

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

Sonnet

ANONYMOUS

This sonnet was published anonymously in The New York Herald in 1937 during the dark days of the Great Depression. It opens in imitation of Wordsworth's poem, "London 1802," which begins, "Milton! Thou shouldst be living at this hour: England hath need of thee." Why does the poet call upon Lincoln? Why is he—and not some other American hero like Washington—needed at this particular hour? What is the "Spirit of Lincoln," and how can the poem's readers invoke that spirit? Is that same spirit needed today?

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Lincoln, thou shouldst be living at this hour:
Son of the soil, brother of poverty
Those hard sharers of great destiny;
Exemplar of humility and power,
Walking alone to meet thy waiting fate
Whose shadow was reflected on thy brow,
Lincoln, thy people invoke thy spirit now—
Preserve, protect, defend our sovereign state!
Lover of justice and the common good,
Despiser of lies, from thy yonder solitude
Consider the land of thine and freedom's birth—
Cry out: It shall not perish from the earth!
Engrave upon our hearts that holy vow.
Spirit of Lincoln, thy country needs thee now.