CHAPTER-IV

SANDBURG'S CITY OF THE BIG SHOULDERS

I speak of new cities and new people.
I tell you the past is a bucket of ashes.
I tell you yesterday is a wind gone
Down, a Sun dropped in the west.
I tell you there is nothing in the world
Only an ocean of tomorrows,
A sky of tomorrows.
I am a brother of the cornhuskers who say
At sundown: Tomorrow is a day.

-Carl Sandburg, "Corlnhuskers" (1918).

Carl (August) Sandburg (1878-1967): A revered figure in American literature, Sandburg is best known for his intense, loosely structured poetry and his epical biographies of Abraham Lincoln. In his poetry, Sandburg realistically evoked the immense diversity of the American citizenry and landscape. He sought to express the dignity of common people in whom he found the spirit and values of American democracy. Sandburg was particularly adept at recreating the rhymes and colloquialism of Midwestern idioms. Rebecca West, in her introduction to his 'Selected Poems' (1926), called Sandburg a "national poet" who expresses the whole life of the Middle West of today. Born Charles August Sandburg; also wrote under pseudonyms of 'Militant' and 'Jack Phillip', was an American poet,
biographer, autobiographer, novelist, author of books for children, nonfiction writer, journalist, songwriter and editor.

Sandburg’s first collection of poetry, *Chicago Poems* (1926), contains free verse poems that were startling in its style, tone, and subject matter. In this volume and throughout his career, he wrote oddly structured, prosaic poetry that emphasized key phrases and images. Sandburg often, examined aspects of industrial urban life, a topic that had rarely been addressed in poetry. For example, in his much-anthologized poem “Chicago”, Sandburg mentions skyscrapers, hog butchering, railroads, and other objects and activities with an intensity that reflects the bustling urban landscape. With ‘*Cornhuskers*’ (1918), ‘*Smoke and Steel*’ (1920), and ‘*Good Morning America*’ (1928), Sandburg established himself as a popular poet who wrote unpretentiously about urban life, nature, and humanity.

Critical response to Sandburg’s poetry has varied markedly, and critics continue to debate its importance. Many contend that his poems are often overly sentimental and resemble randomly arranged prose pieces. In a review Sandburg’s *Collected Poems* (1950), William Carlos Williams acknowledged “Chicago” as “brilliant” but claimed that the rest of Sandburg’s poems were formless and insignificant. On the other hand, reviewers have noted the sense of power or tenderness evinced in many of his poems, and several critics claim that his experimentation with free verse offered an important challenge to traditional forms of poetry. Sandburg was consistent, in his use of common language in poems about the people of the United
States. In his most ambitious poem, *The People, Yes (1936)*, Sandburg catalogues their diversities. Stephen Vincent Benet considered this poem, "a frescoe and a field of grass and a man listening quietly to all the common place, extraordinary things that people say."¹ "The People, Yes" and "Chicago" are generally regarded as Sandburg's finest poetic achievements. Sandburg was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his 'Collected Poems'. While Sandburg won fame primarily as poet and as a biographer of Lincoln, he was also recognized for several volumes of tales for children, known, collectively as the "Rootebaga Stories." 'Remembrance Rock' (1948) is a historical novel set in America and spans the arrival of the pilgrims to the onset of World War II. As a youngman, Sandburg worked many odd jobs, traveled as a hobo, served in the army during the Spanish- American War, and became a journalist with the Chicago Daily News. These adventures and his boyhood experiences are recounted in his acclaimed autobiography, 'Always the Young Strangers' (1952). One of the most popular figures in American literature during his life time, Sandburg traveled extensively and was well known for his lectures and poetry recitals. He also sang and played guitar and banjo. His interest in music is reflected in 'American Song Bag' (1927), a collection of American folksongs. Following his death, Sandburg was given a special service at the Lincoln Memorial.
Life and Career of Carl Sandburg:

Carl Sandburg was born January 6, 1878, in a small three-room frame house on Third street, in Galesburg, Illinois. This prairie town had come into existence only forty-one years earlier; and in the 1870's it had developed into a railroad center because of the crossing or rail lines coming from Chicago. Carl's mother strengthened her children's spirit with love, spiritual values and a high moral code. The father had absorbed the political tradition of Lincoln: and his son followed him in this tradition. Commentators on Sandburg's home background agree with the poet himself that his mother had an inner grace and bright radiance, a religious devotion and deep interest in her children, for friends and neighbors which combined to produce in her a loving and lovable character. Carl's mother believed that "with thought and live in the home so much can be over come."2

In 1882 the family moved to a larger home on East Berien Street, where young Carl was to pass the formulative years of youth. Here he grew up in the company of other Swedes and of New Englanders, Germans, Irish, and Italians; they played together and they understood each other. Economically, life was difficult for the Sandburg family; though the father was the personification of honesty, sobriety, tireless industry and faithful application to duty, his working hours were spent at the forges of the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy railroad shop, ten hours a day for only fourteen cents an hour. On this, the family was fed and clothed, the home paid for and some of the hard-earned dollars given to the
Swedish Lutheran church. Sandburg tells in “Always the Young Strangers” of his early school years. He had begun to read extracurricular books in the school library in his fifth grade. He read also Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer by Mark Twain and some of Charles Dickens works. Eugene Field and Long fellow were read in school and his first taste of poetry became apparent; Gray’s “Elegy in a Country Churchyard” he memorized; but the history books were his private reading material. It was a brief History of the United States that left its imprint on the inquiring mind of the boy.

Hard Times were upon them. Young Sandburg took a job as a porter in the Union Hotel barbershop at three dollars a week, plus occasional small tips. To the Hotel came lecturers, show people, minstrels and actors. The youth watched them all and helped them whenever he could. Young Carl longed to see the world. In 1876 at the age of eighteen, he made his first trip to Chicago, having in his pocket one dollar and fifty cents and a railroad pass to Chicago. He visited the Eden Museum, saw two variety shows and walked through Marshall Fields and many other large department stores; he looked at the building of the Chicago “Daily News” and the “Tribune”, newspaper which he had sold through out the years; he watched the elevated cars, stopped in at the Board of Trade, walked out to take Michigan and “never got tired of the roar of the streets the trolley cars, the teamsters, the buggies, surreys and phaetons, sometime a barouche with a coachman in livery, now and again a man in a saddle on horseback”. (Sandburg p.
He returned to Galesburg penniless but richer for experience of having seen a little of another world. After his return to Galesburg he longed to be again in Chicago’s crowds and roaring traffic and to see again the beauty of the shimmering water of Lake Michigan.

However he had enjoyed his first insight into the activity of the great city. These facts are evidence of the incipient trends toward journalism and cosmopolitan city life that were taking shape in the young man’s mind. In 1897, at the age of nineteen, young Carl decided to see the west. This hunger of seeing and learning the world was a manifestation of his insatiable appetite for learning finally for providing food for his mind and thought and soul. Through the alchemy of adaptation, he was soon to transform these experiences into poetry.

Some commentators have referred to Sandburg’s trip to west as one of the most famous and significant trips in modern American literature. Sandburg was like many other young men in wanting to see the country, it is clear that his reactions to it, and the aspects he seized on, show unmistakable sings of keen sensitivity and a pictorial imagination that fixed scenes in his mind for years to come, together with a lyrical appreciation and gifts of experience, a sharp gift for the observation of life and a keen sense of the pathos of the human situation.

Sandburg’s sensitivity to this last aspect: the human situation- is made evident by his sympathy for the vagrants whom he met on the freight trains. In his
mind they were a direct reflection of the period known as *Hard Times*. In writing of these Vagrant workers he states;

"Newspapers said, the country was pulling out of the *Hard Times*, more factory chimneys smoking, the full dinner pail and the promised McKinley prosperity on the way. Yet there were still many men out of work, many men who had left their homes hoping for jobs somewhere. You could see these men riding the boxcars and sitting around in jungle hang out". (Sandburg, Carl *Always the Young Strangers*. 390).

Sandburg saw in his trip a kind of poetic Odyssey. A little later came a better opportunity—that of learning the painter's trade. But suddenly there came a complete change in his life, when on February 15, 1898, the U.S. battle ship Maine was blown up in the harbor at Havana, Cuba. As a result, the United Sates soon declared war on Spain; and on April 26, Carl Sandburg offered his services with company C, Sixth Infantry Regiment of Illinois Volunteers, and was accepted.

Thus it was in uniform that for the first time in his life he saw the city of Washington, where his regiment was given physical examination by a surgeon. There was little time to roam around but some of the regiment walked out past the Washington home of Abraham Lincoln before going to Falls Church, Virginia, for military training.
There is much in Sandburg’s ‘Reckless Ecstasy’, which reveals his basic philosophy, and outlook. A paragraph from this little volume also serves to explain the harshness of the Chicago poems to come a decade later.

“It is often the case that ideas, which cannot be stated in direct words, may be brought home by Reckless Ecstasies of the language. It is fear of the accusation of obfuscation that drives writers to the reckless ecstasy.... There are some people who can receive a truth by no other way than to have their understanding shocked and insulted... There are thoughts beyond the reach of words, and these seers transmit only by lurid splashes of verbiage, that cannot be gauged by common sense but must be sought out by the spirit of sublimity in us. I try to express myself sensibly but if that fails, I will use the reckless ecstasy. As Kipling has one of his untamed children of the forest say, ‘I will be, the word of the people’. Mine will be the bleeding mouth from which the gag is snatched. I will say everything. (Sandburg, Charles A. in ‘Reckless Ecstasy’, p. 10). It should be stated here that the college poetry was written under the name of Charles A. Sandburg. The youth then preferring the anglicized form of name “Carl”, however he later revered to “Carl”

While traveling across the county selling the stereoscopic views, he was able to read, in his spare time, writers such as Emerson and Tolstoy, whose works was then much in the foreground. His later writings show, that with his awakened social and political interest, and these experiences developed him rapidly as an
observer of human nature and as a commentator on and critic of the social scene. He understood the condition of the poor, especially those compelled to work in factories and mills for low wages. As he himself had tasted bitterness of economic difficulty, knew the toll it exacted, and felt deeply, moved wherever he saw the similar struggle of others before adequate labor laws had been enacted. The desire to write was becoming more and more deep-seated; yet necessity demanded that he earn enough to live. For a short time he wrote local items for the Galesburg Daily Mail; and for a brief period he wrote in Chicago for 'Unity' a magazine of the Unitarian Church.

Along with his newspaper work, Carl Sandburg had been quietly working on poetry, writing and re-writing it. In the field of poetry, 1912 had marked an important date; for in that year Harriet Monroe founded in Chicago the magazine entitled 'Poetry': A Magazine of Verse. The founding of Poetry magazine was the spearhead of the renaissance in American poetry. And the establishment of this literary periodical was the elemental core from which radiated a new enthusiasm instilled in the early twentieth century poets, and a renewed public interest in poetry. Miss Monroe felt that American poetry should treat Contemporary American life in new and freer rhythms. At a later date in 1917 she edited, with Alice Corbin Henderson, an important anthology, "The New Poetry", which contained poems by new writers allied with the movement; it also clearly stated the aim of the movement: "We wanted to get rid not only of rhetoric but of poetic
diction. We tried to strip away everything that was artificial, to get a style like speech, as simple as the simplest prose, like a cry of the heart.³

Nevertheless, when Sandburg’s productions were first published in Miss Monroe’s magazine, the little poem “Chicago produced consternation and shock at the unrestrained frankness, of his appraisal of the city; although followers of the political reform movement saw the power of this unfettered verse. This initial reaction was, by and large, confined to the literary public. Over a diversity of opinion, the name of Carl Sandburg rose to prominence in the world of poetry and many magazines began publishing his poems—magazines such as ‘The Literary Digest, Bookman’, Current Opinion, the Nation and New Republic. Miss Monroe recognized the strength and promise of Sandburg’s free verse poems, and she and other officials of the magazine urged the publication of his first collection.

