Go Left, Young Folk: Meridel Le Sueur’s Radical Children’s Stories
Invoke the Spirit of the Red, White, and True

William J. Valladares
Go Left, Young Folk
Meridel Le Sueur's Radical Children’s Stories Invoke the Spirit of the RED, White, and True

by

William J. Valladares

A Master’s Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
Montclair State University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
Master of Arts
August 2007

School: College of Humanities
and Social Sciences

Department: English

Dr. Claire Taub
Interim Dean

8-28-07
(Date)

Thesis Committee:

Dr. Art Simon
Thesis Sponsor

Dr. Johnny Lorentz
Committee Member

Dr. Laura Nicosia
Committee Member

Dr. Daniel Bronson
Department Chair
Copyright © 2007 by William J. Valladares. All rights reserved.
GO LEFT, YOUNG FOLK
MERIDEL LE SUEUR’S RADICAL CHILDREN’S STORIES INVOKE THE SPIRIT OF THE
RED, WHITE, AND TRUE

by
WILLIAM J. VALLADARES

A THESIS
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of master of arts in
The Department of English in
the Graduate Program of
Montclair State University
August 2007
Acknowledgements

This thesis is the product of collaboration and could not exist without support from more people than I could ever name on a page and a half. I take pleasure in expressing my gratitude to all those who contributed to the success of this project.

It is difficult to adequately express my gratitude to Art Simon for taking on the supervision of this thesis. I cannot overstate the importance of his involvement in my graduate career and his influence on me as a scholar. I am indebted to Art for bringing to my attention this vast treasure of American literature nearly erased from our history, and for encouraging me to explore the amazing complexity of radical children’s literature.

I am indebted to my Thesis Committee, Johnny Lorenz and Laura Nicosia, for guiding me through the writing of the thesis, and for all the corrections and revisions they made to the text. Any errors or shortcomings are my responsibility alone. Johnny was my first professor in graduate school and so I am grateful to him for working on me with my final project as a graduate student. I appreciate his valuable advice to me to slow down and to be patient with my arguments. My only regret is that I never had the pleasure of sitting in one of Laura Nicosia’s classes. Her expertise in this field contributed to the success of this project and I thank her for serving on my committee. Thank you, Art, Johnny and Laura for supporting and inspiring me, for pushing me to ask difficult questions and to be rigorous in my search to answer them. Thank you all for taking time away from your sabbaticals and vacations to read and mentor me.

I am deeply grateful to Naomi Liebler, Emily Isaacs, Dan Bronson, Rita Jacobs, Jess Row, Monika Elbert, and Michele Knobel, my graduate professors. I am also obliged to children’s literature scholar Alida Allison of San Diego State University for taking me on as a student during an independent study. All their voices emerge from this thesis.

I also am grateful to the Conrad family’s generous Lawrence H. Conrad Memorial Scholarship.

I thank Julia Mickenberg for her correspondence with me and for taking time to talk to me at the MLA conference in Philadelphia, and I am grateful to Jim Pearlman of Holy Cow! Press and to John Crawford of West End Press for sending me published and unpublished manuscripts by Meridel Le Sueur, and for sharing their personal stories of her with me.

Rashida Batte and Phyllis Brooks of the English Department, Karen Sprengel of the Graduate School, Denise DeBlasio of the Registrar’s Office, Lynarkah Montique of Human Resources and Employee Relations, and the librarians at the Harry A. Sprague Library deserve special mention for assisting me in many different ways.

I owe a great debt to my friend Stefani Whitehouse for being my connection to the English Department now that I am in Georgia. Without her I would have missed several deadlines. I am also grateful to my friend and student colleague A.J. Kelton, who proofed my weekly papers when we were in class together, encouraged me to speak up in class, and discussed American literature with me over cheeseburgers at the Red Hawk Diner before class.

I thank Gregory Waters, Thomas Haynes, Phyllis Miller, and Garry Rideout for allowing me to enter the master’s program and for giving me the time I needed to complete my graduate requirements when I was employed at Montclair State.

I am indebted to Diana and Evan St. Lifer, who are more like a sister and brother to me than friends. I thank Diana for reading all my papers throughout my graduate career and for her constant encouragement and friendship, and to Evan for allowing me to explore the archives of
the School Library Journal. He is a man I deeply respect for his writing, work ethic, and his example as a father and husband.

I am especially grateful to my last-minute proofreader and friend, Lori Tokar. She was a lifesaver, dropping everything for three consecutive late nights to correct and comment on my thesis with the eye of a skilled educator.

I thank my entire family for providing a loving, encouraging environment for me, especially my parents, Guillermo and Betty Valladares. They raised me, supported me, taught me, and loved me. They made tremendous sacrifices to ensure that I had an excellent education.

Lastly, and most importantly, I thank my dear wife, Kari, for the very special person she is, for the incredible amount of patience she had with me during graduate school, and for putting up with my late hours, spoiled weekends, and bad temper. She bolstered my spirits when I was down, and kicked me when I thought about throwing in the towel. She lived through this thesis as much as me. It is unfair that the diploma has room for only one name because she truly deserves to have her name printed right beside mine, so I share this degree with her.
This thesis is dedicated to
Luke,
Katie,
Stephen,
and Tricia
Abstract

It is no secret to scholars of American literary Communism that left-wing authors blacklisted by adult and textbook publishers that caved in to government pressure during the Communist witch-hunts of the McCarthy era, often survived by writing children’s books. However, by accepting this overly simplified explanation, we risk ignoring a vital genre in recovering a link in American literary and cultural history that a right-of-center government attempted to erase.

In my thesis I will explore how left-wing writer Meridel Le Sueur, in her children’s books, Little Brother of the Wilderness: The Story of Johnny Appleseed, Nancy Hanks of Wilderness Road: A Story of Abraham Lincoln’s Mother, Sparrow Hawk, Chanticleer of Wilderness Road: A Story of Davy Crockett, and The River Road: A Story of Abraham Lincoln, countered government-induced hysteria that domestic Communism was a threat to American society by reclaiming American history for the left, placing it at the heart of American traditions and myths. I will identify in Le Sueur’s wilderness book series how she paid homage to the defunct Popular Front’s attempt to reclaim bourgeois institutions and traditions through American folklore, and how she called on the nation’s own folk heroes to validate its own revolutionary roots.

Beyond that, I will demonstrate how Le Sueur looked even further back to the precursor of American folklore to recover the socialist nature of Native Americans through their egalitarian, genderless society, grounded in a fusion of democratic and communal spirit. Criticizing even her own beloved American Communist Party, Le Sueur nearly got herself blacklisted from American Communist publishers as well, revealing that Le Sueur’s commitment to the working class overrode her commitment to the party line.
I also will explore how Le Sueur’s powerful female protagonists reflect the Popular Front’s move to recruit mothers to influence the next generation. Finally, I will examine how her interpretation of American folklore teaches children—adolescent boys in particular—that a revolution forged in imagination, diversity, cooperation, and love offers a lasting alternative to violence in creating a new egalitarian society. For Le Sueur, children were at the center of the Communist writer’s hallmark message of hope. I will argue that her stories were in fact a call to action by challenging children to use their words as weapons in her peaceful revolution to end oppression.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table of Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploring Radical Children’s Stories Isn’t Just Kid Stuff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter One:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Skins and White Lies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Two:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davy Crockett and Johnny Appleseed: The Odd Couple of Wilderness Road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Three:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy Hanks: Mother of the Midwestern Messiah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Four:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was Lincoln a Lefty?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusion</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Works Cited</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction:
Exploring Radical Children’s Stories Isn’t Just Kid Stuff

“In every child who is born, under no matter what circumstances, and of no matter what parents, the potentiality of the human race is born again: and in him, too, once more, and in each of us, our terrific responsibility towards human life; towards the utmost idea of goodness, of the horror of error, and of God.”
—James Agee (255)

We are, as before, merely soldiers in a campaign. We are bivouacking for a day.
—Leon Trotsky (190)

At the birth of this nation, the unanimous declaration of the thirteen United States of America held “these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.” From the beginning, the governing body has sewn into the fabric of American society, the rhetoric of truth. However, American history tells us that “these truths” are not self-evident, because in a nation that reduces human life to a commodity and commits genocide in the name of Manifest Destiny, all men are not created equal, and freedom, liberty, and justice for all are mere pipe dreams for most. When young Abe Lincoln questions the right or wrong of slavery, which the “principal citizens” (River Road: A Story of Abraham Lincoln 115) seem to be for, Mr. Todd, an older Dutchman who had been forced off his land by English landowners, responds, “Principal citizens—there are no principal citizens. Every man in America is a principal citizen, including slaves. Yes, that’s what we fought for at Valley Forge” (115). Left-wing author and teacher Meridel Le Sueur exposes here the American government’s broken promises equality rhetoric, and by exposing the treachery of the English landowners, tells that the philosophy of capitalism is not American, but in fact a remnant of the European society our forefathers escaped and fought in the Revolutionary War that infiltrated the New World.
American studies scholar Julia Mickenberg points out that “any attempt to reutilize aspects of a complex and contradictory national heritage, a heritage of slave-owners and freedom fighters, westward expansion Indian wars and the Bill of Rights, is inevitably going to be flawed” (“Communist in a Coonskin Cap?” 59). Therefore, the burden falls on the oppressed to question the validity of a textbook; to challenge historical and patriotic dogma as reported by the dominant culture; and to ferret out the missing pieces of history buried outside the classroom.

For Le Sueur, by abandoning passivity and becoming active listeners or readers, the people no longer have to receive history, but can now dig further to uncover the real truth and record their own history. The truth to which I am referring is not conformity with fact. In fact, it is not until the fifth entry that the Oxford English Dictionary finally defines truth as “Conformity with fact; agreement with reality; accuracy, correctness, verity (of statement or thought).” The Oxford English Dictionary defines the truth to which I am speaking of as:

The character of being, or disposition to be, true to a person, principle, cause, etc.; faithfulness, fidelity, loyalty, constancy, steadfast allegiance. One's faith or loyalty as pledged in a promise or agreement; a solemn engagement or promise, a covenant. Belief; a formula of belief, a creed. Disposition to speak or act truly or without deceit; truthfulness, veracity, sincerity; formerly sometimes in wider sense: Honesty, uprightness, righteousness, virtue, integrity.

These are aspects of truth on which Le Sueur accuses generations of the American government of reneging. She holds the ruling class accountable for adhering to the covenant it made with the people and exposes deceit in aligning its “steadfast allegiance” to the foreign European convention of capitalism at the cost of American democracy. Le Sueur tracks in her wilderness book series, a breakdown in veracity, sincerity and integrity when the dominant
culture re-establishes the foreign European principles of capitalism as the paramount American virtue, convincing generations of citizens to value competition over cooperation, individual success over the well-being of the community. Le Sueur places on the oppressed, the burden of responsibility for getting to the truth and fighting for an egalitarian society. She asks:

Who knows the fires, emotions, love, the deep glow and courage of our people? The rich spiced talk of men at night riding over the dark prairie to look for a job; the talk of steelworkers and of women knitting socks for another war? More and more we need words to write the true history of the past so that we may create a true history in the future. History is a thing that everyone feels and some of us make it and many of us are living it right now. It is only YOU who are making this history and can write the true story of it. No matter what you do you are part of history. If you buy an orange or ride in a car or decide to have a baby, you are making history. (Worker Writers 1)

According to Le Sueur, before the people can expose broken promises and begin to tell their own stories, they must look not so much to what the history books tell them, but rather to what they do not tell them. According to Le Sueur, the people’s culture was attacked after World War II in what she called cultural imperialism. After the CIA and corporations began to create cultural grants and take over prestigious publishing houses and magazines, “they made culture a tool of war, aggression, and neo-colonialism” (Worker Writers Afterword), attacking and suppressing the people’s culture. For le Sueur, what is worse than allowing the conqueror to fabricate stories of the oppressed and suffering is to allow him to erase the people from history:

I feel that there has been in our society, our culture, and education, a conspiracy to hide the true history of our democratic people and the struggles of our people in the development of imperialism in the world. It is really terrifying the way that people come
out of higher education with very little knowledge of the immense and great struggle of our people through the 19th and 20th century against the development of the greatest giant power that has ever existed in the world. ("Sitting Around the Volcano")

Le Sueur did not release the people of their responsibility to tell their own stories because they were uneducated, insisting that because they live and make history, it is up to them to write it. She said in an interview for Iowa Woman, “The people who experience have the real literary words” (19).

A card-carrying member of the American Communist Party (CPUSA), Le Sueur began her writing career in the 1920s following a stint in Hollywood as a stunt double. She reached the height of her popularity during the 1930s to mid-'40s for her proletarian fiction, poetry, and reportage on working-class struggles from the Midwestern prairies and farms to city streets and factories. She contributed stories to several left-wing, scholarly and mainstream publications, including the Daily Worker, American Mercury, Dial, Scribner's Magazine, New Masses, Yale Review, Vogue, Harper's Bazaar, and True Confessions (Coiner 81-82, and “Communist in a Coonskin Cap?” 61).

Le Sueur became what scholar Constance Coiner describes as a “biographer of the ordinary, ‘anonymous’ men and women, especially the economic destitute” (81). The intimate portraits Le Sueur painted in her stories of personal suffering allowed her readers to locate in the masses of working poor, the unemployed, strikers, farmers, Native Americans, women, and individual human names and faces. More importantly, her readers got to know them, to share in their suffering, to remember them, to keep their stories alive, and to tell new stories. Ironically, Le Sueur, who for eight decades cried out for the voiceless, was herself nearly silenced—and not just by the McCarthyism witch hunters—but by the CPUSA she served as well, because she was
not afraid to outwardly criticize Communist shortfalls. Instead of defending party lines, this worker writer fought for all the people, intersecting class, gender, and race.

In *Writing from the Left: New Essays on Radical Culture and Politics*, Alan M. Wald explains that "even though Communist-influenced fiction-writers and poets did pioneer issues of importance to women and people of color in their writings, if not always in their critical theorizations, it was specifically the promotion of class culture, and culture viewed through the prism of class, that was understood as the hallmark of the Communist effort" (69). According to Wald, Communist-influenced fiction-writers and poets of the 1930s, who produced a wealth of patriotic prose and denounced fascism, were later blacklisted by adult and textbook publishers during the Communist witch-hunts of the McCarthy age, and survived by turning to writing children’s books. Mickenberg, asserts that the children’s area of the publishing industry slipped under the radar of government scrutiny because librarians and children’s book writers were primarily women, who were viewed as nurturers and not as a threat to children.

Daniel Aaron, who chronicled left-wing writers from 1912 to the early 1940s, said he “paid only the slightest attention to the literary left after 1940; by this time it was already separated from the main currents of American intellectual life and had acquired a sociological rather than literary interest” (ix). Though I do not challenge Aaron’s claim, I find his point of view to be short-sighted and destructive, because by ignoring the literary left after 1940 instead of raising interest by examining the literary value of this marginalized group’s work, he further isolates the literary left’s contributions.

Both Wald and Aaron urge scholars to recover and study the work of the left-wing writers so the American culture does not lose a vital connection to its own literary history. However, by digressing from the conversation to simply mention that these writers only turned
to children's books because they were blacklisted from their adult venues, and by omitting the post-1940 literary left from the discussion, Wald and Aaron have themselves unwittingly become guilty of erasing indispensable work Le Sueur and other leftist writers produced during the age of McCarthyism. Glossing over the radical children's stories they produced during this time is a grave disservice to the vitally important work published post WWII through the 1950s, linking the old left to the new left, which emerged during the 1960s.

