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Leaning Left: Progressive Politics in Sydney Taylor’s All-of-a-Kind Family Series

June Cummins

Known for evoking the past and emphasizing customs and traditions, both American and Jewish, Sydney Taylor (1904–78), author of the five-volume *All-of-a-Kind Family* series, has not been described as a leftist. Indeed, she is hardly seen as a political writer at all, as authors of entries in reference books highlight her “nostalgic charm” (“Sydney Taylor” 4:552) and her recounting of her “early history” and Judaism’s “rich traditions and heritage” (Bloom). At times, she is even seen as reactionary. Editors Alison Cooper-Mullin and Jennifer Marmaduke Coye refuse to include *All-of-a-Kind Family* in their book *Once Upon A Heroine: 450 Books for Girls to Love* because “While for the most part it is a sweet story of five sisters, the culminating chapter is a celebration of the long-awaited birth of a boy. No one can miss the implication that five sisters don’t add up to one son” (xv). Taylor has not been grouped with writers such as Crockett Johnson or Carl Sandburg, who were known leftists and whose personal politics have been traced in their works for children. Yet not only was Taylor a socialist who leaned left for most of the years leading up to her writing of the books, but her progressivism influenced the *All-of-a-Kind Family* series in both overt and subtle ways. As many of Taylor’s readers may have guessed, the *All-of-a-Kind Family* books, which concern a large Jewish family with five daughters and one son living in New York City in the early twentieth century, are semi-autobiographical and only partially fictionalized accounts of Sydney Taylor’s childhood. She is represented by the middle daughter, Sarah. Like Sarah, Taylor was the third of the five daughters.

As a child and teenager in the 1910s, Taylor was not yet a socialist, but in her early adulthood of the 1920s and through the 1940s, as a wife and mother, she first developed and then maintained leftist political sensibilities. Writing

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the *All-of-a-Kind Family* books from the late 1940s to the mid-1970s, Taylor found canny means by which to retrofit her progressive values to memories of her presocialist youth. Dipping only slightly below the surface, we can see results of her artful blending of personal memory and political desire.

Taylor, like all authors who re-create their past through writing, relied, in part, on memory in order to construct her stories. Based on the differences between what we know of her childhood and what she wrote about in her children’s books, we can surmise that she saw herself as having license to fictionalize her account of these memories as much as she liked, particularly given that the stories were billed as fiction rather than as memoir. Today, theorists of autobiography (who study not just “straight” autobiography but memoirs, confessions, “life-writing,” and autobiographical fictions) assert that no author, no matter how pure his or her motives, can ever re-create the past as it actually was because memory is notoriously fickle, not to mention often inaccurate, and always mediated through the present. In recent years the field of autobiographical theory has become what Michael Stanislawski terms an “enormous growth industry” as its practitioners engage both literary analysis and neuroscience in the attempt to understand how authors decide to reconstruct the past (14). Focusing specifically on Jewish writers but with an approach that applies to all autobiographical authors, Stanislawski explains that neuroscientists and cognitive psychologists believe the biochemical processes that constitute memory formation are distinct from those that interpret and make sense of the memories, with encoding and retrieving processes occurring in different parts of the brain. Arguing that “beliefs and emotions” color the encoding process, Stanislawski claims that “current goals and . . . knowledge of the world” also condition the writer’s re-creation of the past (15). “Contemporary neuroscientists’ understanding of memory,” he explains, “supports the literary theorists’ emphasis on the active role of the autobiographer in self-construction” (5). Invested as many of them are in shaping their perceived readers, children’s authors are especially likely to alter or edit their memories of the past when reconstructing that past in order to impart political or ideological values to their readers. Sydney Taylor’s depictions of her past in her children’s books demonstrate this point.

Although not writing about autobiography, historian Hasia Diner also focuses on memory and its uses in telling stories of the past in her book *Lower East Side Memories*. Diner’s central argument is that the Lower East Side, the setting of three of the five *All-of-a-Kind Family* books, became a sacred site for American Jews years after they left the community. In Diner’s view, the Lower East Side was reconstructed by its former residents in order to serve the needs of what she terms the “memory culture” and the formation of a postwar American Jewish national identity. Contending that postwar American Jews needed to invest the Lower East Side with sacred meaning, Diner discusses the historical events that resulted in this need, including suburbanization, the Holocaust, the establishment of Israel, and the loss of traditionalism. Summing up her findings,
she maintains: “in the years after World War II, American Jews needed a Lower East Side, a place of origin through which they could represent themselves, and a venue from which to describe the loss of Jewish authenticity in the face of collective, and individual, achievement” (163). In the process, she argues, many people overlooked or simply forgot the very real difficulties of living in the Lower East Side in the early twentieth century, including deep poverty, hunger, crime, lack of sanitation, and purportedly more people per square acre than anywhere else in the world. Significantly, Diner points to Taylor’s first book, All-of-a-Kind Family, as the text that ushered in this “memory culture.” Viewing the book through her own rose-colored glasses, remembering it from her childhood in Milwaukee, Diner labels the section of Lower East Side Memories that discusses Taylor’s books “Romancing the Past.”

While Diner is undeniably correct that Taylor does not dwell on the negatives in her All-of-a-Kind Family books and suffuses her depiction of the Lower East Side with warmth and love, she tends to simplify Taylor’s writing by contending that the books present the Lower East Side as “an almost hermetically sealed world of Jewishness and love, exist[ing] without contest over culture or generational conflict” (65). She also contends that the girls in Taylor’s books were “never disturbed by debate over tradition and the restrictions it placed on them” (64). Diner is not a literary critic and does not owe Taylor’s books deep analysis, but closer reading of them does yield that in fact debates about traditionalism and gender roles as well as generational conflict all occur. Not knowing anything more about Taylor’s life than what was available at the time she published Lower East Side Memories, Diner could not know that Taylor was a socialist, and thus she could not have read socialism into the books. Yet as an historian, Diner is well aware of the link between liberal politics and Jewish American national identity, and she connects these to the memory culture that created a sacred Lower East Side: “The culture that American Jews fashioned for themselves in the decades after World War II was shaped by the aftermath of that war, particularly the knowledge of the destruction of European Jewry. The memories were also shaped by a counterforce, the triumph of American liberalism, as it played itself out in the era of greater civil rights” (19). I would like to suggest that Taylor’s books actually played a part in encouraging—if not co-creating—this liberalism in her readers as she read the past through the filtering lens of her own left-wing sensibilities.

