

The Wisdom of Carl and Paula Sandburg

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By the time Carl Sandburg died in 1967, at age 89, many Americans considered him one of the wisest men of his time. He was primarily a poet and author of a six-volume biography of Abraham Lincoln, winning a Pulitzer Prize for both history (1940) and poetry (1951)—he had earlier shared the poetry prize in 1919. But he also wrote numerous other works including children’s stories, innumerable newspaper articles and columns, memoirs, and a novel of over one thousand pages. In addition, he was an early collector of American folk songs, which appeared in his *The American Songbag* (1927) and *The New American Songbag* (1950), and which he often sang as he toured the country with his guitar. His wife for almost sixty years was Lilian (Paula) Steichen, a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the University of Chicago. According to many who knew her, she was also a very wise person. After examining their lives in some detail, we shall look more closely at the wisdom they displayed in many facets of their lives. Primarily because Carl was a much more public person and left behind a much more extensive public record, especially his many writings, we will concentrate more on him than her. But like many couples living together for so long, their biographies became intertwined to the extent that the observation of Niven, Carl’s chief biographer, rings true, “his biography is also hers.”¹

The Long Lives of Carl and Paula Sandburg

Carl’s Childhood and Youth

Carl was born the second of seven children on January 6, 1878 in Galesburg, Illinois. His father, August, labored six days a week, ten hours a day as a blacksmith worker for the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad, which ran through town. August was a frugal, hard-working, cautious man who once criticized his wife, Clara, for wasting money (75 cents) on an encyclopedia of world facts that she hoped would broaden the children’s knowledge. While still in grade school Carl (or the less-Swedish sounding Charles as he began calling himself) began working at part-time jobs in order to contribute to the family’s income. Among other jobs, he swept and emptied spittoons at a real estate firm before school and delivered papers after classes ended. Shortly after completing grade school, he saw two younger brothers die from diphtheria. Because the family needed economic help, he did not go on to high school, but began full-time work. In addition to continuing to deliver papers, he became a milk delivery boy. In subsequent years, he worked as a porter in a hotel barbershop, where he also shined shoes, and at jobs in such places as a drugstore, ice house, and horse stalls.

Despite not going to high school, however, he read a great deal, mainly library books, and longed to travel. A family stereoscope and accompanying stereographs of foreign sites whetted his travel appetite. Although his father’s railway pass entitled him to travel freely, his dad only

¹ Penelope Niven, *Carl Sandburg: A Biography* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1991), xvii.

occasionally allowed him to use it, most importantly when he was 18 for a three-day trip to Chicago. The following year, in June 1897, he became a hobo riding boxcar to states from Missouri and Iowa to Nebraska and Colorado. Along the way, he worked at a variety of jobs from farm work in Kansas to washing dishes in Denver. Before returning home in mid-October, he experienced much, and the trip left a permanent mark on him. Already sympathetic to the workers, the poor, and the populism of William Jennings Bryan, these months increased his sympathies with the down-and-outs of society. They also increased his appreciation of the diversity of the American people and of their folk stories and songs. In later poems like *The People, Yes* and in his folk song collections we continue to see traces of his trip. One of the songs he later included in his *The American Songbag* and sometimes sang at performances was “Hallelujah, I’m a Bum!” For the rest of his life, he would cherish travel and often be away from home.

In the decade following his hobo experience, he traveled and learned much more. In 1898 he served as a private during the Spanish-American War and was briefly stationed in Puerto Rico before returning later in the year to Galesburg. While working at the town fire department, he took classes at Galesburg’s Lombard College. Making up for not attending high school, he also took classes at its preparatory school. At Lombard, he studied English, Latin, history, chemistry, drama, public speaking, and elocution; played basketball on the college team, and became editor of the college literary journal. In 1901, he won a major oratory contest at the college with a speech on John Ruskin, the English critic of industrial society who advocated a more artistic approach to life.

The following year he left Lombard without a degree. But he had learned much in his years there, acquiring a life-long love of the poetry of Walt Whitman and reading many other writers such as the pragmatist philosopher William James. The professor who had the greatest impact on him was Philip Green Wright. He encouraged Sandburg’s literary efforts and in 1904 published his former student’s first literary collection, *In Reckless Ecstasy*, which contained Sandburg’s first poems and several prose pieces.

In the summer of 1900, he traveled on his bicycle to neighboring areas to sell stereoscopes and stereographs to housewives, farmers, and others. He gave his father half of the money he earned. The following summer, he and a friend traveled to southeastern Michigan cities, including Ann Arbor and Detroit, to sell more such viewing materials. After leaving Lombard in 1902, he spent additional years selling them in other states including Wisconsin, Indiana, New Jersey, and Delaware. And he continued reading, with Shakespeare, the Bible, Whitman, Emerson, Zola, Ibsen, London, and Norris’s *The Octopus* being among his favorites. He visited Whitman’s New Jersey home and tomb. He agreed with much of the social criticism he found in authors like Norris and Upton Sinclair, and he admired the socialist Eugene Debs (for more on the socialism of Sandburg and Debs in the early decades of the twentieth century, see the section below on “The Sandburgs’ Political Wisdom and the Lincoln Connection”). He also observed terrible labor conditions, like those he witnessed in Millville, New Jersey, observations that made their way into his book *In Reckless Ecstasy*.

In 1904, on the way back to Illinois, he spent ten days in a Pittsburg jail for trying to hop a free ride in a railway coal car. Later on when he sang such songs as “Portland County Jail,” he knew first-hand of the type of experience of which he sang. During the next few years he worked at a variety of jobs, including occasionally selling stereographs. He wrote prose and poems and did editorial work for a Chicago magazine, wrote a column for a Galesburg

newspaper, again worked as a fireman, and traveled around giving lectures on various subjects including Walt Whitman, socialism, and the “Blunders of Modern Civilization” (war, the penal system, and child labor). For a short time he also worked as a writer, associate editor, and advertising man for *The Lyceumite*, a Chicago journal dealing with traveling lecturers and entertainers. In these years he read much on radical politics including works of Marx and other socialists, and Sandburg’s prose writings and lectures reflected his sympathy with the Muckraking social critics of the day like Upton Sinclair. He also admired the work of foreign social critics like George Bernard Shaw and Maxim Gorky. His radical sympathies were clearly evident in two more Sandburg books that Professor Wright published in 1907 and 1908, *Incidental* and *The Plaint of a Rose*.

Another short work that he wrote in 1908 was an essay entitled “You and Your Job,” which was printed and distributed in pamphlet form. In it he attacked the American myth that linked poverty with laziness and monetary success with virtues such as industriousness. All people, he believed, owed debts of gratitude to those who helped form and educate them. “Education was social,” the words that people speak are “a social product, and so are many other things. In fact, it would be hard to find a thing that was purely and unadulteratedly an individual product.” And many things were passed down from previous generations. “Piece by piece, through changes and experiments, we got the alphabet, and so it was with the printing press, and so with the steam engine. . . . Our tools, our houses, our food and clothing, our very manners and customs and songs and arts, are all things that trace far back--far back into the hazy beginnings of history.”²

Paula, Family Life, and Friends

In late 1907 at the headquarters of the Social-Democratic Party in Milwaukee, Sandburg met Lilian Steichen. Her parents, like his, were immigrants. Her older brother, Edward, already on his way to becoming one of America’s best photographers, was born in Luxembourg. Less than a year after their first meeting, the couple married, and he began calling her Paula, as he and some others would for the rest of her life. She also changed the name he had been using, persuading him to go back to his real name, Carl, rather than Charles, which he had been calling himself for some years. She “was by all testimony of her daughters and friends a serene, deeply contented woman, fulfilled, sparkling with vitality, rejoicing in her life.”³ The Sandburgs’ good friend writer Harry Golden stated in 1961 that Carl never made a major decision without first discussing it with her; and describing her at that time, Golden wrote “she is beautiful in a Grecian sense. Her clothes, her hair, everything about her is both graceful and simple,” and she has “enormous energy,” but deliberately “avoided the limelight” that so often surrounded her famous husband.⁴ For almost sixty years, his work and successes depended heavily on her efforts. One of his colleagues observed that Paula “helped make Carl’s married life a song.”⁵ And in old age, Carl stated that “without Paula, he would have been a bum,” and that, along with

² The essay is available at http://debs.indstate.edu/s2133y6_1900.pdf (accessed January 15, 2009).

³ Niven, 682.

⁴ Harry Golden, *Carl Sandburg* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1961), 85.

⁵ Quoted in Niven, 409.

her brother and Professor Philip Green Wright, she was one of the three greatest influences in his life.⁶

In pictures of them, she barely comes up to his shoulders, and she was five years younger. When they met, and for some time afterwards, they were both ardent socialists—his “You and Your Job” bore a Socialist Party imprint. He had recently become a paid organizer for Wisconsin’s Social-Democratic Party; she was an Illinois high-school teacher in the small town of Princeton who helped the party out by translating German socialist writings. She had received more formal education than had he, and in college excelled in philosophy, English, and Latin. A strong, independent-minded woman, she shared his love of literature, nature, walking, and music—he thought she played the piano well enough to become a concert pianist.

For some time after their first meeting, their jobs kept them apart. But they exchanged many letters, and he sent her some of his writings, both poems and prose. These letters reveal her passion and intelligence. She was fond of exclamation marks and often philosophized and referred to writers (for example, she loved the German poet Heine). Although he had contemplated giving up poetry, she encouraged him to keep writing and become *the socialist poet*. In one of her letters, she expressed a sentiment more characteristic of strong women early in the century than near its close: “Your letter tells me that I’m helping you. I like to hear that. So I shall be able to help the world on a little through you.”⁷ Although she would later achieve some fame herself as a well-respected world-class goat breeder—she had spent part of her youth on a farm--she never changed this desire to help the world primarily by helping her husband, and later their three daughters.

Their youngest daughter, Helga, who herself became a writer, noted about her mother: “Her power over my father [was] continuous and subtle.” While he was given to occasional raging and roaring, Paula knew how to disarm him. Helga captured well the relationship between her parents by giving the following example from their old age together. He was irritated when a door handle became stuck and started to shout; “she looked up at him and patted his chest, ‘What a fine strong voice!’ Disarmed, he stood there in love.”⁸ Although not as easy-going as Paula, Carl never spanked his children, and both “parents were gentle presences.”⁹ Helga makes it clear that the respective roles her mother and father adopted throughout their long marriage were freely chosen by each. They both agreed to eliminate in their wedding ceremony any promise by her to obey him, as was often then found in wedding vows, and they thought of themselves as equals, but with different roles. From the very beginning of their marriage, they wanted a child as soon as possible, but their first, Margaret, was not born until three years later in 1911, with Janet following in 1916 and Helga in 1918 (another infant was born dead in 1913).

In the years which followed, he was often gone from home; she looked after their household and helped with some of the more drudgerous tasks of a writer, such as editing, typing, and correspondence. Depending on the location of the changing homes they lived in, she also did some gardening and farming—their daughter Helga said that her mother had the gardening touch. Paula also loved animals, and the Sandburgs had numerous dogs, cats, horses, rabbits, and other four-footed creatures, even pet rats. Even before Margaret was born, while Carl was acting as the private secretary of Emil Seidel, the socialist mayor of Milwaukee, Paula

⁶ Ibid., 694, 695.

⁷ Quoted in Helga Sandburg, *A Great and Glorious Romance* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 113.

⁸ Ibid., 137.

⁹ Helga Sandburg, *Sweet Music: A Book of Family Reminiscence and Song* (New York: Dial, 1963), 13.

had begun raising chickens. Helga observed that “we children . . . weeded, hoed, milked, cleaned the chicken houses and barns.”¹⁰ During Prohibition, she also made wine. And during the mid and late 1930s, as the Great Depression lingered on, the farming efforts of Paula and the girls produced much of the family’s food and milk. But Paula’s most pressing duty was looking after the girls, an especially difficult task because of the unique problems each one presented.

The oldest, Margaret, suffered periodically from epileptic convulsions, the first one occurring when she was nine years old. It took doctors years before Margaret’s epilepsy was correctly diagnosed, but even afterwards for many years, no effective preventive remedies were available to prevent her seizures. Because of her illness and her need to be watched over carefully, the brilliant young girl was educated primarily at home. She read tirelessly, played the piano, and helped her parents and sisters. She never married and lived with her parents for the rest of their lives. After her father’s death, she edited his final book of poems and *The Poet and the Dream Girl: The Love Letters of Lilian Steichen and Carl Sandburg* (1987).

The second daughter, Janet, had much more trouble learning than did either of her other sisters, and at age 16 she was struck by a car that further slowed her educational process. She did not finish high school until age twenty-two. Like Margaret, she also never married, and continued living with her parents until their deaths. Paula devoted countless hours to looking after the special needs of these two daughters, while their always frugal father worried about how to earn enough money for their medical and other needs. His chief biographer wrote that from the early 1920s, “his concern for his family’s long-term security motivated every professional decision he made.”¹¹

The youngest daughter, Helga (originally named Mary Ellen), was the healthiest of the three, and presented less problems for her parents, at least until her romantic involvements began to complicate their lives. In late 1940, at age 21, she told them she had eloped with her mother’s farm hand Joe, who was only 17 years old. Her mom began crying and had to be consoled by her dad—in moments of distress such as this, he often lay down with her on their bed and had her put her head on his shoulder. Helga, who now dropped out of college, and Joe lived with her parents on the property they had moved to in 1927 on Lake Michigan (near Harbert). Although the Sandburg’s three-story house was plenty large enough to accommodate the young couple, Paula had a separate cottage built for them in the Sandburg orchard so they could enjoy more privacy. In late 1941 Helga gave birth to a son and two years later to a daughter. Between the two births, Helga, Joe, and son had moved to Illinois before Joe entered wartime service and she had returned to her parents’ home in Michigan. In 1945, Helga divorced Joe soon after his return from service and later that year the whole three-generational Sandburg family moved to Connemara Farm, 245 acres amidst the Blue Ridge Mountains in Flat Rock, North Carolina.

For the next six years the Sandburgs greatly enjoyed their new three-story, twenty-two room house and property, and grandfather Carl loved having his two grandchildren around. Then in 1951 Helga married again, and after she and her young family remained with Carl and Paula for about a year they moved to Washington, D. C. The grandparents greatly missed their grandchildren, and Carl wrote:

the heart keeps turning to them
memory will not be still

¹⁰ *A Great and Glorious Romance*, 165.

¹¹ Niven, 386.

remembering how and what they were
the faces and words of them . . .¹²

For the next few years, however, occasional visits between the two households occurred until differences and tensions, especially between Carl and Helga's new husband, led to a four-year period in which Helga and her family broke off relations with her dad. Although defending Carl against criticism from Helga, Paula tried to mend the rift; but it was not until 1960, after Helga had separated from her second husband, that father and daughter reconciled. From then until Carl's death (and beyond) Helga and the two maturing grandchildren, as well as a third husband liked by Carl and Paula, often visited Connemara.

