The Other Faces of Mount Rushmore: Tourism, Advertising, and the Commodity of Experience

Jill Angela McNutt
College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

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THE OTHER FACES OF MOUNT RUSHMORE:

TOURISM, ADVERTISING, AND THE COMMODITY OF EXPERIENCE

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of American Studies

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

by

Jill Angela McNutt

1996
APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

[Signature]
Author

Approved, May 1996

[Signatures]

[Signatures]
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family -- Larry, Susan, Derek and Seth McNutt -- who have always been quick to remind me of what I owe the State of Virginia for my education, and to Dawn Goodman. All have shown interest and support from the very beginning and worked to hold me accountable for the completion of this work.
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which tourism advertising commodifies the experience of tourists at Mount Rushmore National Monument. Specifically, it addresses the way in which advertising and the commodity of experience link the sculpture’s historical and geographical context to relevant social constructs like natural beauty, art and technical achievement toward the ultimate goal of attracting tourists.

The “commodity of experience” was defined in greater detail, based on tourism marketing strategy and the concept of mental consumption. Then examples of South Dakota tourism advertising incorporating images of Mount Rushmore were subjected to analysis through E. McClung Fleming’s model for artifact study. They were interpreted both as material culture in and of themselves and as commodified experience.

Finally, a tourism model was presented in which principles of affective analysis provided a framework for examining the ways that a tourist’s journey is influenced and ultimately replaced by the commodity of experience at every stage, from planning to reminiscing.

The results suggest that many of the variations on the commodity of experience manifested in Mount Rushmore tourism advertising are rooted in historical themes related to the sculpture, including notions of Eastern civilization and Western space. However, the manner in which the tourism ads pre-package experience and the conspicuous lack of “full revelation” in the ads make for a spurious experience in the end. In light of the commodity of experience, “democracy” of choice is removed from the consumer and placed in the realm of the commercial.
THE OTHER FACES OF MOUNT RUSHMORE:
TOURISM, ADVERTISING, AND THE COMMODITY OF EXPERIENCE
INTRODUCTION

In 1924 Doane Robinson, former South Dakota state historian, wrote sculptor Gutzon Borglum a letter regarding a "mountain monument to America's greatness." It was an idea that Robinson had been considering for a year. His personal vision was to have the Needles, a geological formation in the state's Black Hills, transformed into the likenesses of some well-known figures from Western history such as Lewis and Clark. However, when Borglum finally visited the Black Hills himself, he did not envision a monument dedicated to a region. Rather, he saw a work of art commemorating the "founding of a great nation and the development of a civilization," based on his notion that "everything in modern civilization has so expanded that the very scale, the breadth of one's thoughts, is no longer limited by town, city, country, state."  

Though Robinson and Borglum had different ideas about what—or who—constituted America's greatness, the desire for a distinctly national monument was common to both men. Mount Rushmore, with its huge representations of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln, was the

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2 Ibid., p. 87.
manifestation of their dreams. In a sense, each man saw his vision realized. Borglum got to memorialize four historical figures on a scale which he saw fitting, given their perceived national significance as founders, developers, and protectors. Robinson, on the other hand, had in his state a gateway to the West of sorts: the monumental images of four “frontier” presidents representative of the exploration and settlement of the plains.3

The academic and material expressions of nationalism generated in Mount Rushmore’s day represented a theme that was key to a structure, character and direction specific to America at that time. However, symbols are changeable stores of information with the capacity to represent multiple themes. Presently, more than two million tourists visit the Mount Rushmore National Monument each year. As with most tourists, these people are looking for an “experience” and have probably arrived with certain expectations which stem from prior knowledge and travels, hearsay, vacation guides, and the various personal motivations which led them to choose the national monument as a destination.4 Through first-hand involvement with the site, some are looking to generate or renew a belief or a feeling.5 Optical pleasure is another desired outcome of their experience, as is authenticity-- these are among the things that sightseers pay for.6 In

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4 Ibid., p. 88. It is the inclusion of Theodore Roosevelt, a relatively contemporary figure on the national scene, which lends to the interpretation of the sculpture as a tribute to the West and westward expansion. Roosevelt was known politically as an economic developer, but it was his “Rough Rider” image which was probably of greatest popular interest.

5 Considerable research and speculation has gone into the area of tourist travel motivators. Some commonly identified reasons tourists travel include business, recreation, status or prestige, and environmental, historical and cultural pursuits. For more on travel motivators and models for understanding them, see Charles Goeldner and Robert MacIntosh, Tourism: Principles, Practices and Philosophies (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1986), pp. 124-140.


addition to these individual expectations, it has been suggested that tourists collectively engage in a ritual which has, since its beginning, “provided an important means by which the complex world could be simplified and understood in its interconnectedness.” In domestic tourism, this “complex world” might be said to comprise “America,” so that the tourist is engaged to some extent in discovering or defining his own “Americaness.”

Ever-changing perceptions of culture and the expectations that accompany them have demanded that themes for Mount Rushmore be presented in newer, more relevant ways. Advertising has been a crucial modern vehicle for disseminating and, arguably, shaping these themes. The tourism industry has also relied heavily on advertising to define and reflect experiences that are appealing because they are pertinent in the present-day. This notion that advertising is central to tourism’s function of educating people in how to understand and view the world around them has tremendous implications, particularly in regards to the study of material culture. Form, function, and the personal meanings attached to an object, image or attraction by a given society become superseded by the object’s place or meaning as related by advertising. In other words, in a culture of consumption, meanings are often derived from sources like ad images which are outside of the observer and frequently beyond his individual control. Such has been the case with Mount Rushmore: images of and references to the site in advertising are prolific, and

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8 Like historians and ethnographers in Henry Glassie’s “Meaningful Things and Appropriate Myths: The Artifact’s Place in American Studies,” advertisers must evaluate, generalize, and conduct a lot of research on “the less friendly, less verbose, less fortunate, more normal members of a society.” In so doing, advertising is able to reach a broader audience like a region or nation rather than an individual or a movement. Glassie implies that it is this broader audience which “gives the minority the power to speak myth.” In advertising, however, the masses don’t necessarily give power, but rather dictate the extent of that power through their response to an ad campaign. From Robert Blair St. George, *Material Life in America: 1600-1860* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), p. 72.
each frames the sculpture in a way that is significant for tourists, though somewhat removed from its original, intended interpretation. The social and cultural elements which contributed to its initial meaning have been replaced by another sphere of existence and influence: the commercial. More specifically, because of the way Mount Rushmore is embedded in the tourist experience, references to the sculpture in tourism advertising ultimately commodify the tourist’s sense of his relationship to the world around him (and hence, his concept of nationalism) by pre-packaging it in ways that link the historical and geographical contexts of the monument to other relevant, contemporary social constructs or travel motivators like natural beauty, art and technology.

Understanding how the Mount Rushmore tourist experience is commodified is important in the study of American culture for several reasons. First, tourism in general and the tourist experience affect an overwhelming majority of Americans. Most everyone is a tourist at one time or another, in the sense that most Americans encounter people or places different from themselves or their homes. It is the sum of these experiences which comprises meaning and provides a context for tourists to view the society around them:

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9 Images of Mount Rushmore pervade not only tourism advertising, but other advertising and productions as well. Representations of it have appeared in motion pictures, soap operas, Saturday morning children’s shows like Bugs Bunny and Pee Wee’s Playhouse, and television and print commercials for everything from electronic equipment to hamburgers. These images serve various functions. Sometimes they lend credibility to a product or invoke humor, while at other times they are meant to tug at the viewer’s patriotic heartstrings. Occasionally the ultimate inaccessibility and monumental size of the sculpture are used to lend an air of danger and suspense, as with Alfred Hitchcock’s *North by Northwest*.

"...tourists are inevitably engaged in the enculturative process of learning and teaching. Whether they call themselves either or both learner-teacher is hardly essential; what is essential is that they are invariably stimulating, responding, growing, participating, because they are also constantly experiencing."\textsuperscript{11}

At even the most basic level, the tourist's experience is important, because "the excitement of preparing and anticipating and the actual travel experiences are memorable occasions of family life."\textsuperscript{12}

Studying the way tourist experience is commodified is also useful because it implies access to abstract concepts like the sightseer's manner of being in the world -- the very personality and character of the tourist\textsuperscript{13} -- through a type of material culture which is, again, part of the majority of Americans' lives. Of all the institutions that mirror and exert influence on modern American culture, advertising is probably the most conspicuous, determined more by the unlimited opportunities created for it than by any real need.\textsuperscript{14} It has been called "one of the most important cultural factors molding and reflecting life today...an inevitable part of everyone's lives."\textsuperscript{15} As an institution which "meets needs" or influences culture, advertising (much like tourism) is a "touchstone of the ways in which...Americans have learned about all sorts of things."\textsuperscript{16} Media organizations, including the purveyors of advertising, purport to maintain a "democratic


\textsuperscript{12} Charles Goeldner and Robert McIntosh, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

\textsuperscript{13} Comment on "experience" is from Dean MacCannell, *op. cit.*, p. 23. Connection to personality is from Jay Jackie *op. cit.*, p. 301.


