Commemorative Sculpture in the United States

A Unit of Study for Grades 8-12

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and the
National Center for History in the Schools
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This publication is the result of a collaborative effort between the National Center for History in the Schools at the University of California Los Angeles and the Organization of American Historians to develop teaching units based on primary documents for United States History education at the pre-collegiate level.

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Introduction

Approach and Rationale

The National Center for History in the Schools and the Organization of American Historians have developed the following collection of lessons for teaching with primary sources. Our units are the fruit of a collaboration between history professors and experienced teachers of United States History. They represent specific "dramatic episodes" in history from which you and your students can pause to delve into the deeper meanings of these selected landmark events and explore their wider context in the great historical narrative. By studying a crucial turning-point in history the student becomes aware that choices had to be made by real human beings, that those decisions were the result of specific factors, and that they set in motion a series of historical consequences. We have selected dramatic episodes that bring alive that decision-making process. We hope that through this approach, your students will realize that history is an ongoing, open-ended process, and that the decisions they make today create the conditions of tomorrow's history.

Our teaching units are based on primary sources, taken from documents, artifacts, journals, diaries, newspapers and literature from the period under study. What we hope to achieve using primary source documents in these lessons is to remove the distance that students feel from historical events and to connect them more intimately with the past. In this way we hope to recreate for your students a sense of "being there," a sense of seeing history through the eyes of the very people who were making decisions. This will help your students develop historical empathy, to realize that history is not an impersonal process divorced from real people like themselves. At the same time, by analyzing primary sources, students will actually practice the historian's craft, discovering for themselves how to analyze evidence, establish a valid interpretation and construct a coherent narrative in which all the relevant factors play a part.

Content and Organization

Within this unit, you will find: 1) unit objectives, 2) correlation to the National History Standards, 3) teacher background materials, 4) lesson plans, 5) student resources, and 6) a selected bibliography. This unit, as we have said above, focuses on certain key moments in time and should be used as a supplement to your customary course materials. Although these lessons were developed for use with high school students, they can be adapted for other grade levels.

The Teacher Background section should provide you with a good overview of the entire unit and with the historical information and context necessary to link the specific Dramatic Moment to the larger historical narrative. You may consult it for your own use, and you may choose to share it with students if they are of a sufficient grade level to understand the materials.

The lesson plans include a variety of ideas and approaches for the teacher which can be elaborated upon or cut as you see the need. These lesson plans contain student resources which accompany each lesson. The resources consist of primary source documents, any handouts or student background materials, and a bibliography.

In our series of teaching units, each collection can be taught in several ways. You can teach all of the lessons offered on any given topic, or you can select and adapt the ones that best support your particular course needs. We have not attempted to be comprehensive or prescriptive in our offerings, but rather to give you an array of enticing possibilities for in-depth study, at varying grade levels. We hope that you will find the lesson plans exciting and stimulating for your classes. We also hope that your students will never again see history as a boring sweep of inevitable facts and meaningless dates but rather as an endless treasure of real life stories, and an exercise in analysis and reconstruction.

TEACHER BACKGROUND MATERIALS

I. UNIT OVERVIEW

The history of commemorative public sculpture and monuments in the United States is a fascinating story. Americans are proud of their national memorials, like the Lincoln, Jefferson, Franklin Roosevelt, and Vietnam Veterans Memorial located in the nation's capital. But small communities across America also take pride in their public sculptures and monuments. These monuments and memorials are a part of the fabric of American culture. In 1986, when the Statue of Liberty was restored, many Americans began looking at their own communities for treasures they needed to protect. Out of this was born the Save Outdoor Sculpture Project, sponsored in part by the Smithsonian Institution. Sculptures and monuments once overlooked were now brought to the forefront of many communities' consciousness. As such, sculptures have been restored at a rapid rate during the 1990s.

Memorials and sculptures not only tell us about the deeds of the past, but they also help us examine our society as it existed at the time these memorials were dedicated. On occasion they can also stir our imagination to rethink the past by reflecting the natural tensions that are part of a democratic society.

This unit should help students see and understand the importance of commemorative public sculpture in the United States. Using examples of some of the greatest pieces located across the United States, students will explore how and why monuments are created and dedicated. They will recognize the place of consensus by either individual communities or memorial committees and will understand that public sculpture in this country is client-patron driven. Students will also explore how controversies arise pertaining to the changing meaning of monuments in relation to our history.

