With Alexander Hamilton's death at the hands of Aaron Burr in 1804, America may have lost not only a future president, but its best hope of peacefully ending slavery and averting civil war.

civil war by emancipating America's slaves. Abolition, in turn, decisively shifts the balance of the U.S. economy from agriculture to industry, priming America to challenge Britain for world economic supremacy.

As Fleming, a historian and the author of *Duel: Alexander Hamilton, Aaron Burr, and the Future of America*, notes, this Hamiltonian order bears certain disturbing similarities to the reign of one of Hamilton's contemporaries, Napoleon. Hamilton's military becomes a bludgeon for enforcing the authority of the federal government over the states. Meanwhile, Hamilton introduces the Christian Constitutional Society he had proposed in 1801, a national organization designed to promote Christian values and attack critics of the Constitution. Hamilton sees no need to step down after two terms and remains president until his death in 1830. Yet he enjoys great popularity during his presidency, as huge federal investments in roads, canals, and other projects breed national prosperity.

The "Hamiltonian revolution," Fleming concludes, would have averted civil war and spared the South from decades of economic ruin. "America would have become one of the great industrial powers of the world by 1860." Inevitably, however, industrialization would breed political turmoil and class conflict. Just as inevitably, a few historians, ignoring "hints of reduced government grants," would begin debating "whether it was a good thing that Aaron Burr had missed."

Promises, Promises

"Political Promises—What Do They Mean?" by David W. Lovell, in *Quadrant* (July–Aug. 2004), 437 Darling St., Balmain, New South Wales 2041 Australia.

As the hard-fought presidential election of 2004 nears its climax, the campaign promises are piling up. Soon cynics will be toting up the winner's unfulfilled pledges—a foolish exercise, in the view of Lovell, acting rector of the University of New South Wales at the Australian Defence Force Academy in Canberra.

It's strange, he points out, that politicians are held to higher standards of promise-

keeping than everyone else. The divorce statistics amply show how willing millions of people are to break what may well be the most solemn vows they will ever make.

Pragmatists hold that promises should be broken if the outcome of keeping them would, on balance, be worse. And what is politics but a pragmatic undertaking, in which outcomes count for more than purity of intention or consistency? But voters tend to forget that.

Promises serve a function beyond the mere harvesting of votes. "Making political promises in liberal democracies helps to provide governments with authority to act. Perceptions that promises are routinely broken—however inaccurate—diminish governmental authority."

But political promises may not be broken as often as we think. A 1963 study of those made in 10 federal elections in Australia found that to be the case. It's the ones that are not fulfilled, particularly those made in extravagant language, that feed "the public misperception that breaking political promises is routine." Remember "read my lips"?

Some promises go unfulfilled because of obstacles beyond the politician's control, such as gridlock or interest-group opposition. Some are deliberately broken because circumstances change—the money dries up or a disaster occurs.

Of course, some promises are broken because they're "unachievable, irresponsible, or overly optimistic." Prime Minister Bob Hawke of Australia was returned to office in 1987 after pledging that he would eliminate child poverty in three years. Politicians shouldn't make such impossible promises, Lovell says. But there's a corollary: Citizens shouldn't ask of politics more than it can provide. No one is promising that citizens will lower their expectations anytime soon.

Churn, Baby, Churn!

"Time, Term Limits, and Turnover: Trends in Membership Stability in U.S. State Legislatures" by Gary F. Moncrief, Richard G. Niemi, and Lynda W. Powell, in *Legislative Studies Quarterly* (Aug. 2004), Comparative Legislative Research Center, 334 Schaeffer Hall, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa 52242–1409.

More than a decade after the first term limits were imposed on state legislators, the results of the new policy are appearing, and they're encouraging to its supporters. The turnover rate among legislators had been dropping, but term limit legislation has halted, and possibly reversed, that trend.

During the 1930s, more than half of all state legislators, on average, were replaced after every election. By the 1980s, that figure had dropped below a quarter: 24 percent in the lower houses and 22 percent in the upper houses, note po-

EXCERPT

The Last Voter

Due to earlier reforms and the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, registration laws are more uniform and registration costs are lower than at any point since registration requirements became widely adopted. There is now little room for enhancing turnout further by making registration easier. . . . [C]ontinued nonvoting by substantial numbers of citizens suggests that for many people, voting remains an activity from which there is virtually no gratification—instrumental, expressive, or otherwise. Consequently, for those whose goal is a democracy where most people engage in the fundamental act of political participation, a pessimistic conclusion cannot be avoided.

—Benjamin Highton, a political scientist at the University of California at Davis, in *Perspectives on Politics* (Sept. 2004).