

2. Wicked problems are those not easily solved by professionals alone. This term was coined by city planners Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber, in a 1973 article entitled "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning."

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A Deweyan Defense of Guerrilla Gardening

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Starting with the interest and effort of the children, the whole community has become tremendously interested in starting gardens, using every bit of available ground. The district is a poor one and, besides transforming the yards, the gardens have been a real economic help to the people.

—John Dewey and Evelyn Dewey, *Schools of Tomorrow*
MW 8:269¹

I do not wait for permission to become a gardener but dig wherever I see horticultural potential. I do not just tend existing gardens but create them from neglected space. I, and thousands of people like me, step out from home to garden land we do not own. We see opportunities all around us. Vacant lots flourish as urban oases, roadside verges dazzle with flowers and crops are harvested from land that we assumed to be fruitless. In all their forms these have become known as guerrilla gardeners.

—Richard Reynolds, *On Guerrilla Gardening* 14-16

IN THIS ARTICLE, I formulate a Deweyan argument in support of guerrilla gardening, or the political activity of reclaiming unused urban land, oftentimes illegally, for cultivation and beautification through gardening. Historically, gardening movements in the United States have been associated with relief programs during periods of economic downturn and crisis, urban blight, and gentrification, as well as nationalist, nativist, and racist sentiments. Despite these last few unfortunate associations, the American philosopher John Dewey portrayed school gardening as a gateway to more enriching adult experiences, not as a nativist technique for assimilating immigrant children to a distinctly American way of life. One of those experiences that school gardening can prepare children for is political activism, particularly involvement in gardening movements. Dewey did not mention this collateral benefit. Nevertheless, an argument can be made that garden advocacy—of, more specifically, participation in politically motivated gardening movements, such as guerrilla gardening, is an acceptable interpretation, or elaboration, of what Dewey meant by “a civic turn” to school gardening.

Philosophy, Gardens, and Garden Politics

Generally, philosophers have shown little scholarly interest in the activity of gardening.² “In neglecting the garden,” David Cooper writes, “philosophy is therefore ignoring not merely a current fashion, but activities and experiences of abiding human significance” (2). Important philosophical questions abound: What is a garden? What are the motivations for gardening? Does cultivating a garden lend itself to cultivating specific virtues? Is gardening a form of art and, if so, what kind? While some philosophers have explored the significance of gardening, more philosophical energy has been devoted to the aesthetic, rather than the political, dimension of gardening.³

One philosopher who does draw the connection between politics and gardening is Isis Brook. She highlights the activity’s value as “an essential component of human well-being” and as an outlet for children to renew contact with nature (Brook, “Importance of Nature” 298; Brook, “Virtues of Gardening” 15). Brook also views gardening as an opportunity for children to be liberated, if only just temporarily, from adult supervision, to allow their imagination to range broadly and to face their anxieties (Brook, “Importance of Nature” 304–05).⁴ Her account of the guerrilla gardening movement is worth quoting at length:

Politically this [movement] has its roots in the same soil as the community gardening movement which began in the 1970s. The new style acts of guerrilla gardening are usually small and take place in built up areas to try to bring something of nature into the space. This could be through planting up road verges or traffic islands. The planting is done surreptitiously and often a mini garden is established and appreciated before anyone with authority over the land notices. Even sites where there is no access have been turned into havens of wildflowers by creating seed grenades with water-filled balloons or Christmas baubles packed with seeds and fertilizer, or the more ecologically respectable seed bombs of molded compost and plant seeds. (Brook, “Importance of Nature” 308)

The proposal that school gardening should function as a metaphorical gateway to guerrilla gardening does not appear in Brook’s essay. Still, she draws the connection between those features of a child’s nature experience that make adult life more fulfilling and the spirit of this radical form of environmental activism. So, it can be inferred that while the gardening habit evokes wonder, freedom, patience, and action in the child, it also has the potential, especially in later life, to translate into politically transformative action.

