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# INKLINGS AND IDLINGS

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The Newsletter of the Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association

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FALL 2021

## FROM SITE SVCS. SPEC. BRYAN ENGELBRECHT

“Autumn Movement”

*I cried over beautiful things knowing no beautiful thing lasts.*

*The field of cornflower yellow is a scarf at the neck of the copper sunburned woman, the mother of the year, the taker of seeds.*

*The northwest wind comes and the yellow is torn full of holes, new beautiful things come in the first spit of snow on the northwest wind, and the old things go, not one lasts.*

Carl Sandburg  
*Cornhuskers, ,1918*

As summer winds down and changes into fall, a few noteworthy changes and events have occurred at Carl Sandburg State Historic Site. On July 13 Illinois Department of Natural Resources Director Colleen Callahan and State Representative Daniel Swanson visited the Site. They viewed the facilities; seeing firsthand the amount of repair and restoration needed due to deferred maintenance. CSHSA Board Members and staff discussed how the variety of challenges, reduced budgets, a lack of capital investment, and lack of staffing have negatively affected the Site. A productive meeting, it is hoped that after viewing the Site and its needs, we will begin to see positive movement with both IDNR management and within the State Legislature regarding access and maintenance to Sandburg's Birthplace.

Due to the spread of the Delta Variant, Governor J.B. Pritzker reinstated the wearing of face masks or coverings at all statewide facilities on July 29. A face mask or covering is required for entry to the Barn, Sandburg Cottage, and Visitors' Center regardless of vaccination status. Wearing of a mask is not currently required on the outdoor portions of the Site. This policy remains in effect indefinitely.

The Master Gardeners have made further improvements to the Sandburg Park. Besides additional plantings and cleaning out of beds, decorative stones and boulders have been placed throughout the grounds. We thank Gail and Jim Coffman for their generous donation of these items. Not only did they donate them from their farm,

but they delivered and installed them too! Be sure to look for these new additions during your next visit.

After a sixteen-month hiatus due to the pandemic the Songbag Concert Series resumed Sunday, August 8. Semenya McCord educated and entertained the audience with her “Spiritual Face of Jazz” program. Galesburg's own Carol Jean Trulson and Jera Faraipanahi-Scott will make a return visit to our Barn on Sunday, September 12. We are very excited once again to host a variety of music artists and styles. The Songbag Committee is currently booking performers for October and November, so stay tuned to the website and Facebook for further concert announcements!

## CSHSA RECEIVES GCF GRANT

The Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association has received a grant from the Galesburg Community Foundation to publish Barbara Schock's book *Sandburg's Hometown*, a collection of essays about Sandburg growing up in Galesburg. The grant was made possible thanks to the GCF's Ruth C. Bradway Endowment Fund. Thanks to Barbara Schock, Pat Kane, Rick Sayre, Joey Lucero, Tom Foley, and Mike Hobbs for helping us secure this grant. We expect the book to be published later this year.

## CARL SANDBURG'S LABOR DAY

By John Quinley

[Ed. Note: CSHSA member John Quinley is a retired college administrator and instructor in American History. He leads house tours at Carl Sandburg National Historic Site in Flat Rock. You may contact him at [jwquinley@gmail.com](mailto:jwquinley@gmail.com).]

Carl Sandburg's youth paralleled the nation's journey from an economy focused on agriculture and smaller towns to one centered on massive industrial development and urban growth. Immigrants from Europe supplied much of the required labor for this transition, working long hours in often dangerous conditions for little pay. Big business monopolies operated with little or no regulation, and Congress and the courts intervened when labor tried to organize.

Among the 25 million who immigrated to the U.S. after the Civil War and before World War I were Sandburg's

parents. His father was a blacksmith's helper who worked on steam locomotives with a sledge hammer—ten hours a day, six days a week, fourteen cents per hour. As a boy of eleven, Carl cleaned offices and delivered newspapers, and after eighth-grade a severe national economic depression compelled him to work full-time. He worked jobs ranging from delivering milk and milking cows to laboring in a brickyard and icehouse, harvesting wheat, and renting out rowboats. Carl sold stereographs all over the Midwest and beyond and worked at a local firehouse that also gave him a place to sleep while he attended college.

