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# Historical Memory of Mount Rushmore

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HISTORICAL MEMORY OF MOUNT RUSHMORE

by

Justin J. Mayer  
Bachelor of Science, Northern State University, 2007

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of


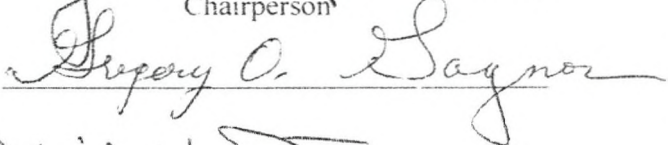
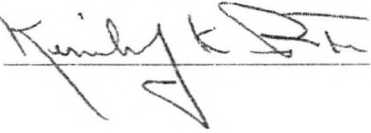
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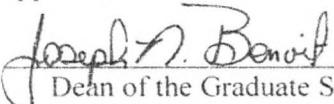
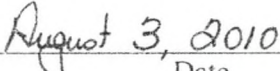
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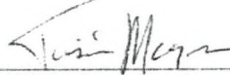
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To my Grandparents and of course,

Jennie

## ABSTRACT

The Mount Rushmore National Memorial in the Black Hills of South Dakota has differing economic, cultural, political and religious meanings. Particularly, an American or “white” interpretation and the interpretations of the Sioux Nation. These different perspectives of Mount Rushmore reveal more about the history of the Black Hills of South Dakota and how cultures redefine events to meet contemporary needs. This thesis examines the original intentions for the Mount Rushmore National Memorial and traces how the monument was described to others during construction. An examination of presidential speeches and remarks made about Mount Rushmore during construction helps discern one political perspective of Mount Rushmore. This work analyzes the historical significance of the United States’ illegal taking of the Black Hills and how it has impacted notions of Mount Rushmore. The different religious interpretations and beliefs of the Black Hills also factor into the historical memory of Mount Rushmore. Mount Rushmore also has unintended consequences like the construction of the Crazy Horse Memorial and the litigation over the illegal taking of the Black Hills that impact the differing political and religious meanings of the Black Hills. The legacies of Mount Rushmore are further understood through looking at the historical context and issues that generate the historical memory of the “Shrine of Democracy.”



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Before construction began on the Mount Rushmore National Memorial in 1927 President Calvin Coolidge declared “the people of the future will see history and art combined to portray the spirit of patriotism.”<sup>1</sup> The original idea for Mount Rushmore was merely suggested as a tourist attraction in the Black Hills of South Dakota, not as a national “Shrine of Democracy.” Tracing the development of Mount Rushmore from a modest idea in 1923 to the abrupt work stoppage in October 1941 reveals how Mount Rushmore was ascribed certain meanings and what these particular meanings or perspectives ultimately came to symbolize. In 1927 Coolidge was referring to American patriotism as it would soon be displayed in the granite carved presidential busts on Mount Rushmore. However, the subsequent physical construction of the colossal monument and competing land claims to the region have revealed different symbolic notions of the “spirit of patriotism” in a culturally contested region as well as contestations over land claims in the Black Hills.

The story of the Mount Rushmore National Memorial includes land claims issues. Ever since the United States acquired the Black Hills region from the Sioux Nation in

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<sup>1</sup> Calvin Coolidge, “Mount Rushmore,” At the Opening of Work on Rushmore Mountain in the Black Hills, 10 August 1927, [http://www.calvin-coolidge.org/html/mount\\_rushmore\\_.html](http://www.calvin-coolidge.org/html/mount_rushmore_.html) (November 18, 2008).

1877, the validity of the United States' claim to the land has been in question.<sup>2</sup> The United States specifically sought out the Black Hills region for its abundant resources and removed the area from the Great Sioux Reservation in 1877. The project that ultimately resulted in Mount Rushmore began in the 1920s as a tourist destination in western South Dakota. The idea for a monument in the Black Hills came from South Dakota State Historical Society Superintendent Doane Robinson. Robinson's original intentions for Mount Rushmore are a part of the efforts to convince the public for a monument in the Black Hills. Turning to the existing literature on Mount Rushmore helps identify the context of Robinson's original intentions as well the other prominent individuals associated with the creation of Mount Rushmore.

Historical scholarship about Mount Rushmore first appeared a decade after construction on the monument ceased. The existing scholarship emphasizes the history of the monument: from the idea to create a sculpture in the Black Hills to biographies of the monument's infamous sculptor, Gutzon Borglum.<sup>3</sup> Absent from existing Mount Rushmore scholarship is a focus on the relationship between the monument's history and how the original creators of the project tried to sell the monument to the public. How

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<sup>2</sup> I refer to the Sioux Nation as the political entity comprising of Tetons who speak the Lakota dialect and the Yanktons and Yanktonias who speak the Dakota dialect. The Sioux Nation is subdivided politically with the Tetons having seven Lakota speaking tribes: Oglalas, Brulés, Minneconjous, Sans Arcs, Two Kettles, Sisasapas, Hunkpapas. The Dakota speaking includes: Mdewakantons, Wahpetens, Wahpekutes, and Sissetons.

<sup>3</sup> Gilbert C. Fite, *Mount Rushmore*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1952), Rex Alan Smith, *The Carving of Mount Rushmore* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985), Howard Shaff and Audrey Karl Shaff, *Six Wars at a Time: The Life and Times of Gutzon Borglum, Sculptor of Mount Rushmore* (Darien: Permelia Publishing, 1985), Jesse Lerner, *Mount Rushmore: An Icon Reconsidered*, (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press/Nation Books, 2002), John Taliaferro, *Great White Fathers: The Story of the Obsessive Quest to Create Mount Rushmore*, (New York: PublicAffairs, 2002).

Robinson and Borglum, as well help from others, presented their ideas for a monument in the Black Hills uncovers how the monument has been originally thought of and presented to others. The Mount Rushmore National Memorial has attached meanings from different cultures and different perspectives that both tell more about the memorial itself and United States history. It is useful to study the Mount Rushmore National Memorial because the process behind the creation of the memorial reveals more about the history of the Black Hills and United States.

The history of Mount Rushmore includes how Robinson and Borglum wanted Americans to view the monument. One way to address how Robinson and Borglum presented their ideas for the monument to others is to recognize the monument's public or historical memory.<sup>4</sup> Mount Rushmore was constructed with a distinct perspective on United States history and the Black Hills' place within the nation as understood in the 1920s. One of the perspectives on United States history and the Black Hills' place within the nation came from the original supporters of Mount Rushmore. A look into the correspondence between Robinson and Borglum reveals their perspective for Mount Rushmore and how it began creating historical memories of Mount Rushmore.

Robinson wrote a letter to Gutzon Borglum in 1924 seeking his interest in creating a sculpture in the Black Hills. Borglum was a nationally recognized artist who

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<sup>4</sup> The relationship between history and memory has broad definitions. Geoffrey Cubitt's remarks on the nature of the discourse between history and memory help contextualize the utility of history and memory when he writes, "the terms 'history' and 'memory' are coupled and uncoupled are complex in their significance, partly because the terms carry multiple meanings simultaneously." The virtue of memory for historians is that "it helps us to explore and to analyze the complex processes by which the past invests the consciousness of the present in human societies." 62. Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

possessed the skills to create the sculpture Robinson envisioned. This 1924 letter led to the fundamental alteration of the Black Hills' natural landscape. Robinson conveyed to Borglum his intentions for sculpture in the Black Hills: "In the vicinity of Harney Peak, in the Black Hills of South Dakota are opportunities for heroic sculpture of unusual character."<sup>5</sup> Borglum took the opportunity to create a sculpture of the most "unusual character" that has not only ensured Borglum's place in history as an exceptional artist, but his grandiose sculpture has forever shaped the public memories of Mount Rushmore and the different cultures who have a claim to the Black Hills.

Robinson's idea for sculpture in the Black Hills created the new historical context for the Black Hills: the massive sculpture soon appeared in the natural landscape of the region and ultimately created a new site of memory and meaning for the United States and the Sioux Nation. Robinson and Borglum's initial efforts created one set of interpretations for Mount Rushmore. Part of the perspectives of Mount Rushmore as represented through the efforts of Robinson and Borglum focuses on the presidential commemoration that Borglum wanted displayed in granite. This focus can be explained through Benjamin Hufbauer's work on presidential commemoration: "Presidential memorials can be nodal points for the negotiation of who we are as a people and where we are going, politically and culturally."<sup>6</sup>

The history of Mount Rushmore's differing perspectives is significant not just to the monument itself but also to the larger, often contested, historical memories and

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<sup>5</sup> Doane Robinson to Gutzon Borglum, August 20, 1924, Doane Robinson Manuscript Collection, South Dakota State Archives, Pierre, SD.

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin Hufbauer, *Presidential Temples: How Memorials and Libraries Shape Public Memory*, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2008), 7.

meanings of the Black Hills region. Mount Rushmore is located in a culturally contested region once owned and occupied by Indian tribes, the last being the Sioux Nation. The Sioux Nation's "sale" of the Black Hills to the United States in 1877 is when the region officially acquired two competing land claims from two distinct cultures.<sup>7</sup> The contested perspectives of the Black Hills region are a part of Mount Rushmore's history as it reveals more about the history of tourism in the American West and American Indian land claims. Furthermore, studying the initial intentions behind Mount Rushmore offers historians a stronger understanding of the different perspectives of the monument and expands the scope of historical understanding of Mount Rushmore and the Black Hills region. Understanding the different interpretations of Mount Rushmore will better help explain Coolidge's "spirit of patriotism" and decipher how Americans have attempted to remember the past in a contested region. Missing from the existing literature about the history of Mount Rushmore is an attempt to integrate the different narratives that combine to tell how Mount Rushmore has been remembered and by whom. The narratives that best shape the history of Mount Rushmore come from the historiographic bodies of the history of the Black Hills, the history of Sioux land claims, the histories of Mount Rushmore, and the processes that created notions of Mount Rushmore and their significance to the Black Hills.

### **The History of the Black Hills**

Histories of the Black Hills in general have focused on the region existing as a

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<sup>7</sup> For a comprehensive understanding of the history of the competing land claims in the Black Hills see Edward Lazarus, *Black Hills White Justice* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991) and Wald Worster, *Under Western Skies: Nature and History in the American West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

resourceful place long before United States ownership. The natural resources of the Black Hills vary from timber, big game, and gold. The United States officially acquired land rights to the Black Hills in 1877. The Act of February 28, 1877 redefined the boundaries of the Great Sioux Reservation to exclude the Black Hills from Sioux Nation control.<sup>8</sup> The first historical works on the Black Hills were published soon after United States acquisition. Annie Tallent (1899), the self-acclaimed first white woman to enter the region, wrote *The Black Hills: or The Last Hunting Grounds of the Dakotas*. Tallent's history of the Black Hills pointed out that the 1874 confirmation of gold by the Custer Expedition and subsequent gold rush in the Black Hills was the primary event that shaped the future of the region.<sup>9</sup> Rodman Paul's (1963) *Mining Frontiers of the Far West, 1848-1880* and Watson Parker's (1982) *Gold in the Black Hills* each offer more insight to the Black Hills gold rush of 1874. Events such as the gold rush sparked national interest in terms of tourism to the Black Hills. The growing number of visitors to the Black Hills shaped the region as a tourist destination. Historian Suzanne Barta Julin (2009) looked at the history of Black Hills tourism in *A Marvelous Hundred Square Miles: Black Hills Tourism 1880 - 1941*. Julin pointed out that Black Hills tourism set up a "vital regional industry."<sup>10</sup> The attractions of the Black Hills have lured tourists before the United States owned the region. The time period Julin looked at included a

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<sup>8</sup> Charles J. Kappler, *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties Vol. I*. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), 169-172. Article I redrew the boundaries of the Great Sioux Reservation, carving out the Black Hills region so that the "said Indians do hereby relinquish cede to the United States all the territory lying outside the said reservation."

<sup>9</sup> Annie D. Tallent, *The Black Hills: or The Last Hunting Grounds of The Dakotas* (1899; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1975), 116.

<sup>10</sup> Suzanne Barta Julin, *A Marvelous Hundred Square Miles: Black Hills Tourism 1880 - 1941* (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2009), 39.

unique political milieu that is important to defining what the Black Hills means and to whom.

The political milieu of the Black Hills during the gold rush was depicted by Howard Roberts Lamar's (1956) *Dakota Territory 1861-1889*. Themes of lawlessness within the region from incoming non-Indians characterized the region. The United States' interest in the Black Hills happened when the Black Hills was still part the Dakota Territory: eventually the region entered the Union within the borders of South Dakota. All along, the Sioux Nation had claim to the Black Hills as the region was set aside as part of the Great Sioux Reservation. Therefore issues of land ownership quickly came to the forefront in the Black Hills.

Since the Mount Rushmore National Memorial is located within the Black Hills, it is a part of the issues of land ownership that confront much of Black Hills and American West history. The actual process behind constructing Mount Rushmore reveals not just an interesting narrative about the monument itself, but rather how Robinson and Borglum established their perspectives of Mount Rushmore and how they contribute to the larger meaning of a national memorial. In the case of Mount Rushmore, I am concerned with the genesis of two political perspectives of the monument: one considered an American or "white" perspective and the other being an Indian perspective that began with the Sioux Nation's relationship and one-time ownership of the Black Hills.

### **History of Sioux Land Claims in the Black Hills**

In 1875, after an exploratory expedition confirmed the existence of gold in the Black Hills, the United States responded to demands from its citizens by deciding to purchase Indian title to the Black Hills as the simplest way to deal with the issue of land

ownership. The goal for the United States was an outright purchase of the Black Hills from the Sioux Nation. The methods used by the United States to officially acquire the Black Hills have been contested over time. In the treaties of 1851 and 1861 the United States recognized Sioux claim to Black Hills. The United States originally recognized the Black Hills as a part of the Great Sioux Nation. It was upon discovery of natural resources that the United States revised previous treaty agreements to exclude the Black Hills region from Sioux Nation control by using illegal methods that violated previous treaty agreements.

The Sioux Nation has claimed that they did not receive just compensation for the forced relinquishment of the Black Hills.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the Sioux Nation also claimed that the Black Hills were unjustly taken from their control in the first place.<sup>12</sup> The legal battles that have been decided have not officially settled the Black Hills land claim.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, I: 170. The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 appropriated annuities for all the Sioux. Robert Utley's *The Last Days of the Sioux Nation* noted how insufficient the annuities were: "appropriations rarely provided the full amount guaranteed." 21-23. The Act of February 28, 1877 continued U.S. compensation for the Sioux's loss of the Black Hills: "In consideration of the foregoing cession of territory and rights, and upon full compliance with each and every obligation assumed by the said Indians, the United States does agree to provide all necessary aid to assist the said Indians in the work of civilization; to furnish them schools and instruction in mechanical and agriculture arts, as provided for by the treaty of 1868." Important to this story is the fact that the U.S. threatened to cut off rations if the Sioux did not sign the agreement to sell the Black Hills. The dependency of the Sioux Nation upon appropriated goods is the epitome of U.S. colonialism. For a comprehensive understanding of colonialism see Jeffery Ostler, *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee* (Cambridge: University Press, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Lazarus, *Black Hills White Justice*, 119-120. Ostler, *The Plains Sioux*, 8.

<sup>13</sup> Lazarus is a lawyer and the son of Arthur Lazarus, principal attorney for the Sioux in the 1980 U.S. Supreme Court case, *United States v. Sioux Nation of Indians*. He states his relation to the Black Hills legal history in the introduction and his unique vantage point that he wrote from. Lazarus is not a historian or a legal historian yet his connection with the intricate history of the Black Hills legal claim makes his account



The backdrop of a legally contested region applies complexity and uniqueness to the history of Mount Rushmore and the Black Hills and how it has been remembered.

However, the land acquisition issues are only a part of the historical context of the Black Hills. Religious issues about the Black Hills are also paramount to the history of the region.

Sioux litigants have argued that the Black Hills have been claimed to have significant spiritual meaning for the Sioux Nation and Indians from neighboring tribes. Existing accounts have documented the Sioux Nation's sacred ceremonies that were performed in the Black Hills that further explain the tribe's spiritual value of the region.<sup>14</sup> Nicholas Black Elk spoke of the spiritual and cultural value of the Black Hills in *Black Elk Speaks*.<sup>15</sup> Some scholars have argued that the "sacred" claim to the Black Hills is a 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon because "the Sioux needed new arguments in their fight to regain them."<sup>16</sup>

Historian Donald Worster analyzed the "sacredness" claim of the Black Hills, outlining the public debates over the sanctity of the land for the Sioux Nation. He argued

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useful inasmuch as he attempted to organize all the developments in the legal aspects of the Black Hills and researched his father's work. Nevertheless he alluded to an essential truth of the Black Hills claim in that the Sioux Nation's refusal to accept awarded monetary compensation for the Black Hills coincides with their cultural belief that the Black Hills were not for sale in the first place.

<sup>14</sup> Fools Crow, Thomas E. Mails, and D. Chief Eagle, *Fools Crow* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 207-214; Lazarus, *Black Hills White Justice*, and Ostler, *The Plains Sioux* all include notions of the Black Hills' sacredness to the Sioux. For better geographical understanding of the region's sacredness to Indians see Linea Sundstrom, "Mirror of Heaven: Cross-Cultural Transference of the Sacred Geography of the Black Hills," *World Archaeology* 28, no. 2 (Oct. 1996): 177-189.

<sup>15</sup> Nicholas Black Elk as told through John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1932), 49-50, 100-102.

<sup>16</sup> Ostler, *The Plains Sioux*, 58.

meaning of the 'Shrine of Democracy.'"<sup>22</sup> Glass was critical of the differences in interpretation of the Black Hills' sacredness. His critique concluded that interpretations of Mount Rushmore contained characteristics "of twentieth-century American political ideologies."<sup>23</sup> Glass's work has alluded to key understandings of the Black Hills' sacredness while paying attention to the historical context of Mount Rushmore, a context that has predominately symbolized one specific notion of America's prosperity. The spiritual value of the Black Hills to the Sioux Nation adds another layer of complexity to the history of Mount Rushmore. While Mount Rushmore contains spiritual meanings for many cultures, in the context of the Black Hills and Sioux Nation, Mount Rushmore itself is nowhere close to a sacred memorial. Turning to the intentions behind Mount Rushmore will help explain how two different political and religious perspectives of the Black Hills reveals more about Mount Rushmore.