Nature Study and School Gardens

In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, policy-makers, educators, and philosophers, including Dewey, sought to bring the careful observation and study of nature to primary and secondary school classrooms as part of the nature study movement.⁵ The reasoning was that if in childhood, people developed a genuine interest in the natural world, both a sentimental fascination and a scientific curiosity, then as they grew older, they would almost inevitably seek to preserve their environment (Armitage 115). “Work in nature study is undergoing reorganization,” Dewey wrote, “so that pupils shall actually get a feeling for plants and animals, together with some real scientific knowledge, not simply the rather sentimental descriptions and rhapsodizing of literature” (LW 8:266).⁶

One of the nature study movement’s founders, Liberty Hyde Bailey, noted that the difference between the “nature desire” and the “garden desire” is that the former is “perpetual and constant,” while the latter re-emerges “with every new springtime” (Bailey, “A Reverie of Gardens” 267, cited by Armitage 111). For Dewey, though, nature study was virtually synonymous with partaking in occupations out-of-doors, one of which was gardening. Not only does gardening permit students to, on the scientific side, test soil to assess how best to conserve water in arid climates,⁷ or on the practical side, to grow their own food, but it also empowers them to come into closer contact with their natural surroundings. For city dwellers, separated as they are from the flora and fauna of the countryside, renewing this vital relationship with the environment, including unseen sources of food, is especially important. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey remarked that involvement in school gardening becomes an invitation to urban community gardening, and vice versa: “The vegetable garden is the obvious starting point [to community gardening] for most city children; if they do not have tiny gardens in their own backyards, there is a neighbor who has, or they are interested to find out where the vegetables they eat come from and how they are grown” (MW 8:268).

For Dewey, gardening is an activity that channels students’ native interests in all things living into a genuine appreciation of, and even a scientific curiosity about, their environment. “No number of object-lessons, got up as object-lessons for the sake of giving information,” Dewey insisted, “can afford even the shadow for a substitute for acquaintance with the plants and animals of the farm and garden acquired through actual living among them and caring for them” (MW 1:8). Learning about seasonal growing periods,

soil chemistry, and methods of cultivation could be a practical entry point into more sophisticated studies, a way of inspiring greater theoretical interest in the biological, environmental, and even *social* sciences. "Instead of the [technical] subject matter belonging to a peculiar study called botany," Dewey wrote, "it [gardening] will then belong to life, and will find, moreover, its natural correlations with the facts of soil, animal life, and human relations" (MW 2:908). Dewey also connected gardening to food production and the practical lessons students would learn through cooking their own recently harvested ingredients.⁸

Cultural Geography, Neoliberalism and Gardening Activism

Perhaps what gives gardens their political meaning are those practical features that all gardens—including dooryard gardens, house gardens, community gardens, allotment gardens, and school gardens—share in common.⁹ According to Clarissa Kimber, "All . . . gardens depend on the gardeners for maintenance and are spaces made meaningful by the actions of people during the course of their everyday lives" (263). More than philosophers, social and cultural geographers have consistently explored the connections between gardening projects and political activism. For example, Lauren Baker has conducted research on Toronto's Community Food-Security (CFS) movement, which is not only about gardening, but also challenging the food system status quo (especially its corporate leaders) and securing alternative food sources (food security) for area residents (especially immigrants and the poor).¹⁰ Christopher Smith and Hilda Kurtz consider the controversy over New York City Mayor Giuliani's plan to auction and redevelop the land occupied by 114 community gardens, describing it as "a politics of scale in which garden advocates contested the fragmentation of social urban space wrought by the application of neoliberal policies" (Smith and Kurtz 193). Giuliani's redevelopment project exemplifies neo-liberal economic policy, or the attempt to privatize public property and, ultimately, undo Keynesian economic policies that give rise to government interventions in a free market.¹¹ Poised to contest neoliberal policies at various geographical scales (local, city-wide and state-wide), members of New York City's gardening coalition successfully stopped Giuliani's ambitious plan to redevelop and auction the public land. The city's extensive network of community gardening activists, including guerrilla gardeners, prevailed.

Besides describing the history, organization, and tactics of gardening movements, social and cultural geographers have tracked the underlying causes and specific political functions of community gardening projects.

Among these causes, Hilda Kurtz identifies patterns of urban blight, disinvestment, and gentrification as well as, on a more conceptual level, the need for marginalized populations, especially immigrants and the impoverished, to redefine the meanings of "community" and "gardening" (Kurtz 656). In the United States from the late-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, vacant urban lots were converted to gardening sites in order to provide relief during war-time and economic crises, but disappeared when food shortages ended and government support declined (Kurtz 658). Beginning in the 1960s, planted urban lots changed from relief gardens into community gardens, as their purpose transitioned from supplementing food production to offering "green spaces for neighborhood sociability . . . a more localized and more complex response to the experience of economic distress" (Kurtz 658).¹²

