



Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years and the War Years

Carl Sandburg

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Civil War and history buffs--as well as all lovers of fine writing--will delight in the detail and accuracy of Carl Sandburg's definitive, best-known biography of Honest Abe. Representing a lifetime of study by the great American poet, Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years and The War Years distills Sandburg's monumental six volume set into a single one-book edition. By gleaning every possible reference from history, literature, and popular lore, Sandburg successfully captures not only the legendary president, but also Lincoln the man. He reveals exactly who Lincoln was, and what forces in his life shaped his personality. More than 100 black-and-white historical photographs and linecuts show Lincoln himself, the places he went, and the people who knew him.

Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years and the War Years Details

Date : Published August 1st 2005 by Galahad Books (first published 1954)

ISBN : 9780883658321

Author : Carl Sandburg

Format : Hardcover 762 pages

Genre : Biography, History, Nonfiction, Military History, Civil War, North American Hi..., American History, Politics, Presidents



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From Reader Review Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years and the War Years for online ebook

Martin says

Really great book. Working my way through the Presidents, I thought I might skip Lincoln, as I'd previously read and seen in so much about him in film and on television. This book showed up in a \$5 Audible sale, and I decided to add it to my list. From this book, I learned many interesting and entertaining facts, especially about Lincoln's early life. The author does a terrific job of weaving the story through Lincoln quotes and dozens (hundreds) of quotes written during Lincoln's life by his friends and enemies. I laughed many times and teared up more than once as well. Powerful writing.

At 44 hours, the longest book I've listened to. Worth the journey.

Excellent narrator! I'd be very happy to listen to him narrate historical documentaries.

Rita Berk says

Long audio book (over 44 hours) of Sandburg's famous biography of Lincoln. It is not a biography in the academic sense but more a series of anecdotes and stories mixed with history that reveals the honest, hard working, compassionate Lincoln as the symbol of the best of the American people. He was beloved by most and hated by some.

Nolan says

First, what can you really say new or different about Lincoln that hasn't already been written scores of times somewhere. The answer is, there's nothing new to say, and that's precisely why you keep reading more. A Kansas legislator summed up my feelings far better than ever I can. These are the words of Homer Hoch, who gave this tribute to Lincoln during a speech he made in the House of Representatives on February 12, 1923. "There is no new thing to be said about Lincoln. There is no new thing to be said of the mountains or of the sea or of the stars. The years go their way, but the same old granite mountains lift their shoulders above the drifting clouds. The same mysterious sea beats upon the shore. The same silent stars keep holy vigil above a tired world. But to the mountains and sea and stars, men turn forever in unwearied homage. And thus with Lincoln. For he was a mountain in grandeur of soul; he was a sea in deep undervoice of mystic loneliness; he was a star in steadfast purity of purpose and service, and he abides."

He abides indeed. He continues to live, though dead, and it is almost as though he looks on us even now with the careful scrutiny of one who restored the constitution when it hung, as it were, by a thread.

Regardless of what you know about Lincoln, I can promise you that if you read this book, you'll learn things you never knew. Modern scholars will freely admit that Sandburg takes a good bit of poetic license with this book. It comes awfully close to narrative fiction in a spot or two, and yet it remains fully credible and still in print. Why? Because Sandburg exhaustively researched this book. It's entirely possible that some of the

stories he quotes about Lincoln verge on the apocryphal, but they are wonderful stories indeed that include much that is documentable today as truth. You ought not ignore this book just because it was researched a half century ago. Perhaps nothing new can be said about Lincoln, but Sandburg finds new ways to teach you old truths, and they are majestic and powerful indeed. Virtually all of us have read his poetry growing up—Sandburg's, that is. We can all remember the image of fog creeping on little cat feet or the vivid image of Chicago with its broad shoulders. This book is a distillation of an earlier six-volume biography Sandburg wrote. It is majestic, beautifully written, and its cadences are reflective of the life of the 16th president. You hear the rough self-educated Kentucky sound that eventually evolves into a more polished memorable orator whose breathtaking climax can be found both in the Gettysburg address and in the second inaugural.

As this book opens, you read of Lincoln's childhood and difficulty as he grew up poor. You learn that his relationship with his father had its share of difficulties. There are the familiar stories of the death of his real mother, Nancy, and the introduction into the family of Sarah (Sally) Bush, who upon seeing the poverty in which Thomas Lincoln and his two children lived reportedly said, "I'll stay for the sake of the boy," referring to young Abraham. (That's not in this book, but the details of how the family lived in a single cabin and sought to maintain privacy with so many people will fascinate you.

You'll learn of the teen-age Lincoln who learns to operate a steamer and takes cargo down into the depths of the slave trading regions of New Orleans and its environs, and you'll come to understand how the impressions of that experience left indelible marks on Lincoln's soul. While he never became a radical abolitionist, he understood full well the evils of slavery, and that understanding is well communicated in this book. Take, for example, Lincoln's own words on the subject as quoted in the book: "Although volume upon volume is written to prove slavery a very good thing, we never hear of the man who wishes to take the good of it by being a slave himself." He called slavery "the durable curse of our race."

As you move through this book, you'll explore Lincoln the young man with his friendships being rare, but running deep. You'll read of his legendary love for Anne Rutledge that ended in her death, and you'll gain a deeper sympathy and more positive image of Mary Todd Lincoln as you see her portrayed through the president's eyes—no easy task, but one that the skillful Carl Sandburg is most definitely capable of.

You'll read about the young frontier lawyer who won a few cases and lost a few others. You'll read about a congressional bid in which he is rewarded with a victory, and another one in which he is sent packing by the electorate. All of these experiences help shape Lincoln's view of what government ought to be. What is that view exactly? It seems a bit of a fascinating mix of libertarian thought and just a hint of so-called compassionate conservatism. I mean no offense to any of you who are uncomfortable with anything Reagan-like or libertarian in nature, but these are Lincoln's own words on the role and function of government: "... To do for the people what needs to be done, but which they cannot, by individual effort, do at all or do so well for themselves: Such as, making and maintaining roads, bridges and the like; providing for the helpless young and afflicted, common schools, and disposing of deceased men's property. ... If some men will kill or beat or constrain others or despoil them of property by force, fraud or noncompliance with contracts, it is a common object with peaceful and just men to prevent it." So road construction and national defense are clearly part of what Lincoln saw as government's role. Interestingly enough, it appears that public schools and programs that assist the very young and perhaps the disabled were also included in his ideas of what government ought to do. But clearly he didn't see it as a grand guardian of all things, nor did he encourage the electorate to abrogate its responsibilities to government.