### **Histories of Mount Rushmore**

Gilbert C. Fite published the first scholarly history of Mount Rushmore in 1952 and argued that that Mount Rushmore is "one of the outstanding cultural and political achievements produced in the United States."<sup>24</sup> Fite's study traced the inception of the project and provided a deep look into the difficulties of starting and finishing the project. *Mount Rushmore* focused on the voices of the key individuals like South Dakota State Historical Society Superintendent Doane Robinson and revealed his determination to see

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<sup>22</sup> Matthew Glass, "'Alexanders All': Symbols of Conquest and Resistance at Mount Rushmore," in *American Sacred Space*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 152.

<sup>23</sup> Glass, *American Sacred Space*, 179.

<sup>24</sup> Fite, *Mount Rushmore*, vii.

that the "sacredness" claim from the Sioux Nation was a modern day appeal to churchgoing Americans to muster sympathy for an outright return of the Black Hills.<sup>17</sup> Worster's argument is based upon his reasoning when he analyzed the "sacredness" claim. Worster argued that the Lakota's ideas of "sacredness" of Black Hills has (1) changed over time, (2) therefore signifying different beliefs "on fundamental principles."<sup>18</sup> Worster then pointed out a lack of nineteenth century references from any members of the Sioux Nation regarding the Black Hills, in any capacity, as sacred being crucial to his conclusions.<sup>19</sup> While Worster analyzed the merits of the "sacredness" claim as used by the Sioux Nation for an outright return of the Black Hills, he ultimately acknowledged, "the Black Hills, or some significant portion of them, should be returned to the Lakota people."<sup>20</sup> Worster largely based, rightfully so, his bold claim on the questionable United States acquisition of the Black Hills. While Worster was right in pointing out that the Sioux Nation's "sacredness" claim does not hold enough merit as the tipping point to justify an outright return of the Black Hills, his discussion over the validity of the Sioux Nation's "sacredness" of the Black Hills has utility when determining Mount Rushmore's differing political meanings and overall significance to the Black Hills and United States.<sup>21</sup> Even with the differing degrees of the Black Hills' sanctity in question, it still remains important to know that the region is indeed sacred.

Matthew Glass wrote a chapter in *American Sacred Space* specifically addressing Mount Rushmore that examined "the tensions arising out of various efforts to fix the

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<sup>17</sup> Worster, *Under Western Skies*, chap. 8, 136.

<sup>18</sup> Worster, *Under Western Skies*, 137.

<sup>19</sup> Worster, *Under Western Skies*, 142-143.

<sup>20</sup> Worster, *Under Western Skies*, 153.

<sup>21</sup> Worster, *Under Western Skies*, 152.

the creation of “such a landmark.”<sup>25</sup> Fite’s contribution to the historiography of the monument came with a nationalistic tone that has carried over into later Mount Rushmore scholarship.<sup>26</sup> Work on the monument stopped in 1941 and Fite completed an initial history of Mount Rushmore that encompassed the funding difficulties of the project through the Great Depression as well as an insight into the sculptor who started work on the project, Gutzon Borglum.<sup>27</sup> Since Fite’s narrative, the historiography of the monument has broadened in scope and perspective.

Rex Alan Smith completed a history of Mount Rushmore in 1985 that focused more on the personalities of those who were associated with the project. Smith simply mirrored Fite’s history of Mount Rushmore. Smith argued that Mount Rushmore is “not only America’s greatest most enduring monument, it is all of mankind’s as well.”<sup>28</sup> Yet as Smith pointed out, the history of Mount Rushmore “is a complex story of men and their times—of unusual men and unusual times.”<sup>29</sup> While Smith may have been correct to assert that the history of Mount Rushmore is complex and unusual, he neglected the role of the contested political meanings of Mount Rushmore in defining what the

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<sup>25</sup> Fite, *Mount Rushmore*, 9. For whatever reason, Fite’s narrative does have specific foot/endnotes in his narrative. This quotation from Doane Robinson was similar to the rhetoric used to promote the idea of a sculpture in the Black Hills. Robinson did not just envision a sculpture, but rather something exceptional that would last for generations.

<sup>26</sup> For a better understanding of the role of nationalism see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991). American nationalism is a theme expressed throughout the historiography of Mount Rushmore.

<sup>27</sup> Fite contributed most of the monument’s potential legacy to the strong personality of Borglum who was determined to create a colossal work of art that would represent his achievements in a distinctly American sense. Fite wrote, “His sculpture would show succeeding generations of men that American society had reached an apex, a high point of material greatness.” 237-238.

<sup>28</sup> Smith, *The Carving of Mount Rushmore*, 13.

<sup>29</sup> Smith, *The Carving of Mount Rushmore*, 15.

monument truly means and to whom. More recent works on Mount Rushmore have begun to evaluate the role of different historical perspectives of Mount Rushmore.

Most certainly Smith intended his work on Mount Rushmore for those who shared his same exceptional view of Mount Rushmore. Smith included very little on the history of the Black Hills' previous inhabitants and their claim to the land.<sup>30</sup> Smith's lack of attention to the Sioux Nation was not continued in John Taliaferro's account of Mount Rushmore history. *Great White Fathers* acknowledged, "Rushmore, needless to say, means different things to different people."<sup>31</sup> Taliaferro's work was the first history that viewed Mount Rushmore as something other than a grand patriotic memorial and simply as a memorial worthy of national praise and admiration. Taliaferro acknowledged the unique location of the Mount Rushmore National Memorial in a contested region: an understanding that is fundamental to Mount Rushmore's history and subsequent interpretations. Taliaferro's story included irony and glimpses of humor in the history of Mount Rushmore and the Black Hills as well as a biographical look into Borglum, often pointing out the sculptor's personal prejudices.<sup>32</sup> Ultimately, Taliaferro's work has helped pave the way for a more in-depth analysis of the political meanings of Mount Rushmore that will ultimately contribute to a deeper historical understanding of the political meanings of the monument.

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<sup>30</sup> Smith, *The Carving of Mount Rushmore*, 98-104. This chapter, "The Chosen Stone" also one the shortest chapter's in the book, outlined how the location for the sculpture were selected.

<sup>31</sup> Taliaferro, *Great White Fathers*, 2.

<sup>32</sup> Taliaferro, *Great White Fathers*, 3-4, 185-195. Chapter 8, "A Rock and a Hard Place" looked at what Fite and Smith overlooked, Borglum's membership in the Ku Klux Klan. For another biographical account of Borglum that directly addressed his Klan membership see Howard Shaff and Audrey Karl Shaff, *Six Wars at a Time*.

The stories told in *Great White Fathers* have opened the doors for a study of the historical memory of Mount Rushmore. Taliaferro's critical account of Borgulm and Robinson's dream has left a void for placing different groups' intentions of Mount Rushmore in historical context that originates with the intentions of Mount Rushmore. Central to the history of Mount Rushmore is the monument's environmental existence in nature or "the human place in nature."<sup>33</sup> Since historical memory includes both the past and present conceptions, Mount Rushmore's physical existence in nature must be considered in any attempt to understand the monument's historical memory.

Acknowledging Mount Rushmore's place in nature will prevent any undermining of the monument's innate center of existence.<sup>34</sup> The fact that Mount Rushmore is located in the heart of the Sioux Nation's *Paha Sapa*, a region highly valued by the Sioux, affects the different political meanings of Mount Rushmore for all who have resided in the Black Hills. Cultures interpret differently a monument that was intended to represent such powerful cultural themes. Tracing how Mount Rushmore is remembered with all of its historical contexts such as the American interpretation and the differing interpretation from the Sioux Nation will reveal more about how cultures redefine historical events to meet contemporary needs.

Journalist Jesse Lerner's *Mount Rushmore: An Icon Revisited* critiqued modern understandings of Mount Rushmore.<sup>35</sup> While Lerner was critical of Mount Rushmore's history, his negative tone suggested more of a personal distaste for the purely patriotic

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<sup>33</sup> William Cronon, "Modes of Prophecy and Production: Placing Nature in History." *The Journal of American History* 72, no. 4 (March 1990): 1122-1131, 1131.

<sup>34</sup> Don Scheese, "Thoreau's *Journal*: The Creation of a Sacred Place." in *Mapping American Culture*, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), 147.

<sup>35</sup> Lerner, *Mount Rushmore: An Icon Reconsidered*, 359.

interpretation of Mount Rushmore rather than a serious scholarly contribution to the historiography, as he often pointed out the “ironic light” of the Rushmore story.<sup>36</sup> Clamoring for a more inclusive history of Mount Rushmore, as Lerner did, is certainly a welcome notion if one could follow through with such a contribution. Lerner’s work is useful to the debates about Mount Rushmore inasmuch as he called for a more complete representation of Mount Rushmore history. The different interpretations of Mount Rushmore that Lerner would like to promote can be found through studying how Mount Rushmore gained different interpretations in the first place. These different interpretations show how the notion of Mount Rushmore has changed over time. More importantly, however, none of these Mount Rushmore scholars has adequately addressed the role that competing land claims in the region has played in creating the different political meanings of the monument.

### **Memory and Mount Rushmore**

In order to address the intentions for Mount Rushmore and its subsequent meanings, one must consider the role of public memory and how memory contributes to the differing perspectives of Mount Rushmore. The broad historiographic themes that Mount Rushmore fits into, such as memory studies, can be summed up with David Thelen’s definition of the historical study of memory: “Memory, private and individual as much as collective and cultural, is constructed, not reproduced...this construction is not made in isolation but in conversations with others that occur in the contexts of community, broader politics, and social dynamics.”<sup>37</sup> The role of public memory within

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Lerner, *Mount Rushmore: An Icon Reconsidered*, 20.

David Thelen, “Memory and American History.” *The Journal of American*

Mount Rushmore exists in two different historical and political contexts: an American context and an Indian context. The memories have meanings in the past and present and consist of distinct cultural comprehensions of the past.<sup>38</sup> Tracing the history of these two different groups' perceptions of Mount Rushmore requires a look into the "transmission, diffusion, and, ultimately, the meaning of this representation" to acquire an understanding of Mount Rushmore's different political and cultural meanings.<sup>39</sup>

Specific work on public memory of monuments in the United States West helps guide this particular study. Paul Scolari's dissertation, "Indian Warriors and Pioneer Mothers: American Identity and the Closing of the Frontier in Public Monuments, 1890 -- 1930" asserted that "in reanimating public monuments by explaining how they came to be, we enliven the people and communities for whom monuments were an important focus of public life."<sup>40</sup> Scolari based his study of monuments in the United States West upon the similar opposing perspectives that are useful in discerning Mount Rushmore's public meaning. Also like Scolari, my study looks at the process of commemorating Mount Rushmore and what that process unveils about Mount Rushmore's opposing

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*History* 75, no. 4 (March 1989): 1117-11129, 1119. Thelen also provided a definition of how memory is created: "Memory begins when something in the present stimulates an association." 1120.

<sup>38</sup> Pierre Nora, "Between History and Memory: *Les Lieux de Memoire*," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 7-8; Dan Ben-Amos and Liliane Weissberg, eds., *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), 12-15.

<sup>39</sup> Alon Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History," *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 5 (Dec. 1997): 1386-1403, 1395. Confino is essentially asking for memory to be studied as a progression, something used "as an explanatory device that links representation and social experience" 1402.

<sup>40</sup> Paul Scolari, "Indian Warriors and Pioneer Mothers: American Identity and the Closing of the Frontier in Public Monuments, 1890 -- 1930" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2005), 5.



meanings.<sup>41</sup> However, necessary to my study is a further review of the history and memory relationship and how the relationship can be applied to a better understanding of Mount Rushmore's different meanings and to whom they belong.

Previous works about Mount Rushmore have thoroughly documented the project from its initial intent to abrupt work stoppage. As previously seen, the Mount Rushmore National Memorial is vital part of the Black Hills and American West histories. Most Mount Rushmore scholars, when focusing on the monument as an American icon, have interpreted the monument as a triumph in American sculpture and a bastion of American ideals. Mount Rushmore was completed during the interwar years and in a context when a "historically based public culture for the nation as a whole" was created.<sup>42</sup> The work on Mount Rushmore happened during America's transition into the modern world with Mount Rushmore serving as a modern sculpture indicative of a nation seeking a collective understanding of the past. What the four Presidents carved on Mount Rushmore represent for the Black Hills and the United States can be seen through the initial descriptions of the monument. Mount Rushmore scholars have interpreted the monument as a unique sculpture; however, the rhetoric used to describe Mount Rushmore and the themes used to express the value of the monument are equally unique because they were formed before anyone had actually seen Mount Rushmore. An examination of the official documents that determined the intentions for Mount Rushmore will help explain the monument's historical memory.

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<sup>41</sup> Scolari, "Indian Warriors and Pioneer Mothers: American Identity and the Closing of the Frontier in Public Monuments, 1890 – 1930." 148.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1991), 299.

Perhaps one of the most difficult challenges of historical memory is its working definition. Geoffrey Cubitt explained the complexity of the history and memory relationship and suggested that establishing a concrete definition of the relationship is not the most productive use for historians. How one historian values the relationship, if at all, of historical memory in a given historical narrative is more of a personal preference than direct need for inclusion. Instead, Cubitt has advocated for a channeled exploration of memory and its utility in the present tense.<sup>43</sup> The role of memory in historical writing can be better understood by looking at the plethora of scholarship that helps define the utility of memory when studying the past.<sup>44</sup> Scholar Kerwin Lee Klein examined what the word “memory” means to the historical discipline and how it has evolved into its own history subfield that in Klein’s interpretation exists as a “therapeutic alternative to historical discourse.”<sup>45</sup> Alternative or not, scholars who have studied memory’s relationship to history have all acknowledged how useful memory is to enduring understandings of the past. Monuments such as Mount Rushmore are ideal places to examine history’s relationship with memory.

American memory studies have often focused on public sites that commemorate

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<sup>43</sup> Cubitt, *History and Memory*, 62.

<sup>44</sup> For a better understanding of how memory has been used with the historical discipline see Kerwin Lee Klein, “On the Emergence of *Memory* in Historical Discourse,” *Representations* 69 (Winter 2000): 127-150; Patrick Hutton, “Recent Scholarship on Memory and History,” *The History Teacher* 33, no. 4 (August 2000): 533-548; Pierre Nora, “Between History and Memory: *Les Lieux de Memoire*,” *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 7-24; Thomas Butler, ed., *Memory: History, Culture and the Mind*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989); Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory*, trans. Steven Rendall and Elizabeth Claman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

<sup>45</sup> Klein, “On the Emergence of *Memory* in Historical Discourse,” 145. Klein views historical memory studies as a post-modern historical subset.

the past.<sup>46</sup> Pierre Nora claimed, "Memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects: history binds itself strictly to temporal continuities, to progressions and to relations between things. Memory is absolute, while history can only conceive the relative."<sup>47</sup> Memory in this case encompasses a past of Mount Rushmore that can only be understood by including the initial intentions for constructing the monument. These are found in the letters written by Doane Robinson. Once the initial intentions for Mount Rushmore are defined, the notions created for Mount Rushmore by Robinson and Borglum can be traced over time.

Cultural beliefs impact the construction of memory. The role of memory in American culture was the focus of Michael Kammen's *Mystic Chords of Memory*.<sup>48</sup> Kammen's work traced the political and cultural developments of the United States and their role in shaping American memory. Even more, Mount Rushmore's existence as a place of United States western tourism as a nationalistic shrine adds more incentive to comprehend the role of memory in national perceptions of landscape.

Simon Schama documented an extensive history of the world's natural landscapes. Schama's *Landscape and Memory* focused on the conceptualization of nature and how people have remembered it.<sup>49</sup> Schama's micro-narrative of Mount Rushmore did not examine the intentions for the monument but rather why Robinson and

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<sup>46</sup> An example of history and memory of American monuments, mostly Civil War monuments, comes from John R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>47</sup> Pierre Nora, "Between History and Memory: *Les Lieux de Memoire*," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 9.

<sup>48</sup> Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 7-8. Kammen argues that America's memory has ultimately been sustained through the U.S. federal government, 700.

<sup>49</sup> Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 61.

Borglum created a monument that rests as the symbol “of the conqueror.” suggesting that Mount Rushmore’s history has conflicting claims.<sup>50</sup> Schama believed places in nature like Mount Rushmore could best be understood through “revealing the richness, antiquity, and complexity of our landscape tradition.”<sup>51</sup> Viewing Mount Rushmore with all of different perspectives that shape the meanings of the monument contributes to the multiplicities of how Mount Rushmore has been remembered. This study traces how Mount Rushmore’s place in American memory has changed from a site of presidential commemoration to existing proof of illegal activity.

Other scholars have addressed how memorials create public memory. Benjamin Hufbauer (2008) *Presidential Temples: How Memorials and Libraries Shape Public Memory* sought out some of the efforts used to commemorate presidents. Hufbauer primarily looked at presidential libraries and how they help the public remember certain presidents. Useful in the case of the Mount Rushmore National Memorial is Hufbauer’s assertion that ultimately “what is at stake in the transformation of presidential commemoration is how power is remembered and how these constructed memories of power shape contemporary and future presidential authority.”<sup>52</sup> Mount Rushmore has a role in part of the presidential commemoration of Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln and T. Roosevelt and reevaluating how Mount Rushmore has been commemorated reveals more

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<sup>50</sup> Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 399.

<sup>51</sup> Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 14. This book includes many photos of the American landscape. Interestingly, Schama also wrote, “The cultural habits of humanity have always made room for the sacredness of nature.” 18. For a look into some of the ways that Americans have created a national landscape see, Paul A. Shackel, ed., *Myth Memory and the Making of the American Landscape*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001).

<sup>52</sup> Hufbauer, *Presidential Temples*, 1.

about national memorials and how they relate to the history and memories of the United States.