Nativism, Growth, and Gardening Politics

How then do we capture the political dimension of Dewey's writings on school gardening, understanding it as an impetus to guerrilla gardening? One important historical point is that the school gardening and nature study movements in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries were intimately associated with nativism, or the belief that immigration to the United States should be reduced or eliminated, and at a minimum, immigrants should undergo intensive assimilation. Historian Adam Rome documents this nativist impulse: "Though a back-to-nature impulse was a defining characteristic of the Progressive Era, the complaints about immigrants demonstrate that some forms of closeness to nature made many Americans deeply uncomfortable" (Rome 434). So, nature study was in many cases justified as one technique for assimilating new immigrants to a distinctly American way of interacting with nature—a way that emphasized observation and appreciation, not Old World practices such as pothunting, peasantry, and peddling.¹³

While Dewey appreciated gardening and nature study as means to promote personal and collective growth, even virtue,¹⁴ he was no friend of the nativists. Indeed, the political dimension of his writings on school gardening emerges most noticeably in his argument that nature study and school gardens leverage the creation of community gardens, especially in immigrant neighborhoods: "gardens being used as the basis for the nature study work . . . is given a civic turn . . . [when] the value of the gardens to the child and to the neighborhood is demonstrated: to the child as a means of making money or helping his family by supplying them with vegetables, to the community in showing how gardens are means of cleaning up and beautifying the

neighborhood" (MW 8:269). If first-generation immigrants are not already convinced of gardening's benefits, then their children, once immersed in school garden projects, are well positioned to persuade them that community gardening has immense practical, economic, and aesthetic value. Reporting on one such project initiated at the Chicago Teachers College, and later disseminated into Chicago's public schools and local neighborhoods, Dewey observes that "a large group of foreign parents came in close contact with it, discovered that it was a real force in the neighborhood, and that they could cooperate with it" (MW 8:271). In this instance, the normative force of the school garden was felt beyond the school yard, resulting in a broader movement to create and sustain gardens in immigrant communities.

Many writings on school gardening utilize the growth of plants as a metaphor for the growth of children and community.¹⁵ For Dewey, the school and the school garden are microcosms for the larger community and community gardens; as one grows, so should the other: "The common needs and aims [of the school and community] demand a growing interchange of thought and growing unity of sympathetic feeling" (MW 1:10). Indeed, the activity of school gardening could be one instance in which Dewey's somewhat ambiguous notion of growth translates into a more practical pedagogical ideal.¹⁶ Similar to Dewey, Mary Beth Pudup insists that the common denominator between school gardening and community gardening, or what she calls "organized gardening projects," is growth: "In the [gardening] discourses . . . there exists an unambiguous relationship between plants and people, and specifically between how plants, like people, grow and flourish with proper care and nurture" (Pudup 1235).¹⁷

Conclusion: Ethical Tools for Guerrilla Gardeners

So far, I have intentionally avoided the legal dimension of guerrilla gardening and, particularly, the objection that this form of activism is indefensible on any grounds (let alone, Deweyan ones) because it involves illegal activity, namely, trespass or conversion of private property. The reason for this avoidance was to expose the more interesting political dimension of gardening activism, as evidenced in the practices of guerrilla gardeners. To briefly respond to the objection, though, private property rights are not unqualified or inviolable. For instance, a person who owns a patch of land may refuse every reasonable offer by a municipal government to purchase it. The owner's unwillingness to sell may not stand in the way of the government's legal right to seize the property. The municipality can "condemn" the property or exercise

eminent domain, paying the owner the land's fair market value, when the perceived advantages to the public good—for instance, to build a highway or a green belt—reach an acceptable threshold. Likewise, property owners only continue to have a legal right to their property on the condition that they pay property taxes. Otherwise, a government may put a lien on the property or take ownership in order to repay back taxes. While guerrilla gardeners are not government agents, and oftentimes the property they garden upon is publicly owned, they are citizens, and thus they have a *prima facie* claim to the property that they wish to reclaim and beautify for the public good.