II. UNIT CONTEXT

It is best to use this unit near the end of a survey course in United States history since, in some cases, students will need to be familiar with the historical context of certain people, themes, and ideas. Using this material would assist teachers in pulling together the wealth of material in United States history that has been studied during the school year. Teachers might also wish to use some of the lessons independently, during the school year, when they are studying topic specific themes, such as the West or Lincoln and the Civil War.

III. CORRELATION TO NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR UNITED STATES HISTORY

Commemorative Sculpture in the United States is a thematic unit examining several standards in the *National Standards for United States History, Basic Edition* (Los Angeles, National Center for History in the Schools, 1996) that investigate various aspects of popular culture in the study of American history. Material for this unit includes numerous photographs of public sculpture providing students with the opportunity to examine visual data to clarify, illustrate, and elaborate upon information presented in historical narratives. The unit specifically addresses **Historical Thinking Standard 2** in comprehending a variety of historical sources. Students will better appreciate historical perspectives by: 1) describing the past on its own terms through the eyes and experiences of those who were there, as revealed through diaries, letters, and the arts; and 2) considering the historical context in which the event unfolded—the values, outlook, options, and contingencies of that time and place.

IV. OBJECTIVES

1. To study historical documents, archival images, and other visual material in order to experience history as a dynamic discipline which studies, interprets, and debates the meaning of human events and through those, humanity's collective past.

2. To recognize the importance of historical memory and commemoration in the United States and how this reflects our place in the world as a people and a nation.

3. To understand how the arts reflect the values of a society at a given place and time.

4. To explain how certain major themes in United States history have been commemorated.

5. How our democratic principle are embodied in public sculpture and monuments by a wide range and variety of images from across the United States.

V. LESSON PLANS

1. Commemoration in the American Democracy

2. An Enduring American Image—The Minuteman

3. The American Pantheon

4. Icons of the West

5. Soldiers of the Civil War

6. The Creation of a National Shrine—The Lincoln Memorial

VI. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ON COMMEMORATIVE SCULPTURE IN THE UNITED STATES

Perhaps nothing in the American cultural landscape is more striking than our sculptural monuments. They were at many times in the past, and even in some locales today, regarded as jewels, venerated for the messages they delivered and the visions their promoters articulated. Public sculpture was this country's first mass-appeal art-form. These works, created and erected to pay tribute, to instruct, to educate, to excite, are a national treasure.

It is estimated that there are over fifteen thousand outdoor sculptures in American cities, towns and villages. Whether for local impact or countrywide appeal, these handmade images stand as eloquent metaphors of our development as a nation. These provocative works of art—in bustling squares and bristling traffic circles, in serene courthouse lawns and on barren concrete plazas—are an integral part of America's cultural consciousness. Public monuments are acts of celebration—symbols of a country articulating its national identity, with chest-thumping bravado or reverential understatement.

While some monuments have fallen victim to a changing standard of aesthetics and others neglected by shifts in our urban cityscape, public sculptures embodied the rhythm and energy of their age. In its broadest stroke, public sculpture joins the didactic and the decorative. Monuments are embodiments of private tribute and chauvinistic celebration. They helped to define our national character. They address an insatiable need to remember heroes, to promote points of view, to honor well-earned and fleeting victories, to acknowledge, on occasion, shortcomings and even failings. Whether praising or remembering, embellishing or documenting, public sculptures pay homage to reputations earned as well as the talents of artists who translate the instructions of the behind-the-scenes sponsors into tangible reality.

Collectively public statues are a three-dimensional honor-roll of America's movers and shakers, dreamers and leaders, celebrating the achievements of great men (and too-few women) and the time-tested causes that have captured our national attention. The story of why and how is as important as who, what, where and when.

Much of America's best figurative sculpture was produced during a three-generation period that began feverishly at the end of the Civil War. This explosion was aided by the arrival in the 1880s of foreign-born bronze casting experts like Riccardo Bertelli and Henry Aucaigne, founders of Roman Bronze Works and Henry-Bonnard Bronze Company, respectively, and by a talented group of stone carvers—the five Piccirilli Brothers (who worked in the Bronx, New York from 1888 to the early 1940s).