Despite the years of separation between Carl and Helga, Niven wrote: "The incontrovertible fact, documented everywhere in poems, letters, and deeds, was the enduring love Sandburg and Paula shared, and their devotion to their family."¹³ After his death, Paula herself wrote, "It seems to me that Carl and I were always surrounded by children, books, and animals. The children had everything that the two of us had to give—love, attention, and in Carl's case, the gift of imagination and humor."¹⁴

One of the secrets of their long happy marriage, according to Paula in old age, was that they "never tried to 'remake' each other" and that they encouraged each other to pursue their individual wishes.¹⁵ Helga thought that her parents fit together well, she with her maternal emphasis on children, house, land, animals, flowers, and crops; and he with his stress on writing. They shared similar values as to what was important in life, always a help in a successful marriage. She thought he was a genius—according to daughter Helga, Paula "excused any crossness or eccentricity on his part," saying "after all, children, he's a genius."¹⁶ In turn, he also admired her intelligence and learning; and they often talked of his writings and of world news. Of the two, Paula seemed to sacrifice the most, but she did it lovingly. This was especially evident when it came to his frequent travels, which occurred for a variety of reasons including the financial needs of his family and because he was "a vagabond at heart."¹⁷ He was often gone for months at a time. In the beginning of 1919, when he was in New York after just returning from over two months of reporting in Sweden for the Newspaper Enterprise Association, he received a letter from Paula. A little over a month earlier, she had given birth to Helga. Paula wrote that she had awoke in tears after a dream that he had come home briefly, but then traveled back to Sweden. She then added:

Buddy [they often addressed each other as "buddy" or "pal"], if you feel you have to go again—it will be much harder for us to let you go! . . . However, Buddy, I'll be game . . . and won't hold you back if you really feel a call to go off somewhere again. I don't want to interfere with your destiny—or your future—or any big chance for your development—or a new inspiration to write! You must be free—till the time comes

¹² As found in Paula Steichen, *My Connemara*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969), 163. This memoir of the Sandburgs' granddaughter eloquently testifies to the mutual love of her and her grandparents.

¹³ Niven, 682.

¹⁴ From her "Introduction" to Carl Sandburg, *The Sandburg Treasury; Prose and Poetry for Young People* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), 7.

¹⁵ Niven, 682.

¹⁶ Helga Sandburg, *Sweet Music*, 25.

¹⁷ Niven, 376.

when your family is sufficiently *mobile* to go with you wherever you go! But meantime you must know *too* how we love you and need you—and so if a proposition is made to you that is *not* very attractive—if you feel 50-50 about it—throw our love for you and & need of you into the balance, and stay home! The kids are a wonderful trio now.¹⁸

In the final year of his life, when she woke him in the mornings, he would sometimes ask in a confused state who it was. She would answer “Paula,” and he would respond, “Too good to be true!” On his deathbed, the final word he spoke was “Paula.”¹⁹

It is not hard to see why he valued her so much—why in a real sense she was almost too good to be true. And in our own age, when many intelligent women would not be as willing to be as self-sacrificing, few women would be as tolerant as she with his almost constant traveling or with his close relationship to many other women.

Niven writes about his “vast web of friendships,” and details his friendly ties with many people, including his brother-in-law, photographer Edward Steichen. Harry Golden wrote that his friendship with Carl “was the most rewarding” of his life and that “Carl was all-out for friendship. If Carl was your friend and your son was sick, Carl worried as much as you.”²⁰ “Friendship with Carl Sandburg is a *complete* thing. It is so complete that at every stage of the relationship you feel yourself helpless because he gives so much more than he receives.”²¹

Golden was a generation younger than Carl, and his Jewish parents had emigrated from the Austro-Hungarian Empire to New York City when he was still very young. In the 1920s, he married, had children, and became a stockbroker, but his firm went bankrupt in 1929 and he was found guilty of mail fraud and sent to prison until 1933. After being paroled, he worked in New York and in the early 1940s became a reporter in Charlotte, North Carolina. He met Carl a few years after the Sandburgs had also moved to North Carolina, by which time Golden was already a passionate critic of racial segregation. He had also begun publishing *The Carolina Israelite*, a bi-monthly paper that touched on racial, ethnic, and other issues. Golden’s many articles and books reflected a concern that was shared by Sandburg, the plight of ordinary people and victims of discrimination. With Sandburg’s cooperation, Golden completed his biography of his friend in 1961 and outlived him by about a decade and a half.

Carl’s other friends were from all over the country, and even some abroad. Many of them were fellow writers like himself, but there were also many others in a wide variety of professions and occupations including the architect Frank Lloyd Wright, University of Chicago president Robert Hutchings, noted attorneys Clarence Darrow and Thurgood Marshall (who eventually became the first African American Supreme Court justice), broadcast journalist Edward R. Murrow, and Illinois governor Adlai Stevenson, who invited his old friend to speak at his inauguration in 1949 and then be his guest at the governor’s mansion in Springfield. Stevenson later recalled:

My acquaintance with Carl Sandburg now extends through many years. Among my most pleasant recollections are parties in Chicago in the twenties and thirties where I listened

¹⁸ Quoted in Helga Sandburg, *A Great and Glorious Romance*, 59.

¹⁹ Niven, 700-01; Steichen, *My Connemara*, 176.

²⁰ Niven, 598; Harry Golden, *The Right Time: The Autobiography of Harry Golden* (New York, Putnam, 1969), 319.

²¹ Golden, *Carl Sandburg*, 265.

to him sing from his songbag to the inimitable accompaniment of his guitar, and happy evenings with him . . . where anecdotes, Lincoln and music took us far into the night.²²

In 1953, at a seventy-fifth birthday celebration for Carl, Stevenson, who had been the Democratic presidential nominee in 1952 and would be again in 1956, said that he “is the one living man whose work and whose life epitomize the American dream. He has the earthiness of the prairies, the majesty of mountains, the anger of deep inland seas. In him is the restlessness of the seeker, the questioner, the explorer of far horizons, the hunger that is never satisfied. In him also is the tough strength that has never been fully measured, never unleashed, the resiliency of youthfulness which wells from within, and which no aging can destroy.”²³

Russian poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko was among a number of foreigners who were proud to say, “I was good friends with Carl Sandburg.”²⁴ Spain’s famous classical guitarist Andre Segovia, who sometimes performed in the United States, was another friend, who because of his fondness for Carl agreed to accept him as a pupil even though Sandburg had been playing the guitar for decades and was then 74 years old.

His friends included many women, as well as men, and in most cases, there was no reason for Paula to be jealous. Niven indicates that there is no evidence that he was ever “physically unfaithful.”²⁵ Nevertheless on a few occasions his friendship with women did give Paula legitimate cause for worry. His frequent travel and dealings with a great variety of women can be illustrated by a few examples.

In July 1943, he wrote to his good friend novelist Julia Peterkin “For fourteen weeks I have been in New York and Washington . . . Twice I ducked home for six day periods.”²⁶ Later that year he went to Hollywood, as he did the following year and from time to time after that. His 1943 trip to America’s film capital occurred because he was under MGM contract to write episodes for an eventual film. The project, however, took on a life of its own. Instead of a film resulting from his effort, it was his long novel, *Remembrance Rock*, which began in this unusual manner. In 1958 Hollywood film stars took part in a tribute to him by reading from some of his many works. In 1960 actress Bette Davis starred in a stage review entitled *The World of Carl Sandburg*. He also worked in Hollywood as a consultant to director George Stevens on the film *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965). Among the many stars he met along the way was Marilyn Monroe, who later sent him some poems she had written—the ubiquitous youtube.com even has some shots of the old Sandburg dancing with the much younger Hollywood sex symbol.²⁷

As he traveled he almost always stayed with friends; while working in Hollywood it was usually at his friend Lilla Perry’s Los Angeles home. He disliked staying at hotels, and friends and acquaintances from all over the United States later recollected stories about Sandburg when

²² Quoted in *ibid.*, 107.

²³ Quoted in Philip Yannella, *The Other Carl Sandburg* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996), xi.

²⁴ Quoted in “Yevgeny Yevtushenko looks askance at money,” <http://www.bankrate.com/brm/news/investing/20040123a1.asp> (accessed December 28, 2008).

²⁵ Niven, 681.

²⁶ Carl Sandburg, *The Letters of Carl Sandburg* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 415.

²⁷ *Marilyn Monroe & Carl Sandburg Rare Images*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6St1d2kE8kE> (accessed December 23, 2008).

he was their house guest.²⁸ In addition to his many working trips, including his trips to towns and colleges to lecture, recite, and sing folk songs, in the family's pre-North Carolina days, he sometimes left their Michigan home to get away from winter weather. Writing of the period just before their move to North Carolina in 1945, Niven explains: "Sandburg, prone to bronchitis, had long escaped to Florida or other warm places during the worst of winter, but Paula and the girls had to stay home, and the farm work increased in winters."²⁹

Yet, when asked later in their life, if it was lonely when Carl was away, Paula responded:

Dear, no. I look forward to it in a way because it gives me a chance to catch up on my own work. I think it is good for couples to separate occasionally. And Mr. Sandburg always has such interesting things to tell me when he gets home. I have never felt left out. . . . But I think a woman should create interests of her own. It would be a lonely life if a woman didn't get interested in things for herself.³⁰

The two most significant cases of Paula's jealousy were in 1914 and then again in the 1950s and 1960s. The occasion for the first was all the time he spent, when not working at his regular job with a management magazine, with the many "bright, beautiful women" who worked for or contributed to *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*.³¹ It was this magazine that made Sandburg's reputation as a poet—in 1914, it declared his "Chicago" the best poem of the year. Paula, at home in their suburban home with Margaret, seems to have become upset with him. She reminded him that they had agreed that if either one wished to leave the marriage, the other would consent. He assured her, he did not wish to separate and that he loved her deeply.

The second serious cause of Paula's alarm involved Chicago business woman Donna Workman, who Niven describes as "statuesque and extraordinarily beautiful."³² In the late 1950s, in the years bracketing his eightieth birthday, he often stayed in her plush apartment when he traveled to Chicago. She was about the age of his youngest daughter, greatly admired his writings, and shared his sympathy for poor people—her company, Workman for Workmen, matched unemployed people with employers seeking temporary labor. She later insisted that there was nothing "illicit" about their relationship, that he never "stepped out of line," but that he did love her in a special way and that those "not noble of mind enough to understand this kind of love can go to hell!"³³ She thought that in the late 1950s, when he was still estranged from his daughter Helga, that she might have served as sort of a substitute, but there is no denying that Donna's relationship to him caused discomfort to Paula. Exactly what Paula knew or suspected is not clear, but he did sometime lay his head on Donna's lap and turned over some of his business matters to her, mainly stemming from his prolific writings. Niven discovered in his unpublished materials a piece of paper on which he wrote "Donna I love you so—such a deep

²⁸ See, for example, William Alfred Sutton, *Carl Sandburg Remembered* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1979); and "A tribute to Carl Sandburg at seventy-five," <http://www.archive.org/details/tributetocarlsan00prat> (accessed February 1, 2009).

²⁹ Niven, 569.

³⁰ Quoted in North Callahan, *Carl Sandburg: His Life and Works* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987), 186.

³¹ Niven, 249.

³² *Ibid.*, 654.

³³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 659-60.

love.”³⁴ Many years before, in the 1930s, he had told another close woman friend that it was possible for a man to love many women simultaneously but that marital fidelity was necessary. Like Donna later, this woman insisted that there was love between her and Sandburg, but no sexual relations.³⁵

By the early 1960s, however, Sandburg no longer spent much time with Donna. She seems to have resented his increasing reliance on a new agent, Lucy Kroll, of whom both Carl and Paula thought very highly. Partly based on interviews with their daughter Margaret, Niven writes that “Paula watched their [Donna’s and Carl’s] friendship diminish with relief, for it had wounded and embarrassed her.”³⁶

Despite Carl’s frequent trips away from home and his many female friends, the Sandburg daughters and friends recalled a happy Sandburg home life. In their Michigan and then North Carolina homes, Carl spent most of his time writing and Paula caring for the daughters, house, land, and animals. But there was also time for family walks along Lake Michigan and then on the many trails on or near their extensive Connemara property. And they all enjoyed music, often singing together. Carl often played folk songs on his guitar and daughters Margaret and Paula inherited some of their parents’ musical talent, with Margaret becoming a gifted pianist like her mom, and Helga eventually taking up the guitar like her dad.³⁷ In 1961 Harry Golden, who often visited Carl at his Connemara Farm, wrote that “the impression you get from Carl Sandburg’s home is one of laughter and happiness.”³⁸ He also mentioned how Carl and Paula often held hands.

Carl’s Writings and Stage Performances in the Interwar Years

Carl’s chief source of income was his various writings and his stage performances. In the early years of his marriage, it was mainly his journalistic reporting and columns. This was especially so during the decade and a half he worked for the *Chicago Daily News* before giving the job up when staff salaries were cut by half in 1932 during the Great Depression. By that time, however, not only had several of his poetry collections been published, but also a few volumes each of his children’s stories and Lincoln books, as well as other works including his first collection of American folk songs, *The American Songbag*. Although by no means a rich man, he now with some confidence could rely on such books, plus his stage performances, to earn an adequate income.

His work as a newspaper man and traveling stage performer had not only occurred simultaneously with his efforts that led to so many book publications, but also often furnished materials for his poetry, prose, and folk song collection. In mid-1919, for example, he wrote a series of articles for the *Chicago Daily News* on the tense racial situation in Chicago, one that culminated in violence at the end of July. Later in the year his articles were gathered together and published as a little book entitled *The Chicago Race Riots, July 1919*. In his reporting he

³⁴ Ibid., 659.

³⁵ Ibid., 499-500.

³⁶ Ibid., 681.

³⁷ For Helga's love of music and some of the many folk songs she learned from her dad and others, see her book *Sweet Music*.

³⁸ Golden, *Carl Sandburg*, 85.

mentioned the hatred of “white hoodlums” and a few days after the riots began wrote a poem, dealing with them, “Hoodlums.”

Throughout most of the 1920s, Sandburg was the main film critic for the *Chicago Daily News*, and this task influenced his other writing. In all, between 1920 and 1928, if one includes all of his reviews, he wrote more than 2,000 columns dealing with films. Niven writes that “the convergence of the motion picture, folk music, travel, home life, and the often preposterous realities of daily news events helped to shape [his poems collected in] *Slabs of the Sunburnt West* (1922). There was an overlay of new imagery, drawn, most likely unconsciously, from the realm of the motion picture. . . . Thus the motion picture was one of the dominant forces at work in Sandburg’s imagination during the decade of the twenties.”³⁹

His travels around the country giving stage performances also furnished material for his publications. In his preface to the *The American Songbag of 1927*, he explained how he gathered some of the songs in the collection:

Perhaps I should explain that for a number of years I have gone hither and yon over the United States meeting audiences to whom I talked about poetry and art, read my verses, and closed a program with a half- or quarter-hour of songs, giving verbal footnotes with each song. These itineraries have included now about two-thirds of the state universities of the country, audiences ranging from 3,000 people at the University of California to 30 at the Garret Club in Buffalo, New York, and organizations as diverse as the Poetry Society of South Carolina and the Knife and Fork Club of South Bend, Indiana. The songs I gave often reminded listeners of songs of a kindred character they knew entirely or in fragments; or they would refer me to persons who had similar ballads or ditties.⁴⁰

A friend of Sandburg’s who worked with him on the *Chicago Daily News* wrote about his singing as he strummed his guitar:

Sandburg may not a great singer, but his singing is great From every song that he sings there comes a mood, a character, an emotion. He just stands there, swaying a little like a tree, and sings, and you see farmhands wailing their lonely ballads, hillbillies lamenting over drowned girls, levee hands in the throes of the blues, cowboys singing down their herds, barroom loafers howling for sweeter women, Irish section hands wanting to go home, hoboes making fun of Jay Gould's daughter. The characters are real as life, only more lyric than life ever quite gets to be.⁴¹

Sandburg also gathered information about Lincoln as he traveled. He “traveled from coast to coast in 1924 filling lecture dates and picking up Lincoln material and new folk songs wherever he went.”⁴²

If, as he wrote in 1909, much of his early work was connected with using “every possible tool and situation for the advancement of The Great Cause [socialism],” his efforts during the last forty-five years of his life were devoted primarily to “nation-building.” One scholar contends

³⁹ Niven, 388-89.

