

**Presentation of Kenneth
Brown**

**2014 Alexander Hamilton
Scholar at the North
Carolina Regional
Convention of the National
Association of Residential
Property Managers
(NARPM)**



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In Lin Manuel Miranda's award-winning musical, *Hamilton*, the second song titled "Alexander Hamilton" introduces us to the treasury secretary's early life, an orphan, abandoned by his father and his mother dies when he was young. The cousin he lived with died by suicide and now he is left alone, working and clerkin' for his late mother's landlord. We see a young man with every reason to give up and to lose hope, but he doesn't. He has this feeling that despite the hardships there is something more out there.

The song goes on to say

*"Well the word got around, they said, "This kid is insane, man!"
Took up a collection just to send him to the mainland
"Get your education, don't forget from whence you came, and
The world's gonna know your name! What's your name, man?"*

My name is Kenneth Brown Jr. I am a proud graduate of Elon University and an even prouder member of the 2014 Hamilton Scholars Cohort and the song I briefly described give us a framework for my story, the story of my cohort, and the story of Alexander Hamilton Scholars and the role that they have played and continue to play in my life.

This organization has helped me to become more grateful not just for the opportunities and privileges that have been afforded to me but also of where I come from. I come from a low-income background, the oldest of 8 kids, there's nine altogether, counting my twin sister who passed away shortly after our birth. As a family, we moved around a lot due to various financial and social circumstances, from a place of our own to staying with relatives to even living in a hotel on several occasions. I saw how my parents worked hard to make sure that my siblings and I had access to every opportunity. Guided by faith in God and a hope that says it has to get better, they instilled in me the value of hard work and tenacity.

Truth be told, it was always a situation that I was trying to escape. Constant efforts to do the most I can do so I don't end up in a similar situation whenever I begin to forge a path of my own. I didn't want to look back. I wanted to leave it in the past. It wasn't until I was accepted into the Hamilton program that a shift began to happen. It was a catalyst for realizing that the things I saw and did growing up gave me the strength to be the person I am today and also realizing a fact that I truly didn't understand at the time: The fact that it could be worse.

Hamilton Scholars create leader weeks that aim to enhance our personal and professional development. Our second leader week in Guatemala was, personally, a life-changing experience. My cohort had just finished our 1st year of college and we were eager to be together again, to catch up, and make memories that will last a lifetime.

One day we went into a local town and visited the house of a woman who made pottery. My description of the house would not do it justice, but it was like what we may consider extreme poverty. The lady was showing us her process and she took us outside to where she heated the clay. We went out back. I turn and see what I can only describe a very solid and thick dirt wall, held up by two large tree trunks and some pretty sturdy rope. That was the back of her house.

Later that day, back at our accommodations, I sat with a staff member with tears in my eyes. It didn't make sense to me that despite the living condition the woman looked content. It didn't make sense to me that I have the nerve to complain over trivial things like lack of Wi-Fi or the library's printer being down. I was shocked and confused. It was that trip where I fully understood joy and happiness. It showed me that it doesn't come from material things. It comes from something greater. It is found in the places and people around you. During the trip, it was found in the volleyball games we played, the meals we shared, the conversations we had, & the fireworks we watched.

It was found in the fact that life could be worse, but it isn't so this day that we live is a gift to share. Just as the woman who welcomed us in her home, as a school who embraced us in their classrooms, as a country who showed me that, in spite of, it could be better, and as parents who gave their kids the best love they could.

That has stuck with me ever since the trip and ever since graduation in May, I have been reminded of the fact that joy and happiness and love aren't found in material things. I have a scripture that sits above my head in my bedroom and it says, "Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." It's everywhere.

A song in the musical titled "Hurricane" describes when a storm destroys Hamilton's town "I didn't drown. I couldn't seem to die." However, he believes that there's something more. He begins to write. The townspeople passed around a plate, total strangers moved by kindness by his story and they put him on a ship that was New York-bound. That is Hamilton Scholars.

Putting kids on ships that are New York-bound. One of my life goals is to serve in this mission. Making sure that I am doing my part to not only breakdown structures that hinders true progress or perpetuate stereotypes but to also make sure that the kids from my neighborhood can be their best selves. An immense thanks to Hamilton Scholars for aiding me in my holistic development and helping me see love, happiness, and joy. Thanks to each of you for the opportunity to create space and to share my story.

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