In the early 1900s Carl was an organizer for the Social Democratic Party in Wisconsin, which championed causes of the labor class and the growth of unions. In addition to higher wages and shorter hours for working people the party supported the prohibition of child labor; protection of the rights of women in the labor force and their ability to vote, a graduated income and property tax, urban renewal free medical care and school work for the unemployed, state farm insurance, pensions, workingmen's compensation, and municipal ownership of utilities. With its exponential growth in numbers and political power the labor movement championed the idea of Labor Day, a holiday that would unify union workers from across the industrial spectrum and highlight the social and economic achievements of American workers.

Sandburg saw it as his civic duty as a writer and orator to use the right of free speech and expression to promote social justice (life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness) for all Americans. He pursued this belief in Chicago, reporting on labor issues and continuing to write poetry that chronicled the life of the working class in a direct, sometimes brutal way. He would often employ the vernacular language of the people to describe their struggles, dreams, and strength to overcome hardships and oppression.

In his highly acclaimed poem "Chicago" he describes the "faces of women and children...the marks of wanton hunger" and also challenges readers to "Come and show me another city with lifted head singing so proud to be alive and coarse and strong and cunning." "Proud to be Hog Butcher, Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat, Player with Railroads and Freight Handler to the Nation."

Nearly fifteen years later Sandburg spoke to the issues of hard times during the Great Depression. In his seminal work, *The People*, Yes he consoles "the people of the earth, the family of man" and lifts the hopes of the people who "in the darkness with a great bundle of grief...march in tune and step with the constellation of universal law." Charlotte journalist and close friend and biographer of Carl Sandburg, Harry Golden, described the work "as a series of psalms which sing the American experience: hardship, humor, fortitude, and speech.... It is affirmative, optimistic; in some places tender, in other tough." The enactment of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal policies, such as workman's compensation and social security, echoed some of Sandburg's earlier political objectives.

Sandburg continued to actively pursue his life's work

during his final twenty-two years in Flat Rock at Connemara, writing one-third of his publications including: *Always the Young Strangers* (an autobiography of his early life), the *Complete Poems* (for which he won a third Pulitzer Prize), the second edition of the *American Song Bag*, *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years and The War Years* (the single 1,000 page volume of Lincoln), *Remembrance Rock* (his iconic work of historical fiction written under contract to MGM Studios), and his last collection of poems, *Honey and Salt* (which he published at eighty-five years of age). He said, "The brightest, most lasting happiness I know is that which comes from yearning, striving, struggling, fashioning, this way and that, till a thing is done." He labored and wrote of ordinary laborers all his life.

Although Sandburg achieved great fame, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, he never abandoned his common roots. In his works and in his personal life he remained true to his moniker, The Poet of the People. At Carl's memorial service in 1967, President Johnson heralded the poet as "the bard of democracy, the echo of the people. Our conscience and chronicler of truth, and beauty, and purpose...he gave us the truest and most enduring vision of our own greatness."

## HELP BRING SANDBURG BACK

By John Quinley

No other American writer was at the same time so widely read, heard, and seen as Carl Sandburg; yet, little attention was given to his work in the decades after his death. Today, I am sure you are pleased when you see Sandburg's legacy included in an article or documentary and disappointed when it isn't.

For example:

Former President Barack Obama noted in his recent book, *A Promised Land*, that his frequent travels from Chicago to Springfield went through Sandburg country.

The *New York Times* bestselling author Erik Larson, shared that the Carl Sandburg Literary Award was among his most treasured honors.

A *Smithsonian Magazine* article on national hobo day mentions Sandburg contemporaries and colleagues, but not Carl.

A PBS documentary about Allister Cooke features a clip of the interview he conducted during Chicago Dynamic Week with Frank Lloyd Wright and Carl Sandburg, but Carl isn't mentioned or shown.

Please send me your own observations (jwquinley@gmail.com), and feel free to be more descriptive than the brief examples above. I am planning to include an analysis of your collective input in an article for *Inklings and Idlings* and in a chapter of my upcoming book, *Sandburg Sidebars*.

