

The Ballad of Pete Daniel

Posted on December 29, 2011 by Rosemary Feurer

By Charles Hughes and Dave Gilbert, graduate students in history at UW Madison. Below are the lyrics.

[Charles Hughes and Dave Gilbert – The Ballad of Pete Daniel \(mp3\)](#)

Lyrics

My daddy didn't get no schoolin'
But he knew how to work the land
Didn't ever use a pencil
'Cause he knew numbers like he knew his hands

As soon as I was able
thumbed my way up off of the farm
Hitchhiked across this whole big country
Pickin crops and learnin' songs

I ended up back in college
Didn't see why they talked like that
Their history it seemed to me
Didn't make any room for folks like me

CHORUS

I wanted to write about working people
Tell their side of the story
I wanna give a voice to the folks who work the land
With a mule but not the 40
I wanted to write about working people
Tell their side of the story
Gotta start working from the bottom up and,
change the top down story of glory.

And then I got down to Knoxville
and they all talked like that

Their history, it seemed to me
Didn't make any room for folks like me
It's just a wealthy white man's fantasy

BRIDGE

When you turn the story upside down
What a world you're gonna find
Some people fight the truth like hell
But that's okay, I don't mind
I been in D.C. a while now
I work at the museum and write
Talked to lots of folks all across the South
and I try to tell their history right

I've come a long way since I started
But some things don't change over time
Carl Perkins, he told me all about his daddy
and he sounded a lot like mine

I've been teaching for a long time
And you know I don't talk like that
And I'm gonna make them listen to me
And when they do they're gonna see
That what they think is history
Didn't make any room for folks like me
It's just a feckless bureaucratic fantasy
And they just can't get rid of me

CHORUS

Author



• Rosemary Feurer

Rosemary Feurer is Professor of History at Northern Illinois University. She is the author of *Radical Unionism in the Midwest, 1900-1950*, among other books and essays. She is working on *The Illinois Mine Wars, 1860-1940* and a new biography of Mary Harris "Mother" Jones.