From before the Civil War until his death in 1882, Ralph Waldo Emerson was renowned—and renounced—as one of the United States’ most prominent abolitionists and as a leading visionary of the nation’s liberal democratic future. Following his death, however, both Emerson’s political activism and his political thought faded from public memory, replaced by the myth of the gentleman man of letters and the detached sage of individualism. In the 1990s, scholars rediscovered Emerson’s antislavery writings and began reviving his legacy as a political activist.

A Political Companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson is the first collection to evaluate Emerson’s political thought in light of his recently rediscovered political activism.

What were Emerson’s politics? A Political Companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson authoritatively answers this question with seminal essays by some of the most prominent thinkers ever to write about Emerson—Stanley Cavell, George Kateb, Judith N. Shklar, and Wilson Carey McWilliams—as well as many of today’s leading Emerson scholars. With an introduction that effectively destroys the “pernicious myth” of Emerson’s apolitical individualism, this collection demonstrates how Emerson is, and always has been, essential to our understanding and theorizing of American politics.

Alan M. Levine, associate professor of political theory at American University, is the author of Annual Philosophy: Education, Skepticism, and Montaigne’s Politics of the Self.

Daniel S. Malachuk, assistant professor of English at Western Illinois University, is the author of Perfection, the State, and Victorian Liberalism.

A Political Companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson is an indispensable resource for students of Emerson, American literature, and American political thought, as well as for those who wrestle with the fundamental challenges of democracy and liberalism.

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