## CARL SANDBURG AS INSPIRATION FOR MY FIRST BOOK

By Roger Butts

[Ed. Note: CSHSA member Roger Butts is a hospital chaplain in a 500-bed system in Colorado. He graduated from Galesburg High School in 1984, Appalachian State University in 1988, and Wesley Theological Seminary in DC in 2002. He has been ordained in the Unitarian Universalist tradition for nearly 20 years. His wife, Marta Fioriti, is a minister in the United Church of Christ tradition. *Seeds of Devotion* is his first book. They have three teenagers and a black lab named Gracie.



Chaplain Roger Butts

As a hospital chaplain, I experienced deep grief and loss in 2020 and the early part of 2021. Unlike many others, I was unable to work from home. Unlike others, there was never an option to sequester myself. I showed up and experienced a wide range of emotions as patient numbers climbed and fell and re-emerged. So many tears. So many stresses.

I was interviewed by a local Colorado Springs TV news reporter about an early COVID death I chaplained. The family could not possibly make it in time to be with their elderly loved one, as one side of the family lived in the southeast, and the other lived in California. She was decompensating so quickly that her children and grandchildren would have made it to the hospital well after she died. So, a nurse and I put on our Personal Protective Equipment, and we connected family members and patient via telephone. They prayed. They sang. They told her she was loved. I will never forget the privilege of holding that phone up to her ear in the last couple of hours of that woman's life.

When I got home at night after work, there were no tennis matches, fewer dinner parties, and a reduced number of church events. I was home more. And my wife, a minister in the United Church of Christ, set up a home office for her ministry which now involved a lot of Zoom and a lot of creativity. I used the home office too. And suddenly all the stories and all the prayers from twenty years of ministry, including recent ones involving COVID, started to line up in my mind. I began to think that a book might be in me. Back when I was graduating from Galesburg High School, Class of 1984, nobody would have voted for me to write a book ever in my life. But here we are.

At that time, mid-2020, a local publishing house, headed up by a friend of mine, put out the word that they

were seeking new authors. I submitted a proposal, and they took it all. Soon, we had a title, *Seeds of Devotion: Weekly Contemplations on Faith*. We had a cover. An editor did her magic and made the manuscript much better. We found great endorsements from a Buddhist writer and teacher, some Catholic contemplatives, and an Emmy Award-winning documentarian, among others.

And, after all of it was put together, ready to launch, the very last thing I had to write was a dedication. Of course, I dedicated my first book to my wife and three kids. And then, I added:

*To Carl Sandburg, who gave me a song and Thomas Merton, who gave me a map.*

It is pretty clear in the book why I dedicate the book to Thomas Merton. His fingerprints are all over the thinking and the orientation of my spiritual path and my expression of it.

But, Carl Sandburg? Why Sandburg? Growing up in Galesburg, I certainly knew about him. Hello mall. Hello community college. Hello "Fog coming in on cat's feet." Hello, Chicago and your broad shoulders.

It wasn't until later that I knew about his socialist organizing, his feisty anger towards fundamentalists, his lifelong NAACP membership awarded to him in recognition of his being a "major prophet of civil rights." I certainly didn't know about his beautiful poem, "Names," which gives voice to his Universalist streak--about a mile long, and nurtured, undoubtedly, by his time at the Universalist-founded Lombard College. I knew "Fog" and that was about it. It would take me years of reading and re-reading Sandburg, especially those early poems, to get to know him in all of his contradictory, beautiful, amazing complexity.

I dedicated this book to Carl Sandburg, because he inspires me. He helped me to see that the prairie was more majestic than what I could see. He gave me a song—of the beauty of the land, of the sacred essence of the ordinary, and of the love of democracy and the people, yes. Of course, the people.

He sang a song that is timely now and timeless. And my book is a tip of the hat to Sandburg. I want to sing along with him.

### THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE AS SACRAMENT/ THE ORDINARY AS SACRED

He makes the human experience a sacrament. Who can forget in his search for happiness and depth and connection that the professors and the executives were lacking the fundamental experience of being alive, so they could not speak of happiness? But the Hungarians with their women and their kegs, now they knew. They embodied happiness and need not even ask the question. They just lived it.