Carl Sandburg’s Position as an American Poet:

The life of Carl Sandburg might be described as an evolutionary process, first of the assimilation of a young man of immigrant stock into a cosmopolitan society that itself was developing a national American identity and consciousness; and then of a growing dedication to the national image, as conceived by a poet of varied gifts and distinctive cast of mind. The associations of his early life, his family his economic difficulties, the association with Professor Philip Green Wright, the fellowship with political reformers, with journalists and with poets of
similar mind and powers, all helped to mold a poetic endeavor regarded by many as uniquely American.

The image of America represented by Sandburg is therefore an expanding image; for as he grew older, some aspects were shed, others taken up, modified, colored. However he never lost contact with his early associates, never lost sight of the views of the labor groups as he became a journalist, lecturer, scholar and a national literary figure. There is, in consequence, a marked evolution in his picture of America, but this is caused less by any changes in the man than by the fact that Sandburg lived in a changing America, which was evolving, feeling its growing pains, stumbling and grouping to maturity. This pageant-like growth was shared by Sandburg and may be relieved in his writings. He chronicles America's growth through one of the most formative periods in its history. The setting for this national portrait is sketched both historically and geographically, with a fine sense of local color and Sandburg’s characteristic picturesque ness of image: “In the beginning was virgin land and America was promises.”

As a poet with a talent for portraiture, the background of his native land naturally figured largely in his poems, a background that achieved a considerable degree of accuracy in detail of the large and varied topography of the United States.

“The salt oceans press in
And push on the coast lines....
River cut a path on flat lands.
The mountains stand up.”
-(Cornhuskers [Prairie], lines 56-59.)

He paints the New England sea coast with “beaten seas and grey winds which blew gray patterns of sleet on Plymouth Rock” (Sandburg Carl. Cornhuskers [Firedreams] 131), in Massachusetts at the time of the landing of the Pilgrims. In the poem “New Hampshire” he paints New England’s sleepy twilight hills, thin white birch trees, black winter waters and White Mountains.

In the lines of “North Atlantic” the poet gives us his impressions of the ocean after leaving the port of Newyork in 1918. One feels the fog, sea waves and sea winds; the sense of timelessness and immensity, and the great age of the body of water that forms the eastern boundary of the American continent. Another poem gives a dual perception of the “Sea Hold”- not only the fascination exerted on men’s minds including his own but also the physical hold of the sea upon the coast lands; the locale of the poem is a narrow strip of coast land bordering Chesapeake Bay not far from Washington. The Oyster boats; the clam boats and the white houses add the human touch to the otherwise impersonal atmosphere of the power of the ocean.

The Potomac River on which is situated the city of Washington is briefly portrayed in lines of imagery and symbolism in “Smoke Rose Gold”. Father in land, the landscapes of Virginia, West Virginia and Maryland are pictured from Harper’s Ferry in images, which trace a moving, animate, visible sensation in the readers mind.
The topographical features of the American continent play a less important role in Sandburg's writing than the life and occupations of the American people; but a considerable degree of portraiture is added to the total effect of the poetry by presentation of the physical aspects of the land. This portraiture is the backdrop against which he paints the human scene; it is the setting in which to place the characters of an evolving and changing America.

In appraising Sandburg's poetry we find it noteworthy for breadth and volume. However, there are limitations and gaps in Sandburg's interpretation of America as he has seen it and experienced it. There is little of the South in his poetry, although in the six volumes of the Lincoln biography, the South receives its full share of history, and the South is not altogether omitted in his poetry, for we have the poems on the Shenandoah Valley, on Harpers Ferry, on the Potomac River. The New England section of America is far more completely interpreted by Robert Frost. Carl Sandburg has not, however, omitted New England altogether.

In the Chicago poems he has not shown many of the political cross tensions, which agitated that urban society. He has, however, shown to a certain extent the power of machine politics of that period, the power of money in elections of that time. Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, also laid bare these political evils of the age of rapidly expanding cities. In his poetry Sandburg's moral and political protest is his own personal and particular protest viewed with a sympathy for the down trodden. In his historical biography however, the political tensions of
nineteenth century America are painstakingly and minutely detailed. Like the Lincoln he portrayed, his mind was indexed and cross-indexed with human and political causes. In no other American biography can be found comparable sympathy for human causes.

One may say that Sandburg in his poetry views America from within the American image; he has not the detachment to see the American image as the foreigner does in the context of world affairs. His is an American’s portrayal of the nation, though the portrayal derives from an awakened and aroused social consciousness.

As late in the 1930’s this aroused social consciousness reacted and scourged with the lash of a prophet those who sought to warp and control men’s minds and into ‘The People, Yes’ went the failure and the strength, the chaos and the achievement, the mediocrity and the ambition, the good and the bad that make up America. Sandburg has been among the men of character whom Emerson would designate as the conscience of the society to which they belong; as such, he understands why America is what she is and at the same time, as the prophets of old, he reminds her of her true role in the context of her past history. As a realist, he portrays the nation as his conscience sees it, as an idealist, he portrays what he believes to be the true or idealized America of tradition; for this reason he has vigorously criticized departure from the justice and freedom of that tradition; and he still reacts against some of the social and international problems which have
been glossed over by others. Because of his conscientious portrayal, his view cannot be an entirely detached one. Nor can the picture be termed complete although it is the most comprehensive portrayal of America in poetry to date.

From a technical viewpoint, Sandburg’s is a mixture of faults and genius, since it is experimental in method of construction, frequently uses colloquial idiom as a medium of expression and has capacity for image making, found in few poets to such an extent. His early efforts at free verse sometimes led to clumsiness of structure and loss of the desired effect, because he was unable to employ the new methods to the fullest advantage. The technique employed in his lines does not always reach the full extent of Sandburg’s capability; and in such instances the desired effect fails to materialize, because of a lack of sharpness. Thus the experimental verse forms, which Sandburg, with deliberation, elected to employ as a vehicle expressive of status, in his poetry do not always attain the standard which the humanitarian content deserves.

However, in many of the shorter poems, such as "Cool Tombs," "Village in Late Summer" "Street Window", the form adequately assists the image and aids in conveying the tenderness, the sympathy or the irony. Sandburg deliberately set himself the task of reproducing colloquial idiom, the vernacular of the men portrayed, and also, which is equally significant, a vocabulary immediately comprehensible to a broader cross section of the American public. Avoidance of
"poetic diction" he regards as an effort at poetic realism, in that communication is opened between the poet and the public at large.

A forced effect is obtained in other Sandburg poems such as "The old Flagman," in which the introduction of crude phraseology distracts attention from the simple, underlying thought of the lines; the picture becomes blurred and incomplete in the reader's mind. Thus in his search for the proper colloquial idiom Sandburg has at times over extended this method of expression. Though one can understand his point of view, and appreciate his reasons for the choice of slang and of irregularities of speech, nevertheless, the effect is lost, in some instances, in the displeasure, which such words arouse in the reader. In contrast, the imagery of the nature poems and short lyrics is more successfully communicated because the poet is free to speak his own thoughts in richer and finer language harmonizing with his response to the beauties of nature, and with lyrical emotion.

In the social poetry Sandburg does not always carry the picture beyond description and immediate impression; and he is not apparently concerned with a probing psychological penetration in his individual portraits. He stays nearer the surface than many, and therefore, is more readily comprehensible. In this respect he forms a marked contrast with poets like T. S. Eliot, who are particularly intent on pluming the individuality of their subjects and whose impressionism is augmented by a complexity of psychological associations. Sandburg does not
often essay such complicated situations: although in 'The People, Yes' we find, such situation. In his "Four Preludes" he more nearly approaches Eliot's method:

The doors were cedar and the panels strips of gold and the girls were golden girls
And the panels read and the girls chanted;
We are the greatest City. The greatest Nation.

The doors are twisted on broken hinges.

The feet of the rats Scribble on the doorsills;
The hieroglyphs of the rat foot prints
Tell us nothing, nothing at all about the greatest city, the greatest Nation."

'Smoke and Steel' (Four Preludes On Playthings of the Wind) lines 10-22.

In contrast to Eliot and other poets of a similar cast of mind, Sandburg for the most part prefers a direct technique; he chooses to keep his poetry straightforward in expression and easily communicable. However, a sense of human frustration and failure pervades his interpretation of modern society; Sandburg, though his polished expression, moves forward from frustration and negation toward affirmation, constructive criticism and active participation in human affairs. The readers of Sandburg's poetry occasionally meets with vagueness of meaning-though rarely-
for Sandburg is not intentionally obscure. But one cannot be sure of the correct interpretation of a poem such as "New Song for Indiana Ophelias;" and the author, himself, admits that he has forgotten the meaning of certain of his poems written forty years ago. Among the hundreds of poems it is inevitable that some appear dull and flat, such as "Whiffletree" or "Very, Very Important" It cannot, however, be said that such obscurity has been deliberately cultivated, or that is the result of highly complex analysis.

In 'The People, Yes' the reader wonders, if the poets' criticism of America did not go too far. Does America really have all these faults? Not all politicians are lying politicians, not all business executives are "raketeers of business," nor are all labor leaders "lying labor skates". ('The People, Yes', line-3352) Not all powder and munitions manufacturers are scheming and profit-mad. Sandburg refers to "balances of pride and shame", (Sandburg, Carl, 'The People, Yes', p.607) to the profiteering of those "respectable scoundrels who reaped their profits from the government's necessity in money, blankets, guns, contracts" (Sandburg, Carl, 'The People, Yes', line-5874) during the Civil War of Lincoln's time. His criticism of judges and bankers is often too severe. Sandburg is pointing out isolated instances, of course, and follows his criticism with the picture of the Pittsburgh Scotsman who gave away his quarter billion dollars before he died, and of the Chicago man who gave millions of dollars to Negro schools of the South. He points out that between the two extremes of those who "live in mansions overly
swept and garnished, or in shambles overly foul" (Sandburg, Carl, 'The People, Yes', p. 562), are the great masses of average people who have the ability to recognize perversions of justice, and who, in spite of such perversions, continue in the path of human progress.

