The relationship American liberalism and civic exclusion sparks debate. Recent accounts hold liberalism and exclusion are opposed, per Rogers Smith, are intertwined, per Jacqueline Stevens, or, as Marc Stears asserts, are either opposed or intertwined, depending on the context. These theories illuminate intellectual and institutional history; however, there is little application of the theories solely to specific thinkers and little critical comparison of the three. This article answers this debate with Tocqueville and Emerson’s accounts of Jacksonian citizenship. Both thinkers advocate individualism in reaction to Jacksonian populism, but Tocqueville whitewashes Jackson’s Indian Removal Act, while Emerson uses democratic individualism to critique the policy. The dueling individualism of Tocqueville and Emerson backs Stears’ argument for divided liberalism and reveals fractures in early American political thought.
Introduction

One of the defining tensions of American politics lies between liberalism and exclusion. This is perhaps most evident in debates over citizenship. American liberalism follows the Lockean axiom that men are naturally equal and that citizenship laws should ignore race, ethnicity, or gender. But inegalitarian citizenship laws plague American history. For example, the 1857 *Dred Scott* decision stripped African Americans’ limited antebellum citizenship rights, reasoning that blacks, free and slave, never had constitutionally protected citizenship. The Fifteenth Amendment restored legal voting rights, but spurred myriad Jim Crow laws preventing the practice of this right. This tension between liberalism and exclusion drives contemporary politics, which simultaneously promises a “post-racial” nation and stringent state immigration laws. As Samuel Huntington summarized “The tension between liberal ideal and institutional reality is America’s distinguishing cleavage. It defines both the agony and the promise of American politics.”

What is the relationship between liberal and exclusionary approaches to citizenship? There are three major accounts of this relationship. The first comes from Rogers Smith (1993, 1997), who asserts several civic ideologies develop through American history, most prominently a liberal-republican tradition and an antithetical tradition of exclusion. Smith’s liberalism is usually egalitarian; however, this sparks debate. The second account, from Jacqueline Stevens (1995), asserts liberalism and exclusion cannot exist separately, for membership in a liberal community, or virtually any community, assumes boundaries to that community, and thus exclusion. Marc Stears (2007) artfully integrates the two into a coherent theory. This third account imagines
liberalism as a set of individualist ideals that are amorphous enough to be claimed by egalitarian and inegalitarian causes. The relationship between liberalism and exclusion is thus context-dependent, varying with the actor or historical milieu.

Smith, Stevens, and Stears focus on intellectual and institutional traditions rather than particular thinkers. Since proponents of Stevens’ argument study institutional histories, Stears, intellectual histories, and Smith, both, these accounts often avoid textual exegesis of select thinkers. Nor can we fault them for this – this simply is not their goal. This article’s first contribution is to complement their work by isolating a pair of thinkers, Tocqueville and Emerson, and giving the two a deep textual reading. In doing so, the article bridges political theory and institutional development by elaborating the ideals that, following Smith, channel institutional change. This also enriches American political thought, which, like other fields of political theory, values thinkers’ historical context.

The article’s second contribution is a critical comparison of the three accounts. Are liberalism and civic exclusion opposed, per Rogers Smith, intertwined, per Jacqueline Stevens, or, as Marc Stears asserts, either opposed or intertwined, depending on the context? This article takes Jacksonian political thought, embodied in Tocqueville and Emerson, as a case study. Tocqueville and Emerson imagine liberal individualism differently. Tocqueville posits Jacksonians empower the common man, liberating him from his fellow citizen. Civic obligation extends only as far as self-interest, blinding the Jacksonian individual to Indian removal. However, the Emersonian citizen, like Emerson himself, withdraws from Jacksonian mob politics, uses this isolation to contemplate the dignity inherent in man, and returns to politics as a social critic. Thus, Emerson critiques
the Party’s Cherokee removal in his 1838 Letter to Martin Van Buren. Both Tocqueville and Emerson answer Jacksonian populism with liberal individualism, but do so differently; Tocqueville eschews social commentary, while Emerson embraces it. This nuanced picture best fits Stears’ account, suggesting early American political thought, though liberal and individualistic, incorporates radically different ideas of civic membership and obligation.

This article proceeds in five sections. First is a discussion of liberalism and civic exclusion. The article introduces Smith’s critique of Tocqueville and his multiple traditions thesis, Jacqueline Stevens’ liberalism as exclusion, and Marc Stears’ liberal multiplicity thesis. The second part of the essay advocates Jacksonian thought as a case study. Third, the essay expounds Tocqueville’s thoughts on the Democrats and Indian removal, and fourth, Emerson’s response. Fifth, the essay parses this difference, noting the rise of the Jacksonians show splits in liberal individualism.