Every day as a chaplain, I see the holiness of the human experience. People tell me about their great loves. And how they met their great loves. They tell me about their families. They tell me about their losses and their

regrets, and they tell me about what makes them proud and what makes them feel alive. It is all sacred. And Sandburg knew it and expressed it:

*Consider the Fish Cryer, whose voice is like the booming north wind over a vast empty corn field, joyful as the star ballerina's transcendent dance. He's glad. Glad that fish are a thing that God made. This gladness hints at the sheer delight of the cryer and the scene. The Psalmist says the glad exult and are jubilant with joy.*

The glad know what is sacred, and Sandburg points to this ordinary scene as a sacred, profound moment. As profound as the righteous in their gladness praising God.

*Consider the guitar maker down by Hull House. I thought he had a real soul and knew a lot about God. There was light in his eyes of one who has conquered sorrow in so far as sorrow is conquerable or worth conquering. Anyway he is the only Chicago citizen I was jealous of that day. He played a dance they play in some parts of Italy when the harvest of grapes is over and the wine presses are ready for work.*

The Hungarians and their kegs, the fish cryer and his customers, the guitar maker and his dance, all are connected to a source of life that enable them to be the icons and embodiments of the God of everyday life.

#### THE REJECTION OF FUNDAMENTALISM-TRIBALISM/THE EMBRACE OF UNIVERSALISM

In his classic poem, "Billy Sunday" (and "To a Contemporary Bunkshooter") Carl Sandburg just rails against Christian evangelist Billy Sunday, who comes around tearing his shirt, yelling about Jesus, and talking about who is going to hell. Sunday shouts and screams about who is going to hell like he "knows all about it." Sandburg was clearly angry that he was making money off this schtick. But that wasn't the worst of it, rather Sandburg saw the damage it did. The way it hurt. Sandburg laments that the carpenters have to build new emergency departments for the women and children who faint and are hurt by his histrionics. I think of this hospital building lament as a proxy for the psychological, emotional, and spiritual abuse that Sandburg sees in Sunday. Sandburg also goes after those who support and back Sunday as the same crowd who killed Jesus. Follow the money, and you'll find a crowd of scoundrels out to exploit the poor and the vulnerable. Sandburg is never so feisty and such a prophet as in "Billy Sunday."

That is a song I've sung a lot in the past, and there are certainly hints of that song in my book. When I grew up in Galesburg and had a vague notion of Sandburg, I did not know anything about Universalism (that knowledge would come in college.) But Sandburg sang a song of Universalism and that song is the song of my heart and his.

His sense of universalism is most pronounced in "Names." "There is only one horse in all the earth and his name is all horses. There is only one fish in the sea and his name is all fishes. There is only one maker and all the people of the earth are called all God's children."

About his own sense of religion, he said: "I am a Christian, a Quaker, a Moslem, a Buddhist, a Confucian and maybe a Catholic pantheist or a Joan of Arc who hears voices. I am all these and more." That is a song he gave me. Of course, this is the heart of my dedication to Sandburg.

Growing up, I did not know that Sandburg attended a Universalist college, Lombard College, in Galesburg. The college did not force students to learn about Universalism, but I have to believe that Sandburg appreciated knowing there was a religion that believed in the goodness at the heart of all creation, that believed in a loving, compassionate God, and that there was no hell. (The Universalists didn't say much about dancing one way or the other, unlike the other churches in Galesburg, but it was clear to Sandburg that they didn't believe you could dance your way to hell, as other places did.)

#### THE POSSIBILITY OF TRANSFORMATION

The haunting example of transformation in Sandburg's poetry is "Grass." Haunting and real and direct. The grass transforms the battlefield to such an extent that memory fades quickly, painlessly. All that had been transformed by the war. The loss. The regret. The shattered families. Lost to a transforming grass and a forgetful citizenry.

"Bath," however, is the transformation poem that touches my heart and mind. Who among us cannot relate at one point or another with the cynicism and despair of the man who sees the whole world as a grinning skull and cross-bones. No color in the flesh of anyone. The joy zapped out of the whole world. The grief, the loss, the exhaustion, the competition, the drama, the regrets, the betrayal, the dog-eat-dog of a human life can get to be a bit much.