“This old anvil laughs at many broken hammers.
There are men who can’t be bought.
The fireborn are at home in fire.
The stars make no noise.
You can’t hinder the wind from Blowing.”
(Sandburg, Carl, ‘The People, Yes’, lines-6259-63)

‘The People, Yes’ may seem to some readers almost paradoxical in its content. While it is Sandburg’s evocation of democracy, it is at the same time a criticism of American Society, and the reader pauses to try to reconcile the poet’s advocacy of democracy and his severe criticism of the maladjustments, the waste, greed and corruption that are at times able to creep into government. Sandburg stated his case much more clearly in his World War II Speech of August 19, 1941-a Speech later broadcast by radio on September 9, His statement is:

“Because we have looked over all the other systems and found that they too have waste, corruption, demagogy and other evils, and we take our chances on the democratic system because of what it has that the other systems don’t have. Who knows better than we who are believers in the democratic system, the many
precise points where it needs study and devotion patience and prayer. Yet we fasten our faith deeper and deeper in it.⁵

A foreign reader coming to American shores could in an erroneous impression of the country from 'The People, Yes' unless he proceeds to a careful analysis of the poem. This is what the literary critic, Willard Thorp, means when he characterizes significantly the didactic quality of 'The People, Yes' and names it "one of the great American books. Whatever may be the name you put to it, a foreigner will find more of America in 'The People, Yes' than in any other book we can give him. But he will have to spell it out slowly".⁶

Sandburg is not always able to present a cohesive solution to a social problem. He approaches questions and conditions as they arise, with an attitude of mind that has remained consistently inquiring, though evolving with his generation-with the evolution of America. Any attempt to form judgment of his pronouncement must therefore, be made cautiously, with a consideration for time and circumstances. Literary judgment of him must be relative.

One of the most serious faults to be found with Sandburg's criticism of America in 'The People, Yes' is that he is often unable to offer immediate practical suggestions as to remedial measures. Yet in some instances he does set forth suggestions, as in the concluding pages of the volume:

After allowing for items to protect future operation
Every cut in production costs should be shared
With the consumers in lower prices
With the workers in higher wages
Thus stabilizing buying power
And guarding against recurrent
Collapses.

-(Sandburg Carl, 'The People, Yes', 5841-46)

But some of the ills of American society which Sandburg has criticized have been gradually ameliorated; a more even distribution of wealth has been effected by taxes on the income of corporations and individuals; trade unions have been organized and have achieved constitutional means of having a voice in industry by the bargaining power with management, and they have helped to balance the economy of the American capitalist system. Sandburg sees imperfection in both management and labor organization; he sees human weaknesses in an open society, but in an open democratic society each individual has equal opportunity under law to rise to political and economic achievement. Sandburg has placed words in the mouth of Roger Williams, which clearly state his own views: "The ambitions, greeds and corruptions that ever menace a democracy Williams knew first hand. Yet he would take his chances with the people"(Sandburg, Carl, Remembrance Rock.277).

Solutions to such problems are not simple. Sandburg knows this-and he prefers in most instances simply to present the question for public consideration. He has been in an excellent position to do so for he has lived closer to reality than many poets and a journalist he has been in immediate contact with public affairs.
He has written, "thousands of news stories about politics, has witnessed scores of conventions and reported meeting of legislative bodies, including the Congress of the United States".  

In one of his newspaper articles Sandburg writes:" A provocative editorial writer likes to say: Today I shall ask questions and be Socratic and write on a clean new page what I find out. And if I end with merely asking questions and not answering them that will be all right. Socratis did it. And Henrik Ibsen once said, his dramas mainly were intended to ask momentous questions arising in the minds of his city characters. In such manner the question is placed in the public mind and stimulates public interest. The solution then lies where Sandburg wishes it- in the hands of the people.  

Sandburg’s social poetry based on urban traits aims at perfect candor; at the same time, in the search for justice, it also aims at projecting the ideal:

“I should like to be at the same moment
an earthworm (which I am) and
a rider to the moon (which I am).
I believe more than I can ever prove
Of the future of the human race
And the importance of illusions,
The value of great expectations.”

(Sandburg, Carl. ‘The People, Yes’, lines,749-752).

The value of “great expectations” and ‘hope’ are expressed throughout his poetry by the symbolism of great doors, of windows, series of hills, of far horizons,
sunlight, rain bows, winds and stars; an by and infinity of tomorrows. Dreaming scholars and scientists are “Man on a Quest” (Sandburg Carl, ‘The People, Yes’, line-4890) “Man will never arrive, man will always be on the way”. (Sandburg, Carl, ‘The People’, Yes, line -1276). Sandburg’s poetry inspite of its regional dress “speaks to the world in its compassion for the plight of man and in its attempt to feel the heart behind the world of the machine.”

Sandburg’s verse is not poetry written for approval and praise by a few selected ones. It is neither formal nor rhetorical. Just as he has pictured the American people as “a polychrome, a spectrum and a prism”, (Sandburg, Carl, Complete Poems, p. 616), so he has constructed his poetry to reflect a synthesis of American people, and their urbanity. The values of his verse rest on authority that is experiential rather than traditional. Many of the lyrics and nocturnes qualify as poetry of a high order; there is nobility of mode in such poems as “Four Preludes, “Prayers of Steel” and “The Long Shadow of Lincoln” which integrate image and meaning, visual clarity and intellectual aspiration. There are many evocations of human possibility. But between the two extremes of the orchestral richness of “fugitive airs in the classic manner” (Sandburg, Carl, Complete Poems, p. 437) and raw vitality of undisciplined street clamor, there are varying degree of quality. Nevertheless, in his attempt at democratizing and urbanizing poetry, Sandburg has had considerable success. Professor Margaret Schlauch of the University of Warsaw, has acknowledged the worth of Sandburg’s efforts in experimental
techniques of poetic communication, and his attempts to reach a large and varied urban audience.

Sandburg's work has had an emancipating influence in that it has helped to widen both the range of suitable subject material and the rhythmic range of American poetry; and it has increased the number of poetry readers. He has popularized the development of American themes and directed attention to the fundamental forces of American life by his emphasis on the importance of the soil, of great industries and of the intellectual achievements of the scholar, particularly in the field of science.

"But Sandburg does more than describes his time and place. He proves that the machine age, even in the city environment, cannot quench that mystic spark that has long guided the way to individual decency and high social ideals. He proves that with the coming of the mechanized life Americans have not allowed the divine gift of righteous indignation to be displaced by a mental gesture of passive acquiescence. He proves that men can look through the smoke of factories and still glimpse beauty un tarnished by the smudge and that some few still dream of a better day that may be achieved through the exercise in an alien world of a few old fashioned virtues."

A wide humanitarianism, a moral earnestness, a broad insight into features of American city life that are significant in the evolution of the nation, and an abiding faith in democracy are distinguishing features of his work. In interpreting
the feelings, and aims of the people the social poetry in its varied fusions of voice and mood, in its less disciplined form, do not comply with conventional literary standards, but it nevertheless achieves an important pragmatic significance by its appeal to the common consciousness. With its sympathetic analysis of human relationships and its identification with the currents of national life it is addressed to the American conscience and to the potential existent in the American people.

In a world where the problems which Sandburg reflected and protested against were universal problems and increasing in scale, sensitive minds of poets and writers, thinkers and humanists were also protesting. Against this background, the emergence of Sandburg on the international scene led to his translation by other poets of a like mind, who in turn were encouraged by him and sharpened by his hard, unmated protests. For example, in the poetry of Arthur Lundkvist we see strength of expression, which may represent an influence of Sandburg. We note his love of cities in the poem “Bring Me Young Noisy Cities” and in another poem in which

“You hear the roar of factories,  
Roar of the heavy  
Loaded trains, the rattle of Riveters,  
The clang of steel on steel.”

In Lundkvist’s poem “The Stone Cutter” it is interesting to compare the architecture of the poem in its forcefulness and strength to the architecture of the “Chicago Poem”;
"I am a stone-cutter
I work in stone with hammer
And chisel I hew
I shape the stone Blocks, Pillars.
What shall become of it?
Temples standing through the centuries?
Poems-dreams-visions in stone living
To the evening of life?  

CARL SANDBURG AS A CITY POET:

HOG Butcher for the World,
Tool maker, Stacker of Wheat
Player with Railroads and the Nation’s Freight Handler;
Stormy husky, brawling

City of the Big Shoulders.

(Sandburg, Carl, ‘Chicago Poems’, 1916.3)

Carl Sandburg was born in that period of American development, which brought the rise of great cities across the continent. In early American history the colonists had, for the most part, led agricultural lives. In the New England colonies the settlers made their living by using the natural resources of the section—the land and their forests; while some turned to shipbuilding and commerce because of proximity to the sea and because the forests supplied the required
material. In the central and southern colonies the fertility of the soil made agriculture the most important occupation.

Most Americans of the early days lived on farms or in small villages. But in the days of the Industrial Revolution and the Lincoln era, the trend was toward industrial centers, and the large cities arose. New York had for sometime been a large city, due to its location on the eastern seaboard to which most foreign commerce came, and where the great waves of immigration arrived. In the decade of the birth of Carl Sandburg, New York had less than 1,500,000 inhabitants; but in the period 1870 to 1920 increased threefold- to 5,000,000.

In 1870, Chicago had but 300,00 inhabitants; in 1920 it had grown to nine times that number-2,700,00. This rapid rise of large centers of urban industry was a distinctive feature of nationwide American development, and these figures assist in the comprehension of the Chicago poems of 1916.

"Omaha and Kansas City, Minneapolis and St. Paul, sisters... growing up.

Towns in the Ozarks, Dakota wheat towns, Wichita, Peoria, Buffalo, growing up". (Sandburg, Carl, ‘Corn Huskers’, p. 81)

But as these cities fast became centers of dense population, civic problems arose, which had not faced the inhabitants of the farms and small villages of earlier days. The housing problem became a very serious one, in some place critical, for the surge of inflowing population forced people to live in very crowded quarters,
often in old buildings in bad shape. These tenement districts soon degenerated into squalid slums and become a menace to public health and safety. Big Business monopolies came into being as a result of rapid industrialization, and they remained largely unconcerned with the social problems they created. Organized labor still in its infancy and little was done to alleviate these conditions.

With the influx of workers leaving agriculture for industry and with the arrival of thousands of immigrants from Europe seeking life in the New world but unable to speak the English language, these problems increased. Social settlements were established for the aid of non-English speaking immigrants. Young children had not sufficient room in which to grow up normally in such over crowded conditions; and these situations constituted only a partial list of the inadequacies of the swollen cities in the period of industrial expansion and disorientation. To remedy such defects, a movement arose among workers themselves and among many liberal thinkers of the time, who pressed for social and economic reform. Among these social critics was Sandburg.

In that era of industrial maladjustments came Sandburg’s famous poem “Chicago” containing the substance:

“They tell me you are crooked and I answer: Yet, it is true I have seen the gunman kill and go free to kill again. And they tell me you are brutal and my reply is: on the faces of women and children I have seen the marks of wanton hunger.
And having answered so I turn once more to those who sneer at this may city, and I give them back the sneer and say to them:

Come and show me another city with lifted head singing so proud to be alive and coarse and strong and cunning. Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling job on, job, here is the tall bold slugger set vivid against the little soft cities,

Bare headed,
Shoving
Wrecking
Planning
Building, breaking, rebuilding

Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, langing with white teeth, under the terrible burden of destiny, laughing as a young man laughs, Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who has never lost a battle, Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the pulse, and under his

Ribs the heart of the people,
Laughing!
Laughing the stormy, husky, brawling
Laughter of Youth, half-naked,
Sweating, proud to be Hog Butcher.
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,
Player with Railroads and Freight Handler to the nation.