Having disclosed the political dimension of Dewey's school gardening writings and disposed of the illegality objection, I would like to consider the ethical dimensions and, specifically, those ethical resources that Deweyan pragmatists and other praxis-oriented scholars might offer participants in grassroots gardening politics. Writings on gardening, garden movements, and school gardens, whether by philosophers, community studies scholars, or cultural geographers, give gardening activists, and specifically guerrilla gardeners, a rough set of ethical/conceptual tools for advancing their cause:

1. Gardens as moral spaces: Gardening provides the material and intellectual conditions for an entire community to flourish. According to Senella Lovino, "the garden is in fact a moral allegory" (278). It is a story of how humans cultivate their own potential as moral agents, taking into consideration the interests of others. While the design of a personal garden might restrict benefits to a single family, community gardens offer more people greater access to nutritious meals, physical activity, and, as a result, improved physical and mental health.¹⁸ The emphasis is on constructing spaces of discourse, in which citizen-subjects are constituted through social interaction and grassroots political activity (Pudup 1232). So, the ability to relate uplifting moral narratives, specifically for the purpose of perpetuating garden projects and their collective benefits, is an important skill for the gardening activist to acquire.¹⁹

2. Gardens as sources of social solidarity: Gardens can be hubs of social solidarity, bringing together poor and immigrant populations to forge common bonds, or, as in some neighborhoods with community gardens in New York City, sites of internal dispute. The way to ease intramural conflict between low-income housing advocates and gardening activists and build solidarity is to re-frame the issue. As New York City gardening activists discovered in their fight against the Giuliani administration, it is possible to defuse the either-housing-or-gardens argument by suggesting a third option: housing and gardens. According to Smith and Kurtz, "Garden advocates did

not deny the housing shortage; rather, they insisted that the city needs both housing and gardens as complementary elements of a healthy city” (204). Indeed, the error in this either-or argument is familiar to both the philosopher, as the fallacy of false dichotomy, and the policy analyst, as a Hobson’s choice. Whether the garden activist looks to the philosopher, the policy analyst, or the example of New York City’s garden activists, the correction is to reconstruct the issue so that it includes a third (conjunctive) option.

3. Gardens as inter-generational bridges: Gardens offer spaces for adults and children to deliberate, socialize, and transfer ideas from one generation to the next. Narrative and discourse within the garden environment always start in *media res*, but they disseminate valuable insights to later generations of community gardeners and gardening activists. The same is true of the school garden. By modeling the ideal school after the ideal home, Dewey did not only demonstrate that a school needs a garden, a space out-of-doors, but that every community school and garden should include an area in which children and adults have the opportunity to communicate freely (MW 1:50–1). Moreover, Dewey’s and Brook’s treatments of school gardening suggest that involvement in school gardening represents a metaphorical “gateway” to participation in community gardening and politically motivated garden activism, specifically guerrilla gardening. In these ways, school gardens function as inter-generational bridges.

4. Gardens as sites of political contestation: Organized garden projects can become sites of political protest, opportunities for people who have been marginalized to formulate alternative discourses and to partake in communities of interest that push back against more powerful interests. After describing the dispute between New York City community gardeners and the Guiliani administration, Pudup discloses the normative significance of gardens as sites of political mobilization: “Under such conditions, urban community gardens claim [that] their very existence signifies resistance: resistance defines the space because something other than growing food and flowers ‘could’ or really ‘should’ be taking place there” (Pudup 1232). Indeed, gardeners whose interests are similarly affected form what Dewey called “publics” (LW 2:255), and Nancy Fraser refers to as “subaltern counterpublics” (123), resisting hegemonic actors and government policies that would eradicate or privatize public gardens.

Dewey’s writings on school gardens have political and ethical implications that contemporary commentators and practitioners—whether philosophers, educators, or gardening activists—overlook at their peril. Dewey

detached school gardening and nature study from the nativist’s tool-kit, portraying them as channels to more enriching adult experiences, not as methods for assimilating immigrant children to a distinctly American way of life. One of those experiences for which school gardening can prepare children is environmental advocacy, particularly involvement in gardening movements. Dewey did not mention this collateral benefit. Nevertheless, an argument (one might even call it a “Deweyan” argument) has been made that gardening advocacy—or, more specifically, participation in politically motivated gardening movements—is an acceptable interpretation, or elaboration, of what Dewey meant by “a civic turn” to school gardening. As one guerrilla gardening manifesto reads, “When you’re a guerrilla gardener, you’re an active participant in the living environment. You’re no longer content to merely react to what happens to the spaces around you. You’re a player, which means you help determine how those spaces get used. And when you’re in tune like this, every plant counts” (Tracey 32). School gardens could become incubators for urban gardening activists, including guerrilla gardeners—places to teach that gardens have normative force, whether as moral spaces, sources of social solidarity, inter-generational bridges, or sites of political contestation.