Evidence suggests that for Le Sueur, writing children's books was more than status quo. I would argue that it was in direct response to the Popular Front's call for more left-wing children's literature. According to Julia Mickenberg, "Although a 'small but sturdy collection' of 'children's proletarian literature' had been published in the late 1920s and early 1930s, beginning during the Popular Front period, the left began to call for a new kind of 'progressive' children's literature that could reach 'the broad masses of children'" (Educating Dissent 196). She goes on to cite Jay Williams, best known for his children's science fiction series, Danny Dunn, who in 1947 criticized left writers and critics for neglecting children's literature:

> The disregard for children's literature in critical organs as well as in the daily press keeps the best writers from entering a marginalized field.... And the left press is no better.... Literature for the 'older youngsters' is usually ignored in the publications of the liberal and progressive movement. But good writers, progressive writers are desperately needed, for it is this literature which feeds these youngsters their ideology and patterns of thinking. (Educating Dissent 228)

It is more than coincidental that Little Brother of the Wilderness: The Story of Johnny Appleseed, Le Sueur's first radically left adventure book for young readers age twelve to fifteen, came out in 1947 after Williams' admonition.
I would argue this and Le Sueur's other children's novels, *Nancy Hanks of Wilderness Road: A Story of Abraham Lincoln's Mother* (1949), *Sparrow Hawk* (1950), *Chanticleer of Wilderness Road: A Story of Davy Crockett* (1951), and *The River Road: A Story of Abraham Lincoln* (1954), is her way of accepting George Orwell's challenge in his 1939 essay, "Boys' Weeklies," calling for left-of-center stories to rival those appearing in conservative boys' newspapers at the time:

There is no clear reason why every adventure story should necessarily be mixed up with snobbishness and gutter patriotism. For, after all, the stories in the *Hotspur* and the *Modern Boy* are not Conservative tracts; they are merely adventure stories with a Conservative bias. It is fairly easy to imagine the process being reversed.... If, for instance, a story described police pursuing anarchists through the mountains, it would be from the point of view of the anarchist and not the police. (Kohl 61)

By reversing beloved American folk heroes' point of view from champions of Westward expansionism to victims caught up in its path, Le Sueur painted a picture of how the old oppressive European philosophy of lords and serfs that our forefathers attempted to escape, invaded this country and survived the Revolutionary War, never giving the promise of a new homegrown American democratic society a strong enough foothold. Beyond that, gravitating toward American folklore helped Le Sueur further build a sense of community by speaking to a dual audience—children and adults. Parents who grew up with tales of these heroes could share their childhood memories with their children while discovering for themselves through Le Sueur's subtle rewrite, varying points of view that their heroes may have had toward capitalism and the rhetoric of equality and justice for all.
Le Sueur’s writing also became a point of contention among the American Communist Party (CPSUA), Michael Gold, in particular, threatening to blacklist her as well, for not following the party line through her lyrical style and portraits of suffering, which the CPUSA and Gold misinterpreted as a defeatist attitude. Whittaker Chambers, an editor of New Masses in 1932, reprimanded Le Sueur for one of her better-known short stories, “Women on the Breadlines,” a portrait of the plight of unemployed women during the Great Depression, because it was “lacking in revolutionary spirit and direction” (Coiner 96). Le Sueur later said in an interview, “I fought them. I kept my lyrical style. Sometimes I was almost blacklisted by the Left, which often commented on my lyrical style. They wanted social realism” (Coiner 96). The Party and Gold simply did not see Le Sueur’s message of hope through suffering—and death.

Elaine Hedges wrote, “For she saw suffering, not as negative and passive, but as a source of solidarity” (Coiner 96). Beyond that, Le Sueur viewed death not as defeat, but as a transition to a new generation, stronger in revolutionary spirit. It is here where we can locate why Le Sueur valued motherhood, history, and her philosophy of dialectics. Le Sueur agreed with Marxist thinking that every aspect of nature “has a history, comes into being, changes and develops, and is transformed.” However, she disagreed with what she described as the male definition of linear time, because for Le Sueur, time is circular. Nature never ceases to exist but is reborn, therefore, we are directly connected with the past and our actions will direct the future. Neala Schleuning described it as Le Sueur’s “circular consciousness”:

Dialectics...in its true modern sense implies a *relationship of interdependence*. There is, for example, in dialectical thinking, no subject, no object which is separate from or outside of the reality. Each is part of the other. You can’t understand or isolate, or analyze anything separately. The implications for Le Sueur’s politics, of course, are
obvious: political theory cannot analyze the self *separate* from the collective, or outside of the circle. In this philosophy, the circle, and the collective, is the reality: it is not constructed or made, it simply is the way things are. (86)

This definition of dialectics is at the core of all Le Sueur’s writing. For Le Sueur, death does not mean the end or defeat, but rather, the moment for new life and new hope to emerge. According to Le Sueur this continuity and interdependence of life is not speculation, but science, grounded in quantum theory and particle theory. She said, according to the scientists, “it shows that no movement in the world can exist without changing every other movement. Humanism has always said this, but now it is a scientific fact that there is no outside. That there is only the interrelated movement on the inside” (Schleuning 142).

Gold, on the surface, appears not to embrace the past and held to Le Sueur’s male definition of linear time, acting today without first learning from the consequences of past actions, and without regard for implications on future movements. According to Gold, “Writers should take up residence in this world of revolutionary labor…. live in it fully, burning all bridges behind them” (Coiner 20). His passion for revolution and bully tactics, and seemingly inability to find value in the past drew harsh criticism from other members of the party. Marxist critic and *New Masses* contributing editor Joshua Kunitz wrote in a letter in the July 1930 issue of the publication:

Mike, I suspect, has not the faintest notion of the dialectic of the historical process. His is a childish nihilism, a blind, impetuous, irrational, almost mystical revolt against anything that savors the past, of ‘old’ culture….revolution does not mean indiscriminant negation and wholesale rejection…on the contrary, it means…a new synthesis….A new life and
new art? Certainly! But not without a very definite utilization of those elements of the old culture that have vitality, dynamism, and a promise for the future. (Coiner 21)

Gold’s call for abandoning the past contradicts his signature novel, Jews Without Money, in which he reflects back on his own immigrant past growing up in New York’s Lower East Side during the early 1900s. Though it is tempting to villainize Gold for viciously attacking and harshly criticizing his comrades, it is necessary to get beyond that to discover that in reality he was not talking about erasing the past, but rather abandoning the bourgeois-style of writing. Le Sueur agreed with Gold on this point:

In the highly polished sentences of the literature of the nineteenth century, much skill was needed, an extensive education, long hours for the labor of its production. This naturally made most of the writers come from the upper classes; also the readers…. Today something is happening. The word as a tool is going back to the people. The best of our writers are saying that writing is no use unless it is a tool, a tool of defense as well as creation, a tool against barbarism, against hunger and want. (Worker Writers 3)

Le Sueur moved to abandon the monological form of English literature Americans were reading during the 19th century because she said the single voice of authority prevented diversity and change. Instead, she wanted to adopt a new form of multi-voiced emancipatory literature written by the people.

Gold and Le Sueur agreed that the only means to a democratic socialist society was revolution—not reform. It was the kind of revolution that divided them. Gold’s idea of revolution involved violence while Le Sueur aggressively sought peace. Rather than expending her energy preaching to the choir, Le Sueur, through her children’s books, was in effect, raising a
new generation by raising a new generation of revolutionaries who would oppose capitalism and embrace equality.

Though Le Sueur valued the tenets of Marxism and Communism, unlike Gold and other members of the Party, she recruited for her revolution, the voices of Leon Trotsky, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW, Wobblies), Midwest radicalism, British Fabian socialists and their philosophy of gradual change, American and Indian folklore, and American democracy. Le Sueur does not simply extract the best ideas from these elements and arbitrarily blend them into some form of literary chop suey. She incorporates into her children’s stories, a multiplicity of philosophies that contain a common thread to demonstrate that a unified voice speaking from diversity grounded in solidarity is a powerful weapon for the people. Le Sueur wrote, “In the Middle West I think we try not to forget the IWWs. They spoke an American language, not an English. Many of them were anarchists, many of them were only haters of the machine, but they started something. Like Johnny Appleseed who scattered the seed for countless orchards in the Middle West, the IWWs brought countless thumbed copies of Marx” (Harvest Song 205). That is not to say Le Sueur’s multi-voiced message is free of contradictions. According to Schleuning, she embraced contradictions in her “interweaving of politics-history-poetry” (105). Through her lyrical prose and reportage, it becomes difficult to locate in her children’s books those contradictions that are unintentional and those that she consciously inserts to counter government accusations during the McCarthy that her vision for a genderless, egalitarian society was un-American.

In the midst of what Le Sueur referred to as her dark time, the Cold War and a looming threat of nuclear annihilation, Le Sueur turned to the child as the greatest source of hope. She recognized that the potential in children stemmed from their open minds, courage to question
authority, and their imagination. Through her writing, Le Sueur was bringing up the next generation of socialist-thinking patriotic revolutionaries. For Le Sueur, children were more than a metaphor for Trotsky’s notion of a temporary proletarian society. They were the embodiment of it, because to be a child is to be in a “brief period of transition, just as the proletariat is before transitioning to socialism. According to Trotsky, “The liberating significance of the dictatorship of the proletariat consists of the fact that it is temporary—for a brief period only—that it is a means of clearing the road and of laying the foundations of a society without classes and of a culture based upon solidarity” (194). Because they are children for only a short time does not mean we do not nurture or value them. On the contrary, we invest in them as a community to ensure a brighter future, just as Trotsky describes the temporary existence of the proletariat:

Our entire present-day economic and cultural work is nothing more than a bringing of ourselves into order between two battles and two campaigns. The principle battles are ahead and may not be so far off. Our epoch is not yet an epoch of new culture, but only the entrance to it. We must, first of all, take possession, politically, of the most important elements of the old culture, to such an extent, at least, as to be able to pave the way for a new culture. (191)

The children in Le Sueur’s stories represent that in-between time, and raising them is actually bringing order between these generational battles and campaigns. This epoch to which Trotsky refers is the generational revolution. The children Le Sueur writes about are not merely caught up in social struggles; they often ignite revolution. I will explore in Le Sueur’s children’s books how they join the struggle, why solidarity for children is instinctive, and how society often blurs roles between children and adults. Children in radical literature are trapped in the same oppressive environment or working-class struggle as their parents. These children are complex
with a liberal social conscience, curious, and act without their parents’ knowledge or permission. Children of poverty and oppression are caught in their own personal dilemmas that test loyalty to family, gangs, nation, and religious and civil law. Le Sueur captures in her folklore how comradeship, love, loyalty, and unity grow from a common struggle. Though Gold criticized Le Sueur, he and other left-wing writers including, Anzia Yezierska in her novel Bread Givers, and Albert Maltz in his short story “Afternoon in the Jungle,” also turned to their literary children, giving them freedom and the opportunity to make decisions in a world that does not offer choices.

While Gold and the other male leaders of the literary left looked for stories that demonstrated how bitterness and disillusionment with the struggle gave rise to revolutionary spirit, Le Sueur wrote counter to the violence of revolution. She revealed to children that through diversity, cooperation, hope, and love, it is possible to attain a communal society. It is this language of love that drew scathing criticism from Gold and the editors of American Communist publications. According to Le Sueur, “Love is an identity with instead of an objective external thing. Everyone talks about love but you don’t go in to find out what love is. Of being central to another person rather than outside of them [sic]. It isn’t easy” (Schleuning 135). This also alludes to writing, which she said must come from within by identifying with the community. The bourgeois convention of narration, she explained, is merely describing something. “To describe something means you’re outside looking at it and it’s your opinion or your arrogance or your attitude that is being written down, more than it is any kind of interdependent relationship—love” (Schleuning 134-135).

Since the common element of folklore embedded in any culture is tradition, the lore of the folk lends itself to Le Sueur and other left-wing writers, who responded to government
According to scholar Jerry Griswold, classic children’s books written from 1865 to 1914 tell “essentially the same story: a child who ‘overthrows’ its parents and becomes independent” (xi). Griswold suggests that “many American readers, as Americans, were particularly drawn to this story because of our political history (because our national identity began with a similar struggle for independence from Old World ‘parents’)” (xi). Le Sueur missed the “golden age of children’s literature” by nearly two decades; however, her folktales serve as an epilogue to that era because they tell of America’s next stage of development past its infancy as an independent nation. By meshing history with regional lore, Le Sueur criticizes America the child, not in a malicious attack but rather as a mother concerned with her child’s development. She acknowledges America’s need for autonomy, but she also points out, in terms of the early American pioneering spirit, the danger in a child’s egocentric mentality.

I will begin Le Sueur’s journey through the children’s genre by examining Sparrow Hawk. Although this was her third children’s book published by Knopf, it was actually the first
manuscript she submitted. In this tale of friendship between an Indian boy and his white comrade, Le Sueur recovers the untold story of how America’s natives planted the first seeds of solidarity in the new land.
Chapter 1:
Redskins and White Lies

“I think all the great language comes from the oppressed. They have nothing to defend. Why are the Indians great orators? Because they’re not defending a lot of sludge.”
—Meridel Le Sueur (Schleuning 129)

“I felt my legs straighten. I felt my feet join in that strange shuffle of thousands of bodies moving with direction, of thousands of feet, and my own breath with the gigantic breath. As if an electric charge had passed through me, my hair stood on end. I was marching.”
—Meridel Le Sueur (“I Was Marching” 165)

On the surface, Meridel Le Sueur’s radical adventure story Sparrow Hawk is a simple coming-of-age Indian tale set in the western frontier on the Iowa-Illinois border during the Black Hawk War of the 1830s. Sparrow Hawk, a young Sauk Indian and his white friend, Huck, work together to raise a crop of super com that they are convinced will end starvation and bring peace to the world, but they must keep it from falling into the hands of those who would profit on the corn and use it to make firewater. Below the surface, however, is a deeper story grounded in Le Sueur’s Marxist principle of the struggle for self-liberation. Sparrow Hawk is a marriage of historiography and myth that reveals to children—and adults—how an egalitarian democratic American society forged in the communal spirit could have emerged free of elitist individualism and capitalism. She equips the oppressed with a left-of-center perspective that balances the history of the dominant culture because “Marxists looked to history to justify their critique of capitalism, not to the future” (Mishler 8). In other words, Le Sueur does not speculate what a utopian socialist society might look like. By turning to history she uncovers how capitalism and individualism contaminated the ideals of American democracy, and she takes her readers even further back, centuries prior to the American Revolution, to establish how deep America’s
radical roots run. She connects the movement of the people by telling how the Indians and the working class shared the same struggles.