-(Sandburg, Carl, 'Chicago'. 20-33.p, 256)
Thus does the poet brutally condemn Chicago; yet in this brutal portrayal Sandburg sees that the sheer vigor that caused the squalor has as its reverse side the sheer strength and vitality that can be effective in bringing about the forms needed. He is a realist in that he does not lose faith or sense of proportion. Indeed, he exults at the thought of the city lifting itself out of the mire by its own power.

Again, in "Halsted Street Car" we note the tone of bitterness, of misery, of irony, and at the same time of sympathy, as it voices a social protest over factory conditions existing in Chicago in the early 1900's.

"Come you, cartoonists,
Hang on a strap with me here.
At seven o’clock in the morning
On a Halsted Street Car.
Take your pencils
And drew these faces
................................
Faces Tired of wishes
Empty of dreams".
(Sandburg, Carl. ‘Halsted Street Car’, 98.115)

In "subway" is a picture of industrial conditions:

"Down between the walls of shadow
Where the iron laws insists,
The hunger voices mock.
With the hunched and humble shoulders,
Throw their laughter into toil,"

(Chicago Poems ‘Subway’, lines 1-5)

In “Clark Street Bridge” is portrayed the mass movement of a teeming city. Sandburg dissects as with a delicate instrument the multitudinous moods, sensibilities of the people passing over the bridge; we see the weary and underprivileged painted with a brush of tenderness; we sense also the note of vitality, prosperity, business and entertainment- a composite of Chicago life in the “wagons and people going/ All day feet and wheels” (Sandburg, Carl, ‘Clark Street Bridge’, lines 3-4).

Wide as is his sensitivity to the infinite varieties of human conditions: the main effect on the reader is not always a pleasing one. In fact, the reverse can often be the case. The effect that overrides all others in the social poems is not a sense of artistic merit. It is an effect of engagement or enlistment in a cause. Sandburg paints a human situation and his poems of social comment leave the reader deeply conscious of the human repercussion and consequences of social maladjustments. In so doing he communicates his own sympathies. But along with all the pathos and deprivation of these neglected victims of society, he also communicates a resilient and challenging faith. This is Sandburg’s achievement.

In ‘Chicago’ he wrote with new commitment, making poetry out of the city, its crowds of nameless faces, its buildings and statuary, its industry, crime and suffering. He made poems out of his own sense of failure and loss. Working alone late into the night, with no friends or mentors there who were poets, no audience
other than his wife and his own need, he was experimenting, and before he knew
the term or the theory, crafting some poems very like those the imagists would
make famous. He brought sorrow into the poems, the loss of their child, the
pervasive losses which define the human condition. He wove anger into the poetry
and the frustration of failure (Sandburg, Carl, Complete Poems, p.31).

With imaginative power, the poet utilizes such a realistic theme as a high
building and brings it to life: "Wire climb with secrets; carry light and carry words
and tell terrors and profited sand waves." (‘Skyscraper’, 11-12)

The skyscraper represents the conception of the architect and the labor of
construction man and seems alive with meaning and purpose, alive with smiles and
tears, secrets, business, and tons of letters that go bundled from the building to all
parts of the world bearing messages from within its high walls. "The poet voices
pride in these towering structure and makes them a symbol of industrial
progress". 13

Much of the poetry was somber with the inevitable progression of losses at
the core of life. "Oh things one time dust, what else now is it/ you dream and
remember of old days"? He wrote in "Dust". In "At a Window" he wrote what was
a recapitulation of his life:

Give me hunger
O you gods those sits and give
The world its orders.
Give me hunger, pain and want.
Shut me out with shame and failure
From your doors of gold and Fame,
Give me your shabbiest, weariest Hunger.

('At A Window', lines 1-7)

Carl Sandburg and his wife Paula Sandburg were no longer strangers in Chicago. When they had first considered the move to the city in 1912, they had worried that it might not "be a go": Already the struggle had yielded rewards beyond their imagining. As he took the wondrous news of the Levison prize home to his wife, Sandburg the poet was very much like the metaphorical young man who epitomized young man who epitomized his city in his poem-"with lifted head signing so proud to be alive and coarse and strong and cunning". Carl Sandburg had made Chicago his city, and himself Chicago’s poet.14

He also took pride in the importance of Chicago as an increasingly busy lake poet:

By the teeming docks
I watch the ships putout.
Black ships that heave and lunge
And move like mastodons
Arising from lethargic sleep.
They pass the pointed headland,
View the wide, for-lifting wilderness
And leap with cumulative speed
To test the challenge of the sea

(Chicago Poems 'Docks' 1-16).
Sandburg presents many pictures of lake Michigan, the sand dunes of its shores, the harbor where "the shadows of the ships rock on the crest of the low blue luster of the tardy and the soft in rolling tide," (Chicago Poems ‘Sketch’ 1-4) I came sudden at the city’s edge, on a blue burst of lake, long lake waves braking under the sun on a spray flung curve of shore” (Chicago Poems The ‘Harbor’ lines 7-8) the picnic boat with its "rhythmic oompa of the brassing playing a polish folk song," (Chicago Poems ‘Picnic Boat’ lines 9-10) the lake short with the “lone grey bird, dim dipping for flying, alone in the shadows and grandeurs and tumults of night and the sea and the stars and storms, and the mist, the impalpable mist”.

(Chicago Poem, ‘From the Shore’ 1-5).

Sandburg’s other poems present the scenes of factories, slaughter houses, railroad, trains, street cars, bridges, the harbor, the mill doors—even the telephone wires—as symbols of human existence.

In the poems about Chicago Sandburg has also pictured for us such places as Lincoln Park in which are situated the bronze status of General Grant and Abraham Lincoln; North Clark street, Harrison Street Court, a lake-front stone residence, the flowers to be seen in parts of the city, and the bridges. He wished for his people, more beauty and more of the better things of life, more of the joys of living. The sprawling, too swiftly growing metropolis is given us by the hand of a word artist who loved his Chicago, and was faced to paint its portrait with harsh and garish colors, at the same time mingling with them some of the softness and delicacy of
pastels. He records not only the physical characteristics of the city but also the city’s traffic, the silences of the city and the lake by night; he depicts the dreams and aspirations of men; the frustration, disappointment, bitterness of failures; the apparent helplessness of the underprivileged; the squalor and drabness of tenement districts; the personalities and activities of business men and women; the business section in both its beauty and its ugliness; the secluded place of the rich man; the pathos as the poignancy of the old woman “for wandered waif of other day” who “huddles for sleep in a doorway, homeless”.("Chicago Poems". 'Old Woman'. lines,11-12) This far-reaching power of many-sided perception reminds the reader of Francois Villon. Especially in the Chicago poems we detect the direct expression of the spirit of Villon, when Sandburg combines verse of social criticism with lyrics of the city and its people. The poet saw beauty in Chicago life and this he gives us in brief lyrics of tenderness and emotion, but he also saw injustices in the great seething industrial metropolis and this he gives us with brash and satirical roughness and protest, just as Villon did.

There is an element of the epic in this collective treatment of a city, with its industry, its bustle, its, “mud and gold” ("The People, Yes", line 43-28) its evolution; its “human comedy” as Balzac would term it. With the epic element there is combined an element of social humanitarian purposefulness, an acute sense of national need.
In contrast to the short poem "Chicago", "Windy city" (published in his fourth volume) is a long historical pageant of Chicago, of the nature of an epic, revealing the story of the city and its spirit. Here Sandburg has achieved a fascinating portrait of the very inception of the city as a "hitching place for the pony express." ('The Windy City' line-6) and as a mere spot on the river to which the Indians had given the name shee-Caw-go, or the river of the wild onion:

The lean hands of wagon men
put out pointing fingers here
Picked this crossway, put it on the map.
Set up their sawbucks, fixed their shotgun,
Found a hatching place for the pony express
Made a hitching place for the iron horse,
The one-eyed horse with the fire, spit head, found a homelike spot and said;
"Make a home" Saw this corner with a mesh of rails, Shutting People, shutting cars, shaping the junk of the earth to a new city.

('The Windy City', lines 1-11).
The poet traces the history of Chicago for its obscure and primitive origin to its more recent situation of progress, of constant change, of industrial growth, of building, rebuilding, where

"Now the roofs and smokes tacks
cover miles
where the deer foot left its writing
and the fox paw put its initials in the snow... for the early moccasins... to read."

('The Windy City' lines, 50-53)

The emotions of the people, the expansion of the city, the rise of great new library, the spirit of progress, the pride of the author are depicted as he writes elliptically and with typical thought association “the pay-day songs of steam shovels”, “The wages of structural iron rivets,” of sky-scrapers as, “parallelograms of night-gray watchman.”

('The Windy City', 33-34)

The enormity of size, the pathos of the monotony of scene, the pride of growth and achievement, the satisfaction of constant development are impressions given by Sandburg as he writes:

"Tell it across miles of sea blue
Water, gray blue land;
I am Chicago, I am name given
Out by the breaths of workingmen,
Laughing men, a child, a belonging”.

(‘The Windy City’, lines 27-28).

Sandburg shows us two Chicago cities in this poem. One Chicago is that of “the respectable tax-payers who ride the street cars and read the papers... the respectable people with the right crimp in their napkins reading breakfast menu card” (‘The Windy City’, lines, 168-170) the well-dressed customers of the haberdashery shops, the stranger who comes to the city and sees only the tall skyscrapers, the parks, the monuments, the famous clock tower. It is a Chicago as seen by individuals insensible to any thing except outward appearance.

The other Chicago is that of the short-change artist; and of that part of the city where “the children play the alley is Heaven... and there are no policemen in Heaven”, (‘The Windy City’, lines, 149-150), Where little children often are the victims of fast motor trucks; where young boys steal coal from a railroad yard; where strikes and strikebreakers battle with each other and the police, must intervene; where monotonous houses go for miles on each side of monotonous streets until they reach the open prairie.

“Forgive the jazz time beat of clumsy mass shadows, foot steps of the jungle, The fang cry, the ripclaw hiss, the slant of the slit eyes waiting Forgive us if we work so hard and the muscles bunch clumsy on us and
we never know why we work so hard
If the big houses with little families
Sneer at each other's bars of
Misunderstanding."

(‘The Windy City’ lines, 191-201)

Thus there are two contrasting moods in the poem, a pattern that occurs in many other of his social commentaries; the somber mood of realism depicting “the clumsy mass shadows” and undertones, the mood of the symbolism of “dust and bitter winds” (‘The Windy City’, line, 160) and the buoyant mood of exultation and joyous sensibility as the poet writes of the building, progress providing employment—“the wheelbarrows grin, the wheelbarrows sing, the shovels and the mortar hoist an exploit, the stone shanks of the monadnock, transportation, the people’s Gas building, stand up and scrape at the sky.” “The bevels and the blue prints talk it over.” (‘The Windy City’ line, 261) great dreams are dreamed in the minds of the builders, great aspirations take shape, proud things arise; great bridges come, so designed as to permit the passage of ore boats and wheat barges; over land trains arrive from the far west, the far east, the south, from Canada, until Chicago becomes the largest railway center of the world; boulevards grace the city, more hotels are built, larger shops appear, and more, and varied industries, more skyscrapers speak “their mountain language” (‘The Windy City’ line, 321).