\textsuperscript{16} Daniel Boorstin, *op. cit.*, p. 128.
balance" by providing access, public education, and a "largely autonomous voice."17 Whether or not they are successful in these areas, the details conveyed in advertising constitute a significant part of the continuous flow of information used by Americans to orient themselves to their physical and social world.18

Yet another reason to explore the function of tourism advertising in commodifying tourist experience is its relevance for museums and historic sites like Mount Rushmore.19 Interestingly (though not surprisingly, given the prevalence of history-related images in advertising), mythologized versions of the American past have become quite popular in twentieth-century tourism. This is particularly true in the case of Mount Rushmore and other landscapes or sites with some national attachment that lend to a sense of national identity.20

In an era where more and more historic sites are dependent on tourist traffic for their survival, both historic sites and tourism advertising “acquire cultural burdens.”21 Historic sites are pressured to cater to the expectations of the man of leisure “by affording its visitors a whole polyphony of pleasures, from technical wonders to haute cuisine, including the panorama.”22 Advertising is required to “refamiliarize or

19 For the purpose of this essay, “historic sites” shall be taken to mean sites which are administered for the public and whose primary functions rest in preservation and education.
20 Jay Jackie. op. cit., p. 286.
22 Susan Sontag. ed., A Barthes Reader (New York: The Noonday Press, 1982), p. 250. The Eiffel Tower was the site Barthes referred to specifically in this excerpt. Research bears out Barthes’ observations. Tourists assess the desirability of a destination in stages. The initial factors in deciding on a destination include comfort factors like accessibility, infrastructure, price levels, natural beauty and climate, and social and cultural characteristics. The
recontextualize...‘bundles of attributes’ in the commodity environment,” allowing it to merge what might be viewed as very disparate objects or concerns (e.g. westward expansion and swimming pools.) Consider the ad for the town of Keystone in *Figure 1.*

This ad invokes nostalgia with the image of a train traveling through space and time, carrying tourists to the activities that will constitute their experience. However, the advertised experience juxtaposes conflicting elements. Under the watchful eyes of Washington and Lincoln -- two presidents who contributed to the opening up of the West -- tourists are shown panning for gold just like the first emigrants that flooded into the Black Hills. Close by, the Indian artist Paha Ska gives a friendly wave. His presence in the ad reminds the reader of an era when the Lakota people inhabited the area, but it does so without calling to mind documented historical events like that nation’s displacement when prospectors arrived, or the tragedy at nearby Wounded Knee less than 40 years before work on Mount Rushmore was started.

Though amenities and advertising may persuade tourists to visit, they sometimes do so at the expense of a site’s educational mission. Credibility (or the notion that they may not be getting the full story, as with the *Figure 1* ad just mentioned) is not always a conscious issue with visitors; tourists tend to trust what they discover, since their experiences are usually “first-hand in a pleasurable social atmosphere, unhindered by

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second stage of decision-making takes into account other parts of the “polyphony of pleasures” like gastronomy, architecture, history, art and music. For more, see Charles Goeldner and Robert McIntosh, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

everyday social bindings. It has been suggested that the ideal tourist experience leaves the traveler feeling as though he really knows the truth of a place or time.

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Figure 1: Ad for the City of Keystone

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24 Jay Jackie, op. cit., p. 301.
25 David Uzzell, op. cit., p. 62.
An analysis of tourist experience as it is embodied in advertising images, when coupled with a review of a site’s interpretive prospectus, could prove useful as a program evaluation or planning tool.

Mount Rushmore offers an ideal opportunity for analyzing the tourist experience as it is defined and commodified by tourism advertising. As a National Park Service monument, it has management and interpretive plans which elucidate interpretive goals and outline the ideal visitor experience from the perspective of an agency interested in the public history applications of the site. As a focal point of a region’s attractions, it has become the predominant image associated with the Black Hills, and even the entire State of South Dakota. It is situated geographically in an area which has grown up to serve its visitors through restaurants, lodging and camping, souvenir trade, and related attractions that claim to make a tourist’s Mount Rushmore experience complete. Ads which appear in the State’s tourism publications, and especially in the annual statewide travel directory, often utilize likenesses of the sculpture, regardless of the type of business being advertised or its proximity to the site. There is even a relative consistency with which the images are used; many advertisers featured the same image in their ads for two or more consecutive years. Finally, the names associated with the monument and its sculptor (i.e. “Rushmore” & “Borglum”) have been adopted by several businesses in the region.

Mount Rushmore and its satellites are the model example of a tourism machine at its finest.26

A two-fold examination of the Mount Rushmore tourist experience will shed light on the way tourism advertising works to commodify the tourist’s relationship to his surroundings. After the commodity of experience is briefly defined, the Mount Rushmore tourist experience will be explored within the framework of a basic model for material culture analysis. E. McClung Fleming’s work provides a useful starting point from which to analyze the commodity or “artifact” of Mount Rushmore tourist experience. This analysis will reveal some of the social constructs which currently fill Mount Rushmore with meaning for visitors. The final portion of the essay will address ways in which commodified experience operates throughout the tourist’s travels, from the planning stage to reminiscing about a trip.
DEFINING THE COMMODITY OF EXPERIENCE

Sociologists like Erving Goffman and Edward Hall have demonstrated the cultural significance attached to architecture, room arrangement, and perception and use of space. Their work supports the notion that space can be shaped in such a way that it becomes a form of material culture, so it might also be argued that time and concepts concerning it can be shaped as well. It should be possible to look at an event or some other segment of the past -- including the recent past, like a tourist's completed trip -- and analyze its components in terms of how and why they were shaped by human, cultural forces. Tourism advertising is already material culture itself, but the tourist experience it embodies should also be subject to analysis as a form of material culture.

Tourism is an economic force defined as "the sum of the phenomena and relationships arising from the interaction of tourists, business suppliers, host governments, and host communities in the process of attracting and hosting these tourists and other visitors."²⁷ From an economic standpoint, the main object of tourism is to bring together the various goals of those connected to the industry. This ultimately means prolonging the relationship between the tourist and the available attractions as long as possible, offering enough "product" or creating enough need in the traveler to induce him

²⁷ Charles Goeldner and Robert McIntosh, op. cit., p. 4.
to increase the amount of time devoted to his experience. Through partnerships and marketing strategies, host governments, attractions, and related businesses work to sell a package experience. In tourism advertising, a traveler is not just being asked to consider renting a motel room; he is being sold the concept that a motel room is worthwhile because it is close enough to Mount Rushmore and enough other attractions that he will need to stay overnight to take everything in.

Advertisers must alter their images accordingly to sell a total experience. For example, large sites like Mount Rushmore which represent a primary destination choice -- termed "mega-attractions" -- would ideally be made to seem as though they are made up of a series of activities and programs that require additional time and oftentimes include branching out into the surrounding communities. They would be transformed into "mega-events." 28 The ad in Figure 2 is an example of how one business turned an attraction into a mega-event. At least two of Mount Rushmore’s presidents are looking over the Gray Line tour bus in this ad, which offers to “show you the Black Hills.” However, the ad text equates the Black Hills with “five exciting tours.” (It is interesting to note that Mount Rushmore

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28 Excerpted from notes on the 1987 Tourism Congress.
is already “consumed” in this ad: the bus is pulling away and on toward the next attraction.

Similarly, a network of satellites around a well-known destination site must be developed to appear integrated and necessary enough to a complete experience of the site that the entire area can be promoted as one attraction. In the ad in Figure 3, the American Presidents Resort sets itself up as a mega-attraction -- a full tourist experience in its own right. It does so by drawing on the variety of local destinations (Mount Rushmore tops the list both visually and in writing), as well as a listing of its own “attractions,” which include a pool, mini-golf and nearby fishing.

All things considered, this complicated process of promoting an attraction is not unreasonable. The tourist is not an easy entity to market to. A large part of tourism, in the tourist’s eye, is passive: “...he expects interesting things to happen to
him,”\textsuperscript{29} even though he must first make a considerable investment of time and emotional energy in the venture. A tourist often commits at least 24 hours to a destination.\textsuperscript{30} The anticipated return is substantial: “travel experiences often are among the most outstanding memories in a traveler’s life.”\textsuperscript{31} Even with today’s sophisticated market research, “the advertiser is never sure of the power of a campaign. The ensemble of myths to which people in the U.S. respond presents a complex, shifting image that does not allow for much standing still.”\textsuperscript{32}

In the case of Mount Rushmore, images of the sculpture in tourism advertising both shape the tourist’s expectations and, in place of the visit, become the standard against which all memories of the trip and other similar experiences are weighed. In the end, the ads fulfill the expectations they helped to establish. The planes at the South Dakota Air and Space Museum (depicted in the ad in Figure 4) are visually given added significance because some have been flown over Mount Rushmore. It is never mentioned in the ad whether the planes in the center picture are actually on display, and no planes at the museum are marked as “THE PLANES THAT FLEW OVER MOUNT RUSHMORE.” However, the ad influences the tourist to remember the two attractions as being associated.