*Sparrow Hawk,* the first children’s manuscript Le Sueur submitted to publisher Alfred A. Knopf in 1947, tells the story of American westward expansionism by those who were marginalized and silenced by a government driven not so much by pioneering spirit as much as by profiting from real estate. In this story she locates valuable opportunities the white man passed up for tapping into natural resources in North America—the Indian and the land—had the government turned to, rather than on, the Indian to develop, rather than conquer, this country. In a letter to Le Sueur, Knopf wrote:

> We are supposed to have histories on the Indians and also accounts of what the revolutionists and immigrants did to build our country, but most of them are so diluted with bourgeois ideology as to make them worthless. Writers like yourself, therefore, are performing a great service to this and succeeding generations by contributing such vivid and true pictures of the associations of “ordinary” folks, their common strivings, through different race or color—as found in “Sparrow Hawk.” (“Educating Dissent” 250)

According to Julia Mickenberg, Knopf also told Le Sueur upon first reading her manuscript that it “was so different...from the usual stories about Indians and Indian life! And truer!” (“Communist in a Coonskin Cap?” 62). Knopf held back on releasing *Sparrow Hawk* until after he printed *Little Brother of the Wilderness: A Story of Johnny Appleseed* and *Nancy Hanks of Wilderness Road: A Story of Abe Lincoln’s Mother* for the same reason he admired the book. Because it was so different, Knopf felt a tale of a white folk hero more familiar and universal in the American culture would have a better chance of success in bookstores and libraries.
“Knopf didn’t think a story about a Native American protagonist criticizing American expansionism was the best choice for marketing Meridel’s first children’s book in the midst of the Cold War culture,” said Jim Perlman, founder of Holy Cow! Press, who brought Le Sueur’s children’s books back into print between 1987 and 1997. “That is why Knopf first published the more appealing folk hero, Johnny Appleseed. And even though introducing Nancy Hanks as a folk hero was a unique approach, people could make a connection to her through her son Abraham Lincoln.” Though it appears that Knopf was strictly profit-driven in his choice, Mickenberg points out that by printing and marketing radical children’s books by Le Sueur or any other blacklisted Communist writer during the McCarthyite attacks of the late 1940s and ’50s, Knopf “took serious and conscious risks” (“Communist in a Coonskin Cap?” 62). This also marks an instance of contradiction in the American Communist culture because the reality of economics dictated that Knopf profit to stay in business to print left-wing literature.

According to Paul Mishler, during the early twentieth century, in an attempt to unify the myriad ethnicities, the official position in the United States was to discourage ethnic distinctions: American Communists shared [Friedrich] Engels’s view and looked to the gradual Americanization of radical immigrants, and particularly their children, as a means of expanding the influence of their movement. This goal was contradictory. They understood that Americanization was going to occur regardless of the wishes of the immigrants. Furthermore, the political importance that the Communist Party came to ascribe to African Americans was predicated on the view that in the future the crucial ethnic divisions in American life would be those based on skin color, not of European countries of ancestry. The myopia of the Communists was that they thought the incorporation of radical immigrants into American culture would lead to greater
radicalization among nonimmigrant workers. In fact, as the bonds of ethnic allegiance among radical immigrants weakened, their radical politics weakened, too. (4-5)

Le Sueur, however, invited the distinctive ethnic voice of the Native American to the socialist movement. **Sparrow Hawk** demonstrates how the shortsightedness of the Communists homogenizing European immigrants to assimilate with white American workers to expand the movement did not take skin color into account. This is a visual society, and skin color will always brand otherness before Americanization can emerge.

The Marxist idea of universal history was a step in the right direction. However, while the white children of immigrants could assimilate into American society by severing ties with their ethnicity, and while the Civil Rights movement gave voice and rights to African-Americans, Le Sueur heard the muffled cry of the Indian. Though Sara Smolinsky in Anzia Yezierska’s *Bread Givers* and Mikey in Michael Gold’s *Jews Without Money* both struggled with their Jewish heritage growing up on the lower East Side of New York, as adults they could identify themselves first as Americans by virtue of their whiteness. In 2007 Sparrow Hawk’s red flesh continues to betray him. Some still find Le Sueur’s flip-flop of roles difficult to swallow. One of the listings for the book on Amazon.com describes Sparrow Hawk as a “white boy and his Sauk Indian friend” who “experience changes in their frontier lives....”

The Indian for Le Sueur embodies the contradictions of American history and the Marxist struggle for a human history. “Because Marxism is concerned with transformations in modes of production and changes in grand historical epochs, it transcends national history. For people between nations, such as immigrants to the United States, this aspect of Marxism could be particularly attractive” (Mishler 7). Attractive to immigrants, perhaps, but this idea fails to address the Indians’ dilemma. The difference between the plight of immigrants and Indians is
that whether fleeing from persecution or venturing out to find a better life in America, immigrants choose to come to America and therefore would expect to abandon certain aspects of their native heritage to assimilate into citizens in their adoptive country. The Indians, however, already inhabited this continent and were forced to adapt to the intruders after what Le Sueur describes as the “invasion from Europe” (Mound Builders 55). For the Indians there was no choice, only a decision to make—Americanize or face genocide.

What emerges from Le Sueur’s writing is that the condition of each suppressed voice in every small village is connected to global, timeless oppression. She reported on individual suffering to spread a message of hope by pointing out the similarity in circumstances and the potential strength in numbers, should the suppressed of the world ever discover that voice in a unified front—solidarity of all humanity. According to Constance Coiner, “As her [Le Sueur’s] interest in ‘communal discussion’ suggests, she saw the need for forms that would promote what [M.M.] Bakhtin has termed ‘heteroglossia,’ forms that would allow writing to serve as a vehicle for the emergence of multiple suppressed voices” (97). For more than 70 years Le Sueur gave voice to wage earners suppressed by business owners, to working women doubly suppressed by business owners and then by their husbands at home, and especially to children, who are most suppressed because they are subservient to any adult. For Le Sueur, even Mother Earth has a voice in the struggle because she has been abused and raped by quick mindless expansion and an industrial revolution driven by the profit margin. We learn through Sparrow Hawk that the Indian embodies heteroglossia because through the Indian Le Sueur heard the voices of the oppressed, the working class, the farmers, women (which includes Mother Earth), and especially the children.
Le Sueur also re-utilized heteroglossia by recruiting to the struggle, the voices of multiple radical principles that emerge in Sparrow Hawk as a collective ideology. Among the voices that cry out for social justice in this story are the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or the Wobblies), the Fabian Society, Midwestern Radicals, and American Indian philosophies of nature and gender blindness. She turned to these ideologies not to replace those of Marxism but to strengthen them. She criticized the Communist Party’s androcentric culture and the restrictive rules the leading American Communist Party critics imposed on writers—not to puncture the Communist armor but to locate and iron out the kinks. Le Sueur also stole the voice of the dominant culture by reworking the bourgeois Bildungsroman as a weapon for the people.

According to Neala Schleuning, anarchism “is, in many ways, anti-political—and if there is one constant pattern in anarchism it is the hostility to organization and structure based on centralization and hierarchy” (America 92-93). In Bows Against the Barons, When 16-year-old Dickon, who wishes to join Robin Hood, asks if Robin is of noble birth, he replies with another question: “Aren’t you satisfied with a common man as your leader?... If you want to follow an earl, you can have your pick of them—but you won’t go with me. Some fools no sooner lose one master than they look for another” (69). Robin’s response is one of an anarchist because his role is not master of a band of merry men but rather as a mentor to a community of revolutionaries.

Le Sueur linked the anarchists and the Indians to show similarities in their communal structure in an effort to demonstrate to her readers that the struggle for an egalitarian society free of property is enduring and universal. According to Le Sueur:

There are no leaders in Indian society; we had to make chiefs in order to have them sign something. This is true even today in Indian cultures, economically so battered down.

You can’t control a communal structure: you have to get the vote of everyone to give
away the land. That’s why we made the chiefs and got them drunk and pretended they could sign the treaties. But Indians don’t have chiefs. It’s a very important thing for us to realize. We can’t think without a leader or come to conclusions without a leader.

Actually, that’s the most inferior kind of conclusion to come to. (Jo Hoy 16)

Though Black Hawk is called Chief, he is not in a hierarchical position, but rather serves as the tribal elder who shares his wisdom and recommends action that his people are free to accept or reject. While the Sauk are on the run from the militia, Black Hawk neither has the power, nor attempts to stop those warriors and families who abandon their tribe to join the Indians who now serve the white man. Black Hawk’s tribe follows him because he serves his people: “But they all obeyed Black Hawk’s words when he visited them at night, and they knew that every one of them was dear to him” (155). Because the narrator reveals the people’s thoughts, the reader must accept Black Hawk’s loyalty and love for his people and their loyalty to him.

The other concept at the heart of anarchism, which the Indian embodies in Le Sueur’s folklore, is the rejection of property for any reason. Agreeing with French philosopher and anarchist thinker Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s assertion that “property is theft” (America 89), Le Sueur criticizes Marxism because she denounces even the idea of communal property. When Sparrow Hawk wanders onto a cornfield and finds Shut-One-Eye, son of a white landowner, beating Sparrow Hawk’s mother, Evening Star, with a hoe, Sparrow Hawk batters the white boy until he pleads for mercy while attempting to convince Sparrow Hawk that his mother is trespassing. Le Sueur declares through Sparrow Hawk, “Land can belong to no one…. It belongs to the Great Spirit. Man tends to it so he can live. We now plant corn for all here. Corn for life and not for your whiskey stills” (113). The attack on Evening Star also addresses the link between property and domination. Property for Le Sueur included slave trade, wage earners,
even wives and children in the home hierarchy. Developing the land to feed the entire community instead of claiming it for personal profit was where Le Sueur planted her seeds for a universal crop of hope. For Le Sueur, corn is more than a metaphor for the starving and oppressed. She defines corn as:

> The oldest food solely developed by human beings.... It was food for wanderers and made cities possible. It was philosophy, and making it possible for them to stay in one place.... Changing Woman brought it to the Indians.... The planting, the growth, the pollination, the sacred female cob of corn are all deeply expressive of the American Indian culture of emergence and renewal, the Pollen Path, the cosmic fluidity.... It is the only plant whose destiny is tied with the human: It cannot be harvested without human aid. (Rites of Ancient Ripening xi)

Corn springs up in all Le Sueur’s children’s books, including Zapata, an unpublished children’s manuscript she wrote in the 1990s. It is a story set in Mexico during the early 1900s about Timoteo, a young Aztec, who joins forces with his hero, Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata, who campaigned for the restoration of village lands confiscated by hacendados—white landowners—in Mexico. After federal soldiers executed Zapata, his martyrdom for the oppressed made him a legend. The hacendados have pushed Timoteo and the villagers off the land they cultivated, just as the white landowners did to the North American Indians. The hacendados order the villagers to plant sugar cane instead of corn. Sugar cane, a leading export, does not feed the people who grow it. For Timoteo and his indigenous people, without the sacred corn they will starve. Timoteo plants the corn with his mother, nourishing the earth with seed so that the earth will nourish his people. He prays for and to the corn—his children—to not only grow tall but gaily as well:
Dark earth of ours
We pray thee,
Give back the corn we pay thee.
Oh holy corn, by moon or morn
Grow strong, grow tall, grow gaily,
O tierra chica mia. (Zapata 18)

The narrator points out that Timoteo prays in his Nahuatl tongue, with the same Zapotec prayer his ancestors prayed thousands of years ago. Le Sueur has Timoteo end the prayer in Spanish as a joke to remind her readers that the white landowners took from these indigenous people, even their native language.

It is through the Indians’ humanity and social consciousness that Le Sueur removes the “savage” stigma attached to them, validating the Native Americans’ claim to this country and their voice in the struggle. According to Schleuning:

Jimmy Durham, the Indian Marxist, is developing the idea that capitalism and private enterprise had a terrible time of it when they came here. He argues that there were many more Indians than we thought—perhaps up to 80 million[s]. And these communal cultures stood squarely in the way of the capitalists. They were so communal, they didn’t know they could sell the land. They represented a great opposition to the free enterprise system and the development of capital. They had to physically destroy the communal idea of the Indian and the pioneer in order to move into the land. They never did defeat the Indians militarily.” (70)

I would argue that examining Sparrow Hawk with Durham’s description of the Indians’ stand in terms of blocking the path of capitalists as the framework, it becomes apparent that Le Sueur
allows the voice of the Wobblies to emerge. Here again Le Sueur has planted another story below the surface. Sparrow Hawk reflects the IWW because it is a universal organization that continues to open its arms to all races worldwide. With a slogan of solidarity, the Wobblies find power in a collective voice.

The divide-and-conquer strategy that defeated the Indians and later caused the decline in IWW membership resulting from internal conflict and government repression is more than a military tactic. It is a tactic that employs racial prejudice to divide the masses of oppressed people around the world. Le Sueur said:

The concept of conquest is at the base of this idea of hierarchy. That’s racism. You make another race foul, dirty, terrible, and most importantly, inferior. Then you conquer them. In a collective you wouldn’t have this concept of power and conquest, the imbalance.

(America 102)

Using Le Sueur’s own corn imagery, the IWW represents the cob that brings together all the individual kernels of the oppressed. This form is superior to a melting pot because though part of a larger community, each kernel still retains its individuality. This is not to say that the IWW in any way expressed the same goals as Midwestern farmers. Though the IWW and the American Federation of Labor chose different tactics for labor, Le Sueur valued the idea of universal solidarity. The uneasy coalition the IWW and the farmers of the Non-Partisan League struck are reflected in the uneasy coalitions Le Sueur’s folk heroes attempt to form. Black Hawk attempts to unite all Indian nations, even the enemies of the Sauk, to fight the greater enemy that would take the land of all Indians. Davy Crockett, on his way to the Alamo, meets up with a fellow named Thimblerig, “looking mighty like the Peddler, but who came along to the Alamo giving up his evil ways” (Chanticleer 135). He also is joined by a singing Bee Hunter, a Pirate who had
“fought with Old Hickory at New Orleans,” and an Indian. This uneasy coalition perished together defending the Alamo.

Le Sueur alludes to the IWW again when she reveals that the Sauk are lead miners. Sparrow Hawk represents reportage on America’s first miners’ strike. The people call on Black Hawk to organize a strike, not because their homes are taken from them, but because the men who “went every spring to the mines at Galena which the Sauk had mined for generations, lost their mining privileges. ‘They beat us with sticks,’ one miner said…. ‘But they have been our mines for hundreds of years,’ a woman cried out. ‘They say we are taking their mines,’ the miners laughed a bitter laugh” (53). Black Hawk as strike leader, attempts peaceful negotiations. However, while they are still open, he attempts to form a union with the other tribes, should a strike become imminent. Colonel Davenport, a storeowner and friend to the Sauk, serves as facilitator between the strikers and the landowners, and promises to present the Sauk’s case to President Andrew Jackson. “He says you will have to go across the river and never return” (114), says Davenport. Because the Sauk call the president their “white father,” they become orphans without a home in their own nation. Another allusion Le Sueur makes to a strike is how big business controls the press and sways public opinion. When false rumors quickly spread across the Midwestern landscape, Black Hawk says, “Stories and lies are told about us by the people who want our land, then the settlers who are with us at the first are turned against us and the army comes. It’s always the same” (100).

As in any union, the most contemptible enemy is the traitor from within. In Sparrow Hawk it is Chief Keokuk who sells out. He wears the clothes of the white man, drinks whiskey and has become fat from laziness. “Traitor Keokuk! Sparrow hawk said…. ‘Black Hawk remembers his fathers. He remembers the good of his people—not only to dress himself up like a
white father in Washington” (9). What makes Keokuk’s traitorous behavior so deplorable is that he abandons his own people to serve himself.

When the governor calls out the militia to move the Indians off the land, he represents the land or business owner sending in the strike busters. “They were not bluecoats but militia recruited from old Indian fighters, backwoodsmen who were on an Indian hunt for the fun of it, to put notches in their guns” (119). The militia is not a regiment of soldiers but a mob of thugs who murder a young Winnebago boy who had been attracted to the lights of their camp.

Negotiations break down when General Gaines, the militia commander, tells Black Hawk that because the Sauk are in violation of a treaty he will drive them out “dead or alive.” Black Hawk responds by thrusting his knife into the treaty document. “I do not know the lines on the talking paper…. I set my name on none” (115), he says.