And "then." Whenever Sandburg throws that word "then" into a poem, something magical is about to happen. Magical as any scene in a Garcia Marquez book,

*Then cynical despairing man walks into a concert. And is washed, washed deep inside. Something happened. The music broke down his heart and his mind and his heart and his mind were regenerated, rebuilt, renewed. He clapped and clapped along with the rest of the crowd. Encore. Encore!*

For me, it was back in 1990-something. I had just come out of a long-term relationship. I was no longer working on Capitol Hill. One Thanksgiving morning I drove from the city out to the suburbs on I-95 to see my long-time dear friends also from Galesburg who also ended up in DC for work and life. I was driving out of the city and listening to the Indigo Girls. There was a crispness to the air. There was a stark blue sky. And there were the voices of Amy and Emily maybe singing about love or love lost or a sense of belonging. Who knows what the song was? In that moment, it was as if eternity came into me. Something in me was regenerated, rebuilt, renewed. I'll never forget it. It is the closest thing I've ever had to an epiphany.

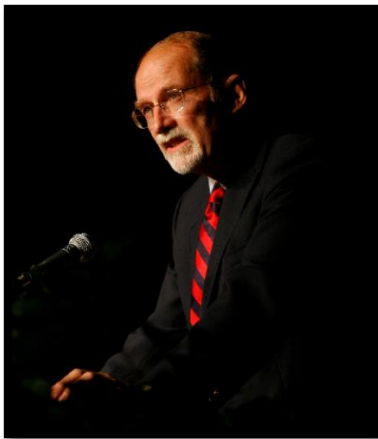
Sandburg, I notice, is a poet of hope, always seeking that language that will capture the essence of the transformative possibility.

This is why I dedicated my book to Sandburg. The belief in transformation. This belief in the sanctity of the human person. This belief that we are all in this together, and together we can build a better world.

## WORLD WAR I & SANDBURG'S ANTI-WAR POEMS

By Dr. John Hallwas

[Ed. Note: A writer, speaker, and adult-education leader, John E. Hallwas is Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Western Illinois University. Well-known for his many books about Illinois and the Midwest, he has also written scores of journal articles and hundreds of newspaper and magazine essays, as well as several plays. Dr. Hallwas received his Bachelor of Science in Education degree (with honors) in 1967 and his Master of Arts degree in 1968. Both were from Western Illinois University. He was an NDEA Fellow at the University of Florida in the late 1960s and received his Ph.D. there in 1972. Hired by his alma mater, Hallwas taught English at WIU for thirty-four years. An expert on the literature of Illinois, Hallwas is the editor of *Illinois Literature: The Nineteenth Century* (1986) and *Studies in Illinois Poetry* (1989). He has also written introductions to modern editions of works by half a dozen Illinois authors, including Carl Sandburg's *Chicago Poems* (1992). He was a featured speaker at the Carl Sandburg Festival in Galesburg, The author of local history books on his home area, as well as the writer and host for local history television programs, Hallwas currently writes a weekly newspaper column titled "On Community" for Macomb's newspaper, the *McDonough County Voice*. Hundreds of the Hallwas articles and lectures are available in the John Hallwas Collection at the Archives of Malpass Library, Western Illinois University. The following article appeared in the July 22, 2017 *McDonough County Voice*.]



Dr. John Hallwas

Today marks fifty years since the death of writer Carl Sandburg who was once widely known for his poetry and multi-volume Lincoln biography. He also wrote the well-known *Rootabaga Stories* for children as well as a very good memoir about growing up in Galesburg, titled *Always the Young Strangers* (1953).

Although he was, in his own time, one of the most well-known and widely admired Americans, public familiarity with his work has diminished since his death in 1967. In 1992 I did an edition of his most famous poetry volume, *Chicago Poems* (1916), which first gave him a reputation a century ago. As I mentioned in my introduction, it was "a tradition-shattering book" in some ways, especially because "it focused substantially on city life and expressed

the poet's commitment to the masses." Young Sandburg was, of course, an ardent Socialist.