Unless you are capable of reading without any emotion whatsoever, you'll likely be moved nearly to tears as you read Lincoln's majestic words at certain turning points in his life. Upon his election to the presidency in 1860, it became necessary, of course, to leave his friends and associates in Springfield, Illinois to go to

Washington. According to Sandburg, these are his final words upon leaving Springfield—a community to which he would never again return alive: “I now leave, not knowing when or whether ever I may return with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington. Without the assistance of that divine being whoever attended him, I cannot succeed. With that assistance, I cannot fail. Trusting in him who can go with me and remain with you and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well. To his care, commanding you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell.”

This book is not all soberness and tears. Lincoln’s sometimes slightly earthy jocular nature simply would never allow for constant tears. Regarding the head of the war department, Secretary Stanton, who apparently was given to be an excitable man occasionally, Lincoln said “We may have to treat him as they are sometimes obliged to treat a Methodist minister I know of out west. He gets wrought up to so high a pitch of excitement in his prayers and exhortations that they are obliged to put bricks in his pockets to keep him down. We may be obliged to serve Stanton in the same way, but I guess we’ll let him jump a while first.”

Friends, this is no boring textbook that rambles on and on for hours and teaches you but little. You’ll read with interest Lincoln’s philosophies on why the civil war had to be fought at all. He explained his perspective this way in a letter originally written in August of 1862 and which was widely circulated throughout the nation: “I would save the union. I would save it the shortest way under the constitution. The sooner the national authority can be restored, the nearer the union will be the union as it was. If there be those who would not save the union unless they could at the same time save slavery, I do not agree with them. If there be those who would not save the union unless they could at the same time destroy slavery, I do not agree with them. My paramount object in this struggle is to save the union, and is not either to save or destroy slavery. If I could save the union without freeing any slave, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that. What I do about slavery and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help to save the union. I shall do less whenever I believe what I am doing hurts the cause, and I shall do more whenever I shall believe doing more will help the cause. I shall try to correct errors when shown to be errors. I shall adopt new views so fast as they shall appear to be true views. I have here stated my purpose according to my view of official duty, and I intend no modification of my oft-expressed personal wish that all men everywhere could be free.”

As you read this book, you’ll read of a gentle, merciful empathetic Lincoln who once exclaimed, “I shall do nothing in malice. What I deal with is too vast for malicious dealing.”

You’ll read about the Lincoln who agonized over the emancipation proclamation and how to best implement it gradually so as not to drive the border states like Missouri, Kentucky, and Maryland into the hands of the Confederacy. You’ll read of midnight walks from his office to the war department enwrapped in brooding gloom to see what the telegraph carries regarding the movements of his armies. You’ll read about the frustration Lincoln experienced with a variety of generals whose fear of fighting now seems legendary; and you’ll read of the friendship that grew and grew between Lincoln, Grant, and William T. Sherman. The three ultimately would work together almost in lock step as Sherman and Grant would consolidate their victories and move inexorably closer to one another, trapping the remainder of the confederate army between them.

You’ll read of the shrillness and thoughtlessness of the American people as thousands of them crowded into the White House with their demands. On one occasion, a dispute over a postmaster position in Ohio had lasted for days and brought waves of delegates to Lincoln’s desk. Finally, in desperation, knowing that he couldn’t take the boring rants of one more group of Ohio delegates, he ordered the two stacks of papers that dealt with the nominations of the two would-be postmaster candidates to be weighed. One man’s bundle of petitions and letters weighed three quarters of a pound more than did the other’s bundle. The postmastership

went to the man whose papers were the heaviest.

You'll read about a Lincoln who maintains his humor and humility despite sometimes sharp disagreements with his most trusted cabinet members. "Did Stanton say I was a damned fool?" Lincoln once asked a reporter. "He did, sir, and repeated it." Came the reply. Lincoln's face took on a thoughtful look. "If Stanton said I was a damned fool, then I must be one. For he is nearly always right and generally says what he means."

On another occasion, Lincoln wrote one of his generals who had publicly suggested that what the country needs is a military dictatorship. Lincoln pointed out that the man got his command, not because he had said that a dictator was necessary, but in spite of his position. Then in classic Lincoln style, the president wrote: "Only those generals who gain successes can set up dictators. What I now ask of you is military success, and I will risk the dictatorship." In a very fatherly way, Lincoln continued in his letter by encouraging General Joe Hooker not to be rash, but to press on with sleepless energy. Nearly in tears as he completed reading the letter, Joe Hooker commented, "That is just such a letter as a father might write to his son. It is a beautiful letter, and although I think he was harder on me than I deserved, I will say that I love the man who wrote it."

You'll read about the Lincoln who became an expert at deflecting the criticism of others against his staff, and particularly against General Grant. On one occasion, a medical doctor fretted to Lincoln that Grant drank too much. Lincoln's reply was classic and memorable. "Then looking as serious as I could I said, 'Doctor, can you tell me where General Grant gets his liquor?' The doctor seemed quite nonplused, but replied that he could not. I then said to him, 'I am very sorry. For if you could tell me, I would direct the chief quartermaster of the army to lay in a large stock of the same kind of liquor and would also direct him to furnish a supply to some of my other generals who have never yet won a victory.'"

You'll read about how the war tore away at Lincoln's health. He frequently assured visitors that he would never see the war end—that it would kill him first. On one occasion, when encouraged to take a vacation, he remarked, "I sincerely wish war was a pleasanter and easier business than it is, but it does not admit to holidays." One day at his desk, worn down with the war-based decisions of the day, he called out, "I wish George Washington or some of the old patriots were here in my place so that I could have a little rest."