I. Liberalism and Exclusion in Civic Identity

Tocqueville asserts America’s liberal Enlightenment founding culminated in Jacksonian democracy. However, Rogers Smith claims Tocqueville lauds Jacksonian populism but ignores Indians, blacks, and women. Thus Smith advocates approaching American political development through multiple traditions, in which liberal trends intertwine with exclusion, which he labels “ascriptive Americanism.”

Smith’s first step debunks Tocqueville. Smith claims Tocqueville, emerging from aristocratic France, is dazzled by the equality of condition in America. *Democracy in America* is a lesson on how France might shake its feudal history; thus, Tocqueville emphasizes America’s freedom from landed aristocracy and the liberal charters and
middle-class sensibilities of Anglo-American colonists (Smith 1993, 551). But Smith responds that Tocqueville’s myopic focus on America’s freedom from feudalism blinds him to the plights of nonwhites and women. Smith explains:

The Tocquevillian story is thus deceptive because it is too narrow. It is centered on relationships among a minority of Americans (white men, largely of northern European ancestry) analyzed via categories derived from the hierarchy of political and economic statuses men have held in Europe: monarchs and aristocrats, commercial burghers, farmers, industrial and rural laborers, and indigents. (Ibid, 549)

In using these narrow citizenship categories, Tocqueville ignores Indians, blacks and women. Illiberal practices like Southern slavery deviate from America’s liberal course, but betray no flaw in liberalism itself; Tocqueville predicts Northern liberalism will oust black slavery (Ibid, 552). Similarly, Indian removal presages the elimination of Native Americans by waves of frontiersmen. Tocqueville praises women’s peaceful home life in America, but confines them to the domestic, rather than political, sphere.

According to Smith, Tocqueville shapes debate over American political culture. Gunnar Myrdal (1944) and Louis Hartz (1955) each extend Tocqueville’s thesis by forcing minorities to a footnote in the liberal story. Even critics of liberalism ignore Tocqueville, or worse, are trapped by his arguments which “still provide the deep structure within which they debate real but lesser differences” (Ibid, 555) – Smith notes the republican tradition of Bailyn, Pocock, and Wood, though pitted against Tocquevillian liberalism, was similarly agnostic to race.

The next step of Smith’s argument proposes the multiple-traditions thesis that “the definitive feature of American political culture has not been its liberal, republican, or ‘ascriptive Americanist’ elements but, rather, this more complex pattern of apparently inconsistent combinations of the traditions, accompanied by recurring conflicts” (Ibid,
558). Tocquevillians downplay the ascriptive side of liberalism, while critics emphasize it, but Smith detaches ascriptivism from liberalism. Exclusion is so essential to American political development that Smith enshrines it in an independent, competing tradition. The tension between exclusion and liberalism drives political development, which Smith illustrates through the Reconstruction. Liberalism flourished with the abolition of slavery, the Reconstruction Amendments, citizenship for American natives regardless of race, and a growing women’s rights movement. Yet the era also saw Jim Crow, the Chinese Exclusion Act, and social Darwinism. Bucking Tocquevillian orthodoxy, Smith concludes “American political development cannot be seen as a rising tide of liberalizing forces progressively submerging contrary beliefs and forces. The national course has been more serpentine.”

Jacqueline Stevens condemns Smith, stressing exclusion follows logically from liberalism, such that democracies must exclude some groups to make citizenship meaningful. For example, she suggests Jim Crow reconciled the Union and Confederacy as a white republic, even as blacks were granted de jure equality. In separating liberalism and exclusion, Smith misses this marriage, and thus excuses liberalism for exclusion. Others elaborate this liberalism as exclusion thesis. Ira Katznelson (1999, 568) avers “As in The Liberal Tradition in America, in [Smith’s] Civic Ideals it is an idealized and purified, even essentialized, liberalism that makes an appearance. Whenever racism rears its ugly head, this showing is taken as confirmation of a nonliberal strand rather than as a commentary on the liberal tradition itself.” Rather, Katznelson posits, “liberalism’s ordinary functioning can, under some circumstances advance and thus bond with nonliberal and illiberal impulses of various kinds;” he suggests the Southern Democrats’
veto on civil rights and labor was such an example (1993). Similarly, Desmond King (1995, 1999, 2000) posits restrictive immigration laws narrowed America’s civic identity, while Kazenstenstein, Ibrahim, and Nelson (2010) assert liberal legalism disenfranchises convicts. Smith rebuts Stevens, admitting that liberalism and exclusion are occasionally compatible (Smith 1997, 37-39), but emphasizes they are not logically married, being matters of politics, rather than logical necessity. Instead, he proposes Stevens downplays the importance of exclusion by tacking it to liberalism, much as did Tocqueville and Hartz (Smith, 1995).