NOTES

1. Citations to the *Collected Works of John Dewey* use the conventional method, LW (Later Works) or MW (Middle Works) or EW (Early Works), Volume:page number. For example, MW 9:221 refers to the Middle Works, Volume 9, page 221.
2. Gardens have also received little serious treatment by environmental historians. According to Kenneth Helphand, a “look at the literature of environmental history reveals that in this burgeoning realm, virtually all speak of landscape, but few speak of that most special and concentrated landscape, the garden” (Helphand 139).
3. Cooper insists that despite this disproportionate attention, “the significance of the garden cannot be restricted to the domain of the aesthetic” (4).
4. Brook identifies four features of the child’s experience of nature in Gerald Durrell’s *Cornish Trilogy*—time (“very focused attention for long periods to observe the minutia of life”), wonder (fascination with “how all of nature fits together”), action (“a kind of engaged looking we could call experimenting”), and freedom (the “ability to just let him [the nature explorer] be”)—that operate as metaphorical gateways to enriched adult experiences (Brook, “Importance of Nature” 296–98).
5. Robin G. Schulze nicely captures the spirit behind the nature study movement: “In the Progressive era in America . . . Nature Study took on a new life as a means of vital educational and national reform. Throughout the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, American school children planted and tended gardens, watched pollinwogs develop into frogs, tamed and bred animals, and learned to identify trees. They were encouraged, both boys and girls, to get their hands dirty” (Schulze 474). For seminal statements of

the nature study approach, see Comstock's *Handbook of Nature Study*, Coulter's "Nature Study and Intellectual Culture," and Jordan's "Nature Study and Moral Culture."

6. Unlike many of the movement's founders, Dewey endorsed neither an exclusively sentimental nor an exclusively scientific rationale for studying nature. Some nature study advocates wanted students to develop an emotional attachment to nature solely through a close reading of literary sources, especially poetry. Responding to them, Dewey argued for increased emphasis on the study of nature through scientific method, not to the exclusion of sentimental bonds and literature, but in the interest of greater balance. In Ben Minteer's estimation, "Dewey's enthusiasm for nature study was obviously much more than a case of fanatical science worship" (36).

For a sample of views on what nature study is, and whether it should endorse scientific or sentimental ends, see Beal and colleagues' "What Is Nature Study?" Nature study also shares much in common with the more recent movement for greater environmental literacy. See, for instance, Sideris's "Environmental Literacy and the Lifelong Cultivation of Wonder."

7. Gardening advocate Benjamin Marshall Davis demonstrated that soil experiments could be undertaken by school children (76–77). Nature study pioneer Anna Botsford Comstock claimed that familiarity with "the kind of soil is the first step to the right treatment of it" (Comstock, "Nature-Study" 6).

8. For instance, at the Cottage School in Riverside, Illinois, Dewey observed that "the children have a garden where they plant early and late vegetables, so they can use them for their cooking class in the spring and fall; the pupils do all the work here, plant, weed, and gather the things" (MW 8:266).

9. On allotment gardening, see Scott's "Cockney Plots: Allotments and Grassroots Political Activism."

10. According to Lauren Baker, over one hundred gardens in the city of Toronto (Ontario, Canada) have become "sites of place-based politics connected to the community food-security movement" (309). Baker describes two exemplary gardens in the CFS network and concludes: "The gardens [in Toronto] are examples of how groups of typically marginalized citizens—immigrants and people living on low incomes—use their neighborhood as a means of resistance, asserting their identity to reclaim space and engage in projects of citizenship" (323).

11. Mary Beth Puddup describes the conflict between New York City gardening activists and the Giuliani administration in the early 1990s, claiming that "gardening in such collective settings is an unalloyed act of resistance" (1232). For an analysis of recent grassroots activism aimed at undermining neo-liberal economic policies, see Couldry's *Why Voice Matters: Culture and Politics after Neoliberalism*. Smith and Kurtz document the various tactics employed by New York City's gardening activists:

First, garden activists held demonstrations in key public places in order to raise awareness about the struggles of community gardens in New York City and gain valuable news coverage. Second, activists linked the struggle to save gardens with other political struggles and took part in preplanned political events sponsored by non-garden-related organizations. Third, activists used the Internet as a resource for broadening the scope of the struggle and encouraged support from extralocal audiences. Fourth, the garden coalition built on this extension of the spaces of engagement to use formal channels such as lawsuits to stop the auction. Fifth, garden advocates built . . . social networks to raise funds that were to be used to purchase the gardens had the auction taken place. (Smith and Kurtz 205–06)

12. In a study of the Loistada gardens in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, Karen Schmelzkopf specifies various functions that gardening fulfills, such as socializing youth and providing healthy food in a poor, crime-infested area of New York City (365–70). In this way, the gardens encourage social and economic solidarity. Yet, with a shortage of housing for the areas' poor, community gardens have also become sites of political contestation, not just between advocates of neo-liberal economic policies and gardening activists, but also between low-income housing activists and their gardening counterparts. Schmelzkopf writes: "Several of the large gardens have become politically contested spaces, and conflicting community needs have led to a dilemma of whether to develop the land for low-income and market-rate housing or to preserve the gardens" (Schmelzkopf 364). As part of his administration's failed policy of selling off the land occupied by New York City's immense network of community gardens, Giuliani unsuccessfully attempted to exploit this weakness within the gardening movement (Smith and Kurtz 204).