When the Enterprise, a riverboat loaded with soldiers and armed with big guns pointed at the Sauk village comes in, Black Hawk sneaks his entire village out in the middle of the night. I would argue that this is a peaceful protest march in which Le Sueur literally anticipates the movement in solidarity later found in marches and protests. In her short story “I Was Marching,” Le Sueur describes the power of the collective and a feeling that only someone who participates in a strike will ever experience:

The movements, the masses that I see and feel I have never known before. I only partly know what I am seeing, feeling, but I feel it is the real body and gesture of future vitality…. I feel most alive and yet for the first time in my life I do not feel myself as separate. I realize then that all my previous feelings have been based on feeling myself separate and distinct from others and now I sense sharply faces, bodies, closeness, and my own fear is not my own alone, nor my hope. (163)
By allowing the reader to accompany the Sauk for months, evading the militia on this peaceful protest march, Le Sueur lets her readers experience Black Hawk’s struggle to get his people, weak and starving down river. Readers also experience the slaughter of women, children, and the elderly when the militia catches up and ends the strike just as they are about to cross over to freedom. The “bluecoats shot directly into the scattered and fleeing women who held their children as they fell. The warriors ran forward crying, ‘We surrender,’ and the bluecoats shot directly at them” (170-171). Evening Star, who is among those women, is killed at the foot of a tree. This is where Le Sueur took head on, critiques from Gold and the other male CPUSA leaders that her stories were weak and defeatist. What they did not understand was that for Le Sueur, death did not defeat, it signaled regeneration of the struggle. Le Sueur explains in the Rites of Ancient Ripening that the “planting, the growth, the pollination, the sacred female cob of corn are all deeply expressive of the American Indian culture of emergence and renewal, the Pollen Path, the cosmic fluidity” (xi). By placing Evening Star at the foot of a tree when she dies, Le Sueur returns Evening Star to the sacred limbs from which she emerged, not in defeat, but rather in a moment of renewal, as she illustrates in her title poem:

I fall and burst beneath the sacred human tree.

Release my seed and let me fall. (23)

It is Black Hawk’s strength that offers him an option as leader of this protest march to choose peace over combat. The scalp dangling from his hip reveals that he has the ability to kill. Le Sueur uses strike imagery from 1935 to connect the present-day struggle to the Indians’ plight a century earlier, and creates a sense of timeless solidarity by using Indian imagery in “I Was Marching” to describe a modern-day chief: “I wondered why they took such care of him. They all looked at him tenderly as he slept. I learned later he was a leader on the picket line and had
the scalps of more cops to his name than any other” (160). Though Le Sueur acknowledges the Sauk, young and old, have the ability to fight a violent revolution—Sparrow Hawk kills in self-defense, taking his ax he “hurled it at the officer on the ground who had shot at him” (148)—it is not the blood of revolution that effects lasting changes on the culture but consciousness and peace. “ ‘I killed my first man,’ Sparrow Hawk said. ‘And it did not make me feel good’ ” (150). This is why Sparrow Hawk returns to his friend Huck to continue to change hearts by continuing to plant corn and tell of his people’s oppression. This marks the end of this book, but by no means the end of the story, or this generational revolution.

Le Sueur embraced contradiction and duality by turning upside down the norms entrenched in American history and lore, popular culture, and even Marxist ideology. The title Sparrow Hawk itself is a contradiction and the foundation on which Le Sueur built her story. She acknowledges in Sparrow Hawk that good (sparrow) and evil (hawk) co-exist in both Indians and white men. It was not the white conquerors who killed Sparrow Hawk’s nameless father but a Sioux. Capitalism for Le Sueur is the systemic source of societal evil. Speaking about her male characters, who are always the oppressors, Le Sueur said, “I don’t make them villains, because they’re not. They’re destroyed by their own illusions” (Jo Hoy 18). However, the oppressed also must maintain a revolutionary spirit and the courage to fight with conviction, to risk life, and to draw blood in the struggle for freedom just as the country’s first revolutionaries fought the British invaders. Sparrow Hawk’s father, who never appears because he was killed in battle before the story begins, advised his son to “Take good care of your weapons. Be in front of the fighting. Defend your people. Strike hard at the enemy. Say to yourself, I will be brave. I will fear nothing” (11). I would argue that the real enemy is not a group or an individual. It is capitalism.
I suspect Le Sueur had Sparrow Hawk’s father killed at the hands of another Indian to align herself with Marxist and Communist movements that “disavowed explicit utopianism” (Mishler 7). Le Sueur on several occasions shows her reader that though the communal Indian nation was superior to a society based on capitalism, it was still flawed and just as vulnerable to capitalism and individualism, which ultimately led to divisiveness and the demise of the Indian nations. Even Sparrow Hawk is briefly tempted to abandon his community and settle down, but resists when he questions the greed of capitalism: “I am going to catch beavers and sell them and buy some land that has a paper saying it is mine. Why does the white man want so much beaver?” (47). Imagining a society where every citizen thrives empowers this child to resist the tug of the dominant culture. Le Sueur turned to the child as a conduit for social revolution because she recognized that imaginative power thrives in the open, receptive minds of children.

Herbert Kohl points out that the power of imagination comes from the ability to entertain alternatives to what we have been told. However, it is the dominating culture that directs imagination. He writes:

Children’s imaginations are lively and fed by the stories they are told and the images provided them by their culture…. Culture, I believe, channels the imagination while experience informs it. (62)

Le Sueur attempted to change the culture that fed young imaginations by offering alternatives to what most people accepted as the driving forces behind America’s folk heroes. In her stories the underdog fights oppression by igniting hope and action, yet that is not what makes them radical, because bourgeois writers feed their readers’ imaginations with the same kind of story. What separates the left from the right is that the underdog in right-wing stories overcomes his or her personal oppressors, but societal class and capitalism continue to thrive, because those stories
come from the dominant culture. In left-wing stories the underdog imagines a world cleansed of oppressors, and fights in solidarity to emancipate the entire community. Kohl describes this as social imagination, because it targets the group rather than the individual struggle. Properly nurtured, social imagination is the lifeblood of revolution. According to Kohl:

Without the encouragement of the social imagination, of freedom to imagine the world being other than it is, we are left without hope for society as a whole…. Dreams of personal liberation are important, but moral consistency, self-respect, and healthy communal life imply more than personal liberation. They demand commitment to larger struggles to eliminate victimization. (63)

When the freedom to imagine the world being other than it is dies, hope soon follows. The result is that the oppressed no longer live. Instead they simply exist to serve the conquerors, just as Dickon’s mother does in Geoffrey Trease’s radical children’s book, Bows Against the Barons. Dickon, a young serf from Nottingham who joins an aging Robin Hood’s band of revolutionaries, asks his mother why the peasants starve while the king’s deer grow fat. She responds, “It’s always been so…and I suppose it always will be. So long as we keep alive somehow, to do their work and fight their wars, they don’t care how poor we are” (12). When Dickon responds that he would like to teach them, his mother reprimands him. “Boy’s words! You’ll learn to take your whip and be thankful” (12). The real tragedy here is not that the ruling class has crushed imagination and hope in Dickon’s mother, but that she condemns her son for imagining a better society, and resigns him to her own existence of servitude, fostering both generational and societal oppression. Evening Star, however, recognizes the potential of dreaming and projects that hope onto Sparrow Hawk. “The corn feeds us. The big corn you and Huck have grown may make peace between the Indians and the white people. It is a dream of
corn. Without dreams, the great Manitou says, men will starve” (12). Because Evening Star is selfless she can redirect her own suffering and hunger to find a way to feed society. She places in her son’s hands that same dream because she recognizes that hope empowers him to take action:

He thought next year they would triple the corn and make possible the dream of the Sauk and the nations of the East, led by Tecumseh, of a great United Nations of Indians, dwelling on their own lands in peace with the white nations, with corn enough for all.

(16)

When the spirit of social imagination thrives as it does in Sparrow Hawk, even corn has the potential to peacefully initiate equality and end starvation.

I would argue that encouraging or nurturing the child’s social imagination is at the core of Le Sueur’s radical children’s books, and take that a step further by arguing that she targets the social imagination of the adolescent male in these adventure stories. Here is where she turns to the “Fabians’ concept of social change through education and persuasion” (What’s Left?” 351). Le Sueur speaks through Sparrow Hawk in her feminist voice to encourage her young male readers to imagine an alternate society that thrives on equality and gender blindness, while sending out a message to the patriarchal leadership of both the U.S. government and the CPUSA. In a journal entry she writes:

The world has gotten into trouble because of the “male” philosophy. By that I don’t mean just men, but men do represent it. The female, the mothering element of the earth—men have got to become mothers and nourishers instead of exploiters and seizers. (Schleuning 147)

Le Sueur believed a peaceful revolution was the only lasting solution for eradicating oppression and capitalism. Her strategy for winning that revolution was to awaken in adolescent males the
female consciousness. This is another aspect of Le Sueur’s writing that drew criticism from the
androcentric CPUSA leadership, which confused the female consciousness and her message of
peace with weakness. On the contrary, Le Sueur adhered to big-stick diplomacy. A closer look at
Sparrow Hawk’s vision of peace reveals that while corn plays an integral role in the peace
process, it is through solidarity of a great United Nations of Indians, that his people can dwell on
their own lands in peace with the white nations, simply because the white nations would have no
choice but to live in peace with what would be a formidable enemy.

Sparrow Hawk “was hung in the spring sun so the birds lit on his head” (17). Literally
raised as corn he empathizes with his siblings, and when he gets older, assumes the traditional
woman’s role in the fields as mother and nourisher:

He heard the women singing to the corn seeds and the singing of the young girls in the
corn dance. Older, he had sung himself, helping his mother dig the holes and drop the
corn kernels in, four to a hill and pat it over with his hand, singing lullabies for the baby
corn. (17)

Sparrow Hawk becomes mother without forfeiting his manliness and fighting spirit. His female
consciousness does not contradict his male consciousness; they work together. That is why he
can sing lullabies for the baby corn as the young girls do, yet still perform a warrior dance that
“the young men attended and he sang and danced his dance of courage, and he got many
followers to his dream so that many young warriors wanted to go with him” (138). The
mothering element of the earth that drives Sparrow Hawk’s love of the corn and his community
actually makes him a better protector. Beyond that, he has shared his dream just as his mother
shared her dream with him.
Growing corn in *Sparrow Hawk* becomes the vehicle to an egalitarian society and a precursor to John Chapman, another male hero figure who literally impregnates the earth with his seeds, then nurtures his children—the apple trees—that grow to feed a nation. Le Sueur places in the hands of Sparrow Hawk and his friend Huck, a white farmer, the motherly privilege of protecting and raising corn that will feed generations of nations and end all wars. That charge, however, does not come from a woman, but from Sparrow Hawk’s father, who before he is killed, tells his son that “with corn enough for all there would be no wars. The Sioux were enemies because, hunting the buffalo, they raised no corn and came in bad years to steal the corn caches of the Sauks and Winnebagoes” (13). It is because the Indians are gender blind that Le Sueur can call on the spirit of Sparrow Hawk’s father to deliver this message of peace, just as Evening Star can teach her son to be a warrior: “You come from a people, brave always, before the seen enemies, and before the unseen enemies. Never show fear upon your face” (12).

Le Sueur in her folklore nurtures young readers by sharing and demonstrating the value of daily work and serving the community. However, she reminds her adult readers that they cannot force their own values onto their children, who must be allowed to act independently and make their own choices. The risk is that some youth will make the wrong choices and embrace the bourgeois self-serving philosophy. Even the corn can take the wrong path to demonstrate how easily the false glamour of capitalism corrupts the innocent. Corn can feed an entire nation, but it also is the main ingredient in alcohol. Therefore, corn is partly responsible for the Indians losing their land because the three men who signed a treaty in St. Louis were “full of firewater” (17), even if the corn is an unwilling participant: “‘I can hear the corn crying not to be made into the bad drink that puts men to sleep,’ Sparrow Hawk said” (38).
Le Sueur connects circumstances and leads the reader to witness that the white soldiers and settlers, the Indians, even corn, are both good and bad, but that capitalism is the true corrupter, which allows few to thrive while many starve. Her Marxist perspective of capitalism comes from the lens of a Midwestern mother who was not on the outside, but experienced and added her own voice to the suffering and starving masses during the Great Depression:

Now from city to city the real source of violence in American life was naked—the violence of corporate wealth able to starve you, control your jobs, your life, your being. This is the true violence. When people tell you that violence comes from the streets or from the unemployed or from the Third World, this is not true. The real violence is the hunger and the speculation and the destruction of the crops of the people. This is the real terror of our time. (America 106)

Le Sueur directed her peaceful revolution at this violence of corporate wealth. She blamed hunger and destruction of the earth on the short-sighted male concept of linear time:

One of the most dangerous concepts that we have in modern life is what I call the linear or male view of the world. It is aggressive, progressive.... The bright and terrible activity of progress, development, making money, grabbing everything in sight. It made a curious air of aggression, fear and even hate. (Schleuning 145)

Sparrow Hawk and Huck embrace Le Sueur’s female concept of circular or spiral time because they are aware that their actions or inaction will affect the future, just as the past has determined the present condition. No action can stand alone without repercussion. They both act only after they examine how their actions will impact both the community and future generations.

Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano said the indigenous people of the Americas “see nature as sacred in the sense that every harm we cause turns against us one day or another. So every crime
becomes a suicide” (“The Open Veins of McWorld”). This sense of responsibility, like social imagination, is not instinctive but carefully nurtured during the formative years of a child’s life.

Le Sueur takes her readers through that journey in *Sparrow Hawk* and her other children’s books. She accomplishes this by stealing from the bourgeois Bildungsroman and borrowing elements of the proletarian autobiographical sketch, then fuses them together to create her own radical brand of American folklore.

Barbara Foley explains in her book *Radical Representations* that bourgeois Bildungsroman heroes “are usually set apart from their peers by a number of distinctive traits—looks, intelligence, ambition. They are at once ordinary and extraordinary” (321). She points out that “writers motivated by left-wing politics would work in the genre of the Bildungsroman only at considerable peril” (323) and goes on to reveal radical writers of the 1930s were not deterred by that skepticism. Le Sueur’s left-of-center Bildungsroman holds true to the classic form, which pairs protagonists during their formative years, with older, wiser mentors who provide spiritual education and guide them through life’s lessons.

Le Sueur’s protagonists are ordinary and emerge as heroes of the people because their mentors guide them. From the opening scene, it appears that Sparrow Hawk displays inherent heroic qualities when the young Sawk, sitting on his horse, Treads-the-Earth, kills with one arrow a charging buffalo, and gains the admiration of the older, more seasoned hunters in the tribe. A closer look reveals that Chief Black Hawk and the community of hunters guide him through the kill. “Suddenly Sparrow Hawk saw that Black Hawk’s horse, on the outside of the thundering buffalo was pushing his own horse Treads-the-Earth, inward toward the surrounded buffalo…. Other riders closed in and he could see that he was being crowded alongside the bull” (3-4). Beyond this physical nudge, Black Hawk, Sparrow Hawk’s surrogate father, provides
emotional reassurance when he shouts, “Above all things, do not be afraid!” to which the narrator responds, “And he was afraid” (4). Sparrow Hawk does not believe he has the strength to get the job done, but because Black Hawk tells him he can kill the buffalo, he summons up the courage to do it.

The notion of fear and the need to overcome it for the good of the people is a recurring theme in Le Sueur’s novel. Black Hawk and Evening Star tell Sparrow Hawk on several occasions to not be afraid, while the narrator keeps reminding the reader that he is. Le Sueur allows the narrator to read Sparrow Hawk’s thoughts to inform the reader that the folk hero is ordinary. What allows ordinary folk to locate extraordinary courage—and act on it—is putting the people’s needs before the individual’s. Black Hawk tells his adopted son:

“If you have a friend, cling close to him. Cling close to your people and their good. Think of your friend and your people before you think of yourself. … Cling close to your friend and your people and give your life for them.” This gave Sparrow Hawk courage. (93)

The narrator returns to Sparrow Hawk’s thoughts to demonstrate how the wisdom of age channels the social imagination of youth to find the courage to act on behalf of the people.