Monuments like Mount Rushmore are ideal sites to study the role of memory in order to gain stronger understandings of the past. Kirk Savage analyzed how United States Civil War era history is told in public spaces.<sup>53</sup> Monuments such as Mount Rushmore along with the process of commemoration are ideal places to discover more about certain time periods. Savage stated the benefit of studying monuments when he said, “the *process* of commemoration often leads to conflict...because in defining the past we define our present.”<sup>54</sup> As you will see, the process of commemorating Mount Rushmore supplements the history of the Black Hills.

The historical contexts of Mount Rushmore show that studying the history and memory of the monument reveals more about the legacies of land disputes as well as distinct cultural meanings of sacredness and prosperity. The differing perspectives of Mount Rushmore may begin with Robinson and Borglum: they do not end with their efforts. Remarks by politicians, such as Coolidge’s “spirit of patriotism,” have shaped the American perspective of Mount Rushmore. Later presidents made speeches that have impacted the perception of Mount Rushmore. The *New York Times* extensively covered the construction of the monument and their stories reveal the differing perspectives of Mount Rushmore and more broadly the Black Hills region. Public documents and statements about Mount Rushmore have predominately shaped the connotation of the

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<sup>53</sup> Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 3.

<sup>54</sup> Savage, *Standing Soldiers*, 4. Savage also summed up the power in analyzing monuments by asserting, “public monuments ultimately tested the limits and possibilities of collective consciousness.” 210.

dominant culture's vantage point and are not necessarily historically accurate: particular public memories of Mount Rushmore have justified one culture's understanding of existence. A monument of Mount Rushmore's stature deserves a study to pinpoint its enduring political legacies. Previous land disputes, the cultural sacredness of the Black Hills, and Mount Rushmore's environmental impact as a place in nature and as a source of tourism are all essential to the understanding of Mount Rushmore's changing memories in a culturally contested region. The first step in delving into Mount Rushmore's significance is looking at how the monument was perceived before construction and then interpreted during construction. The history of Mount Rushmore's different interpretations will ultimately unveil what the historic monument represents in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. If Mount Rushmore is to represent American ideals and a "spirit of patriotism," then a study of the monument's two different perspectives will reveal what exactly Mount Rushmore has meant in a culturally pluralistic region. The story of the creation of the Mount Rushmore National Memorial helps reveal the differing perspectives of the significance of the Black Hills region.

## CHAPTER II

### CONCEPTUALIZING MOUNT RUSHMORE

The notion for a sculpture in the Black Hills of South Dakota started with Doane Robinson brainstorming for attractions that would increase tourism in the Black Hills region.<sup>55</sup> The original idea from Robinson did not include busts of Presidents and Gutzon Borglum was not the original artist Robinson had in mind to create “heroic sculpture.”<sup>56</sup> Originally, the sculptures in the Black Hills were to include statues of prominent Americans who were also a part of South Dakota’s own history. Historical figures such as Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, Jedediah Smith, Sacagawea, and Red Cloud all had ties to the history of South Dakota and the American West.<sup>57</sup> As other studies have noted, sculptures in the American West were popular in the 1920s as the country transformed into a modern nation.<sup>58</sup> In his original idea, Robinson merely wanted to

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<sup>55</sup> Gilbert C. Fite, *Mount Rushmore*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1952), 3-4, 7-9; Rex Alan Smith, *The Carving of Mount Rushmore* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985), 24; John Taliaferro, *Great White Fathers: The Story of the Obsessive Quest to Create Mount Rushmore*, (New York: PublicAffairs, 2002), 46; Jesse Lerner, *Mount Rushmore: An Icon Reconsidered*, (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press/Nation Books, 2002), 92.

<sup>56</sup> Doane Robinson to Gutzon Borglum, August 20, 1924. DRMC, Folder 149, Pierre, SD.

<sup>57</sup> Robinson mentioned the possibility of these figures in his second letter to Lorado Taft, February 8, 1924. DRMC, Folder 149, Pierre, SD.

<sup>58</sup> For a work on sculptures in the American West see Paul Scolari, “Indian Warriors and Pioneer Mothers: American identity and the Closing of the Frontier in Public Monuments, 1890 – 1930” (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2005).

showcase “all of the old heroes.”<sup>59</sup> Robinson never anticipated the constant change that had already happened in the Black Hills region as a trend or progression that would continue well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the span of decades, the United States acquired the Black Hills and then South Dakota obtained statehood. The dwindling presence of the Sioux Nation witnessed the transformation from mining boomtowns in the Black Hills to the physical permanence of Borglum’s carved presidential busts. The actions taken to transform the Mount Rushmore National Memorial into a working project reveal the original intentions behind the monument that are vital to Mount Rushmore’s American perspective.

Mount Rushmore was intended to describe a particular notion of United States history in the late 1920s and early 1930s before anyone ever saw the “Shrine of Democracy.” As Mount Rushmore was set to tell the story of America through carved presidential busts, one must consider the monument’s location in a culturally pluralistic region as something essential to how Mount Rushmore was envisioned. These cultural differences can be seen through a thematic rhetoric, a distinctly “patriotic” rhetoric that described the monument before construction began. The rhetoric used by officials like Robinson and Borglum to describe Mount Rushmore was distinctly patriotic because the words carried significant motifs indicative of the United States’ cultural and political history. Themes of exceptionalism, heroism, independence, and self-government all fit into the distinctly patriotic rhetoric used to describe Mount Rushmore. President Coolidge first labeled Mount Rushmore as patriotic in 1927, and his description of Mount

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<sup>59</sup> Doane Robinson to Lorado Taft December 28, 1923. DRMC, Folder 149, Pierre, SD.



Rushmore, as well as the themes from others, fit into patriotic rhetoric. These significant remarks help unveil the official intentions behind Mount Rushmore. Furthermore, Mount Rushmore gained a pseudo-religious meaning that is often included within the patriotic rhetoric.<sup>60</sup>

### **The Intentions for Mount Rushmore Before Construction**

The efforts to begin the Mount Rushmore National Memorial contain patriotic rhetoric used to describe the monument before a single drill marked the infamous mountain. This rhetoric explains how the project was justified to the public and helped build the context for the subsequent memories of Mount Rushmore. The early intentions and patriotic rhetoric used to describe what became Mount Rushmore originated in the correspondence between Doane Robinson and Gutzon Borglum and other officials, like President Coolidge, carried it on. Together, these public statements justified Mount Rushmore. Together, their big-thinking and publicity efforts ultimately accomplished Robinson's goal of a tourist destination.

Before Doane Robinson went public with his idea for "heroic sculpture" in the Black Hills, he had already published one disturbing conclusion in his 1904 book: the Sioux Nation's prosperity was fundamentally over. Robinson wrote, "The course of the Sioux as a tribe is now completed. He had fought his last war, he has discarded the blanket and donned the habiliments of civilization."<sup>61</sup> Robinson's self-assured

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<sup>60</sup> See Benjamin Hufbauer, *Presidential Temples: How Memorials and Libraries Shape Public Memory*, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2008), and Scolari, "Indian Warriors and Pioneer Mothers: American Identity and the Closing of the Frontier in Public Monuments, 1890 – 1930." Both studies acknowledge notions of a pseudo-religious feel from monuments and sites of American memory.

<sup>61</sup> Other histories of Mount Rushmore have included these infamous words from

conclusion of the Sioux most certainly underestimated the tribe's value and control of the Black Hills. The Sioux Nation's valuing of the Black Hills can be seen through the Falling Star Myth, a story that aligns sacred sites in the Black Hills with the seven villages or tribes of the Lakotas.<sup>62</sup> With disregard for the Sioux Nation's value for the region, Robinson continued his plans to increase tourism in the region. A vital source of inspiration for Robinson's ideas for the Black Hills came from the popular craze of driving across the country in the 1920s. Robinson thought that the Black Hills needed something spectacular so people would stop when they drove the newly popular American automobile.<sup>63</sup> Clearly Robinson was concerned with what could transform the region and boost South Dakota's economy.

Robinson believed that a grandiose landmark in the Black Hills could jumpstart tourism in South Dakota. Originally, the economic benefits of the state were his sole concern; he did not envision a monument that would be labeled as the "Shrine of Democracy."<sup>64</sup> Robinson envisioned a monument that represented the character and

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Robinson. Nevertheless they help explain Robinson's understanding of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Sioux and South Dakota history. Moreover, Indian tribes across the nation at the turn of the century were displaced onto reservations as the physical fighting between Indians and the United States had ended. Doane Robinson, *A History of the Dakota or Sioux Indians From Their Earliest Traditions and First Contact with White Men to the Final Settlement of the Last of Them Upon Reservations and the Consequent Abandonment of the Old Tribal Life*, (Minneapolis: Ross and Haines, Inc., 1904), 13.

<sup>62</sup> For an explanation of the Falling Star Myth and other Black Hills Sioux myths see Linea Sundstrom, "Mirror of Heaven: Cross-Cultural Transference of the Sacred Geography of the Black Hills," *World Archaeology* 28, no. 2 (Oct. 1996): 179-182.

<sup>63</sup> Smith, *The Carving of Mount Rushmore*, 22-24; Taliaferro, *Great White Fathers*, 47-52.

<sup>64</sup> Texas oil millionaire Joseph S. Cullinan described Mount Rushmore at the monument's first dedication as "American's Shrine for Political Democracy." Borglum urged President Franklin Roosevelt to use the phrase "Shrine of Democracy" when he first visited the monument. Martin Luschei, *The Black Hills and the Indians: "A haven of*

history of South Dakota. Furthermore, Robinson originally intended for the sculpture to be located in the “pinnacles,” or the granite needle-like mountain peaks near Harney Peak, which was accessible by a paved highway. The purpose of sculptures near a major highway was simply for drive-by access. In a letter to then-Gov. Peter Norbeck, Robinson wrote, “Already they are running automobiles a long way into that region [Harney Peak] and with a reasonable amount of work a good road could be built...”<sup>65</sup> Clearly the popularity of the automobile and the roadway access to mountains and cliffs in the Black Hills motivated Robinson’s plans for sculpture.<sup>66</sup> Once Robinson settled on an idea, he then began exploring the possibility of his dreams.

In a letter that was originally printed for the *Deadwood Pioneer Times*, Robinson explained his idea for the Black Hills project and his motivations for seeing something happen:

Whatever best lends itself to the situation will occupy but a small space in the vast panorama of the needles and will by contrast, augment the glory of the pinnacles as God made them...Commercially such an enterprise would be of tremendous value to the Black Hills and might with a few years bring you [residents in the Black Hills] more money than does the precious mineral wealth...<sup>67</sup>

Clearly, Robinson was focused on the long-term value of the Black Hills project. His idea to form something massive and aesthetically attractive was part of the context for Mount Rushmore’s original intentions. Yet absent from Robinson’s original idea of

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*Hopes*” (San Luis Obispo: Niobrara Press, 2007), 154; Fite, *Mount Rushmore*, 192.

<sup>65</sup> Doane Robinson to Gov. Peter Norbeck, February 7, 1924, DRMC, Folder 161, Pierre, SD.

<sup>66</sup> Fite, *Mount Rushmore*, 3-7; Taliaferro, *Great White Fathers*, 47-52.

<sup>67</sup> Doane Robinson to the *Argus Leader* February 2, 1924, DRMC, Folder 149, Pierre, SD.

sculpture was an understanding of the significance of the Black Hills region to other cultures like the Sioux. Surely Robinson understood the significance of the Black Hills to the state and the nation, but not for the Sioux Nation. In a letter to a newspaper editor Robinson remarked, "I can vision...Red Cloud [sic] and a band of Sioux scouts, resentful and suspicious, spying upon it through the rifts in the pinnacles..."<sup>68</sup> Robinson's initial suggestion only included images of the Sioux: the people who used and viewed the region differently. Perhaps he viewed this as irrelevant in the 1920s. Robinson did not consider the cultural significance of the Black Hills for the Sioux; a region that they believed to be sacred and essential to their way of life.

Robinson's idea for a sculpture in the Black Hills had South Dakota's best interests in mind, and once Robinson proceeded with his idea he actually lost all of his originality. Robinson originally envisioned famed Indian-sculptor Lorado Taft for the project, and he hoped to lure Taft as the sculptor for his Black Hills idea. Taft was most certainly a worthy candidate to lead such a project since he was one of the country's leading sculptors. His "Big Injun" sculpture was a forty-eight-foot-tall Indian that attracted many to see his impressive accomplishment.<sup>69</sup> Taft, citing ill health, replied to Robinson informing him that he was incapable of undertaking the Black Hills project.<sup>70</sup> With the demurral of Taft, Robinson continued his search for a sculptor and refined his ideas for the project.

Robinson initially suggested his idea to Taft as "massive sculpture" of "all the old heroes." The "heroes" Robinson envisioned being carved in the Black Hills were the

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<sup>68</sup> Robinson to *Argus Leader* Feb. 2, 1924. DRMC, Folder 149, Pierre, SD.

<sup>69</sup> Taliaferro, *Great White Fathers*, 53.

<sup>70</sup> Taliaferro, *Great White Fathers*, 53.

“heroes” that were involved with the nation’s westward expansion and were the carriers of the Manifest Destiny ethos. Robinson’s own ideas for the project promoted a representation of American history as he understood it in the early twentieth century. He was the superintendent of the State Historical Society and quite confident in his understanding of the past. With his bleak assessment for the Black Hills’ previous owners, Robinson envisioned a Black Hills project that represented his current understanding of Black Hills and American West history. Robinson wanted something grandiose, and he told members of the Black and Yellow Trail Association that “I can think of nothing in America that would outrival such a spectacle.”<sup>71</sup> The project now had a tone of something exceptional: a stern conviction that the Black Hills project would be one-of-a-kind. The project took this tone because the Black Hills sculpture had to be distinguished from other sculptures in the American West. Robinson wrote, “If such a sculpture as I have suggested should be done . . . the world would hasten to view it.”<sup>72</sup> Even though the project lacked a sculptor, Robinson set up the Black Hills project as something exceptional that has contributed to modern-day understandings of Mount Rushmore.

The history of Robinson’s idea engulfed a new direction when he approached and eventually lured another artist. It just so happened that Gutzon Borglum was available and in need of work. Borglum was already a famous artist who was attempting a massive

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<sup>71</sup> Fite, *Mount Rushmore*, 7-9; Taliaferro, *Great White Fathers*, 54. The Black and Yellow Trail Association wanted to see the expansion of US Highway 14 from the Black Hills to Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming.

<sup>72</sup> Doane Robinson to the *Argus Leader* February 2, 1924. DRMC, Folder 149, Pierre, SD.

sculpture of prominent leaders of the Confederacy.<sup>73</sup> Borglum's work on the Stone Mountain Memorial in Georgia, a Southern Confederacy memorial, made him a controversial artist.<sup>74</sup> After striking out with his first choice of an artist for the Black Hills project, Robinson contacted Borglum on August 20, 1924.

In the vicinity of Harney Peak, in the Black Hills of South Dakota are opportunities for heroic sculpture of unusual character. Would it be possible for you to design and supervise a massive sculpture there. The proposal has not passed beyond the mere suggestion, but if it be possible for you to undertake the matter I feel quite sure we could arrange to finance such an enterprise. I should be glad to hear from you at your convenience.<sup>75</sup>

Robinson wanted to know if "heroic sculpture of unusual character" could be possible in the Black Hills. Little did Robinson know that the artist he approached had plenty of confidence in his artistic abilities and he had his own ideas for such a project. Borglum saw the Black Hills project as an opportunity to promote political views and ensure a personal legacy.<sup>76</sup> Once Robinson shared his idea for sculpture in the Black Hills with Borglum, the vision he had for the project transformed from a western monument towards a more patriotic national monument.

Gutzon Borglum responded to Robinson's proposition with intrigue and

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<sup>73</sup> June Culp Zeitner and Lincoln Borglum, *Borglum's Unfinished Dream: Mount Rushmore*, (Aberdeen: North Plains Press, 1976), 91.

<sup>74</sup> Fite, *Mount Rushmore*, 10; Smith, *The Carving of Mount Rushmore*, 17; Howard Shaff and Audrey Karl Shaff, *Six Wars at a Time: The Life and Times of Gutzon Borglum, Sculptor of Mount Rushmore* (Darien: Permelia Publishing, 1985), 145-153.

<sup>75</sup> Doane Robinson to Gutzon Borglum, August 20, 1924, DRMC, Folder 149, Pierre, SD.

<sup>76</sup> Willadene Price, *Gutzon Borglum Artist and Patriot* (Washington D.C.: Rand, 1961), 149-169.

optimism for the project.<sup>77</sup> Borglum visited the Black Hills in search of a possible mountain for the sculpture. Borglum wanted his Black Hills visit to be private, as he was still under public scrutiny from his work on the Stone Mountain Memorial, but he was greeted with a crowd and rushed off to a luncheon upon his arrival.<sup>78</sup> Eventually Borglum saw the Black Hills firsthand and he even hiked to the summit of Harney Peak. Immersed in the Black Hills' peculiar formations, Borglum later recalled, "We walked through a veritable 'Garden of the Gods.'"<sup>79</sup>

What stood out to Borglum the most was the centrality of the Black Hills region in the United States. In Borglum's mind, the very location of the Black Hills made it ripe for "colossal figures."<sup>80</sup> Borglum was already sold on Robinson's idea of sculpture in the Black Hills; now Borglum took Robinson's idea and modified it to fit his interpretation for a potential monument.

An interesting correspondence took place between Robinson and South Dakota's U.S. Senator Peter Norbeck. Norbeck was a former governor of the state and just as optimistic as Robinson about the Black Hills project. Like Robinson, he met with Borglum to discuss ideas with the intent of using his position in the Senate to help acquire funding for the project. After one meeting with Borglum, Norbeck wrote to Robinson to keep him up to speed on the happenings with Borglum and the Black Hills project. On Borglum's personality Norbeck noted, "He is a peculiar combination of a promoter, publicist, politician

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<sup>77</sup> Fite, *Mount Rushmore*, 10, 29.