Read this book to get a sense of Lincoln who often risked his life to simply mingle with those who elected him. Once asked why he insisted on shaking hands with railroad engineers and railroad firemen with their blackened sooty hands, Lincoln replied simply, "that will all wash off; but I always want to see and know the men I am riding behind."

This book will also make you think long and hard about how wrong media representatives can be when covering what will become historical events. That's why our day and time is the perfect day and time to read this book. We need stark and clear reminding of how utterly stupid and clueless the mainstream press can be about so many things so often. Following his stirring remarks at Gettysburg, the nearby Harrisburg newspaper wrote, "The president succeeded on this occasion because he acted without sense and without constraint in a panorama that was gotten up more for the benefit of his party than for the glory of the nation and the honor of the dead. We pass over the silly remarks of the president; for the credit of the nation, we are willing that the veil of oblivion shall be dropped over them and that they shall no more be repeated or thought of."

We blanch today at the thought of the Gettysburg address being blown off as silly remarks. Ah, but the Chicago Times outdid the Harrisburg paper. "The cheek of every American must tingle with shame as he reads the silly, flat, and dish watery utterances of the man who has to be pointed out to intelligent foreigners

as the president of the United States.” Not everyone who covered the Gettysburg address was so far afield. A Cincinnati reporter called it a “perfect thing in every respect.” The Europeans got it all wrong, as one might well expect. The London Times said Lincoln’s address was dull and commonplace. Others accused him of callously using the event as a platform for re-election. One Philadelphia paper said Lincoln’s remarks would stir future generations, and that they would read it with a moistening of the eye. The Springfield Republican called the speech “a perfect gem.” So not everyone got it wrong, but this book will amaze you as you read about those who clearly did. I found parallels in the way Bush junior and Lincoln were ridiculed by the press and the nation for their speech patterns. This book has reminded me as few others can that we aren’t really much different from our 1863 counterparts—a sobering thought indeed.

Finally, you will read the stark horror that was the assassination. I suspect Sandburg took significant poetic license here, but underlying the blow-by-blow drama he created seems to be solid and sound research. It is so well written that you may find yourself involuntarily calling out as I did, “no, please, please rewrite this and make your new ending be the correct one!” Of course, there was no rewriting or revising for my sake or anyone else’s. Lincoln’s final hours are most thoroughly detailed, and this is well enough written that you will surely be caught up in every final ragged breath.

This book dedicates a chapter to Lincoln’s feelings regarding religion. Clearly a student of the Old and New Testaments, he was also clearly uncomfortable with the Christianity of his day. He frequently referenced God in his writing and speaking, but Jesus isn’t singled out much, and there’s no record of Lincoln being particularly more fond of one sect than another. Still, it’s a fascinating chapter.

Folks, in summation, I suspect newer and more modern scholars have written materials about Lincoln that are somewhat more factual in nature, but this is an excellent read, and it’s certainly not fictional. I’ve not found anyone willing to just openly discredit this book and fling it aside. It has an important place in any library. The writing style alone will help those who aren’t particularly interested in Lincoln’s life to learn more about him. It’s not a quickie beach read, but it is a thought-provoking heart-changing way to spend the upcoming anniversary of the battle of Gettysburg and the upcoming anniversary of the birth of the nation.

Jeff says

Wow....what a great book. I figured before I allowed Spielberg and Daniel Day Lewis to poison my mind with their view of Lincoln, I'd go to the source and read this Pulitzer Prize winning bio. I'm glad I did. Sandburg is a great writer in the same vein as Barbara Tuchman and William Manchester. He paints a vivid portrait of Lincoln....I highly recommend this book. You may not learn a lot you didn't know, but I guarantee you that you will put the book down and think deeply about matters. What a great book.

James says

I read this when I was a senior in high school, and when I finished the final volume after nearly two months of reading, I cried because there was no more to read. This is an amazing rendition of Abraham Lincoln's life. If you read it out loud, it is beautiful to hear. It is a pleasure to have the words roll off of one's tongue. A few of Carl Sandburg's poems are this way, such as "Choose Something Like a Star." If I am not mistaken, this is the longest and most comprehensive biography that has been written. Mr. Sandburg also wrote a

condensed version of this biography in one volume, which I have also read.

Scott says

4/13 - My mother bought me the 6-volume Sangamon edition at an old bookstore in Sonoma, CA. I opened the first red-bound volume of "The Prairie Years" on Lincoln's 200th birthday after visiting his birthplace in Hodgenville and then driving across Kentucky to Springfield, IL. I started "The War Years" in 2010, 150 years after Lincoln's first election in 1860, and have pretty much kept pace a volume at a time, following his presidency 150 years later. So I just finished Volume Four, covering 1863 and the first part of 1864. This important year began with the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation and went on to the New York draft riots that inspired the movie "Gangs of New York," Gettysburg, the bravery of former slaves fighting in battle (depicted in the movie "Glory"), the Gettysburg Address, and the run-up to Lincoln's re-election in 1864. I found especially poignant the scene at the end of 1863 when the Statue of Freedom was raised atop the newly completed Capitol dome. This had special meaning this year, as Marla and I attended President Obama's Second Inauguration under that dome (we got engaged at the top of the dome, beneath the Statue of Freedom), and our former boss Senator Schumer spoke from the platform about how the completion of the dome in the midst of the ongoing Civil War signified that a united country would be achieved and live on.

5/09 - Just finished volume one of the six-volume Sangamon edition. While this Lincoln biography has been poked at in light of better and more recent historical research, it is unmatched for its beauty and poetry in the telling of Lincoln's life. Reading it, one gets a cinematic view of Lincoln's life, his mind, and the country and the world that was developing around him as he developed into one of the great heroes of all time. To read this book is, at times, to look him in the eye.

3/10 - 150 years later, this book lays out in very poetic terms why Lincoln has become THE American icon. Volume Two begins with his professional life as a lawyer in Illinois, goes through the Lincoln-Douglas debates, Cooper Union speech, and the 1860 campaign for the presidency. At the end of this chapter, as Lincoln boards the train in Springfield and says goodbye to his hometown for the last time, Sandburg captures the sense of triumph and foreboding that shrouded the occasion.