Marc Stears offers an alternative to Smith and Stevens, proposing American liberalism is alternately inclusive and exclusive. Echoing Smith, Stears claims Stevens’ liberalism as exclusion cannot show exclusion follows logically from liberalism. Nor does liberalism as exclusion clearly define liberalism; some imagine liberalism as ideals, while others imagine rhetoric, or actors (Stears, 93). Thus, liberalism must be defined, as must its relationship to exclusion. But Stevens’ core assertion, that liberalism can exclude, is right, and so is Smith’s implication that it can include.

Stears incorporates both in his liberal multiplicity thesis. By positing liberalism is closer to an ongoing debate over ideals than a unified tradition, he allows both inclusive and ascriptive causes to be liberal. These constant, shared ideals – Stears lists individualism, liberty, equality, and skepticism of power – are vague enough to simultaneously serve opposed purposes. They inspire political action, but bound legitimate debate, thus constraining the action they incite. Therefore, actors often must choose between group-oriented racial liberalism and individualistic economic liberalism (Ibid, 95). For example, Jacksonian Democrats supported slavery by appealing to
economic libertarianism, while Northern Whigs claimed abolition in opposition. Stears suggests successful causes hew to the median, best adopting core liberal ideals. Stears restores liberalism to the heart of American politics, following the Tocquevillians, but is also able to explain the politics of exclusion that elude Tocquevillians and that spurred Smith’s initial critique. In summary, “liberalism is essentially a loose set of interrelated general ideals, the contents of which are the subject of continuous contestation. The American liberal tradition, in other words, is essentially a shared argument rather than a single set of clear, coherent, and consistent beliefs” (Ibid, 97).

These studies focus on grand institutional and intellectual traditions rather than particular thinkers. Stears synthesizes literature on American liberalism from the last fifty years. Stevens’ critique of Smith is brief, but others who expound it, including Ira Katznelson (1993) and Desmond King (1995, 1999, 2000), sketch the evolution of national citizenship laws. Smith, whose account is broadest, posits a civic tradition consists in both institutions and in ideas. In Smith’s Civic Ideals, ideas coalesce into intellectual traditions spanning American history. These ideas constrain actors, who in turn channel the evolution of institutions (1988, 2006). Robert Lieberman adds that purely ideational approaches ignore historical context. He holds “studies that emphasize political ideas as central causal factors…give short shrift to the political settings in which ideas become influential” (Lieberman 2002, 700). Ideas flourish when they harmonize with institutions, and thorough accounts of political development attend how ideas shape institutions (Lieberman 2011, 220).

This article complements these accounts by isolating two thinkers. This gives detail to the ideas that drive institutional change according to Smith and Lieberman and
illuminates Tocqueville and Emerson by situating them in their historical context and in the debate over civic identity. Recent work on antebellum political thought has insightfully attended to thinkers’ historical context (Morone 2003; Frank 2010), and this essay aims to continue this trend. Additionally, this method allows critical comparison of the three accounts of liberalism. Having established the three approaches, the essay now asks which best describes Jacksonian political thought.

II. Jacksonian Indian Removal as a Case Study

Jacksonian America, torn between liberalism and exclusion, is ideal for testing the three accounts. Smith opens Civic Ideals’ chapter on the Jacksonian era by noting

the Age of Jackson has special significance in debates over American political identity. Jacksonian America was the America that Tocqueville visited in 1831-1832. It was also Louis Hartz’ focus, discussed in nearly half of the chapters of his 1955 book. If ever an era fit the Tocquevillian and Hartzian accounts, this should be it” (Smith 1997, 197).

Tocqueville’s optimism came as Jacksonian Democrats leveraged expanded white-male suffrage into populist presidential victories in 1828, 1832, and 1836. Yet the Party sponsored the Indian Removal Act, as well as expansion of slavery, and confinement of women to the home. A foray into the Party’s populist elections and the Indian Removal Act give the context needed to interpret Tocqueville and Emerson.