\textsuperscript{29} Daniel Boorstin, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 298.

\textsuperscript{30} Charles Goeldner and Robert McIntosh, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 528-529. This is the standard for what is classified as a “tourist.” Less time at a destination qualifies one as an “excursionist.”

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 168.

\textsuperscript{32} Herve Varenne, ed., \textit{Symbolizing America} (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), p. 8. The high percentage of advertisers who used the exact same ads from year to year during the period covered in this essay might suggest that the use of images of Mount Rushmore are general enough that they flex with myth shifts, or that there has been some relative consistency in the messages conveyed by the ads.
The ad in Figure 4 underscores the fact that tourism advertising is very much like one historian's description of democracy in that it "suffers from the temptation to allow the problem of persuasion to overshadow the problem of knowledge." In other words, advertising can paint a picture for researchers of what people believe rather than what is true; it can become "more concerned with credibility than with truth."33 This distinction is crucial in understanding the commodity of tourist experience: despite the best-laid plans of the tourism industry, how sites are experienced and remembered lay largely in the realm of advertising. What is true becomes secondary to what is deemed a valuable or enjoyable experience in the ads.

33 Daniel Boorstin, op. cit., pp. 28-29.
Overall, tourism advertising can be said to shape public opinion and patterns of consumption, making apparent the images that society will attach to itself as identifying marks. In fact, advertising gives the illusion of inviting the public to create itself in accordance with the ways the ads have already created it.34 Advertising images represent "congealed longing," becoming "the final form of an active wish" that is a tangible manifestation of the tourist experience.35 As exemplified by this ad (Figure 5), the view enjoyed by the "accountant on vacation" is a duplicate of the professional photographer's representation.36 The accountant's experience becomes a reproduction of the experience already captured in the ad image. Likewise, the tourist's actual visit to Mount Rushmore is a reproduction of the

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36 That the "photographer on location" is a professional is implied. By situating that picture at the top of the ad, so that it is read first, it is established as the original against which comparisons can be made.
commodity of experience he has mentally consumed multiple times before he even arrives at the site:

"Each advertisement promises a fix on the complexities of the market by appealing to the power of purchase as a mental power, a matter of possession and leverage in an indeterminate situation. For every actual purchase, countless contemplated purchases prepare the way. A habit of mind thus develops that uses the commodity without...using it up. What modern consumer culture produces, then, is not so much a way of being...as a way of seeing -- a way best characterized as visually acquisitive." 37

In The Tourist, anthropologist Dean MacCannell writes about a bond between tourists and social objects through which the tourist can enter into a relationship to society. If a tourist perceives a distance between himself and what he sees -- if he is alienated from the meaning of what he sees -- that bond is weakened. 38 By providing some explicit meaning for the Mount Rushmore experience by defining it as a commodity, and by using Mount Rushmore to provide explicit meaning for the tourist experience at other sites, tourism advertisements act to bridge the gap between the traveler and the sites he visits and allows the tourist to pursue the relationship MacCannell outlined. This would not be possible without the commercial aspect of the modern tourism ritual.

37 Richard Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears, op. cit., p. 73.
38 Dean MacCannell, op. cit., p. 136.
ANALYZING EXPERIENCE AS MATERIAL CULTURE

Photographs and sketched representations of Mount Rushmore in materials distributed by the South Dakota Office of Tourism are plentiful, offering numerous opportunities for interpretation. Approximately 114 photographs and other artistic images of the sculpture appear in the South Dakota Vacation Guides dating 1986-1991 (see Table 1). These ads promote 26 different businesses or other entities, nearly half of which use the same ad in five or six of the six editions.

Table 1  Mount Rushmore Images in Tourism Promotion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Object of promotion</th>
<th>Number of ads</th>
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<tr>
<td>State of South Dakota</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black Hills Region</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Cities</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monument Itself</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lodging Facilities</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Attractions</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Ads:</strong></td>
<td><strong>114</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
E. McClung Fleming's model for artifact study (see Figure 6) is particularly well-suited to the analysis of tourism experience as it is embodied in these advertising images. Fleming proposed beginning with an outline of five properties of an artifact, including history, materials, construction, design and function. He then suggested four "operations" which could be performed on these properties: identification, evaluation, cultural analysis, and interpretation.  

Figure 6  E. McClung Fleming's Model for Artifact Study

**E. McClung Fleming's Model for Artifact Study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operations</th>
<th>Information Supplementing the Artifact</th>
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* First stage of four-fold operations, to be performed on these properties: history, material, construction, design and function.

In attempting to analyze examples of Mount Rushmore images from South Dakota Tourism materials, Fleming’s five properties will be considered in light of both the sculpture itself and the tourist experience. The operations on these properties will be undertaken on the ad images. A “typical,” fictional Mount Rushmore tourist will be referred to from time to time, serving as an example of how the analysis relates to travel experience.

**Properties of the Artifact**

**HISTORY**

Although the earliest federal legislation regarding Mount Rushmore was recorded in 1925, it was not until 1927 that sculptor Gutzon Borglum actually began the work of rectifying nature’s “aesthetic error of scale” by creating what was expected to be the largest sculpture in the world.\(^{40}\) Borglum spent the rest of his life, through March, 1941, working on the monument. His son did some work toward completion after that, but the project was abandoned seven months after Borglum’s death. The sculpture cost almost one million dollars, with the government share accounting for over 80 percent of this.\(^{41}\)

Socially and culturally, the widespread interest in Mount Rushmore surprised some. Herman Oliphant, who had served at one time as secretary-treasurer of the Mount Rushmore National Memorial Society, was overheard by Borglum’s son as saying, “I


\(^{41}\) Division of Interpretive Planning, *Interpretive Prospectus: Mount Rushmore National Memorial, South Dakota* (Harpers Ferry Center: National Park Service, April, 1992), from the appendices.
never realized how something so unnecessary could become so important to the country." However, a variety of social conditions leading up to the time of the sculpture would indicate that there had been a need for this type of monument evolving for some time. The merging of ideas and interpretations in the conception and eventual carving of Mount Rushmore is an example of what G. Edward White discusses in the introduction to *The Eastern Establishment and the Western Experience*. White notes that the West, "far more than the other regions, has tended to elicit imaginative responses which stress the distinctiveness of regional heritage while closely identifying that heritage with the intrinsic 'Americanness' of American civilization." He goes on to describe the duality of this image in terms of civilization and wilderness, or more specifically, eastern civilization and western space. Along with this conflicting-yet-complementary division of East and West in the American mind was a set of contradictory attitudes, a dialectic manifested in the simultaneous embrace and rejection of industrialization and materialized in the form of Mount Rushmore.

The phenomenon of relating to America through a symbol such as Mount Rushmore was not unique to South Dakota or the West. It was an important feature of American society in general at the time the sculpture was started. The unveiling of the Statue of Liberty in 1886, the flood of immigration it came to represent, and a scare in the form of an economic panic in 1893 had created an awareness among citizens nationwide.

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42 Division of Interpretive Planning, *op.cit.*, p. 2.
44 Ibid., p. 5.
of the problem of assimilation and the need to make sure that new Americans were willing Americans. Later dust bowls and the Great Depression (tragedies touching both the East and the West) during the time of sculpting fueled the perceived necessity of the monument: a huge reminder of the triumphs of a nation in taming and settling the American wilderness could certainly provide some encouragement and inspiration during troubled times.

Legislation affecting Mount Rushmore spanned 18 years. It covered such things as appropriations, the formation of a Mount Rushmore National Memorial Commission, the transfer of the property to the National Park Service, and the construction of a burial crypt for Borglum and his wife, Mary. It was always intended that the memorial would be open and free to the public. Visitor use reached one million per year in 1959, and it has grown to average two million per year ever since 1970. A 1989 point of origin survey revealed visitors from every state, eight of ten Canadian provinces, Mexico, and eight foreign language groups representing an undetermined number of foreign countries.

**MATERIAL**

The site itself, support facilities like motels and related tourist attractions, and services like restaurants would all be considered the material of the tourist experience under Fleming's model. A review of vacation literature, advertising and any applicable

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physical management plans for the destination provide pertinent information on this property.

The Mount Rushmore National Memorial includes 1,238 acres in South Dakota’s Black Hills. The sculpture is the main feature of the site. “Rolling, mountainous terrain, evergreen forests and a semi-arid climate” characterize the natural resources at the site. Cultural resources include the Hall of Records (initially meant to house significant documents of United States history), the sculptor’s studio and residence, the compressor, the water reservoir and the lift platform. Interpretive and tourist resources consist of a parking lot and avenue of flags, restrooms, visitors’ center, amphitheater, concession building, and dormitories for seasonal workers.

In light of the artifact of experience, the material of Mount Rushmore can be said to include four communities, five National Park Service sites and a state park, eleven attractions, and seven campgrounds or motels. These just represent the parts of the tourism fabric which appear in the South Dakota Vacation Guides and which either bear the name or images of the sculpture. If the sections of the Vacation Guides focusing on the geographical region of the Black Hills were considered in their entirety, or if the guide were taken as a whole, the material of the Mount Rushmore tourism experience would expand greatly.