Riley says

It is easy to see why Carl Sandburg's account of Abraham Lincoln is so beloved, since it focuses so much on Lincoln the folk hero. I enjoyed this book a lot, though its style (kind of a Thomas Wolfe rip off) got on my nerves after a while.

Two Lincoln anecdotes I highlighted, which give a good sense of the book's tone:

"Protests of innocence often came from men plainly guilty. They reminded Lincoln of a governor who visited a state prison. The convicts one by one had the same story of innocence and of wrongs done them. At last the governor came to one who frankly said he had committed a crime and the sentence given him was perfect justice. 'I must pardon you,' said the governor, 'I can't have you here corrupting all these good men.'"

And:

"Six days after the Fort Pillow massacre Lincoln spoke at a Sanitary Fair, reminded his Baltimore soldiers that in looking out on so many people assembled to serve the Union soldiers, the fact was that three years earlier the same soldiers could not so much as pass through Baltimore. 'We all declare for liberty; but in using the same word, we do not all mean the same thing. With some the word liberty may mean for each man to do as he pleases with himself, and the product of his labor; while with others the same word may mean for some men to do as they please with other men, and the product of other men's labor ... The shepherd drives the wolf from the sheep's throat, for which the sheep thanks the shepherd as a liberator, while the wolf denounces his for the same act as a destroyer of liberty, especially as the sheep was a black one. Plainly the sheep and the wolf are not agreed upon the definition of the word liberty; and precisely the same difference prevails today among us human creatures, even in the North, and all professing to love liberty ...'"

Florence says

Abraham Lincoln lived before he became a politician. He farmed, he worked on the Mississippi River hauling freight, he labored with ordinary people. He truly was born in a cabin with a dirt floor. He had no benefit of an education, but devoured every book that he could get his hands on, eventually becoming a lawyer. This unabridged version of his biography chronicles every part of his professional life. Lincoln was a man with a dry sense of humor. He was a great storyteller. He was a modest man. Some ridiculed him for his homespun appearance and faulty grammar. But his empathy, his steadiness, his tenaciousness were the source of his greatness. He preserved our nation as one entity and he abolished the evil of slavery. I found myself mourning his passing over one hundred and fifty years after he drew his last breath.

Steven Peterson says

This is a biography of Lincoln by the esteemed poet Carl Sandburg. I was born just up the road, US Route 34 (in Kewanee), from his home town of Galesburg, Illinois. Thus, I have always had a soft spot for this version of Lincoln's life

As a poet, Sandburg's version tends to be more epic and mythical--and less critical--in its examination of Lincoln. For all of that, the book still works well. The first part, "The Prairie Years," recounts Lincoln's youth and early career before he attained the presidency. The story, of course, starts with his family settling in Kentucky, where Lincoln was born in 1809. Later, he moved with his family to Illinois. Lincoln began in New Salem and later moved to Springfield. Sandburg's depiction of his development, to becoming a practiced attorney, his political ambitions, his brief time in the militia, lays out the standard treatment of Lincoln, written extraordinarily well. Many anecdotes dot the volume. We see his doomed relationship with Ann Rutledge and his rocky courtship of Mary Todd. The discussion of his famous debates with Stephen Douglas in the Senate Campaign that brought him national visibility (and rendered him viable as a potential presidential candidate) is well told.

Then, the work goes on to explore his place in the Civil War. The volume speak poignantly of the family tragedy that he experienced (the death of a child is always difficult), the strained relationship with his wife, the challenges of orchestrating the Union's war effort.

In a sense, this is a poetic, lyric, romanticized view of Lincoln. It could scarcely be anything else, I think, given Sandburg's perspective. Nonetheless, for that, this is still a compelling work and worth a read.

Steve says

<http://bestpresidentialbios.com/2014/...>

“Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years” is a two-volume biography of Lincoln’s early life written by Carl Sandburg and published in 1926. Sandburg, like Lincoln, was a son of the Illinois prairie and he harbored a lifelong fascination with the sixteenth president. Although better known as an eminent American poet, Sandburg was also a well-regarded biographer.

Following publication of “The Prairie Years” Sandburg began an exhaustive effort to complete his study of Lincoln. In 1939 he published a four-volume series “Abraham Lincoln: The War Years” covering Lincoln’s presidency. This second installment on Lincoln’s life earned Sandburg the 1940 Pulitzer Prize in history, making him the only person ever to receive Pulitzers in both poetry and history. Sandburg died in 1967 at the age of 89.

Despite lacking access to many of the historical sources available to modern Lincoln biographers, much of Sandburg’s “The Prairie Years” rings familiar to readers acquainted with Lincoln’s life. This two-volume effort totals nearly 1,000 pages of text, but lacks the footnotes and bibliography which would be expected of a more recent historical work. Volume 1 covers Lincoln’s life through the mid-1850s (after his service as an Illinois Congressman). Volume 2 covers the half-decade of his life through his election as president. The series ends with the President-elect’s train departing Illinois for the nation’s capital in early 1861.

“The Prairie Years” is a biography about which I possess conflicting emotions. To its credit, it is a unique look at Lincoln’s early life and is a tale often beautifully told; that its author was a renowned poet is often unsurprising. While reading Sandburg’s account of Lincoln’s earliest years one cannot help but visualize the same raw material Mark Twain must have drawn upon for many of his stories. The first volume, in particular, is almost a reference manual on the uncultured, rugged frontier life.

On the other hand, this biography is an imperfect combination of history, context and fluff. As a contributor to Lincoln scholarship, the series lacks the potency it probably once possessed. As a source of unique cultural and social context, the series is excellent – but it provides virtually no historical context whatsoever. And it is replete with stories of (and by) Lincoln which add individual bursts of color to the portrait. But after an endless barrage of these brief, rapid-fire tales they grow almost pointless – adding filler but little substance.

Happily, Sandburg’s writing style feels far more modern than the biography’s age would suggest; the text is smooth, fluid and easy to read (excepting Sandburg’s propensity for incorporating the local dialect in many passages). Unfortunately, the biography does not follow a consistently logical, linear progression but takes on a form that only a “creative” thinker could perfect.