Three decades intervened between the years Taylor depicts in her All-of-a-Kind Family books—1912 through 1921—and the year she began publishing them, 1951. From the time Taylor finished high school at the age of sixteen in 1920, to the year she became pregnant with her daughter, 1934, she engaged in many fun activities; she enjoyed a young adulthood not available to her immigrant parents, who struggled to support their ever-growing family from the moment they arrived in America in 1901. Although she worked full-time, Taylor had the time and money for educational and leisure activities, which she pursued with ardor. Scrapbooks, photographs, and letters reveal that in the
In the early 1920s, “Syd Brenner,” as she called herself, had picnics and parties in the park with friends, went on vacation several times at a rustic proto-resort called Camp Tamiment, performed with the acting troupe known as the Lenox Hill Players, and danced onstage with Martha Graham as part of Graham’s dancing company. None of these activities would seem, on the face of them, to be particularly political. Yet most of them were.

In 1923, for example, when she was nineteen years old, Taylor joined the Young People’s Socialist League (YPSL). The YPSL, the youth affiliate of the Socialist Party, was founded in 1907 and prospered during the 1920s. A heavily Jewish organization, especially in New York, the YPSLs, as the members called themselves, held social events as well as organizational meetings (Liebman 53). The YPSLs identified themselves strongly with democracy. Although they believed in a classless society, which is what made them socialists, the YPSLs were just as interested in egalitarianism—inclusion of all races and religions—and individualism. We cannot determine with certainty just which YPSL publications and documents Syd encountered at the YPSL meetings, but we can make educated guesses, based on extant material from the time period, as to what sort of socialist ideologies she was exposed to. For example, the Souvenir Journal of the YPSL National Convention held in December 1922 included an article by the Executive Secretary of the Greater New York League, Morris Novik, who wrote such ringing declarations as:

> At this period of human history, with its wars, race hatreds and national hostilities, with the sacrifices that the youth made, is making, and will continue to make, our most advantageous contribution to the radical movement would be to teach as many young people as possible to discard all prejudices, all inherited and false conceptions, and train them in Economics, History, and Principles of Socialism, etc. (5)

Other YPSL publications state the goals of the organization and describe its activities, which included both educational and recreational events. Throughout this literature, authors repeatedly make references to racial, ethnic, and religious tolerance and acceptance. In Jews and the Left, Arthur Liebman asserts that Jews were especially attracted to radical groups when they “also included the elimination of ethnic discrimination” (30). Statements such as “production for use safeguarded by political and economic democracy means an end to racial and religious discrimination and to the constant class struggle besetting society today” (“Share in the Struggle for Socialist Youth”) would appeal to young Jewish people who felt the pinch of discrimination based on religion as well as class. (Taylor’s daughter reports that her mother constantly heard anti-Semitic jokes and slurs on the job because her co-workers did not realize she, a blonde, was Jewish [Marshall interview, 2003].) Wrapped up in radicalism, these sentiments would appeal to young Jewish people’s idealism and zeal for social change.
Taylor continued to develop her socialist ideologies during stays at the socialist and educational camp for adults, Camp Tamiment, where she vacationed at least three times during the 1920s. Run by the People’s Educational Camp Society, and loosely connected to the Rand School of Social Science, a socialist institute that attracted many YPSLs, Camp Tamiment combined leisure and recreational activities with classes, lectures, and political discussions. Members of the People’s Educational Camp Society were required to belong to the Socialist Party. The camp’s pamphlets and brochures published in the 1920s make quite clear that socialist activities were taking place there, most often in the form of lectures. Taylor kept among her memorabilia several newsletters called “Breakfast Serial,” which were published daily at Camp Tamiment. Reading the titles of these lectures, we see that Taylor deliberately chose to vacation at a camp steeped in radical ideas concerning class, economics, politics, and literature. Moreover, from an early age, Taylor was exposed to the idea that literature could express social views and attitudes; indeed, in addition to attending lectures, she took at least one class at the Rand Institute, Main Currents in Literature, which focused specifically on analyzing literature.

Back in New York City, Taylor’s career on stage as both an actress and a dancer might seem apolitical, but in fact many of the young women who danced with Martha Graham during this time period were Jewish leftists (Foulkes 201–17). While Graham herself is not always seen as a political radical, many of the women who populated her company in the early 1930s decidedly were. Dance historian Mark Franko sums up the relationship between Graham and her protégés well: “[Graham’s] work’s radical potential was largely attributable to the fact that it was inhabited by politically radical young women” (59). Historian Ellen Graff makes clear who these women were: “an overwhelming percentage of those involved with the revolutionary dance movement in New York City were children of mostly poor Russian Jewish immigrant families” (19). Women whose names appear alongside Taylor’s in the programs for Martha Graham’s performances—Anna Sokolow, Sophie Maslow, Lilian Shapero, and Lily Mehlman—were all Jewish radicals and among “the leaders of the revolutionary dance movement,” according to Graff (13). Sokolow, Maslow, Shapero, and Mehlman all went on to become prominent modernist dancers with leftist political goals. Taylor, not usually remembered for her dance career, left Martha Graham’s company when she was pregnant with her daughter Jo and never returned to a professional career in dance. I would argue, however, that writing became the creative outlet through which she could accomplish what she and her fellow Jewish dancers tried to achieve through dance: a drawing together of leftist principles with an American identity.

How do we know that Taylor’s involvement with leftist organizations and activities—the YPSLs, Camp Tamiment, and modern dance—influenced her thinking and choices? Taylor rarely and only minimally wrote about her political principles in the diaries she kept during this time period, but her scrapbooks and the testimony of her daughter give us clues. For instance, clippings and
photographs in her scrapbooks testify to Taylor’s admiration for Eugene Debs; Jo, her only child, also reports that her parents always had a picture of Debs on the wall in their Chelsea apartment.

This information encourages us to explore the relationship between Taylor’s early socialist politics (and ongoing progressivism) and the *All-of-A-Kind Family* books. Progressive attitudes that reflect Taylor’s socialist politics are expressed in the books’ treatment of parenting styles, feminism, social work, and workers’ rights. Taylor often presents these issues gently in earlier books and then more starkly in later books, suggesting that as the restrictive political climate of the postwar period began to thaw and certain attitudes once associated with the left became more mainstream, Taylor felt freer to express her views and manifest them through her characters.

Taylor’s treatment of parenting and discipline styles is a case in point. In the 1930s—the time period between what is depicted in the books and when the books were written—attitudes toward parenting styles underwent major changes, many of which were influenced by progressive politics. Not surprisingly, the parent-child relationship is constantly explored throughout the *All-of-a-Kind Family* series, focused as it is on the family and domesticity. Although readers like the historian Diner may not remember any intergenerational conflict, it in fact occurs in every book in the series. One or other of the five sisters—most often Henny, the rambunctious, extroverted, second-eldest daughter—gets into trouble for some reason or another, and the girls’ parents must react to the mischief or disrespect. In these scenes, Taylor displays sensitivity to both the child who misbehaves and the parent who must respond. An analysis of the parents’ reactions displays the results of changes in parenting advice as well as Taylor’s growing sense of freedom to depict them.

