

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

Lincoln Monument: Washington

LANGSTON HUGHES

Langston Hughes (1902–67), widely known as a leader of the 1920s Harlem Renaissance, brought the African American struggle for civil rights into the public sphere with his novels, plays, and poems. This poem, published in 1926, pays tribute to Lincoln at a time when Washington, DC was still a segregated city.

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Why does the poet call Lincoln “Old Abe,” and why is he described as “quiet”? What is the “voice” the poet hears “Against the / Timeless walls,” and what do you think this voice says? What is the role of time in this poem? Why does Hughes (over-)emphasize the years during which the Memorial has been standing? How is the voice heard against the wall of the Memorial “timeless”?

Let's go see Old Abe
Sitting in the marble and the moonlight,
Sitting lonely in the marble and the moonlight,
Quiet for ten thousand centuries, old Abe.
Quiet for a million, million years.

Quiet—

And yet a voice forever
Against the
Timeless walls
Of time—
Old Abe.