⁴⁰ Carl Sandburg, *The American Songbag* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1927), ix.

⁴¹ Lloyd Lewis, *It Takes All Kinds* (Freeport, NY Ayer Company Publishing, 1970), 75.

⁴² Niven, 414.

that “every work from 1922 forward served this function in some way” and that “from that point onward, Carl Sandburg transforms into, and presents himself as, an American patriot. His many works, in multiple genres, served as efforts to give Americans of all ages a sense of their country’s history as well as its potential. He also wanted Americans to understand and appreciate the common man and the common laborer.”⁴³

Sandburg had spent the last several weeks of World War I in Sweden and Norway, from where he reported on the war, its immediate aftermath, and on the chaotic revolutionary conditions in Finland and Russia. On December 10, 1918, a month after the end of the war, he wrote: “I have the feeling that unless Europe gets down to a plain old fashioned ‘rest cure’ of some kind, then Europe will turn into a shambles and a madhouse.”⁴⁴ In the postwar period, many European writers expressed dismay at what Europeans had done to themselves, and titles such as Oswald Spengler’s *Decline of the West* (1918-1922) and T. S. Eliot’s famous poem, “The Waste Land” (1922), reflect a pessimism that was widespread in the 1920s.

Back in the United States, many intellectuals were critical of American life.⁴⁵ Especially notable was the influence of two writers, both friends of Sandburg, Sinclair Lewis and H. L. Mencken. Lewis’s novel *Main Street* appeared in 1920, followed two years later by his *Babbitt*. In his *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920’s*, which first appeared in 1931, Frederick Lewis Allen wrote:

The effect of these two [Lewis] books was overwhelming. In two volumes of merciless literary photography and searing satire, Lewis revealed the ugliness of the American small town, the cultural poverty of its life. . . .

After *Babbitt*, a flood of books reflected the dissatisfaction of the highbrows with the rule of America by the business man and their growing disillusionment. The keynoter of this revolt, its chief tomtom beater, was H. L. Mencken.⁴⁶

Although Sandburg shared some of the harshly critical views of his two friends toward some aspects of American society, overall he was much more positive than they or most major U. S. writers, including many of them who spent part of the 1920s in Europe. “Instead of offering a bleak and pessimistic view of life and human nature, Sandburg’s works make an attempt to offer common readers a renewed sense of optimism. Instead of participating in the modernist tradition of writing obfuscating and challenging fragmented texts, Sandburg offers tightly knitted works that clearly contain over-arching themes of hope and promise. In many ways, Carl Sandburg took it upon himself to put back together a country that many writers saw as hopelessly fragmented.”⁴⁷ And his reaction to the general postwar malaise that affected so many writers in the Western world who

⁴³ Evert Villarreal, “Recovering Carl Sandburg: Politics, Prose, and Poetry after 2006,” (Ph.D. diss., Texas A&M University, 2006) 48, available at <http://txspace.tamu.edu/bitstream/handle/1969.1/4167/etd-tamu-2006B-ENGL-Villar.pdf;jsessionid=7FC582F4DFFAA43A849B6B0FE9296B9C?sequence=1> (accessed January 1, 2009).

⁴⁴ Quoted in Niven, 319.

⁴⁵ For a brief summary of this criticism, see my *An Age of Progress? : Clashing Twentieth-Century Global Forces* (London; New York: Anthem Press, 2008), 191.

⁴⁶ For this quote and more on the critical views of Lewis and Mencken, see *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920’s* (New York: Perennial Library, 1931), 191-98; also available at <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/ALLEN/ch9.html>; for a review of Walter Lippmann, on Mencken’s *Notes on Democracy*, see <http://www.mencken.org/text/txt001/lippman.walter.1926.h-l-mencken.htm> (accessed January 1, 2009).

⁴⁷ Villarreal, 49.

depicted “the decline of the West” was to use “literature to combat—not expose or further manifest—this sense of cultural and moral collapse.”⁴⁸ His optimism can be seen in three different types of work he was engaged in the early 1920s, his poetry, his children’s stories, and his Lincoln biography; and this sense of hope would continue to shine forth in his works for the rest of his life. It was also evident in his political support of Democratic candidates such as Franklin Roosevelt, Adlai Stevenson, and John Kennedy (see below on “The Sandburgs’ Political Wisdom and the Lincoln Connection”).

One scholar’s judgment on the poems in Sandburg’s *Slabs of the Sunburnt West* (1922) is that “many of the poems in this volume, as well as those published thereafter, attempt to retell American history, and this was done to give Americans pride and a renewed sense of understanding of their native land. . . . From this volume of poetry onward, Sandburg would use his literature in a boldly ambitious way—he would use it as a way to build up the nation’s consciousness of its own past and as a vehicle to re-situate and re-present the nation’s rich history, one founded on idealism. Each piece would be couched in such a way that would allow Sandburg to take a sweeping, panoramic view of America’s past, present, and future.”⁴⁹

In his two volumes of children’s stories published in 1922-1923, *Rootabaga Stories* and *Rootabaga Pigeons*, Sandburg created an imaginary world especially suited for American children like his own daughters. According to Golden, “Rootabaga Country is an American country. It has a railroad, ragpickers, policemen, ball teams, tall grass. It is mapped out. If it existed, you could get to it and find your way around. Geographic reality is what makes the *Rootabaga Stories* the first genuinely American fairy tales.” Golden contrasts it with Sinclair Lewis’s *Main Street*:

Rootabaga Country . . . is a good place to live because of the people who inhabit it. Sandburg never fell for the temptation to seize upon this aspect – life in the small town – and use it for ridicule, and do what so many other of our writers have done to point out the dullness and narrowness of the lives and interests of the people. Sinclair Lewis set the fashion with *Main Street*. . . .

. . . [Unlike Lewis, Sandburg] is not clinical, not trying to re-create mediocrity but creating joyousness.⁵⁰

And these stories reflected some of their author’s deeply felt beliefs and values, for example “the courage to go on doggedly,” that “love for work or others can enable transcendence over harsh circumstances, and the enduring solace of home.”⁵¹

In 1926, Sandburg’s two-volume *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years* appeared, containing almost one thousand pages. In 1939, he followed up his first two volumes, with his four-volume *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years* (containing over a million words), and the following year he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for history. In 1954 his condensed one-volume *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years and The War Years* was published. That same year Edward R. Murrow came to Connemara to interview Sandburg for his “See It Now” television program and asked him why he devoted so many years to Lincoln. Sandburg replied that the best answer

⁴⁸ Ibid., 47.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 50-51.

⁵⁰ Golden, *Carl Sandburg*, 222-23.

⁵¹ Niven, 392.

was that Lincoln was good company. Morrow also interviewed Paula who said that Carl had become more like Lincoln, more understanding than he had been as a young man. Several of Carl's friends had also earlier commented on the similarities between the two men, with one of them observing that Carl had put much of himself into his portrait of Lincoln.

Near the end of the twentieth century one scholar summed up the impact of Sandburg's Lincoln works. "*Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years and The War Years* is, for better or worse, the best-selling, most widely read, and most influential book about Lincoln. . . . They have also provided the basis for a great many adaptations for various media, including Robert Sherwood's Pulitzer Prize-winning play *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* in 1938 [itself the basis for a 1940 film with the same title, which President Roosevelt got a special White House viewing of the night before its Washington D.C. premiere]. . . . Probably more Americans have learned their Lincoln from Sandburg than from any other source."⁵² This same historian, as well as many others, have pointed out that many historians have criticized Sandburg for taking liberties, especially when writing about Lincoln's pre-presidential years, that most professional historians would shun--no footnotes or endnotes, imagining various conversations and other scenes, and relying on some unreliable sources, as well as the many trustworthy ones that he made painstaking efforts to locate and use. Sandburg often digressed from his main topic, for example writing pages about the planting and harvesting of corn or the jokes Lincoln *might* have told.

Part of the reason that he included so much besides straight biography and history was that he thought Lincoln was a man of the people and that it was necessary to depict their way of life in order to understand him. Toward the end of his last volume on Lincoln and the "war years," he wrote:

Out of the smoke and stench, out of the music and violent dreams of the war, Lincoln stood perhaps taller than any other of the many great heroes. This was in the minds of many. None threw a longer shadow than he. And to him the great hero was The People. He could not say too often that he was merely their instrument."⁵³

Sandburg's emphasis on the masses was a consistent element in his writing. In his *Chicago Poems* (1916) there is the poem "I Am the People, the Mob."

I am the people—the mob—the crowd—the mass.
Do you know that all the great work of the world is done through me?
I am the workingman, the inventor, the maker of the world's food and clothes.
I am the audience that witnesses history. The Napoleons come from me and the Lincolns.
They die. And then I send forth more Napoleons and Lincolns.⁵⁴

⁵² James Hurt, "Sandburg's Lincoln within History," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 20, no. 1 (Winter 1999),

<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/jala/20.1/hurt.html> (accessed January 7, 2009).

⁵³ Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years and The War Years* [hereafter ALPYWY], Laurel ed., vol. 3 (New York: Dell, 1959), 884-85.

⁵⁴ Carl Sandburg, *The Complete Poems of Carl Sandburg*, rev. and expanded ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2003), 71. This and many other poems from Sandburg's early collections can be found on the Internet. See, e.g., <http://carl-sandburg.com/POEMS.htm> (accessed December 29, 2008).

In 1927, referring to *The American Songbag* he was then preparing for publication, he wrote to his friend the poet Vachel Lindsay: "It is *not so much my book* as that of a thousand other people who have made its 260 colonial, pioneer, railroad, work-gang, hobo, Irish, Negro, Mexican, gutter, Gossamer songs, chants and ditties."⁵⁵

In 1936, Sandburg's epic poem *The People, Yes* was published. In it he wrote:

These are heroes then--among the plain people—
 Heroes did you say? And why not? They give all they've got and ask no questions
 and take what comes and what more do you want?⁵⁶

But he was not unaware of the people's shortcomings, for in that same long poem he wrote:

The learning and blundering people will live on.
 They will be tricked and sold and again sold

 The people is a tragic and comic two-face:
 hero and hoodlum: phantom and gorilla twist-
 ing to moan with a gargoye mouth.⁵⁷

Yet in general, as Harry Golden said of him in 1961, "His instincts are with the people. He believes they have an infinite capacity for good."⁵⁸

The Sandburgs' Final Decades

During World War II Carl worked hard to help the U. S. war effort and President Roosevelt's endeavors. He wrote a weekly column for the *Chicago Times* syndicate, delivered foreign broadcasts for the Office of War Information and captions for a morale-boosting exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art. In 1943, his book *Home Front Memo*, a collection of his wartime columns, was published.

In the first few postwar years, he struggled to finish his long novel, *Remembrance Rock* (1948). After that herculean effort, his major creative work lie behind him. Most of the poems that appeared in the first edition of his *Complete Poems* (1950) were written before WWII, as were his six Lincoln volumes. Yet, he still continued writing and producing some quality work, including new poems, his autobiographical *Always the Young Strangers* (1953), and his condensation into one volume, *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years and The War Years* (1954), of his previous six Lincoln volumes. This last effort involved not only condensing but updating his account as a result of new Lincoln scholarship that had become available. By the year this condensed work was published, 28 books by him had appeared since 1916, and more were still to

⁵⁵ *The Letters of Carl Sandburg*, 246-47.

⁵⁶ *Complete Poems*, 460. Sandburg reading from this poem can be heard at <http://static.salon.com/mp3s/sandburg050602.mp3> (accessed January 11, 2009), and a youtube video of him reading a small portion of it is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=woAtxjLA2ZE> (accessed February 2, 2009).

⁵⁷ *Complete Poems*, 615-16.

⁵⁸ Golden, *Carl Sandburg*, 271.

come, including his final poetry collection, *Honey and Salt* (1963). But increasingly the books were new combinations of older works he had written, including stories and poems appropriate for children.

Although some fine new poems appeared in *Honey and Salt* (see below), the demands of fame and celebrity status, combined with decreasing health in the 1960s, slowed his creative output. Besides traveling around the country, where he often combined singing folk songs, reading poetry, and speaking, he recorded more than 20 albums from his “songbags,” poetry, works for children, published autobiography (*Always the Young Strangers*), and Lincoln books. Besides being recorded for Murrow’s *Hear It Now* and *See It Now*, he also often appeared on other radio and television programs including some of the most popular TV programs of the time such as those of Ed Sullivan and Milton Berle and the *Today* and *Tonight* shows. The most illustrious live audience he addressed was a Joint Session of the U. S. Congress, before which he spoke on the 150th anniversary of Lincoln’s birth (February 12, 1959). He was the first private citizen to do so in the twentieth century. The following year he helped Harry Golden campaign for Jack Kennedy for president (see below on “The Sandburgs’ Political Wisdom and the Lincoln Connection”). In the 1950s and 1960s, there were also numerous honorary degree ceremonies, interviews, awards (for example, the Presidential Medal of Freedom awarded to him in 1964 by President Lyndon Johnson), and schools named after him. Harry Golden estimated that by the early 1960s, he was refusing about 500-600 invitations a year, but trying, with the help of a secretary who worked on the chore four to five days per month, to answer all the mail he received. People also sometimes stopped by the Sandburgs’ Connemara home in North Carolina. In 1964, for example, a young man who would soon become a major cultural influence in the USA, Bob Dylan, came to introduce himself to the old poet, who came out on his porch and talked with the young folk-singer.

In his final years, he greatly curtailed his travelling and was usually at Connemara, where he spent much time, reading, walking, and listening to music. His memory began to fail him, and he suffered a series of medical problems including two heart attacks in 1967. Until then his health had generally been good. His only problem of long-standing was his eyes, upon which he had had an operation as a young man and which later occasionally bothered him. Around the house at Connemara he usually wore a green eyeshade.

Meanwhile, Paula remained her usual cheery, dynamic self. Besides all the time spent caring for her family and Connemara Farm, she became increasingly famous herself. In 1960, one of her goats, Jennifer II, broke a world record for milk production in a single year. Trophies and ribbons won by Paula and daughter Janet for their animal successes shared pride of place with Carl’s awards on the walls and shelves at Connemara. Paula willingly shared her knowledge of breeding with local farmers and in goat journals. In Carl’s final months she cared for him with a love that seemed only to deepen with time. She surrounded him with flowers and the classical music he loved. After he uttered “Paula” and died a peaceful death, she oversaw his simple funeral service, and a few months later took part in a much more elaborate ceremony at the Lincoln Memorial, where almost six thousand people gathered to honor his memory. They included Chief Justice Warren of the Supreme Court, Carl’s friend Justice Thurgood Marshall,

various congressmen, poets, and President Lyndon Johnson. In the president's remarks he referred to Sandburg as a "vital, exuberant, wise, and generous man."⁵⁹

Paula survived Carl for another decade and fostered his legacy in various ways, perhaps most importantly by soon selling Connemara to the federal government.⁶⁰ She and her two oldest daughters moved to nearby Ashville. After she died at age ninety-four in 1977, her ashes joined those of Carl's in his hometown of Galesburg, Illinois.

