Hamilton, Wall Street's First Black Millionaire

*Shane White*

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**Shane White : Prince of Darkness: The Untold Story of Jeremiah G. Hamilton, Wall Street's First Black Millionaire** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Prince of Darkness: The Untold Story of Jeremiah G. Hamilton, Wall Street's First Black Millionaire:

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Four StarsBy CustomerVery informative.11 of 13 people found the following review helpful. A most unlikely man in a most remarkable timeBy Ashutosh S. JogalekarThis is a story about a fascinating and underappreciated character in history. Jeremiah Hamilton was Wall Street's first millionaire in the 1850s. That he could achieve this feat when slavery was still deeply ingrained in the country and where black people even when they were not enslaved were often discriminated against is almost a miracle.Shane White tells us the story of how Hamilton rose from an unlikely provenance as a black man in pre Civil War America. Even then he had shrewd entrepreneurial instincts and was caught shipping counterfeit coins to Haiti. Escaping punishment and rising through the hard-scrabble existence of a determined young man, Hamilton amassed a fortune of \$2 million (more than \$40 million in today's currency) through a variety of business ventures, ranging from railroads to insurance to real estate. White details well the meteoric rise of this unlikely character who charmed his way into the world of wealth white New Yorkers. However the author also does not ignore Hamilton's flaws, noting how he unscrupulously made money off the victims of fire. Perhaps his most monumental feud was with business tycoon Cornelius Vanderbilt with whom he clashed over partial ownership of a rival railroad - ironically one on which black people could travel in parts of the country.The book is also full of fantastic stories, none more so than of the time when a lynch mob during the Draft Riots of the 1860s descended upon Hamilton's house. Hamilton's wife - a white woman whose marriage to him raised eyebrows and kept him insulated only because of his wealth - somehow convinced the mob that her husband was not home and who admirably sent the men away with trinkets and other valuable items in the form of appeasement.Jeremiah Hamilton was a very unlikely character in a time of great racial, social and economic upheaval and this book is the first full length biography of him that I have come across. I agree with the previous reviewer that the writing is a bit dry, especially relative to the unique nature of the story, but the story itself is so remarkable and unlikely that I believe the writing to be a relatively minor blemish. Worth reading.8 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Heads I win, tails you loseBy David WinebergThis stunning portrayal of life in 1800s New York, and in particular the trials and tribulations of a black/mulatto broker, is a rude awakening. It is rude because New Yorkers see themselves as fair and evenhanded, part of an almost unique melting pot, where anyone can play if they pay. Not so in the 1800s, especially if your hair was "wooly" and your skin dark. New Yorkers compared unfavorably to southerners in their snotty mistreatment of other races. For an intelligent, hustling nonwhite, the battle in the financial marketplace was multiplied by the prejudice of the courts and threats in the streets. Jeremiah Hamilton overcame all of it to be the first American millionaire who wasn't white. He found the angles, timed his moves and leveraged everything and everyone. He made enemies by the carload.And money.Hamilton bullied his way onto Wall St. He was as clever, sharp and underhanded as any of his white counterparts. He made a living claiming insurance for losses, mostly at sea, and mostly in court. He battled prejudiced judges and juries, favoritism among whites, and a clearly uneven playing field. When attacked in person, in court or in print, he always hit back harder, which shocked white New York. He totally distanced himself from nonwhites, had his own circle of white friends, married a white woman, and disported himself as a wealthy white. Any one of which could have cost him his life.The great achievement of Prince of Darkness is Shane White's ceaseless digging. Reading the many daily newspapers of Hamilton's lifespan, the court records, government records, and following all kinds of slim leads, he draws in parallel characters and stories for context. His research stretches to the books on Hamilton's shelf, listed in his bankruptcy filing, and those on his library card, some 250 more. White paints a remarkable and memorable picture of someone who lived the moment and lived it large. White interjects himself from time to time, explaining the lengths he had to go, the assumptions and the choices he had to make along the way. The effect is to make the reader a partner, giving us the choices made of uncertainty, though White tells us which way he leans.What White never reveals is how on earth he ever even discovered the existence of Jeremiah Hamilton. An Australian history professor in Sydney is not the most likely to stumble across the obscure 19th century independent Wall Street broker. This is a man who left no photos, no portraits, no documents or ledgers, and who was forgotten as soon as he left the scene in 1875. There are no books that profile him, no documentaries celebrating him, and no institutes honoring him. It makes this book a real achievement.David Wineberg

Winner of the 2015 Society for Historians of the Early American Republic Best Book PrizeIn the middle decades of the nineteenth century Jeremiah G. Hamilton was a well-known figure on Wall Street. Cornelius Vanderbilt, America's first tycoon, came to respect, grudgingly, his one-time opponent. The day after Vanderbilt's death on January 4, 1877, an almost full-page obituary on the front of the National Republican acknowledged that, in the context of his Wall Street share transactions, "There was only one man who ever fought the Commodore to the end, and that was Jeremiah Hamilton." What Vanderbilt's obituary failed to mention, perhaps as contemporaries already knew it well, was that Hamilton was African American. Hamilton, although his origins were lowly, possibly slave, was reportedly the richest colored man in the United States, possessing a fortune of \$2 million, or in excess of two hundred and \$50 million in today's currency. In Prince of Darkness, a groundbreaking and vivid account, eminent historian Shane White reveals the larger than life story of a man who defied every convention of his time. He wheeled and dealt in the lily white business world, he married a white woman, he bought a mansion in rural New Jersey, he owned railroad stock on

trains he was not legally allowed to ride, and generally set his white contemporaries teeth on edge when he wasn't just plain outsmarting them. An important contribution to American history, Hamilton's life offers a way into considering, from the unusual perspective of a black man, subjects that are usually seen as being quintessentially white, totally segregated from the African American past.