In the first and most widely read book of the series, *All-of-a-Kind Family*, a somewhat uncharacteristic event takes place in a chapter in the middle of the book, “Sarah in Trouble.” Unlike the playful antics and sunny dispositions described in most of the other chapters of the book, the events and moods in this chapter are strangely discordant. Middle daughter Sarah (the character based on Taylor herself) comes home from school for lunch but refuses to eat Mama’s soup. Taylor makes clear how unusual such behavior is, explaining:

> There was a strict rule about not wasting any food in Mama’s house. . . . Sarah, usually so good, must have been feeling especially contrary this morning to think that she could change this rule for her own special benefit. She idly stirred the spoon in her plate of soup and made no attempt to begin eating. When the others had finished, Mama served each a plate of meat and vegetables, but Sarah got nothing. (105–6)

A power struggle ensues between Sarah and her mother, with Sarah asking for the next course and her mother refusing to serve it to her. Sarah’s will hardens and persists, but Mama does not back down. Becoming enraged, Sarah begins to yell, a very unusual behavior for a child to demonstrate in any of Taylor’s
books: “‘I’ll choke on it if I eat it . . . I don’t want it. I don’t want it. I don’t want it!’ Her voice rose higher with each ‘I don’t want it’ until she ended on a shriek” (107). Mama responds to the outburst “very quietly: ‘If you don’t eat your soup, I’m afraid you’ll get nothing else for your dinner. You’ll have to go back to school without eating’” (107). That is exactly what happens; Sarah returns to school, and “all through the afternoon school hours, hunger gnawed at [her]” (109).

This scene is unusual for a number of reasons. While readers will see many more incidents of the children misbehaving throughout the series, this is the first and only time a character’s behavior is so willfully stubborn and so seemingly unprovoked. In fact, of all the daughters Sarah is usually the most sensitive, the most well-behaved, and the quietest. And in a rare reversal of what will be depicted later, Papa displays some sweet parental care when it is usually he who is the stern disciplinarian, with Mama intervening on the children’s behalf. This time, Papa “leaned over and stroked Sarah’s hair. ‘Be a good girl, Mäusele (little mouse). Eat your soup. You don’t have to eat it all. Just a little and then you can have your nice meat and vegetables.’ His gentle, soft manner dissolved Sarah in tears, but it was too late now for her to be able to give in” (108, translation Taylor’s). Papa goes so far as to shoot “an appealing look in Mama’s direction,” but Mama cannot relent because “she knew if she did there would be trouble with the children in the matter of food and food was too costly to be wasted. So though Mama had to harden herself to continue this struggle with such an unhappy and weeping daughter, she said firmly, ‘It’s just as Papa says. You don’t have to eat it all. Just show me that you are really trying to do what is right’” (109). Taylor’s exploration of Mama’s economic rationale and of her interior thoughts invests her with agency. Mama is not being dictatorial just for the sake of it; she has reasons for and difficulties with her adamancy.

The struggle continues when Sarah returns from school at the end of the day, ravenous. When she reaches for a roll, Mama stops her and says she cannot have it until she eats the warmed-up soup. Through Sarah’s homework, piano practice, and outdoor play, the battle wages on. She feels enormous self-pity and hunger; Mama also feels “miserable,” she but tells herself not to feel sorry for her daughter, that the child must learn a lesson (110). Finally, at suppertime, Mama places the soup in front of Sarah again. Taylor emphasizes how unappetizing it has become: “By this time, it had thickened and formed a lump in the bottom of the plate so that it looked more unattractive than ever” (111). Sarah, driven by desperate hunger, forces herself to start eating.

Again Taylor switches to an examination of Mama’s interior thoughts, evoking sympathy for Mama at the same time she depicts her authoritarian control of the situation:

Mama looked at the woebegone figure choking over the soup, and she wanted to cry herself. She quickly removed the offensive dish and placed before Sarah a heaping plate of thick, juicy boiled beef and potatoes. She had deliberately omitted the vegetables tonight so that there would be no further cause for a
“must” in eating. Mama knew that she would not have to do any urging for meat and potatoes. (111)

Two counter-forces are at work in this first book in the series. Taylor depicts the strong authoritarianism of an early-twentieth-century parent who is concerned about money and influenced by the social climate of the time, which dictated forceful parental control of children. At the same time, she renders the controlling parent sympathetic by revealing her own sadness over the situation. Yet Mama’s authority prevails; Sarah eventually eats the soup. There is no negotiation between parent and child, no surrender to the child’s demands and emotions.

This depiction of the parent-child relationship may well have been influenced by the advice that Taylor herself received as a new mother. Taylor became a mother in 1935 and kept the notes Jo’s pediatricians wrote about her appointments with them. These notes reveal that Jo’s doctors were very much in the mode of John B. Watson, a parenting authority who, Julia Mickenberg explains, “criticized parents for their emotional excess and failure to instill children with proper habits and discipline” (“The Pedagogy of the Popular Front” 230). Jo’s doctors repeatedly labeled her as “spoiled” because she wanted attention, and they admonished Taylor to ignore Jo’s cries and refuse to give in to her. When Jo was two and a half weeks old, for example, a doctor wrote, “Do not pick up, coddle and amuse” (Doctor’s note #1), and when she was a year old, another doctor wrote, “[Jo] is getting spoiled from too much attention. She needs more neglect” and “this girl would do better if she ate alone” (Doctor’s note #2). Demanding that not only Jo’s grandparents but that Taylor herself limit their contact with the baby, the doctors insisted on rigid schedules and tightly controlled behavior, especially at meal time. In a note that could serve as a précis of the chapter “Sarah in Trouble,” a doctor writes: “After food give her 30 minutes to take it all. Then remove tray without comment [. I]f she refused any one meal, give the same meal over” (Doctor’s note #2).

It is possible that Taylor was also influenced by memories of her own mother’s disciplining style. Her living relatives repeatedly tell me that in “real life” Mama was often exacting and aloof and that her children did not feel very emotionally close to her. Papa is the one who is described by his grandchildren as loving and sweet, a “pussy cat.” This chapter of the first book of the series seems to capture the relatives’ characterization of Taylor’s two parents. But subsequent books in the series reverse Mama and Papa’s roles, and Papa appears the more aggressively autocratic of the two while Mama intervenes on her children’s behalf, always successfully, as we will see below. What might have motivated this flip in portrayal and general undermining of a strict parenting style?

