virtues. Skeptical secularists might turn to Dewey's early essay "Christianity and Democracy" (1893), where he argues that the main theme of the New Testament is that "the truth shall set you free," and that "Democracy thus appears as the means by which the revelation of truth is carried on." It is an ongoing, open-ended revelation, congruent with the dynamics of Pragmatism.

President Obama's election represents the more hopeful, progressive, participatory strain of American democracy of which Dewey might approve (although he invariably voted for socialist candidates, now a *rara avis* in American electoral politics). Several tests of the viability of Deweyan deliberative democracy will be the current effort to reform an inefficient, ineffective American health care system; to diminish the overinvestment of "blood and treasure" in colonialist wars; and to redistribute American wealth from the top-heavy "trickle-down" model to more of a "trickle-up" model. Such progress would prove to be the ongoing redemption, rather than the relative squandering, of the promise of American life. Melvin Rogers's articulate, timely work helps make audible once again Dewey's voice in this fateful conversation.

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Charles Hersch, *Subversive Sounds: Race and the Birth of Jazz in New Orleans* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008, $35.00). Pp. 210. ISBN 0 226 32867 8.

The varied musical sounds that would become jazz emerged at the turn of the nineteenth century, an era often described as the "nadir" of American race relations. Jim Crow segregation was but the most obvious codification of a national ideology defending white racial purity. With a discerning eye (and ear) for viable expressions of political opposition to this worldview, Charles Hersch opens *Subversive Sounds* with a telling juxtaposition of two New Orleans creoles of color. Homer Plessy, plaintiff in the famous *Plessy* v. *Ferguson* Supreme Court case, and jazz innovator, pianist Jelly Roll Morton. Plessy lost his case challenging the legitimacy of binary racial classification, while jazz musicians like Jelly Roll, who embodied hybrid racial identities in both their persons and their music, won at least a small victory by musically undermining the rigidity of racial categorization.

Hersch traces this process through judicious examination of New Orleans history, urban geography, social and economic organizations, aesthetic sensibilities, and musical qualities. Hersch draws profitably on local sources – particularly the William Ransom Hogan Archive of New Orleans Jazz – as well as on a wide range of secondary materials. Delineating how places, people, and music contributed to a protean musical culture, Hersch explores multiple ways in which New Orleans provided a "unique" (203) environment for hybridization between African American, Creole, and European cultural forms. Hersch emphasizes Bakhtinian models of dialogic exchange to reject rejecting "melting pot" and "Afrocentric" models for jazz history (8). Instead, he celebrates New Orleans's carnivalesque atmosphere as his alternative.

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Most histories of early jazz recognize a synergy between African American and creole cultural influences. Hersch travels this familiar territory highlighting dynamic qualities of creolization, thus bringing fresh perspectives to topics such as the role of Storyville and other sporting-life venues, creole ethnic and family networks, and the "Africanization" of European music. Mapping the many ways African Americans signified on received musical culture, Hersch draws a broad context for the hybrid qualities of jazz itself. Hersch provides excellent music examples throughout the study, explaining, for example, how ironic versions of patriotic songs crossed cultural boundaries between African, American, and European music, as well as blurring genre distinctions between sacred, ratty, ragtime, and jazz music.

Careful not to claim that jazz overturned racist norms in the early twentieth century, Hersch nevertheless shows how jazz expressed fluid musical and racial identities. Hersch ends with a provocative comparison of Morton, Nick LaRocca, and Louis Armstrong – all of whom helped take jazz to a more national audience. Hersch concludes that Armstrong succeeded, unlike the others, because he could negotiate multiple identities and communicate "impure" (188) performance to the larger entertainment world. In his assertion that "racial intersubjectivity" (205) provides a better model for jazz studies than many earlier ones, Hersch's work effectively complements jazz scholars, like David Ake, interested in the complicated dynamics of performance masks, racial identity, and music. Unlike these studies, Hersch records, in detail, a multivocal ensemble of musical influences beyond the captivating examples of individual New Orleans jazzmen.

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Catrin Gersdorf, *The Poetics and Politics of the Desert: Landscape and the Construction of America* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009, $93.60). Pp. 355. ISBN 978 90 420 2496 0.

The stated aim of this book is to stress the primacy of "the desert" in the constitution of the United States' national and cultural identity. In the author's words, it "is one of the most potent symbols representing America and Americanness" (27). Despite Gersdorf's arduous attempt in the opening section of the book to situate her argument within the (supposedly) critical framework of eco-criticism and transnational American studies, *The Poetics and Politics of the Desert* reads like an uncanny offspring of the myth-and-symbol tradition (with a twist).

The United States' "encounters" with the "desert" or rather its "translations" (as Garden, Orient, Wilderness and Heterotopia) are used to explain how the nation has gradually disentangled itself from its connections with European identity. As Gersdorf reminds us, the United States is, in its origins, "a European idea" born out of "European topographies" subsequently projected onto what has been deliberately misconstrued as a "blank slate." But when the author states from the outset that "the desert functions as the topographical manifestation of difference" (14) and that the United States in its dominant mythology was and still is meant to be a verdant and pastoral land of plenty in the image of Europe, she straitjackets her

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