**\*\*Winner of the 2016 New York City Book Award\*\*\*\*Winner of the 2015 Society for Historians of the Early American Republic Best Book Prize\*\***"This is historical detective work of the highest magnitude... Indeed, the feeling the book left the prize committee with after its 300-plus pages was: how could the story of an American character this fascinating not have been written before?" ?2015 SHEAR Best Book Prize citation"White has created a fitting tribute to a man who had all but been forgotten." ?Perspectives on History, American Historical Association"A stunning feat...White introduces us to a figure that history has essentially forgotten." ?The Daily Beast"Examines the colorful, complex life of the man who in the eighteenth century was reportedly the wealthiest Black man in the United States?with a fortune of \$2 million or in excess of \$250 million (estimated) in today's currency." ?Essence.com"Alexander wasn't the only controversial Hamilton from New York. After prodigious research, Professor Shane White rescues Jeremiah G. Hamilton from oblivion." -- The New York Times"Chronicles how the complex and notorious Hamilton bucked racial stereotypes and social expectations to make his unprecedented wealth...a fascinating picture of the enigmatic figure." ?Ebony"If this Hamilton were around today, he might have his own reality TV show or be a candidate for president...An interesting look at old New York, race relations and high finance." ?New York Post"Like Mr. Hamilton himself, Shane White makes the impossible possible. Only the indispensable historian of black New York could have brought the "Prince of Darkness" back to life. He makes smudgy newspapers and dusty court records pulse with the ambition, treachery, and hilarity of a different age of boom, bust, and dubious racial progress. A great read about a one-of-a-kind who nevertheless has much to tell us about Gotham and U.S. history." ?David Waldstreicher, The Graduate Center, City University of New York"White details his incredible life, marriage to a white woman, and contentious presence on Wall Street, in the process revealing the ways that historians reconstruct the past. An engaging look at an extraordinary man." ?Booklist"Hamilton's story is gripping; so, too, is his puzzling near disappearance from the historical record. White does an excellent job drawing out the facts of Hamilton's life and supplementing them with details from the history of Wall Street and of other African American New Yorkers of the era." ?Library Journal"A well-told, stereotype-busting tale about a nineteenth century black financier who dared to be larger than life, and got away with it!" ?Elizabeth Dowling Taylor, author of A SLAVE IN THE WHITE HOUSE"Villain? Hustler? Financial Genius? Black Horatio Alger? The White Man's worst nightmare? With panoramic vision and panache, Shane White unravels the mystery that is Jeremiah G. Hamilton." ?Robin D. G. Kelley, author of THELONIOUS MONK: The Life and Times of an American Original (2009)"Pieces together the remarkable career of an antebellum Wall Street broker who was married to a white woman, ambitious, ruthless, successful, and black: in short, "a racist's nightmare come to life." ... Superb scholarship and a sprightly style recover an unaccountably overlooked life." ?Kirkus s" In Prince of Darkness, Shane White employs the superb skills of an accomplished historian to narrate the compelling story of a New York Hamilton who commanded front page news attention in his day and faded into obscurity in the years that followed. Jeremiah Hamilton was not only America's first black millionaire, he was a ruthless businessman and trader who sparked fear, contempt, jealousy and a range of other emotions from contemporaries and adversaries. A fine read, I highly recommend this important new book." ?Earl Lewis, President, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and co-author with Heidi Ardizzone, LOVE ON TRIAL"Shane White's impeccably researched book offers a compelling history of Jeremiah Hamilton, America's first black Wall Street millionaire. Prince of Darkness tells the complex story of race and wealth in antebellum New York, with a mysterious and sometimes purposefully ambiguous character at its center. From the islands of the Caribbean to Gotham, Hamilton welded together grit and intellectual agility that propelled him into unimaginable wealth. Unlike his African American contemporaries, Jeremiah Hamilton was less concerned with respectability politics or racial uplift. The "Prince of Darkness" was a man who wanted to be rich, and nothing would stand in his way." ?Erica Armstrong Dunbar, author of A FRAGILE FREEDOM: African American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City" At a time when Gotham was virtually inventing segregation, long before the South did, a black man bulled his way into Wall Street, the city's whitest citadel, and ruthlessly made a fortune there. He challenged social codes, too, marrying a white woman, living in a mansion, and was nearly lynched from a lamppost for his transgressions. Yet after his vivid life Jeremiah G. Hamilton vanished completely from New York's collective memory. Happily Professor White, in a bravura display of historical sleuthing, has brought the so-called Prince of Darkness back into the light, and illuminated Hamilton's city as well." ?Mike Wallace, co-author of GOTHAM, winner of the Pulitzer PrizeAbout the AuthorSHANE WHITE is the Challis Professor of History and an Australian Professorial Fellow in the History Department at the University of Sydney specializing in African-American history. He has authored or co-authored several books, including Playing the Numbers, and collaborated in the construction of the website Digital Harlem. Each project has won at least one important prize for excellence from institutions as varied

as the American Historical Association and the American Library Association. He lives in Sydney, Australia.