As a new mother, Taylor might have been heavily influenced by her pediatricians’ punitive advice, but as soon as Jo was old enough for school, Taylor and her husband chose institutions with philosophies toward children that were diametrically opposed to those of Watson. Jo attended nursery school
at the original Bank Street College of Education, known for its progressivism and “child-centered” philosophy. After Bank Street the Taylors enrolled Jo in Greenwich Village’s Little Red Schoolhouse, which was known for its progressive politics as well as its experimental educational philosophy. When asked what she remembers about the Little Red Schoolhouse, which she attended from 1941 to 1948, Jo says, “This was, at the time, truly ‘little Red’ as they had us making little dioramas of the Ukraine. We watched as many of our little friends, their parents and our teachers—wearing Henry Wallace campaign buttons—marched in the May Day parade” (Marshall, “Re: the May Day quotation”).

Jo contends that her parents chose Bank Street and Little Red, a private school, because “they were such progressives” (Marshall interview). Julia Mickenberg’s work on progressive education and progressive parenting helps us see the circumstances that would influence such a choice. Mickenberg links educational and parenting theories to socialism and progressive politics, tracing the evolution of parenting advice in the 1920s and 1930s, which, by the end of the latter decade, emphasized “permissivism,” “freedom,” and “progressivism” (“The Pedagogy of the Popular Front” 230–31) in contrast to the advice Taylor received from Jo’s doctors. Taylor herself must have become aware of this shift in advice, for the Little Red Schoolhouse actively promoted progressive education and linked it to democracy, which it saw as inherently about equality, creativity, and individuality—very much like the values of the YPSLs in the 1920s.

In 1944 educator Agnes De Lima published her account of the school in the 350-page volume *The Little Red Schoolhouse*. Explicitly connecting educational policy to government, De Lima argues throughout *The Little Red Schoolhouse* that the future of democracy depends on the success of progressive education as exemplified by this institution. In the preface De Lima claims, “progressive [education] … has been strengthened through the growing popular awareness that the principles it stands for and the methods it applies are closely allied to those of a democratic society” (xi). In 1944 Jo was nine years old and a student at Little Red. Taylor would most assuredly have been aware of De Lima’s book and may have encountered her earlier claim that “Some canny sleuth will discover that there is a direct connection between schools which set out deliberately to train children to think, and to develop creatively, and the radical movement” (qtd. in Mickenberg, “The Pedagogy of the Popular Front” 230). Taylor’s increasingly more progressive depiction of parenting in the *All-of-a-Kind Family* books was likely influenced by the Little Red Schoolhouse. The success and acceptance of her first book, in which her counterpart, Sarah, is disciplined in an old-fashioned way, may have allowed Taylor in the subsequent books to feel freer to represent the progressive parenting styles the Little Red staff advocated.

In the late 1970s historian Arthur Liebman explained the strong links between the Little Red Schoolhouse and the Jewish Old Left, as well as the link the school supplied between the Old Left (Jewish and non-Jewish) to the 1960s New Left, populated by baby boomers, many of whom were raised with
progressive educations (556). Liebman explores the midcentury curriculum of Little Red, pointing out the courses on socialism, labor history, and minorities: “[The students] were predisposed [to] an acceptance of a need for radical social change in America” (556).

We do not know with certainty when Taylor began writing out the stories she told Jo at bedtime about her own childhood, but relatives report to me that she must have been writing them throughout the 1940s, the years Jo was at Little Red. When Taylor’s husband allegedly took the manuscript out of a drawer in 1950 and submitted it to the Follett contest for contributions to children’s literature (an anecdote related in all the reference books), it had been lying around for at least a few years (Baker and Brenner). Thus, as Jo was bringing home from school the fruits of her progressive education in the form of school projects and newsletters for her parents, Taylor was putting on paper the words that would define her as a writer and bring Jewish children’s literature into the mainstream of American society. In reference books Taylor is quoted as saying that she told her daughter these stories at bedtime because she felt that Jo was lonely, not having any siblings, and because Jo asked her why the books she read had only “Gentile” characters. This narrative constructs Taylor’s storytelling as casual, almost accidental, and dependent on her husband to move from the drawer to the marketplace. Younger relatives tell me, however, that Taylor worked on the first book for several years and sent it to various publishers on her own (Baker and Brenner).

If we perceive Taylor as consciously defining herself as a writer and carefully constructing these texts, then we can think of her as being aware of the ways in which she folded her political beliefs into stories set in a time before she developed those beliefs. But she was not unaffected by outside pressures. Taylor’s first editor, Esther Meeks of Follett, was excited but anxious about publishing a book featuring Jewish children. In correspondence from late 1950 and early 1951, Meeks urged Taylor to make her characters “more American” by including some American holidays, such as the Fourth of July, alongside the discussions and depictions of Jewish holidays. When Taylor resisted at least some of this pressure, Meeks alluded to events of the day—presumably the Rosenberg trial—implying that audiences needed soft-pedaled portrayals of Jews. Taylor gave in at least somewhat, adding a chapter about the Fourth of July and a story line about non-Jewish characters.7

I would argue that in this first book Taylor reigned in not only Jewishness but also attitudes she had that might be seen as progressive or political in nature. After the success of the first book, she began to relax and allow more of the progressivism to seep into her narratives. Returning to the example of parenting advice, we can see a change from the first book to the second, *More All-of-a-Kind Family*, published in 1954, after Jo graduated from the Little Red Schoolhouse, but set in 1915. In the chapter “A Friend in Need,” the explicit subject is Papa’s authoritarian discipline style and the tension between his expectations and the consistently transgressive behavior of Henny, the second-eldest daughter.
By the 1950s Taylor would have been thoroughly familiar with progressive parenting styles, now mainstream and popularized by Benjamin Spock. In her attempt to express her ideologies at the same time as she strived to achieve verisimilitude in her portrayal of the past, Taylor would have wanted to be truthful to the discipline style most parents were practicing without suggesting to her child readers that this parenting style was a good one. In More All-of-a-Kind Family Taylor shifts authoritative parenting to Papa and then subtly critiques it by subverting it. In the chapter “A Friend in Need,” Henny forgets her curfew after her father threatens to punish her if she does not come home on time. Much is made of the “licking” that Henny will receive; Henny worries that she will “catch it” (44), and Papa “fumes” and states that “the child must be taught a lesson” (41). Sure enough, when Henny tiptoes home with her girlfriend, Papa reaches out in the dark and delivers a strong spanking—to Henny’s friend, aptly named Fanny. After Fanny wails in pain and the mistake is uncovered, Papa is at first “abashed” (46) but then joins Mama and Henny’s giggling. Soon, everyone is “laughing so hard they couldn’t stop” (48). Thus, by making light of the spanking Henny would have received, Taylor undermines Papa’s disciplinary style: not only does the punishment become the source of laughter—a joke—but Henny is not hit after all and thus remains unpunished, unlike Sarah in the earlier book, who suffers from hunger and having to force-feed herself. Now the authoritarian and physical parenting style has no effect and appears as comical, even ludicrous. Even so, Papa’s dignity is spared.