Le Sueur uses the didactic voice of the omniscient narrator in only two of her children’s books—Sparrow Hawk and River Road: A Story of Abraham Lincoln—I would argue, to inform her readers that while her stories may contradict recorded history, the courage and humanity from within that drive heroes of the people to challenge the dominant culture are beyond dispute. Foley writes that the didactic voice:

shares its wisdom in interspersed passages of political commentary throughout the novel… is signaled to be the product of the character’s experience; narrator and character
are conflated with one another and the reader intuits, with the author as well…. In large part the text demands to be read as “true.” (289)

This literary device comes from the proletarian autobiography in which the author speaks from the third person as Mike Gold does in Jews Without Money. Approaching an autobiography from the third person allows the author to make political commentary without lecturing to the reader. Speaking through Chief Black Hawk, Le Sueur’s attempt to raise boys with feminine consciousness resonates with her adolescent male audience because her message emerges from this powerful male warrior chief.

As in any revolution, those who suffer are the innocent refugees caught in the middle. Sparrow Hawk and Black Hawk survive the massacre, are captured, and assimilated into the capitalist society. “Black Hawk lived to be an old man on a farm the government gave him in Iowa. He traveled over America speaking to white people to make them understand” (175). He also dictates a book and it is at this point where Le Sueur sends out her call to action by directly addressing the reader: “You can read now all Black Hawk had to say and he spoke so the earth could hear for he spoke much truth” (175). It is the reader’s responsibility to find the truth. And, as is the hallmark of proletarian literature, a message of hope emerges from this tragic tale.

Sparrow Hawk still believes “there would come a time when the corn would grow big in the summers for all the children, of every color, who would play in peace together in the villages of the world and the earth would speak with her son, Man, in fruit and seed” (175).

Sparrow Hawk and Huck represent the rebirth or continuation of this universal struggle in solidarity. They shall continue to work together planting corn and raising herbs, demonstrating that the revolution did not die with Evening Star. It will continue with the next generation and beyond, so long as the present generation nurtures social imagination in its children.
Chapter 2:
Davy Crockett and Johnny Appleseed: The Odd Couple of the Wilderness Road

No matter what you do you are part of history. If you buy an orange or ride in a car or decide to have a baby, you are making history. Don’t tell yourself that it is not up to you to write true history. Who is to write it if not you? You live it. You make it. You write it.
—Meridel Le Sueur (Worker Writers 1-2)

The McCarthy era, when the government embarked on an anticommunist crusade, was the most pervasive period of political repression in this country’s history. Demonizing the image of American Communists as spies and subversives threatening American security justified any actions a suppressive government took in the name of patriotism and protecting the nation against the threat of domestic Communism during the Cold War. Meridel Le Sueur and other members of the American Communist Party (CPUSA) responded to the red scare and accusations that they were un-American by reclaiming American history for the left, placing themselves at the heart of American traditions and myths. According to scholar Julia Mickenberg, “As was characteristic of the Popular Front’s larger rhetorical and practical turn, the new wisdom held that rather than rejecting bourgeois institutions and traditions (such as those from American history) outright, they might be transformed, reclaimed, or refunctioned” (“Educating Dissent” 172). Le Sueur, adhering to the wisdom and practicality of the Popular Front, refunctioned in her children’s books, bourgeois institutions and traditions from American history—not history itself—because the truth of history, as Cary Nelson points out, “is literally unspeakable…. The inadequacy of language will forever prevent us from fully reconstructing history…. For texts previously ignored or belittled, our greatest appreciative act may be to give them fresh opportunities for an influential life” (13-14). Therefore, Le Sueur’s aim was to offer an alternative lens through which to examine the events that shaped this nation.
Le Sueur did not attempt, nor did she claim, to chronicle an authoritative glimpse at American history. As Mickenberg explains, “any attempt to reutilize aspects of a complex and contradictory national heritage, a heritage of slave-owners and freedom fighters, westward expansion, Indian wars and the Bill of Rights, is inevitably going to be flawed” (“Communist in a Coonskin Cap?” 59-60). Le Sueur embraced the contradictions and complexity of America’s national heritage to capture the mood of the working class during the Cold War by turning to the lore of the people.

Left-wing folklore also taught that first generation of American children who lived under the threat of nuclear annihilation that their imagination empowered them to retell history from their own perspective, to learn and act from its lessons, and to find alternatives to the world they lived in.

The narrator’s grandmother, the main source of information in Chanticleer of Wilderness Road: A Story of Davy Crockett and Little Brother of the Wilderness: The Story of Johnny Appleseed, is herself complex and contradictory because she witnesses both Crockett and Appleseed’s lives, and somehow later appears as Nancy Hanks’ midwife at Abraham Lincoln’s birth. Unlike the omniscient narrator in Sparrow Hawk, the narrator in these stories reports the accounts of Davy Crockett and Johnny Appleseed as told to her by her grandmother. Le Sueur constructs the grandmother as the storyteller to present a counter interpretation to the past that the right obscured. It is here where politics and gender intersect because the grandmother retells history not as a narrator from the outside, but as a participant from within. Mickenberg explains that the narrator’s grandmother is both “a carrier of tradition and, on occasion, someone who actually figures into the story” (“Communist in a Coonskin Cap?” 72). Because she actually plays a part in the story, the narrator’s grandmother brings to the lore the authority of firsthand
experience. Reporting these stories through her grandmother relieves the narrator of accountability for errors or conflicts in the stories. According to the narrator’s grandmother, “Nobody knows how a legend grows, everybody adding a little bit” (7). To further convince readers that the narrator’s grandmother is a reliable source, Le Sueur allows Crockett, Appleseed and Lincoln to personally endorse her validity by expressing their admiration for her and confirming her authority. I will discuss this further in the next chapter.

Folklore presented an attractive genre for left-wing writers during the repressive McCarthy era because sharing stories of the people is a communal activity that addresses and invites discussion on values and contradictions in history. Because folk heroes and their legends belong to the people, Le Sueur had the right to claim them for the CPUSA just as the right-wingers claimed them, and the Disney Corporation claimed Davy Crockett as a commodity. Le Sueur writes that Crockett is just one of the “hackers, hunters, swingers of the ax, the builders, tall talkers, long walkers into the sunset” (4), therefore he is an ordinary member of the working class. As a “terror to kings” (4), he also is an American revolutionary, and it is here where Le Sueur reminds the reader that this country was formed on the revolution.

Contradiction, the cornerstone of folklore, is the tool radical writers use to convert passive readers into active readers, by getting them to question aspects of their culture they had always accepted as truth. It also fuels the imagination and demonstrates the freedom of choice, which is especially attractive for the oppressed child. Philip Nel in his essay, “‘Never Overlook the Art of the Seemingly Simple’: Crocket Johnson and the Politics of the Purple Crayon,” writes that Johnson “offers an enabling strategy for children in an uncertain world. To encourage both child and adult readers to be more critically aware of that world, Johnson deploys shifts in perspective that rearrange what the reader or character had thought to be true” (149). Nel says
Johnson empowers Harold. His “stubby little crayon” enables Harold to dream up a whole universe, just as Le Sueur empowers her protagonists. While Johnny Appleseed’s power lies in his ability to nurture, Davy Crockett conquers with old Betsy, a gun that is not merely a tool but a companion. Le Sueur tells us Johnny Appleseed carries a shovel, an ax and a hoe, “but never a gun.” So in contrast to Harold and Crockett, Appleseed also is empowered by what he does not carry. He is safe to walk the wilderness trail because word spreads among the wild animals and the Indians to not attack the man who walks without a gun. However, despite their differences, Le Sueur makes it clear that Crockett and Appleseed share a dream of a new egalitarian, socialist society that nourishes all its citizens and nurtures the earth.

By writing about American icons Davy Crockett and Johnny Appleseed, Le Sueur reaffirmed this country’s revolutionary heritage and the need to remain loyal to the ideals of the American Revolution. The narrator’s grandmother in Nancy Hanks of Wilderness Road recalls a “Revolution they had fought for this free land, for learning for their children, for a country with no hunger and no slavery” (11). Le Sueur also demonstrated through her folk heroes that the CPUSA was infused with nationalistic spirit by informing her young readers and reminding the witch-hunting McCarthyites that the subversives who challenged the English monarchy gave birth to an American democracy that was supposed to be based on equality and justice for all people. When telling his children about their radical ancestry, Crockett locates the origin of his revolutionary spirit by proclaiming with pride, “My grandfather fought in the Revolutionary War” (21). Later, while touring the east coast with his son Robbie, Congressman Crockett stops at Bunker Hill and laments on how he wishes he could invoke the spirits of the revolutionaries to give him insight. “I felt like calling to them to tell me how to help protect the liberty they bought for us with their blood. I resolved to go for my country always, everywhere” (111). Le Sueur
reutilizes the capitalists’ action of “bought” to illustrate that radicals who challenged the English monarchy paid for liberty with their blood, which is far more currency than the money capitalists spend retracting that liberty by exploiting the working class. Le Sueur redirected the right’s accusation that the left was un-American back onto itself in her wilderness book series by outlining how American society regressed back to the un-American European exploitation of the people because the few rich in the New World continued to profit on the labor of the wage earners. I will continue this discussion in a later chapter.

Though it is never mentioned in Little Brother of the Wilderness, the biographies of John Chapman Le Sueur included in the postscript reveal that this folk hero, who aggressively sought peace and was a year old when the American colonies declared their independence from England, also had revolutionary blood coursing through his veins. His father, Nathaniel, was a Minuteman who fought at Concord and in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War.

The narrator’s grandmother in Nancy Hanks of Wilderness Road: A Story of Abraham Lincoln’s Mother tells that both of Tom Lincoln’s grandfathers fought in the Revolutionary War under George Washington. She says of Tom, “there was no backdown in him and he could fight all comers if he had to” (20). From his grandfathers Tom inherited, and passed down to his son, Abe, the revolutionary commitment and fighting spirit.

In River Road: A Story of Abraham Lincoln, eighteen-year-old Abe remembers “Hananian Lincoln, a first cousin, who fought at Brandywine under Washington; and another cousin, Amos, from Massachusetts, who was one of the men, his family said, who rigged themselves up as Indians and dumped the taxed tea into Boston Harbor from the British ship, to show their disobedience and contempt for taxation without representation” (112). This recollection uncovers more than family pride for his revolutionary relatives. Le Sueur, through
Lincoln, connects the heroic, patriotic act of the Boston Tea Party to Communist subversion and disobedience, reinforcing the rights of the people to rebel when the government ceases to be of the people, by the people, and for the people. She also reminds the reader once again that Lincoln and her other folk heroes value and gain wisdom from the past as it guides them toward their legendary achievements. Le Sueur revisits the idea of the Bildungsroman because the lessons and values young Abe adheres to come from family history that his parents teach him. Davy Crockett shares those same values while he sits in front of a fire with his children, demonstrating the power of storytelling and his duty as a parent or mentor, instilling in the next generation of Crockett, the indispensable partnership between socialism and democracy. I would argue that all the parent characters in Le Sueur’s Children’s stories adhere to what child expert Sidonie Gruenberg expressed in her 1939 book, *We, the Parents*:

> If we ever hope to have a form of social life—national and international—constructive and cooperative and free from the devastating aggressions and vindictiveness that we see all around us today, we must start by building well-rounded personalities through better family life. For democracy is more than a point of view, more than a political form of government, it is a way of life. It is inherent in the relationships of people with one another; hence its roots are in the family. Democracy begins at home. Living decently together is not merely for the family, with which we have concerned ourselves, but for all humanity. (“Educating Dissent” 156)

Through the power of storytelling, Le Sueur hoped to avert bloodshed of a violent revolution and to reinvent American society by educating future generations and infusing in children a sense of communality and love of the Earth during their early, impressionable years.
Because folklore addresses both children and adults, Le Sueur utilized in her children’s books what children’s book scholar Barbara Wall calls a “double address narrative technique” (Jack 421). Parents revisiting a folk tale with their children recapture their own childhood memories and heroes, and pass them down to their children. Parents who are repeating the tales they heard may incorporate their own interpretations as they remember the stories, thereby becoming folklorists and keeping the lore current. According to Wall, traditional beliefs can only remain current when folklore evolves with the common people.

Folklore scholar Jack Zipes explains that tall tales are optimistic because they are about escape and about how common people “outwit hostile forces.” I would argue that the words “outwit” and “hope” in Zipes’ definition are critical to gaining an understanding of Le Sueur’s interpretation of American folklore. Using the power of the intellect to outwit hostile forces was a far more palatable war for Le Sueur than one fought in violence. A war won by intellect, however, requires more time—it is a generational fight. The people in Le Sueur’s children’s books may lose the battle, but hope always emerges from the youth, who are poised to continue the struggle. Though the Popular Front was all but defunct at the start of the Cold War, Le Sueur wrote folk tales that reflected the coalition’s movement away from militant revolution to what Mickenberg describes as a “more inclusive cooperative pro-laborism that emphasized social consciousness, interracialism, internationalism, and, in particular, American democratic… traditions” (“Educating Dissent” 171). Linking parenting with her folk heroes’ revolutionary spirit and their commitment to building an egalitarian American society for all people regardless of race or gender presented an opportunity for Le Sueur to dispel the masculine misconception that violence is the only condition of revolution.
The peaceful revolution for Le Sueur, a central theme in her children’s books, is one the patriarchal leadership of American Communist writers did not understand. She is telling her young readers that it is not necessary to perish as a martyr to become a hero of the people. This is where she turns to the Fabian concept of social change “through education and persuasion (rather than revolution)” (“What’s Left?” 351). Part of the Fabian concept is a movement toward a society built on gender blindness. According to children’s literature scholar Chamutal Noimann, “as long as men and women continue to think and behave according to conventional social and gender codes, they will not be able to create a new socialist society” (368). This explains why Johnny Appleseed is both mother and father to thousands of young apple trees. He exhibits attributes of a lumberjack, a preacher, a literacy teacher, and St. Francis of Assisi, patron saint of the animals and the environment. In addition to the apple seeds he plants across the country, he turns to the educational aspect of Fabianism when he breaks his Bible into three parts, gives them to the families, and tells the families to pass the parts amongst them. “There must be reading in America” (40), he says. This Fabian concept also appears in Chanticleer of Wilderness Road after Davy Crockett is elected magistrate. “Davy became a squire so it wasn’t fitting to just yell.... So now he began to spell and read” (63-64).

I would argue that when Le Sueur alludes to emancipating the child through education, she also turns to the “Lyrical Left,” which, according to Mickenberg, came of age just prior to WWI. According to Mickenberg:

Though they are not remembered for doing so, the Lyrical Left...influenced both education and children’s literature in significant ways, imagining and predicting social transformation through what I call “children’s liberation.” Moreover, in important ways their sensibility and their work would serve as a “usable past” to later Leftists who
entered the field of children’s literature in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. (“Of Funnybones” 145)

The usable past of the lyrical left reflects the language of Le Sueur’s folktales and speaks directly to her own writing style, which she refused to change to accommodate what she referred to as the “male supremacist” New Masses during the 1930s. “I fought them,” she wrote. “I kept my lyrical style. Sometimes I was almost blacklisted by the left, which often commented on my lyrical style” (Coiner 96).