<sup>78</sup> Fite, *Mount Rushmore*, 29-35.

<sup>79</sup> Smith, *The Carving of Mount Rushmore*, 33.

<sup>80</sup> Gutzon Borglum to Doane Robinson, December 2, 1924, DRMC, Folder 149, Pierre, SD.

and, last but more important, he is one of the great artists of the world...he refuses to be discouraged."<sup>81</sup> Understanding how two of the prominent founders and leaders involved with the Black Hills project regarded the personal makeup of Borglum helps explain why Borglum was determined and uniquely capable of sculpting Mount Rushmore. Borglum was an ambitious artist and made his own proposal for a sculpture in the Black Hills.

After viewing the Black Hills and deeming it an appropriate location for a national monument, Borglum proposed to Robinson what he envisioned as sculpture: "I suggested two colossal figures—Washington and Lincoln, because these two figures will give your undertaking national interest and consideration; and a subject so treated will be of more certain success than any group."<sup>82</sup> With the suggestion of carving national figures—former U.S. presidents—Robinson's original idea for sculpture in the Black Hills was no longer entirely his. The rhetoric used by both Borglum and Robinson to describe the Black Hills project became significantly more patriotic as their proposed sculpture transformed from a distinctly western monument to a patriotic national monument.

With an actual idea in place for sculpture, Robinson felt a sense of urgency to see his idea come to fruition. In trying to convince local residents about the project, he conveyed his appreciation of the unique match of Borglum and the Black Hills:

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<sup>81</sup> Sen. Peter Norbeck to Doane Robinson, January 20, 1925. DRMC, Folder 162, Pierre, SD.

<sup>82</sup> Gutzon Borglum to Doane Robinson, December 2, 1924. DRMC, Folder 149, Pierre, SD.



Mr. Borglum is now nearly sixty; his years of activity are few; it would be an irreparable disaster if we failed to avail ourselves of the opportunity offered by the World's Greatest Master in heroic sculpture to give us a work that would forever give South Dakota a distinction as unique as it will be artistic. We can have it if we move now; next year may be too late.<sup>83</sup>

The notion of sculpture in the Black Hills did not excite everyone. Some Black Hills residents were skeptical over the necessity of the project. Robinson and Borglum had to convince residents of the Black Hills that Mount Rushmore was worthwhile and useful for the state and region in the long-term.

Borglum's artistic vision for sculpture widened the magnitude of the project. Both Robinson and Norbeck thought highly of Borglum's artistic talent. Norbeck even quoted Borglum in a letter to Robinson that insisted upon the urgency of the project: "I have reached a certain age and I only want to do one more thing in sculpture work."<sup>84</sup> Creating a sense of urgency certainly helped gain attention for the seriousness of Robinson's idea. Norbeck thought "that we must respond at this time or forget it until another opportunity comes along, which may be in a decade, but more likely in a century."<sup>85</sup> Meanwhile, Robinson wanted people to understand "the importance of the matter both from the artistic,

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<sup>83</sup> Doane Robinson to B.C. Yates, December 8, 1924. DRMC, Folder 149, Pierre, SD. Robinson's praise for his second choice of sculpture is perhaps based on the urgency of completion of the project.

<sup>84</sup> Gutzon Borglum quoted in a letter from Sen. Peter Norbeck to Doane Robinson, January 20, 1925. DRMC, Folder 162, Pierre, SD.

<sup>85</sup> Sen. Peter Norbeck to Doane Robinson, January 20, 1925. DRMC, Folder 162, Pierre, SD. Perhaps Norbeck was exaggerating with the "century" comment but nevertheless he conveyed expressed urgency for Mount Rushmore.

and from the commercial point of view."<sup>86</sup> The seriousness of this project became solely dependent upon financing. In their efforts to convince people for private donations, Robinson and Borglum used patriotic rhetoric to describe the monument.

### **Fundraising for Mount Rushmore**

Robinson had the confidence that he could help raise money for the project; yet he underestimated how much money would be needed for the project, estimating that each figure would cost \$100,000.<sup>87</sup> Borglum, on the other hand, was financially demanding and undisciplined with his proposed budgeting and spending. An early estimation from Borglum requested "an annual appropriation of say two hundred thousand for say three years."<sup>88</sup> Also, Borglum refused public funds until it became absolutely necessary, as Borglum wanted to be in sole control of his work. Initially, the use of state or federal dollars was a non-option for Borglum if he were to work on Mount Rushmore.<sup>89</sup> Robinson took the initiative to search and write for financial donors. In Robinson's letters to prospective donors he continued to use patriotic rhetoric to describe the project. "I can think of no other thing so sublime and compelling as these great national heroes standing in majesty and grandeur on the summit of this great mountain, at

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<sup>86</sup> Doane Robinson to Maude Gardner, January 20, 1925. DRMC, Folder 149, Pierre, SD.

<sup>87</sup> Fite, *Mount Rushmore*, 71; Taliaferro, *Great White Fathers*, 213.

<sup>88</sup> Gutzon Borglum to Doane Robinson via telegram November 21, 1924. DRMC, Folder 149, Pierre, SD.

<sup>89</sup> Howard Shaff and Audrey Karl Shaff, *Six Wars at a Time*, 225-230.

the very center of North America."<sup>90</sup> Robinson also thought that "there is perhaps no way in which one could so well perpetuate his name; or do a finer thing for American art, than to provide the means for the Borglum sculptures in our Paha Sapas."<sup>91</sup> The fervent desire to see the monument through was one of Robinson's selling points for prospective donors: associate yourself or your organization with a national monument, and one will be forever recognized with a national undertaking. Acquiring substantial funds for the construction of Mount Rushmore was its own project to say the least. Raising public awareness of the monument and its potential regional and national value was one way Robinson and Borglum sought to gain financial support and public recognition. When it came to promoting the monument for funding, none other than Borglum fittingly described the project.

The summer of 1927 was selected for the opening of construction. An editorial by Borglum appeared on July 10, 1927 in the *New York Times*, which explained Borglum's intentions and procedures for the project as he explained who and what would be depicted on the monument. "This memorial will be to the founding, extending and preserving the Union and to completion of the dream by Columbus by the cutting of the Panama Canal, and the four Presidents represent these epochs in our history."<sup>92</sup> Borglum then sought to sell the project to the

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<sup>90</sup> Doane Robinson to Mrs. Anthony Cooke, President General, Daughters of the American Revolution, December 9, 1924. DRMC, Folder 149, Pierre, SD.

<sup>91</sup> Doane Robinson to Marry Borglum, June 1, 1925. DRMC, Folder 149, Pierre, SD.

<sup>92</sup> Gutzon Borglum. "Making a Monument out of a Black Hills Mountain." *New York Times*, July 10, 1927.

masses noting that the funding of the project came from Congress and that the state of South Dakota organized the efforts for the project. Twice in the editorial Borglum explained why Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, and T. Roosevelt were selected, as Borglum thought that together the four former presidents' tell the story of the United States. He also included a timetable for each president's bust. Even though Borglum initially suggested Washington and Lincoln, he later added T. Roosevelt largely from encouragement from Senator Norbeck. Norbeck was aware of immediate federal funds for a Roosevelt sculpture, and since Borglum was a political supporter of Roosevelt, he gladly included T. Roosevelt. Scholars are not certain of the exact moment when Borglum expanded from two to four presidents, but Borglum viewed Jefferson and the Louisiana Purchase as essential to America's past.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, Borglum's editorial included an insight into his artistic style:

Sculpted work on a mountain must belong to the mountains as a natural part of it; otherwise it becomes a hideous, mechanical application. A simple inscription upon the broad face of the mountain, for instance, is much nobler and natural than if that inscription has a border or line around it.<sup>94</sup>

Aside from Borglum's attempts as a promoter, and in a sense historian, his true talent was as an artist, and he set up Mount Rushmore to be his greatest accomplishment. After years of planning, Mount Rushmore was set to take shape in 1927. Though the monument was originally planned to be in the Harney Peak region, the available granite at the Mount Rushmore mountain proved ideal for

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<sup>93</sup> Fite, *Mount Rushmore*, 58-60.

<sup>94</sup> Fite, *Mount Rushmore*, 58-60.

the project. Before drilling on the monument began, however, Borglum and others experienced the ultimate publicity stop—a stop that heavily influenced the creation of Mount Rushmore’s American perspective.

The latter half of the 1920s was an economically prosperous time. President Calvin Coolidge, who once remarked, “the business of America is business,” provided much-needed national media attention when he selected the Black Hills for his summer vacation home in 1927. His arrival assured Borglum that the business of funding the project could continue. President Coolidge’s summer vacation in the Black Hills brought a once in a lifetime opportunity for Borglum. Not only did Coolidge support the project, but also his presence at the monument allowed for photo opportunities and created national enthusiasm for the project.<sup>95</sup> Historian Suzanne Barta Julin noted that Coolidge’s visit put the region on the map while reinforcing Black Hills tourism.<sup>96</sup> With Coolidge so close to the monument, Borglum wanted the president to speak at the monument’s opening ceremony. On August 10, 1927 the president, who was known for brevity, delivered a lengthy speech that greatly shaped one of the perspectives of Mount Rushmore.

### **Introducing a Meaning of Mount Rushmore to the United States**

The moment that President Coolidge spoke created a new national perspective of Mount Rushmore. Coolidge’s first sentence immediately linked the yet-to-be sculpted monument with something divine. “We have come here to

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<sup>95</sup> Fite, *Mount Rushmore*, 86-87.

<sup>96</sup> Suzanne Barta Julin, *A Marvelous Hundred Square Miles: Black Hills Tourism 1880 – 1941* (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2009), p. 84 -104.

dedicate a cornerstone that was laid by the hand of the Almighty.” exclaimed the President. He continued with the “memorial...will represent some of the outstanding features of four of our Presidents.”<sup>97</sup> By insisting that the monument was located in the heart of “God’s Country,” Coolidge ascribed a pseudo-religious meaning to a monument that no one, including himself, had seen. Mount Rushmore, in Coolidge’s eyes, “will be decidedly American in conception, in its magnitude, in its meaning and altogether worthy of our Country.” More importantly, Coolidge’s words established an American perspective of Mount Rushmore.

Coolidge’s words, like Robinson and Borglum’s ideas for Mount Rushmore, assisted in the creation of the American perspective of the monument. Perhaps the largest influence upon Mount Rushmore’s distinctly patriotic perspective created from Coolidge’s remarks was his description of the monument and for whom it would exist:

The union of these four Presidents carved on the face of the everlasting hills of South Dakota will constitute a distinctly national monument...Its location will be significant. Here in the heart of the continent, on the side of a mountain which probably no white man had ever beheld in the days of Washington, in territory which was acquired by the action of Jefferson, which remained an unbroken wilderness beyond the days of Lincoln, which was especially beloved by Roosevelt...They [future visitors] will know that the figure of these Presidents has been placed here because by following the truth they built for eternity. The fundamental principles which they represented have been wrought into the very being of our

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<sup>97</sup> Calvin Coolidge, “Mount Rushmore.” At the Opening of Work on Rushmore Mountain in the Black Hills, 10 August 1927. [http://www.calvin-coolidge.org/html/mount\\_rushmore\\_.html](http://www.calvin-coolidge.org/html/mount_rushmore_.html) (November 18, 2008).

Country.<sup>98</sup>

President Coolidge offered his own history of the American West while justifying why Washington, Jefferson, T. Roosevelt, and Lincoln should be forever enshrined on the mountain. Yet by using the suggestive phrase—"white man"—Coolidge suggested that the land that monument rested upon only had legitimacy once the United States acquired it and was owned by a white male. This statement completely disregarded the Black Hills' previous owners and the history of the region. Consequently one president's message of a "distinctly national monument" representing America and its past as understood in 1927 dramatically shaped the purpose of the monument's existence as he was the first United States President to publicly comment on the monument and establish a thematic perspective of Mount Rushmore. Coolidge's vague understanding of Black Hills history does not mean that history of Mount Rushmore should begin at the convenience of the United States. Intended or not, by speaking at the beginning of construction for Mount Rushmore, Coolidge greatly shaped the context for Mount Rushmore's cultural meaning through patriotic rhetoric.

Coolidge's remarks also predicted what Mount Rushmore would signify once completed: "This memorial will be another national shrine to which future generations will repair to declare their continuing allegiance to independence, to self-government, to freedom and to economic justice."<sup>99</sup> Through patriotic

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<sup>98</sup> Coolidge, "Mount Rushmore," At the Opening of Work on Rushmore Mountain in the Black Hills, 10 August 1927.

<sup>99</sup> Coolidge, "Mount Rushmore," At the Opening of Work on Rushmore Mountain

rhetoric, Mount Rushmore's associations with freedom, independence, and self-government were publicly stated before anyone even viewed the monument. Why was Coolidge so sure of what Mount Rushmore would represent to future generations when he could not fathom the actual impact of the finished sculpture? He, like many Americans at the time, believed in a patriotic spirit that conveyed an American perspective of the history and memories of the United States. This use of strong patriotic rhetoric helped set the context for the monument's meaning. Phrases like "spirit of patriotism" and "American spirit" were attached to subsequent memories. Journalist Jesse Lerner suggested in 2002 that Mount Rushmore "doesn't appeal to everyone," claiming in his numerous visits he has "rarely seen black Americans...and never, ever saw an American Indian."<sup>100</sup> His suggestions underscore the shortcomings of Coolidge's opening remarks.

When Coolidge spoke at Mount Rushmore in 1927 he did so in the midst of the "Roaring Twenties:" a decade that championed Coolidge's preferred laissez-faire economics. South Dakota was still fairly new to the Union and Coolidge was encouraged that economic development was underway in the young state. He noted that Mount Rushmore "is but another illustration of the determination of our people to use their material resources to minister to their spiritual life."<sup>101</sup> For whatever reason Coolidge again insisted upon a pseudo-religious meaning for Mount Rushmore: a monument that he thought would be

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in the Black Hills, 10 August 1927.

<sup>100</sup> Lerner, *Mount Rushmore: An Icon Reconsidered*, 18.

<sup>101</sup> Coolidge, "Mount Rushmore," At the Opening of Work on Rushmore Mountain in the Black Hills, 10 August 1927.



“certain of adequate returns in the nature of increased public welfare.”<sup>102</sup>

Suggesting that Mount Rushmore will be viewed and received by all as something patriotic was Coolidge’s audacious attempt to put a single interpretation of the United States’ presence in the Black Hills upon Mount Rushmore.

The history of Mount Rushmore is covered with the motifs of patriotic rhetoric that Coolidge used. The phrases “this memorial will crown the height of the land...” and the reference to George Washington as “the foremost disciple of ordered liberty” suggests that the monument itself is a spiritual epicenter that depicts the faces of those who carried out the very principles Mount Rushmore represents.<sup>103</sup> After the speech, Borglum gained the national recognition he wanted for the project because of Coolidge’s words. He also gained the national spotlight as he began carving Mount Rushmore.

Before Coolidge spoke, Robinson had encountered some concern about Mount Rushmore. Black Hills resident Maude Hoover wrote Robinson in 1924 asking “Why should we add to...the work of nature with the puny work of man?”<sup>104</sup> People across South Dakota voiced their concern about the environmental aspects of the Black Hills project. Robinson often responded to each criticism and continually justified the utility of Mount Rushmore. By stressing the urgency of the moment and potential economic value of Mount Rushmore, Robinson simply did not think of a sculpture in the Black Hills as

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<sup>102</sup> Coolidge, “Mount Rushmore,” At the Opening of Work on Rushmore Mountain in the Black Hills, 10 August 1927.

<sup>103</sup> Coolidge, “Mount Rushmore,” At the Opening of Work on Rushmore Mountain in the Black Hills, 10 August 1927.

<sup>104</sup> Quoted in Taliaferro, *Great White Fathers*, 2.

environmental destruction since parts of the Black Hills region had previously been exploited for mining.<sup>105</sup> Instead, he saw Mount Rushmore as a completion of God's work as a part of the country's development of the West.<sup>106</sup> Robinson brushed off attacks that carving in the Black Hills was "desecration of nature" by insisting that his critics were "very mistaken."<sup>107</sup> The potential economic value of Mount Rushmore as a tourist destination displaying a "splendid work of Art" was at the forefront of Robinson's mind. The optimistic Robinson simply did not tolerate public criticism over environmental concerns: he had faith in Mount Rushmore's national significance.

When Robinson insisted to the public that Mount Rushmore was simply the completion of God's work, he set up Mount Rushmore to be viewed and understood in a religious sense. Robinson viewed himself and the history of South Dakota and the American West as a part of what religious studies scholar Matthew Glass called "agents of a divine civilizing process."<sup>108</sup> This is the process of how the Black Hills transformed from an unsettled region to a modern civilization. Robinson's divine notions of Mount Rushmore gained more public momentum once President Coolidge joined Robinson in describing Mount

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<sup>105</sup> Taliaferro, *Great White Fathers*, 59-60.

<sup>106</sup> Doane Robinson to Maude Gardner January 20, 1925. DRMC Folder 149, Pierre, SD.

<sup>107</sup> Doane Robinson to Maude Gardner January 20, 1925. DRMC Folder 148, Pierre, SD.

<sup>108</sup> Matthew Glass, "'Alexanders All': Symbols of Conquest and Resistance at Mount Rushmore." in *American Sacred Space*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 157. Glass claimed that Robinson viewed "artistic and scientific transformations of nature as an embodiment of an essentially religious task." Religious rhetoric was fundamental in Robinson's explanation of Mount Rushmore, 158.

Rushmore as a sacred place. Divine connotations were not the only direct meaning associated with Mount Rushmore. The patriotic rhetoric used by Borglum, Robinson, and Coolidge suggested that monument would also stand as a symbol of American nationalism.

Borglum's intention for Mount Rushmore was for the monument to be something that represents the country as a whole. With patriotism as their rallying cry, Robinson and Borglum oversaw a monument that was sculpted to represent the ideals and characteristics of America. For a monument that was originally intended to serve as a mere tourist destination, it acquired a unique perspective indicative of the United States in the late 1920s. After all, the United States in the early 1920s experienced cultural enhancement and economic prosperity. This decade was a time for Americans to thrive and advance forward as a nation. This enthusiastic time period in America certainly enhanced the scope of the Black Hills project. Mount Rushmore was given a discernible purpose and meaning before any recognizable resemblance of a former president appeared.