The Sandburgs' Wisdom

Carl and Paula Sandburg were wise people. They generally made good judgments, perhaps the essence of wisdom, in various aspects of their lives and in how they related to the world around them. One wisdom scholar has written that "Wisdom [is] the application of successful intelligence and creativity as mediated by values toward the achievement of a common good [it] is not just about maximizing one's own or someone else's self-interest, but about balancing various self-interests (intrapersonal) with the interests of others (interpersonal) and of other aspects of the context in which one lives (extrapersonal), such as one's city or country or environment or even God."⁶¹ This does not mean that everything the Sandburgs did was wise; no one is wise all the time. As Alexander Pope wrote, "To err is human." But they led good, long, happy, creative, and productive lives, balancing their own interests and using their unique talents to enrich not only their own lives but also those of many others, especially their daughters, their numerous friends, and the American people.

In leading a wise life, perhaps no decision is more vital for most people than their choice of a spouse or domestic partner. Unfortunately, many young people are not as wise when they first make this decision as they may be later in life. But Carl and Paula were more mature than most couples when they married, and their choice of each other reflected their maturing wisdom. Another important judgment helpful for leading a wise life is one's choice of a career, and again they both chose wisely, selecting careers that contributed to their happiness and that of many others. Although Paula put Carl's career first, she seemed content with helping him and her children and tending to house, land, flowers, crops, and animals. Only later in life did her own career as a world-record goat breeder emerge.

Scholars have written about various values associated with wisdom, and as we examine the Sandburgs' lives more closely we shall see how they held and manifested many of them.⁶² What strikes one about the mutual life they built for themselves was how integrated it was, how it flowed from their fundamental values and beliefs. They were fortunate to share a mutual philosophy about what mattered most in life. Because he wrote a great deal and was the more prominent of the two, we know more detail about his philosophy than hers; but in general they agreed about what was most important. Already in 1909, he wrote in an essay:

⁵⁹ John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. Santa Barbara, CA: University of California (hosted), Gerhard Peters (database). Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=28435> (accessed December 23, 2008).

⁶⁰ For the circumstances surrounding the sale and opening of the Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site, see <http://www.nps.gov/carl/parknews/upload/PR%2040th%20Anniversary.pdf> (accessed February 22, 2009).

⁶¹ Robert J. Sternberg, *Wisdom, Intelligence, and Creativity Synthesized* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 152.

⁶² For a convenient list of such values, see "Values that Various People Have Associated with Wisdom," <http://www.wisdompage.com/valueslists.html> (accessed February 21, 2009).

What do you think about these things? To get into the game of life, take chances, make decisions, and keep moving. . . To acquire friends with whom you can babble of stars, roses, coffee and the weather. . . To use every possible tool and situation for the advancement of The Great Cause [socialism]; to distinguish between intelligent discussion and futile rag-chewing. . . To pity the respectable and satisfied, and see in the heart of the jailbird your own impulses; to be patient with the stupid and incompetent, and chat reverently with the town fool about his religion. . . to realize that the grafter, the scarlet woman, Rockefeller, Thaw [a rich man of the time] and the one-legged man on the corner selling lead-pencils, are each the result of conditions for which all of us are in part responsible . . . To spell Art with a capital A and enjoy paintings, poems, stories . . . to hoe in the garden, split wood, carry out ashes, get dirty and be actually useful every once in a while if not twice . . . To live in a bungalow, with bathrooms, music, flowers, a beautiful woman and children healthy as little savages; to be proud that you're human and aware that it's grand to be human; to help make life a chord of music wherein are blended the notes of companionship, love and ability--how about these things, Brother?⁶³

A year earlier he had written to Paula that great people found happiness in the simple things in life such as nature, food, love, and work. One of his early poems, "Happiness" expresses well a similar thought:

I ASKED the professors who teach the meaning of life to tell
me what is happiness.
And I went to famous executives who boss the work of
thousands of men.
They all shook their heads and gave me a smile as though
I was trying to fool with them
And then one Sunday afternoon I wandered out along
the Desplaines river
And I saw a crowd of Hungarians under the trees with
their women and children and a keg of beer and an
accordion.⁶⁴

Many decades later, Harry Golden asked him what he wanted out of life, and he responded "to be out of jail to eat regular to get what I write printed a little love at home and a little nice affection hither and yon over the American landscape and when I'm at all in health, I've got to sing and I go to it for a half-hour or hour." Golden also quotes guitarist Andre Segovia as saying "the heart of this great poet constantly bubbles forth a generous joy of life—with or without the guitar."⁶⁵ Decades earlier when Carl was writing for

⁶³ As found in *Fra Magazine*, August 1909, available at http://books.google.com/books?id=Kdbt8PiIO1sC&pg=RA5-PR15&lpg=RA5-PR15&dq=sandburg+%22get+into+the+game+of+life%22&source=bl&ots=zQ8oUP3Ew8&sig=XVg5hrqGJ86O-CIzCtmNfPzB2o&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=4&ct=result#PRA5-PR16,M (accessed December 28, 2008); see Niven, 206, for the circumstances surrounding the essay.

⁶⁴ Sandburg, *Complete Poems*, 10.

⁶⁵ *Carl Sandburg*, 31-32, 83.

the *Chicago Daily News*, his friend and fellow journalist Ben Hecht made a similar observation, saying that he “was a man in love with life.”⁶⁶ One wisdom scholar has included “a positive, ‘let’s make the most of it’ attitude” and “possessing a deep happiness that is independent of externals” as desirable in achieving wisdom.⁶⁷ In his life and many optimistic writings he certainly possessed and manifested such an approach, and Paula was similar.

Like Carl when she met him, she also desired little in the way of material goods. Viewing their future together, she wrote to him, “As for household goods—I say: *as little as possible!*”⁶⁸ Even at their large house at Connemara, the furnishings remained simple and unpretentious. Often visiting the Sandburgs there, Golden emphasized their simplicity, a value the psychologist Maslow indicated was possessed by the self-actualizing wise people he studied. For themselves, both Sandburgs sought beauty, truth, and goodness in the simple things of life—nature, exercise, family, friends, and music. But like wise people generally, they also looked beyond themselves. The early socialist passion they shared was built on their desire to improve the conditions of humanity

Although Carl was brought up Lutheran and Paula Catholic, they both had ceased to be Church-going Christians before they met. They were especially critical of Christian preachers like the famous evangelist Billy Sunday, who they believed falsified the teachings of Jesus. In 1915 Carl’s poem “Billy Sunday” appeared in a few leftist journals— several years later in his *Chicago Poems* it reappeared, in a slightly more moderate version, under the title “To a Contemporary Bunkshooter.”

You come along. . . tearing your shirt. . . yelling about Jesus.

Where do you get that stuff?

What do you know about Jesus?

Jesus had a way of talking soft and outside of a few bankers and higher-ups among the con men of Jerusalem everybody liked to have this Jesus around because he never made any fake passes and everything he said went and he helped the sick and gave the people hope.

You come along squirting words at us, shaking your fist and calling us all damn fools so fierce the froth slobbers over your lips . . . always blabbing we’re all going to hell straight off and you know all about it.

I’ve read Jesus’ words. I know what he said. You don’t throw any scare into me. I’ve got your number. I know how much you know about Jesus.

He never came near clean people or dirty people but they felt cleaner because he came along. It was your crowd of bankers and business men and lawyers hired the sluggers and murderers who put Jesus out of the running.

.....
You tell people living in shanties Jesus is going to fix it up all right with them by giving them mansions in the skies after they’re dead and the worms have eaten ‘em.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Niven, 335.

⁶⁷ See Copthorne Macdonald’s list at “Values that Various People Have Associated with Wisdom,” <http://www.wisdompage.com/valueslists.html> (accessed February 21, 2009).

⁶⁸ Quoted in Helga Sandburg, *A Great and Glorious Romance*, 136.

.....
 You tell poor people they don't need any more money on pay day and even if it's fierce to be out of a job, Jesus'll fix that up all right, all right--all they gotta do is take Jesus the way you say.

I don't want a lot of gab from a bunkshooter in my religion.
 I won't take my religion from any man who never works except with his mouth and never cherishes any memory except the face of the woman on the American silver dollar.⁶⁹

The kind of Christianity Carl and Paula did have some sympathy for was that which stressed helping the poor and needy. Once when Dorothy Day (the co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement and one who practiced that kind of Christianity) was arrested, Carl sent her a check, saying to Harry Golden, “she’ll need bail and things.” On another occasion in response to a question about his religion, he said: “I am a Christian, a Quaker, a Moslem, a Buddhist, a Shintoist, a Confucian, and maybe a Catholic pantheist or a Joan of Arc who hears voices. I am all of these and more. Definitely I have more religions than I have time or zeal to practice in true faith.”⁷⁰ When Carl died in 1967, Paula chose to have funeral services for him at a picturesque Episcopal Church in Flat Rock, but with a Unitarian minister presiding. When Paula died a decade later, services for her were held in an Ashville Unitarian church.

Aldous Huxley once wrote a book about perennial philosophy, “the metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds.”⁷¹ In writing about wise people, another thinker maintains that many of them share “a perennial philosophy perspective,” that is “independent of culture and geography.” They are “reality-seekers” who are “open-minded, flexible, and receptive. They know that all explanations, models, and metaphors are just pointers to truth and crude maps of reality.” Great religious teachers were generally similar. “It is their followers who have sometimes become closed and rigid — true believers — guardians of temple and church who took each word of their leaders to be absolute truth. *Words aren't truth*. Wise people recognize this; they remain seekers.”⁷² The Sandburgs shared the perennial philosophy perspective and remained seekers, not dogmatists.

Achieving Wisdom and Balance in an Age of Consumer Culture and Mass Media

In writing to Carl before their marriage, Paula expressed her admiration for his prose and poetry and told him that his prose was “strong, simple, direct, and full of joy and wisdom.” On another occasion she wrote: “Such fire in your words and such wisdom in your thoughts.”⁷³ But to achieve the budding wisdom she observed he had to overcome several obstacles.

⁶⁹ *Complete Poems*, 29-30.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Golden, *Carl Sandburg*, 64, 93.

⁷¹ *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2004), vii.

⁷² Copthorne Macdonald, Ch. 1 of *Toward Wisdom: Finding Our Way to Inner Peace, Love & Happiness* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2001), this chapter is available online at <http://www.wisdompage.com/tw-ch01.html> and the whole book can be downloaded at <http://www.wisdompage.com/twdown73462.html> (both accessed January 21, 2009).

⁷³ Carl Sandburg and Lilian Steichen, *The Poet and Dream Girl: The Love Letters of Lilian Steichen and Carl Sandburg*. ed Margaret Sandburg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 32, 66.

First, he had to go beyond the limited horizons of his hard-working Swedish immigrant parents, of a father who thought that buying an encyclopedia of world facts for less than a dollar was a waste of money. Carl's passion for learning and his early travels as a hobo, soldier in Puerto Rico, and salesman helped him broaden his mind and transcend the narrow subcultural confines that limit so many. As noted earlier, his hobo experiences were especially important in expanding his social sympathies and appreciation of American diversity.

His years at Lombard College came later, and the love he developed there for writers such as Walt Whitman deepened him considerably. He was also fortunate in having a mentor like Professor Philip Green Wright. Years later, Sandburg wrote about him that "there was never a time when he didn't deepen whatever of reverence I had for the human mind and the workings of a vast mysterious Universe."⁷⁴ Having such a sense of wonder about the world is often characteristic of wise people, as is the desire to keep learning, growing, and developing that Carl displayed throughout his long life.

Another obstacle to be overcome was to avoid the trap of becoming too self-centered, a danger that often hinders "self-made men" from becoming wiser and less egotistic. In his 1908 essay "You and Your Job," he shows signs of avoiding this temptation because he argued that no such men existed, that all people developed due to the help of others, both living and dead.

In general, however, Carl's temperament seemed less conducive than Paula's to achieving wisdom. He found it harder to control his temper and be humble and patient. To put it simply, in layman's terms, "he had a bigger ego than she did." Daughter Helga commented about her mother, "How wise Paula seems—tending, fostering, pacifying genius."⁷⁵ A filmmaker of a documentary about Carl wrote that "everyone who knew her [Paula] spoke about her much the same way Carl did, that she was an angel of wisdom, competence and companionship."⁷⁶ We can also reasonably question if he was always as considerate of Paula's feelings as she was of his and if he always acted as wisely as he could have in regard to her and his children. As has been mentioned, his relations with a few other women, even if non-sexual, caused Paula some occasional discomfort, and a wiser approach probably could have avoided his temporary rift with daughter Helga. Many women of today might also wonder if Paula was *too* tolerant and accomodating toward Carl and gave him *too* much freedom in regard to travel and other women. There are no easy answers; they lived in a different time; and "none of us is perfectly wise or totally unwise."⁷⁷

As we have seen, wisdom is "about balancing various self-interests (intrapersonal) with the interests of others (interpersonal)." This balancing also involves judgments about how best to allocate time between various activities including work and leisure. Generally, Carl and Paula seemed to have balanced wisely, but several times during his life, Carl overdid the working and suffered from it. Paula said that early in their marriage, he sometimes worked 16 hours a day, "part of the time at the paper and then at home on the first Lincoln biography."⁷⁸ In 1925, however, chest pains led his doctor to advise him to slow down, which he did temporarily, but

⁷⁴ Carl Sandburg, *Ever the Winds of Chance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 32.

⁷⁵ Helga Sandburg, *Where Love Begins* (New York: D. I. Fine, 1989), 227.

⁷⁶ Paul Bonesteel, "The Day Carl Sandburg Died," <http://bonesteelfilms.blogspot.com/> (accessed December 23, 2008).

⁷⁷ The quote is from Copthorne Macdonald, "Playing the Wisdom Game," at <http://www.copmacdonald.com/wisdomgame.html> (accessed December 23, 2008).

⁷⁸ Quoted in Callahan, 186.

then in 1927 he suffered a nervous breakdown. What caused him the most stress was finishing up *The American Songbag* (1927), his collection of 280 folksongs in almost 500 pages, complete with words, music, and introductions. It was a laborious process requiring collaboration with various musical and folklore specialists. But he also was working on a few other books, including a new book of poetry, *Good Morning, America* (1928), and a new collection of children's stories, eventually published in *Potato Face* (1930). In addition, he continued working at the *Chicago Daily News*, where to his old job as film critic was added a new one when he was given a new open-ended column to write. And he continued to travel around the country giving stage performances, where he lectured, read his poetry, and sang folk songs.

His breakdown came that July not long after returning to the Midwest from working with his publisher in New York. In August, he wrote to a friend, "I have been ordered . . . a long lay off. I have a good machine, but the motor and propeller have been in the air too much and are ordered to ground work. . . . I have had more work, travel, fun and philosophy than the law allows."⁷⁹ He indicated that his doctors told him to work less, and he told another friend that "if I don't work less, play more, and give the Works a chance, I'm a plain ridiculous fool."⁸⁰ Luckily for him Paula, with her usual good sense, stamina, and efficiency, coaxed him to slow down and provided an idle environment in which to do so.