Throughout the series, Henny breaks rules and worries she will be physically punished, but she always escapes the “wallop” or “licking.” All-of-a-Kind Family Downtown, a book set in 1913 but published in 1972, again directly addresses physical punishment. In the chapter “The Wrong Side of Bed,” Henny has a very bad day and purposely breaks rules and causes injury to others. When she pulls a chair out from under her sister Charlotte, who lands “sprawled on the floor” and is quite hurt, Mama says “Henny, that’s very dangerous! If I ever catch you doing it again, you’ll get a wallop!” (102). Later the same day, Henny disappears for several hours, and everyone becomes very worried. When she returns home, Papa prepares to beat her. This time, Taylor is explicit about the severity of the punishment: “Papa walked over and lifted the strap from the kitchen wall. Henny cringed. The children held their breath. She was sure going to catch it this time! But over their heads, Mama’s eyes met Papa’s. Reluctantly, Papa’s arm came down. The girls sighed, relieved. Henny was not going to get a licking after all” (116). As the chapter concludes, Henny tells her mother that the principal wants to see her and produces a crumpled note. The last line of the chapter is “That night Mama and Henny had a long, long talk.” Clearly, the parents now employ a wholly different discipline style, one involving communication and an implied parity.

By the last book of the series, published posthumously in 1978 and set in 1919, Ella of All-of-a-Kind Family, even Papa has softened his disciplinary impulses. When eldest sister Ella must choose between a professional vaude-
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ville career and marriage, she asks her father what she should do. A by now very enlightened Papa says, “No, Ella, in this case you’ve got to make up your own mind. You’re not a child anymore, . . . It’s your life and you’ll have to live it, not us. Take your time. Don’t rush. Think it over in your mind. . . . You’ll know that whatever you decide, we’ll stand by and help all we can” (74). Gone completely is the blustery patriarch. Here instead is the 1970s permissive, loving, progressive parent.

The mainstreaming of permissive, progressive parenting can explain the changes in discipline style seen throughout the series. Attention to feminism might explain the shift from Mama to Papa as the primary discipliner. We know that Taylor’s connection to feminism was long-standing, and it was demonstrably connected to socialism. As a young woman she chose a long quotation from Debs about women’s equality to put in her scrapbook. Debs was well known for his “deep commitment to woman’s emancipation” (Buhle 43). One could argue that a series of books that features five self-directed, talented, vivacious sisters as protagonists is inherently feminist. But the feminism became more explicit and clearer as the All-of-a-Kind Family books continued to be published over the course of the century. Thus, the earlier books’ treatment of feminism is subtle and might not be recognizable to contemporary audiences.

Most often, feminism emerges through the character of eldest daughter Ella and her interest in performance. In actuality, the real person, Ella Brenner Kornweitz, had a beautiful singing voice and loved to perform. Throughout the series Taylor focuses much attention on Ella and shows her directing and performing in many public appearances, almost all of them related to Jewish holidays. In the first book all the children perform in the chapter titled “Purim Play.” But the novel singles out Ella both visually, in a picture that shows her standing much taller than her seated or very short sisters, conducting them while they play instruments or sing, and textually, when she is described as singing a solo: “At the end of the show came a special treat. No show was ever over until Ella had sung. She had a beautiful voice, and when she sang, the children always said they could feel the walls tremble. She sang a mournful Jewish melody and when she finished there was thunderous applause” (103). In More All-of-a-Kind Family, Ella organizes and produces a May Day procession. By All-of-a-Kind Family Uptown, set in 1917, after the family moves to the Bronx, Ella is directing plays at Sunday school: “For every important Jewish holiday she had the children present a play” (135). When the Jewish holiday of Shavous is near, she directs the children in such a play and is involved in every aspect of its production. As the narrator observes, “Ella’s guiding hand was in everything. Other teachers did the sewing, but it was Ella who designed the costumes. The scenery was put together by the older boys, under Ella’s watchful eyes, and with Ella doing much of the painting. It was Henny who worked out the dances, but it was Ella who offered suggestions” (136). And although she is the director and not a performer, she ends up singing the lead character’s solo from backstage while a young actress lip synchs onstage. In All-of-a-Kind
Family Downtown, published after Uptown but set earlier in time, she is the unexpected star of another Purim play. Although she does not have a main part and is only a “little jester,” she steals the show (64–66). And in the final book in the series, Ella of All-of-a-Kind Family, the plot’s main concerns are Ella’s developing career as a dancer and singer and the conflict between that career and a proposal of marriage.

Ella is clearly a talented and dynamic character, but just what about her performances and directing of performances is feminist? Linda J. Tomko, in her study Dancing Class: Gender, Ethnicity, and Social Divides in American Dance, 1890–1920, sheds light on the connection. Focusing on the period 1890–1920, or the Progressive Era, Tomko links dance studies with American history to demonstrate how dance practices throughout America in this period changed perceptions of the female body and brought women to the forefront of dance performance. Much of Tomko’s book focuses on New York City, and especially the Lower East Side, at the time the Brenner family lived there and the All-of-a-Kind Family books are set. Tomko discusses in detail two major institutions that influenced the development of girls and women in dance—the Henry Street Settlement House and the Neighborhood Playhouse, which was also on Henry Street and an outgrowth of the Settlement House. Both of these institutions could not have been unknown to the Brenner family, but Taylor does not mention them at all until late in her writing career, when she finally focuses on the Henry Street Settlement House in Downtown, published in 1972. Both the settlement and the playhouse depended on Jewish women as dancers and Jewish stories for performance material.

While some Jews participated in settlement activities, many others did not, perhaps because they recognized the efforts of the settlement institutions to Americanize immigrants and homogenize ethnic experience even as they highlighted ethnic difference in dance and play subject matter. Even so, Ella takes on many of the characteristics and abilities of famous women connected to Henry Street and the Playhouse, such as Lillian Wald and Irene and Alice Lewisohn (all German-American Jews, a group known for its desire to assimilate and refine the great influx of Russian and Eastern European Jews, such as the Brenners, in the early twentieth century). Tomko invests these settlement house women and dance itself during this era with tremendous value for the development of women’s roles and agency: “Dance is intimately connected to Progressive-era issues of gender, democracy, and industrialization. It demonstrates that women’s cultural practices provided a ground for women’s innovation in dance, and that such innovation helped to constitute women’s gendered identity” (40). Significantly, Tomko relates settlement house and playhouse dance and performance to Martha Graham and modernism through women who danced alongside Taylor in the early 1930s, such as Anna Sokolow and Sophie Maslow. Tomko contends that the rise of powerful women such as Martha Graham during the era of modern dance was intimately connected to the cultural work during the Progressive Era of women like the Lewisohn sisters. As she says, “Women’s
Leaning Left

constituents of themselves as creators in addition to executants (and employers as well as employees) and their construction of a new kind of dance practice in which to take charge, to take power, was clearly the start of something new in the Progressive era” (xiii). Throughout the All-of-a-Kind Family series, Ella’s leadership and creativity through dance, singing, and drama recapitulates the work of the Lewisohn sisters and others who empowered women through the performing arts. Performance becomes one enactment of feminism.