The national significance that was placed upon Mount Rushmore's meaning helped the monument gain local support and national attention. Once Congress appropriated more funds for construction, the potential for a completed sculpture rested with Borglum. The patriotic rhetoric used by Robinson and Borglum to describe the yet-to-be sculpted monument struck a chord of admiration and national sentiment. The timing of the late 1920s was economically and culturally ideal for Robinson's dream of "heroic sculpture" to

be carved in the American West. Once President Coolidge appeared and gave a dedication to the monument the context for memories of Mount Rushmore was set with an ardent, patriotic focus. The soaring rhetoric used to describe Mount Rushmore before construction established the context for Mount Rushmore's American perspective.

## CHAPTER III

### THE CREATION OF MOUNT RUSHMORE MEMORIES

During the construction of Mount Rushmore, the national significance already placed upon the monument was further developed. While Borglum worked on the monument, the behind the scenes efforts to fund the project encountered complications. Yet with the difficulties of funding and maintaining steady constructional progress, the notion that Mount Rushmore was "heroic" motivated everyone associated with the monument and became a common motif to rally financial backing. When Borglum transformed Robinson's initial idea for sculpture in the Black Hills, Robinson then served in an administrative role on the project. What was once Robinson's ambitious dream finally came to visual fruition with each drill mark from Borglum. As construction proceeded on the Mount Rushmore National Memorial, Robinson and Borglum's American perspective of the monument persisted through the individual bust dedications and public speeches of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Gutzon Borglum as well as the efforts from the members of the Mount Harney Memorial Association.

The different public memories of Mount Rushmore have been sustained through what historian John Bodnar identifies as public commemoration. Because of Mount Rushmore's symbolic intentions for the United States, the monument fits well into Bodnar's definition of carriers of public commemoration: belief in the "nation-state and

the language of patriotism.<sup>109</sup> The words from U.S. presidents and Borglum described how Mount Rushmore represented the “American spirit” and the nation’s ability to persevere and develop.<sup>110</sup> Bodnar’s “language of patriotism” as a mnemonic technique was used to describe and motivate construction of Mount Rushmore. Believing on the part of the American public that the four presidential busts represent American ideals helped create Mount Rushmore’s national significance.

America’s past was believed at the beginning of construction on the monument as one of national triumph and enrichment throughout the country. Furthermore, as memory studies scholar Paul Connerton has noted, the construction of memory is often found in “commemorative ceremonies.”<sup>111</sup> In the case of Mount Rushmore, Connerton’s method can be applied to the dedication ceremonies that happened at the unveiling of each bust. Just the mere sight of a carved president inspired those associated with the monument to continue telling America’s success and story through stone. Once when asked about the four separate dedication ceremonies, Borglum responded, “I never unveil one of my works that I do not think of the mother as she presents to the world one of her children for the first time...I never tire of dedications. How could I? Every dedication is a brand new experience.”<sup>112</sup> Borglum’s enthusiasm for the ceremonies combined with the messages conveyed in each ceremony ultimately sustained Robinson and Borglum’s

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<sup>109</sup> John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 16.

<sup>110</sup> Coolidge, “Mount Rushmore,” *At the Opening of Work on Rushmore Mountain in the Black Hills*, 10 August 1927.

<sup>111</sup> Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 71. Essentially Connerton argues that memory is created through various social processes.

<sup>112</sup> Gutzon Borglum quoted in Willadene Price, *Gutzon Borglum. Artist and Patriot*, (New York: Rand, 1961), 174.

perspectives of Mount Rushmore. As Connerton asserted, "If the ceremonies are to work for their participants...they must be habituated to those performances."<sup>113</sup> The ideas and statements spoken at these ceremonies reveal how Borglum and other prominent speakers shaped the American perspective of Mount Rushmore.

### **Dedicating a Work in Progress**

One of the ways Robinson and Borglum's ideas for Mount Rushmore were expressed was within certain presidential speeches. These speeches included patriotic rhetoric that celebrated the United States' development as a nation and also ascribed a lasting significance to Mount Rushmore. It is through public presidential speeches about the four former presidents that the initial intent and American perspectives of Mount Rushmore are revealed. The ability for Mount Rushmore to maintain the prescribed meanings came from the efforts of Robinson and President Coolidge, but they are vested with the artistic and promotional efforts of Borglum. The United States' birthday on July 4, 1930 coincided with the public unveiling of the completed bust of Washington.<sup>114</sup> With a carving of Washington completed, the outlook for continuation of Mount Rushmore seemed plausible. Borglum even stated that Jefferson would be completed in nearly a year.<sup>115</sup> Along with the completion of Washington's bust was the newly graded road from the town of Keystone, South Dakota to the base of Mount Rushmore.<sup>116</sup> This road increased public access to Mount Rushmore and affirmed to those associated with the project that they were truly working on something for the benefit of South Dakota and

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<sup>113</sup> Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 71.

<sup>114</sup> Fite, *Mount Rushmore*, (123-124; Taliaferro, *Great White Fathers*, 248. President Hoover was invited but did not attend.

<sup>115</sup> Fite, *Mount Rushmore*, 124.

<sup>116</sup> Fite, *Mount Rushmore*, 125.

the United States as soon as more people could witness the Mount Rushmore National Memorial in progress.

Soon after work began on the monument, the Mount Rushmore National Memorial Commission was established to oversee project development with its most important task being the accrual of the necessary funding for the project. Chief administrative officer John Boland headed this task.<sup>117</sup> While Boland experienced frustration with Borglum over funding, he remained loyal to the project and persevered to see Mount Rushmore completed. The next task for Mount Rushmore, as Borglum stated, was the completion of Jefferson's bust. The significance of this accomplishment was that it represented a halfway point for the sculpture.

Work on Jefferson's bust began shortly after Washington's and Borglum aimed for completion in one year. Funding prevented the Jefferson bust from being completed in 1931, and it took until 1934 to acquire enough funding to finally see progress on Jefferson's bust. The Great Depression squeezed budgets throughout the country and its effects halted work on Mount Rushmore. Work on Jefferson was not completed until 1936. The summer of 1936 was set for another public dedication and unveiling at Mount Rushmore. Before the event Borglum wrote to Doane Robinson, updating him on the progress of the monument and urging Robinson to attend. Compassionately, Borglum lauded Robinson: "This mountain would never have been carved if it hadn't been for Doane Robinson."<sup>118</sup> Aside from Borglum's praise for Robinson, rumors of Franklin Roosevelt's visit to the Black Hills excited Borglum.

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<sup>117</sup> Fite, *Mount Rushmore*, 135-142.

<sup>118</sup> Gutzon Borglum to Doane Robinson, August 11, 1936. DRMC, Folder 151, Pierre, SD.



The Great Depression and drought both struck the Midwest, and by 1936 Franklin Roosevelt's reelection bid led him to check out the Great Plains. Borglum gained information from national newspapers that Franklin Roosevelt might stop by Mount Rushmore during his South Dakota visit.<sup>119</sup> Borglum gleefully exclaimed, "It is the first time a President will have seen what we have done and get a clear idea about what is really intended."<sup>120</sup> Borglum then reported on an observation he overheard at lunch: "Rushmore stands apart and makes him [mankind] think that an older Civilization had reached into the Western World and out on the frontier of life had created symbols of its latest and best efforts."<sup>121</sup> Borglum was certainly proud of the progress on the monument and enjoyed artistic praise from others; the potential visit from President Franklin Roosevelt meant more national attention for Mount Rushmore and Borglum.

President Franklin Roosevelt merely attended to see how work on the monument was progressing. Borglum was informed that the president would only stay for twenty minutes and not make a speech.<sup>122</sup> Yet at the urging of Borglum, Franklin Roosevelt gave some brief remarks and impressions of Mount Rushmore. Interestingly, Borglum enticed the President into calling Mount Rushmore a "Shrine of Democracy" when he introduced Franklin Roosevelt: "I want you, Mr. President to dedicate this memorial as a

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<sup>119</sup> Taliaferro, *Great White Fathers*, 278-279.

<sup>120</sup> Gutzon Borglum to Doane Robinson, August 11, 1936. DRMC, Folder 151, Pierre, SD.

<sup>121</sup> One has to question the authenticity of the statement because Borglum did say who said these words. Perhaps someone did say something like this to Borglum or perhaps these words were his idea or attempt to appease Robinson. Gutzon Borglum to Doane Robinson, August 11, 1936. DRMC, Folder 151, Pierre, SD.

<sup>122</sup> Taliaferro, *Great White Fathers*, 279.

Shrine to Democracy.”<sup>123</sup> Once Borglum asked Franklin Roosevelt to speak, he delivered his impromptu remarks, words similar to Coolidge’s that contributed to shaping the public meanings of Mount Rushmore.

Franklin Roosevelt only provided a glimpse into how he interpreted Mount Rushmore when he spoke on the spot with candor in 1936: “I had...no conception until about ten minutes ago not only of its magnitude but of its permanent beauty and of its permanent importance...this can be a monument and inspiration for the continuance of the democratic-republican form of government.”<sup>124</sup> The ceremony was a dedication of Jefferson’s bust, but Franklin Roosevelt said nothing about Thomas Jefferson, even though some historians have noted how much Franklin Roosevelt liked Jefferson.<sup>125</sup> Two weeks prior to Franklin Roosevelt’s visit, Borglum thought of the Jefferson dedication as something significant; for in Borglum’s opinion, Jefferson was the “step-father of the Republic.”<sup>126</sup> Instead, Franklin Roosevelt spoke on the larger motifs that have carried Mount Rushmore’s American perceptions through construction. The individual accomplishment of a carved Jefferson, while a feat in itself to celebrate, was only a part of Mount Rushmore’s national significance, which was publicly stated by Franklin Roosevelt.

As seen before in Coolidge’s speech in 1927, another U.S. president associated

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<sup>123</sup> Gutzon Borglum, delivered at Mount Rushmore on August 30, 1936. A copy of this speech was accessed February 5, 2009 on the National Park Service website. <http://www.nps.gov/moru/historyculture/index.htm>

<sup>124</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, delivered at Mount Rushmore on August 30, 1936. A copy of this speech was accessed February 5, 2009 on the National Park Service website. <http://www.nps.gov/moru/historyculture/index.htm>

<sup>125</sup> Taliaferro, *Great White Fathers*, 279.

<sup>126</sup> Gutzon Borglum to Doane Robinson, August 11, 1936. DRMC, Folder 151, Pierre, SD.

the monument with motifs of freedom and patriotism. Franklin Roosevelt also expressed the lasting value of Mount Rushmore's "permanent beauty."<sup>127</sup> What Franklin Roosevelt truly felt by seeing the large, granite carved busts with the setting of the Black Hills can best be explained through his 1936 speech. Perhaps Franklin Roosevelt found Borglum's attention to detail in facial features just as impressive as the colossal size of the entire monument. Even more intriguing is the possibility that Franklin Roosevelt was captivated with the idea of a memorial that forever enshrined only those who, like him, have served as President of the United States.

Analyzing what two former U.S. presidents have said about Mount Rushmore helps contextualize memories and gives insight into what the nation's leaders think of a monument of their exclusive colleagues. Comparing what former presidents like Coolidge and Franklin Roosevelt have said about Mount Rushmore to 21<sup>st</sup> century notions of Mount Rushmore help uncover the origins of Mount Rushmore's distinctly American perspective. The four presidents carved on Mount Rushmore inspire different perceptions of the country's past: perceptions that Coolidge and Franklin Roosevelt believed Mount Rushmore symbolized such as the continuance and expansion of the Union. Franklin Roosevelt also hoped that Mount Rushmore would symbolize to subsequent visitors proof of a working government that is emblematic of the American people when he remarked that hopefully "they will believe that we have honestly striven every day and generation to preserve for our descendants a decent land to live in and a decent form of government to operate under."<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, delivered at Mount Rushmore on August 30, 1936.

<sup>128</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, delivered at Mount Rushmore on August 30, 1936

Franklin Roosevelt's words at Mount Rushmore shaped the American perspective of the monument and perhaps revealed his personal aspirations of American prosperity for future generations. The nation was in its worst economic depression ever, and Franklin Roosevelt stood at Mount Rushmore and said similar things as others have: he tied American values of freedom and economic prosperity to a carved granite cliff.

Perhaps Franklin Roosevelt saw Mount Rushmore as a medium to convey his message of freedom and opportunity, while Borglum wanted the monument to be a visual representation of the American form of government and how the country arrived at its present state. Franklin Roosevelt's remarks focused on the immediate meaning of the monument as a symbol of hope and pride for the American people, not the granite history lesson that Borglum insisted upon. Franklin Roosevelt's words at Jefferson's dedication focused on the country and echoed America's 1936 struggles; simultaneously they continued a patriotic description of Mount Rushmore.

### **Promoting Mount Rushmore and Influencing Perceptions**

Aside from presidential publicity and speeches made at Mount Rushmore, other attempts were made to help publicize and gain financial support for Mount Rushmore. The Mount Harney Memorial Association, located in Rapid City, South Dakota, produced a flier describing Mount Rushmore to the public: "Its appeal is to patriotism, to culture, to appreciation of art, to the spiritual heart of America."<sup>129</sup> The intent of the promotional flier was to promote the purchase of souvenirs the raid funds. The flier contained the title "The Greatest National Memorial" and listed highlights about the

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<sup>129</sup> Mount Harney Memorial Association, "The Greatest National Memorial," DRMC, Folder 152, Pierre, SD.

monument and its value to the Black Hills. "The memorial will inevitably be the national shrine: the Mecca to which all feet will turn."<sup>130</sup> The pseudo-religious meaning at Mount Rushmore coincides with President Coolidge's remarks at the opening of construction in 1927. The notions of patriotism in the Mount Harney Association flier also promoted a distinct perspective of Mount Rushmore.

Promotional fliers were not the only disseminated literature on Mount Rushmore. Postcards, often with a picture of the monument in progress, were printed and sold to promote Mount Rushmore. One particular postcard showcased a completed Washington, a nearly completed Jefferson bust, and the initial work on Lincoln. Below the black and white photo of the monument was a description of the project: "The largest sculpture ever attempted by Man, the Mt. Rushmore National Memorial will endure as long as the solid granite mountain itself."<sup>131</sup> The postcard described the dimensions of the monument, calling the planned sculptures "four great Americans" and noted each face was sixty feet in height.<sup>132</sup> Represented from this particular postcard are continued notions of Mount Rushmore as a grandiose monument. Taking pride in the biggest sculpture ever attempted implies that the scale or scope of the project was enough to justify its continued work and perhaps public praise. The back of the postcard has a written note stating "about 10,000 sold this year of this card alone."<sup>133</sup> Perhaps the hope was that

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<sup>130</sup> Mount Harney Memorial Association, "The Greatest National Memorial," DRMC, Folder 152, Pierre, SD.

<sup>131</sup> Mount Rushmore National Memorial Postcard 1936, DRMC, Folder 152, Pierre, SD.

<sup>132</sup> Mount Rushmore National Memorial Postcard 1936, DRMC, Folder 152, Pierre, SD.

<sup>133</sup> Mount Rushmore National Memorial Postcard 1936, DRMC, Folder 152, Pierre, SD.

some percentage of purchased postcards would transform into future visitors. Today this postcard reveals the other efforts made to promote and inform the public about Mount Rushmore.

The leading group behind Mount Rushmore's publicity efforts was the Mount Harney Memorial Association. The group sent out promotional fliers, informing people about the work on Mount Rushmore and asking for others to purchase souvenirs that helped fund the project. The secretary of the group, Herbert Myrick, sent out a two-page newsletter describing the function of the group and the work being done by Gutzon Borglum. In asking for subscription fees Myrick stated, "I can assure each subscriber that every dollar made available for this purpose will produce 100 cents in results, in making possible this everlasting memorial to the continental expansion of the United States, exemplified by the enduring colossi in Rushmore's eternal granite of Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln and Roosevelt."<sup>134</sup> By stating that Mount Rushmore is a "memorial to the continental expansion of the United States" Myrick's suggestion continued the American perspective of Mount Rushmore's significance to the country as a monument of expansion and as an example of another attempt to promote a particular memory of Mount Rushmore. This particular newsletter reveals the sophistication of the organizational efforts started by Doane Robinson to oversee and promote sculpture in the Black Hills. Informing the public of the group's purpose and goals, the Mount Harney National Memorial Association made a strong case for continued private funding while promoting the American perspective of Mount Rushmore.

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<sup>134</sup> Herbert Myrick, "An efficient Organization, Economically Managed." DRMC, Folder 152, Pierre, SD.

While public efforts were made to continuously gain funding for Mount Rushmore, work on the project continued. Borglum often stressed the importance for private and even public funding to be sustainable for the continuation of Mount Rushmore. Since the bulk of construction happened during the Great Depression, those associated with the project received resentment from those who did not want federal funding to support colossal sculpture. A representative from Pennsylvania simply exclaimed, "You cannot eat art," suggesting that the United States government prioritize the needs of Americans over artistic projects such as Mount Rushmore.<sup>135</sup> Yet with a discernable sculpture of Washington and Jefferson, Borglum proceeded with Lincoln's bust. In the summer of 1936, Borglum and his crew completed "detailed work on Lincoln's brow, nose and eyes."<sup>136</sup> Mount Rushmore scholar Rex Alan Smith expressed the initial visible work at the end of the 1936 season as nothing more than "a roughed-out forehead and eye sockets and an irregular granite ridge of nose."<sup>137</sup> Nevertheless, the work on Lincoln carried into the summer of 1937 and wrapped up on September 1937. Borglum arranged for another dedication ceremony.

The ceremony for the completion of Lincoln's bust coincided with the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United States' adoption of the Constitution. With 5,000 spectators present, the ceremony dedicating Lincoln further shaped the American perspective of Mount Rushmore.<sup>138</sup> Lincoln was praised for his upholding of the Constitution during the ceremony, and Borglum reflected upon the meaning of Lincoln and Mount Rushmore.