As we now look back over a century to our nation's involvement in World War I, it is also pertinent to remember that he was perhaps the most significant American poetic voice about that war. One of his most interesting poems on that subject is "Killers" in which he empathizes with all the soldiers—before America even became involved. He had not seen them fighting, but he had read about the horrific battles and huge casualties, and in an imaginative sense, he is a witness to their sacrifice:

*Under the sun  
Are sixteen million men,  
Chosen for shining teeth,  
Sharp eyes, hard legs,  
And a running of young warm blood in their wrists.*

*And the sixteen million are killing . . . and killing and  
killing.*

*....I never forget them day or night:  
They beat on my head for memory of them; They  
pound on my heart. . . ."*

He is clearly obsessed by the massive, senseless slaughter, and later in that poem he says, "I wake in the night and smell the trenches."

In another anti-war poem, called "Iron," Sandburg wants his readers to reflect on the inevitable relationship between war and graves, so after describing "Long, steel guns/ Pointed from the war ships," he also describes "Broad, iron shovels,/ Scooping out oblong vaults." And he invites the readers of his poem to become imaginative witnesses, too: "I ask you to witness--/ The shovel is brother to the gun."

In Sandburg's view, most wars were the result of leaders quarreling, and the problem was that ordinary men then sacrificed their lives for causes that should have been addressed in other ways. In a poem called "Ready to Kill" he even depicts himself as an angry onlooker at "a bronze memorial of a famous general,/ Riding horseback with a flag and a sword and a revolver on him," for he knows that figure is "Ready to kill anybody that gets in his way." And in contrast, "the farmer, the miner, the shop man, the factory hand, the fireman, and the teamster" are not remembered with bronze memorials, even though they are "the real huskies, that are doing the work of the world, and feeding people instead of butchering them." He wants to change the perspective of people, so they celebrate the positive things that hard-working folks do every day, rather than just the achievements of those who fight and kill for some cause.

One of our nation's most well-known anti-war poems is "Grass," which he wrote after Americans also became involved in World War I, and it takes a broad look at all wars—as a waste of human lives. He gives voice to the grass itself, which says at the outset,

*Pile the bodies high at Austerlitz and Waterloo.  
Shovel them under and let me work—  
I am the grass; I cover all.*

As he points out later in the poem, ten or twenty years after those men laid down their lives for a particular stretch of ground, the public forgets them, asking the train conductor as they pass, “What place is this?/ Where are we now?”

When I was doing research on Sandburg, forty years ago in the late 1970s I discovered an early poem by him that he had probably forgotten and was never included in his 800-page volume of *The Complete Poems of Carl Sandburg* (1969). Written during 1915 for *The International Socialist Review*, it is called “Ashes and Dreams,” and it depicts “mothers of the world,” who are watching as their young sons get killed and are buried on battlefields, often in mass graves. It concludes,

*White faces up,  
Eyes wide and blind,  
Legs stiff and arms limp,  
Pass them along*

*And pile them in  
And tumble them over,  
Ashes and dreams together*

*(Mothers of the world,  
Your waste of work)*

In other words, there are always other victims of war losses, besides the dead soldiers themselves—especially mothers, who also had dreams for those sons, and who had worked to raise them, only to see those hopes become ashes.

As these and other poems reveal, early in his life, as a former soldier himself in the essentially unjustified Spanish-American War, and then as a man in his thirties watching World War I get started and become horrific, Sandburg was a very outspoken anti-war poet. Later, as he studied Lincoln and the Civil War, he did not express the same views. He very much approved of Lincoln’s effort to free the slaves, and of course, he did not oppose World War II. But early in his career, he was a thought-provoking critic of militarism, and it happens that historians have long agreed that World War I accomplished little, if anything, at a human price that was unprecedented in the history of humanity.

Fifty years after his death, Sandburg is still a thought-provoking voice for the struggle and suffering of ordinary people, who are often the victims of powerful cultural forces—including the values and motives prompting wars that might otherwise be avoided.

## **SANDBURG INTERVIEW WITH MURROW**

By Gayle Keiser

[Ed. Note: This is part 2 of CSHSA member Gayle Keiser’s account of journalist Edward R. Murrow’s interview of Carl and Lilian Sandburg at Connemara in 1961.]