The Democrats’ electoral strategy sparked Jacksonian populism. As Hofstadter explains “new political conditions diminished the power of old elites. The new efforts to reach broad electorates, the increasing use of political ‘staging’…required more and more time and devotion, and a greater willingness to approach the common man” (Hofstadter, 210-211). Between 1812 and 1828, the number of states allowing popular selection of presidential electors rose from 9 to 22, tripling size of the electorate (Aldrich, 106-7).
Jackson’s deputy, Martin Van Buren, mobilized these voters with a cadre of provincial politicians. Gordon Wood avers that Van Buren “brought together large numbers of ordinary people in order to counter the family influence and personal connection of Federalist gentry” (Wood 1991, 299). Hofstadter seconds that Van Buren’s “men were middle class or lower class, often self-made men…Three of them…were the sons of tavernkeepers, and the others characteristically went from farms to small-town law offices” (Hofstadter, 241), echoing Tocqueville’s portrayal of “mostly village lawyers, tradesmen, or even men of the lowest classes” (Tocqueville, 200). And like Tocqueville, Hofstadter finds they were “were considerably more interested than their predecessors in organization, considerably less fixed in their views of issues, considerably less ideological” than their predecessors (Ibid, 213). Even Joel Silbey, who maintains Jackson’s deputies were aristocrats, admits they sought election rather than principled politics (Silbey, 118-124). In 1828, this Jackson-Van Buren machine doubled John Quincy Adams’ votes in the Electoral College, sweeping away “King Caucus,” the cabal of congressional elites that ran the presidential nomination. Crowds of all classes and races swarmed to Jackson’s inauguration the following March, from “highest and most polished down to the most vulgar and gross in the nation…The reign of KING MOB seemed triumphant” (Remini 1999, 120).

Yet exclusion accompanied this populism, for, once in office, the Democrats narrowed civic membership to their white male constituency. Robert Remini argues the root cause of this exclusion was the Democratic constituency, whose “sole concern was with the rights of the white man. It was a party of and for white men. Blacks, Indians, and women did not enter the political thinking of its members” (Ibid, 46). Harry Watson
posits the Democrats sought to guard America’s agrarian virtue from the industrial revolution and reformist Whig Party (Watson, 59-60), and thus took a stringent approach to civic identity that directly opposed that of the Whigs. As Watson explains, “For Jacksonians, equality was absolute and indivisible. If a man was entitled to some privileges of citizenship, he was entitled to all of them, and there could be no intermediate classes of partially enfranchised or semi-equal citizens” (Ibid, 67). Thus, in Dred Scott, Roger Taney stripped blacks of all citizenship rights, rather than allowing the half-citizenship favored by Whigs. Similarly, the “true Jacksonian Democrat was master of his own house, shop, or farm” (Ibid, 69), not even allowing women priority in the domestic sphere. The Whigs, however, made overtures to Indians, blacks, and women. Whigs relied on the same white male constituency as the Democrats, but they championed Indians’ legal challenges to Jackson’s removal policy and the “gag rule” banning debate on abolition in the House. Years before the Seneca Falls convention, Whigs made concessions to women on issues like temperance, hoping women would urge their husbands to the polls.

The Indian Removal Act of 1830 exemplifies the Democrats’ exclusion. Introducing the Act in his 1829 State of the Union, Jackson posited states have constitutionally guaranteed sovereignty within their borders, precluding independent Indian nations in Georgia or Alabama. He explained, “If the General Government is not permitted to tolerate the erection of a confederate State within the territory of one of the members of this Union against her consent, much less could it allow a foreign and independent government to establish itself there.” Thus, he permitted Georgian and Alabaman Indians to retain their territory so long as they submitted to state laws and
assimilated with whites. Should they seek to preserve their culture, he offered land beyond the Mississippi, emphasizing “emigration should be voluntary, for it would be as cruel as unjust to compel the aborigines to abandon the graves of their fathers and seek a home in a distant land.” Congressional Democrats supported the Act. Senate Democrats rallied to the bill, while Anti-Jacksonians Theodore Frelinghuysen and Peleg Sprague offered vocal but inadequate opposition; the bill passed twenty-eight to nineteen. Ronald Satz notes

the voting pattern was overwhelmingly along party lines. The alignment of anti-Jackson men from Missouri and Ohio against Indian removal and of Democrats from New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania for the measure suggest that propinquity to the frontier was not the decisive factor” (Satz, 21-25).

The House debate was less polarized. Occasional Democrats opposed passage, while anti-Jacksonians unified against the bill. However, Van Buren strong-armed enough Democrats to ensure success, and the bill passed 102-97. Polarization increased with subsequent votes on Indian treaties, Democrats favoring removal and Whigs contesting it (Rolater, 197).

Since the Democrats advanced liberal populism and civic exclusion together, Jacksonian political thought should be fertile ground on which to evaluate the Smith-Stevens-Stears debate. Do the era’s thinkers reconcile liberalism and exclusion? Do they bolster Smith’s opposed traditions, Stevens’ liberalism as exclusion, or Stears’ combination? This essay turns to Tocqueville and Emerson for the answer.