Along its vaguely chronological path, Sandburg takes frequent detours to explore favorite topics or themes. Although the diversions can be fascinating they are often followed by events non-sequential to those taking place before the diversion. Only later will the reader find the storyline returning to the original point of departure. One moment Lincoln is in a courtroom using humor to sway a jury; the next he is headed to Washington as a congressman...but he never seems to have decided to run for office or to have campaigned. But fear not, that piece of the puzzle will come later.

Missing in the broad coverage of Lincoln's life are key elements of his success: his intense drive for self-education, his passionate love of politics and his zealous (if evolutionary) views on slavery. The Lincoln-Douglas debates are not particularly well described and someone unfamiliar with American history will not gain a better grasp of the Compromise of 1850 or the Kansas-Nebraska Act.

Sandburg's biography is at its very best when placing the reader in Lincoln's place and time, exposing his surroundings, culture and local flavor. While reading these two volumes, it is easy to imagine yourself sitting around a campfire listening to Sandburg (or Lincoln) telling one story after another. It is harder to imagine that you might be listening to a lecture by a noted historian. And the experience is best for readers with no pressing business; this biography is in no hurry to get anywhere at any particular time. It is best enjoyed at a carefree pace...possibly with a glass of wine.

Overall, Carl Sandburg's "The Prairie Years" is a fascinating and enjoyable cultural and literary experience, even if disappointing from a historical perspective. For many reasons it is not ideal as an introduction to Abraham Lincoln for the modern reader seeking a comprehensive, detailed and historically potent account of his life. But as a second or third source, designed to add splashes of color and flavor unavailable elsewhere, Sandburg's work on Lincoln's early years is quite well-suited.

Overall rating: 3½ stars

<http://bestpresidentialbios.com/2014/...>

"Abraham Lincoln: The War Years" is a four-volume, 2,400 page biography focused on Lincoln's presidency and death. Written by Carl Sandburg and published in 1939, it was published about a dozen years after Sandburg's two-volume "Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years" covering the first five decades of Lincoln's life.

"The War Years" was a monumental effort which earned Sandburg, already a well-known American poet and an increasingly well-regarded biographer, the 1940 Pulitzer Prize in history. Like Lincoln, Sandburg was a son of the Illinois prairie and as a consequence he harbored a lifelong interest in the sixteenth president. Sandburg died in 1967 at the age of 89.

Unlike Sandburg's "The Prairie Years" which covered Lincoln's childhood and early career as a lawyer and politician, "The War Years" does not have the sprightly, effervescent feel of a biography written by a poet. Instead, this series is heavy and more dense and only sparingly reveals its author's normal passion for verse and dexterity.

Like its predecessor volumes, "The War Years" is mostly – but not strictly – chronological. Periodic interruptions in the flow allow the author to explore cultural or political topics which could probably be placed nearly anywhere in the series. But unlike Sandburg's coverage of Lincoln's first fifty-two years in "The Prairie Years" which consumed more than nine-hundred pages, this series covers just four years of Lincoln's life in nearly three times more pages. As a result, "The War Years" is heavy on details - both important and trivial – and requires an immense investment of time.

Unfortunately, while most of the big picture moments will strike the reader as familiar, much of the surrounding detail will not. A casual reader will often get lost in unimportant details and miss the forest for the trees. On more than one occasion I lost track of which part of Lincoln's life was being discussed since the text wandered so deeply into one topic or another that previously familiar terrain became unrecognizable. Matters which might be dispatched with a paragraph, or perhaps a page, are routinely covered in ten or

twenty pages.

On the other hand, with such breadth and depth Sandburg is able to provide insight into topics rarely found in other Lincoln biographies. For example, the reader is introduced more thoroughly to the Confederate Cabinet and its provocative personalities than anywhere else I've ventured. I've also never witnessed a more complete description of the drudgery of Lincoln's day-to-day life as President (with innumerable requests for patronage, pardons or other favors).

The congressional plot against Secretary of State Seward is particularly interesting and the chapter describing Robert E. Lee's surrender to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox is unrivaled. In addition, this series provides the most thorough and dramatic account of Lincoln's assassination that I've yet read. Covering more than 100 pages, Sandburg's description of Lincoln's last moments provides a fascinating and engrossing conclusion to the series.

With several hundred illustrations, photographs, notes, newspaper clippings and caricatures there is a great deal to be found in Sandburg's biography that adds unique color and clarity to Lincoln's story.

Unfortunately, the text itself leaves Lincoln two-dimensional and his relationship with his family largely unexplored. For reasons unknown, Sandburg seems determined to avoid humanizing Lincoln, his wife or his children (none of whom become familiar after this lengthy series).

Also missing are observations or analyses by the author which would provide special insight into matters of great historical significance or serve to explore Lincoln's legacy. Little or no overarching commentary examines Lincoln's views on slavery, religion or other big-picture topics of interest. Although valuable messages and insights are contained in the series, they are widely scattered and well-hidden beneath mountains of minutiae.

Overall, Carl Sandburg's "The War Years" is an encyclopedic recounting of Lincoln's day-to-day life as president during a time of great conflict and turmoil. Though likely of great interest and value to a historian, the series will prove overwhelming and esoteric for a more casual reader. Although it is a jewel of American history, Sandburg's biography does not distinguish between the trivial and the momentous. Impressive in scope, it is equally overwhelming and without enough moments of clarity and revelation to be of interest to the modern reader.

Overall rating: 3 stars

Larry Bassett says

I finished listening to this audible book with tears in my eyes. I suffered from the assassination of Abraham Lincoln and I gloried in the prose of Carl Sandburg. Sandburg noted that when Lincoln died he became a legend surrounded by mythology. And so this book did not seem so much to be a compilation of historical truth as a collection of homegrown stories. The reading was superb with the inflection of the people of the times. And yet I would like to think the stories and the anecdotes captured the truth of the man and the times. There is the historical struggle about the truth of whether the Civil War was to free the slaves or preserve the union. It is fair to say that the book captures Lincoln as both a hero and a villain.