The two contrasting moods—that of critical realism and that of joyous pride are fused in a mood of hopeful anticipation for Chicago’s future in the following lines;
“it is wisdom to think no city
stood here at all until the working
men, the launching men come, it is
wisdom to think tomorrow
new working men, new laughing men,
may come and put up a new-city
Living lighted skyscrapers and a night
Lingo of lantern testify tomorrow shall
Have its own say-so”.

(‘The Windy City’, lines 284-304)

The river panorama and the artist’s conception of Chicago at night offer
colorful portrayal as we read of “night gathering itself into a ball of dark yarn” and
the yarn changing to ‘fog and blue strands’, of the streets becoming canyons
swarming with the “red sand light of sunset,” and of skyscrapers “gone to the
gloaming” (‘The Windy City’, line, 321).

Chicago is a city of contrasts, and the poet, who truthfully portrays it, must
paint the city on a wide canvas to interpret the chaos of contrast and change. The
varied contrasts are symbolized in the conclusion. The poet having written of “the
bitter winds in the undertones” of discontent, now summons in eloquent appeal-on
behalf of the future of Chicago- young white springs winds “White as the arms of
snow born children”, the strength of “fighting winter winds” and the freshening,
inspiring “blue” winds off the blue miles of lake. “Carry your blue to our homes.”
(‘The Windy City’, 352-355).
In “Chicago Pomes” Sandburg examines a level of American social experience that was not considered poetic. In fact, the title of the book is an oxymoron, for “Chicago” epitomized the harsh reality that was not reflected in “poems.” But the lives of the poor, the laboring masses, which Sandburg understood so well from his experience as the son of a semiliterate railroad worker and his own work as a social Democratic Party Organizer and urban journalist, constituted the foundation of his authority as a poet. Much of what “Chicago” stood for in the public mind was the very essence of his voice. Hence, in “The Right to Grief” he conveys his determination to bring the struggles and sorrows of America’s desperately poor urban families into the public consciousness through his poetry.

While writing the poems that appeared in the book Sandburg was well aware that he was challenging the established poetic. Indeed, a little known poem called “Choices” makes that explicit. He asserts that he will not focus on the many well-established, appropriate subjects for poetry but will concentrate on the harsh realities that other poets omit. Especially in the “Chicago Poems” Sandburg strives to enact this daring new poetic that will not flinch at hunger danger, and hate-unpoetic realities of the human experience in urban industrial America. Hence, his most famous poem, “Chicago”: affirms the evils of the city:

They tell me you are wicked and
I believe them, for I
Have seen your painted women
Under the gas lamps luring the farm boys,
And they tell me you are crooked and
I answer; yes, it is
True I have seen the gunman kill and
go free to kill again
And they tell me you are brutal
And my reply is; on the faces of women
And children I have seen the marks
Of wanton hunger;

These lines have peculiar force because the poet is asserting his role as witness; the city’s reputations, its symbolic meaning as harsh urban reality, is verified by experience (“I have seen). Moreover, Sandburg is not a casual onlooker. He identifies with the human reality of Chicago; he is part of “this is my city”. He is not an isolated artist who can seek a personal resolution that distances him from the ugly aspects of his culture. Hence, he does not simply condemn the city, as so many writers before him did, including William T. Stead’s If Christ Came to Chicago (1894) and Upton Sinclair ‘The Jungle’ (1906), two visitors who wrote best-selling exposes. Instead, Sandburg asserts his responsibility to his culture not only by witnessing the discouraging reality that he knows but by discerning those human forces that offer hope—the vitality, confidence, and determination of the people. Those forces in abundance are what make Chicago the “Hog Butcher”, ‘Tool Maker’, ‘Stacker of Wheat’, ‘Player with Railroads’ and ‘Freight Handler to the Nation’. The poem is not a defense of the city’s evils but a
refusal to see Chicago—or the urban industrial society it symbolizes from a partial
or poetically idealized perspective. "The city is imperfect cultural hero, but a
deeply American one".16

"Chicago" is a mythic poem that invites the reader to identify with the city,
to see urban-industrial society as the dynamic essence of America, where the
people must work out their "terrible burden of destiny". The city is "cunning as
a savage pitted against the wilderness"(John. E. Hallwas, p. xx) because urban
people, immigrants and others, continue the struggle to establish America that is
the core of national experience. In the furious work of urban development, the
"building, breaking, rebuilding" that forms the climax of the poems, lies the hope
of finally establishing a society that is commensurate with the American
democratic myth of concern.

Most of the fifty-four poems that follow in the remarkable "Chicago Poems"
section of the book portray facets of American urban industrial life that must be
evaluated in the context of that national ideal. For example, the workers in
"Subway" who toil "Down between the walls of shadow /Where the iron laws
insist" and the children in "They Will Say" who "work, broken and smothered, for
bread and wages" contradict the American social ideal. They are victims. So is the
frustrated speaker in "Black listed " who must give up his name to find work. But
despite their oppressed situation the people struggle on with "the clutch of hope"
(John. E. Hallwas, p. xxi) in their faces, as the speaker notes in "Passer-by". Some
even have occasional happy times, like the “crowd of Hungarians under the trees with their women and children and a keg of beer and an accordion”, who are described by the poet-witness in “Happiness”.

In a fine short article James Hurt views Sandburg’s city poems as a commentary on “the American dream”, a vague concept that, in his study, refers to dramatic myth of concern, “the founder’s dream” of an inclusive, equalitarian society, offering a better life for all:

Sandburg’s Chicago, built up of glimpses, vignettes, and fragmentary impressions, is a microcosm of turn of the century America, confronting frightening new challenges to the American dream, There is girding poverty, the remorseless struggler for existence that leads Mag’s husband to cry, “I wish to God I never saw you, Mag.” There are the injustices of class and ethnic prejudices, the gaps between rich and poor, native-born and immigrant, lucky and unlucky which are summed up in “Child of the Romans”, in the image of the dago shovelman sitting by the railroad track eating bread and bologna while a dining car whirls by full of people eating “steaks running with brown gravy, strawberries and cream, éclairs and coffee.” And most of all, there a lowering standardization of man, a lowering of expectations, and a limited vision of possibility, summed up in “Limited” (a significant and ambitious title) in the man who, asked where he is going, can imagine no answer to that question other than the “Limited”, literal one, “omha;” (Hurt, pp. 37-36).
Like the other socialists of his era, Sandburg felt that the democratic ideal was being subverted by a wealthy group that had established an economic system based on the exploitation of working class people. The rich perverted the American dream, changed it into a quest for wealth and social exclusivity. That is precisely what is conveyed in the fine short poem called “A Fence”:

Now the stone house on the lake
Front is finished and
The workmen are beginning the fence.
The palings are made of iron bars with steel points that
Can stab the life out of any man who falls on them.

(‘A Fence ’lines, 1-7)

To socialists the inordinate pursuit of private property by the well to do caused inequality, lack of community, and eventual social disruption. That is what the fence around the lakefront mansion symbolizes. The closing line of the poem suggests the inevitability of social change, for a vicious barrier that causes resentment today is apt to be penetrated “Tomorrow”.

In “skyscraper,” which closes the “Chicago Poems” section, Sandburg asserts that America’s myth of concern is still valid in twentieth-century urban industrial society, and he places the contributions of workers at the center of nation’s culture. As Rebecca West remarks in this context “it is a curious fact that no writer
of Anglo-Saxon descent, no representative of the New England tradition, has described the break between Lincoln’s America and modern industrialized America so poignantly as Carl Sandburg has.”

He also views the skyscraper, that Chicago-born symbol of modern society, as a kind of monument to the working people who built it and occupy its offices:

Men who sunk the pilings and
Mixed the mortar are laid
In graves where the wind whistles
A wild song without words
And so are men who strung the
Wires and fixed the pipes and
Tubes and those who saw t rise
Floor by floor.

Souls of them all are here, even the huckster begging at back doors hundreds of miles away and the bricklayer who went to state’s prison for shooting another man while drunk. (‘Skyscraper’, lines 1-13).

Indeed, the skyscraper symbolizes the democratic myth of concern. Any one who works for it or within it is spiritually integrated with it; all workers are part of the social whole. Hence, through his symbolic skyscraper Sandburg asserts that their ideal is still valid, still capable of unifying and directing the efforts of Americans, even in a modern urban-industrial setting. As gay Wilson Allen observes- In “Skyscrapers” Carl Sandburg strives to give the building a “soul”. “The skyscraper he says, acquired its soul from the men who built it, those who
dug the foundation, erected the girders, carried the mortar, laid the brick and fitted the stone, strung miles of wires and pipes; and later the stenographers, scrubbing women, and watchmen who worked in it. He ignores the business executives, but perhaps they have no soul-power to spare. Anyway, this is the manner in which the poet humanizes inanimate steel and stone”.18

The remaining parts of Sandburg’s famous first book are not impressive as the “Chicago Poems” section, but there are two other distinctive groups of related poems. One is “Shadows”, which depicts the brutalizing impact of the city on women; the other is ‘War Poems’ (1914-1915) which is composed of antiwar lyrics inspired by the outbreak of World War I.

The seven poems that comprise “Shadows” form a sequence that closes with “Gone”, one of the most familiar and perhaps least understood of Sandburg’s poems. The poem has been misinterpreted because it is often anthologized separately, and the sequence provides important clues to its meaning. The poem ‘Gone’ appears to describe an attractive young singer and dancer whose departure from the city saddens her admirers. However, the six proceeding lyrics focus on urban prostitution. The first of these, “Poems Done on a Late Night Car” has three parts. In part I (“Chickens”) the city speaks of its desire for “girls fresh as country wildflowers/, with young faces tired of cows and barns”; in part 2 “(Used up)” the mouths of prostitutes “beaten by the fists of/ Men using them” are compared to “red roses,”/ “crushed,” and in part 3 (“Home”) the speaker wishes
that the world had more maternal love—which presumably would prevent the
restlessness that causes young women to leave home for the city. Here too
Sandburg asserts his role as witness; “Used up” is subtitled “Lines based on
certain regrets that come with rumination upon the painted faces of women on
North Clark Street, Chicago”. In the second lyrics, “It Is Mach,” the speaker
advises streetwalkers. “Woman of Night Life”, that “it is much to be warm and
sure of tomorrow”. That is, traditional home life is preferable to misdirected
striving for self-filament among the lights and shadows of the city at night. The
next two poems are also about streetwalkers, and they vividly enlarge upon the “
Used up” theme of the opening lyric. “Trafficker” describes a prostitute with
“beauty wasted, body faded, claims gone./ And no takers”, while the female
speaker in “Harrison Street Court” laments, “I have been hustling now/ Till I aint
much good any more, I got nothing to show for it.” The fifth and sixth poems
depict prostitutes of a higher social class, both of whom were abandoned by men.
The woman in “Soiled Dove” was “not a harlot until she married a corporation
lawyer who picked her from Ziegfield chorus” – and it was his infidelity that
promoted her moral decline. In ‘Jung-heimer’s” a well known saloon speaks,
describing a painting within it -“of a woman half dressed thrown reckless across a
bed after night of booze and riots.’ She is evidently a call girl abandoned by those
who had hired her. The painting makes Jungheimer’s a kind of continual witness,
to the social problem to which “Shadows” is devoted. It gives the otherwise
typical saloon “a soul”.