III. Tocqueville on the Democrats and Indian Removal

Tocqueville argues the Jacksonian Democrats empower the common man, but in doing so, liberate him from his fellow citizens. Democrats also encourage materialism
and self-interest, which draw man to local affairs and neighbors. But the Jacksonian citizen lacks empathy for man in himself and for distant peoples, and thus has little feeling for the Indian. Tocqueville accepts Americans’ mutual disinterest and thus views removal as the Indians’ hope for salvation.

America was born populist. Tocqueville asserts the fate of a nation, like that of a man, is determined at birth, noting “America is the only country in which we can watch the natural quiet growth of society and where it is possible to be exact about the influence of the point of departure on the future of a state” (Tocqueville, 30-32). Few English aristocrats had reason to settle the New World, and colonists abandoned primogeniture and English inheritance laws, dividing property with each generation and choking feudalism. This legal egalitarianism culminated in Jacksonian universal white male suffrage. But Tocqueville warns “Democratic institutions awaken and flatter the passion for equality without ever being able to satisfy it entirely” (Ibid, 196-199).

This restless desire for equality expresses itself two ways. First is the election. The collapse of European hierarchy placed material pleasures in the common man’s grasp, sparking insatiable ambition (Ibid, 536-7). Elections promise to assuage desire through material redistribution, but only excite it. “When elections quickly follow one another, they keep society in fervent activity, with endless mutability in public affairs” (Ibid, 202-203). Presidential elections best demonstrate this: “As the election draws near, intrigues grow more active and agitation is more lively and wider spread. The citizens divide up into several camps, each of which takes its name from a candidate. The whole nation gets into a feverish state” (Ibid, 135). Parties excite the population, inflaming this
democratic fervor: Jacksonian citizens are “surrounded by the constant agitation of parties seeking to draw them in and enlist their support” (Ibid, 173).

Second is the party. Tocqueville explains “aristocratic or democratic passions can easily be found at the bottom of all parties and that though they may slip out of sight there, they are, as it were, the nerve and soul of the matter” (Ibid, 178). Aristocratic “great parties” rise in times of crisis, and are “more attached to principles than consequences…Private interest, which always plays the greatest part in political passions, is there more skillfully concealed beneath the veil of public interest.” He admires the Federalists and Jeffersonians who, through their comfortable wealth, held “immaterial interests of the first importance, such as love of equality and independence.” The democratic small parties of the Jacksonian era were better suited to America’s egalitarian and materialistic spirit. They “are generally without political faith. As they are not elevated and sustained by lofty purposes, the selfishness of their character is openly displayed in all their actions” (Ibid, 174-177). “Lacking great parties, the United States is creeping with small ones and public opinion is broken up ad infinitum about questions of detail.” America was not split by religion or class, so Jacksonian partisans hitched themselves to canals, tariffs, and attacks on the Bank of the United States, running on material causes rather than philosophical ones (Ibid, 178). These partisans were “obscure people whose names form no picture in one’s mind. They are mostly village lawyers, tradesmen, or even men of the lowest classes.”

Tocqueville redeems materialism through individualism and self-interest. Jacksonians crowds and conventions collect the common man, but by empowering him as an individual, they make him independent of his fellow man. Tocqueville explains this
Jacksonian phenomenon: “it is just at the moment when a democratic society is establishing itself on the ruins of an aristocracy that this isolation of each man from the rest and the resulting egoism therefrom stand out clearest.” Thus, newly empowered voters “have a presumptuous confidence in their own strength, and never imagining they could ever need another’s help again” (Ibid, 508). Conventions do not celebrate companionship, but mutual independence. Tocqueville redeems individualism through self-interest. While the Jacksonian has little love for mankind, his interest draws him into local affairs, and the lives of his neighbors (Ibid, 527)

Since individualism limits compassion to one’s neighbors, it allows abuses like Indian removal. Indian removal was foreign to most Americans, mediated through newspapers, as Emerson notes, and thus did not deserve empathy or intervention. Tocqueville pities Native Americans but does not consider Indian removal a common problem for Americans, as does Emerson. Thus, lacking the protection of the common man, Indians’ best hope is President Jackson’s paternalism. Tocqueville recounts the Indians’ plight: “Europeans continued to surround them on all sides. Isolated within their own country, the Indians have come to form a little colony of unwelcome foreigners.”