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<sup>135</sup> T. L. Moritz quoted in Fite, *Mount Rushmore*, 180.

<sup>136</sup> Fite, *Mount Rushmore*, 197.

<sup>137</sup> Smith, *The Carving of Mount Rushmore*, 327.

<sup>138</sup> "Lincoln Head Revealed," *New York Times*, September 19, 1937.

With three of the four presidents carved, Borglum promoted what he envisioned the soon-to-be-completed monument to signify:

It is my privilege and now my bounden duty as the creator of this memorial...to emphasize the cultural necessity to make of this colossal undertaking something more than the 'biggest' in the world, that is, to make it a great work of art...In my conception, in my purpose, the subject matter selected as related to our civilization, expressing the story of our human and political accomplishments...assure its being a great work of art...This work, to be a credit to the men who founded civilization, must proceed much further: it must be carried on with a fresh and a new sense of its greatness and the need of perfecting this message from the soul of America to posterity.<sup>139</sup>

Artistically speaking, Borglum touted Mount Rushmore as a "colossal undertaking" with the intention of creating a stunning work of art recognizable to the rest of the world. Certainly as an artist, Borglum earned every right to situate his work on Mount Rushmore into the context of other large sculptures. Yet Borglum's 1937 remarks are captivating because of how he depicted the United States and perhaps overstating what the finished work on Mount Rushmore will mean for the nation. The perspective of Mount Rushmore as monument of "men who founded civilization" is another motif that surely exceeds the initial purpose of the monument. Furthermore, Borglum's assertion that Mount Rushmore tells the story of "our human and political accomplishments" leaves a void in Borglum's intent for Mount Rushmore; Borglum's level of comprehension of America's past is unknown, as well as his understanding of the immediate past of Mount Rushmore's location in the Black Hills. The word "our" is interesting, because Borglum did not explicitly state whom he was speaking for, yet he felt compelled to establish a

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<sup>139</sup> Gutzon Borglum at Mount Rushmore, September 17, 1937. Quoted in Fite, *Mount Rushmore*, 208-209.



collective foundation of understanding of Mount Rushmore's purpose and intent throughout construction. More so, Borglum did not mention, nor most likely was aware of, the Sioux Nation's perspective of Mount Rushmore and the Black Hills. The 1937 Lincoln dedication ceremony provided a much stronger definition of Mount Rushmore's American perspective even though the monument was not complete.

Borglum's 1937 speech revealed his artistic intentions and interpretations of Mount Rushmore and when his words are put into context, Gutzon Borglum himself stands out. While Borglum viewed Mount Rushmore as a "colossal undertaking," he also spoke candidly on other occasions about his intentions for Mount Rushmore as an artist and as an American. In 1940, just three years after the Lincoln dedication, Borglum spoke to a group of Boy Scouts about Mount Rushmore's significance: on "this great rough cliff...I had promised to carve a monument to our philosophy of government...sixty feet high those heads are, five hundred feet about where we stand. I am carving them so you will understand them and so your children's children will understand them."<sup>140</sup> Borglum revealed his lasting intentions for Mount Rushmore as a monument that teaches future generations about American government. However, the question has to be asked: how one can gain an enduring understanding of the American form of government from simply viewing a monument? Borglum overstated the educational utility of Mount Rushmore.

One can gain a pictorial understanding of the facial features of Washington, Jefferson, T. Roosevelt, and Lincoln, but can one acquire an enduring understanding of

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<sup>140</sup> Gutzon Borglum quoted in Willadene Price, *Gutzon Borglum, Artist and Patriot*, 210.

American government? In Borglum's lasting intentions, spoken through patriotic rhetoric, he shaped the American perspective of Mount Rushmore because his ideas as the monument's artist have historical significance. One way to further measure Borglum's influence on Mount Rushmore's initial perceptions is to look deeper into his planning for the last individual dedicating ceremony, Teddy Roosevelt's bust.

### **The Penultimate Feat for Borglum's Mount Rushmore**

Borglum's plans for the T. Roosevelt dedication appeared a month after the Lincoln dedication in 1937. Though T. Roosevelt's bust was not completed until 1939, the ideas for the ceremony included extravagant plans. Borglum wrote to Robinson, wanting "to make the unveiling of Theodore Roosevelt a very special event..."<sup>141</sup> The dedication included a gathering T. Roosevelt's "old friends...special guests...and some special entertainment."<sup>142</sup> Honoring T. Roosevelt and assembling many of his former acquaintances was not the entirety of Borglum's plans for the 1939 ceremony. Borglum also wanted "to develop a pageant celebrating the inaugural of the first president, the defeat of despots and dictators and honoring and inaugurating the age of democracy or parliamentary government."<sup>143</sup> The rise of fascism in Europe gave Borglum more reason to celebrate his ideal form of government. Given the unstable worldwide context of 1939, a ceremony honoring the defeat of dictators proved to be a bit premature. Nevertheless, this intended pageant represents Borglum's ambition to promote and celebrate his accomplishments at Mount Rushmore.

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<sup>141</sup> Gutzon Borglum to Doane Robinson, October 18, 1937. DRMC, Folder 152. Pierre, SD.

<sup>142</sup> Gutzon Borglum to Doane Robinson, October 18, 1937.

<sup>143</sup> Gutzon Borglum to Doane Robinson, October 18, 1937.

The accomplishment of T. Roosevelt's completed bust was celebrated in 1939 as Borglum initially hoped back in 1937. The dedication ceremony coincided with the celebration of South Dakota's fiftieth anniversary of statehood. While Borglum wanted to dedicate T. Roosevelt's bust in a fine fashion, he was concentrated on finishing another aspect of Mount Rushmore that further reveals Borglum's intentions for Mount Rushmore.

Borglum's ambitious plans included a vault-like chamber behind the four carved faces. This was called the Hall of Records and it was Borglum's plan for the original Constitution and Declaration of Independence to be placed in the Hall. Also, Borglum wanted his biography, a history of the United States' first 150 years and any documents on the four carved Presidents that could be obtained.<sup>144</sup> Borglum's idea for the Hall of Records was quite possibly his most ambitious; for he had no authority to force the United States' founding documents to be removed from Washington D.C. and be relocated in a vault behind four presidential busts in the Black Hills of South Dakota. The fact that Borglum wanted to turn Mount Rushmore into a patriotic shrine of faces and store nationally important documents suggests that Mount Rushmore could have engulfed an even larger significance in the United States' history and culture. Carving a memorial was one daunting task for Borglum; creating a Hall of the nation's founding documents was simply too much for one mountain to contain in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Borglum was unable to win public support for the Hall of Records. Nevertheless, he proceeded as if the rest of the nation would eventually come around to his idea for the Hall.

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<sup>144</sup> Fite, *Mount Rushmore*, 252-253.

Soon after T. Roosevelt's dedication, Borglum turned his focus to finishing the Hall of Records. The work began with a staircase leading to the vault in 1938 and Borglum stated his intentions for the Hall of Records: "It is my intention that this room shall be the most complete, carefully built and studied, elaborately finished archives in the world."<sup>145</sup> Yet just like the memorial, each step in the Mount Rushmore project needed sufficient funding. South Dakota's United States Senator Peter Norbeck assured Borglum that he could arrange for the Civilian Conservation Corps to construct the staircase, freeing Borglum to put finishing marks on the presidential busts.<sup>146</sup> Given the access to labor from the CCC, the notion that the federal government could send out workers seemed financially practical for Mount Rushmore, if not expedient for the construction on the Hall of Records.

For a multitude of reasons, the Hall of Records was never finished. Borglum and his crew completed the staircase. Borglum nixed the CCC idea, most likely because Borglum wanted everyone who worked on Mount Rushmore to directly report to him.<sup>147</sup> Borglum only trusted the men he hired to work; government-hired CCC workers were not capable of accomplishing or even understanding of Borglum's standards, thus revealing Borglum's prejudice towards the CCC.<sup>148</sup> Today the staircase leads up the door of the Hall and inside is a small, vacant room only containing Borglum's dreams. Borglum's idea for the Hall of Records shows how ambitious he was for Mount Rushmore to have a lasting place in United States history and culture. Borglum's fascination with dedication

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<sup>145</sup> Gutzon Borglum, quoted in Fite, *Mount Rushmore*, 225.

<sup>146</sup> Fite, *Mount Rushmore*, 227.

<sup>147</sup> Fite, *Mount Rushmore*, 227-228.

<sup>148</sup> Taliaferro, *Great White Fathers*, 277.

ceremonies and his efforts to create an American archive shows how his ideas single handedly shaped the American perspective of Mount Rushmore.

Borglum's insistence on dedication ceremonies carried on the significance of Mount Rushmore through construction. Like Coolidge before him, Franklin Roosevelt's speech at Mount Rushmore contributed to the American perspective of Mount Rushmore. After the four presidential busts were carved, Borglum turned his attention to the Hall of Records. Borglum's words about the monument throughout construction and his intentions for a Hall of Records reveal how instrumental he was in establishing a certain American perspective of Mount Rushmore. Borglum's and Franklin Roosevelt's words established Mount Rushmore as a memorial to attempt to tell "the story of America for five million years."<sup>149</sup>

The ambitious aspirations Borglum had for Mount Rushmore did not come to fruition in his lifetime. Borglum died from a blood clot in his heart that caused an embolism in March of 1941.<sup>150</sup> His son Lincoln oversaw the duties on Mount Rushmore throughout the summer of 1941. Federal funding ran out in the fall, and the last drill mark on October 31 only seemed like a temporary delay in construction. However, after a fateful day in December, the priority of a national monument was forever changed. Work ceased on Mount Rushmore during World War II as the country transitioned to defending democracy instead of honoring its legacies. After gas rationing was lifted,

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<sup>149</sup> Gutzon Borglum quoted in Willadene Price, *Gutzon Borglum, Artist and Patriot*, 172.

<sup>150</sup> Smith, *The Carving of Mount Rushmore*, 386; Taliaferro, *Great White Fathers*, 307.

more tourists flocked to see the prescribed “Shrine of Democracy.”<sup>151</sup> The federal government soon placed a 1,500-acre buffer zone around the monument, preventing tourist destinations within extreme proximity of the visitor’s viewing area.<sup>152</sup> Since work stopped on Mount Rushmore in 1941, Mount Rushmore did not have an official ceremony dedicating the national memorial until July 3, 1991.

The official dedication of Mount Rushmore as a national memorial coincided with the monument’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of existence. President George H.W. Bush delivered the dedication and his remarks sustained the American perspective created by Robinson, Borglum and the preceding presidents who spoke at the monument. President Bush commented on what the four faces on the monument symbolize:

Each of these four Presidents enriched this country. Each made full use of his Presidential powers without forgetting that he owed his power and legitimacy to the people. The heroes behind me were fighters as Americans have always been, fighters for independence, for freedom, for democracy, for equality, for the values and the lands we revere.<sup>153</sup>

Then President Bush sustained previous efforts to create memories of Mount Rushmore by noting the memorials everlasting value: “Look at the vast sculpture before us, and you see carved in stone a symbol that evokes the American character, soaring and unafraid.”<sup>154</sup> President Bush proclaimed just as other presidents before him that Mount

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<sup>151</sup> Taliaferro, *Great White Fathers*, 310.

<sup>152</sup> Taliaferro, *Great White Fathers*, 310.

<sup>153</sup> “George Bush: Remarks at the Dedication Ceremony of the Mount Rushmore National Memorial in South Dakota,” July 3, 1991. *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29656&st=mount+rushmore&stl=> accessed June 2, 2009.

<sup>154</sup> “George Bush: Remarks at the Dedication Ceremony of the Mount Rushmore National Memorial in South Dakota,” July 3, 1991.

Rushmore symbolizes all that is American. Perhaps he is right to assert that a monument that stood for 50 years as a tourist destination and national memorial contained notions of the political, cultural, and social makeup of the United States' character. President Bush's brief remarks officially dedicated Mount Rushmore. Like Calvin Coolidge and Franklin Roosevelt before him, his remarks also neglected the significance of Mount Rushmore in a culturally contested region.

Mount Rushmore's location in the Black Hills is crucial for a better understanding of Mount Rushmore's two different perspectives. After the United States acquired the Black Hills region from the Sioux Nation, the tribe contested the legality of the transaction that culminated in a Supreme Court ruling. This ruling acknowledged United States wrongdoings and directly impacts the history and memory of Mount Rushmore. The public memories and descriptions of Mount Rushmore as expressed through public dedication ceremonies, often highlighted by presidential speeches, only acknowledged the American perspective of Mount Rushmore as the monument that Robinson and Borglum envisioned. Missing from the public dedicating ceremonies was an inclusion of Mount Rushmore's contested existence revolving from the problematic nature of the 1876 agreement between the Sioux Nation and the United States. The perspective of Mount Rushmore, the Sioux perspective, can best be understood through a review of the Sioux Nation's legal history over the Black Hills that began in 1924 and ended in the 1980 U.S. Supreme Court ruling.

## CHAPTER IV

### UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF MOUNT RUSHMORE

Understanding the efforts that created the context for memories of Mount Rushmore only unveils some of Mount Rushmore's lasting national and cultural implications. Furthermore, once construction ceased on the memorial, Mount Rushmore's widespread significance to the Black Hills region and the country became noticeable through various unintended consequences and subsequent legal and historical revelations that have fundamentally affected the political and religious meanings of Mount Rushmore. Most notably, the Sioux perspective of Mount Rushmore can be found through a review of the construction of the Crazy Horse Memorial and the Black Hills litigation.

#### **A Carved Consequence**

One direct cultural consequence of Mount Rushmore came in the form of another monument. The planning for another monument that memorialized the Sioux Nation's presence in the Black Hills began in the late 1930s.<sup>155</sup> The Sioux as an entity had been excluded from the Black Hills. This new monument promised to tell the story of another culture who also had a legitimate claim of the Black Hills region. One prominent leader within the Sioux Nation wanted to see a memorial in the Black Hills for the Sioux people.

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<sup>155</sup> Taliaferro, *Great White Fathers*, 329.



The Sioux monument's location in the Black Hills and official intentions are directly linked to the unintended consequences of Mount Rushmore, consequences not envisioned by any of the sponsors, creators, and interpreters of the monument. Henry Standing Bear, a prominent Sioux, first called for the idea of a Sioux monument in the Black Hills in 1939. After seeing progress on Mount Rushmore, some Sioux leaders wanted to see a monument for their culture and their people in the Black Hills.<sup>156</sup> It seems that the motivation for the Crazy Horse Memorial is a direct consequence of the creation of the Mount Rushmore memorial.

Even though Mount Rushmore was intended to represent the United States' form of government and the American progression as a nation and people, Mount Rushmore was indeed carved without regard for the Sioux Nation, as discussed in previous chapters. The fact that Mount Rushmore was carved in the middle of the Sioux Nation's *Paha Sapa* shows lack of consideration from the individuals responsible for Mount Rushmore towards the Sioux. Furthermore, the issue of land claims to the region and the Sioux Nation's belief in the sacredness of the Black Hills also shape the different perspectives of Mount Rushmore. Aside from the legal claims the Sioux Nation subsequently filed against the United States, many tribal leaders suggested their own monument in the Black Hills, showing how the proud Sioux Nation had leaders who consistently fought for their way of life. With the beginning of work on the Crazy Horse Memorial, some members from the Sioux Nation responded to the Mount Rushmore National Memorial with

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<sup>156</sup> Crazy Horse Memorial Frequently Asked Questions, <http://www.crazyhorsememorial.org/faq>, accessed August 1, 2009. Also see Suzanne Barta Julin, *A Marvelous Hundred Square Miles: Black Hills Tourism 1880 - 1941* (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2009), 180 and Taliaferro, *Great White Fathers*, 320-329.

another monument that helps reveal the Sioux perspective of Mount Rushmore.

Henry Standing Bear wrote eventual sculptor Korczak Ziolkowski stating, "My fellow chiefs and I would like the white man to know the red man has great heroes, too."<sup>157</sup> Luther Standing Bear's idea was for a Sioux monument of Crazy Horse, who was considered "the real patriot of the Sioux tribe."<sup>158</sup> The combination of the Sioux seeking their own monument in the Black Hills and their proceedings with a legal claim against the United States shows how contested the Black Hills became. Ziolkowski later revealed that Standing Bear's idea for a Crazy Horse monument originally grabbed his attention for the project.<sup>159</sup> Ziolkowski had experience working on Mount Rushmore, as he was an assistant on the Mount Rushmore project until he had an argument with Borglum's son, Lincoln. The quarrel resulted in fisticuffs, ending with Lincoln Borglum needing medical attention. Ziolkowski was fired from the project, and eventually returned to the Black Hills after World War II after worked stopped on Mount Rushmore.<sup>160</sup>

Using what he gained from working on Mount Rushmore, Ziolkowski established the Crazy Horse Memorial as an entirely different project. One of the most immediate differences between Mount Rushmore and the Crazy Horse Memorial is that Ziolkowski set up the project to be exclusively funded by private citizens. The Crazy Horse Memorial webpage lists Ziolkowski's intentions as a strong belief "in individual initiative

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<sup>157</sup> Luschei, *The Black Hills and the Indians*, 162

<sup>158</sup> Taliaferro, *Great White Fathers*, 322-323.

<sup>159</sup> Luschei, *The Black Hills and the Indians*, 162.

<sup>160</sup> Smith, *The Carving of Mount Rushmore*, 367-369. Smith noted the friendship between Gutzon and Korczak as two men who were "much alike." Korczak was fired for physically hurting his superior, not for personal reasons.

and private enterprise.”<sup>161</sup> Ruth Ziolkowski, Korczak’s wife, commented in 1986 after Korczak’s death “Korczak never did anything in a small way. It always had to be the biggest and it had to be the best.”<sup>162</sup> Due to Korczak’s desire to carve a massive sculpture and preference for private control, the Crazy Horse Memorial is a nonprofit foundation.