By this point in their lives, all of Carl's writings and other work were earning the family a good income and the Sandburgs were able to afford domestic and professional assistance, and Paula was able to devote much of her time to helping Carl towards recovery. Just a few months before his breakdown, she had settled the family on the Michigan side of Lake Michigan. Following doctors' orders (and probably Paula's), he allowed himself the luxury of idleness. He invited three friends that summer to visit him for some swimming and talking at the family's Lake Michigan retreat (not yet the larger property purchased later that year, upon which Paula oversaw the construction of the big house they would live in until moving to North Carolina in 1945), and they came. A little later he wrote to his friend, editor, and publisher Alfred Harcourt that he was sleeping nine hours a night, had changed his diet, wielded an ax about an hour a day, "done puttering work of different kinds another hour and then laid around lazy whenever I felt like it."⁸¹

Despite slowing down somewhat, Carl worked very hard for several more decades. Soon after recovering from his breakdown he began working on his Lincoln "War Years" volumes, which took him more than a decade to complete. He confided to Golden that "it was fascinating work, and there were days I was at the typewriter sixteen and eighteen hours."⁸²

Until the last several years of his life, when poor health kept him from traveling and working much, he kept up a demanding schedule. An editor who worked with him in the late 1940s said, "He was one of the hardest working writers I have ever known."⁸³ Harry Golden, who often stayed overnight at the Sandburgs at Connemara, noted that he usually worked until the early morning hours, would then sleep late and seldom came downstairs until noon. We have already seen that his chief biographer wrote about his "courage to go on doggedly."⁸⁴

⁷⁹ *The Letters of Carl Sandburg*, 250.

⁸⁰ Quoted in Niven, 458.

⁸¹ *The Letters of Carl Sandburg*, 251.

⁸² Quoted in Golden, *Carl Sandburg*, 240.

⁸³ Quoted in Niven, 586.

⁸⁴ Niven, 392.

“Being self-disciplined; [being] able to work now for a reward later” and “being courageous” are two traits that one scholar has listed as important for achieving wisdom.⁸⁵

At Connemara he had both a writing room and a bedroom up on the top floor, and another study on the main floor, where he often worked with a typist dealing with all the mail he received and sent out. Also on the main floor, Paula had a bedroom, where Carl also sometimes slept, as well as her “farm office.” Books, more than 14,000 of them, were spread all over the house, often containing pieces of paper to mark pages Carl considered important. There was also a small greenhouse on the main floor. To let in as much light as possible and enjoy views of the outdoors, including some bird feeders, the windows were left uncurtained.

The whole Sandburg family loved the outdoors. As a young man Carl had written:

Freedom is found, if anywhere, in the great outdoor world of wild breezes and sunshine and sky. To get out into the daylight and fill your lungs with pure air, to stop and watch a spear of grass swaying in the wind, to give a smile daily at the wonder and mystery of shifting light and changing shadow, is to get close to the source of power. Out under the wide dome, amid night odors and silences, you get your size, and breathe, feel, think, and live. Careless winds blow in your face and your eye is keen for things homely and beautiful near by. Stars look at you through tangled tree tops. The rattle of a distant wagon is like subdued laughter. You get a new hold on your own particular problems and the ghosts of despair are put out of business.⁸⁶

Carl and Paula never lost that sense of wonder and awe amidst nature that is generally shared by wise people. Paula and the girls spent much of their day outside, first primarily along Lake Michigan and then at their larger property at Connemara. At the North Carolina property were miles of hiking trails, pastures, lakes, and mountainous areas, as well as a barn and other buildings necessary for the goat-rearing and other farm activities of Paula and the girls. Although Carl worked inside most of the day at each of their main homes, he also took long walks, trying to fit in some exercise. Daughter Helga recalls that he would walk along Lake Michigan for an hour or so, often taking family dogs along and sometimes taking a few golf clubs and balls. Sometimes one or more of the family also went with him. On occasion in Michigan he also swam in the lake.

When visiting at Connemara, Harry Golden often accompanied Carl on his walks, and was happy to discover that he was not the only one who could not keep up with his pace. In 1961 Golden wrote that “he paces himself like an athlete. He has stamina. It seems to me that his grip at the age of eighty-three is as strong and firm as it was in 1948.”⁸⁷ Like many wise people, Carl tried to keep fit in old age. At Connemara, he would often start his day with a half-hour of calisthenics, including lifting a chair over his head, an exercise he was still proud of doing on his eighty-seventh birthday. The year before, he had observed that “life is a series of relinquishments,” that he had given up playing baseball at forty and running up stairs at sixty,

⁸⁵ Macdonald, “Playing the Wisdom Game,” at <http://www.copmacdonald.com/wisdomgame.html> (accessed February 24, 2009).

⁸⁶ Available at http://www.archive.org/stream/tendenciasinmode029967mbp/tendenciasinmode029967mbp_djvu.txt (accessed January 31, 2009).

⁸⁷ Golden, *Carl Sandburg*, 102.

and reduced his cigar smoking during his seventies, and his whisky drinking in his eighties.⁸⁸ He was also “a restrained eater.” His plate was “never loaded.”⁸⁹ Paula was quoted during these final years as saying, “he doesn’t like sweets and won’t eat cake.”⁹⁰

What one of Carl’s biographers wrote about the Sandburgs when they lived along Lake Michigan was also true after they moved to North Carolina--“the family liked visitors, and Carl always enjoyed being with people when he could spare the time, which was not often.”⁹¹ For him, there never seemed enough time to do all he wanted, including thinking and contemplating.

Even though a good friend like Harry Golden always seemed welcome at Connemara, he tells us that he and Carl prepared an agenda for their talks together so that they wouldn’t waste time rambling. Socio-political issues, writers, and writing were often the topics. Golden thought that his friend had “a profound understanding of political undercurrents and social and cultural phenomena.”⁹² His daughter Helga recalled that when she was young her dad would sometimes play with her and her sisters after supper and play his guitar as they all sang, but then often would tell them he had to go upstairs and work. Golden attributes much of his strong work ethic to his coming from a poor background and always being concerned with earning enough money to provide for Paula and the needs for the rest of their lives of his two oldest daughters with special medical problems.

It is often difficult to judge the wisdom of others’ choices about how they allot their time, but Carl gave some thought to the problem. He once wrote to a friend:

Time is what we spend our lives with. If we are not careful we find others spending it for us. . . . It is necessary now and then for a man to go away by himself and experience loneliness; to sit on a rock in the forest and to ask of himself, “Who am I, and where have I been, and where am I going?” . . . If one is not careful, one allows diversions to take up one’s time--the stuff of life⁹³

And he told Golden that men needed solitude and added:

I feel sorry for those who have never learned what Pascal meant when he said, “the miseries of men come from not being able to sit alone in a quiet room.” Today they’ve got to have radio, gotta have everything besides books. Books were enough for Pascal. William James enjoyed presenting an Indian chief who said you had mastered the secret of life “when you could sit in a chair and think about nothing.” Some of the psychiatrists think it is quite a trick, to sit quiet and “empty your mind” Along with this emptying will go all your worries and anxieties. And this Indian had what it takes.⁹⁴

Living in an age when technology was providing increasing options for leisure activities, Sandburg realized that one of the major challenges facing people was how to use wisely their

⁸⁸ Cited in Callahan, 230.

⁸⁹ Golden, *Carl Sandburg*, 102.

⁹⁰ Quoted in Callahan, 231.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁹² Golden, *Carl Sandburg*, 145.

⁹³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 194.

⁹⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, 267.

leisure time and interact with mass media.⁹⁵ In answer to a question from a reporter in 1953 about the most notable development during his long life, he responded: “Well, I’ll say . . . culturally speaking, [it] is the new media that’s come across the last thirty or forty years. The movies, radio, and now television.”⁹⁶

Already in the 1920s, he had realized the importance of films and had written: "The cold, real, upstanding fact holds—the movies are. They come so close to pre-empting some functions hitherto held exclusively by the school and the university systems that the philosopher of civilization who doesn't take them into consideration with broad, sympathetic measurement is in danger of being in the place of the drum major of the band who marched up a side street while the band went straight along on the main stem—without leadership." And he also wrote during this period that "culturally speaking, there are arguments to be made that Hollywood—for real or woe—is more important than Harvard, Yale or Princeton, singly and collectively."⁹⁷

By 1953, however, as mass media continued its rapid development, he had become more wary.

The main evil about these is that they go to many people who don't know they are time wasters, that while they do deliver a good many things that are priceless. . . [too many people sit] there hours and hours and taking whatever they give you. You then become an addict, which in other terms is a dope. Too many people, and particularly young people, have not learned to be selective about movies, radio, television.⁹⁸

Four years later *Time* magazine reported the following:

Lured onto a speakers' platform in Asheville, N.C. by the General Federation of Women's Clubs, frosty-haired old (79) Poet Carl Sandburg sat bemusedly while a TV show was praised. Then he took aim at the 21-in.-screen hog caller for the world ("When we reach the stage where all of the people are entertained all of the time, we will be very close to having the opiate of the people") . . . : "More than half the commercials are filled with inanity, asininity, silliness and cheap trickery." TV's Arlene Francis burred a defense ("We're only babies. We have to grow") after the ancient mellowed slightly and allowed that television is a "young medium, and we will pray for it."⁹⁹

Asked after this meeting if he had a TV set, he said that he did but also possessed a home-made remote control to avoid commercials. That same year on another occasion he criticized film executives who “aim their product at blood, sex, violence, profits, and who ignore

⁹⁵ I deal at some length with twentieth century technology, media, and consumer culture in Chs. 2 and 7 of my *An Age of Progress*. On p. 265, I touch briefly on the challenges these forces present for people wishing to live wisely. This page and a few others are available at <http://www.wisdompage.com/MossOnWisdom.html> (accessed February 22, 2009).

⁹⁶ Quoted in Sutton, 177.

⁹⁷ Carl Sandburg and Roger Ebert, *The Movies Are : Carl Sandburg's Film Reviews and Essays, 1920-1928* (Chicago: Lake Claremont Press, 2000), vii, xi; see also Doug Fetherking, *Carl Sandburg at the Movies: A Poet in the Silent Era, 1920-1927* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1985).

⁹⁸ Quoted in Sutton, 177.

⁹⁹ Available at <http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,867723,00.html> (accessed January 30, 2009).

the classics.”¹⁰⁰ Around this same time, he told Harry Golden, “Never was a generation that has been told by a more elaborate system of the printed word, billboards, newspapers, magazines, radio, television—to eat more, play more, have more fun. But General Robert E. Lee told a mother with a child in her arms: ‘Teach him to deny himself.’”¹⁰¹

Since television was a relatively new phenomena, it is only in the 1950s that we notice Sandburg’s criticism of some of the effects it was having, but he had already criticized other forms of mass media and advertising in his *The People, Yes* (1936). Even as the Great Depression lingered on, he saw and decried various attempts at creating artificial wants and encouraging a culture of consumption. He criticized billboards in these lines, “Desecrate the landscape with your billboards, gentlemen, / Let no green valleys meet the beholder’s eye without / Your announcements of gas, oil, beans, soup. . . .”¹⁰² He criticized print ads in the following words:

The liar in print who first lies to you
 about your health and then lies about
 what will fix it, the scare liar who hopes
 his lies will scare you into buying what
 he is lying about,
 The better-than-all-others liar, the easy- pay-
 ments liar, the greatest-on-earth liar, the
 get-rich-quick liar
 Befouling words and mutilating language and
 feeding rubbish and filth to the human mind
 for the sake of sales, selling whatever can
 be sold for a profit.¹⁰³

In the same poem, he makes clear his belief that U.S. culture placed too much emphasis on money, even though it was understandably important to those who had too little to buy necessities. He emphasized that “money buys everything except love, personality, freedom, immortality, silence, peace.”¹⁰⁴

According to an item appearing in *Time* in 1956 he “deplored the U.S.’s manner of pursuing happiness. Result of the pursuit: ‘Fat-dripping prosperity.’ Said the Illinois sage: ‘When the goal of a country is only happiness and comfort, there is danger.’ Albert Einstein said as much . . . Listen, ‘To make a goal of comfort or happiness has never appealed to me.’”¹⁰⁵

In his criticism of mass media and a consumer culture, Sandburg predated such later critics as Neil Postman in the mid-1980s, who wrote that “our politics, religion, news, athletics, education, and commerce have been transformed into congenial adjuncts of show business,” and that “we are a people on the verge of amusing ourselves to death.”¹⁰⁶ His words also came before

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Niven, 656.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Golden, *Carl Sandburg*, 264.

¹⁰² *Complete Poems*, 505.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 457.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 542.

¹⁰⁵ Available at <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,824195-2,00.html> (accessed January 30, 2009).

¹⁰⁶ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, new ed. (New York: Viking, 2006), 3-4.

those of his friend Edward R. Morrow's most famous media criticism and also those of FCC chairman Newton Minow.¹⁰⁷

His criticism cannot be dismissed as just those of an old man against change and new technology, for he admitted that twentieth century media did "deliver a good many things that are priceless." As a film critic, he had praised many films including most of the Charlie Chaplin ones he had seen, and had spent considerable time in Hollywood. He valued FDR's fireside chats and Murrow's radio and television work and was often on the radio and television himself. He also was enthusiastic about many other modern developments including jet flight. In 1959 he agreed to be a guest on American Airlines' first transcontinental jet flight from New York to Los Angeles, and later allowed the airline to reprint an essay which praised the flight.¹⁰⁸

A few years earlier he had gone up in a helicopter over Chicago to help him write a new poem about the city that had always fascinated him. Thus, Sandburg was certainly not against all the new technology and change of the modern world. Nor was he against selling and marketing, both of which he had done some of as a young man, and he was always shrewd about "selling" himself and his works and performances. What he realized, however, was twentieth century media presented a great challenge to people if they were to be used wisely.

His daughter Helga tells us that "he was vociferous that one should not read trash or listen to junk music," and that he often read to the family both from his own works and others he thought worthy.¹⁰⁹ Later on he criticized kids reading too many comic books, and his own grandchildren were limited in how many they could read. Instead of "junk music," the Sandburg home was always full of the folk music that Carl played. Helga also says that her dad could "whistle wonderfully, sometimes in imitation of birds, quavering and trilling,"¹¹⁰ and she tells us that she also heard symphonies at home. Carl and Paula had bought a Victrola in 1911, and he told reporters in 1957 that he preferred his two hi-fi sets to his radios and television.

A young woman in Illinois recalled that when Carl, then about twenty years of age, visited her home, "he always wanted to go to our new piano and Dad nicknamed him 'Bang Bang.'" Part of Paula's appeal to Carl was that she played the piano beautifully, as later did daughter Margaret. And a piano was one of the family's prized possessions. Not only did daughter Helga take up the guitar and love folk music, but her two children also eventually played that instrument loved by their grandfather.

Carl's love of music is clearly evident in one of his early poems:

A MAN saw the whole world as a grinning skull and cross-bones. The rose flesh of life shriveled from all faces. Nothing counts. Everything is a fake. Dust to dust and ashes to ashes and then an old darkness and a useless silence. So he saw it all. Then he went to a Mischa Elman [a famed Russian violinist who made his U.S. debut in 1908] concert. Two

¹⁰⁷ For Morrow's 1958 speech to a Radio-Television News Directors Association convention, see <http://www.turnoffyourtv.com/commentary/hiddenagenda/murrow.html> (accessed January 30, 2009); for Minow's 1961 speech, see Newton N. Minow and Craig L. LaMay, *Abandoned in the Wasteland: Children, Television, and the First Amendment* (New York, 1996), 188.