Southern state governments look to expunge them entirely:

If one studies the tyrannous measures adopted by the legislators of the southern states, the conduct of their governors, and the decrees of their courts, one is readily convinced that the complete expulsion of the Indians is the final objective to which all of their simultaneous endeavors are directed (Ibid, 334-335).

In his First Inaugural and his response to *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832), Jackson backed Southern states’ right to retract tribal sovereignty. Yet Tocqueville imagines Jackson’s government shields the tribes from the states: “oppressed by individual states, the Creeks
and Cherokees appealed to the central government. The latter is far from insensible to their ills, sincerely wishing to preserve the remaining natives…but when it tries to carry this plan into execution, the individual states put up formidable resistance.” Therefore, the national government mandates removal not to serve the states, but the Indians.

Tocqueville makes two points. First, Jacksonian politics is unprincipled, materialistic, and raucous, spurring self-interest. Second, individualism precludes love of mankind, blinding Americans to citizenship abuses and yielding a narrow civic identity. Indians are the butt of white populism, and thus are objects of pity, but not candidates of citizenship. We can now briefly affirm Smith’s critique of Tocqueville, having shown Tocqueville views the Democrats as populists, rather than as drivers of Indian removal. Given the narrowness of Tocqueville’s account, Emerson offers a useful counterpoint.

IV. Emerson’s Counterpoint

Emerson joins Tocqueville in condemning the Democrats’ mass politics. He starts with materialism. “The Jackson Party hath envy, and doubtless the low and idle hate the rich” (Emerson, Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks, IV, 20), and so “It seems the relations of society, the position of classes irk & sting [the Democrat]” (Ibid, VII, 99). The Democrat upsets society for personal and material gain, rather than principle. This riles Emerson, who, as a staunch Whig, defends aristocracy (Sacks 2008, xiv; Ladu 1940). He asserts class distinction “is not fluent or removable but a distinction in the nature of things, [and] that neither caucus, nor the newspaper, nor the Congress…can destroy the offense of superiority in persons.”

Nonetheless, voters are enamored with this materialism and flock to the Democrats. “The Best are never demoniacal or magnetic but all brutes are. The
Democratic party in this country is more magnetic than the Whig. Andrew Jackson is the best example of it… It is the height of the animal” (Ibid, VII, 376). In tandem with this materialism, electoral pageantry overwhelms voters. Emerson vividly recounts the 1834 election: “Noisy Election; flags, boy processions, placards, badges, medals, banded coaches – everything to get the hurrah on our side. That is the main end” (Ibid, IV, 333). A Whig caucus is just as hectic: “The Whigs meet in numerous conventions & each palpitating heart swells with the cheap sublime of magnitude and number.” Emerson continues: “This country is not an aristocracy, but a cacophony rather. This town in governed in Wesson’s bar room. And the country in all the bar-rooms” and “Our countrymen love intoxication of some sort. One is drunk with whiskey & one with party…Many of them fling themselves into the excitement of business until their heads whirl & they become insane” (Ibid, VII, 315, 369).

Emerson worries populism strips individuals of their autonomy. He admired the self-reliant individual who contemplated and lived by his own moral principles. Parties, however, force individuals to conform to party principles, offering a false morality. Emerson explains “A whig victory…raises your spirits & you think easy days are preparing for you. Do not believe it. It can never be so. Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the attainment of principles” (Ibid, VII, 145). Attainment of principles requires distance from party politics, for as Tocqueville warned, voters lose themselves in the rabble. Emerson continues “Conventions vote & resolve in multitude…It is only as a man detaches himself from all support & stands alone, that I see him strong and to prevail. He is weaker by every recruit to his banner. Is not a man better than a town?” (Ibid, VII, 403). Taken from Emerson’s early journals, these quotes
reappear in the essay “Self-Reliance,” the manifesto of Emerson’s individualism, showing Emersonian self-reliance is partly a response to Jacksonian party politics. Kenneth Sacks summarizes: given the best government is composed of autonomous, self-reliant individuals, and “raucous campaigning suggested mere practical opportunism…it is hardly surprising that Emerson was terrified by what Tocqueville had recently identified as the tyranny of the majority” (Sacks, xvii).

Contemplation of nature offers refuge from politics and a principled, individualist life. Thus, Emerson’s naturalism can be read as a retreat from vitriolic Jacksonian partisanship. He asserts “A man feels that his time is too precious[,] objects within reach of his spirit too beautiful than that his attention should stoop to such disfigurements as Antimasonry or Convent Riots or General Jackson” (Emerson, Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks, V, 29). In nature Emerson finds a transcendental sanctuary. He asks “if a man should go to walk in the woods & should there find suspended on the oaks or bulrushes electioneering placards,” whether such placards would “exalt his meditation” (Ibid, VII, 292). In an earlier journal, he avers “In the hush of these woods I find no Jackson placards affixed to the trees” (Ibid, IV, 369).