Young readers are probably more likely to notice feminism when Henny, the second-oldest sister, decides to be the first girl ever to run for class representative of her high school’s General Organization in the last book of the series, Ella of All-of-a-Kind Family (1978). By the 1970s Second Wave feminism had successfully taken hold of American culture, making women’s issues mainstream. In this book, Taylor clearly feels free to depict “women’s lib,” but she does so by contextualizing Henny’s campaign in the contemporaneous debate concerning women’s suffrage. Classmates and family members call Henny a suffragette, and Papa says, “Listen to her! A regular suffragette already! Next thing you know, she’ll be marching in a parade carrying a sign like all those crazy women” (32–33). His daughters and even his wife set Papa straight, telling him that life will improve when women get the vote. Oldest daughter Ella makes a speech: “Equal rights for women. It’s coming, Papa. You can’t stop it. Pretty soon the Suffrage Amendment is going to be submitted to the states. I bet by next year, women will have the right to vote” (32). Papa quips a rueful response, but Taylor’s narrator explains, “His voice sounded woebegone, but his eyes were twinkling,” undercutting both Papa’s antifeminist attitude and his paternal authority. Henny wins the election, proving the women in the family right. Although in real life Henny was a spitfire and a brash girl, she never actually ran for class representative in high school; in fact, she stopped going to school after eighth grade. And Taylor was not, as far as we know, marching in suffragette demonstrations at the age of fifteen. Instead, Taylor reformulated the past to be consistent with perspectives she developed a few years after the depicted events would have occurred.

Set in 1919 but written in the mid-1970s, Ella of All-of-a-Kind Family clearly reflects cultural movements of the post–Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. But this late-century feminism did not arise out of a vacuum. Mari Jo Buhle, in Women and American Socialism, 1870–1920, argues that from its beginnings socialism was used “as the arena for women’s emancipation” (53). Buhle explains that on the topic of suffrage, socialist women in various regions of the United States were divided, but in New York City, and especially among Jews, the connection between socialism and suffrage was very strong (241). Other scholars see 1960s Second Wave feminism as linked to the communist movement of the 1930s, but Buhle goes much further back into the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century to establish the roots of the connection between twentieth-century women’s rights and socialism, concluding that the women’s movement of the 1960s found its beginnings with socialism, not
To unearth feminism in various ways, both Tomko and Buhle zero in on the time period (the early twentieth century) and place (the Lower East Side) that Taylor depicted in her children’s books (as a meditation upon her own childhood).

The files labeled “YPSLs” at the library of the New York Center for Jewish History are full of brochures and other printed matter focused on the subject of feminism written by such socialist feminism luminaries as Theresa S. Malkiel, Meta Stern, and Eugene Debs. These publications were issued by the Woman’s National Committee of the Socialist Party, an organization Taylor must have known when she was a young YPSL. One indication that she was influenced by what she read and saw is that, all of her life, she kept her unmarried name—S. Brenner—on the door of the apartment she shared with her husband. It may be that Taylor felt more liberated to depict overt feminism in one of her books after its tenets were accepted by mainstream American society.

Social work is a third progressive strand that does not show up until late in the series. In this case, the late blooming of the topic may have less to do with the mainstreaming of progressive values and more to do with changes in Jewish perception of it. At the time the Brenner family was living on the Lower East Side, not all Jews were comfortable with the settlement house in their neighborhood. Historian Riva Shpak Lissak describes the settlement house movement as one that was progressive but essentially elitist, as upper-middle-class white women saw it as their mission to move into poor, immigrant neighborhoods and draw residents to settlement houses in the effort to Americanize them. In *Pluralism and Progressives: Hull House and the New Immigrants, 1890–1919*, Lissak focuses on Jewish resistance to Hull House in Chicago, and Tomko sees that the social workers at the Henry Street Settlement House in New York City at the same time also had in mind “disciplin[ing] immigrant people to American ways” (85). Although Russian and Eastern European Jews and other immigrants were the objects of the social workers’ efforts, they were not the settlement movement’s leaders. As Lissak explains:

The typical settlement was middle-class or upper-middle-class, white Anglo-Saxon Protestant. This elitism was determined both by the movement’s concept of the nature of the working class and by the voluntarism embedded in the service without material compensation in its earlier years, like its professionalization in later years, made it impossible for members of the lower classes to become settlement workers in any meaningful number. (20)

We do not know what Taylor’s attitude toward social work was in the 1920s and 1930s. But some time in midcentury America, Eastern European Jews started becoming the social workers instead of the socially worked over. In 1959 Alfred Kutzik published *Social Work and Jewish Values*, a book calling for the moving together of these two entities, and in 1957 Yeshiva University opened the Wurzweiler School of Social Work. In Taylor’s family social work became an important career path. Daughter Jo became a social worker, obtaining her
masters of social work from the Columbia School of Social Work in 1959 and later teaching there. In 2004 the Columbia School of Social Work erected the first building dedicated entirely to a school of social work on an American university campus. The new building includes a terrace named after Jo.

Social work does not come up in the *All-of-a-Kind Family* books until *Downtown*, published in 1972, after Jo received her degree in social work. Interestingly, the book accurately depicts a settlement house worker as non-Jewish and middle class. Miss Carey, a non-Jewish woman, is the social worker/nurse who explains she lives in the settlement house “with the other nurses. That makes it easy to find us whenever we are needed” (27). Henny demands, “Miss Carey, why don’t you work uptown with the rich people, instead of down her on the East Side? . . . Then you could make lots of money.” Miss Carey responds with a chuckle: “But I like this section of New York, and I like the people here” (27).

Even before Henny’s testy question, Taylor introduces tension around the topic of the settlement house when youngest sister Gertie tugs at Ella’s arm and asks to go to the settlement house instead of the library. Ella protests the request with, “The settlement house? What for?” For more than half a page, Ella and Sarah argue with Gertie against going to the settlement house, even when Gertie points out that Henny takes dancing lessons there, a fact never mentioned in the three earlier books in the series. When the older sisters eventually give in, they find that the library at the settlement house does not lend books—it only allows one to sit and read within the house—and Gertie is upset until kind Miss Carey intervenes and gives Gertie one of her own children’s books. Thus, at the beginning of the book the settlement house is seen as inconvenient and insufficient, but Taylor gradually brings the five sisters into its fold.