¹⁰⁸ The essay is available at http://www.archive.org/stream/voicesfromameric017894mbp/voicesfromameric017894mbp_djvu.txt (accessed January 30, 2009).

¹⁰⁹ Quoted in Golden, *Carl Sandburg*, 91-92.

¹¹⁰ Helga Sandburg, *Sweet Dreams*, 27.

¹¹¹ Quoted in Sutton, 227.

hours waves of sound beat on his eardrums. Music washed something or other inside him. Music broke down and rebuilt something or other in his head and heart. He joined in five encores for the young Russian Jew with the fiddle. When he got outside his heels hit the sidewalk a new way. He was the same man in the same world as before. Only there was a singing fire and a climb of roses everlastingly over the world he looked on.¹¹²

Near the end of his novel *Remembrance Rock*, Sandburg has Justice Windom's grandson read something his wise grandfather had written: "You may become the witnesses of the finest and brightest era known to mankind. You shall have music, the nations over the globe shall have music, music instead of murder. It is possible. That is my hope and prayer--for you and for the nations."¹¹³ Sometimes when traveling around the country giving talks and playing music, he liked to quote these words. At the end of his life, when poor health and a failing memory had greatly reduced the vitality that had always been so characteristic of him, he often read (Whitman, Emerson, and Francis Bacon's essays remained among his favorites) and listened to classical music on his record player, especially Chopin. To Sandburg, music was like poetry in its ability to help men and women transcend their humdrum existence. As he put it in *The People, Yes*:

who but they have held to a hope
poverty and the poor shall go
and the struggle of man for possessions
of music and craft and personal worth
lifted above the hog-trough level
above the animal dictate:

"Do this or go hungry"?¹¹⁴

Maslow and others have written of the importance of transcendence for achieving wisdom, and perhaps no one has written more thoughtfully than the French philosopher and dramatist Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973) on how music can contribute to both transcendence and wisdom. He believed that music, especially classical music, and, to a lesser extent, poetry can help us transcend our limited egos and temporal conditions and put us in touch with the eternal. To Marcel music was one of humans great means of experiencing the mystery and awe that transcends everyday existence.¹¹⁵

Enjoying good music and books, walking outdoors, and being with family and friends were the main leisure activities that Carl engaged in to balance his strenuous work life. In his integrated life they were often mixed together except for his writing, which necessitated solitude. He also seems to have been aided by a good sense of humor, a quality listed by at least a few

¹¹² *Complete Poems*, 26.

¹¹³ *Remembrance Rock* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1991), 1063.

¹¹⁴ *Complete Poems*, 608.

¹¹⁵ For some of Marcel's thoughts on the subject see the following works of his: *Awakenings*, trans. Peter S. Rogers (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2002), 31; *Music and Philosophy*, trans. Stephen Maddux & Robert E. Wood (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2005), 46, 79, 105, 107, 112-13; and *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond: Including, Conversations Between Paul Ricoeur and Gabriel Marcel*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 38.

thinkers as helpful in developing wisdom. Sandburg valued it in Lincoln and displayed it in many of his children's stories and some of his poems. Niven writes of his youthful "exuberant sense of humor" and quotes one of his friends who noted his "redeeming sense of humor."¹¹⁶ Golden also observed it. He tells us that the way Sandburg handled the hate mail or that which was strongly critical was simply to reply: "Thank you for your letter. I shall try to do better."¹¹⁷

The Wisdom of the Poet

Although Robert Frost and Sandburg had their differences, the two poets also were friends at various points in their lives, and in 1953 Sandburg said Frost was one of his favorite writers.¹¹⁸ Frost once wrote that a poem "begins in delight and ends in wisdom."¹¹⁹ And there is no doubt that writing and reading good poetry can help make us wiser people, for both acts encourage reflection and seeing life more holistically than we might otherwise do. Writing poetry helps develop the creativity and combining of intellect and intuition that is conducive to becoming wiser¹²⁰—in writing his children stories, Sandburg used similar talents. In choosing to be a poet, he selected a calling that was more conducive than most to acquiring wisdom.

His predominant poetic style, free verse, resembled that of the poet who influenced him the most, Walt Whitman. Sandburg wrote, "Now, if free verse is a form of writing poetry without rime [sic], without regular meters, without established and formal rules governing it, we can easily go back to the earliest styles of poetry known to the human family--and the style is strictly free verse."¹²¹ The primary appeal of it to him was that it was closer to the speech of everyday people and that it constrained his expression less than if he tried to follow some regular rhyming or metrical pattern.

After World War II, Sandburg's poetic reputation among critics, other poets, and professors of literature steadily declined. Some said his poetry was too political and propagandistic. To the extent that his poetry reflected sympathy for society's unfortunates, however, he was displaying a quality that many thinkers believe is necessary for achieving wisdom—compassion. Moreover, his poetry was more wide ranging than some critics recognized. He thought that "poetry is written out of tumults and paradoxes, terrible reckless struggle and glorious lazy loafing, out of blood, work and war and out of baseball, babies and potato blossoms."¹²² He also believed "what is poetry for any given individual depends on the individual and what his personality requires as poetry."¹²³ Although to him poetry was about creating beauty, he recognized that poets perceived beauty in different ways. It is thus clear that

¹¹⁶ Niven, 126, 145.

¹¹⁷ Quoted in Golden, *Carl Sandburg*, 104.

¹¹⁸ Sutton, 183.

¹¹⁹ Robert Frost, "The Figure a Poem Makes," available at <http://www.mrbauld.com/frostfig.html> (accessed February 27, 2009).

¹²⁰ See Macdonald's list at "Values that Various People Have Associated with Wisdom," <http://www.wisdompage.com/valueslists.html> (accessed February 21, 2009).

¹²¹ Carl Sandburg, *Early Moon* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 24; these words and others of Sandburg about poetry are also available at <http://www.marxists.org/subject/art/literature/children/texts/sandburg/talk.html> (accessed February 26, 2009).

¹²² Quoted at Robin Metz, "Many Faces of a Poet," <http://www.lib.niu.edu/1992/ii920719.html> (accessed January 25, 2009).

¹²³ Sandburg, *Early Moon*, 20.

Sandburg thought that poetry could deal with the most varied aspects of life and that his own poetry did so.

Looking at Sandburg's poetry we see a wide range of values often associated with wisdom. Compassion is displayed in poems on WWI's tragic deaths and in lines he wrote during the Great Depression such as the following:

Have you seen them with savings gone
furniture and keepsakes pawned
and the pawntickets blown away in cold winds?
by one letdown and another ending
in what you might call slums--
To be named perhaps in case reports
and tabulated and classified
among those who have crossed over
from the employables into the unemployables?

What is the saga of the employables?
what are the breaks they get?
What are the dramas of personal fate
spilled over from industrial transitions?
what punishments handed bottom people
who have wronged no man's house
or things or person? ¹²⁴

His poems also displayed other types of passion, and yearning and seeking. Gabriel Marcel once wrote that "a *wisdom* which does not include passion . . . is not worthy of being called wisdom" and that it "is much less a state than a goal." Although aware of the tragedy of life and acknowledging "the central fact of death," Marcel's wise man was a hopeful seeker and journeyer who saw life as a wonderful mystery.¹²⁵ Another thinker who has written much about wisdom has observed that "wise people . . . remain seekers rather than becoming believers," and suggests that they see the "world around them with a sense of awe and wonder."¹²⁶ Sandburg shared these ideas and was awed by the mystery of the universe. He thought that "at the root of love—romantic, patriotic, platonic, family love, love for life—was passion."¹²⁷ And this passion was linked to his being a constant seeker after truth and beauty. Sandburg said about his hero Lincoln, "he was a seeker. Among others and deep in his own inner self, he was a seeker."¹²⁸ The poet also described America "as yet ever more seeker than finder." In his last published poem, completed in his eighties, he wrote of the "vast Unknown" and the "vaster Unknowable" and referred to himself as

¹²⁴ Ibid., 484-85; for some WWI poems, see 36-42.

¹²⁵ Marcel, *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*, 198, 205, 206.

¹²⁶ Macdonald, Ch. 1 of *Toward Wisdom*, available online at <http://www.wisdompage.com/tw-ch01.html> (accessed January 27, 2009).

¹²⁷ Niven, 697; See also Sandburg's late poems "Evening Sunsets Witness and Pass On" and "Fog Numbers" in *Complete Poems*, 716-17, 723

¹²⁸ Sandburg, *ALPYWY*, vol. I, p. 162.

. . . one more seeker
 one more swimmer in the gold and gray procession
 of phantoms laughing, fighting, singing, moaning
 toward the great cool calm of the fixed
 return to the filaments of dust.

I am more than a traveler out of Nowhere.
 Sea and land, sky and air, begot me Somewhere.¹²⁹

From his first book containing most of his youthful poems, published in a small 1904 edition, until his last one, *Honey and Salt*, in 1963, some of his poems reflect his sense of being part of something larger than himself. He shared the perception of many ego-transcending wise people, east and west, that all life is interconnected, earth, water, sun, moon, rain, plant and animal life, as well as humankind. Here is Sandburg writing about the prairie in his 1918 collection *Cornhuskers*:

I was born on the prairie and the milk of its wheat, the red of its clover,
 the eyes of its women, gave me a song and a slogan.

.
 The prairie sings to me in the forenoon and I know in the night I rest easy
 in the prairie arms, on the prairie heart.

And the prairie answers:

I am dust of your dust, as I am brother and mother
 To the copper faces, the worker in flint and clay,
 the singing women and their sons a thousand years ago

.
 I am the prairie, mother of men, waiting.
 They are mine, the threshing crews eating beefsteak, the farmboys driv-
 ing steers to the railroad cattle pens.¹³⁰

Throughout his adult life he perceived humans' evolutionary path. Here is what one of his poems said in 1904:

I am the deer and the weasel, the tiger, the eagle—
 And I am thy brother and one of thy kin!¹³¹

And "Timesweep," the last poem in *Honey and Salt*, is partly a meditation on evolution, and the poet's realization that he is part of a great chain of being that has evolved through time:

¹²⁹ *Complete Poems*, 744, 769-70.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 79, 80, 83.

¹³¹ Charles A. Sandburg, *In Reckless Ecstasy* (Galesburg: Asgard Press, 1904), 16.

For I am one and all of them:
 they swarm in me with song, cry and murmur;
 they fill my room with scurrying fish,
 with apes and kangaroos, with swine and birds . . . ¹³²

As one wisdom scholar has written “without a grasp of evolutionary processes we have little sense of our deep kinship with the universe.”¹³³

“Timesweep” and several other poems like “The Gong of Time” in *Honey and Salt* also suggest that he dealt wisely with what psychologist Erik Erikson considered the last major challenge of life, accepting our own mortality and not giving way to despair. To Erikson maintaining a positive approach to life in the face of death itself was the true test of wisdom.¹³⁴ Here are Sandburg’s most relevant thoughts on death in “Timesweep”:

Since death is there in the light of the sun, in the song of the wind,
 Since death is there in the marvel of the sun coming up to travel
 its arc and go down saying, "I am time and you are time,"
 Since death is there in the slow creep of every dawn and in all the
 steps of shadow moving into evening and dusk of stars,
 Since death is there in almost inaudible chimes of every slow
 clocktick beginning at the birth hour there must be a tremor
 of music in the last little gong, the pling of the final
 announcement from the Black Void.

.
 Where I go from here and now, or if I go at all
 again, the Maker of sea and land, of sky and
 air, can tell.¹³⁵

Sandburg’s leading biographer wrote that “for Sandburg, poetry was the supreme myth, which enables human beings to endure reality, to survive it, even to transcend it.” Applying some of the insights of Maslow on transcendence, including the transcendence of death, pain, and sickness, and how it can help lead to wisdom, helps us to see that by the end of his life, Sandburg’s poetry and his life generally indicated that he had achieved transcendence in many ways.¹³⁶

¹³² This poem, “Timesweep,” is available online at <http://www.nps.gov/archive/carl/people/archives/poems/time01.htm> (accessed January 28, 2009), see also *Complete Poems*, 769.

¹³³ Macdonald, Ch. 1 of *Toward Wisdom*, at <http://www.wisdompage.com/tw-ch01.html> (accessed January 27, 2009).

¹³⁴ Erik H. Erikson, “Reflections on Dr. Borg's Life Cycle,” in *Aging, Death, and the Completion of Being* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979), 60.

¹³⁵ *Complete Poems*, 767, 770; also at <http://www.nps.gov/archive/carl/people/archives/poems/time01.htm> (accessed January 28, 2009).

¹³⁶ Niven, 613; see Abraham H. Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (Viking Press, 1971), 271-72, for transcendence of death, pain, and sickness, and all of Ch. 21 on “Various Meanings of Transcendence.” Copthorne

The Sandburgs' Political Wisdom and the Lincoln Connection

It is difficult to write about how wise an individual's political views are because there is so much room for honest disagreement about the wisdom of contrasting approaches. Both wise people and fools can be found among various political groupings, whether of the left or the right. It is also important to realize that to be a good citizen requires less extensive political wisdom than it does to be a good political leader. Regardless, however, several characteristics can be identified that contribute to political wisdom. Compassion, tolerance, pragmatism, and humility are each important in helping one to make good political judgments, which is the essence of political wisdom. Understanding the past and having insights into human nature are also helpful. The Sandburgs displayed many of these qualities throughout most of their lives.

Compassion was certainly there from the beginning of the couple's relationship. Their ardent socialism was motivated primarily by it. In his 1908 essay "You and Your Job," which Paula helped him to prepare, Carl wrote, "I say that a system such as the capitalist system, putting such obstacles as starvation, underfeeding, overwork, bad housing, and perpetual uncertainty of work in the lives of human beings, is a pitiless, ignorant, blind, reckless, cruel mockery of a system." He cited great disparities in incomes, mixing in statistics with concrete examples—"A woman takes her poodle with her to the opera to hear Caruso sing; babies die in the slums for lack of food. A bulldog of specialized type sells for \$8,000; at founding asylums infants may be had for the asking. Small families live in large houses; large families live in small houses." He recalled that his father, as most workers at the turn of the century, was at the mercy of his employer: "Our father was lucky enough to have a job most of the time, though it was a little hard back in '03, when the shops ran only four hours a day. Father worked hard and didn't get laid off, but I can remember yet that hunted, weary look he would have when he'd come home at noon, done with work for the day, and would mumble, 'They say maybe we'll all be laid off tomorrow.'" Sandburg related that he himself "was in Oshkosh a few days ago, and was told of a laborer who while at work was crushed to death by a falling wall. The oldest of his nine children is fourteen. There was no insurance--a man who gets \$1.50 a day and has a wife and nine children takes food from living babies who are hungry if he pays life insurance premiums." Sandburg then referred to Census Bureau data indicating that there were "1,700,000 child laborers, all under fifteen years of age." And he stated that "one reason I'm a Socialist is because the Socialists were the first to fight to abolish child labor, and today the Socialist party is the only one that has dared to declare in its platform that it is unalterably opposed to child labor, and that it will do all in its power to remove all conditions that make it possible for human beings anywhere to be underfed and overworked."¹³⁷

Both Sandburgs also thought that the socialists were correct to back women's suffrage. In an article, he wrote "woman is a human being and the equal of man" and added, "In giving women the right to vote, men will but honor themselves, and build toward a greater civilization." In another article of the same period, he wrote that "the real knights nowadays are working to save womanhood from the miserable wages paid in sweatshops, factories, mills and department stores, wages that usually drive hundreds of thousands to loveless marriages and careers of

Macdonald (see <http://www.wisdompage.com/tw-ch01.html>), among others, has written on how Maslow's "writings tell us much about the nature of wisdom."