In many of his early writings, Emerson shies from political activism, and his initial notes on Indian removal are no different. But Jackson’s Indian removal particularly riled him, for, like Tocqueville and even Jackson, Emerson showed a paternal pity for the Indians. A Mohawk Indian is “as beautiful & savage as a briar rose,” because he lacks artifice (Ibid, VII, 410). Emerson recounts meeting Indians, likely Penobscots, on a summer trip to Maine in 1834. The tribe clutters into a filthy town, yet is still proud and able-bodied (Ibid, IV, 390). Later Emerson predicts whites will overwhelm Indians. Not
only are some individuals superior to others, he asserts, but also are races. “Caucasians & Saxons,” he notes with only slight irony, are more civilized than Indians or blacks, and thus force the Indian and slave to extinction. But here he breaks with Tocqueville: “Yet pity for these [Indians] was needed, it seems, for the education of this generation in ethics. Our good world cannot learn the beauty of love in narrow circles & at home in the immense Heart, but it must be stimulated by [something] somewhat foreign & monstrous” – the treatment of Indians (Ibid, VII, 393). Like Tocqueville, Emerson disdains mass politics. Unlike Tocqueville, his ideal citizen has an ethical obligation to his fellow man. The Emersonian citizen, like Emerson himself, retreats from mass politics, derives an ethical code, and return to politics as a social activist.

Emerson’s writings on Indian removal are his first coherent attempt at political action. He holds the discerning observer picks ethical issues from politics. Van Buren’s Indian removal and the slave trade are such issues, and require the contemplation of the self-reliant individual. He asks “How can such a question as the Slave Trade” or “the treatment of Indians [which] are pregnant with doctrine…pass over a Nation without leaving some ethical conclusions laid up in the mind of all intelligent citizens?” (Ibid, V, 440). Emerson advocates contemplation, followed by action. Initially, he asserts resistance to Cherokee removal is useless, but concludes that if he does not act, no one will. After a successful lecture against Cherokee removal, he published an open letter to Van Buren. He notes in his journal “Yesterday went the letter to V[an] B[uren]…I write in my journal, I read my lecture with joy – but this stirring of the philanthropic mud, gives me no peace. I will let the republic alone until the republic comes to me,” but he admits: the letter “is merely a Scream but sometimes a scream is better than a thesis”
(Ibid, V, 475-479). Self-reliance requires political contemplation, unearthing the ethical issues in politics, and, if one is to be consistent, acting on these issues.

Emerson stoutly condemns Van Buren’s Cherokee removal. Indian removal is not a mere political question of currency or trade, but a moral one, “the immortal question whether justice shall be done by the race of civilized man to the race of savage man.” The removal treaty is unjust, he asserts, since it received neither the consent of the full Cherokee people nor the American people. The Cherokees, in losing their culture, sought to adopt white culture, but are stripped of both and cast beyond the Mississippi. White America, uninvolved in the decision, is stained with this crime, “a crime that deprives us as well as the Cherokees of a country…the name of this nation, hitherto the sweet omen of religion liberty, will stink to the world” (Emerson 2008, 51). This is a double injustice, once against the Cherokees, and once in yoking Americans this crime, binding morally autonomous individuals to an immoral act.

V. Discussion

The essay now returns to the original question: what is the relationship between liberal and exclusionary accounts of citizenship? Tocqueville and Emerson’s individualism places them in the broad liberal tradition, but supports Marc Stears’ claim liberalism is alternately inclusive or exclusive, depending on the context. Perhaps this is unsurprising. Whether liberalism is the sole, Hartzian tradition of American politics, or one of several traditions, it encompasses diverse thinkers. This final section explains how Tocqueville and Emerson use individualism differently and what this means for liberal citizenship.
Tocqueville and Emerson agree populism spurs individualism. To Tocqueville, populism empowers men, making them independent of each other, and turns their mind to narrow, materialistic goals. For better or worse, this is the reality of politics and it excuses the individual from compassion for distant and abused groups like Indians. The Tocquevillian citizen is an individualist since he keeps a narrow sense of civic obligation and identity. Emerson posits mass politics strips the individual’s agency, substituting a false morality through conformity. The responsible individual willingly retreats from politics to contemplate nature and universal truths. This gives him a love for mankind generally, rather than specific men, and thus an ethical code. With this code, the individual may return to politics as an activist.