The strict stance on private funding is one reason why the Crazy Horse Memorial itself is still unfinished with no established timetable for completion. The entire Crazy Horse Memorial project, as Ziolkowski envisioned, includes the Indian Museum of North America, a visitor center, and plans for an on-site University.<sup>163</sup> Like Mount Rushmore and its visitor center, the Crazy Horse Memorial was conceptualized to host visitors and tell another side of history. Whereas Mount Rushmore tells a distinctly American or “white” history and emphasizes white advancement across the continent, the Crazy Horse Memorial is intended to remind all that the Sioux Nation had a powerful presence within the Black Hills. Together, these two memorials in the Black Hills contribute to the differing economic, cultural, political and religious perspectives of Mount Rushmore.

### **The Crazy Horse Memorial’s Historical Memory Within the Context of Mount Rushmore**

The work that has been completed reveals a face of Crazy Horse, an image in question, as admitted by Ziolkowski himself. Scholars have noted Crazy Horse refused

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<sup>161</sup> Crazy Horse Memorial Frequently Asked Questions. <http://www.crazyhorsememorial.org/faq/> accessed August 1, 2009.

<sup>162</sup> Ron Martz. "Crazy Horse Memorial Is Dream in Progress" Omaha World - Herald, July 6, 1986.

<sup>163</sup> Crazy Horse Memorial, Korczak Ziolkowski storyteller. [http://www.crazyhorsememorial.org/about\\_storyteller.html](http://www.crazyhorsememorial.org/about_storyteller.html) accessed August 1, 2009.

to be photographed, and Ziolkowski even mentioned “Crazy Horse is being carved not so much as a lineal likeness but more as a memorial to the spirit of Crazy Horse—to his people.”<sup>164</sup> An accurate likeness of what Crazy Horse actually looked like is a notable difference between the Crazy Horse Memorial and Mount Rushmore; as Borglum depicted each presidential bust from actual portraits of the men. Yet like Mount Rushmore, the Crazy Horse Memorial was originally intended to evoke some type of spirit for whoever views the sculpture. The multiple differences between Mount Rushmore and the Crazy Horse Memorial in terms of project inception and actual accomplishment should also be noted. However, for the purposes of each memorial’s efforts of promoting their intended perspectives each had original intentions as sculptures that reveal more about cultures and their efforts for perseverance. The original intentions of each monument reveal the cultural attempts to tell similar stories but with different perspectives.

A visit to the Crazy Horse Memorial indicates the purpose of the memorial. Upon admission, Indians pay no admission fee while all non-Indians must pay to see the work-in-progress. Ziolkowski always insisted that the Crazy Horse Memorial was for the benefit of the Sioux, therefore deeming it unnecessary for any Indian to pay to see their memorial. The Thunderhead Mountain, as Ziolkowski named the area of the memorial, has been a slow sculpting process yet the site has large-scale intentions for the Sioux as a resource. A 2008 Executive Proclamation from South Dakota’s Governor M. Michael Rounds restated the big picture goals for the Crazy Horse Memorial as a continued effort

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<sup>164</sup> Crazy Horse Memorial Frequently Asked Questions, <http://www.crazyhorsememorial.org/faq/> accessed August 1, 2009; Taliaferro, *Great White Fathers*, 330.

for "steady progress on the memorial's humanitarian goals."<sup>165</sup> Gov. Rounds also praised the Crazy Horse Memorial for enriching citizens from around the world from the experience of viewing the memorial.<sup>166</sup> However, not all have shared positive remarks for the Crazy Horse Memorial.

As the workers on the Crazy Horse Memorial have sought steady progress for the memorial, tribal members have voiced displeasure for a memorial that perhaps has turned into a "cash cow."<sup>167</sup> Some displeasure with the visible progress on the memorial is understandable because the Ziolkowski family is the direct beneficiaries of sustained income, perhaps by the appearance that the family has sustained consistent employment through their undertaking of the memorial. Even family spokesperson Rob de Wall pointed out in Korczak's 1982 obituary:

Ziolkowski left everything so his wife, Ruth, and their children could carry on in conjunction with the non-profit Crazy Horse Memorial Foundation board of directors. Ziolkowski's whole life would be wasted if the project stopped after his 35 years of labor and all the momentum he has given it. It will continue and his family is dedicated to that end.<sup>168</sup>

Not only would the original Crazy Horse Memorial artist not see his work come to fruition, but the project itself was left to the will of his family and a board of directors. For the past 63 years, the historical memory of the Crazy Horse Memorial had changed

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<sup>165</sup> M. Michael Rounds, Executive Proclamation, State of South Dakota, May 6, 2008.

<sup>166</sup> M. Michael Rounds, Executive Proclamation, State of South Dakota, May 6, 2008.

<sup>167</sup> Taliaferro, *Great White Fathers*, 379.

<sup>168</sup> "Korczak Ziolkowski, Sculptor Who Portrayed Crazy Horse." *New York Times*, October 22, 1982.

just like the Mount Rushmore National Memorial. The Ziolkowski family continues carving the memorial as the Sioux perspective of the monument reveals more about the Black Hills and their interpreted historical significance of the region.

The intentions behind the Crazy Horse Memorial are important factors concerning the American and Sioux perspective of Mount Rushmore and the Black Hills. Generations of spirited and talented artists and leaders attempted to tell a story, each with a different perspective and serving as essential to each culture's history and interpretations. The history of the Crazy Horse Memorial, from the Borglum-Ziolkowski rift, to the consistent refusal of public dollars, is interesting in itself. However, Mount Rushmore and the Crazy Horse Memorial combine to represent the contested past of the Black Hills and serve as visual indicators of past accomplishments and misfortunes. Ultimately, the unintended consequence of the Crazy Horse Memorial helped define Mount Rushmore's legacy.

### **Unresolved Historical Claims**

Some Mount Rushmore scholars, such as Jesse Larner and John Taliaferro, reference a particular perspective of Mount Rushmore history: the American or "white" perspective. Other perspectives are equally as important to Mount Rushmore's history and public memory; other perspectives or interpretations of Mount Rushmore arise from the fact that the monuments are located in the Sioux Nation's sacred Black Hills. The tribe regarded the Black Hills region as a holy site of nourishment for its abundant game, as a lasting natural resource of timber for the poles for teepees, lodges, and as a place for

spiritual ceremonies such as the Sun Dance.<sup>169</sup> Once the Sioux Nation lost territorial control of the Black Hills, the tribe made claims of an egregious wrongdoing by the United States. By 1934, Mount Rushmore was well underway to being established as the United State's "Shrine of Democracy." The Sioux Nation's legal journey over the illegal 1876 transaction regarding the Black Hills shapes the significance of Mount Rushmore equally as much as the aspirations from those who created Mount Rushmore's American perspective of the monument.

As previously mentioned in the Introduction, the Black Hills region officially entered the United States in 1877. An 1874 United States expedition into the Black Hills led by Lt. Gen. Custer confirmed the rumored speculation of gold in the region. By 1877, the United States government arranged for the sale of the Black Hills. The Sioux Nation was faced with declining population, shortage of goods, and a need to provide for the future of the tribe. Since the United States' acquisition of the region, the Sioux Nation has contested the sale and called for an outright return of the Black Hills. Understanding the legal journey pursued by the Sioux Nation is necessary to explain the roots of the Sioux Nation's perspectives of Mount Rushmore. Mount Rushmore's progression as a national memorial took place during the Sioux Nation's legal claims against the United States, meaning that the United States sponsored a national memorial in a region that was questionably obtained—or more striking—never intended to be sold by the Sioux Nation.

The validity of the United States' acquisitions and subsequent ownership of the Black Hills should be considered when viewing Mount Rushmore as a National Memorial. Years of rulings, appeals, and special waivers have demonstrated how the

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<sup>169</sup> Nicholas Black Elk, *Black Elk Speaks*, 33, 49-50, 103.

Sioux Nation actually had a valid legal claim in terms of full compensation for the sale of the Black Hills. The Sioux Nation's case before the U.S. Supreme Court represents how the federal government has dealt with illegal land confiscation and how the Court has attempted to reconcile past events.

### **Mount Rushmore's Public Memory in a Culturally Contested Region**

Soon after the four presidential busts were carved, Mount Rushmore's cultural significance to non-Indians became clearer. As Calvin Coolidge, Franklin Roosevelt and Gutzon Borglum previously stated, Mount Rushmore was an American monument that was supposed to represent all that has been accomplished within the United States. Yet Mount Rushmore's location in the Black Hills—a region that was previously singled out as under Sioux Nation control—became an identifier of all things that were questionable about Mount Rushmore's existence as a definite American monument. The Sioux Nation felt violated under the provisions of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, and their eventual sale of the Black Hills to the United States in 1876. In 1934, with an Indian-friendly administration in Washington, the tribe filed a case in the court of claims in 1934 seeking compensation and a return of the Black Hills.

Gutzon Borglum envisioned a distinctly national monument that is located in a culturally contested region. Robinson was confident of the demise of the Sioux Nation as a culture in the 1920s, perhaps from the federal government's policy of assimilation and the low population of Sioux Indians on the South Dakota reservations. However, Robinson had strong faith in white conquest over the Black Hills and Sioux Nation; otherwise he may not have advocated for a monument in a region where U.S. ownership could be contested. The U.S. Supreme Court's 1980 ruling explained the U.S.



wrongdoings in a legal sense and how contested the region had become. Culturally speaking, however, the region remained contested for the Sioux even though Borglum completed a "Shrine of Democracy" in 1941.<sup>170</sup> Mount Rushmore has served as a tourist destination and American symbol of freedom and patriotism, but not for the Sioux Nation. As the Black Hills' previous owners, the Sioux Nation had different cultural perspectives of the use of the region.<sup>171</sup> In order to better understand the legal questions of ownership of the Black Hills and ultimately the cliff Mount Rushmore was carved on, one must turn to the history of the legal proceedings of the Black Hills claim.

The Sioux Nation argued that the United States wrongfully acquired the Black Hills and that the region should be returned to the tribe. When Sioux attorney Ralph Case filed the grievance in 1934, work on Mount Rushmore was well underway and the Black Hills region officially began a legal journey rooted in the legacies of federal Indian policy. The legal history of the Black Hills claim shows how Mount Rushmore's existence in the Black Hills has to be considered questionable because of the Sioux Nation's legal claim and eventual legal victory. Ultimately, Mount Rushmore was sculpted in a region that the United States unlawfully acquired. The Supreme Court's ruling, though favoring the Sioux Nation, overlooked the tribe's cultural values with respect to the Black Hills. Mount Rushmore represents United States culture and the triumphs of United States government. The Sioux Nation's legal claim is important to Mount Rushmore's legacies, because it greatly shapes how Mount Rushmore has been interpreted and what the monument means to two different cultures: each with a claim to

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<sup>170</sup> Fite. *Mount Rushmore*, 275. Lincoln Borglum, Gutzon's son, completed the final drilling at Mount Rushmore on October 31, 1941.

<sup>171</sup> Worster, *Under Western Skies*, chapt. 8, 112-113.

the Black Hills.

The main documents used to argue for the Sioux Nation's claim are based upon treaties and the Congressional Act of February 28, 1877. The Act of February 28, 1877 officially eliminated the Black Hills region from the Great Sioux Reservation as outlined in the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. The basic legal claim from the Sioux Nation is that the Act of 1877 "constituted a taking of the Black Hills for which just compensation had not been paid."<sup>172</sup> After reaching a tribal agreement on the Pine Ridge Reservation in 1906, the Sioux Nation decided to seek a legal ruling on the United States' acquisition of the Black Hills. The legal proceedings carried on through much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>173</sup> Given the unique status of American Indian tribes from the *Worcester* decision, the Sioux Nation was not able to legally sue the United States for the wrongful acquisition of the Black Hills, because the United States is the legal guardian of the Sioux Nation, thus nullifying the Sioux's legal protection from the entity that guards them.<sup>174</sup>

Before *U.S. v. Sioux Nation* appeared before the Supreme Court, the previous efforts and legal proceedings from the Sioux Nation's legal team reveal a tenacious effort to seek justice for the loss of the Black Hills. Edward Lazarus' *Black Hills White Justice* covers the Sioux Nation's legal proceedings pointing out that because of the past legal efforts, the *U.S. v. Sioux Nation* case was rooted in the legacies of federal Indian

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<sup>172</sup> *United States v. Sioux Nation of Indians, et al.* 448 U.S. 371

<sup>173</sup> Edward Lazarus, *Black Hills White Justice*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 124.

<sup>174</sup> For a history of the Black Hills' initial legal proceedings see Lazarus, *Black Hills White Justice*, 119-138. For a comprehensive history of the Sioux Nation see Robert M. Utley, *The Last Days of the Sioux Nation*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963). Also, the decision in *Worcester v. Georgia* established the parameters of the relationship between Indian tribes and the United States.

policy.<sup>175</sup> Lazarus' account is interesting, because he is the son of Sioux attorney Arthur Lazarus and because he researched his father's legal workings with the Sioux Nation. Edward Lazarus wrote his narrative of the legal proceedings after the Supreme Court decision. Lazarus, like many Black Hills scholars, pointed out that the Sioux lost the Black Hills when the Act of February 28, 1877 passed through Congress. Specifically, the Act stated:

In consideration of the foregoing cession of territory and rights, and upon full compliance with each and every obligation assumed by the said Indians, the United States does agree to provide all necessary aid to assist the said Indians in the work of civilization; to furnish them schools and instruction in mechanical and agriculture arts, as provided for by the treaty of 1868.<sup>176</sup>

The Act of February 28, 1877 continued the agreement made between the United States and Sioux Nation in the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, which included a continuation of compensation for the tribe for cooperation with the United States. The Act of February 28, 1877 excluded the Sioux Nation's sovereignty over the Black Hills and placed the territory within the United States. Key to the Sioux Nation's legal claim is recognizing the compensation and agreements made in the 1868 treaty as a form of a sale of the Black Hills to the United States. Absent from this 1877 Act was the continuation of full compensation as described in the 1868 treaty; thus the foundation of a legal case to sue the United States took shape.

Seeking legal action against the United States was technically not an option for the Sioux Nation. Before the Sioux Nation could present a case against the federal

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<sup>175</sup> Lazarus, *Black Hills White Justice*, 124-130.

<sup>176</sup> Charles J. Kappler, *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties Vol. I*. (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904), 170.

government. Congress had to grant them permission. Edward Lazarus wrote a history of the Sioux Nation's legal proceedings for the Black Hills claim. Under Congress' waiver of sovereign immunity passed in 1873, all Indian tribes must be granted a Special Jurisdictional Act allowing a tribe to sue the federal government.<sup>177</sup> Therefore, the Sioux Nation's first legal task was to convince Congress to pass a Special Jurisdictional Act. The Act finally arrived in the summer of 1920 and allowed the Sioux Nation to proceed with a legal claim.<sup>178</sup>

The next step for the Sioux Nation was to obtain a lawyer through a process regulated by the Indian Bureau.<sup>179</sup> The initial "selected" lawyer could not advance the Sioux Nation's claim out of the Circuit Courts. There is a difference between a BIA appointed lawyer and a lawyer actually selected by the tribe. Lawyer's that were selected by the tribe usually better represented and argued for the tribe. Ralph Case became the first hired lawyer to represent the Sioux Nation and promised to help the tribe achieve just compensation for the United States' acquisition of the Black Hills.<sup>180</sup> After the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt, new federal policies recognized Indian sovereignty and thus helped advance the Sioux Nation's case. With the appointment of John Collier as Commissioner of Indian Affairs and the passing of the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), change in Indian country happened.<sup>181</sup> The changes Collier intended for Indian country, and specifically for the Sioux Nation, meant "the chance of the Indian is now and not

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<sup>177</sup> Lazarus, *Black Hills White Justice*, 124.

<sup>178</sup> Lazarus, *Black Hills White Justice*, 138.

<sup>179</sup> Lazarus, *Black Hills White Justice*, 138-139.

<sup>180</sup> Alexandra New Holy, "The Heart of Everything That Is: Paha Sapa, Treaties, and Lakota Identity." *Oklahoma City Law Review* 23, 1998: 333.

<sup>181</sup> Lazarus, *Black Hills White Justice*, 161.

hereafter. It is the chance of all time to get whatever you are entitled to."<sup>182</sup> Congress set up the Indian Claims Commission in 1946 to hear cases regarding Indian land taken away from tribes and how to award just monetary compensation.<sup>183</sup> With a significant shift in federal Indian policy, a sense of urgency for legal action overcame Case and the Sioux Nation and they proceeded with their legal claim. The actual legal progression of the Black Hills claim was motivated by one central belief of the Sioux Nation regarding the Black Hills: they regarded the Black Hills as their spiritual epicenter and never intended to sell the region.<sup>184</sup>

#### **The Argument of Sacred Land vs. Political Expediency**

Along with natural resources that the Black Hills provided, the sacredness of the land made the Sioux Nation's forced relinquishment in 1877 difficult. Nicholas Black Elk, a Lakota Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux, told of the Black Hills' spiritual significance in his autobiography *Black Elk Speaks*. Olivia Black Elk Pourier, Nicholas' granddaughter, remembered what her grandfather taught her about the Black Hills: "Grandpa used to show us where they got their wood and their lodge poles, and then they used to do the sun dance in certain places in the Black Hills."<sup>185</sup> The combination of natural resources and ideal locations for spiritual services contributed to the sacredness of the Black Hills for the Sioux Nation along with the Black Hills being identified as the location of much of the Lakota genesis narrative. The sanctity of the Black Hills for the

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<sup>182</sup> John Collier quoted in Lazarus, *Black Hills*, 162. Interestingly, Collier was given the nickname of Iron Man by his passionate speaking abilities.

<sup>183</sup> Lazarus, *Black Hills White Justice*, 372.

<sup>184</sup> Black Elk, *Black Elk Speaks*, 50, 100-102.

<sup>185</sup> Esther Black Elk DeSersa, Olivia Black Elk Pourier, Aaron DeSersa Jr., and Clifton DeSersa, *Black Elk Lives: Conversations with the Black Elk Family*, ed. Hilda Neihardt and Lori Utecht (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 134-135.