¹³⁷ The essay is available at http://debs.indstate.edu/s2133y6_1900.pdf (accessed January 15, 2009).

prostitution.”¹³⁸ In 1911, soon after the birth of his oldest daughter, Margaret, he wrote a magazine article entitled “My Baby Girl.” In it he stated,

She shall see women go forward and cast ballots and speak and write and with passionate earnestness take part in political movements

. . . Woman, the common woman—the wife of the workingman—is the slave of a slave, cooking, sewing, washing, cleaning, nursing in sickness, and rendering a hundred personal services daily for a man who is himself not in power to dictate a constant job and living wage for himself. My baby girl shall see the slave achieve freedom for himself and his class," and Sandburg suggested that freedom for the workingmen would also liberate their wives.¹³⁹

Although mainstream Americans today might doubt that a couple could be wise if they advocated socialism, further investigation into what socialism meant for the Sandburgs in 1908 might change their minds. This was a time when not only women but also most blacks were denied the vote; when most of the latter lived in segregated conditions; when unions were weak and workers had few protections; when Social Security and minimum wage laws did not yet exist; and when very few workers received pensions and child labor and unsafe working conditions were widespread. In a section of his biography of Sandburg entitled “Fifty-two years of evolution,” Golden recalls him saying the following about Democratic platform adopted at the 1960 convention: “That’s a very good imitation of the national Socialist Party platform adopted in Chicago in 1908 when my future wife and I were in sparking attendance.”¹⁴⁰ Part of the reason that Sandburg eventually supported Democrats such as FDR, Adlai Stevenson, and John Kennedy was that they advocated some of the positions of earlier socialists. But he never lost his compassion for the victims of society. Nor did Paula, who, according to Golden, retained even more of her earlier political sympathies.¹⁴¹

In 1919, Carl displayed compassion for the plight of Chicago’s African American community in his articles and book *The Chicago Race Riots, July, 1919*. Much of what he wrote was based on interviews he conducted in black neighborhoods, where he talked to a wide variety of people including veterans, preachers, store owners, factory workers, housewives, and pimps. In his pieces, he quoted an Urban League official who told him: “Every time a lynching takes place in a community down south you can depend on it that colored people from that community will arrive in Chicago inside of two weeks.” Sandburg indicated that they had come from the south looking for “better jobs, the right to vote and have the vote counted at elections, no Jim Crow cars, less race discrimination, and a more tolerant attitude on the part of the whites.”¹⁴² As the black population of the city more than quadrupled in four years, however, what the

¹³⁸ Sandburg and Steichen, *The Poet and Dream Girl*, 258, 262.

¹³⁹ Quoted in Helga Sandburg, *A Great and Glorious Romance*, 185-86.

¹⁴⁰ Golden, *Carl Sandburg*, 31.

¹⁴¹ Besides Golden’s *Carl Sandburg*, where the author frequently mentions Paula, see Ch. 28 of Golden’s *The Right Time*, completed after Carl’s death, especially p. 324, where he mentions Paula’s politics. Sandburg’s *Complete Poems* also furnish many examples of his compassion. Despite becoming more moderate as he aged, Sandburg did continue to criticize threats to human rights such as those presented by McCarthyism. For the FBI file on Sandburg, see http://foia.fbi.gov/foiaindex/sandburg_c.htm (accessed January 21, 2009).

¹⁴² Carl Sandburg, *The Chicago Race Riots, July, 1919* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969), 31; also available at <http://books.google.com/books?id=-ZwTAAAYAAJ> (accessed February 19, 2009).

newcomers found were slums, high unemployment, poor wages and schools, and inadequate medical care. *The Chicago Race Riots, July 1919* begins as follows:

The so-called race riots in Chicago during the last week of July, 1919, started on a Sunday at a bathing beach. A colored boy swam across an imaginary segregation line. White boys threw rocks at him and knocked him off a raft. He was drowned. Colored people rushed to a policeman and asked for the arrest of the boys throwing stones. The policeman refused. As the dead body of the drowned boy was being handled, more rocks were thrown, on both sides. The policeman held on to his refusal to make arrests. Fighting then began that spread to all the borders of the Black Belt. The score at the end of three days was recorded as twenty negroes dead, fourteen white men dead [later accounts gave a slightly higher number], and a number of negro houses burned.

The riots furnished an excuse for every element of Gangland to go to it and test their prowess by the most ancient ordeals of the jungle. There was one section of the city that supplied more white hoodlums than any other section. It was the district around the stockyards and packing houses.¹⁴³

Sandburg's observations of "white hoodlums" was extended in his poem "Hoodlums" It began:

I AM a hoodlum, you are a hoodlum, we and all of us are a world
of hoodlums—maybe so.
I hate and kill better men than I am, so do you, so do all of us—maybe—
maybe so.
In the ends of my fingers the itch for another man's neck, I want to see
him hanging, one of dusk's cartoons against the sunset.
This is the hate my father gave me, this was in my mother's milk, this is
you and me and all of us in a world of hoodlums—maybe so.¹⁴⁴

Carl's commitment to racial justice continued throughout his life. In *The People, Yes* he wrote: "Man will Yet Win\Brother may yet line up with brother" and

So men in this land, where once were only
Indians, are now men of many colors —
white, black, yellow, red.¹⁴⁵

As Golden wrote in 1961 about his commitment, "the fight against anti-Semitism and Negrophobia had been a special project."¹⁴⁶ As a newspaper man in Chicago after World War I, he printed the platform of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and not long before his death Roy Wilkins, head of the NAACP, made him a lifetime

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ *Complete Poems*, 201.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 617.

¹⁴⁶ Golden, *Carl Sandburg*, 109.

member and declared him “a major prophet of Civil Rights.”¹⁴⁷ In *The Family of Man* (1955), a book which Carl contributed to (see below) there is a wonderful picture showing a little black boy walking down the street with his arm draped around the shoulder of his little white boy friend. More of that type of amity was part of the Sandburg’s dream for America. During World War II Carl hired two Japanese-Americans to work for him during the same period that over 100,000 other such Americans were being uprooted and sent to internment camps. He also wrote a column warning against such prejudice.

Although his friend Governor Adlai Stevenson said that he “is the one living man whose work and whose life epitomize the American dream” and both he and Paula were patriots in the best sense of the word, the Sandburgs’ hopes extended to all peoples. In 1908, Paula wrote her future husband, “As for an ‘obsession of nationality’ — of course not! It is possible — to love one’s own people and take pride in other peoples too — Fourth-of-July patriots to-the-contrary, notwithstanding!”¹⁴⁸ In the early 1950s, as Senator Joe McCarthy was stirring up flames of intolerance and suspicion of foreign ways, Carl collaborated with Paula’s brother, Edward Steichen, who was putting together an exhibit of over 500 photographs for New York’s Museum of Modern Art, where he served as director of the Department of Photography. The exhibit opened in January 1955 and subsequently was displayed in various parts of the world, becoming the most viewed display of photographs in history. In 1959, Carl went with his brother-in-law to the traveling exhibit when it was shown in Moscow, both men hoping the exhibition would further understanding among Cold War rivals. The pictures in the exhibit were gathered from almost seventy countries and were meant to demonstrate humanity’s oneness. Carl wrote the Prologue for the extremely popular book, *The Family of Man*, which reproduced the photographs. In it he wrote:

Everywhere is love and love-making, weddings and babies from generation to generation keeping the family of Man alive and continuing. Everywhere the sun, moon and stars, - the climates and weathers, have meanings for people. Though meanings vary, we are alike in all countries and tribes in trying to read what sky, land and sea say to us. Alike and ever alike we are on all continents in the need of love, food, clothing, work, speech, worship, sleep, games, dancing, fun. From the tropics to arctics humanity lives with these needs so alike, so inexorably alike.

And he closed the Prologue with a portion of a poem he had first written a few years before.

There is only one man in the world
and his name is All Men.
There is only one woman in the world
and her name is All Women.
There is only one child in the world
and the child’s name is All Children.

¹⁴⁷ Niven, 338-39, 699.

¹⁴⁸ Sandburg and Steichen, *The Poet and Dream Girl*, 45-46.

In the last section of the last poem (“Timesweep”) of his final book of poetry, he repeated these lines.¹⁴⁹

During their early years together, however, the Sandburgs’ compassion and socialism sometimes led them to overlook the possibility that political doctrines, including socialism, can often be too simplistic. Carl’s more radical socialist beliefs in the war years of 1915-1918 were spelled out in articles he wrote for the *International Socialist Review*. A scholar who has analyzed these articles has concluded that the man who wrote them “saw no possibility that the conditions in which most Americans then lived could be bettered by liberal reforms He held out only one hope for the country and its ordinary people. If the United States collapsed . . . Sandburg believed at that time, then there would be hope. Massive direct action by workers, class conflict in the form of strikes and crippling general strikes, and, finally, revolution to overthrow capitalism was the way to change the lot of the ordinary people.”¹⁵⁰ As they got older, however, the Sandburgs came to appreciate more the complexity of truth, whether in the political arena or beyond. With this appreciation came increasing political humility, pragmatism, and tolerance for those who thought differently on political issues. This is most clearly evidenced in Carl’s writings and speeches and in the remembrances of his friends.

A letter that Sandburg wrote to the French novelist Romain Rolland in late 1919 reveals that he was still in transition from his more radical and ideological youth to the more pragmatic, mature, and wiser man he would eventually become. Portions of the letter indicate his continuing radicalism and ideological bent which leads him to make some poor judgments—“I am for unrest, discontent, revolt and war to whatever extent is necessary to obtain the Russian Bolshevik [Communist] program which centers on the three needs: bread, peace, land.” Of course, it is easier to realize in hindsight that such a judgment was unwise. But if Sandburg is to be credited with being ahead of the mainstream on so many issues from rights for minorities and women’s suffrage to increasing workers’ rights and protections, it must also be admitted that he made some poor judgments, including supporting the Bolsheviks, whose policies led to intolerance and dehumanization. Before long, however, Sandburg realized that Communist policies were very different than the dreams they earlier espoused, and that communism had little future in America. Writing in 1961, Golden recounts that “time and time again he has told me the greatest bigots in the world are the Communists.”¹⁵¹

Already in his letter to Rolland, however, Sandburg was beginning to move in a more pragmatic direction:

You ask me to belong to something. You wish me to join a movement or party or church and subscribe to a creed and a program. It would be easy to do this. It is the line of least resistance. If I have a fixed, unchangeable creed then I am saved the trouble every day of forming a new creed dictated by the events of the day. If I have a program and a philosophy and a doctrine, crystalized [sic] in an organized movement, then the movement is supposed to do for me what I ought to do for myself.

¹⁴⁹ Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.), *The Family of Man: The Greatest Photographic Exhibition of All Time--503 Pictures from 68 Countries* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1955), 3-4; Sandburg, *Complete Poems*, 771.

¹⁵⁰ Yannella, xiv; for a more complex view of Sandburg’s WWI politics, see http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/s_z/sandburg/radical.htm (accessed January 16, 2009).

¹⁵¹ Golden, *Carl Sandburg*, 145.

In this letter Sandburg also indicated that he supported politicians from various parties “and was free to vote any ticket or back any candidate.”¹⁵² Indeed during World War I, Sandburg had moved away from his early socialist criticism of the war to supporting President Woodrow Wilson’s decision to have the USA enter the war in 1917. Thereafter, although voting for socialist, and friend, Eugene Debs for president in 1920 and remaining supporters of many of their earlier socialist aspirations, Carl and Paula remained independent voters, never again officially joining a political party.¹⁵³

In 1933 he wrote in another letter that he saw “many striking parallels between Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt in political method, in decision amid chaos, in reading trends, in development of policy so as to gather momentum, in resilience and acknowledgement of hazards—and much else.”¹⁵⁴ And in 1935 he sent an article entitled “Lincoln in the Shadows” to Roosevelt himself, and in the accompanying letter told the president: "Having written for ten years now on 'Abraham Lincoln: the War Years,' starting this year on the fourth and final volume, I have my eyes and ears in two eras and can not help drawing parallels. One runs to the effect that you are the best light of democracy that has occupied the White House since Lincoln. . . Your speeches like Lincoln’s will stand the test of time.”¹⁵⁵

Being a strong supporter of FDR’s New Deal, in 1936 Sandburg gave several speeches encouraging Roosevelt’s reelection and comparing him to Lincoln. He also wrote several articles in the mid-1930s pointing out some of the similarities he saw between the two presidents and their times. In 1937, Roosevelt gave Sandburg a personal tour of the White House areas of special interest to the Lincoln scholar. In the late 1930s and into the 1940s, the president made increasing use of comparisons between himself and Lincoln that were made not only by Sandburg, but also by other writers such as playwright Robert Sherwood and poet Stephen Vincent Benét. In 1940, after FDR heard a rumor that Sandburg might run for a Congressional seat, he encouraged the Lincoln biographer and poet, stating “it would be grand to have your kind of Lincoln liberal in the Congress.”¹⁵⁶

That same year Sandburg once again strongly supported the president’s reelection and compared him to Lincoln. On the eve of the election, he was the final speaker on a two-hour national radio broadcast in behalf of FDR’s reelection. In his speech, which he had talked over beforehand with the president at the White House, Sandburg quoted a speech that a Reverend Henry Fowler had given in behalf of Lincoln in 1863. Fowler had stated that the “explanation of his every act is this: He executes the will of the people. . . . His wisdom consists in carrying out the good sense of the nation. . . . He stands before you . . . a not perfect man and yet more precious than fine gold.” Sandburg then added “and for some of us, that goes in the main in the present hour of national fate, for Franklin Delano Roosevelt.”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵² *The Letters of Carl Sandburg*, 169.

¹⁵³ Niven, 285. See also *The Letters of Carl Sandburg*, 325, where in 1935 he wrote, "I belong to no political party and have not for 24 years. I belong to no organizations open or secret except the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Authors League of America"

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 297-98.

¹⁵⁵ *The Letters of Carl Sandburg*, 318.

¹⁵⁶ Quoted in Alfred Haworth Jones, *Roosevelt's Image Brokers; Poets, Playwrights, and the Use of the Lincoln Symbol*, 77.

¹⁵⁷ Carl Sandburg, *Home Front Memo* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1943), 29-30.

Even before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, Sandburg was a strong supporter of FDR's assisting Great Britain by such steps as his Lend-Lease program. In August 1941, he spoke at Madison Square Garden quoting Lincoln and praising American democracy for having "more give and take, more resilience, ductility, and malleability, more crazy foolishness and more grand wisdom, than any other system." Aware that many people were critical of FDR for moving toward war against Germany, Sandburg said: "Who wants war? Nobody. Only fools and idiots want war. . . . Yet sometimes the issue comes before a nation of people: Will you fight a war now, or would you deliberately chose another later inevitable war. . . ?"¹⁵⁸ Just a week before the Pearl Harbor attack, he wrote in his weekly column for the *Chicago Times* urging national unity and again quoting Lincoln.¹⁵⁹

In the same month as the attack, he wrote a poem in which he asked whether there was any easy road to freedom and again interspersed with his own words those of Lincoln [in italics] from his December 1, 1862 message to Congress:

*"Fellow citizens . . . we cannot escape history.
The fiery trial through which we pass
Will light us down in honor or dishonor
To the latest generation. . .
We shall nobly save or meanly lose
the last best hope of earth."*

Four little words came worth studying over:

"We must disenthral ourselves."