Before Edward R. Murrow’s interview with Carl Sandburg continued, Murrow spoke directly to listeners on the other side of the camera. “In his epoch novel, *Remembrance Rock*, Mr. Sandburg interprets for us his

deep faith in America and in the people who shaped what is sometimes called ‘the American Dream.’” Murrow asked Sandburg to read the following passage from that book:

*When we say a patriot is one who loves his country, what kind of love do we mean? A love that we can throw on a scale and see how much it weighs? A love we can take apart to see how it ticks? A love where with a yardstick we record how long, high, wide, it is? Or is a patriot’s love of country a thing invisible, a quality, a human shade and breath, beyond all reckoning and measurement? These are questions. They are old as the time of man. And the answers to them we know in part. For we know when a nation goes down and never comes back, when a society or a civilization perishes, one condition may always be found. They forgot where they came from. They lost sight of what brought them along. The hard beginnings were forgotten and the struggles farther along. They became satisfied with themselves. Unity and common understanding there had been, enough to overcome rot and dissolution, enough to break through their obstacles. But the mockers came. And the deniers were heard. And vision and hope faded. And the custom of greeting became “What’s the use?” And men whose forefathers would go anywhere, holding nothing impossible in the genius of man, joined the mockers and deniers. They forgot where they came from. They lost sight of what had brought them along.*

The October 1961 interview turned deadly serious when Murrow asked Sandburg, “Do you feel that we’re in danger of tearing ourselves apart?”

Sandburg furrowed his brow and began, “There never has been a time that there were not clouds on the horizon for this country. And there was one crisis after another that can be named, from the coming of the Revolution, and that Civil War the likes of which almost no other country has ever had. Then the two world wars.”

Settling back, Sandburg continued, “Over and over again it has looked as if we were sunk as a nation. And always—it’s the point I try to make in that novel, *Remembrance Rock*—always there’s been a saving remnant, always there has been enough of a small, faithful minority, faithful to the death.”

What were the issues facing the U.S. in 1961 that would have caused Murrow to ask if the country was being torn apart? Are there similar issues or events occurring now in 2021?

In January of 1961 John Kennedy became the 35th President of the United States after winning the 1960 election with the smallest margin of victory in American history amid rumors swirling that the election was “stolen” with fraudulent votes manipulated by Chicago Mayor Richard Daley’s political machine. No voter fraud in that election has since been proven.

Kennedy’s vigor in office contrasted with historian William Manchester’s characterization of Dwight Eisenhower’s Presidency as “a long, lazy game of golf while clouds gathered on the horizon.” Kennedy’s agenda did not include racial discrimination issues, consistent with

Eisenhower's hesitancy in the realm of civil rights for African Americans.

So-called "Freedom Riders" began in 1961 to challenge racial segregation laws by riding interstate buses through the South. Some of the Freedom Riders, including John Lewis who was later elected to Congress to represent Georgia's District 5, were attacked and beaten for their civil rights activism.

President Kennedy addressed Congress on May 25 and committed the U.S. to land the first man on the moon. The USSR already had celebrated much success in the space race—first solar orbit, first impact on the moon, first photographs of the moon from a lunar orbit, and first Russian cosmonaut in space on April 12. The U.S. was not far behind, consistent with Sandburg's observation that "(our) forefathers would go anywhere, holding nothing impossible in the genius of man." On May 5 Alan Shepard became the first American astronaut to orbit the Earth.

U.S. relations with the USSR deteriorated into a "Cold War" when Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev closed the border between East and West Berlin on August 13, 1961. He ordered construction of a wall to stop people leaving the East to pursue freedom and greater economic opportunity in the West. The Berlin Wall became a visible reminder of the distrust between East and West.

At Murrow's request, Sandburg read from *Remembrance Rock*:

*The call to hardship, toil and combat runs like a blood-scarlet thread over and through the story of the American people. It has cost to build this nation. Living men in struggle and risk, in self-denial and pain, in familiarity with sacrifice, wounds and death—those living men of the past paid the cost....They ought not to be forgotten, the dead who held in their clinched hands that which became the heritage of us—the living.*

Fast-forward nearly six decades to 2020.