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48 Division of Interpretive Planning, op. cit., pp. 5-6. At the completion of this writing, plans were already being implemented at Mount Rushmore to greatly alter the “material” of the tourist experience through construction of new visitor facilities.

CONSTRUCTION

The property of construction in Fleming’s model has to do with “the way parts are organized to bring about the object’s function,”⁵⁰ among other things. In the case of tourist experience, an analysis of this property would have to include the way the experience is orchestrated by both internal and external forces. Again, vacation literature can provide a good resource for understanding this property, along with interpretive plans for destination sites and itineraries developed by outside organizations.

Planning for Mount Rushmore was extensive, and Borglum created detailed scale models of the project long before the first blasting was undertaken. The actual sculpting of Mount Rushmore involved tremendous danger and risk to those who participated. Scaffolds attached to the side of the mountain and workers dangling precariously from seats that appeared to hang in mid-air characterize some of the historic photos of the construction of the monument. Encouraging people to value the sculpture as a “marvelous engineering achievement” is one of the interpretive themes identified by the National Park Service for this site.

The rubble pile at the base of the sculpture has been officially recognized by the National Park Service as “part of the historic scene,” and it is included with the sculpture and remaining construction-era buildings in a historic district that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.⁵¹ However, despite its perceived importance on the part of

⁵⁰ Thomas Schlereth, op. cit., p. 166.
the managing agency, this part of the sculpture is usually cropped from tourism advertising images.

On the grounds of the memorial, the actual tourist experience is constructed through flow of visitor traffic and interpretive efforts. Upon parking at the monument, the tourist approaches the visitor services complex through an avenue of flags, where all 50 state flags are displayed. Restrooms are available, and a concessions area provides opportunity to purchase food and souvenirs. Once in the visitor center, the tourist may use the information desk or go into an audio-visual room that houses 13 monitors, all simultaneously screening a video on the sculpture’s history. Visitors in the evening may proceed to an amphitheater for an evening lighting ceremony. This program is prefaced by a film and interpreter presentation and culminates in the illumination of the sculpture and the singing of the Star-Spangled Banner.

The most extensive static exhibits at the site, including artifacts and photographs, are located at the sculptor’s studio. An interpreter does a formal presentation there using the model of the sculpture and the Hall of Records as focal points. Only about a quarter of tourists ever visit this part of the site, and the National Park Service attributes this to the fact that the building is not visible from the main traffic areas. Several other interpretive markers and exhibit panels complete the construction of the tourist experience on-site.\(^{52}\)

In the *South Dakota Vacation Guides*, Mount Rushmore tourist experience is constructed in both state and regional terms. Both photographs and artistic renderings of
the sculpture appear on the covers of every guide in the period under consideration (1986-1991.) The state has adopted the monument as its own, and it’s primary tourism slogan reflects this: “Great Faces. Great Places.” Distinct tourism regions are identified in the Vacation Guides, pointing to the construction of the artifact of experience as a regional one.

**DESIGN**

The property of design relates to style or iconography. Information on the design of the experience would include the subject or bias of imagery related to the site. Do the ads in promotional pieces put the site in a historical context? Do site brochures focus on the scientific aspects of the site, or perhaps its gift shop? As regards design, the tourist experience at Mount Rushmore embodies the conflicting views of technology outlined earlier. Photographic images are one way such a dialectic has traditionally found expression. Just as with some of the pictures of Western photographer A.J. Russell, where technology was repressed in the image but reinforced through the caption, images of Mount Rushmore in a variety of contexts represent the historical love-hate relationship with technology characteristic of the era preceding the commencement of the sculpture. For example, while many images of Mount Rushmore depict it as a sort of naturally occurring formation, where there is a conspicuous absence of the technology and artistic forces that contributed to its existence, captions in the context of Vacation Guide advertising or editorial materials continually refer to the methods and work of Borglum and others who carved it. (This will be further explored later.)
Design is an important property to consider over time, when possible. As with any other form of material culture, the artifact of experience is subject to gradual changes in design or style to accommodate a generic, ever-shifting collective consciousness.

**FUNCTION**

When function is considered, Fleming suggests looking for the artifact’s intended and unintended roles. Intended results of the tourist’s experience might be economic gain on the part of the surrounding communities, and an expanded understanding of the natural, cultural or social history of the site for the tourist. The unintended uses would stem from the tourist’s personal travel motivators, and the potential for supplying those expectations through existing resources. Publicity in vacation literature and a survey of other recreational, cultural, or educational attractions in the vicinity of the sculpture would shed some light on the site’s property of function.

When Mount Rushmore was first proposed, Doane Robinson had as an underlying motive the attraction of visitors and the improvement of economy through tourism. Today, the National Park Service has identified formal interpretive themes and objectives for Mount Rushmore which can serve as the basis for the intended use of that site. (See Appendix A.) These also reflect what might be an ideal tourist experience, from the perspective of site staff. Among the objectives listed was the task of informing people about the sculpture itself and those involved in its creation, the achievements of the presidents honored, and the natural and artistic context of the monument. Two more abstract objectives were aimed at inspiring visitors to appreciate natural resources and “to draw strength from the achievement of goals in the face of great obstacles.” Interpretive
themes focus on the principles and accomplishments in America’s first 150 years, the engineering feat of the carving, and the area’s geologic features and natural resources.

The prospectus addresses the issue of visitor experience quite specifically:

“But what will the visitor experience be? It will not be the same for all people because it is possible to respond to Mount Rushmore on several levels. One can be impressed by the size of the carving, its beautiful natural setting, and the skill that it took to create the sculpture. Visitors may be moved to think about American history. They may wonder about where our historical pathway will lead us -- will democracy last as long as the carving? They may think about cycles in history and the divided nature of mankind. People may also have patriotic feelings or draw some personal conclusions about their own lives.

"Some of these visitor experiences are aided by interpretive media and programs. Others are not; they are more of a private and personal reaction. No attempt will be made to standardize the visitor experience. Democracy does not mean that everyone must have the same thoughts; rather, people must be free to respond in their own ways, assisted when appropriate by our facilities and services. “

A 1987 study provided data as to how tourists were actually thinking about and using the site. For instance, the main reason given for visiting the sculpture was just to see it. Park Service personnel attributed this response to a lack of knowledge on the part of the tourist as to what else there was to do at the site. The commodity of tourist experience provides another explanation: the tourists come primarily to see the sculpture so as to compare the mountain before them against the images they have already consumed before arriving. Only 12% of tourists reported that they had made no visits to other attractions in the area; for the vast majority, the artifact of experience at Mount Rushmore was certainly multi-dimensional. Finally, visitors arrived with expectations

53 Ibid., p. 18.
already in place: 78% felt children’s programs were important, though 68% brought no children along. Also, 86% of visitors believed the tours of the historic district to be important, while only 36% actually went to the studio. Ads making up the artifact of experience support this. Many ads with images of Mount Rushmore include other images of family activity. This may contribute to the sense of importance regarding children’s programs, despite the low percentage of visitors who brought children. Also, a tourist who has already consumed his experience via ads may not feel a need to visit the sculptor’s studio in the historic district. He had his own complete experience through the historical references in the ads, or he believes a “complete experience” to be made up of attractions other than those at the site.

Besides working to define the Mount Rushmore tourist experience, advertising featuring this colossus is also educating visitors as how not to see the sculpture. In his article “The Social Context of Commemoration,” Barry Schwartz discusses ways in which commemorative art in the nation’s Capitol helps to achieve avoidance, and Mount Rushmore works in the same way: the people or events chosen as vehicles for national symbols in commemorative art represent some consensus about what parts of American history are safe (i.e. all things celebratory, “virtuous,” favoring union, etc.)

Tourists act out “this miracle of consensus” in their destination choices, and tourism

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54 Schwartz, “The Social Context of Commemoration,” (Social Forces: Vol. 61, No. 2: December, 1982), pp. 374-402. From p. 396: “America’s originating events and early leaders are not symbols of national unity because of their priority and factual importance but because this priority and this importance have become and remained convenient objects of consensus among later generations.”
advertising both supports and reflects it. "...Moderns somehow know what the important attractions are, even in remote places."\(^{55}\)

Now that the properties of the artifact of experience have been defined, Fleming’s four operations can be applied. Two qualifications must be issued. First, though they may foster multiple definitions of Mount Rushmore, images will only be considered as they function in a few categories. Also, images will not be analyzed in light of all of the historical developments which have transpired since the sculpture’s beginning. Images are analyzed solely as they work within the context of tourism advertising, and as current vehicles for symbols in two areas which stand for -- but are not necessarily part of -- the same type of conflict White outlined: Mount Rushmore as part of the natural environment, and Mount Rushmore as art or technical achievement.

**Operations on Artifact**

**IDENTIFICATION**

In Fleming’s model, identification includes three steps: classification, authentication, and description.\(^{56}\) Even in general material culture studies there is no consistent, systematic scheme for artifact classification. Typical schemes based on utility or material are not entirely appropriate for the artifact of experience. The best means of

\(^{55}\) Dean MacCannell, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

approaching this aspect of identification seems to rest in classifying individual ads as to the travel motivators they address.