Chick Lorimer is undoubtedly also a prostitute. Her name connects her with
the “Chickens” who are lured to the city in “Poems Done on a Late Night Car,”
and her singing and dancing evoke the harlot in “Soiled Dove.” Hence, the opening
line, “Every body loved Chick Lorimer in our town”, has a double meaning. But
in one important respect she contrasts with the women in the six preceding poems:
she is “ a wild girl keeping a hold/ on a dream she wants.” Her life is focused,
purposeful, irradiated by her dream. It is that which makes her fascinating-the girl
“we all love”. Indeed, it is that which makes her preeminently American. Soiled
though she may, Chick Lorimer is in the process of self-creation, and her pursuit of
her dream allows her to transcend the circumstances that trap and destroy so many
others. Thus, the important thing about Chick Lorimer is not “where she’s gone”
but the fact that she is gone-that her dream has redeemed her from what she has
been. One of the finest poems in the volume, “Gone” is a stunning conclusion to a
remarkable poetic sequence-and a testament to the redemptive power of dreams in
a society where people are free to pursue them.

In a general delineation of the facts of the industrial system Sandburg, in the
“Chicago Poems”, also turned to the role of social historian. In particular, as with
Emerson he espoused and ennobled the commonplace, giving value to aspects of
universal appeal and at the same time holding up for public consideration the
covetousness of unthinking or selfish men, especially the misuse of power by some of the industrial magnates. He took Emerson's plea for treatment of common themes, of trades and manufacturers, for frank portrayal of many men to its furthest point in poetic development. At the same time in reply to those, we see in him a chaotic, cacophonous prose, he developed the image as a vital tool of his art, he explored meaningful and arresting rhythm patterns, exercised a gifted control of words, and developed technique of swift pen stroke vignettes that set his thought in graphic form. With all this his shock images were set in a varied pattern of mood; his love of nature in smooth lyric lines and beauty of phrase. As Hazel Darnell remarks, "Chicago Poems" were recognized as arresting and topical, it is no exaggeration to claim that in them Sandburg achieved stature as a dynamic, controversial painter of an America developing in material growth more rapidly than in spiritual growth.¹⁹

I. City, A Symbol of American Democracy:

If Chicago was a symbol of a specific social situation and of industrial and human dynamism, the poet's interpretation of the city of Washington conveys a very different impression, that of American history in the making, a conception of the people and the forces which have helped to mold the American nation and its form of government.

Carl Sandburg was perhaps alone among the modern American poets to view the city from within. He alone seems to have made a valiant effort to perceive the
modern city as an essentially democratic institution whose supreme function and legitimacy in modern life are much less disputed than those of his own art. Sandburg's view, essentially un/antipoetic in its assumptions, compelled to recognition of the physical reality of the city on terms not so congenial to the poet.

Sandburg presents the city of Washington in quite different manner from that of Chicago. He gives us an impressionist's view of Washington...its symbolism in the life of the nation- its significance and meaning in the history of America. Mitch could be said of its impressive beauty, its architectural charm, for it is one of the beautiful cities of the world, but Sandburg chooses to interpret the city in terms of what it represents as a capital; it is therefore a transition of spiritual values, of moral appreciation of Washington as a symbol of the American story.

In "The Prairie Years" Sandburg symbolically defines the city of Washington in terms of history and human progress as "built on something resembling an oath that the states, North and south, belonged together and should meet at a half-way point". 20 We are told briefly of the march of progress beyond the Allegheny Mountains, of the gold rush to California and the settlement of the West; "until it was seen that the little city with the big white dome on the Potomac River would be the gathering place of men from states at distances staggering beyond anything in the dreams and plans of those who placed and laid out the city... in the mystic float of the capitol dome rested some mystery of the Republic something that
people a thousand miles from the Potomac River believed in and were ready to make sacrifices for."21

The white dome of the capital was unfinished at the time of President Lincoln’s inauguration but was finished and the statue of Freedom put in place atop the dome before his assassination; therefore the completion of the dome is associated with the history of the Civil War and with the preservation of the Union of the States and of American democracy. In “Tangibles” the poet poses the question:

“Can a dome of dream deeper than living men?

Can the float of a shape hovering among the tree-tops can this speak an oratory, singing and red beyond the speech of the living men?

There is ... something... here... Men die for.

('Smoke and Steel’, lines, 10-15).

The poem, “Washington Monument by Night” is devoted to General Washington, his part in the Revolutionary War is which American independence was achieved, and especially the terrible winter at valley Forge when his indomitable will and perseverance kept the struggling Continental army together in the face of great suffering, intense cold and lack of food and clothing. The name of General Washington is not mentioned in the poem; however, the imagery and symbolism convey the name and its significance perfectly to every American. This
is a very effective illustration of Sandburg’s successful fusion of biography, history and poetry:

“The republic is a dream.
Nothing happens unless first a
dream.
The wind bit hard at Valley Forge
One Christmas.”

(‘Washington Monument By Night’ lines, 10-12).

The monument, figuratively depicted as a “lean, swimmer diving into the night sky,” commemorates the aspiration of the Republic and is also a memorial to the “iron Man” who fought as a general to found it and was honored by being elected its first president.

The city of Springfield, ‘I Illinois,” is also described in terms of its historical past and its importance as

“ Abraham Lincoln’s city,
Where they remember his lawyer’s
Shingle,
The place where they brought him
Wrapped in battle flags,
Wrapped in the smoke of memories
The place now where the shaft of
His tomb
Points white against the blue Prairie
dome”.

-(Cornhuskers ‘Knucks’, lines, 4-8).
Springfield has its own significance as the capital city of Illinois and the site of the executive mansion. Sandburg himself was given a distinguished part in the inauguration of one of the governors. To the poet this city is preeminently, identified as the home of Abraham Lincoln as Lawyer, Illinois legislator and President elect.

However devoted Sandburg may be to the beauties and wonders of nature, to objective nature, it is nevertheless human nature which is the greater challenge to his literary energies. People and the affairs of the human life constitute his greatest interest.

He delineates the many types of human personality which compose "the grand canyon of humanity" ('The People, Yes'. Line 5598) that is American democracy. Because America is very vast, and because its form of government is far reaching in its implications, the concept of American democracy is not easy to define. It certainly cannot be defined in a short or simple sentence.

While Sandburg in his verse may be the poet of the city and of the prairie, and of nature, he is undeniably a sympathetic poet of the people. Images of American people and places pass before the reader, and they extensively mirror the American scene.

II. The Social Condition in the City:

The phenomenal growth of large cities which could not readily absorb the millions of immigrants, the rapid expansion of industries which become so big as
to be unwieldy and beyond proper management, the rise of great fortunes among isolated captains of industry so scarcely knew what to do with their sudden wealth, were marked characteristics of the social changes in the United States in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century.

“Then the fat years arrive when the fatcrips.
Then come the rich men baffled
By their riches,
Bewildered by the silence of their
Tall possession.

('Good Morning, America'. lines. 370-373)

Woodrow Wilson set forth the situation as follows:

“With great riches has come inexcusable waste. We have been proud of our industrial achievements, but we have not thoughtfully enough count the human cost, the cost of lives snuffed out, of energies overtaxed and broken, the fearful physical and spiritual cost.... With the great Government went many deep secret things which we too long delayed to scrutinize with, candid, fearless eyes.”

Tensions in social thought troubled Americans of that period. They gradually came to realize that self-sufficient individualism must reach a compromise with American society as a whole. The needs of the complete society must be considered, or else individualism would result in glaring inequalities. Some of the very rich realized the social disparity, and many multi-millionaires
voluntarily began the founding of hospitals, libraries, museums, and the endowment of colleges and universities. Andrew Carnegie was among those pioneering in the foundation of libraries. Yet such measures were not sufficient to remedy the situation; the need for Federal measures for more equitable control of wealth in the rising industrial economy, became apparent.

In this context of the release of industrial potential and energy which developed modern, industrialized, capitalist America, Sandburg’s early poems of the Chicago period take on the value of social documents. While great fortunes had been amassed by a few individuals large sections of the working classes existed intolerable personal conditions, for which the cities had no immediate answer, until social conscience and working class pressure of an increasingly organized nature gradually combined to provide more suitable conditions.

Thus the Chicago poems of Sandburg are of particular interest in that he who was able to paint the feelings and conditions of the ordinary people, and who felt the vocation to do so, laid bare these stresses and unsatisfactory conditions. At the same time, however, he was sufficiently broad-minded and inquiring to be able to set this presentation in its national context, and to see, in this period of growing pains, the origins and material of which prosperity, social mindedness, the vital expanding economy and the modern nation were being formed. Sandburg’s accomplishment is therefore the placing of this period of Chicago life in its historical setting, showing whence it had come, and at the same time, showing the
roots of future development. He speaks not in terms of production norms and
investment patterns, but in terms of human endeavor and responsibility. Man, and
in particular, American man has been the force that has molded American life. It is
men's vitality that exists alongside the squalor; the sense of justice that exists
alongside abuse and vice which eventually are adjusted and something better
results. In the Emersonian tradition, Sandburg urges looking from Better ahead to
Best.

This is the basis of Sandburg's concept of American development and of
American democracy- a critical analysis and the taking of steps toward
improvement. It is an evolutionary conception of man closely analyzed, and in its
poetic presentation closely and sympathetically painted. He communicates and
infuses his faith.

Sandburg's protest is in accord with long American tradition. It was a
protesting religious spirit following the reformation that brought the English
Pilgrims and puritans to the New World. Roger Williams objected to the theocracy
and intolerance of the Puritans. Samuel Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin
Franklin and many others protested against the political oppression of George III
and some of his ministers and against the incipient force of a nation aristocratic
element which the person of Hamilton gave voice to the sentiment; "Your People,
Sir, is a Great Best". (The People, Yes, line.975).
Emerson in the nineteenth century was the prominent voice of protest in literature and on the lecture platform; but there were other contemporary dissenters such as Thoreau and Whittier who wrote appeals for political equality. Wendell Phillips gave voice to the force of abolition. The spirit of inquiry and protest is inherent in the character of the American nation.

In the discussion of Chicago as a growing, over crowded city, we have already seen when many social pictures of its struggling people in shifting economy. These portrayals are not left in abstract terms, but are brought home to the reader by the pictures of hungry women and children; of underpaid workers; of striving immigrants; of tenement dwellers; and by brief glimpse of child labor and exploitation of the young;

"Of my city the worst that men will ever say is this;
You took little children away from the sun and the dew,
And the glimmers that played in the grass under the great sky,
And the reckless rain, you put them between walls
To work, broken and smothered, for bread and wages.

.................
For a little handful of pay on a
Few Saturday nights",
(Chicago Poems,. ‘They Will Say’, lines 81-87)

This social theme is repeated in “Mill Doors” in protest against the human cost in the greatly expanded industrialism. The tragic situation is fearlessly held up for public examination as the poet dramatically evokes the plight of those who are “old before they are young”. (Chicago Poems ‘Mill Doors’ line 96).