President Trump had received criticism from some quarters for the amount of time he spent golfing. In fact, he was golfing at the Trump National Golf Club in Virginia when TV networks called the November election for Joe Biden. But Trump's turbulent Presidency could hardly be compared to "a long, lazy game of golf." No issue was more crucial to his downfall than Trump's handling of the COVID-19 virus outbreak which caused the deaths of over 235,000 Americans by Election Day.

President Trump developed a warm relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin soon after taking office. In his twenty years as president or prime minister, the 67-year-old former KGB spy organized a brazen end-run around Russia's presidential term limits that will allow him to stay in office until 2036. Perhaps inspired by Putin's example, President Trump challenged the tradition of the peaceful transfer of power maintained by the US Constitution, refused to concede defeat in the 2020 election, and insisted without evidence that the election was "stolen."

On January 6, 2021 when the U.S. House of

Representatives met to certify the votes cast by the Electoral College, supporters of the defeated incumbent stormed the Capitol with the intention of disrupting the Constitutionally mandated process. Despite highly charged divisions within Congress that mirror nationwide political, social, and economic divisions in American society, President Biden was inaugurated the 46th American President two weeks later.

Congressman John Lewis often stated, "THE most important right we have as Americans is the right to vote." Lewis fought for federal legislation to guarantee equal treatment of all Americans with respect to voting rights. Despite passage in the House of Representatives of voting rights legislation prior to Lewis' death in 2020, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell refused to call the bill for consideration in the Senate. Meanwhile a flurry of bills passed state legislatures in 2021, making voter participation more difficult for minorities.

The year 2021 saw many Americans fighting for fair treatment in how the U.S. justice system arrests, adjudicates, and penalizes people of color, women, and immigrants. Approximately a year after George Floyd died under the knee of a Minneapolis police officer, nationwide protests sparked against racism, discrimination, and police brutality in the U.S., and a murder trial began in March. The Black Lives Matter movement generated international protests. On June 25 Derek Chauvin was sentenced on a second-degree murder charge to twenty-two and a half years in prison.

In the midst of a global warming crisis that endangers the existence of life on earth as much as the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis threatened nuclear annihilation, a private entrepreneur built "a highway to space in order to save the earth" and give hope for the future. In July 2021 two privately funded flights with civilian passengers were launched into space. More civilian flights are anticipated as NASA develops business partnerships to land a man on Mars and colonize that planet.

In summary, critical parallels exist between challenges facing this country in 1961 and again in 2021. What might Sandburg say about similar problems resurfacing years later? Murrow asked Sandburg to read from *The People, Yes, #107* passages which reflect his spirit of optimism and wisdom on the echoing of issues through time:

*The people will live on,  
The learning and blundering people will live on.  
They will be tricked and sold and again sold  
And go back to the nourishing earth for footholds,  
The people so peculiar in renewal and comeback,  
You can't laugh off their capacity to take it.  
The mammoth rests between his cyclonic dramas.*

*Man is a long time coming.  
Man will yet win.  
Brother may yet line up with brother.*

*This old anvil laughs at many broken hammers.  
There are men who can't be bought.  
There are women beyond purchase.  
The fireborn are at home in fire.*

*The stars make no noise  
You can't hinder the wind from blowing.  
Time is a great teacher.  
Who can live without hope?*

*In the darkness with a great bundle of grief  
the people march.  
In the night, and overhead a shovel of stars for  
keeps, the people march:  
"Where to? what next?"*

The themes in *The People*, *Yes* and *Remembrance Rock* are the same as those running through other Sandburg writings: his love of America and its democracy, the mystery of human beings and where they are going, and the hope that people everywhere will someday blunder through the fog of injustice and the hypocrisy of bigotry into a bright and enduring world of peace.

**CARL  
SANDBURG**  
*"...for it could be a place  
to come and remember."* **HISTORIC  
SITE  
ASSOCIATION**



The **Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association**, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, promotes awareness of the historical and cultural significance of Carl Sandburg and the Carl Sandburg State Historic Site in Galesburg, Illinois. We support a variety of educational programs and the collection, preservation, and display of materials which demonstrate the life, times, and achievements of Carl Sandburg.

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