Images of Mount Rushmore in South Dakota Tourism materials can be seen to define the sculpture, and in turn, the tourist’s experience, in terms of at least seven associations, with many ads attaching multiple definitions to the sculpture. On a behavioral level (reflecting active interaction with the sight), ads depict Mount Rushmore as ultimately accessible, as a part of community life, and as the object of recreational/leisure pursuit. These three ways of seeing Mount Rushmore all connect the sculpture with the more current man-made attractions and tourist opportunities surrounding it, and they often place an emphasis on family participation.

The ad for a Black Hills helicopter tour service in Figure 7 depicts people achieving ultimate accessibility to Mount Rushmore. The tourists presumably in the helicopter are eye-level with the sculpture itself, a perspective which is not possible from the viewing platform at the site and which relatively few tourists will ever realize except through mental consumption of the ad and others like it. In many ad pictures, the manipulation of scale works to create the same sense of accessibility by removing any distance between the viewer and the sculpture, making the sculpture appear to take up the tourist’s entire field of vision.
The community of Hill City presents itself as the “Heart of the Hills” in the ad in Figure 8. All of the attractions surrounding this town, including Mount Rushmore, are contributing to the heart or life of the community. This particular portrayal of Mount Rushmore lends some credibility or authenticity to the sculpture, setting it up as a “back space” of a community. This interpretation is especially appealing to tourists, who tend to seek out back spaces.\footnote{Dean MacCannell, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 92-95. See also Barthes’ discussion of “insides” in Susan Sontag, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 248-249}
Figure 9 is an excellent example of a “family album” ad lay-out. Through its association with swimming, hiking, horseback riding and shady camping, Mount Rushmore is established as a relaxing, recreational pursuit. There is complete absence of
any appeal to nationalist sentiment or a sense of historical significance in relation to the sculpture. The only item in this campground ad which moves beyond an audience of purely recreational tourists is the mention of "Indian dancing" as an evening program.

![Figure 9 Ad for Rafter J Bar Ranch Campground](image_url)

On an ideological level (reflecting particular ways of thinking about the site), images in advertising materials accentuate a much more individualistic experience. These pictures of Mount Rushmore depict a visit to the sculpture as a cultural experience, as a natural wonder or phenomenon, as an artistic creation, and as a symbol of the conquering of nature. These ads associate the sculpture with the processes involved in its creation and with surrounding historical and natural attractions and tourist opportunities.
The campground ad in Figure 10 associates Mount Rushmore with such “American West” cultural experiences as Indian dancing and “Smitty’s Trail Rides.” By extension, it also suggests that Mount Rushmore is “Ideal for Reunions,” giving the sculpture a special social function as well.

Three other National Parks and a National Forest frame Mount Rushmore as a naturally occurring part of the landscape in the two-page ad in Figure 11. Through shared visual and verbal language (discussed in more detail later), Mount Rushmore is presented with the other sites as a completely natural feature of the landscape.
Figure 11  State-sponsored editorial featuring Federal sites in western South Dakota

PARK HERE

South Dakota's crown jewels are all located within a half-day's drive of each other.

Mount Rushmore National Memorial
Located on the summit of the Black Hills, the memorial features the faces of four U.S. presidents: Washington, Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Lincoln. The memorial is accessible via the Iron Mountain Road, which offers scenic views and interpretive exhibits.

Jewel Cave National Monument
This cave is one of the largest and most well-known in the world. It features a network of subterranean passageways and chambers, including the Great Abyss, a huge chamber that is over 1,000 feet deep. The cave is accessible via a guided tour that lasts approximately 2.5 hours.

Wind Cave National Park
This park is known for its beautiful formations and unique geological features. It is the second-longest cave in the world, with over 150 miles of explored passages. The park is accessible via the main entrance, which offers scenic views of the surrounding hills.

Badlands National Park
The park is known for its unique geological formations, including sandstone mesas, buttes, and spires. The park is accessible via the main entrance, which offers scenic views of the surrounding landscape.

PARK FEES

Mount Rushmore National Memorial
No entrance or parking fees

Jewel Cave National Monument
No entrance or parking fees

Wind Cave National Park
No entrance or parking fees

Badlands National Park
No entrance or parking fees

Guided tours: Adults $10, children 6-15 $5, and under 5 free, senior citizens 65+ with Golden Age Passports.
By placing the sculptor’s face in the foreground, the museum ad in *Figure 12* emphasizes Mount Rushmore as a work of art. This is carried one step further in *Figure 13*, where the technological forces behind the creation of art are displayed in such a way that Mount Rushmore seems subdued by workers under a profusion of scaffolding and wires.

![Figure 12 Ad for Rushmore-Borglum Story Museum](image)

In some ways, all seven of these categories of association still reflect White’s notions of the conflicting reactions to industrialization which were manifested in many postbellum representations, and especially in representations of the West. In all cases though, images invoke nostalgia and allude to travel motivators in framing White’s categories in such a way as to link the historical experiences of industrialization and westward expansion with the modern-day tourist experience.
Figure 13: Historical image from state-sponsored editorial on creation of Mount Rushmore

Unfinished Rushmore
Will be Dedicated in '91

[Image of Mount Rushmore with text and illustrations]
The second step in identification in Fleming’s model -- authentication -- can be somewhat problematic, as the very structure of tourist attractions and the ads that promote them is often built around giving the appearance of authenticity sans any real, full revelation. In the case of the artifact of experience, it may be possible to address authentication by comparing the experience embodied in advertisements against the realistic ability to approach that experience given existing resources. (This aspect of identification would not try to determine the authenticity of a particular site, for instance, but rather would focus on whether the site could be viewed from the motel, as the ad suggests.) Some of the artifact of experience in the Mount Rushmore tourism ads can be authenticated: the typical tourist can, for instance, take a helicopter ride that passes near Mount Rushmore (Figure 7). If he tires from the leisurely confines of his RV, he may enjoy a free shuttle ride to the monument (Figure 10), or he may take the time to have a “full ‘Rushmore Experience’” at a related attraction (Figure 12). However, he will never dangle alongside Mount Rushmore to conquer it for himself. He may even be disappointed to arrive at the monument and find that the faces seem smaller than expected because of their considerable distance from the observation platform. He will certainly deduce from the rubble pile and other evidence on-site that the sculpture was carved out of the mountain and did not just spring neatly up without the aid of man. In considering these ads in the identification phase of Fleming’s model, it could be said that they represent both spurious and genuine experience at Mount Rushmore. Even the ads reflecting genuine experience must be viewed with some caution though, as they may be modified to a point that their “authenticity” is compromised. Figure 14 illustrates this.
The image of Mount Rushmore lends the “American” to the All-American Inn in this simple ad, which touts balcony views of “mountains.” The unsuspecting tourist might be surprised that Mount Rushmore is not one of those mountains.

Description is the final aspect of artifact identification in Fleming’s model. This involves very simply outlining the dimensions of the experience. Much of the same information used in determining the material and construction of the artifact and presented in a previous section applies in describing the commodity of experience.

**EVALUATION**

The second operation in Fleming’s model for artifact study -- evaluation -- involves judgment of aesthetic quality and factual comparison of the artifact with similar objects. The tourist experience embodied in ads will only be successfully received insofar as it has broad appeal, or specialized appeal for a particular target audience. In terms of mainstream culture, the aesthetic of the tourist experience must “express the
broadest consensus of values of the modern nation-state, to give concreteness to the subjective dimensions of the national psyche." Analysis of the artifact of experience at this stage may focus on all of the material of the experience (i.e. its component parts, as portrayed in ads) and the extent to which it possesses a generic appeal. Ads related to one site can be compared as to the “mega-event” experience they manifest, or series of ads for different entities can be evaluated as “mega-attractions.”

The remainder of this consideration of the Mount Rushmore tourist experience using Fleming’s model for material culture analysis will concentrate on use of nostalgic references to White’s opposing interpretations of Western experience in selling the commodity of experience. In this light, the series of ads featuring images of Mount Rushmore both as a part of the natural landscape and as a brilliant technical achievement have the broad appeal necessary to reach the mainstream public. The number of ads reflecting either interpretation of the sculpture are relatively balanced throughout the Vacation Guides. Tourists feeling a strong inclination toward one interpretation or another are not left out of the experience.

CULTURAL ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

Cultural analysis and interpretation, Fleming’s third and fourth operations, look at how an object is viewed in its own culture and in the culture of the observer, respectively. These are the areas probably best developed by students of the tourist experience up to

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58 H.L. Nieburg, op. cit., p. 52.
this point. Scholars have examined ways in which tourism functions within the world of
the tourist and in society as a whole. Where the artifact of experience is concerned, the
same considerations can be applied.

