

The *Eastland*

Sandburg, Carl, 1878-1967

Let's be honest now
For a couple of minutes
Even though we're in Chicago.

Since you ask me about it,
I let you have it straight;
My guts ain't ticklish about the *Eastland*.

It was a hell of a job, of course
To dump 2,500 people in their clean picnic clothes
All ready for a whole lot of real fun
Down into the dirty Chicago river without any warning.

Women and kids, wet hair and scared faces,
The coroner hauling truckloads of the dripping dead
To the Second Regiment armory where doctors waited
With useless pulmotors and the eight hundred motionless stiff
Lay ready for their relatives to pick them out on the floor
And take them home and call up the undertaker. . .

Well I was saying
My guts ain't ticklish about it.
I got imagination: I see a pile of three thousand dead people
Killed by the con, tuberculosis, too much work and not enough fresh air and green groceries . . .

A lot of cheap roughnecks and the women and children of wops, and hardly any bankers and
corporation lawyers or their kids, die from the con-three thousand a year in Chicago and a
hundred and fifty thousand a year in the United States-all from the con and not enough
fresh air and green groceries...

If you want to see excitement, more noise and crying than you ever heard in one of these big
disasters the newsboys clean up on,
Go and stack in a high pile all the babies that die in Christian Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and
Chicago in one year before aforesaid babies haven't had enough good milk;
On top the pile put all the little early babies pulled from mothers willing to be torn with abortions
rather than bring more children into the world--

Jesus, that would make a front page picture for the Sunday papers

And you could write under it:
Morning glories

Born from the soil of love,
Yet now perished.

Have you ever stood and watched the kids going to work of a morning? White faces, skinny legs
and arms, slouching along rubbing the sleep out of their eyes on the go to hold their jobs?

Can you imagine a procession of all the whores of a big town, marching and marching with painted
faces and mocking struts, all the women who sleep in faded hotels and furnished rooms
with any man coming along with a dollar or five dollars?

Or all the structural iron workers, railroad men and factory hands in mass formation with stubs of
arms and stumps of legs, bodies broken and hacked while bosses yelled, "Speed-no
slack- go to it!"?

Or two by two all the girls and women who go to the hind doors of restaurants and through the
alleys and on the market street digging into the garbage barrels to get scraps of stuff to eat?

By the living Christ, these would make disaster pictures to paste on the front pages of the
newspapers.

Yes, the *Eastland* was a dirty bloody job--bah!

I see a dozen *Eastlands*

Every morning on my way to work

And a dozen more going home at night.