And what is a thrall? And who are thralls?

Men tied down or men doped, or men drowsy?

He hoped to see them

shake themselves loose

and so be disenthralled.¹⁶⁰

In December 1944, he read a new poem, which was published in a popular magazine the following February. It was entitled "The Long Shadow of Lincoln: A Litany," and he ended it with the line he had often quoted from Lincoln:

The earth laughs, the sun laughs
over every wise harvest of man,
over man looking toward peace
by the light of the hard old teaching:
*"We must disenthral ourselves."*¹⁶¹

In April 1945, Sandburg gave a wartime radio address to millions encouraging the American people to prevail and again quoting Lincoln from his December 1, 1862 message to Congress. That same month FDR died, and Sandburg followed in the tradition of one of his

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 40.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 114-17.

¹⁶⁰ *Complete Poems*, 625.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 625.

favorite poets, Walt Whitman, who upon Lincoln's death had written "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," as Sandburg had recalled in his last Lincoln volume. Sandburg's poem, "When Death Came, April Twelve 1945," however, with its frequent references to bells and the Commander calls to mind more another Whitman poem upon the death of Lincoln, "O Captain! My Captain!"¹⁶²

By the time Sandburg had finished his six volumes on Lincoln in 1939, he was more humble, pragmatic, and tolerant than he had been as a youth. This was partly because he believed Lincoln possessed such qualities and often demonstrated his "pervasive simplicity of speech and life-style; his kindness and generosity; his dislike of all pretense; his humility."¹⁶³ A more recent historian has observed that Sandburg's Lincoln appealed to Americans because he possessed "what Americans have always considered their most noble traits—honesty, unpretentiousness, tolerance, hard work, a capacity to forgive, a compassion for the underdog, a clear-sighted vision of right and wrong, a dedication to God and country, and an abiding concern for all."¹⁶⁴ A biographer of Sandburg's writes that according to Sandburg, Lincoln displays "more tolerance and forgiveness than any other national leader."¹⁶⁵ Sandburg himself in an essay of the early 1940s that appeared in his *Home Front Memo* under the title "What would Lincoln do now?" stressed his hero's pragmatism. After explaining that Lincoln often had to decide between "what was partly right and partly wrong" and how what in theory might seem "perfectly right" was unfeasible, Sandburg said that if Lincoln were living in the early 1940s he "would often be doing the expedient thing rather than the right thing."¹⁶⁶ Earlier, in his last Lincoln volume, Sandburg had recounted how Lincoln said the year before he was assassinated that he was elected at a "time when a man with a policy would have been fatal to the country. I have never had a policy. I have simply tried to do what seemed best each day, as each day came."¹⁶⁷

Sandburg's own observations and work on Lincoln convinced him that opinions, disagreements, and debate were the lifeblood of democracy and that nobody had a monopoly on truth. In *The People, Yes* he wrote:

Let the argument go on.

.....

The people have the say-so.

Let the argument go on.

.....

Who knows the answers, the cold inviolable truth?

.....

And how few they are who search and hesitate and say:

"I stand in this whirlpool and tell you I don't know and if I did know I would tell you and all I am doing now is to guess and I give you

¹⁶² See *Ibid.*, 637-38, for Sandburg's poem.

¹⁶³ Niven, 415.

¹⁶⁴ Stephen B. Oates, *Abraham Lincoln, the Man Behind the Myths* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 30.

¹⁶⁵ Callahan, 165.

¹⁶⁶ Sandburg, *Home Front Memo*, 7-8; the essay was earlier printed as "Abraham Lincoln," in *There Were Giants in the Land; Twenty-Eight Historic Americans as Seen by Twenty-Eight Contemporary Americans* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, inc, 1942), 226-42.

¹⁶⁷ ALPYWY, vol. 3, p. 731.

my guess for what it is worth as one man's guess.¹⁶⁸

In a newspaper piece of August 10, 1941 entitled “The job of Chief Magistrate,” Sandburg again stresses the cacophony of democracy: “If he speaks to the country, there are those who are sure he has said just the right thing and others sure that once more he has opened his mouth to no use and to no avail. . . . If he opens any door of policy, he is sure to hear it should be opened wider, it should be closed entirely, or there should be a new door or a return to the door that was there before, or the original intention of the Founding Fathers was that a window is better than a door anyhow.” Twenty years later, Sandburg repeated these exact words in his Forward to President John Kennedy’s *To Turn the Tide*.¹⁶⁹

In 1961, Sandburg also sent a copy of his novel *Remembrance Rock* to Kennedy, stating that he realized the president would not have time to read it all, but that he might wish to look at a radio speech delivered during World War II by Sandburg’s fictional former Supreme Court Justice Windom--note the one letter difference with the word wisdom.

I can see many of your faces. They are the faces I have seen in our America, faces I have met from coast to coast, from the Great Lakes to the Gulf. They are the faces of today, of now, of this hour and this minute. Yet it is worth considering that many of those same faces have had their shining moments in our America of the past. We can go back fifty or a hundred years, two and three hundred years, and we meet these same faces of men, women and children. . . .

Long before this time of ours America saw the faces of her men and women torn and shaken in turmoil, chaos and storm. In each major crisis you could have seen despair written on the faces of the foremost strugglers. Yet there always arose enough of reserves of strength, balances of sanity, portions of wisdom, to carry the nation through to a fresh start with an ever-renewing vitality.¹⁷⁰

As with Lincoln, the fictional Justice Windom bore some resemblance to Sandburg himself, including that they both gave national wartime radio speeches. Windom’s mention of “portions of wisdom” among the people was in keeping with a similar belief expressed in *The People, Yes*, where “more than a third of the poem is devoted to myth, folklore and sayings of people around the world.”¹⁷¹ Sandburg also valued Lincoln’s wisdom. Describing the young Illinois state representative in Springfield, he wrote:

In this period of his life he let himself go in sarcasm and satire that was to bring him shame and humiliation. He would change. He was to learn, at cost, how to use the qualities of pity and compassion that lay deeply and naturally in his heart, toward wiser reading and keener understanding of all men and women he met.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ *Complete Poems*, 614.

¹⁶⁹ *Home Front Memo*, 84; John F Kennedy, *To Turn the Tide; a Selection from President Kennedy's Public Statements from His Election Through the 1961 Adjournment of Congress, Setting Forth the Goals of His First Legislative Year*, (New York: Harper, 1962), x-xi.

¹⁷⁰ *Remembrance Rock*, 21; for the letter to Kennedy, see *The Letters of Carl Sandburg*, 537.

¹⁷¹ Niven, 509.

¹⁷² Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1926), 60.

Years later Sandburg indicated that part of the wisdom of President Lincoln, and President Franklin Roosevelt, was displayed “in carrying out the good sense of the nation.”

Sandburg and John Kennedy admired each other, and Sandburg’s *Forward* to the Kennedy speeches gathered together in *To Turn the Tide* (1962) occurred because of the president’s request. In it, the Lincoln biographer compared Kennedy to Lincoln. After quoting Lincoln’s words--“If we could first know where we are and whither we are trending we could better judge what to do and how to do it”—Sandburg pointed out that Kennedy in this collection presented “the known facts as to where we are and whither we are tending and offers his counsel on what to do and how to do it.” Sandburg ended the Foreword with the following paragraph about Kennedy:

Plainly he has had humility, scruples, care and anxiety about what he thinks, writes and says, hoping to mislead no one, hoping his words will stand up and make sense and perhaps wisdom for his own time and later times. When our generation has passed away, when the tongues of praise and comment now speaking have turned to a cold dumb dust, it will be written that John F. Kennedy walked with the American people in their vast diversity and gave them all he had toward their moving into new phases of their great human adventure.¹⁷³

In January 1963, Sandburg celebrated his eighty-fifth birthday among many friends including U. S. Ambassador to the United Nations Adlai Stevenson and Supreme Court Justice William Douglas. President Kennedy sent a congratulatory telegram saying that Sandburg “as a poet, story-teller, minstrel and biographer, has expressed the many-sided American genius.” Before the year was out, Kennedy was assassinated. The national grieving that occurred reminded some people of the extended description Sandburg had provided in his last Lincoln volume, where they read of a grieving nation following Lincoln’s assassination.

By the time he wrote the Preface to the first edition of his *Complete Poems* (1950), Sandburg was more mindful of the complexity of life, political and otherwise, than ever. “All around us the imponderable and the unfathomed— at these targets many a poet has shot his bullets of silver and scored a bull’s-eye, or missed with dull pellets of paper.” He quoted humorist Will Rogers--“We are all ignorant but on different subjects”—and others who indicated how baffling life could be.¹⁷⁴ In one of the poems in this collection, “Elephants Are Different to Different People,” the poet relates a discussion about a zoo elephant and ends his poem this way:

They didn't put up any arguments.
They didn't throw anything in each other's faces.
Three men saw the elephant three ways
And let it go at that.
They didn't spoil a sunny Sunday afternoon;
"Sunday comes only once a week," they told each other.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ *To Turn the Tide*, x, xiii.

¹⁷⁴ *Complete Poems*, xxiii-xxiv.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 628-29; the poem had earlier appeared in a Modern American Poetry anthology of 1936.

By 1960, Golden thought that Sandburg was incapable “of a thoughtless act or an unkindness, and that goes for his politics in which he is so heavily involved.” After returning from a campaign meeting for John Kennedy, Golden recalled that he began criticizing the Republicans, but Sandburg “raised his finger to his lips and said, “Shhh-hh, they gave us Earl Warren [Chief Justice of the Supreme Court], didn’t they?”¹⁷⁶ In the poet’s final poem to appear in his last book of poetry, he wrote: “Each of us makes his life in what to him is the Known and for each of us there is a vast Unknown and farther beyond the vaster Unknowable--and the Ignorance we share and share alike is immeasurable.”¹⁷⁷ Thus, as he aged Sandburg’s political tolerance, pragmatism, and humility increased.

His understanding of the past also developed, as did his conviction that a knowledge of history was vital to achieving greater wisdom. In his long novel, *Remembrance Rock*, which his publisher declared “follows the growth of the American dream through more than three centuries of our nation’s history,” he had former Supreme Court Justice Windom say, “When a society or a civilization perishes, one condition can always be found. They forgot where they came from.”¹⁷⁸ These lines were a portion of the few pages he had recommended to President Kennedy. The research he had done for this book and more significantly all his years of studying Lincoln and his times contributed greatly to his own knowledge of the American past, its government, and people. His many comparisons of Lincoln’s times to his own and Lincoln to FDR and, to a lesser extent to JFK, indicate how important he thought it was to learn from the past in order to exercise wise contemporary political judgments.

His own political wisdom was also deepened by his frequent traveling around the country and his gathering of American folk music. These many trips, his natural friendliness, and his many years of newspaper work and poetic contemplation also contributed to his knowledge of the American people. Although less familiar with foreign lands and peoples, his occasional trips abroad, a few foreign friends like Andre Sergovia, and his many conversations and work with brother-in-law Edward Steichen, who spent more time abroad, helped broaden his appreciation and understanding of an increasingly globalized world.

About Paula’s political wisdom we have much less of a public record to go on, but by all accounts she also possessed many of the characteristics we have identified as helpful in possessing it.

Conclusion

The wisdom of Carl and Paula Sandburg was manifested in their personal, family, social, and political activities, and it matured as they aged. In their youth they emphasized learning and personal growth and were passionate and compassionate seekers of truth, beauty, and justice who appreciated the mysteries of nature and the universe. Without losing these traits, Carl became more humble, pragmatic, and tolerant of political differences as he got older. By temperament, Paula was always more patient and humble. By their old age, they knew more of history and human nature, which contributed to their political wisdom.

¹⁷⁶ Golden, *Carl Sandburg*, 266.

¹⁷⁷ *Complete Poems*, 770. Also at <http://www.nps.gov/archive/carl/people/archives/poems/time01.htm> (accessed January 18, 2009).

¹⁷⁸ *Remembrance Rock*, 19.

By displaying compassion for those most exploited and discriminated against, as well as constant faith in the American people, Carl's work helped to buoy up American spirits during difficult times such as the Great Depression and World War II. Like Presidents Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt, and John Kennedy, the Sandburgs encouraged their fellow countrymen to believe in the "American Dream," with Carl's herculean Lincoln work, poems like *The People, Yes*, and his public backing of Roosevelt and Kennedy being especially significant. In 1963, a newspaper quoted these words of his:

I have spent as strenuous a life as any man surviving three wars and two major depressions, but never, not for a moment, did I lose faith in America's future. . . . I see America, not in the setting sun of a black night of despair ahead of us. I see America in the crimson light of a rising sun fresh from the burning, creative hand of God. I see great days ahead, great days possible to men and women of will and vision.¹⁷⁹

It should be added that when this article appeared the racial conflict that Carl had highlighted in his *The Chicago Race Riots, July, 1919 (1919)* was intensifying as civil rights leaders pushed hard, attempting to overcome the legacy of segregation and discrimination. The "great days" he saw ahead, were ones, he hoped, that would be free of the racism of the past.

His poetry, like his final published poem, "Timesweep," reflects some of the other aspects of wisdom that had matured in him as he aged--his sense of oneness with nature and others, living and dead; maintaining a positive approach to life in the face of infirmities and death itself; achieving transcendence (which Maslow writes so eloquently about) through this sense of oneness, as well as through poetry, music, and other means. This transcendence is also evident in his willingness to help younger people, whether his grandchildren, school children (some of whose schools were named after him), or President Kennedy.

The influence of the Sandburgs—with hers being mainly through him--extended far beyond their own lifetimes. Although Carl's reputation as a poet and biographer has declined both in academic institutions and among the general public, the words of his poet friend Archibald MacLeish at his Lincoln Memorial service in 1967 still seem significant:

What Sandburg knew and said was what America knew from the beginning and said from the beginning and has not yet, no matter what is believed of her, forgotten how to say: that those who are credulous about the destiny of man, who believe more than they can prove of the future of the human race, will *make* that future, *shape* that destiny. This was his great achievement: that he found a new way in an incredulous and disbelieving and often cynical time to say what Americans have always known.¹⁸⁰

Offering hope and belief in the human future in "an incredulous and disbelieving and often cynical time" by the beginning of the year 2009 seemed not so old-fashioned any longer. The successful U. S. presidential political campaign of Senator Barack Obama, another man who first emerged on the national scene out of Chicago and greatly admired Lincoln, indicated that Sandburg's sense of optimism and hope was not dead in America. Like Sandburg, Obama

¹⁷⁹ Quoted in Callahan, 233.

¹⁸⁰ MacLeish's speech is reprinted as an Introduction in Sandburg's *Complete Poems*; see p. xxii for the quote.

refused to see “a black night of despair ahead of us,” but stressed, as he entitled a book, “The Audacity of Hope.”¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ I have briefly touched on some of the parallels between Sandburg and Obama in my essay “Obama, Sandburg and Lincoln” on the *History News Network*, available at <http://hnn.us/articles/60650.html>; and my reflections on Obama’s appreciation of wisdom are available in another essay, “Obama, McCain, Bush, Age, Experience, and Wisdom,” available at <http://hnn.us/articles/52853.html>.