By placing pictures of Mount Rushmore in association with pictures of a natural
environment that is also being promoted as a tourist sight, the organization of the South
Dakota Tourism materials can be said to portray Mount Rushmore as a natural wonder
itself, springing up from the mountainside without the aid of man. For many travelers,
Mount Rushmore is much like the natural rock and cave formations which surround it:
unusual, and even exotic. Advertisers frequently capitalize on that association in tourism
brochures. Four such uses of Mount Rushmore images in the Vacation Guides alone
exemplify this point. They include a two-page blurb on National Parks, an introductory
blurb on the Black Hills as a vacation destination, an ad for a Black Hills community near
Mount Rushmore, and a campground ad.

The “Park Here” pages of the Vacation Guide (Figure 11) feature pictures of four
tourist sights, all of which are administered by the National Park Service. While the text
surrounding the picture of Mount Rushmore refers to the sculpting of the mountain, the
other images of Wind Cave National Park prairie and wildlife, Badlands rock formations,
and the Jewel Cave interior clearly identify Mount Rushmore with naturally occurring
tourist sights. This association begins at the top of the first page, where Mount Rushmore
National Memorial is located on a map as a hub, at the heart of tourist sites conveniently
erected by Mother Nature “within a half-day’s drive of each other.” The title “Park Here”
indicates the end of travel, setting Mount Rushmore up as the final destination for
tourists. By calling the sculpture one of South Dakota’s “crown jewels,” Mount Rushmore is further promoted as a thing of beauty, as well as a reigning attraction, worthy of homage.\(^5\)

Shared language between the descriptions of the sites provides further connections. Descriptive words pulled from the narratives on the sites, including “shrine,” “hidden, silent labyrinth,” “eerie,” “strange and beautiful,” “wonderland,” “incredible,” and “bizarre” lend to the sense of exotica represented by these sites. The editorials all refer to scale as well, adding to the notion that these tourist sights are part of the sublime Western landscape. Mount Rushmore, the Black Hills National Forest and Jewel Cave descriptions all focus on the monumental size of the attraction, while the Badlands and Wind Cave narratives allude to the ancient history of the sites. Yet another connection which reinforces Mount Rushmore’s interpretation as a natural wonder can be found in the description of the Badlands: just like Mount Rushmore, the Badlands were “carved” out of the landscape.

People are present in the Jewel Cave and Badlands images, but there is still a sense of nature unspoiled; there is no evidence of technology in any of the images. It is obvious, for example, that not all the light in the Jewel Cave picture is provided from the guide’s flashlight, but there is no other visible light source in the image. Even the camper driving in one of the Badlands photos appears to be just skirting the edge of the Badlands.

\(^5\) This presentation of National Parks is not so unusual, given the history behind their significance to their host states. Freeman Tilden writes, “...the very possession, within its borders, of a national park, was a plume in the crest of any state. ‘Why can’t we have a national park, too?’ The director was being embarrassed with offers of new national parks that did not seem to him to have national significance, excellent as many of them were.” Freeman Tilden, The State Parks: Their Meaning in American Life (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), p. 3.
without intruding into them. Likewise, though it is known that Mount Rushmore was created using the technology available at the time, there is no presence to remind the viewer: no remains of scaffolds, no tools, etc. It is worth noting here that very few images of Mount Rushmore used in tourism advertising expose enough of the mountain so as to make evident the color difference between the untouched mountain and the sculpted stone.

Another blurb -- “Destination...Black Hills and Badlands” (Figure 15) -- also demonstrates this depiction of Mount Rushmore as a seemingly natural occurrence. In this section, also two pages in length, the picture of Mount Rushmore is surrounded by pictures of natural grandeur, including a lake shot, a photograph of Devil’s Tower and a representation of the Badlands. The appearance of a train, the “1880 Train” which runs out of nearby Hill City, adds an interesting element to the images in this ad. The train itself is naturalized as it emerges from a natural background. Next to this image, the representation of Mount Rushmore becomes another part of the spectacular landscape which the train provides access to. Mount Rushmore, of course, was not yet one of the sights of interest for railroad passengers actually traveling in 1880 (just as one cannot see Devil’s Tower from that part of South Dakota), but this set of images is reminiscent of landscape photography from that time period and produces much the same effect. They infuse the artifact of experience with historical nostalgia that suggests a tourist might re-create the “discovery” of the “natural west.”
Figure 15 An ad promoting the Black Hills and Badlands region as a destination
In an ad for the town of Custer (Figure 16), Mount Rushmore is again associated with the natural environment. The text accompanying the ad is of special interest. It places Mount Rushmore with natural sights like Wind and Jewel Caves. However, it also mentions the “Crazy Horse Mountain carving now in progress.” The ad would seem to suggest that Mount Rushmore has been transformed by its being completed (for all practical purposes) into a permanent and undifferentiated piece of the Black Hills. Crazy Horse, on the other hand, is not part of that landscape. Though within a half-hour’s drive of Mount Rushmore, Crazy Horse is a mountain in transition at the hands of man, and any tourist can visit and experience the process first-hand. Also, though the ad claims “Custer makes the Hills come alive,” the set of images presented, appropriately inset into a larger picture of the mountains and a lake, point to the fact that it is tourists who actually make the Hills come to life. Here, Mount Rushmore is just another feature of the landscape which can be brought to life through the tourist experience.

A final image depicting Mount Rushmore as a natural phenomenon is a sketched representation in the ad for the Black Hills-Mount Rushmore KOA Campground (Figure 17.) Along the same lines as the “Destination” ad and the artistic and photographic conventions arising from the postbellum Western experience, this simple illustration suggests the possibilities of admiring an awesome, natural landscape from the comforts of an insignificant camp. The KOA ad implies that the campground offers such a view of grandeur -- it is, after all, called a “camping paradise.” While postbellum landscape
Come up to mile-high Custer, center of your Black Hills' vacation plans! At Custer, you'll explorefabulous new sites daily— all just a short drive away: Mt. Rushmore National Monument, Wind Cave National Park, Custer State Park— just a short drive away! Mt. Rushmore National Monument, Wind Cave National Park, Custer State Park now in progress. Drive the Needles Highway, Iron Mountain Road and Wild Life Loop through Custer State Park— see the largest herd of free-roaming bison and the bighorn sheep. Camp out— complete your hike. Fish, hike, sun, relax. All this and more in great weather— warm days, cool nights. It's all here in Custer— just waiting for you. Call us. We'll help you make the hills come alive— for your best vacation yet.

1-800-892-9816

CUSTER COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
painting and photography often featured lines which led to an apex or point of light in the
distance, roads of sorts to a deity or some mythical promised land, the Figure 17
ad features a barbecue pit/altar under the trees for the solemn admiration of the four
deities’ faces which grace the apex of Mount Rushmore.

Other images in South Dakota Tourism materials provide quite a different
perspective of Mount Rushmore, portraying it as a display of man’s control over nature.
These materials include ads in the Vacation Guides for a museum in Keystone, SD,
Mount Rushmore itself, and another community near the sculpture. These are in no way
negative representations of Mount Rushmore, but rather an alternative way of viewing the
sculpture.

The ad for the Rushmore-Borglum Story (Figure 12), a museum in Keystone,
features a sketch of Mount Rushmore, but the largest and most commanding presence in
the ad image is the sketch of sculptor Borglum. Everything in the image and the
accompanying text points toward a reading of Mount Rushmore as the artist’s domination
of nature, and away from a view of the sculpture as part of the natural landscape.
Borglum’s face is clear and in the foreground, while the mountain with its barely
distinguishable faces hovers above his head like an idea in a cartoon “thought bubble.”
The color difference between the sculpted areas and natural face of the mountain has been made obvious. Authentic newsreels presented at the museum (mentioned in ad text) recreate a presence of work and technology on the face of the mountain. This association of the sight with the man who conquered it is so important that the ad claims the Rushmore-Borglum story can provide a “full Rushmore experience,” presumably without ever having to actually visit the monument. This is certainly different from some of the previously mentioned ads, where interaction with Mount Rushmore (i.e. the landscape) was implied.

A blurb on Mount Rushmore itself in the vacation guides (figure 13) also emphasizes the artist’s role and the idea of conquering the elements. The use of historic photographs in this ad places men in precarious positions along the mountainside, hanging from barely visible wire, and working on such small portions of the monument that it seems nearly impossible that they could produce any realistic sculptural representations. However, the inclusion of a more recent photograph of the sculpture on an opposing page reminds the viewer that the feat was accomplished, despite the perils or problems posed by such a monumental task. The idea of conquering is further manifested in the smaller of the two historic photographs, where an American flag has been planted in George Washington’s head, and another, larger flag draped over Lincoln’s face. From romanticized pictures of Columbus to the first moon walk, planting of flags has symbolized discovery, conquest, and laying of claims. These images of Mount Rushmore historically preceded the use of flags in a similar way on the moon, but the popular
association with and widespread recognition of that later usage certainly influences the current reading of this Vacation Guide image in support of the notion of control and power over the environment.

