



Mount Rushmore National Memorial is located in the Black Hills of western South Dakota. The spectacular granite sculpture features the busts of four outstanding Presidents—the selection of which was purely the decision of sculptor Gutzon Borglum. George Washington’s likeness was intended to symbolize founding of the new American nation and self-governance, independent of Great Britain. The image of Thomas Jefferson was meant to represent America’s democratic political philosophy and the first great period of expansion, when the United States purchased Louisiana from France. Borglum reasoned Abraham Lincoln’s portrait would represent preservation of the Union (his paramount purpose for fighting the Civil War) and freedom for all people residing in the United States. Theodore Roosevelt appears as emblematic of America’s global responsibilities (brought on by the late 1800s expansionist era) and his devoted conservation of the West. No man-made accomplishment exalts America’s glorification of bigness and technology in grander fashion—during the historical era perhaps most associated with colossus—than the “Shrine of Democracy.” Each head is approximately 60 feet tall, which according to scale would compute to a human of some 465 feet in height! Borglum’s stone masterpiece rises more than 500 feet above the valley. President Calvin Coolidge was present to christen the work in August of 1927. Borglum himself was hoisted up the cliff to remove the first pieces of rock. Carving was accomplished through controlled blasting with dynamite (scheduled twice daily) and laborious drilling using pneumatic hammers. Workers were often suspended hundreds of feet above ground. [Dangerous work it was, but surprisingly, not a single casualty occurred among the nearly 400 workers during the entire construction process spanning 14 years!](#) The last details of Mount Rushmore were completed in late 1941, seven months after Borglum’s death, by his son Lincoln. Years later, several of the crew members would unfortunately succumb to silicosis, a condition of dust accumulation in the lungs, attributed to their Mount Rushmore labor.