13. According to Puddup, the early twentieth-century discourse around community gardening also became a means for cultivating "a strong work ethic and steady work habits . . . [in] those new Americans [or recent immigrants]" (1230).

14. Dewey would have been familiar with the view, common among progressive reformers, that school and community gardening in urban areas helped cultivate the virtues associated with rural living, especially farming (hard work, thrift, etc.). Environmental historian Kevin Armitage writes: "Many supporters of urban gardens viewed gardeners, especially school gardeners, as little farmers, thus bringing the virtues of rural labor to urban denizens. For progressives, so appalled by the corrupt and debasing features of industrial society, the tenets of agrarianism seemed, by comparison, not merely benign but laudable" (Armitage 172).

15. Examples of the growth metaphor can be found in an early work on school gardens by M. Louise Greene: "The garden is becoming the outer classroom of the school, and its plots are its blackboards. The garden is not an innovation, or an excrescence, or an addendum, or a diversion. It is a happy field of expression, an organic part of the school in which the boys and girls work among growing things and grow themselves in body and mind and spiritual outlook." A competing metaphor is that of wedding technology and nature, or the "machine in the garden" (Greene 18). Also, see Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden*.

16. On the ambiguity in Dewey's notion of growth, see my "A More Practical Pedagogical Ideal: Search for a Criterion of Deweyan Growth."

17. For a more detailed comparison of Dewey and Puddup's treatments of school gardens, see my "It Takes a Garden Project: Dewey and Puddup on the Politics of School Gardening."

18. For empirical evidence of these benefits, see Sarah Wakefield and colleagues' study of community gardens in Toronto, Canada, titled "Growing Urban Health: Community Gardening in South-East Toronto." Based on a series of focus groups and personal interviews, they conclude that "[c]ommunity gardens were seen to contribute to improved nutrition among gardeners and their families. In addition, the opportunity for physical activity that gardening presented was seen as beneficial to health, especially for the elderly. For many, being part of a community garden was stress-relieving, and was thought to contribute to improved mental health" (Wakefield et al. 100).

19. A good example of such an uplifting narrative is the environmental ethicist Andrew Light's "Elegy for a Garden," an account of how garden activists fought against New York Mayor Giuliani's bulldozing of the community garden "El Jardin Esperanza."

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Is Thoreau More Cosmopolitan Than Dewey?

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I. Dewey's American Philosophy and Cosmopolitanism Today

In 1921 John Dewey published an article on "mutual national understanding" based upon his real experience of encountering foreign cultures in Japan and China ("Creative Democracy" 228). The article echoes his democratic spirit of learning from difference beyond national and cultural boundaries. The vitality of his American philosophy and its potency in a global context are still evident today. Some of the recent research on Dewey is plain enough evidence of this (Hickman; Hansen). Neither fixed within national ground nor appealing to any universalist cause in the process of continuing growth, Dewey encourages us to *become* cosmopolitan, going beyond cultural differences and national boundaries. By inheriting what Dewey has left us, this paper critically re-examines the viability of Dewey's philosophy today in the context of a debate on cosmopolitanism and global citizenship in American philosophy. It tests his claim that understanding different cultures should be a pre-condition for our becoming cosmopolitan. To take up this task, I want to confront Dewey with another voice of American philosophy—that of Henry David Thoreau as revived by Stanley Cavell. Thoreau tends to be absent both in Dewey's writings themselves and in those of Deweyan scholars. What does this absence imply? What does the silenced voice of Thoreau suggest when one looks at Dewey's line of argument regarding cosmopolitanism? In searching for answers to these questions, this paper explores what lies behind this absence. I shall re-read Thoreau's *Walden*, via Cavell's ordinary language philosophy, as offering an alternative mode of becoming cosmopolitan—beyond the dichotomous framework of cosmopolitanism in words and cosmopolitanism in action. It will show us how our endeavor to