Finally, the ad for Rapid City (Figure 18) embodies the tourist experience in its most basic form, appealing to the most popular modes of transportation in current tourist traffic. Set up with road signs, it provides direction to the tourist as to what will constitute his experience related to the community. Like the earlier “Park Here” ad, stopping is encouraged -- after all, there is “free parking.” When the tourist is ready to proceed, Mount Rushmore is waiting. In fact, the “one way” sign pointing to the picture of the sculpture would seem to indicate that a visit to the site is inevitable. There is no hint of anything natural or pristine in this overall lay-out, which suggests that roadways provide total accessibility.
One way to see Rapid City is to go for a ride on our scenic bike path. You'll wind your way through beautiful park areas and numerous golf courses, swimming pools, tennis and racquetball courts, and other recreational opportunities.

Then, it's back in the car, and on to the City Circle Tour where you'll visit many free attractions. Dinosaur Park, Storybook Island, the School of Mines Geology Museum, and the Sioux Indian & Mineralia Pioneer Museums are just a few of the exciting stops you'll make.

You can add even more enjoyment to your stay in Rapid City by riding at award-winning horse and dog racing, championship car racing, or maybe even attend a real western rodeo. Those who have the shopping bug can shop to their heart's content in the city's many fine retail stores.
Whether presenting Mount Rushmore to tourists as a natural wonder or as a symbol of man’s influence and control over nature, or in any of the other categories initially established, tourism advertising is presenting more than a definition of Mount Rushmore. The variety of messages arising from the South Dakota Tourism materials represents the presentation of a choice to the traveler, who may see Mount Rushmore in any way that best helps him avoid major issues, explain his society, or understand himself. It is not unlike what the Mount Rushmore Interpretive Prospectus outlined as “democracy” of interpretation, although in the ads it is a false democracy. How the tourist experiences the sculpture will ultimately come back to the pre-defined messages that the ads convey. Because it is recognizable, and because it has national, patriotic appeal, the appearance of Mount Rushmore in an ad or promotional blurb lends an air of importance or credibility to the object of the ad, and it also justifies any significance and meaning which the tourist discerns from the image in its context. It lets the tourist know that it is all right to think about Mount Rushmore in other than spatial and temporal terms or in ways which seemingly conflict. These images diverge from what the National Park Service may wish to emphasize where the sculpture is concerned, yet they offer a flexible but strong cohesion, holding together a related but distinct set of meanings within a powerful media of popular expression: advertising.
ADVERTISING AND THE TOURIST TREK

The typical tourist performs all of Fleming’s operations on the subjects of advertisements during the course of his experience. His whole trip is a personal study of the attractions from his own point of view, as all of the information supplementing his visits to specific sites is drawn from his personal store of knowledge (compare with column B in the diagram of Fleming’s model in figure 6). In this respect, the scholar’s reflection on the tourist’s experience is actually a second-level interpretation of the same ads which have already influenced the tourist.

Advertising and the commodity of experience it attempts to sell have an important function in every phase of the tourist experience. Scholars who have worked toward a more complete picture of the touristic process, including Dean MacCannell and Jay Jackie, have concerned themselves not only with what is offered to travelers at various attractions, but also with what sorts of expectations and tools tourists bring to a site and how those things have been shaped beforehand to influence the outcome of their experiences. Basic paradigms from multiple fields, including tourism, education, and history, can contribute to a useful model of the tourist experience:60

60 This model is a composite of ideas from a variety of sources. The base (Marriott’s model of tourist flows between two locations, developed in 1976) is from Douglas Pearce, Tourism Today: A Geographical Analysis (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1987), p. 74. It has been expanded to include planning and reminiscence on the appropriate end of the experience. Based on the assumption that tourism is learning (from Theodore Brameid and Midori Masyama,
The "origin" in this model is the tourist's permanent place of residence, say Glasgow, Kentucky. The Black Hills or Mount Rushmore constitutes the "destination" tourist center or attraction which the tourist will visit. The "access" and "return" routes are the link between origin and destination. These routes are sometimes one and the same. A tourist may choose the most direct route, or he may utilize a recreational route, which provides other facilities and attractions for his use. Between Glasgow and Mount Rushmore, for instance, the tourist may opt to venture into western Kansas to take in Monument Rocks, the Chalk Pyramids and the Fick Fossil Museum before heading due north for Mount Rushmore. The four learning stages of the tourist's travels -- discovery, understanding, decision-making, and reaction -- are shaped by advertising in different op. cit., p. 184, stages rooted in affective learning analysis from a model by Alan Machin, cited in David Uzzell, op. cit., pp. 150-151, are positioned over the parts of the tourist's travels with which they correspond.
ways, and at each stage there is a function in which advertising can be considered to have commodified experience.\(^6\)

The “discovery” stage includes an individual’s “circle of contact,” beginning with family and acquaintances. This circle is enlarged by previous travel, mass media, and formal education. As it relates to the Mount Rushmore tourist experience, “discovery” represents the initial identification of the sculpture as a destination. This may begin through an introduction to travel options in the Black Hills area by way of the Vacation Guide, or it may involve the immediate selection of the site based on something like name recognition. This particular component relates to the entire process of planning and preparing for the trip.

In the discovery stage and trip planning, tourism advertising has the important role of drawing attention to an opportunity:

> “The purpose... of tourist promotion is to perform the vital marketing function of ‘making the sale’ without the consumer being able to touch, inspect, smell, or even see with his own eyes. And while the key ‘sale’ factor is the sale of lodging accommodations or an attraction ticket away from home, the total sale involves a great deal more.”\(^6\)

The success or failure of a tourism advertising campaign rests in the degree to which its

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\(^6\) Alan Machin, cited in David Uzzell, op. cit., pp. 150-151. The discovery and understanding elements of Machin’s social helix can be compared with the nostalgic re-creation of “discovery” of the West offered up in advertising and previously discussed under Fleming’s model.

\(^6\) Charles Goeldner and Robert McIntosh, op. cit., p. 65.
images appeal to individuals and groups. The pictures and accompanying text must be in a language -- both verbal and visual -- that is understood by the target audience.

Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein and linguist Edward Sapir believed language offered all the reality one could ever hope to know: "every language reproduces its own distinct reality." The reality communicated by the ad must be something that potential visitors find desirable and essential. Even in this early stage of the tourist process, ads are designed to circulate generic experiences for consideration. By choosing the object of an ad as a destination for a trip, the tourist has accepted or consumed that experience. In mentioning the "monumental advantages" of the Rushmore Plaza Hotel in Figure 20, for instance, the ad text exchanges objects, so to speak, making the motel the main attraction. Mount Rushmore has already been consumed and is reduced to a postcard, ready to send home to family and friends.

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The “understanding” phase of the tourist’s travels encompasses opinion-forming. This part of the process focuses on ways the tourist draws on personal memory and knowledge to develop perceptions. “Understanding” occurs in the Mount Rushmore tourist experience as the traveler begins to assimilate information just prior to departure and enroute to the sculpture. It is here that he draws on the data acquired in activities like a review of vacation literature. Memories of relevant occurrences in his personal life like a past trip to Washington DC or a picture of Mount Rushmore in a high school history text, and current experiences like his side trip to Monument Rocks on the way to South Dakota all contribute to anticipation of and expectations about the destination.

Advertising plays an important part; besides drawing people to major destinations, tourism promoters hope to inspire travelers to make maximum use of their states, regions, or communities.

In tourism advertising, the “challenge constitutes a communications problem to relate the values of a total experience to the consumer for a decision.”64 Ideally, as a tourist has decided on a destination, he has also identified other things which will make up his experience in the vicinity of the destination. Traditional advertising in guides and brochures provide frequently consulted reminders and suggestions. (Billboards are another genre of advertising very effective in this respect, although these are aimed primarily at creating impulse buying.) Regardless of the medium, advertising works to sell the total experience in advance by putting options in physical and ideological relation

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64 Charles Goeldner and Robert McIntosh, op. cit., p. 65.
to one another, and by including images which emphasize the accessibility of these options. This plays on the mesh of individual psychology and discovery which are characteristic of the understanding stage of the tourism model.

"The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe... To look is an act of choice. As a result of this act, what we see is brought within our reach -- though not necessarily within arm's reach. ...We never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves."\(^{65}\)

For the actual on-site visit in the tourism model, advertising sets the tourist up for a "moment of truth." Daniel Boorstin writes about the importance of information that is generated in advance of an event:

"The authentic news record of what ‘happens’ or is said comes increasingly to be what is given out in advance... The story prepared ‘for future release’ acquires an authenticity that competes with that of the actual occurrences on the scheduled date."\(^{66}\)

What is true for news media and events can also be applied to tourism advertising and the on-site visit. The better publicized a site is, the more authentic it will seem. This stems not so much from the fact that publicity lends an air of credibility, although this point could most certainly be argued. Rather, authenticity can be viewed as growing out of the


transformation in what constitutes the “original” in the on-site experience. “We go not to test the image by the reality, but to test reality by the image,” writes Boorstin.67

The “decision-making” component of the tourism model includes the individual’s consideration of information rooted in commercial and political processes. These promotions and host government activities are in play before and during the tourist’s site visit and are exemplified in something like the “Great Faces/Great Places” slogan and the picture of Mount Rushmore on South Dakota license plates. The “decision-making” phase of the Mount Rushmore tourist experience might include the traveler’s personal consideration of his on-site visit. The real “decision-making” about how the sculpture is viewed has of course happened long before he arrives at the site. However, he is left to contemplate how the pieces fit together as he travels back to his point of origin.