Significantly, the girls do not visit the settlement house out of need but in order to help an impoverished Italian child, Guido, who is aided by Miss Carey and taken in by her when his mother dies. Before then, the family helps Guido in many ways, especially when they discover how ill his mother is. Ella and her mother travel to Guido’s tenement apartment to give him and his mother food and some of Papa’s money. Through helping Guido, Ella enters a garment factory for the first time, learning about the terrible conditions there, and she sees a poverty-stricken area of the Lower East Side. For the first and only time in the series, Taylor reveals germ-ridden dirt and dire poverty. Significantly, the Jews encounter these horrors as aid workers, not victims, tending to Guido’s mother, cleaning their apartment, and rescuing Guido from starvation. The chapter title, “Ella Lends a Helping Hand,” emphasizes Ella’s role as aid giver.

Much of the narrative of *All-of-a-Kind Family Downtown* is concerned with the story of Guido, his sick mother, and Miss Carey. Jewish activities receive comparatively less emphasis than they do in earlier books in the series. By the end of the book Mama mentions that she is taking her baby to the settlement house for his check-up, and some of the sisters attend a Thanksgiving party there. With these activities Taylor suggests involvement with the settlement house, but never does she show that the family depends on or needs the social
workers. Instead, the family helps the non-Jew who is in need. The novel describes and praises the settlement movement when Ella says,

I can’t help but wonder about Miss Carey. Looking at her, just listening to how she talks, you realize she comes from a very different kind of background. She must have been brought up by people who were well to do, don’t you think? What do you suppose made her take up nursing in the first place? And then come down here to the East Side to work with the poor! It’s hard to understand! (99–100)

Mama’s answer addresses Ella’s questions but also reveals a possible shift in attitude toward social work from what Taylor and her parents may have felt when she lived on the East Side in the early part of the century: “There are exceptional people in this world whose hearts are big. They really care about what happens to others. It’s people like that who started the settlement house. They work out of concern for others with little thought of their own comfort or the money they might earn” (100). This admission of the benevolence of non-Jews and the family’s involvement in actively helping Guido represent a shift in the Jewish view toward social work that occurred as the century progressed.

The last issue that reveals socialist attitudes, the treatment of workers of the lower class, shows up earlier in the series. The first book, *All-of-a-Kind Family*, introduces these workers. Papa owns a junk shop, and the peddlers who sell their goods to him are welcome to sit in his shop. Taylor describes the scene:

A few chairs formed a half-circle about a small coal stove. In the winter the little stove glowed fiery red in a vain effort to heat such a large area. On its top a teakettle sang an unceasing merry tune. Papa kept it filled all day so that the peddlers in the neighborhood might warm their insides with a hot cup of tea as they sat about and chatted. In the summer, the stove was cold and there was no tea, but the lack of sunshine made the place moist and cool, so that the peddlers still sat in Papa’s chairs and chatted. (35)

Taylor introduces each peddler one by one, giving each a name, a nationality, and a personality, and demonstrates how comfortable the sisters are with them when they come to visit their Papa.

In the next book, *More All-of-a-Kind Family*, the peddlers become part of the way in which Taylor subtly integrates her politics into her portrayal of the past. On the cover of the book is a colorful picture of the five sisters surrounding their brother Charlie, who is sitting in a cart. The children appear to be participating in some kind of celebration, perhaps a parade. While the youngest sisters wear fanciful costumes—Charlotte is dressed as an elf, Gertie as a fairy—the boy in the center of the illustration, baby Charlie, is dressed as a mini Uncle Sam. The children are in fact observing a holiday that Taylor calls “the May.” A conversation between youngest sisters Gertie and Charlotte at the beginning of the chapter makes clear that there is a celebration of “the May” every year, and they cajole big sister Ella into making a May party this year, 1915.
While to some midcentury American readers a May party with maypole and costumes (the traditional celebration of an ancient British holiday) might seem normal, in fact people on the Lower East of New York in the 1910s did not observe May Day in this way at all. Lower East Side residents had been observing the labor holiday of May Day in the streets since 1890 (Waldinger). Many accounts of life in this region mention May Day parades of the labor kind, but I have not found any evidence of this British-derived rendition of the holiday occurring in the Lower East Side. New York Jews at this time were well aware of what May Day meant. As Debs described it in 1907, “This is the first and only International Labor Day. It belongs to the working class and is dedicated to the revolution” (qtd. in Cobban). Jo recalls watching radical May Day parades in the 1940s, a memory she links to workers’ rights: “We also attended ‘anonymous’ meetings billed as Folk Concerts where young singers sang songs about workers uniting. . . . I also remember the walls of the assembly were decorated with huge WPA-type four-season murals depicting the strength of the working masses” (Marshall, “Re: the May Day quotation”).

Yet in this book the children want to celebrate the first of May with a maypole and fairy costumes. With this emphasis, Taylor appears to be Americanizing her Jewish characters, as her editor pressured her to do in her first book, published three years earlier, by Anglicizing them. That is, by having the children participate in a holiday associated with an ancient British past, Taylor “whitens” them, but to make sure they are not mistaken as English, Taylor dresses Charlie in an Uncle Sam costume. On the surface, this move seems to register a shift in identity from Jewish immigrant to American patriot.

But something interesting happens during the children’s parade. As they march in their fanciful costumes with their maypole, clouds form and a storm begins. Ella ushers all the children into the nearest dry spot she can find—her father’s junk shop. Papa welcomes them and sticks the maypole into an empty stove, making the children laugh. Papa remarks that because of the rain, there will not be any business that day. Soon, several peddlers straggle in, also escaping the rain. These are the men we met in the earlier book. Once again we are introduced to them by their names and various nationalities, reminding us of their multiculturalism and status as workers. The peddlers make the party a success by playing a harmonica and stomping and dancing different ethnic dances, such as a hornpipe and a Polish dance. In response, Ella begins to sing, “Today’s the first of May, May, May! Today’s the first of May!” (100). Up until this point in the chapter, the actual day in May had not been mentioned. Now in the workplace, Ella affirms that indeed she is talking about a very specific May day, May 1. Together the children and the peddlers have a festive and boisterous party, which climaxes with the comical peddler Picklenose holding up the maypole: “He lifted it high. The bigger girls formed a circle and took hold of the streamers. In and out and under they waltzed, winding the ribbons in pretty patterns around the pole” (102). As the girls encircle a peddler while they wind the ribbons around the pole, the worker merges with the maypole,
simultaneously merging the labor holiday with the ancient festival. When the children leave the junk shop, one asks, “Did you ever hear of a May Party in a cellar?” Another answers, “I’m glad it rained! . . . It was the best May Party ever.” The narrator concludes, “And everyone agreed” (104).