Len says

Look, there are obviously lots of Lincoln biographies out there, and I have read many of them, but after having read this book, I have concluded that the others are merely imitations of Sandburg (some of them very good imitations, certainly, and worth your time, but imitations nonetheless).

Consider that this book is a condensed version of Sandburg's six-volume (!) biography of Lincoln, and you realize that its level of detail is merely suggestive of the detail to be found in the six-volume set.

Wendee says

My kids and I have taken an interest in Abe Lincoln and have enjoyed the illustrations as well as the stories in this book. In fact, we used it in our family's Memorial Day devotional, which was very powerful in educating us about those who have gone before and what they have accomplished for our liberties.

Pete says

I've been reading a lot this year, and the more books I pore over, the more disgruntled I become. It was in reading this book, strangely, that I realized the possible cause: the range of narrative voice employed by authors (especially contemporary "literary" ones) is extremely limited. The opening few pages of Sandburg's second of three volumes on Lincoln reads like his poetry, which reads a lot like Whitman's poetry. It is flowing, free and expansive, lyrical. The rest reads like a history book, which is fair; that's what the book is intended to be, after all. The fact that I was hoping for something else--something subjective and poetic, an unabashed mythologization of Lincoln (but not so unabashed as to have him slaying vampires)--is irrelevant.

Why are there so few eccentric and distinct narrators? Perhaps it is the mark of an immature reader to even want one. When I compile a list of some of the best examples--works by Hunter Thompson, Mark Twain, The Catcher in the Rye--it seems that it is the same list likely to be found in the favorites of avid readers aged 15-21. I don't believe that, though. Poets have often write in distinct voices, and are not denigrated for the strategy, and that is telling, in a way. Poetry is reliant on rhythm, and rhythm is what truly gives a narrative voice its identity. I suspect that the problem is in who reads, and who decides what is published and how. The support base for literary texts is very narrow, I imagine (this is based on no hard evidence, and barely any soft evidence). Educated, probably. Upper-middle class and above, probably. Based on those two factors alone, additional racial, regional and cultural profiling could be extrapolated, based on the various and marked inequalities that exist along those lines.

Back to Sandburg's biography of Lincoln, it isn't written with the flare I expected from one of America's better poets, and, from what I've read on the internet (the best place to find facts), it is not the most reliable account of its subject. Maybe read the first 4 or 5 pages, and then go see the movie in which the 16th president of the United States plays poker with the undead.

Lewis Codington says

Fascinating, extremely well researched and written. Gives a wonderful glimpse into life and issues in the earlier years of our country through all that Lincoln experienced and was involved in.

Samyann says

Written by Carl Sandburg, narrated by Arthur Morey, a very long audiobook - over 44 hours of listening. Although originally released way back in 1954, this audiobook format was released in 2013.

Two American legends. One, Carl Sandburg - poet, author. The other, Abraham Lincoln. This alone should tell you this book is a pretty decent listen. Predominantly a history of the United States from the late 1700s through the end of the American Civil War, Abraham Lincoln is also recommended for anyone interested in an understanding of Lincoln, the man.

Abraham Lincoln is a compilation of Sandburg's decades of research. The book is filled with Lincoln-esque homily, often disconnected, one line insights as an attempt to convey Lincoln, his time, character, friends, enemies, and Lincoln's humble roots. Typical of the writings of the time, the prose is wordy and some would say verbose. Starting with details about Lincoln's heritage, his grandfather also being an Abraham Lincoln, his father Tom, the brief life of his mother Nancy Hanks, the book traverses Lincoln's life, election, presidency, the American Civil War, through his ultimate assassination in April of 1865.

Narration by Arthur Morey is superb. It's apparent that Morey admired Sandburg's writing and Abe himself.

If you are interested in the preeminent insight into Lincoln, an in-depth look at his foibles and amazing intellect, this read is a must. It is also an excellent American history lesson. Enjoy!

James Burns says

ABRAHAM LINCOLN BY CARL SANDBURG

I have read and reviewed this book in tandem with the the six volume Abraham Lincoln by Carl Sandburg.

My opinion of President Lincoln has always been a little tainted by strong southern upbringing and my love of that heritage and their leaders. The patriotic person in me, my love of GOD, Country and Corps has admired and respected the great things america was to accomplish through his leadership.

Before reading this book I wanted to see if it answered or confirmed my question or my opinion of the causes and what was the real reason the Civil War was fought. Was the true cause:

- 1- States Rights
- 2- Slavery
- 3- southern stated succeding and the firing on Ft. Sumpter
- 4- northern aggression, invading the south
- 5- to preserving the union

6- social and economic differences between north and south

7- some or all the above

8- something not stated above

9- and why was the election of Abraham Lincoln used as the catapult to war.

Vol. I - covers Lincoln's birth to 1854. Sandburg covers his childhood, the death of his mother and his

father's 2nd marriage to Sarah Bush who would be a constant in his life and a very close relationship.

According to Carl Sandburg he was to become a successful Lawyer and Politician on the state and national level.

No surprises accept that during this period of his life he and Mary had successful marriage based on love.

You start to understand Lincoln through his losses politically and relationships. His deep depressions and his deep belief that he would suffer a tragic death. Looking forward to read volume II.

Vol -III would like to start by saying I'm not a big fan of his, I do understand the greatness in the man and the incredible will to keep the Union together and the great cost to our nation in both lives, material and monetarily. Volume II takes us thru the great Debates With Douglas, and the Election and his final farewell To Illinois. I was really amazed at the portrayal of Mary Todd. I always thought of her as a nuisance and on this side of being insane. According to Mr. Sandburg although a pain in the neck, she was also a great helpmeet and a friend, ambitious though she was, she had his best interest at heart. According A. Lincoln they were a team, they complemented each other, their strengths were the others weakness. Someone once said behind every great man there is a good woman behind him. I believe war was inevitable from the Beginning, because of the cultural differences, and political differences. I also believe the south made sure of succession when the split the Democratic party and ran their own candidate. With three Democrats Running against, A. Lincoln they insured his Victory. Mr. Sandburg pointed out that A. Lincoln did not receive a single vote in ten of the eleven States that formed the Confederacy. According to Hudson Strode Author Of Jefferson Davis Books Lincoln did not receive a single vote from all of the eleven states. Lincoln Received approximately 1.6 million votes that is 1 million of the combined votes of the three Democratic Candidates. Actually thoroughly enjoyed reading this and I am really beginning appreciates President Lincoln and all he had to overcome. I can't wait to see what Volume III has in store for us...

