I Am the People, the Mob

By Carl Sandburg

I am the people—the mob—the crowd—the mass.
Do you know that all the great work of the world is done through me?
I am the workingman, the inventor, the maker of the world’s food and clothes.
I am the audience that witnesses history. The Napoleons come from me and the Lincolns. They die.
And then I send forth more Napoleons and Lincolns.
I am the seed ground. I am a prairie that will stand for much plowing. Terrible storms pass over me.
I forget. The best of me is sucked out and wasted. I forget. Everything but Death comes to me
and makes me work and give up what I have. And I forget.
Sometimes I growl, shake myself and spatter a few red drops for history to remember. Then—I
forget.
When I, the People, learn to remember, when I, the People, use the lessons of yesterday and no
longer forget who robbed me last year, who played me for a fool—then there will be no
speaker in all the world say the name: “The People,” with any fleck of a sneer in his voice or
any far-off smile of derision.
The mob—the crowd—the mass—will arrive then.

n/a

Though first made famous for the urban aesthetic of his poems about the people and city of
Chicago, Carl Sandburg was born with humble working-class roots in Galesburg, Illinois. An activist,
poet, and author, he won two Pulitzer Prizes, the first in 1940 for his biography of Abraham Lincoln
and the second in 1951 for his Collected Poems.

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