Since folklore, as Alleen Nilsen explains, draws on the story of the rough and rugged, it seems likely that Le Sueur would draw on the lyrical left, which “wished to preserve rather than tame the child’s ‘uncivilized’ impulses, indeed, to raise questions—even if an ostensibly playful manner—about the deeply held values of civilization itself” (“Of Funnybones” 148). Davy Crockett merges the uncivilized with the rhythm of Le Sueur’s lyrical prose:

> For he was one of the hackers, hunters, swingers of the ax, the builders, tall talkers, long walkers into the sunset, a terror to kings, one of the first-rate men of Wilderness Road, half horse, half alligator, and a sprinkling of steamboat, and such as don’t likely grow anywhere on the face of the universal earth, just about the backbone of America. (4)

Le Sueur defied the patriarchal delusion that peace was a sign of weakness through Johnny Appleseed. He is a friend to all animals, a missionary spreading a message of peace and love, a farmer spreading apple seeds, and a teacher of literacy. Johnny Appleseed is best known as the man who planted and nurtured apple orchards across America, but as Le Sueur reveals, he has the courage to wander through the unexplored wilderness alone and without a gun. He survives harsh winters wearing nothing but a sack, and he walks through the snow in his bare feet. Though he does not fight the Indians who attack a settlement, he runs nearly 30 miles to the
nearest fort to warn the soldiers and gets back in time to watch the battle. He also is an expert lumberjack who meets a young Abraham Lincoln on the wilderness trail of westward expansion and challenges him to a chopping competition that Appleseed wins. “They both took an ax and the chips flew. Johnny’s tree went down first. ‘Say,’ says the tall man, ‘you’re a regular alligator horse. We should go into partnership.’ ‘No,’ Johnny said. ‘I’m a planter of seeds’ ” (54). Johnny Appleseed has an opportunity to start up a lucrative lumber business with Lincoln, but he displays his strength of conviction by turning down the offer, choosing instead to remain a pioneer for the people and plant seeds. Serving the community is his duty.

Le Sueur captures in all the books in her Wilderness Series that one pivotal moment when her protagonists are tempted with an opportunity to get rich and gain individual power, but they choose to stay with the struggle. In other words, these folk heroes do not fight for the people because they were without options. The opportunities presented to them to rise above the people validate their free will to serve instead of rule the people. When a gentleman approaches Congressman Crockett on the street, this folk hero has a chance to earn wealth in real estate by betraying his constituents:

“Now sir, you are too intelligent a man. I can show you how to buy cheap and sell dear. If we can get that land, beg borrow or steal it, we can rent it out for cash money.”

“Over my dead body, you’ll do it,” Davy said.

“I know all the ways to make money and I’m finding out some new ways. How much would you take not to vote on your own Squatter or Indian Bill? We got the land, the titles, the Indians, the squatters, the slaves. Come on our side and you can bring your wife east and dress her in velvet. You can have the life of Riley.”
“But you ain’t got me,” Davy shouted. “I’ll get a streak of lightnin’ and thrash you with it. I’m the yaller blossom o’ the forest. You make my liberty sap rise.” (106-107)

Beyond what Le Sueur captures on the pages in her books, contradictions emerge between the lore of Johnny Appleseed and biographies of Jonathan Chapman. The biographies reveal that he actually was a wealthy businessman who charged six cents for a seedling. However, he did accept cornmeal, old clothes, or a promise to pay in the future from settlers who couldn’t pay, and he used his money for charity rather than for his personal comfort. Though Le Sueur erases this from her book, she does allude to it in this exchange between Johnny Appleseed and a storekeeper after he plants his seeds and promises to return in a year once settlers move in and build a town. “‘Shall I sell them the trees?’ asked the storekeeper, who was always thinking of selling something. ‘Sell them or not,’ Johnny Appleseed said, ‘but see that they all have apple trees’ ” (22). Knowing that the storekeeper is always thinking of selling something, by giving him the option to sell the trees or not, Johnny Appleseed can expect to return and collect the money and promissory notes for those trees. I would argue that Le Sueur drops this hint to indicate that she is not against earning a living. She opposes rich capitalists profiting on the hard work of wage earners. Appleseed rejects the bourgeois class by choosing to wear rags and fully immerse himself in the working class.

In contrast to Johnny Appleseed is the complex, contradictory Davy Crockett, an Indian killer who fights for the Indians, and a bear killer whom the bears respect. He even battles contradiction within himself about his final westward journey, which he knows will lead to his death at the Alamo. “I am now on my journey to leave my home, my neighbors, friends, and country for a strange land. I don’t know the right of it, blast my corn shucking soul” (129). He is
drawn to the fight because it is for his children and the oppressed who are losing their land.

Because he has a corn shucking soul he is one of the people.

I would also argue that each of these folk heroes represents one of two approaches to the approaching revolution. Crockett represents that agitator side. He is vulgar; he conquers; and he kills. Crockett, who is martyred in battle fighting at the Alamo, represents the masculine side of the fight:

I’m full when my people fill me. I’m strong when you’re touchin’ me. I’m half horse and half alligator and a little touch of snapping turtle and mostly I’m you. I can hold a buffalo out to drink, put a rifle bullet through the moon, fight fistifferously, kick hossiferously, or bite catifferously, and I can fight anyone in beaver hats and silk stockings who wants to take our land away from us by seizure or eight percent interest. (92)

By contrast, Johnny Appleseed proves that a man can take a feminist approach by fighting a peaceful revolution for a socialist society. Appleseed is an artist who nurtures his apples and in effect paints the landscape with his apple blossom trees. The narrator’s grandmother reports that “Sometimes in the forest the Indians would see him sitting in a clearing with the noses of deer on his knees and he would be telling them that all men are brothers and should live together in the forest in peace” (28). Appleseed has such a deep regard for all life that he counts among the people he serves even the smallest insect. “Once in the summer a mosquito flew into his fire and he put the fire out saying to the mosquito, ‘God forbid that I should build a fire for my comfort and that it should be the means of destroying any of his creatures’ ” (30). It is important to note that even though Johnny Appleseed lives to an old age, he achieves legendary heroic status just as Crockett does.
Though he is at times violent, vulgar, and a braggart, Johnny Appleseed’s counterpart in this unlikely pair stands for the same principles and commitment to the people. In reality, he also is a man of peace in Le Sueur’s account. Though Davy Crockett is an Indian killer, Le Sueur tells how he sneaks off to talk to the Indians to get to the truth of their plight and later comes to their defense by opposing President Jackson’s Indian Removal Bill. Reflecting on his life, Crockett contradicts the pleasure he experienced as a hunter when he expresses his regrets about mistreating the earth by comparing his actions to the capitalists he opposes. Crockett, cautions his sons—and the readers—not to make the same mistakes:

I’ve seen men making a mighty dollar, with codfish, timber and rum; I’ve seen hunting parsons and scarlet-robed judges, and fat men in six-horse gilt carriages. I’ve seen land offices and law courts run elections. I’ve seen Negro and indentured white slaves, without learning, some without vote. You can see a mighty lot just walkin’ the Wilderness Road, in moccasin or buckskin.

I’ve wasted some myself, killin’ more animals than I could eat. Left their carcasses to the buzzards, helped poor the land and the forest, too. (123-124)

By embracing contradiction, both in history and within her characters, Le Sueur demonstrates that in striving for a socialist society she is not promising utopia on earth. There is good and bad in all creatures and things. I would argue that she returns to her own usable past growing up with a preacher father by connecting contradiction to redemption. It is in recognizing the contradictions within himself that allows Crockett to correct his mistakes through his children by teaching the next generation how to avoid the traps of capitalism.

Le Sueur demonstrates this marriage of contradiction and redemption even more dramatically in her interpretation of Slickerty Sam Patch Thimblerig Skippoweth the Peddler.
Mickenberg describes Sam Patch as “the real villain of this episode” and the “symbolic capitalist figure” (“Coonskin Cap” 70), while Irwin Shapiro in the preface to his story, Yankee Thunder: The Legendary Life of Davy Crockett, writes that the Peddler represents “the shady capitalist who, for Cold War Communists and fellow travelers, seemed to be a fascist prototype” (“Coonskin Cap” 67). Mickenberg argues that Le Sueur, in erasing Crockett’s racism, targeted his scorn toward the Peddler and writes, “In the case of both Le Sueur and someone like Shapiro, the move to make Sam Patch the villain of the story is at the crux of why I would call Le Sueur’s version of the Crockett legend ‘radical’” (“Coonskin Cap” 68). I disagree and would argue that what makes Le Sueur’s version of the Crockett legend radical is that Sam Patch is not the true villain but rather a victim taken in by the false glamour of capitalism. Le Sueur clearly designates Sam Patch as the anti-hero who appears in the story nine times in different disguises and a variety of names to lie and cheat, not only for his own personal gain, but because he is so contemptible that he derives pleasure and satisfaction from instilling pain on the oppressed.

During his first encounter with Crockett’s family on Christmas Eve when they are waiting for Crockett to return from a hunt, the Peddler fabricates a story, for no apparent reason, reporting that Crockett is dead. That same night he cheats Crockett’s sons after losing a bet by leaving them a painted wooden ham for their Christmas dinner. Later, Crockett explains how “That infarnal Peddler had been sitting right there at the treaty in the disguise of an Indian, getting them to sign away their lands forever” (73). When newly elected Congressman Crockett visits President Jackson in the White House, he guesses that the man advising the president, who rises without turning his face, and leaves the room is Slickerty Sam. It is soon after this meeting that the president introduces his Indian Removal Bill. During a tour of Philadelphia, the disguise of
the gentleman who offers to make Crockett rich if he cheats his constituents, slips away, revealing the “cock-eyes of the Peddler looking at him” (107).

Le Sueur builds a repetition of the Peddler’s treachery for more than a hundred pages to clearly establish how entrenched in the evils of capitalism he has become. However, neither Mickenberg nor Shapiro mentions the final chapter when Crockett encounters the Peddler one more time on his way to the Alamo. Crockett’s diary reveals that “he met up with a peculiar fellow, named Thimbelrig, who sat all day with three thimbles and a pea, looking mighty like the Peddler, but who came along to the Alamo giving up his bad ways, and fighting with Davy for freedom” (135). This contradiction Le Sueur builds into the Peddler’s character reveals that it is possible for even the most contemptible capitalist to abandon that lifestyle and find redemption in serving the people. The Peddler proves his love for the people and his commitment to Crockett by forfeiting his life at the Alamo. The narrator’s grandmother reports Davy fell on the last parapet “with Thimbelrig at his feet” (147). The message of hope here is that if a capitalist as wretched as the Peddler can abandon the bourgeois lifestyle and join the revolution, anyone can.

Though Crockett and Appleseed both die, Le Sueur’s children’s books do not end with the death of the folk heroes. According to Le Sueur, death represents the beginning of a new chapter in the struggle. Finality represents the masculine concept of linear time, the end of life, and the end of the fight, leaving the working class in despair. Le Sueur views time as circular, which means that folk heroes’ physical bodies may perish, but their true life source—their vision, their adventures, the legend and their message of hope for one day attaining a truly democratic socialist society live on in their spirit and in the new generation of children:

When one thing comes another thing goes....

The Little Brother of the Beasts had to go.
The Indians had to go, too.

But in a hundred thousand miles north and south, east and west, the apple trees grew, raising their tide of blossoms in the spring, dropping their golden apples in the fall. (Little Brother 66)

Johnny Appleseed’s legacy lives in his children—the apple trees that populate the nation.

Indians, like the trees are deeply rooted in the earth of American society. The corn they planted and the herbs they grew continue to feed and heal generations, while their descendents, as Le Sueur tells her readers in Sparrow Hawk, continue to tell their ancestors’ stories.

Le Sueur ends the story of Davy Crockett by retelling “one of the loveliest stories of Davy Crockett, told by him most likely, but watered dearly by the springs from the hearts of that Old New Deep Shallow Clear Muddy Straight Crooked river of the People of great grit and whole hearts” (151). It recalls one bitter cold day in January when the Earth froze on its axis and the sun got caught between two cakes of ice. Crockett, who even in death continues to serve his people because “somethin’ must be done or human creation is done for” (152), beats a dead bear “agin” the ice until hot bile pours out of the animal, which he uses to lubricate the axis. Then with one big kick he gets things moving again. This demonstrates that Crockett, in his own vulgar fashion—and Appleseed, in his nurturing fashion—bring an even greater, mythic power to the people of the working class as they continue to spark revolution in death, keeping the message of hope alive.
In his examination of the characteristics of radical children’s literature, Herbert Kohl cites Virginia Hamilton’s *The Planet of Junior Brown* as a classic because:

> It functions on spiritual, personal, political, and social levels. However, these levels are blended into each other, as what seem to be extended metaphors turn out to be realities, while the characters grow into great dignity and strength and a utopian vision of hope emerges from the depths of homelessness, poverty and despair. (75)

If these are Kohl’s prerequisites for radical children’s literature, then Meridel Le Sueur’s *Nancy Hanks of Wilderness Road: A Story of Abraham Lincoln’s Mother*, like Hamilton’s book, functions just as he defines a classic in this genre. I would argue that by bringing together the first four of Kohl’s characteristics in *Nancy Hanks of Wilderness Road*, Le Sueur has taken the CPUSA’s contributions to democracy and its value on the primary family community to biblical proportions. In a journal entry Le Sueur writes, “Isn’t it any wonder people feel religious about the party. It is love, wife, children to us” (Coiner 95). In the story of Nancy Hanks, it becomes evident that all the events of American history (Old Testament) lead up to the birth of Abraham Lincoln (New Testament), the messiah of the Midwest. And all events after his martyrdom at Ford’s Theatre—on Good Friday, April 14, 1865—look back upon his teachings as a source of strength and a vision of hope.
For Le Sueur, the impact of these events is not confined to the United States or to the
nineteenth century; it is global. Lincoln is a universal working-class hero. In Le Sueur’s
manuscript Zapata, Timoteo, a young Aztec Indian, and the other villagers in Mexico who lose
their land to the hacendados in 1911, continue to draw strength from Lincoln. Looking for
courage, Timoteo invokes the spirit of Lincoln and Juarez, a Mexican president of the people
descended from Indians. “I will be like Juarez and Señor Lincoln that he liked so much—strong
and wise so nobody can move me to evil” (8). Timoteo’s declaration tells the reader Lincoln is a
hero among heroes.

When the reader first meets Nancy Hanks, she is a “high singin’, dancin’ woman,
sometimes the talk of the town” (5-6), but this child-adult matures to assume her role as the wife
and mother of the “holy family” of Wilderness Road. It is advent in the United States and
slaves—both black and white—are preparing for the coming of their savior. I include whites here
because in Le Sueur’s versions of their stories, Davy Crockett and young Abe Lincoln, who are
forced into indentured servitude by their fathers, empathize with the slaves. Davy recalls hiring
out to work out his father’s thirty-six-dollar debt so his father would “discharge me from my
service and I might go free…. I could have gone free, but a Quaker farmer told me he held a note
for forty dollars for my father, so I stayed there six months and worked this out” (29). For
Lincoln, the narrator explains that “by law his pa had him locked there till he was twenty-one,
for every son by law had to help his father till he was of age to pay back for his boring (The
River Road 6). I would argue that by using the words “free” and “locked up,” Le Sueur connects
the plight of the working class to slavery, and tells that there is a financial penalty to pay for
being born. The working class enters into this capitalistic society already in debt. Because Davy
chooses to waive his opportunity to go free to help his father out of debt, there is another message here about loyalty and family.

Le Sueur hints that this preparation for Lincoln extends to the Indians. Because Nancy Hanks’ maiden name is Sparrow, Le Sueur alludes to Hanks’ relationship to Sparrow Hawk. We learn that Hanks is not just pregnant with Abraham Lincoln; she is pregnant with hope. Unlike the New Testament though, which is separated into four firsthand gospel accounts of the life of Christ by male writers, Le Sueur reports on the life of Nancy Hanks and a sketch of young Abe Lincoln’s life in two books that report on his call to serve the nation’s working class. The story of Nancy Hanks is a firsthand account by the narrator’s grandmother and by Hanks’ cousin, Dennis Hanks, while the second is told by the third-person omniscient narrator.