Vol - III covers From Lincoln's swearing in as President and the critical task in picking out Cabinet and the Uncertainty in being able to avoid War With the Southern States (CSA). After the inauguration And the Firing on Ft. Sumter, and a call for troops.

The Author introduces us to the President of the Confederate States of America and Vice President and Cabinet, And a Brief Personal and Political Comparison, such as their physical similarities and personality traits. They were both born in Kentucky one year apart and were raised in a different state. According to the book (Two Presidents: Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis) by Charles E. Gilbert, Their political Beliefs were similar.

The Author Covers the battles from Bull Run (#1); Bull Run (2), Shiloh, Monitor and the Merrimac, "Seven days", and the bloody battle of Antietam, and Fredericksburg. At the First Battle at Bull Run, Neither Side realized the Brutality and the longevity and the Horrors of Warfare that was thrust upon them. The General Thinking on Both sides was that it would only last a short time. When word got out that there was to be a battle at Manassas (Bull Run) Senators, Congressmen, Military Officers, Foreign Dignitaries and their Ladies rode out to Picnic and watch the Battle, eventually became panic route back to Washington. Lincoln Placed McClellan over the Army of the Potomac And Relieved him of Command after the Battle of Antietam For inactivity. Then Pope and Relieved Him after the defeat at the 2nd battle of Manassas. Then he

placed Burnside in command and relieved him The Defeat at Fredericksburg. And Then Back to McClellan to organize, equip and train after the demoralizing defeat at Fredericksburg.

Before deciding on the Emancipation Proclamation - Lincoln Had series decisions to be made, If the slaves are freed will that drive the remaining slave states still in the Union to the CSA. Another Option that Lincoln had favored for a long time was to Free the slaves, compensate the Owners and to provide passage to Haiti or Liberia for Colonization. The Big Question is how the remaining Slave States would respond.

Lastly, England and France were waiting for any justification to intervene on behalf of the confederacy. And the Emancipation Proclamation would probably keep them at bay.

Throughout all this Lincoln kept his head, showing that he was a capable and able Leader. He arguably one of the Great Presidents in American History.

Vol - IV-Covers the war year of 1863, This was the year that started the decline of the Confederacy, Starting with the defeat at Gettysburg by the Union Forces under the Command of General Meade, The surrender of Vicksburg by General Grant and giving Union Forces control of the Mississippi River Dividing The CSA in half. Also, The emancipation Proclamation freeing the Negro slaves in CSA controlled States, Allowing the Negro Freemen the right to serve in the Union Army. This added an increase to the Union Army by approximately 100,000 men that the CSA could not match, therefore, adding to their already Superiority in man power. In addition to all the above, was the Promotion Of Major General Grant to LT. General and his appointment of Commander of all Union forces in the field and direct control of the army of the Potomac, opposing General Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia. General Grants Appointment did Several things that secured eventual defeat and surrender of the southern forces: 1) It gave Lincoln's Army an aggressive commander that was dedicated to engaging and putting pressure on the Army of Northern Virginia. 2) Knowing that engaging his troops in combat would decrease the fighting Capability of Gen. Lee's Army by decreasing irreplaceable Manpower and War Materials Including Ammo, Cannons and rifles, Clothing and shoes that Gen. Lee's Army so dearly needed, That Grant had plenty of at his disposal. 3) Ceasing the policy of Prisoner exchange, Which denied the south of receiving additional Manpower and lost leadership.

After the defeat at Gettysburg caused the South to lose any chance of Recognition as a Nation and aide from England or France.

Vol IV also gives the reader an in-depth view of the Greatness and the many problems and crises that Pres. Lincoln had to overcome from, political enemies and pressures, of opportunists seeking federal jobs, Dealing with strikes by the American workers, also working and receiving help from states governors and still preserving state rights.

This book gave me more insight and respect for The Man President Lincoln was to the Nation as a hole, and was probably the only Man that was what needed to preserve the Union.

Vol. V - The war years 1864: If 1863 was the beginning of the end for the CSA, then 1864 was the year that the nails were being hammered in the coffin. This is the book that you really get a glimpse into the compassion and the political and intelligence, and the heavy burden of Abraham Lincoln. Even though he was nominated for re-election by his party, The elite of the party wanted him to bow out of the race. They thought that they couldn't win him. What they did not realize was that the people wanted him; especially the soldiers who were doing the fighting were solid behind him. Abraham Lincoln was one of the last American Presidents where the people had daily access to him. Lincoln fought for re-uniting the union, He once told an old friend that He came in without a policy, and he made decisions day by day. Citizens north and south came to plead for Presidential pardons for their loved ones or friends. To the dislike of the Secretary of war,

and the Generals in the fields, he would pardon someone who was to be executed without first seeking advice from the army leadership, He would read the record but he would in his own words try to find a reason. A congressman came in and asked for a pardon for a young soldier who was being executed for falling to sleep on guard duty; Lincoln exclaimed he had promised Secretary of war Stanton That he would not Pardon anyone else without consulting him. The congressman said you won't give him a pardon, he said I Didn't say that. Write the pardon yourself and sign it A. Lincoln. Not long after he left, Mr. Stanton Ran in and confronted the Pres. About Breaking His word and Mr. Lincoln responded that He did not sign a presidential pardon.

