

## Mount Innovate-More

Our family finally made the great American road trip this summer and visited the Black Hills and famous national landmark, Mount Rushmore. The gigantic stone sculptures embedded into the rocks of the Black Hills National Forest of course reveal 60-foot high carved faces (equivalent to six-story high profiles) of four important national figures: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Teddy Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln. It's hard to appreciate the magnitude of such a project, undertaken by more than 400 workers who removed more than 450,000 tons of rock in dangerous conditions to create this impressive "Shrine of Democracy"—a feat that took 14 years to complete. But there it is, an enduring creation and tribute to four U.S. presidents.

While staring at the immense detailed sculpture with my husband and children, I couldn't help wondering what these truly larger-than-life characters had in common, besides the prestigious title of "president," given their unique personas and places in history. Certainly they had to be great leaders who inspired confidence, and they had to be intelligent strategists to mind the political affairs of the nation. But what else?

My first question was: Were they all lawyers? Thomas

Jefferson (third president) and Abraham Lincoln

(16th president) were. Teddy Roosevelt (26th president) went to law school at Columbia Law School but dropped out before completing it. And George Washington never studied and never was a lawyer.

But were there any other take-aways? While trying to confirm their attorney-at-law status, I recognized an unexpected, or at least a not previously contemplated, commonality among these four men: They were all experimenters and innovators in their own right.

Of course it's easy to recognize Washington as an innovator given his role as a key architect of our new country and its governance and design. But he also displayed his respect and promotion of new ideas during his presidency when he signed the act setting up our country's patent system.

Lincoln, who I always envision sitting at a large wooden desk pontificating and writing great speeches, apparently extended his proficiencies beyond the written and spoken word, because he is the only U.S. President to have a registered patent (No. 6469)—a patent for a device used to lift riverboats over shallow waters. He also waved his innovative colors by frequently testing new weapons presented by inventors and is marked as an avid and early adopter of technology (a telegraph at the time).

Now Roosevelt did not have a patent or a specific invention associated with his name. But he certainly had an inquisitive mindset and a broader adventurous vision that promoted the construction of the Panama Canal.

And believe it or not, Jefferson's "founding father" status extends to ice cream; he is credited with developing

the first written recipe for ice cream in the United States. In addition, he had a keen interest in improving technologies and among other things, designed an upgraded farming plow, as well as a cipher for sending coded messages.

I thought I was just visiting a national landmark with presidents' faces. But in reviewing the accomplishments of these Mount Rushmore luminaries, there is more to glean from this site than I had expected.

Is it possible that what made Washington, Lincoln, the younger Roosevelt, and Jefferson extraordinary went beyond their upbringing, beyond their education, beyond their role in national politics, and beyond their title as president? Despite their differences and moments in history, it seems that each of these individuals

also shared a willingness to look beyond what they could see, to take on new technologies and inventions (even beyond their "work life"), and to make their businesses and lives more interesting, efficient, and productive—a rare quality and ability. Maybe Mount Rushmore is not only a monument of hope and democracy, but an inspiration for innovation from which we can all learn and benefit. ▲



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