By allowing the narrator’s grandmother, who served as Nancy Hanks’ midwife, and her cousin Dennis, to bicker over whose account of the life of Lincoln’s mother is accurate, Le Sueur has crafted a work of radical literature that demands an active read. There are even conflicts identifying Dennis Hanks, who on some pages is referred to as Nancy’s cousin, and on others her nephew. It becomes the reader’s responsibility to determine, from their disagreements, which often escalate to shouting matches, whose version of the story to believe. Constance Coiner writes, “clearly, Le Sueur is searching for forms that will permit heteroglossia, forms that will allow a multiplicity of voices to speak for themselves in the recognition that all selves are interdependent” (113). A better circumstance is that the contradictions will re-teach the passive reader to become an active, more communal reader by seeking out other sources and asking more questions. Giving voice to the narrator’s grandmother and to Dennis enabled Le Sueur to employ reportage, a journalistic convention the CPUSA promoted. During the Great Depression,
attempted to detail conditions from the perspective of those most acutely suffering
them—the hungry, unemployed, and homeless. Reportage intended to make the reader
“experience” the event recorded. This “three-dimensional reporting” eschews the
presumed objectivity of traditional journalism. (Coiner 28-29)

Julia Mickenberg explains that the narrator’s grandmother is both “a carrier of tradition and, on
occasion, someone who actually figures into the story” (72). On the surface, Le Sueur’s account
of Hanks is objective, but a second look reveals that her objectivity is a deception. Le Sueur
covertly leads the reader toward her agenda. For instance, she gives the narrator’s grandmother
the stronger, more definite voice. “My grandmother was never satisfied with the telling of this
period in the life of Nancy Hanks by her nephew Dennis Hanks. ‘But what can a man know?’ my
grandmother would ask bitterly” (15). The narrator’s grandmother also is quick to point out that,
like John the Baptist, Dennis had an opportunity to shine as a prophet but failed. John the Baptist
said of his cousin Jesus, “I am just baptizing with water. But someone more powerful is going to
come, and I am not good enough even to untie his sandals” (Luke 3:10-16). The narrator’s
grandmother says:

“In the biggest moment of your life, Dennis Hanks, when you might have been a
prophet of the first water you turned out to be a clown.”

And he had to admit it. History had made a bitter taste on his tongue for when he had
looked on the new young Abe that first day of his birth, tossed him up, he had said to
Nancy, the new mother, “Aunt, he’ll never amount to much.” And all his life he had to
find the bitter taste of that laughing prophecy on his tongue.” (34)

In yet further deception of objectivity, Le Sueur directs her sources to agree on episodes
that illuminate her own, and the CPUSA’s, fundamental values and beliefs. Neither the narrator’s
grandmother nor Dennis can deny that Nancy Hanks is a powerful woman who can step in and out of traditional gender roles. She is a “working woman, a walking woman and a digging woman” (19). Beyond that, she does not wait for a man to choose her. Whomever she marries, it will be her decision. Hanks “wondered who she would choose” (18), and pondering possible husbands, sings, “Come my love and go with me. And I will take good care of thee (my emphasis)” (19). Abe’s parents form a unified front and pass on to their son their shared hatred “for any man lording over another man,” but in her home she has the final word. Nancy unilaterally names her son, and she is his first teacher. Although Tom finds no use in education and wants to pull Abe out of the classroom, Hanks wins the argument. The narrator’s grandmother says, “That thin little willow of a Nancy Hanks turned out to be steel aimin’ to get an eddication for her Abe” (48).

Le Sueur’s wrote about powerful female characters who countered the patriarchal Communist utopian future that did not take gender into account. Barbara Foley writes:

Women writers stand out in the discourse of the 1930s left not because they had a different “line”—unformulated or not—on the relation of gender to class or because they “subverted” Marxist orthodoxy, but because they contemplated questions of cultural revolution more fully as a group than did their male colleagues. The female literary radicals raised a series of considerations about consciousness and selfhood that invited their readers to move beyond familiar bourgeois ideological paradigms. (246)

Working class women in this country were doubly oppressed as a group, which the Communist Party blamed on the development of private property. According to German social philosopher and revolutionary Friedrich Engels, “the modern family is founded on the open or concealed domestic slavery of the wife…. Within the family he [the husband] is the bourgeois and the wife
represents the proletariat" (Mishler 17). Communists pointed a finger at capitalism for removing women from their role as mother, which Le Sueur believed was natural for all women. However, prior to the Popular Front, it also was the Communist Party that frowned on Party women having babies because full-time activists would become ineffective. Le Sueur recalled that Peggy Dennis, wife of party leader Eugene Dennis, underwent “several abortions when children would have interfered with her and her husband’s political work, and she knew of other women who reluctantly submitted to abortions on orders from the CP leadership” (Coiner 78). Le Sueur’s female characters are not trapped in their gender roles because of her inability to break through stereotypes. It was the Party’s shortsightedness that prompted Le Sueur to embrace the traditional roles of women and to privilege them as the gender that would give birth to and raise a new generation of revolutionaries. Le Sueur said the “primal relationship between mother and child is the only communality left in capitalist society” (Coiner 77). Her female characters move freely in and out of traditional gender roles, but they never abandon, and in fact they embrace, their role as mother.

Alleen Pace Nilsen explains that gender roles were established in folktales, which are set several hundred, or even thousand, years ago when most activity required brute strength. “Hence it was by necessity that the men were the doers and the women were the on-lookers” (925). However, “the theme of many folktales is the triumph of the small and the weak through cleverness or perseverance. This was often a female” (926). Nilsen noticed that literary women and girls are often token characters, unobtrusive, and pictured looking out at the action. “They stand in doorways...they look through windows...and they sit on the porch in rocking chairs.” Le Sueur goes on to point out that the boys are the doers and the girls the on-lookers, and even worse, they are invisible. She predicts that girls might have problems in finding their own
identity. Before joining the collective women and girls need to “successfully function as individuals” (919). Nilsen writes, “I am not saying that we should go about de-emphasizing the traditional female roles, but I am saying that we need to provide dozens or even hundreds of models for young girls so that there is room for selection and individual differences” (921). For instance, according to Davy Crockett, the narrator’s grandmother exhibits legendary qualities that even exceed the machinery of the industrial age:

She’s a Granny, an all-screamin’ glorious gal, can jump a seven rail fence backwards, dance a hole through a double oak floor, spin more wool than one of your steam mills, and smoke up a ton of Kentucky weed. She can crack walnuts for her great-grandchildren with her front teeth, and laugh a horse blind. She can cut down a gum tree ten feet round, and steer it across Salt River with her apron for a sail and her left leg for a rudder!

(Chanticleer 56-57)

The narrator in Little Brother of the Wilderness also mentions that “almost everyone obeyed my Grandmother” (41).

On the surface it may appear that Le Sueur is unable to liberate her powerful female characters from their traditional gender roles, however, those roles, combined with their strength and independence, empower them to function as both mother and father. In other words, Le Sueur’s women assume these traditional gender roles, but she also allows them to step out. Although Crockett’s wife, Polly Ann Whirlwind, stays home with the children while he leaves to serve the people, she serves the family—the primary community from which all society grows. Yet she also hunts and fells trees, and she guides Crockett in making his life decisions. Le Sueur’s female characters, I would argue, do not need the male figures to take care of them, rather, they take care of the males. This leftist version of Polly and Davy contradicts Disney’s
message to girls and boys that men and women are locked into gender roles. In Disney’s 1954 movie “Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier,” Polly is a one-dimensional character who serves only as window dressing. She is portrayed as the homogenized June Cleaver-type character of the frontier, waiting patiently by the door in an apron to greet her husband who is absent from the family.

What is disappointing in Nancy Hanks of Wilderness Road is that Nancy Hanks contributes to the problems in allowing women to find their own identity. After she gives birth to Sarah, Lincoln’s older sister, Hanks is still lonely despite the arrival of her daughter. If this and her subsequent book, The River Road: A Story of Abraham Lincoln, are Le Sueur’s primary texts from which she attempts to stir her readers toward a genderless society, this apparent disregard for Nancy Hanks’ daughter represents a flaw in her plea for gender equity. Le Sueur, who tells the story of Nancy Hanks because “there are many tales told about famous men but no one sings about the women,” (Nancy Hanks 3), who amassed cartons of books, poems, essays, articles and journals singing praises of women, who was nearly blacklisted from the CPUSA for criticizing its patriarchal politics, contradicts her own censure of androcentrism. After Nancy Hanks marries Tom Lincoln, she waits now and hopes “for a child who would be a friend to her in the wilderness” (28), but when Sarah is born, Hanks knows:

Sarah was not the one, for she was a child with no beyond in her, who saw only the spring and the deer, and the pot on the fire, and the little rabbits looking from the thorn thicket. To her they were just what they seemed to be and there was nothing beyond or yonder or further. Sarah was not the one. (33)

Le Sueur falls into the trap of male hero worship by privileging the son who is not even born yet. She essentially tells her readers that if the “vision” is not instinctive in a child it will never come,
and therefore that child—a daughter—is disposable. Unlike Sparrow Hawk’s father, who shares his vision with his son, Davy Crockett, who shares his vision with his sons and daughters, and Johnny Appleseed, who shares his vision with children across the nation, Hanks shirks her responsibility as a parent and mentor by withholding her vision from her daughter. The implications for Sarah in this book are at odds with what Le Sueur has to say about the indispensable place of women in history by allowing Abe to achieve hero status while making Sarah the loser. After Abe is born, Sarah fades in and out of the story. Hanks “taught Abe his ABC’s from an old Webster spelling book she got” (43-44), but she fails to mention Sarah. The illustration that accompanies the passage depicting Lincoln and his mother reading the book together exaggerates the absence of Sarah because she literally is erased from the picture.

A pivotal moment in the story is the coming of Abraham Lincoln. In a scene Le Sueur conjures up to reflect the manger in Bethlehem, Abe is born “in an open cabin on a bed of corn husks nailed to a log pole wall” (37-38). Instead of cows and sheep, the illustration of this Midwestern nativity scene depicts a deer poking its head in a window as the Lincoln family pays homage to the child savior. Meanwhile, all the “wrens and the deer in the cold winds outside, with no better bed than the new baby had, murmured in the wilderness dark—’Little old Abe—Abe—Abe Lincoln...’ ” (41). Dennis Hanks’ less than flattering description of the infant Abe Lincoln reinforces the leftist message that Lincoln, a legendary hero of the working class, is by birth, just an ordinary unattractive baby born into that class:

Dennis said an awful squall came from the baby in the yellow petticoat and he picked up the bundle and saw the cherry pulp face and the cold wrinkled skin and didn’t think much of what he saw and it was then he tasted the bitter words, for he cried, “Take him Aunt, he’ll never come to much!” (38)
Though Lincoln emerges as a hero, he does not rise above his class, because he, like the other American folk heroes of the people, becomes the voice of the people.

I would argue that Le Sueur as a feminist does not imply that women would prefer a world devoid of men, nor does she call on women to revolt. She values an equal partnership between father and mother in raising Reds. Le Sueur gives folk hero Abe Lincoln attributes from both his parents and from Johnny Appleseed and Davy Crockett as well. From his parents who are "always looking, looking yonder" (27), he inherits his vision and his humanity. He learns that neither of his parents "liked for anyone of any color to be a slave" (26), and both parents claim credit for Abe's fighting spirit. After he punches the other boys "mightily" for calling him names, "Nancy smiled to see the fight in Abe and when she told Tom he said, 'the old Lincoln fight,' and she said to herself, 'the old Fight of the Hanks!' " (44-45) Abe takes from Tom his size and his ability to swing an axe and spin a yarn, which later charms even his enemies. Abe acquires his greatest strength, the hallmark of all heroes of the working class—compassion—from Hanks, his first teacher. Hanks' vision of greatness for her son empowers her to override Tom's decision to keep Abe out of school. On the surface it appears that Tom is attempting to rob his children of their education, but in reality, he is suspicious of American education's underlying motives:

Communists believed that the school represented interests opposed to those of the working class; its job was to inculcate children with conservative values and to teach them to support the status quo. As The Child of the Worker expressed it: "What is the character of the present day school? It is an institution of the ruling classes for the poisoning of the working-class children, an institution for the training of servile and submissive wage slaves, a nursery for future scabs and white guards. (Mishler 25)
However, turning again to the Fabian society, Hanks values education because it will develop her son’s intellect and reasoning skills that will enable him to lead the people.

Hanks “saw soon that she had taught him everything she knew and now he had to go further, beyond, yonder, where she would never go” (65). She had one more lesson in compassion to teach her son—not in words but in deeds. When the “dread ‘milk sick’ ” (67) infects their village, Hanks nurses a hunter’s wife “and the fever got her” (67). She achieves folk hero status because she sacrifices her own life in service of her people. As is the trademark of folk tales, Le Sueur does not end this story in death. She reports through her grandmother that Hanks’ legend and myth are born when:

people in Kentucky and Indiana said, and the hunters from the forest said it, and the plowmen from the fields, and women looking up from drawing water at the well said that they would often see a sweet young woman come up to them and she would ask, “Have you seen my son, Abe? How did Abe do? Did he get some larin’?” They saw her, they said, asking questions, laughing, lonesome like, wandering in the locust woods, long gone now, wandering when the big white blossoms hang heavy and smell sweet. (70)

Hanks’ death is not the end but part of the continuation of Le Sueur’s definition of circular time that never ends. Her spirit lives on in Abe. However, Hanks never realizes her own dream. She dies before she can witness how the values, education, sensitivity, and fighting spirit she ingrained in her son led him from Wilderness Road to the White House. According to Coiner, “The harsh reality of the world in which the woman lives contrasts sharply to the world of which she dreams, a world ‘she will never realize’ ” (100). Le Sueur’s story acknowledges that compassion and intellect go hand-in-hand. An egalitarian society can only exist when both
are carefully cultivated in a leader. However, it also is important to acknowledge that the qualities of woman and man must coexist as well, and that is the song of Nancy Hanks.
Chapter 4: 
Was Lincoln a Lefty?

The “Lincoln legend” is a sure and firm rock, upon which we stand as solidly as our fathers did, and upon which our children will stand too. It is an old homily—yet a true one—that in a free state when the people need a leader they will find him, and that he will come from the people with the strength of the people behind him.

—Howard Fast (10)

In River Road: A Story of Abraham Lincoln, a sequel to Nancy Hanks of Wilderness Road: A Story of Abraham Lincoln’s Mother, Meridel Le Sueur departs from her reportage style. The narrator’s grandmother, who up to this point had told Lincoln’s story, disappears, allowing young Abe Lincoln to tell his own story. This shift in voice allows the reader to explore Abe’s thoughts, share his observations, empathize with his loneliness, and question the immorality of slavery and class distinction right along with him.

Anticipating that readers, knowing Lincoln’s fate at Ford’s Theatre, might approach the novel with a preconceived notion of defeat in death, Le Sueur addresses the issue of death several times in the story. Abe does not fear physical death because his life is connected to a much larger struggle that leads to immortality, not only for himself, but for all the people:

He knew a man who becomes part of his people, of animals, land, cannot be destroyed. Such a man, because he is not only himself and his own climbing or getting ahead, has in him the sorrow and tenderness, the tough fiber and sinew, the swing of the axe, the strength of the blacksmith, and the endurance of the mother. To destroy such a man or his memory you would have to destroy all the animals, erode all the land, turn back all the rivers, and the everlasting memory of the struggles of his people which could not be destroyed. (River Road 136-137)
Only those who strive for individual success by climbing over the people and trampling Mother Earth need to fear death.