As the tourist leaves the site, tourism ads link the internal thoughts and feelings generated from mental consumption before arrival to the external and objective characteristics of the on-site visit.68 This is where the commodity of experience is fully realized — where the predefined messages, having been proven and made authentic through the on-site visit, are consciously acknowledged by the tourist. The concepts which the ads used to sell the experience now can help reconstitute the journey after the fact, becoming a souvenir of sorts. The attraction is “empty,” but the ad reinvests history -- even the recent history of a site visit.69

67 Ibid., p. 304.
68 Judith Williamson, Decoding Advertisements (op. cit.), pp. 24-36.
69 Roland Barthes, op. cit., pp. 103-105.
The final component of the tourism model is “reaction.” In tourism advertising, as with advertising in general, the tourist is expected to transform himself or his life. “Publicity persuades us of such a transformation by showing us people who have been transformed and are, as a result, enviable.” It is at this point that the tourist may take action through social, economic, political, and cultural initiatives, making a judgment or choice about his trip. He embraces or rejects the teachings of his experience: particular values may be added to his world-view to shape future actions, others might be reinforced, and others yet perhaps dismissed as no longer relevant. His final judgment may not always result in a direct, outward social action, but it will almost always alter his outlook in some way. For example, a Mount Rushmore tourist may buy a T-shirt with a picture of the sculpture on it to wear during the trip home, or he may choose to stay that evening at a lodge bearing the site’s name. Once at home, he might check out a book on presidents or decide to use his next vacation to travel to Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello. He may undergo a heightened sense of patriotism or a greater sense of urgency about supporting National Park Service programs. Perhaps he will make some connection about the historical significance of westward movement or the importance of his landscape to the way he lives, based on an advertisement he saw showing the 1880’s train in association with the site.

On the other hand, it is also possible that he found no redeeming quality in his experience. He may have been bored and under-impressed, in which case he may decide never to visit another national park. His opinion that the Black Hills (and by association,

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70 John Berger, op. cit., p. 131.
Mount Rushmore) are just a “tourist trap” may be reaffirmed, or he may avoid joining an effort to erect a commemorative monument in his home community. He could even make a conscious decision not to do anything at all about his experience and go on with his life as though it had not happened. The possibilities for positive, negative or indifferent reaction are endless, but the process of reacting is fundamental to a tourist experience.

Advertising in the last stage of the tourist’s odyssey serves to spur memories of the site visit. “Images were first made to conjure up the appearance of something that was absent.” Advertising images house the tourist’s accountability toward authentic experience. In a way, having become the “original” in place of the actual on-site experience, the tourism ad becomes as important as any other photographs or souvenirs the tourist takes home. Some advertising even sports a “family album” lay-out.

In closing, it is important to acknowledge two complications which are inherent in this tourism model. First, because advertising is vested with multiple messages, and because every individual brings a different core of personal history to the interpretation of ads, meaning (and hence, experience) can change from one stage to another of the model. The experience embodied in the ad images enroute to a destination will likely be very different from the experience captured by the same images during the trip home.

Secondly, a tourist who uses “recreational routes,” by virtue of the fact that he is making use of multiple sites, is more difficult to consider. The commodity of experience in his case would be dependent on a combination of images which may not apparently have

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71 John Berger, op. cit., p. 10.
72 Elizabeth Diller and Ricardo Sofidio, op. cit., p. 1.
73 Judith Williamson, Consuming Passions, (op. cit.), p. 125.
much relation. As it exists now, the model is one-dimensional; it is best suited for considering one specific ad, or a series of ads utilizing closely related imagery (as with Mount Rushmore.) The challenge for future work on this model will be building in additional dimensions.
CONCLUSION

"The end of history will be a very sad time. The struggle for recognition, the willingness to risk one's life for a purely abstract goal, the worldwide ideological struggle that called forth daring, courage, imagination, and idealism, will be replaced by economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns, and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands. In the post-history period, there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history."  

As described in Francis Fukuyama’s controversial essay, the end of history would seem to be close at hand. While the struggles leading to daring and idealism may not be completely absent in daily life, the economic calculation and concern for satisfying sophisticated consumer demands which will replace these things are quite well-developed. Today’s society is one in which commodities have become the givens of existence. "Modern consumer culture holds up the cognitive appetite as the model and engine of its reproductive process." Advertising in general accelerates and exaggerates the process by which history will meet its demise, so to speak.

At first glance, tourism advertising would seem to be an exception. As has been demonstrated with Mount Rushmore, images related to historical experience prevail in

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75 Richard Fox, and T.J. Jackson Lears, op. cit., pp. 67-73.
vacation guide ads. They seem to succeed to some extent at keeping meaning for that sculpture current by drawing on representations from its historical context. However, it is the history that is not present that is most important in tourism ads. Because ads hide or remove sources of conflict or undesirable elements, the struggles and risk Fukuyama mentions are deliberately put out of sight and eventually out of the consumer mind.

Modern American advertising is able to do this because “erasure” is one of its main features.76 This can refer to the erasure of other influences which might sway a consumer, or it can be the overt erasure of certain meanings. Absence is meant to give the viewer the feeling that he can create the ad’s meaning, when every ad actually provides defined channels for its own decipherment. When a tourist decodes an ad, he is not producing genuine meaning, but rather consuming predetermined solutions bounded by the ad itself.77 Advertising substitutes consumption for democracy as it works to “mask and compensate for all that is undemocratic within society. And it also masks what is happening within the rest of the world.”78 Domestic travelers, at least, are most generally involved in making systematic decisions to avoid overt political and other controversial issues, and these types of experiences are conspicuously absent from tourism ads. In this respect, the commodity of experience eventually dominates the tourist’s understanding of his world and his conception of nationalism. In consuming the spurious commodity of experience, the tourist has no responsibility -- and more

76 Daniel Boorstin, op. cit., pp. 130-134.
77 Judith Williamson, Decoding Advertisements, (op. cit.), pp. 72, 75.
78 John Berger, op. cit., p. 149.
importantly, no vested interest -- in the history, understanding or nationalist sentiment available through genuine experience.

Some key themes and issues are obviously missing from ads which feature images of Mount Rushmore. No ads promote Mount Rushmore as a desecration of the landscape. In spite of the images drawing attention to the sculpting process, the fact that a horrible mistake could have been made in creating the monument is never alluded to (...what if Washington's nose had been accidentally blasted off, and the project scarred beyond repair?) The implications of carving up a part of South Dakota viewed as sacred by the Lakota and all of the resultant controversy are never mentioned in tourism ads. Even the basic humanness of the men sculpted is conspicuously absent. No one seems to worry that slaveholder Jefferson shares billing with emancipator Lincoln. In fact, there is virtually no personalized treatment in tourism ads. In most cases the complicated public and private lives of the presidents whose graven images appear at Mount Rushmore are condensed through advertising and the tourist ritual into a watered-down representation of America's trek West.

One of the ways to prevent the full-fledged "end of history" may be to remove, devalue or redirect the commercial's sphere of influence. The artifact of experience is a souvenir that has been "elevated in importance to the point where it breaks its relationship with the attraction" to promote itself as authentic. This reversal of roles between the attraction and its vestiges must undergo a new transformation which returns the attraction
to a position of ascendancy and the souvenir to a fallen position more appropriate for its status as a copy of the "original."\footnote{Ibid., pp. 158-159}
APPENDIX

EXCERPTS FROM MOUNT RUSHMORE NATIONAL MEMORIAL INTERPRETIVE PROSPECTUS: INTERPRETIVE OBJECTIVES AND THEMES

Interpretive Objectives

To increase appreciation for the value of the resources -- cultural and natural.

To inform visitors about the various stages of construction.

To acquaint visitors with the major achievements of the four presidents.

To encourage an understanding of the people who played a part in the creation of the carving.

To place the monumental carving at Mount Rushmore into an artistic framework.

To enable visitors to understand the origin and nature of the carving medium--the granite.

To inspire visitors to draw strength from the achievement of goals in the face of great obstacles as exemplified by the presidents, by the creators of the carving, and by democratic institutions.
Interpretive Themes

Mount Rushmore symbolizes the principles of liberty and freedom during the first 150 years of America's development. Four presidents were selected for the carving for their accomplishments during crucial periods of U.S. history.

Mount Rushmore should be valued as a great work of art and as a marvelous engineering achievement.

The geologic features and natural setting play a role in the visitor's experience and understanding of Mount Rushmore.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


ALSO CONSIDERED...


VITA

Jill Angela McNutt

The author was born in Louisville, Kentucky, August 31, 1966. Graduated from Paoli Community Junior-Senior High School in Paoli, Indiana, June, 1984. B.A. cum laude with departmental honors from the Individualized Major Program (concentration in museum management and educational programming) at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana, 1988.

In August, 1988, the author entered the College of William and Mary as a graduate student in the Department of American Studies, completing coursework with a concentration in material culture studies.