Sioux Nation added more importance to the litigation. Once the Sioux Nation controlled access to the Black Hills by pushing out competing tribes around 1815, they regarded the region as a holy place where *Wakan Tanka*, the Great Spirit, surrounded the tribe.<sup>186</sup> Historian Jeffrey Ostler noted how by the 1870s, the Sioux Nation understood the “economic, religious, and political” value of the Black Hills.<sup>187</sup> The values of the Black Hills to the Sioux Nation are the substance of the Sioux perspectives of Mount Rushmore. However, the Sioux Nation’s claim to the region became tied up in litigation, largely due to the United States’ definition of just compensation.

The definition of just compensation was central to the Sioux Nation’s case. The definition of just compensation from the Fifth Amendment of the Constitution was one part of the Sioux Nation’s legal claim that had to be proved in court. Beneath the argument for just compensation was the crux of the Black Hills legal claim for the Sioux Nation: a demand for actual return of lost lands. As the land that Mount Rushmore was carved into now faced issues of cultural and legal legitimacy. Central to *U.S. v. Sioux Nation* is the understanding that the tribe did not only want just compensation, but rather the physical return of ownership of the Black Hills, and what was to happen to Mount Rushmore was uncertain. However, before the United States challenged the 1979 Court of Claims decision, the Sioux Nation’s legal journey included decades of argumentation in the Court of Claims.

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<sup>186</sup> Lazarus, *Black Hills White Justice*, 7; Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee* (Cambridge: University Press, 2004), 58-59. Scholars have noted the different tribes that the Sioux Nation pushed out of the Black Hills such as the Kiowa and Crow. The year 1815 is used as a safe marker of exclusive Sioux reign over the region.

<sup>187</sup> Ostler, *Plains Sioux*, 59.

Gaining permission to sue the federal government was not an easy accomplishment. The permission for judicial review that the Sioux Nation sought seemed hopeless after many cases were dismissed in Circuit Courts. The Court of Claims ruled in 1942 that Congress had not given the courts enough power to decide if the Sioux Nation could seek redress under the Fifth Amendment for the taking of the Black Hills.<sup>188</sup> What made this decision difficult for the Sioux Nation was that Congress allowed the Sioux Nation to seek redress through a Jurisdictional Act in the first place. The branch of the federal government that the Sioux Nation was allowed to seek a ruling from simply stated that they did not have enough power to make such a ruling.<sup>189</sup> The initial legal efforts led by Sioux Nation attorney Ralph Case simply did not accept the ambiguity delivered by the Court of Claims. Case proceeded with the Black Hills claim until his death in 1957. Edward Lazarus summed up his accomplishments on the case: "In thirty-five years, two courts in three decisions had dismissed or rejected the Black Hills claim."<sup>190</sup> Even through the legal rulings during Case's career were not favorable to the Sioux Nation, the work that Case completed for the Sioux Nation's claim proved useful for the next attorney as they reframed the Sioux Nation's legal argument.

New attorneys Arthur Lazarus and Marvin Sonosky found fundamental shortcomings with the original legal argument.<sup>191</sup> The Sioux Nation was not fully aware of the United States' intent during the "sale" of the Black Hills in 1876 and vice versa.

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<sup>188</sup> Lazarus, *Black Hills White Justice*, 177.

<sup>189</sup> Lazarus, *Black Hills White Justice*, 177. Lazarus pointed out that the context of World War II may have significantly influenced the 1942 decision; the U.S. was already paying the cost of war and perhaps the Court of Claims felt it untimely to accrue more debts for the United States.

<sup>190</sup> Lazarus, *Black Hills White Justice*, 216.

<sup>191</sup> Lazarus, *Black Hills White Justice*, 266.

Lazarus and Sonosky, upon reviewing Case's initial argument, found that there was "no consideration" made by the United States when they acquired the Black Hills.<sup>192</sup> Finding the Fifth Amendment argument in the Act of February 28, 1877 proved to give the Black Hills claim a more complete legal argument, since just compensation with interest had not yet been paid. The United States acknowledged the Sioux Nation's sovereignty over the Black Hills in the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. Specifically, Article Two stated that the land was to be "set apart for the absolute and undisturbed use and occupation of the Indians herein named."<sup>193</sup> With this treaty in effect, the Sioux Nation had exclusive rights to the Black Hills. For the Sioux Nation to have a legal victory, they would need to show the Supreme Court that they were never fully compensated for the Black Hills.

### **Supreme Court Ruling**

Lazarus was the lead attorney for the Sioux Nation before the Supreme Court and presented the legal brief that included an extensive history of relations between the United States and Sioux Nation and their specific relevance to the Black Hills claim. The case was argued on March 24, 1980 and decided on June 30, 1980.<sup>194</sup> The decision of 8-1 in favor of the Sioux Nation took into consideration much of the historical wrongdoings on behalf of the United States to affirm the 1979 Court of Claims ruling. Justice Blackmun delivered the majority opinion and opened with powerful remarks:

This case concerns the Black Hills of South Dakota, the Great Sioux Reservation, and a colorful, and in many respects tragic, chapter in the history of the Nation's West. Although the litigation comes down to a claim of interest since 1877 on an award of over \$17 million, it is necessary.

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<sup>192</sup> Lazarus, *Black Hills White Justice*, 265-266.

<sup>193</sup> Kappler, *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties Vol. II*.

<sup>194</sup> *US v. Sioux Nation of Indians*, 448 US 371 (1980).



in order to understand the controversy, to review at some length the chronology of the case and its factual setting.<sup>195</sup>

The United States' admission of wrongdoings was a moral victory for the Sioux Nation. Yet as Blackmun stressed the role of the history of the case, he viewed the context of the past between the Sioux and United States as imperative to the Court's affirmation and he turned the majority opinion into more of a historical narrative. The lone dissenter, Justice Rehnquist, pointed out that the role of the Supreme Court is not to take part in "historical revisionism."<sup>196</sup> Also, Rehnquist was against the wavier dismissing *res judicata* that re-opened the Sioux Nation's case for the 1979 Court of Claims ruling.<sup>197</sup> Rehnquist's dissent was ideologically and politically based, merely promoting the authority of the Court versus actually seeking justice. Dissent over the past or not, Justice Blackmun used what he believed to be the most accurate account of the past when he wrote:

We conclude that the legal analysis and factual findings of the Court of Claims fully support its conclusion that the terms of the 1877 Act did not effect 'a mere change in the form of investment of Indian tribal property.' Lone [448 U.S. 371, 424] *Wolf v. Hitchcock*, 187 U.S., at 568 . Rather, the 1877 Act effected a taking of tribal property, property which had been set aside for the exclusive occupation of the Sioux by the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. That taking implied an obligation on the part of the Government to make just compensation to the Sioux Nation, and that obligation, including an award of interest, must now, at last, be paid.<sup>198</sup>

Agreeing with the Court of Claims ruling was a significant change in how the United States has compensated Indian tribes for illegal land transactions. The Supreme Court

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<sup>195</sup> *US v. Sioux Nation of Indians*, 448 US 371 (1980), 3.

<sup>196</sup> Lazarus, *Black Hills White Justice*, 400.

<sup>197</sup> *US v. Sioux Nation of Indians*, 448 US 371 (1980). See also, Lazarus, *Black Hills White Justice*, 401.

<sup>198</sup> *US v. Sioux Nation of Indians*, 448 US 371 (1980), 20.

affirmed that Congress violated the terms of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 when they passed the Act of 1877.<sup>199</sup> The Supreme Court understood the unique circumstances of the Black Hills claim and attempted to reconcile the wrongdoings of the past through the affirmation of the 1979 Court of Claims Ruling.

The Supreme Court's decision to affirm the Court of Claims ruling was not solely based on the tragic historical record. The court's affirmation included a legal reasoning based on the role of the Fifth Amendment that entitled the Sioux Nation to paid interest on the Black Hills' monetary value. While reviewing the constitutionality of the 1979 Court of Claims ruling on the legality of the Fifth Amendment in the 1877 Act, the majority opinion agreed with the precedent established with the *Fort Berthold* decision.<sup>200</sup> Congress did not act appropriately when they acquired the Black Hills and the 1877 Act required compensation under the Fifth Amendment. The affirmation of the Supreme Court for the Sioux Nation's claim not only upheld the "Fort Berthold Test" but allowed the Sioux Nation to receive just compensation under the Fifth Amendment.

The impact of the Sioux Nation ruling on federal Indian law was indeed a legal victory while also demonstrating a cultural difference. The Sioux Nation contended that it never intended to sell the Black Hills. Nicholas Black Elk commented, "Only crazy or very foolish men would sell their Mother Earth."<sup>201</sup> According the Supreme Court's ruling in *U.S. v Sioux Nation*, a monetary award was the legal compensation for the United States' taking of the Black Hills. Some of the Sioux Nation's tribal governments

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<sup>199</sup> Bryan Wildenthal, *Native American Sovereignty on Trial: A Handbook of Cases, Laws, and Documents*, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO 2003), 59.

<sup>200</sup> *US v. Sioux Nation of Indians*, 448 US 371 (1980), 14-15.

<sup>201</sup> Black Elk. *Black Elk Speaks*, 103.

did not want a monetary award: they wanted a return of the land that since 1877 has been used by the United States. Mount Rushmore is a permanent reminder of the Sioux Nation's loss of the Black Hills as the new owners of the region allowed for a nationally significant memorial to rest in a questionably acquired region.

### **A National Memorial in an Illegally Acquired Region**

When Doane Robinson envisioned sculpture in the Black Hills he did so without any inkling of a possibility of the Sioux Nation taking or claiming back the region. Mount Rushmore was created as a memorial for all Americans while the Sioux Nation has reminded all Americans of their permanent claim for the Black Hills. Once the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Sioux Nation, the historical memory of Mount Rushmore was legally and fundamentally changed. The Sioux Nation has not accepted the legally ruled compensation for the United States' taking of the Black Hills because of the sanctity of the region. In a review of the *U.S. v. Sioux Nation*, Richard Pempelton Jr. noted how the Supreme Court's decision was culturally destructive:

In practice, however, the legal theory of the case is dangerous precedent against Indian litigants. In holding for the Sioux nation, the Supreme Court applied legal doctrines and precedents whose premises are hostile to the deepest conviction to the Lakota and Dakota people. The decision has effectively barred almost every subsequent property and religious freedom claim...<sup>202</sup>

Since the Sioux were awarded a substantial sum of money, their other legal grievances may be overlooked under the belief that the Court has already decided and justly ended potential land claims regarding the Black Hills and Sioux Nation.

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<sup>202</sup> Richard Pempelton Jr. " 'I Saw That it was Holy': The Black Hills and the Concept of Sacred Land." *Law and Inequality: A Journal of Theory and Practice* 3 (1985): 305-306.

The 1980 Supreme Court affirmation was a formal acknowledgement of the United States' illegal taking of the Black Hills from the Sioux people. However, the compensation was neither what traditional Sioux members nor tribal governments believed to be culturally adequate. Alexandra New Holy's review of *U.S. v. Sioux Nation* traced the tribe's reaction and efforts after the Court's ruling. The Sioux have tried to protect parts of the Black Hills from being privately developed as tourist destinations.<sup>203</sup> New Holy pointed out how the Sioux have learned to understand the Black Hills as a sacred place that preserves their identity and culture. Also, New Holy placed an emphasis on the cultural predicament the Supreme Court created for the Sioux Nation with their affirmation.<sup>204</sup> Not only did the Sioux Nation have land taken from them under U.S. law, but the only way they can receive compensation for the illegal act is through federal law and U.S. cultural beliefs. With two different perspectives of the Black Hills, only one would be considered in the courtroom. The Sioux Nation's cultural perspectives of the Black Hills and how to be treated justly was not recognized.

After the 1980 court affirmation, New Holy made a strong contribution by identifying the cultural values that Supreme Court overlooked in 1980. Instead, as Justice Blackmun's opinion showed, the Court relied on correcting historical mistreatment and illegal behavior; yet they also created an unresolved cultural dichotomy for the Sioux Nation. As a federally recognized tribe, the Sioux Nation should be allowed to maximize their economic development. Certainly the money awarded from

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<sup>203</sup> Alexandra New Holy, "The Heart of Everything That Is: Paha Sapa, Treaties, and Lakota Identity," *Oklahoma City Law Review* 23 (1998): 348-350.

<sup>204</sup> New Holy, "The Heart of Everything That Is: Paha Sapa, Treaties, and Lakota Identity," 319-320.

the Supreme Court would help the tribe's economic development, yet the acceptance of a payment would officially complete a transaction that some Sioux claim should have never taken place. The Sioux Nation's strong cultural beliefs mixed with the realities of the twenty-first century only add to the legacies of failed federal Indian policy. Mount Rushmore's public memory, therefore, should include an acknowledgement of the Sioux Nation's legal claim for the Black Hills region as well as their cultural claim that they never intended to sell the Black Hills. Even now with the consequences of Mount Rushmore, the Crazy Horse Memorial, and subsequent legal rulings, the American and Sioux perspectives of Mount Rushmore will forever include the legacy of existing in a region that was not intended to have a price, let alone be sold.

The Supreme Court affirmed the monetary compensation of \$106 million dollars with interest, and that sum still sits in the United States Treasury. With interest since 1980, the amount has accrued to just over \$900 million.<sup>205</sup> Even though the Sioux Nation was awarded the largest sum for illegal U.S. land confiscation in history, they have not accepted the money. Their legal premise that one does not sell sacred land is just one reason why the money still collects interest. Another reason is that once the Sioux Nation accepts the money, their loss of the Black Hills is officially compensated, and they would lose the opportunity to demand an outright return of the land.<sup>206</sup> Legally, the Sioux Nation achieved a courtroom victory: culturally the Sioux received a continuation of

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<sup>205</sup> "Sioux Split on Suit Seeking Money for Black Hills," *New York Times*, April 23, 2009. Interestingly, some members of the Sioux tribe filed a class-action lawsuit demanding some of the awarded money be distributed.

<sup>206</sup> Congress had made attempts to return portions of the Black Hills to the Sioux but each piece of legislation has not passed. See the Bradley Bill and Sioux Nation Black Hills Restoration Act of 1993.

misunderstandings from the United States.

The United States government understood Mount Rushmore as a monument for all Americans. Since Mount Rushmore's location is in a place considered by the U.S. Supreme Court as illegally obtained, the Mount Rushmore memorial is perhaps not a monument for all Americans. The Crazy Horse Memorial was a direct response to the creation of the type of memorial that ultimately conveys history of a nation and people from the dominant white perspective. Thus, two massive memorials have been attempted in the Black Hills that tell the stories of the United States. Together the perspective of the memorials reveals the cultural significance of the Black Hills and the changing historical memory.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

As previously discussed, the notion for a massive state related memorial in the Black Hills morphed into a National Memorial. Doane Robinson's 1923 idea to attract more interest into the Black Hills region ultimately proved to be the tourist destination in Western South Dakota that he envisioned. What Robinson could not fully envision were the lasting legacies of his once modest idea. Once Gutzon Borglum signed on as the lead sculptor for the project, the proposed sculpture in the Black Hills was destined to become a physical reality and a National Memorial. Since Mount Rushmore showcases the busts of four of America's prominent presidents, it was fitting that Presidents Coolidge and F. Roosevelt offered public comments throughout the construction of Mount Rushmore that created the American perspective of Mount Rushmore. Tracing the rhetoric used to describe Mount Rushmore before it was completed shows how Mount Rushmore was intended to represent American ideals even before anyone had the opportunity to view the monument as only a monument: a sculpture minus the prescribed label as a "Shrine of Democracy."

The history of Mount Rushmore has been documented multiple times, yet

scholars have often overlooked the differing economic, political, cultural and religious perspectives that have changed over time and proved vital to understanding Mount Rushmore's meaning in the Black Hills and as "Shrine of Democracy." Mount Rushmore began in a context that encouraged Americans to celebrate freedom and in a strong period of economic prosperity during the 1920s. The onset of the Great Depression slowed the progression of Mount Rushmore, but just like the nation, the monument survived economic hardships. To this extent, the monument does include glimpses of Coolidge's "American spirit:" a permanent symbol of perseverance through tough times. Yet the unique historical context of Mount Rushmore's construction through drastic economic cycles should not completely justify the monument worthy as a National Memorial. Even though Mount Rushmore was intended as a National Memorial for all Americans, the fact that it exists in the Black Hills region that was illegally acquired becomes essential to truly understanding the historical significance of Mount Rushmore.

Too often Mount Rushmore tells an American story and often neglected in Mount Rushmore studies is a serious acknowledgment of land contestation over the Black Hills. Since Mount Rushmore was carved in a region that was ruled by the Supreme Court as an illegal transaction raises the question, what does Mount Rushmore really signify and to whom? The United States government, through words of former U.S. presidents, has implied what Mount Rushmore should mean for generations to come with an established American perspective of the monument. The drawback lies in that what Mount Rushmore means to the Sioux Nation and what the tribes' perspective of the Black Hills region reveals about Mount Rushmore's public memory and national significance. The



Sioux perspective of Mount Rushmore shapes the overall meaning of the monument just as much as the American perspective.

The original interpretations of Mount Rushmore from Robinson and Borglum are problematic because of the 1876 Mannypenny Agreement. This "agreement" resulted in some form a sale of the Black Hills, allowing the United States to use the land. The truly powerful American ideals that have been prescribed to the monument include an egregious acquisition. One should ask how a monument carved in a region with as much cultural history and land contestation as the Black Hills could exist with the longstanding claim as a "Shrine of Democracy." The ideals and means of acquiring the land Mount Rushmore is located upon were not democratic.

Generations upon generations, just as Borglum hoped, will view Mount Rushmore and be told that Mount Rushmore represents the triumphs of American democracy. In a theoretical sense, Mount Rushmore does indeed tell the story of the American form of government. In reality, however, Mount Rushmore continues the legacies of cultural misunderstandings and wrongdoings by the United States. The legacies of Mount Rushmore, just like the United States government, should always consider both sides of the story when evaluating the national and regional significance of Mount Rushmore.

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