The first Battles that Gen. Grant Led against Gen Lee were in the Wilderness at Spotsylvania, Cold Harbor and Massive assaults on the defenses at Petersburg which were Defeats with more Union Losses than Gen. Lee had Troops. Grant Rcvd 25,000 replacement troops, Lee's Losses were irreplaceable. This where Grant Made the Controversial Decision to cease all prisoner exchanges, realizing that a captured soldier was as bit a loss as a KIA to the South, they could not be replaced. This was a tough decision giving that the horrible conditions that Grant was condemning union pow's in southern prisons. According to Mr. Sandburg 15 out of every union prisoner died in Confederate POW camps and 12 out of every 100 confederates died in union POW camps. Then Lee Sent Gen. Early out Thru the Shenandoah Valley Towards Wash. D.C. and was turned away just miles from the Capital. Sherman Defeated Hood in Georgia towards Atlanta. Sherman after taking Atlanta, Divided His Army and give Gen. Thomas 60,000 troops to hold Gen Hoods 40,000 men and Then himself start a thousand mile march to the sea, burning and depriving the south of all materials and food stuff and resources that would advance the starvation and strangling of the south to an early defeat, and the join Grant to Defeat Lee. During this time Gen. Thomas routed Gen Hoods army so thoroughly that they ceased to be an effective unit.

The Greatest Victory for the North in the year 1864 was the re-election of Abraham Lincoln as President of the United States and Andrew Johnson a southern Democrat as Vice President. That was the biggest blow to the south and the last nail to the coffin. How important was Lincoln being re-elected to the war effort? I will leave you with an excerpt from the book; "Then Sojourner Truth released her speech poem: "Mr. President when you first took your seat I feared you would be torn to pieces, for I likened you unto Daniel, who was thrown into the lions' den; and if the lions did not tear you into pieces, I knew it would be God that had saved you; and I said if He spared me I would see you before the four years expired and He has done so, and now I am here to see you for myself." He took the Little book that she had brought out, and as sojourner had phrased it, " The same hand that had signed the death-warrant of slavery signed as follows":

For Auntie Sojourner Truth,
Oct. 29th, 1864. A. Lincoln"

Vol. VI - Covers from January 1st, 1865 - Lincolns' burial in May, 1865. Lincoln is re-elected, and then is able to push the Thirteenth Amendment thru Congress for ratification from the states. Lincoln knows the end is near for the confederacy and is preparing for bringing the confederate states back in with as much leniency as he can or as lenient as the northern politicians will allow. Grant finally forces Lee to surrender at Appomattox Courthouse on April 9th, 1865, at the Victory speech the following night Lincoln's speech confounded the crowd and press because it wasn't what was expected, it was about leniency and healing and then he requested the band to play Dixie. April 14th, 1865 President Lincoln was shot by John Wilkes Booth in the head and the President died early the next morning. President Lincoln died they same day that Confederate Gen. Joseph Johnson surrendered the Army of Tennessee to Gen. Sherman. Lincoln's Assassination and death was not the great deed for the south as John Wilkes Booth imagined. It actually was the LAST NAIL in CSA coffin, and killed any chance for a lenient reconstruction. Pres. Johnson and especially Secretary of War Stanton wanted the south especially the Leaders to Pay dearly.

As he breathed his last breath, Mrs. Lincoln cried out Oh My GOD!! I have given my husband to die. Over the worn features had come, wrote John Hay, "A look of unspeakable peace." Stanton it was said Afterward, pronounced the words: "Now He belongs to the Ages." And wrongly some accounts said he said "Now He Belongs to the Angels."

I will end This with Two excerpts from the book:

1) Reports have been published that the face in the coffin was shrunken and decayed to such an extent that perhaps good taste should prevent further exposure of it to public gaze. The embalmer on the train had several times by his craft wrought improvement. However this might be, there came from Toledo an old friend and a valued comforter of Lincoln, David R. Locke, who wrote under the pen name Petroleum V. Nasby. He wrote now: "I saw him, or what was mortal of him in the coffin. The face had an expression of absolute content, of relief, at throwing off a burden such as few men have been called upon to bear - a burden which few men could have borne. I had seen the same expression on his living face only a few times, when, after a great calamity, he had come to a great victory. It was the look of a worn man suddenly relieved. Wilkes Booth did Abraham Lincoln the greatest service man could possibly do for him - he gave him peace."

2) Bishop Mathew Simpson in a moving oration spoke as an interpreter and foreteller: There are moments which involve in themselves eternities. There are instants to contain germs which shall develop and bloom forever. Such a moment came in the tide of time to our land when a question must be settled, affecting all the powers of the earth. The contest was for human freedom . Not for the republic merely, not for the union simply, but to decide whether the people, as a people, in thier entire majesty, were destined to be the Governments or whether to be subjects to tyrants or aristocrats, or to class rule of any kind. This is the great question for which we have been fighting, and its decision is at hand, and the result of this contest will affect the ages to come. If Successful republics will spread spite of monarchs all over this earth." And then came from the people, exclamations of Amen!!!

The real Crime is that it was over a hundred years with the signing of the civil rights bill by LBJ in 1968 for Lincolns' Thirteenth amendment to become an actuality and with the Election of Obama for President in 2008.

Karen says

This such a great book, and it made me fall in love with Mr. Lincoln.

Curtiss says

A superb one-volume version of Sandburg's six-volume biography of our most cherished and beloved president; from "The Prairie Years" of Lincoln's youth in Kentucky and Illinois, training himself in the law, and in practical, frontier politics, to his successful bid for the presidency during the bitter and divisive 1860

campaign; and finally the enormous challenges he confronted during "The War Years" of his presidency.

Aside from the personality and character of Lincoln himself, who literally and figuratively towered over his contemporaries, other figures who stand out among the statesmen and leaders of that era include: Stephen A. Douglas, William T. Sherman, Ulysses S. Grant, and Robert E. Lee, all men of outstanding moral and physical courage and personal integrity.

Watching the trailers and promotional commercials for the recent movie "Lincoln", I was a bit alarmed at one scene in which Daniel Day-Lewis as Lincoln shakes his fist at his advisers and asserts: "I am the President of the United States; endowed with *enormous* power..." , which seemed to be out-of-character for Lincoln as Sandburg depicts him - that is, until, low and behold, I reached the part of the book in which Sandburg describes Lincoln as using those very words to demonstrate his authority and to encourage his advisers to see to it that the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery was passed.

Good for Carl Sandburg, Steven Spielberg - and Mr. Lincoln!

Bwmson says

I wanted to learn more about Lincoln....and this book delivered. Wonderful writing with plenty of detail.