The overcrowded social structure of the city was also clouded by the disproportionately great number of incoming job hunters, surpassing the amount of employment available.

“Last week she got eights cents a box, Mrs. Pietro Giovonnitti, picking Onions for Jasper,
But this week Jasper dropped Pay to six cents a box because So many women and girls had Answered the ads in the Daily News,”
(Chicago Poems ‘Onion Days’, lines.13-16)

There is the noonday portraits of the woman who made cigars with “fingers wage-anxious”; on the arrival of the noon hour for food and relaxation, she is silhouetted within a window-frame of the walls of the cigar factory over looking
the river. Sandburg has pictured her, feeling at her throat, seeking the cool moving air of the outdoors over the river;

“At her throat and eyes and nostrils
The touch and the blowing cool
Of great free ways beyond the walls”.

(Chicago Poems)

The picture of the pawnshop man is symbolic of the industrial and social distortion of the period; for he “knows hunger, and how far hunger has eaten the heart, of one who comes with an old keepsake.’ (Cornhuskers, ‘Street Window’ lines.1-3). The wedding rings and baby bracelets, the watches of gold and silver and other deeply personal treasures brought to him for money, tell their stories.

The social structure of this period included many types in addition to the afore-mentioned; the policeman, the dynamiter, the ice-handler, the teamster, the ditch digger, the undertaker, the gravedigger, the newsboy, the house painter and others. Among the immigrant variations pictured are Greeks, Italians, Hungarians, Poles, Germans, Russians, slaves and Swedes.

In contrast to this poverty, the poem “A Fence” is Sandburg’s ironical glimpse into the life of the millionaire in his great stone house at the lake front. Around it are high iron palings with steel points:

“As a fence, it is a masterpiece, and will shut off the rabble and all vagabor.ds
and hungry men and all wandering
children looking for a place to play.
Passing through the bars and over
the steel points will go nothing
except Death and Rain and
Tomorrow”.

(Chicago Poems, ‘A Fence’ lines 5-9)

The social contrasts and maladjustments toward which Sandburg directed
much of the caustic realism of his earliest ‘Chicago Poems’ were gradually
remedied, and it is not easy now to picture conditions as they then existed. Harry
Hansen, the literary, editor of the Chicago Daily News, knew both Sandburg and
his poems quite well. His overall assessment of “Chicago” and Windy City shows
how close to the scene Sandburg was: “These two long poems identify him
particularly with the sidewalks of Chicago. They may well picture, for a later age,
the industrial hegemony.”

Outside this industrial hegemony, however, there existed other modes of life
without these depressing aspects. Lake shipping from the port of Chicago offered
an opportunity for work out of doors, and the poets pictures the freedom of the
boatman’s life as he lounges placidly on his ship on Lake Michigan the day before
its scheduled departure, watching clouds and winds, knowing that tomorrow the
throbbing of the ship’s engines and the play of the ship’s pistons will be its call to
life and the boatman’s call to the vocation of his choice:

“Tomorrow we move in the gaps and
heights
On changing floors of unlevel seas
and no man shall stop us and no man
follow
For ours is the quest of an unknown shore
And we are husky and lusty and shouting gay.”

(Chicago Poems, 'Waiting' lines 15-19)

Many Sandburg poems portray people in rural districts. An illustration of the happy life of the great outdoors is that of the “Plowboy” plowing in the dusk the last furrow. The gleam of the brown turf and the smell of the soil in the cool moist haze of an April evening are portions of the poetic descriptions in which Sandburg conveys the joy of prairie living, and the contentment of the people who turn to the sill for their vacation; the same lines convey the poet’s love of the life-giving earth, the functional beauty and the good that he sees in the farmer in the fields.

Prairie life and prairie production are so closely identified in the poet’s mind with the fundamental supporting structure of American economy that in “Corn Hut Talk” he has personified the prairie autumn harvest in terms of man’s needs and wants and dreams. The “hand sake of the pumpkins” is the gift of food, for human consumption. “There is hope for every corn shock” as a gift of “shoes for rough weather in November,” (Sandburg, Carl, the complete poems, pp. 256, 257). As a gift of shirts for early May. Even the five O’clock prairie sunset is personified as “a strongman going to sleep after a long day in a cornfield.” (Carl Sandburg,
the complete poems, p. 257). Naturally, it is possible to touch on but a few of the aspects of American life that Sandburg has crystallized in his verses; but these excerpts convey the hardship, the poverty, the brilliance, the sheer activity whether in factory or the farm. Work and life are shown, however, not merely as a set of conditions, but as a frame of mind, a human reaction, a personal identification—and in cases a dedication. In other cases, work has become soulless. In portraying these opposing aspects of work, Sandburg has shown human feelings and not abstracts.

It is not until a later date, when Sandburg essayed poems of broader vision and greater literary attainment, that more of the professional type of society came within his poetic horizon. More particularly in his later prose works has Sandburg dealt with the evolution of the liberal professions in the history of America. In the early twentieth century a new class of professions emerged and he has given them appropriate recognition in poetry by his portrayal of engineers, architects, technical experts, scientists and men of specialized skills. This recognition began as early as the writing of "Windy City" when he "mentions proud things" (Sandburg, Carl, complete Poems, p. 279) and catalogues them; he emphasizes the importance of bevels and blue prints for this was a period when rapid industrialization brought forth many new skills.

In "God Morning, America," the poet pays sincere tribute to the country’s professional engineers who designed and constructed America’s great cathedrals,
her bridges, her railroads, her sky-scrapers, her ships, for it was in the trained minds of these men that the plans were conceived and it was by their specialized techniques that the plans were executed. They represent "the endless yearnings of man for the beyond, for lights beyond. (Sandburg, Carl, p. 616).

In the social portraits of these Chicago days, i.e. in the context of his own time, Sandburg observes the nation with a non-partisan, non-political eye; with the eye of a prophet who distills the wisdom of the past and with a moral imperative attempts to arouse his readers from the errors and economic inequalities of the machine age. He detaches himself from politics more by instinct than by deliberation, and redefines the guiding light of justice and idealism that has been the directive force of American tradition. Because his humanitarianism made him susceptible to the social and economic distortions of industrialism as it existed in that period, he became the best known poetic interpreter of the rise of industrialized and rapidly expanding cities of America—a period that ushered in a new system of transportation, finance and economy which would bring a greatly changed national picture.

III. City, A Symbol of Industrial Development:

As Sandburg witnessed the phenomenal growth of great cities throughout America, Sandburg analyzed the various reasons for their development. Primarily, the large cities arose with the upsurge of an industrial economy, special factors contributing in many instances to the development. The poet has designated
various cities as the products of special technical and economic factors and also as the products of transport and communication facilities—Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Gray, Allegheny, Youngstown, Birmingham and other cities owning their importance to steel and iron. Many cities of the West and Far West are centers of cattle-raising districts. Kansas City and Chicago became shipping centers for the live stock of these districts. Detroit, because of its strategic location in a lake system of navigation and its proximity to the iron ore regions, became the center of the automobile industry; Duluth became an important lake port for the shipment of the iron ore of its region. New York, Boston and Philadelphia initially rose to prominence because they were strategic seaports. In Sandburg poems on New York emphasis is on the traffic crowds arriving by sea from all over the world and on the commercial shipping with boats arriving by ocean and by two rivers. Thus the poet successfully identified American cities with their industrial or economic importance. His identification of Chicago as “hogbutcher of the world” (Sandburg, Carl, ‘Complete Poems’, p.3) is generally recognized and accepted, and it very often appears in print in quotation marks—even in analytical accounts of American cities or industries or American life.

Sandburg has placed in verse the names of other great cities across the continent—cities with tall buildings—

“Steel and concrete witnesses gazing
down in San Antonio on the little old Alamo.
Blinking across old quaker foot paths
Of the City of brotherly love;
Shooting crossed lights on the old
Boston common.........

(Sandburg, Carl ‘The People Yes’. 597lines, 5528-5533)

America’s cities are a very vital component of national life. Sandburg has
given them a correspondingly important place in his poetry. To him a city is not
merely a name or a place on the map; it is an aspect of American civilization
contributing to industrial and economic development of the nation.

Sandburg’s “Chicago Dynamic” (1959) indicates how the American nation
is united in thought and spirit, cities are representative of American progress.
Industry is one of the great forces which have contributed to the strength of
America; and Sandburg has chosen to interpret that force in poetry, notably in the
long poem “Smoke and Steel”. Sandburg here pays tribute to the patriotism and
devotion of the workers in the sheet-steel mills and rolling -mills and to the great
importance of this gigantic industry. This poem is a pageant of steel that takes the
reader into the very shops and factories of war-time-into the innermost workings of
the mills. The poet has looked his arm in that of a worker, learned the idiom of
the steel mill, observed its multiple processes and figuratively, he takes us with
him. In his vivid picture we witness the fire and dust the furnaces, the red dome of
the ovens and the cindery sleeves of the workmen who toil grimly as they face “
the buckets of fire exploding or running wild out of the steady ovens,” and we see
"the sleeping slag foam from the mountains" (Sandburg, Carl, ‘Smoke and Steel,’ lines. 122), transformed into molten metal.

“A bar of steel—it is only smoke at the heart of it, smoke and the blood of a man, a runner of fire ran init, ran out, ran somewhere else, and left-smoke and the blood of a man and the finished steel, chilled and blue.

(Sandburg, Carl, ‘Smoke and Steel’. lines, 44-48)

As Emersion counseled, Sandburg has “grasped the hand” of the steel worker and taken his place beside him to be taught and to become “vocal with speech”, and in so doing he has “extended his dominion” and has been instructed “in eloquence and wisdom.” The steel mill has been a “dictionary” 24 has given him insight into its manufactures; has given him the viewpoint both of labor and management with the result that he has expressed its atmosphere, its place in industry and the war effort more completely than has any other writer. At the same time, with his particular art, the part and the whole became fused and the significance of this economic giant which, in a very real sense, is the backbone of national industry can be sensed all the way down to the most basic of operations.

The poem “Smoke and Steel” partakes of the epic in its presentation of the far-reaching localities of the steel industry and its significance to the Allied Armies
in World War I. From the united industrial effort in the steel mills came the railway box cars for the transportation of wheat, corn, cattle; fruit from the West and South; freight loads of automobiles from Detroit; freight loads of the materials of war going to Europe—jeeps, guns, tanks, food. From the steel mills came the girders for bridges, steam shovels and many war-time necessities. To a lesser degree, other industries are introduced into Sandburg poetry and serve as an illustration of the importance of urban industry in American life. Chicago leads the world in the meat-packing industry, and typifies as a "Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler" one of the world’s greatest rail road centers. Sandburg had ample opportunity to study industry connected with railroads, for his father, throughout his life, was an employee of the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad shop in Galesburg; therefore the poet had first-hand knowledge of railroad industry conditions.

One of the most poignant poems of the Chicago days was "Child of the Romans," which portrays the railroad section-hand as he stopped at noon to eat his humble meal of bread and bologna and saw the train whirl-by a Pullman train in which men and women were dining on steaks and strawberries at tables on which stood beautiful bouquets of roses and jonquils. The poem further portrays the duty of the section-hand to keep the road-bed to smooth that the ....."roses and jonquils Shake hardly at all in the cut glass vases, Standing slender on the tables in the dining cars". (Chicago Poems ‘Child of The Romans’10-12).
The lake shipping industry is depicted in many poems in which the docks, the workmen, the steamers and the lake itself are described; as are also dynamiters, the truck-drivers, the shovel-man and the bricklayer.