The shared commitment to individualism makes both Tocqueville and Emerson liberals. Stears only briefly lists the common ideals of liberalism, among them liberty, skepticism of authority, and equality. Each of these conflicting ideals emphasizes the individual’s political agency and worth. Therefore, American liberalism is partly a debate over the individual’s civic obligations. Tocqueville privileges individual liberty over obligation, while Emerson argues the egalitarian individual embraces his fellow citizen. We should not read this merely as strong (Tocquevillian) individualism that favors mutual independence versus weak (Emersonian) individualism favoring interdependence. Rather, Tocqueville and Emerson conceive of individualism in different terms. To Tocqueville, individualism is economic liberty and to Emerson, it is metaphysical liberty.

Therefore, this article accepts Stears’ liberal multiplicity thesis with a few addenda. Stears proposes two sorts of reform movements, both liberal, develop through American history. Economic reformers appeal to free markets and economic
individualism, in opposition to racial egalitarians, who hope to repair group-based injustices. Liberalism is the cluster of legitimate political strategies over which these movements compete. While both movements appeal to liberalism, Stears posits only one movement can dominate liberal discourse at a time. Tocqueville and Emerson roughly follow this, as Tocqueville supports economic self-interest and Emerson supports racial compassion. Stears also posits the former movement prevails in America, since “At the conceptual level, the fault lies partly with the deeply ingrained individualist assumptions of American liberalism, which have restricted the number of group-based grievances that can be easily addressed” (Stears, 95).

This article cannot evaluate Stears’ claims on the history of American reform movements, but it does speak to the content of liberal ideals, and breaks with Stears on three points. First, Stears posits group-based racial reformers hew to liberal egalitarianism, rather than liberal individualism. However, Stears misses the broad tradition of American democratic individualism, of which Emerson is a part. Democratic individualism recognizes the value of the individual not merely because he shares redeeming traits with all of humanity, but also because he is unique and irreplaceable, containing multitudes (Kateb 2003, 277-278). Thus we see Emerson’s admiration of the Native Americans he meets in his travels and Du Bois’ lovingly detailed description of particular Reconstruction tenant farmers. Neither appeals to equality in solely universal terms, as might a Lockean liberal. Second, the debate over American liberalism and exclusion should nod to this school of individualism. Democratic individualism is a recent line of inquiry in American political thought, and might rejuvenate the study of American liberalism, which is still attempting to overcome Louis Hartz. Disappointingly,
this individualism is not only absent in Stears, but also in Smiths’ early accounts. Finally, Stears posits “American liberalism can assist both egalitarian reform and inegalitarian reactions at different times” (Stears, 96). Yet in the case of Tocqueville and Emerson, liberal individualism is simultaneously harnessed to inegalitarian and egalitarian causes, suggesting that liberal ideals may be more flexible than liberal movements.

There are three implications to this. First, liberalism inheres not only in laws, institutions, and movements, but also, following Smith and Stears, in ideas. As an ideal, liberalism entails a normative individualism that explains how a citizen should participate meaningfully given mass politics. Put differently, Tocqueville and Emerson attempt to reconcile obligation to one’s fellow citizens with the anonymity of modern democracy. They differ on the limits of this obligation. Emerson proposes a deep obligation out of his compassion for his fellow man, a compassion that draws on the uniqueness of the individual. Since this democratic individualism is absent in Tocqueville, his obligation is weaker. Importantly, Tocqueville and Emerson’s invocation to participate is distinct from strong republican and communitarian traditions, for, as Tocqueville demonstrates, participation can occur through the sort of isolated self-interest strong communitarians oppose.

Second, this broad interpretation may suggest that many Americans are liberals, but of varying stripes. This is not to revive the Hartzian thesis with a caveat for civic exclusion. If anything, following Stears, this account opposes Hartz, suggesting liberalism is not monolithic but is nuanced. Third, Smith and Stevens are not wrong to respectively exonerate and condemn liberalism, but their accounts cannot stand alone. Stears asks whether liberalism is opposed to exclusion, per Smith, or directly responsible
or indirectly complicit in exclusion, per Stevens. In the case of Emerson, liberalism is opposed, while in the case of Tocqueville, liberalism seems complicit in exclusion.

In summary, we see contrasting visions of liberal citizenship. Emerson’s belief that all individuals hold promise is a different individualism from that of Tocqueville, which disassociates itself from politics. We see this in modern citizenship laws that privilege the economic liberties, jobs, and wages of native citizens, echoing Tocqueville’s argument for mutual liberation. But against these laws are Emersonian appeals to Americans’ common humanity and particular merits. The tension in American citizenship is not between liberalism and exclusion, but within liberalism itself.
References

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