Le Sueur offers as evidence of the people’s power over death and the “endurance of the mother,” Nancy Hanks has already died in the service of the people, but her spirit that lives on in her son continues to thrive beyond Nancy Hanks of Wilderness Road. Le Sueur valued the progressive family as the most fundamental community, and from that community, Abe develops a thirst for education, compassion for all human life, courage, and fighting spirit. Coiner writes, “Le Sueur’s commitment to a ‘communal’ sensibility derived partly from her living so passionately in relation to her children: ‘I cannot help but feel the superiority of this kind of collective feeling to anything I feel myself alone.’ Le Sueur longed to extend the love she felt for her children to all humanity” (80). That communal sensibility prompts young Lincoln to begin questioning a government that is not serving the people and his need to act takes root:

I got to figure why some say, “You toil and earn bread and I’ll eat it.” We got this here not from the mouth of a king but the same tyrannical principle, an excuse for one race enslaving another race. I got to think out what’s the common right of humanity and what’s the right of kings. (53)

This riddle of humanity and accountability, which eighteen-year-old Abe is compelled to resolve, haunts him throughout the book. He begins to link the plight of workers who toil and earn bread while someone else eats it, to slavery. Abe’s birth and his journey down the river that crystallizes the mission he will undertake as a man take on Biblical proportions. The spiritual imagery in Nancy Hanks, which recounts the strong connection between Nancy and Abe continues in River Road. This story is an account of eighteen-year-old Abe’s three-month journey into the wilderness before he begins a life of service for the people, which parallels
Christ’s journey. Jesus wanders into the desert while Abe floats down the Mississippi River.

Both emerge victorious over hardship and temptation, ready to accept their ministries in life. Abe carries with him down the Mississippi, “wrapped in a buckskin against the weather—a Bible, the Parson Weems Book on George Washington that cost him three days’ work, and Aesop’s Fables” (72). These books represent those elements that define Lincoln. He is a politician, a spiritual man, and a storyteller. Mickenberg writes that the image of Lincoln as a savior of the working class transcended Le Sueur’s books:

All ends of the political spectrum tried to claim Lincoln as their own. Under the Browder-led Popular Front, Lincoln, Lenin, and Washington were held as the secular trinity of twentieth-century Americanism, but Lincoln was the true “son of the working class,” the “genuine revolutionary” who Marx himself had praised long before Earl Browder.

(“Communist in a Coonskin Cap” 74)

The spirit of Nancy Hanks fuels Abe’s passion to serve the working class and demonstrates that his compassion for the oppressed takes precedence over his own life. When Dennis Hanks asks, “You gonna carry a gun? Suppose you get kilt?” Lincoln responds, “I ain’t got a gun. If I git killed, I can’t die but oncet” (53). By quoting Lincoln phonetically Le Sueur connects Abe to the working class for which he seeks equality. Abe’s response also speaks to the CPUSA’s message of collective battles. For Le Sueur, death does not represent finality. The collective will continue the struggle. According to Herbert Kohl, “collective battles for equity and justice are larger than individual lives, the cause still calls its participants. It does not lose its force with the death of one leader, no matter how central that figure is to the struggle” (73).

Like Abe, Mikey’s ties to his mother lead to deeper connections to his own class:

“Mother! Momma! I am still bound to you by the cords of birth. I cannot forget you. I must
remain faithful to the poor because I cannot be faithless to you! I believe in the poor because I have known you. The world must be gracious for the poor! Momma, you taught me that!” (158).

According to Julia Mickenberg, River Road, like Le Sueur’s other books, received favorable reviews and gained attention beyond “the traditional left-wing audience for whom she intended to write.” Le Sueur was scheduled to appear on an NBC radio program, “Carnival of Books” until the show’s producer canceled her appearance after the Milwaukee Sentinel ran two controversial articles and an editorial about the book. One headline read, “New Book on Lincoln Has Pink-Tinged pages” (“Communist in a Coonskin Cap” 75). I would argue that in her final and most controversial book in the series, Le Sueur overtly reveals to her readers the un-American tenets of capitalism and of slavery. For Abe, the south resembles what America’s forefathers fought. “At the wharves he saw gentlemen and ladies and their black servants. It seemed more like a European life he had heard men tell of, where men were serfs and there were rulers and kings” (103). Abe asserts that the “rich leisure of a few” were un-American because “Their grandfathers had not fought at Kings Mountain, had they? Or at Valley Forge. Had they?” (130). Lincoln is not the only American folk hero who turns the accusatory rhetoric of the McCarthyist witch hunters back onto themselves. While attending a dinner on a tour of Philadelphia, Davy Crockett points out that landowners are, in reality, European invaders who infiltrated this country and are the threat to American democracy. Davy admonishes the northern “Gentlemen” who are mocking him and the people when he raises his glass and says, “I make a toast to you Whigs and Tories. You have been fought by my own grandfather and my son after me will fight you.... May the bones of tyrants and kings serve in hell to roast the souls of Tories and Whigs, if it turns out they have souls!” (Chanticleer 114-115). Young Abe warns that “If men are to be property, then pretty soon all men will go back to being property like they was in
the old country, and we'll be back whar we started from” (104-105). In other words, Lincoln ties the plight of the slaves to the white working class wage earners, and he declares that returning to a foreign European society where men are property means his family members who gave up their lives in the Revolutionary War would have died in vain.

Though Le Sueur portrays Lincoln as a folk hero of biblical proportion, she also reminds her young readers, in the first sentence of River Road, that he is still a boy, who through his growing pains embodies the childhood struggles of the working class. Clara Ingram Judson, who wrote another biography of Abraham Lincoln for young readers in 1950, “emphasizes that Lincoln's poverty was itself a myth” (“Communist in a Coonskin Cap” 79). However, the measurement she uses to support her assertion is weak. She says, “People feel ‘rich’ or ‘poor’ in comparison to their neighbors. The Lincolns were comfortable enough according to the standards around Knob Creek” (79). Using that logic we could argue that a family living in a ghetto below the poverty level is comfortable enough according to the standards of that slum.

Like Le Sueur, Mike Gold also turns to the religion of the Communist in Jews Without Money. Mikey, an American-born boy of Jewish immigrant parents, endures the disappointment of several false messiahs including one he fabricates. His messiah is one who “would look like Buffalo Bill, and who could annihilate our enemies” (191). But in the youth of his adulthood, when his social conscience and religion finally come to terms with one another, Mikey finds his true messiah, which he reveals in a prayer:

O workers’ Revolution, you brought hope to me, a lonely, suicidal boy. You are the True Messiah. You will destroy the East Side when you come, and build there a garden for the human spirit. O Revolution, that forced me to think, to struggle and to live. O great beginning!” (309)
The subversive child is not a literary device fabricated by leftist authors. Don Latham points out that “Just as adults did, children negotiated, protested, and rebelled against unfair working conditions and challenged dominant authority and institutions” (3). For instance, according to scholar Susan Campbell Bartoletti, children played a critical role in bringing about child labor laws in the early 1900s. Meanwhile, Herbert Kohl discovered in a Boston graveyard alongside the remains of Crispus Attucks and Samuel Adams, Christopher Snider, who was killed at age twelve. According to a plaque on the grave, he was the “innocent first victim in the struggle between the colonists and the crown which resulted in Independence” (57). Kohl questions whether Snider was merely a victim caught in the crossfire or one of the revolutionaries pelting the British soldiers with snowballs they made by packing snow around rocks. Kohl also points out that during the Civil Rights Movement, demonstrations in Montgomery, Alabama were initiated by children as young as eight years old. “Many historical accounts,” he writes, “attribute these acts to the leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr., but in fact, he supported the children’s demonstrations only after the children had already been out on the street” (58).

In a capitalist or fascist society children are forced to take on adult responsibilities, so they have the ability to function between both worlds. However, the adults in these stories, oppressed by bosses, landlords, and soldiers, have forfeited their independence. They are treated, and often act, like children. Latham writes, “such an environment tends to blur the distinctions between children and adults” (Latham 5). Children protect themselves in what he describes as calling on the resources of the “inner parent.” At seventeen years old, “Abe is a tall one, between man and boy…. Planting time would come, and by law his pa had him locked there till he was twenty-one, for every son by law had to help his father till he was of age to pay back for his
homing” (5-6). This moment in the text brings to the forefront the plight of working-class parents, in this instance, a single father. According to a column by Slava Dunn titled “Parent Problems” in a 1936 edition of The Worker, Dunn claims that:

often a parent who has a strong sense of inferiority takes it out on their children by bossing them, since this is his only way to feel important and superior to others. Such a parent needs help so that he can realize his own good points. He needs a boost from his mate or from some friend. (“Educating Dissent” 169)

Tom Lincoln embodies Dunn’s claim after the death of Nancy Hanks. He does more than boss young Abe; he humiliates him. Tom’s inferiority and his need for help nearly keep Abe from venturing out to hunt his vision. Beyond his belief that the school represented interests opposed to those of the working class, Abe’s father was “agin too much eddication” because “He thought it cut no wood, carried no water, shot no turkeys, ran no mill” (Nancy Hanks 47-48). However, Tom does value learning to some extent because he is not completely “agin eddication,” he is “agin too much eddication.” When Tom meets Nancy Hanks, he is a man of moral fiber, a worker, and a radical who turns down a paying job finding escaped slaves and “bringing them back from freedom to slavery” because Tom, “a free man, didn’t like for anyone of any color to be a slave” (Nancy Hanks 26). Like Nancy, he is a “wanderer.” In River Road, Tom slides and takes on all the traits he despises in Nancy Hanks. Without the compassion of his wife to guide him, Tom becomes the oppressor of his family and loses his vision. Tom physically abuses Abe and robs the boy of his dignity. While Abe is sitting on the rail fence asking questions of a bearded man passing by in a caravan, “his pa,” comes up from behind and knocks him off the fence. Tom’s treatment of Abe threatens the boy’s humanity that his mother instilled in him because we learn that Abe, who describes himself as an “indentured slave to my pa until I’m
twenty-one” (39) “hated his father” (7). This struggle and hatred later helps Abe empathize with the plight of the slaves.

When seven runaway slaves attack and almost kill Abe, Le Sueur tells the reader that he “knew this was a different kind of fight than he had ever fought before. This is a pivotal moment in the story. These men wanted to kill him, not for food, but because they hated him, with a bitter, terrible hatred” (121). We also learn that although Abe returns the hate during the fight, he begins to ask questions after he breaks free:

“We were almost killed, not by men merely trying to rob us, but by something which gripped us both in a terrible force. I thought we were going to kill each other. I wanted to kill him.... I am not his master, his enslaver. Why did he hate me?” After winning a good fight you usually felt splendid, but Abe felt as if something had been taken from him he could not name—as if he had been in some nightmare... Abe leaned over the raft edge and was violently sick; and the scar he would wear all his life opened again and bled.

(124-25)

This fight ends in a violent catharsis that reveals for Abe the basis of hatred. Had he focused on the “I,” on self-preservation without question, Abe could easily have gone over to the other side, especially when his companion Allen Gentry attempts to convince him that “They’re not men.” But it is his mother’s spirit, her legacy, that allows Abe to look beyond the moment, to expel the hate, which he acknowledges, will kill them both, and to question why the slaves so passionately hate him when he is not even a slave owner. Kohl writes, “Orwell reminded us, radical vision must be informed by a deep humanity that has a high regard for the individual as well as the society” (93). He comes to the conclusion that doing nothing makes him just as guilty as
supporting a country that barters human beings. Now, as a hero of the working class, Lincoln’s question shifts from the why to the action: what can be done to abolish slavery?

This pivotal moment in Abe’s life would never have occurred had he not taken action, which is the practice of anarchism. “Anarchists have always demanded the integration of theory and direct political action” (Schleuning 103). When Lincoln offers his hand to a slave, who leaves him feeling “blunted, diminished as a man, as part of this” (131), he moves from theory to practice. After talking to the slave, Lincoln feels his pain and understands his hatred; he is no longer outside. He can now return home to begin his work for the oppressed.

Abe enters into this story as a radical youth questioning oppression in America. He emerges as “Father Abraham to us all” (140). The message of hope is that the spirit of Abraham Lincoln and his resolve continues to thrive in his children who must continue the struggle toward a democracy that supports an egalitarian communal society.
Conclusion

Meridel Le Sueur’s wilderness book series is a link in American literary and cultural history that a right-of-center government attempted to erase at the onset of the Cold War. She redefined American history through folklore by offering left-of-center stories that rivaled conservative accounts, reversing what Julia Mickenberg describes as the Cold War culture’s “violent and exclusionary rhetoric of American superiority” (Communist in a Coonskin Cap? 59). Le Sueur’s narratives countered government-induced hysteria that domestic Communism was a threat to American society by reclaiming American history for the left, placing themselves at the heart of American traditions and myths, and by allowing American icons Johnny Appleseed, Davy Crockett, and Abraham Lincoln to emerge from the left.

Her powerful female figures contradict the patriarchal hierarchy of the bourgeois family. They demonstrate that in a genderless society, women are not trapped in traditional gender roles. Women are privileged by nature because as mother figures they influence the next generation, and they can just as easily step into the father’s role. They do not need men to take care of them; however, the men need the women to take care of them. Le Sueur looks even further back to the precursor of American folklore to recover the socialist nature of Native Americans through their egalitarian, genderless society.

Le Sueur’s interpretation of American folklore teaches children—adolescent boys in particular—that imagination, diversity, cooperation, and love give rise to the possibility of an egalitarian society. Because of this, Le Sueur found children to be at the center of the Communist writer’s hallmark message of hope.

I would argue that Le Sueur wrote the wilderness book series not only for the children of the Cold War but for future generations as well. Her concept of circular or spiraling time holds
every individual—as part of a collective—accountable for the well-being of the Earth and its future generations. Just as this generation’s actions will determine the lives of its descendents, the actions of Sparrow Hawk, Johnny Appleseed, Nancy Hanks, and Abraham Lincoln directly affect today’s generation. By showing that this nation’s greatest heroes emerged from the people, adhered to socialist ideals, and fought for a classless society, Le Sueur validated the left’s place and duty to continue the revolution in American society. Le Sueur said culture needs to come from the oppressed. Therefore it is imperative that the oppressed people share their own stories:

All the morality and humanism falls into the oppressed, because the oppressor can no longer even pretend to be human. He has to trash humanism—and so the only bearers of the culture of humanism are the oppressed. And if you don’t believe that, forget it. You’re not going to feel anything or see anything or record anything. (Le Sueur in Schleuning 129)

Folklore teaches children that it is possible to determine their own destinies. Le Sueur insists that we examine how we live now and cajoles youth into being participants in this world. With imagination, hope, and action, Le Sueur declares that anything is possible. After all, that is the message of radical literature.
Works Cited


Jack, Kimberly. “Trouble in the Farm Yard: Labor Relations and Politics in Doreen Cronin’s


Jo Hoy, Nancy. “One Orange for Christmas: An Interview with Meridel Le Sueur.”


Latham, Don. “Childhood Under Siege: Lois Lowery’s *Number the Stars* and *The Giver.*”

Le Sueur, Meridel. *Chanticleer of Wilderness Road: A Story of Davy Crockett.*


----. *Nancy Hanks of Wilderness Road: A Story of Abraham Lincoln’s Mother.*


----. “Sitting Around the Volcano.” *Multinational Monitor*. Vol. 5, No. 1:


Moustakis, Christina and Roderick McGillis. “Fairy Tales: Their Staying Power.”


Wald, Alan M. *Writing from the Left: New Essays on Radical Culture and Politics.*

Weems, Mason Locke. “The Cherry Tree.”