I believe Taylor consciously converted the ancient British holiday into a day off and time of celebration for the workers. By having Papa shove the maypole into a stovetop that peddlers stomp and dance around, she burlesques it while integrating two traditions within it. Contrary to romanticizing the past, Taylor was seeing it through the lens of sensibilities she formed after she lived through the time period she was depicting. In this way, Taylor used children’s literature similarly to how her modern dancer cohorts used their artistic medium. Julia Foulkes explains:

Jewish participation in modern dance in the 1930s was a part of the larger attempt to define America in new cultural terms. Predominately as children of immigrants, Jewish women displayed their Americaness on stage often at the expense of their Jewish tradition. But their roots molded their impact, primarily in giving modern dance its political base. They transformed a new art form into a value-laden movement that emphasized the communal, ethical elements embedded in the American traditions of pluralism and democracy. (213)

In other words, the radicalism that Jewish women brought to modern dance was transformed through their medium into a distinctively American art form. I believe Taylor does something similar when she cloaks socialist principles—which are ethnically tied to her Jewish identity—in American clothing. Charlie’s Uncle Sam outfit, then, is not so much about the Anglicization of Jewish characters as it is about the Americanization of socialist principles. Support for workers and celebration of the labor holiday become acts of patriotism when Uncle Sam participates. Taylor folds her memories of the past into the principles of her present.

When one considers the huge readership of Taylor’s books, which are still in print, selling briskly on Amazon.com, and available in libraries all over the United States (Delacorte just re-released a hardbound edition of the first book in the series), one realizes that Hasia Diner’s point about Taylor’s part in creating the Lower East Side “memory culture” is valid. But Taylor did more than make Jews feel rosily nostalgic for the tastes and sounds of a vanished immigrant past. She also infused this past with the ideals and values she had been developing since she had lived in it. We can conjecture, then, that the many baby boomers who read Taylor’s books in the 1950s through the 1970s not only might have felt an identification with Judaism if they were Jews (or appreciation of it if they were not) but also might have been persuaded to connect this Judaism with progressive parenting styles, feminism, and celebrations of workers. Perhaps Taylor herself fostered in her readers a progressivism that expressed itself through the counter-cultural movement of the 1960s and as liberal politics later in the century. Subtle as the progressivism in her books is,
it is indubitably connected to Jewishness, reflecting both a long tradition of the radicalism of immigrant Jews and an ongoing relationship between Jews and the left. Knowing that Taylor wrote the *All-of-a-Kind Family* books from an ideological base of socialism allows us to see that what may seem “traditional” and “nostalgic” in her stories is in fact part of a progressive evolution in American society. Once we make that connection, we realize that socialism had more lasting and lingering effects than most people realize. As scholars such as Tomko and Buhle dig into the past to unearth the formerly hidden but ultimately discernible contributions of dance progressives and feminist socialists, we can see that Taylor herself has also been a hidden early radical. Her midcentury books are parallel to the modernist movement in dance and the Second Wave movement in feminism: all three seem to mask the socialist impulses behind them. With research and analysis, however, we can determine the roots of Taylor’s progressivism—socialism—and discover the product of those roots in the stories of a Jewish family living in New York in the early twentieth century. And we can add to the list of famous left-leaning writers who strongly, even if at times subtly, influenced a generation of American children readers.

**Notes**

I thank the special editors of this volume of the *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly* for their excellent advice and guidance, my family for their patience and time, and Ettie Goldwasser, librarian at the YIVO Institute of Jewish Research, who rose above and beyond the call of the already high standards of librarian duty.

1. Throughout this article I use the term “left” to designate a set of political sensibilities influenced by both socialism and progressivism. These two movements are not identical, but both are generally anticapitalist and pro-democracy, and I sometimes use the terms interchangeably. With either term I mean to convey the sense of a liberal politics, one concerned with freedom, equality, feminism, and workers’ rights. For the most part I am not talking about communism, a movement that socialists and progressives sometimes actively disassociated from, finding it more radical than they liked. For information about Sandburg’s and Johnson’s political perspectives as manifested in children’s literature, see Mickenberg, “Of Funnybones and Steamshovels,” and Nel, “Crockett Johnson and the Purple Crayon.”

2. Sydney Taylor was named Sarah Brenner at birth. As a teenager she changed her first name to Sydney, and when she married she took the last name of her husband, which was “Taylor.” For the sake of the clarity, I will henceforth refer to her as “Taylor,” even when addressing time periods before she was married or when she used the name Sydney Brenner professionally.

3. The People’s Educational Camp Society’s By-laws, Article 3, Section 1 state: “Any person may be elected to membership in the Society provided that he has publicly subscribed to the principles of Socialism for a period of at least two years.”

4. Taylor did not dance with Martha Graham again, but she later became the dance and drama director of Camp Cejwin, a Jewish children’s camp, for almost forty years. In
that capacity Taylor wrote dozens of plays and songs. She directed and choreographed these plays, often receiving assistance from one or more of her sisters.

5. Although Taylor stopped dancing professionally in 1934, her family’s involvement with the modern dance movement continued for many years. Her husband Ralph Taylor was the co-founder and co-editor with Louis Horst of the journal *Dance Observer*, which provided reviews and critiques of the contemporary dance scene. Horst is famous for being Graham’s “mentor” and “musical director” (Graff 51). It is interesting that dance historians know about Ralph Taylor (Graff calls him a “Socialist”), but none of them realize that one of the young Jewish women on stage with such luminaries as Sokolow and Maslow—Sydney Brenner—would go on to become an artist eventually known by far more people in her role as the author of children’s books.

6. These topics are all addressed, directly or indirectly, within the *All-of-a-Kind Family* books. One might argue that publishing the books in the 1950s was in and of itself a progressive gesture. In 1951 Jewish children’s literature existed but had not crossed over into the mainstream. As Linda Silver explains, “The publication of Sydney Taylor’s *All-of-a-Kind Family* (Follett, 1951) marked an important milestone because it and its four sequels were the first Jewish children’s books to cross over and become popular with non-Jewish readers as well.” Taylor’s desire to depict Jewish children in literature may be seen as one that developed as a result of her involvement with socialism, which stressed equality, tolerance, and diversity.

7. For a fuller discussion of this correspondence and the pressure on Taylor to tone down the ethnicity of her first book, see my article “Becoming an All-of-a-Kind American: Sydney Taylor and Strategies of Assimilation.”

8. See, for example, Weigand, *Red Feminism*.

9. Tomko, in *Dancing Class*, discusses large gatherings held in Central Park in the early twentieth century—maypole parties organized by the Girls’ Branch of the Public Schools Athletic League. The organization of these large “park fetes” was motivated in part by the drive to provide physical education for children and in part by the effort to integrate the immigrants of various backgrounds. Although some Jewish girls may have partaken in these maypole parties, and Taylor might in fact have gained awareness of them through hearing about them as a child (she never mentions participating in one), these parties were not held in the Lower East Side and were not instigated by Jews.

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