Urban industry is dependent on the labor of the people of the cities, even though it is becoming more and more mechanized. The industrial life of a city, in the final analysis, is a reflection of the life of a section of its people, and this portion of the urban population reflects the nature of the city’s industries. The two factors are indispensable to each other in the economic scheme of things;

“It is wisdom to think of the people are the city.
It is wisdom to think the city would fal to prices
And die and be dust in the wind
If the people of the city all move away and
Leave no people at all to watch and
Keep the city.
The city is a tool chest opened everyday,
A time clock punched every morning,
Aa shop door, bunkers and overalls
Counting everyday.
The city is a balloon and a bubble plaything
Shot to the sky every morning, whistled in
A ragtime jid down the sunsets.
Everyday the people get up and carry the City,
Carry the bunkers and balloons of the city,
Lift it and put it down"

(Slabs of The Suburnt West, 'The Windy City' lines, 295-300)

Gary, Indiana (not far from Chicago), is an industrial city identified with the manufacture of steel. Sandburg’s first poetry of protest against the steel industry was the poem “Mayor of Gary” written in 1915 on the subject of the exploitation of the work-men in the mills. In the poem we find irony, a spirit of criticism, and the challenge to human conscience, which characterized so many of the early Sandburg poems:

“Go into the plants and you will see
the
men doing nothing –machinery
does everything, said the mayor of
Gary
When I asked him about the 12-hour
Day and the 7-day week.

(Smoke and Steel, 'The Mayor of Gary' 3201-3203)

When we consider the much improved present-day industrial conditions in American mills and factories it is difficult to imagine the conditions which existed at the beginning of the century. Yet records prove that a seventy-two hour work-week existed in the steel industry until 1923. Exploitation of workers was rife with the arrival of thousands of men and women from their farms seeking work in the mills and with the arrival of millions of immigrants who provided an abundant
labor force accustomed to lower living standards. In addition to the requirement of long work hours, the industry included physical hazards; fatal accidents were not unknown. In "Psalm of Those Who Go Froth Before Daylight" the poet describes the steel workers returning home after the long day, as "brothers of cinders." (Sandburg. Carl. P. 166) Since adequate labor laws were not yet in force there were shop gate battles of Strikes and strike breakers and occasional deaths from these battles. Sandburg exposed to his generation the fatigue, exploitation and degradation of the workers as well as the dangers existing in the steel works during this transitional phase of growth.

Among industrial conditions attacked by Sandburg was insufficient protection against fire hazards. There is a fusion of poignancy and protest in the poem, "Anna Imroth" named after the girl whose death in a factory fire was the result of lack of fire escapes. In railroad industry there was ample cause for criticism. We recall that the poet's father, August Sandburg, in the previous century had worked all his life ten hours a day for fourteen cents an hour. He had worked cheerfully and steadily; and without any complaint so to the industrial situation he had managed, with the help of his son, to support the family and to become a homeowner. Living costs rose in the twentieth century, but labor and management were still far apart in the industrial and economic structure of American social history when Carl Sandburg in 1918, published the poem "Southern pacific": 
“Huntington sleeps in a house six
Feet long.
Huntington dreams of railroads he
Built and owned.
Huntington dreams of ten
thousand men saying; yes, sir.
Blithery sleeps in a house six feet long.
Blithery dreams of rails and ties he laid;
Blithery dreams of saying to
Huntington:
Yes sir, Huntington, Blithey, sleep in
houses six feet long”.

(Comhskers, ‘Southern Pacific’ lines 1-8)

Perhaps in no other poem has Sandburg so successfully combined industrial
and social satire with the image of death as the ultimate leveler of democracy. The
poem portrays the days of the rise of great industry when the business Titan
occupied a position of materialistic superiority, and was treated with servility by
his “ten thousand” employees.

The foregoing instances serve to show some of the tone of Sandburg’s
protest against industrial conditions of the early part of the century and how the
people of industry spoke through him. Since then the labor scene and working
conditions have been transformed out of all recognition. There have come
minimum wage laws, the National Labor Relations Act, the Taft-Hartley Act and
other national acts pertaining to the relations of labor and management in industry.
American Government has always permitted open criticism by the members of its social structure. American is a society adhering to a policy of self-criticism. Carl Sandburg’s position as a poet has been partially due to his protest against social and industrial conditions in need of correction. Emerson once said, “What the poetic youth dreams, prays, and paints today, shall presently be the resolutions of public bodies, then shall be carried as grievance and bill frights though conflict and war and then shall be triumphant law and establishment for a hundred years, until it gives place, in turn, to new prayers and pictures.” In allying his poetry with public issues, Sandburg has played an important role in espousing these public issues and forcing men to think and to realize what they were doing in accepting or imposing such conditions.

IV. The City as Agent and Witness;

Carl Sandburg’s ‘The People, Yes’ (1936) is an elaborately articulated poem to America’s strength whose potential the poet perceives rightly in her people. It is the longest poem in the Sandburg canon with its one hundred and seven sections of uneven merit. The poem moves through objective narration interspersed with commentary, reportage, spells of deep reflection, snippets of dialogue, parody, folk tales and myths, and excerpts form such disparate sources as newspapers, historical documents, and strips, factory bylaws, billboards, and the Gettysburg speech.

The people, as ever in Sandburg, belong to the city. ‘The People, Yes’ faithfully records their speech and physical movements; still life and images of the city;
sounds, colure, and smells; and the feel of open spaces and dark enclosures. A remarkable feature of this poem’s panoramic range and rambling mode of progressions is the kind of integration and focus they nevertheless achieve by projecting the city as the literal environment of action. The city in ‘The People Yes’ is more than a decor or a functional backdrop. It is the vast deep and the multitudinous expanse from which and to which the people keep flowing, it the tumultuous bustle of the city streets appears to be rather, low keyed in this poem, it is only because such moderation is consistent with Sandburg’s urgent purpose to uphold the supremacy of man over the artifacts of human intelligence and power. That the dusting of man is irrevocably bound up with the city is a theme that runs through several sections of ‘The People, Yes.’ This theme is foreshadowed in the travesty of the Babel myth in the opening section of the poem. Men and women assemble to build jointly a skyscraping tower. The big job goes on till God “a whimsical fixer” wrecks it. The unfinished tower, the poet says, still confronts to mock man’s presumptive urge to outdo God’s creation;

The wreck of it stood as skull
And a ghost,
A memorandum hardly begun,
Swaying and sagging in tall hostile
Winds,
Held up by slow friendly winds....

(‘The People Yes,’ lines 43-47)
This taint of folly and reversal has stuck man’s conscience ever since. For all what man achieves singly or his community accomplishes collectively, the people are destined to “move/ in a thin smoke (Sandburg, Carl, p. 451) Again, 12 alludes to the architectural imperfection of an arch whose strength is guaranteed by theoretical assumptions, but in effect stands “loses as any sag or spread/ failing of the builder’s intention, hope,” (Sandburg, Carl, p. 451).

Sandburg interweaves the Biblical myth and the subject of the poem in section 17. Rhetorical questions are posed in order to forge connections between the people and the myth of their collective strength:

“The people is a myth, an abstraction.”
And what myth would you put in place
Of the people?
And what abstraction would you exchange
For this one?
And when has creative man not
Toiled deep in myth? (The People, Yes)

The irony implicit in this human toil despite lessons learnt from Babel forms the conceptual base for the following section where people keep the city going with their nickels and dimes. The people “are the bottom pedestals of steel ribbed skyscrapers”. They feed the massive urban-industrial system quite unmindful of its alarming potential to dwarf its feeders, turn them into blind buyers, bullied and hypnotized by the insinuations of the mass media. The city thrives this resourceful
sales-game with its "seething whirl" of boards, electric signs, window robots and dummies. Section 19 acquaints us with a few random samples from the city population. The city holds them all; housewives, working women, job hunters, walkers and buyers, crowds at shopping centers, bystanders, business men, fun-farers, sports-fans, and witnesses to comic, tragic, or drab events. To the well-settled and the down-and-out alike, the city is nothing more than a gambling den. One wins or loses in the gamble, but is never exempt from "the terror of these unknowns. ... a circle of black ghosts holding men and women in toil and danger, an sometimes, shame". "Sandburg, Carl, the Complete Poem", p 460)

Section 21 identifies the people as metal polishers, soldiers, paint-spray hands, riveters, bolt-catchers and so on. They slough off such subservience and assume masterly over machinery as the custodians 22. The Chicago poet of section 23 is "credulous" about the destiny of such men. The people, however, appear as under slung workers in factory, mill or mine in section 25. They pay in their blood to turn out "finished products proclaimed on bill boards yelling at highway travelers" (Sandburg, Carl, the ‘Complete Poems,’ p. 467)

However, the poets credulity in man’s destiny in no way affects his sanity of judgment. Section 33 to 38 diagnoses the ills that debilitate the people as workforce. Sandburg does not readily subscribe to anti urban sentiments or irrational protests against industrialism. The point he makes repeatedly in these scions is that he city’s evil is evenly matched by man’s sinful arrogance and
greed, his unnatural hatred towards his brethren, and reckless passion for sophisticated life. Section 36 closes with an ironic note of disenchantment. Man, not the city is against himself.

... We are a house divided against itself.
We are millions of hands raised against Each other. We are united in but one Aim -
Getting the dollar. And when we get the Dollar we employ it to get more dollars.

("The People, Yes’ 1336-1339)

Later is section 52, Sandburg borrows Whitman’s homely world of grass and men, the elder poet’s New World flanerie which he endeavored to retain despite the swell of crowded cities and streets:

The population of the grass are lush
And green with care in the sun and rain.
And recurring seasons, the grass carries benedictions And fables of service toil and misuse.
To whom does the grass belong if Not to the people?

("The People Yes,’ lines 2543-2546)
Whitman’s well-known analogy of grass and populous nation is well taken. Sandburg appropriates analogy and renders it more suggestive with a touch of the pastoral. The “People” in Sandburg is a vibrant concept. It enshrines, as in, Whitman, the principle of hard, dignified labor and just reward, of natural vitality and fertility that ensure continuation of the human race. Left to themselves, the people restore sweetness and grace to the city of sweat and toil, of bondage and sterility;

In the people is the eternal child,
The wandering gypsy, the pioneer
home seeker,
The singer of home sweet home.

(‘The People, Yes’, 2673-2675)

The People, Yes for all its contents as a long poem of ambitious scope remains a distinguished saga of the people who build and wreck, haul and put the city together. The city earns for this poem an operative center of action and, occasionally, considerable focus. The city, if not quite a participant, is more than a functional setting. As an agent and witness, it imparts to the poem an integrative force that enables the poet to make easy back and forth references. This perhaps, was Sandburg’s expedient device to “hold easy conversation with his subject, the people, who otherwise, must fall into a dusty disordered poetry.” (The People, Yes lines, 5895-5896).
Chapter-IV

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