It is important to recognize that public sculpture is a patron-generated art. Sculptors never sat in their studios, dreaming up compositions or speculating on projects. The sculptor never initiates; he reacts to a vaguely worded inquiry or responds to a detail-laden proposal. As work progressed, the patron remained engaged; sug-

gestions, refinements, even wholesale changes could be (and often were) proposed by the client.
Inexplicably this system rarely stifled creativity—artist and patron flourished as symbiotic partners. Never having the luxury of working in seclusion, public sculptors made a virtue of their goldfish-bowl existence. Whether over-the-shoulder meddling or circumspect monitoring, the patron's involvement was a given. The step-by-step production from small design to finished monument provided predictable points of contact, timetables for reviews and schedules of payment.

The task of creating a public memorial is a many-layered undertaking that demands the sculptor be an artistic performer as well as a businessman, contractor, accountant, supervisor and publicist. Far different expectations are asked of a painter who often works in seclusion in a studio, needing only at the end of production to interest a prospective purchaser or to secure a gallery display space. An architect, who negotiates a contract with reassuring words and well-worked renderings often disappears as the builder erects an elegant home or a contractor constructs a grand office building.

The everyday operations of making monuments demand the sculptor be both hands-on laborer and nuts-and-bolts manager, bookkeeper and press publicist. The sculptor became both jack and master of all trades. Except for the upfront payment on signing the contract, funding liability favored the patron. Throughout the labor-intensive modeling stages, when expenses for materials and extra studio services were greatest, monies for the sculptor only trickled in. Only after the monument was erected and the sculptor's hands-on work long-finished was the largest installment (often as much as fifty percent) tendered. In spite of the unevenness of this monetary playing field, most practitioners of public sculpture prospered.

Making monuments is a multi-stepped operation, commencing with a patron's first queries and ending, quite often, several years later at an elaborate dedication ceremony. A larger-than-life bronze statue begins as a hand-sized maquette. A two-step enlargement follows as the sculptor creates a midsize, "working" model and a full-scale statue. Procedures hardly vary—modeling in malleable clay, then reproducing the completed work in more durable (but still fragile) plaster.

The early development of monumental sculpture in America was inextricably linked to the technical advances in bronze manufacturing brought on by the Civil War. Prior to 1860, most of America's sculptures were carved in marble for display indoors. As the cannon-casting industry retooled, the great majority of America's monuments were made in bronze.

Creating public sculpture is not a dream-world exercise; it is a labor-intensive activity that involves the artist intimately in both the mental and the menial. From courting a client to taking the obligatory bow as the dedication bunting is raised, American sculptors became one-person concert performers. In conceiving and manufacturing public monuments, American sculptors became three-dimensional fact-finders and myth-makers. Unlike the biographer or historian, who might use thousands of words or scores of illustrations to defend a thesis or evaluate a career, public sculptors distilled the essence of their subject in a single summarizing moment; everything available, instantly accessible and irrefutably permanent.

Lesson VI: The Creation of a National Shrine—The Lincoln Memorial

A. Objectives

- To demonstrate the complexity of erecting a memorial on the national level.
- To understand the relationship between cooperating sculptor and architect.
- To recognize the process a sculptor uses to create a large, heroic sculpture.
- To explain the process of how public sculptures are created from initial planning to installation and dedication.
- To discuss why the Lincoln Memorial is considered the greatest public monument in the United States.

B. Background Material

Daniel Chester French's marble portrait sculpture of Abraham Lincoln, the commanding feature of the Lincoln Memorial, is an American icon—a seven-year labor of common sense skill and artistic genius. Although the architect, longtime friend Henry Bacon, had been involved in the project since the summer of 1911, the sculptor was not selected until January 4, 1915. French spoke about the challenge:

I am all too well aware how great is the responsibility of making a statue of the Nation's best loved man. I feel at times so inadequate, but I try not to think of these momentous things, but only of doing the best that is in me.

Several models or maquettes were created by the sculptor in the ensuing years. The first study was 10 inches and was presented to the Presidentially-created Lincoln Memorial Commission in the summer of 1915. The plaster model captures all of the essentials of the composition: Lincoln is seated in a large chair, deep in thought, head slightly bent forward. His feet are firmly anchored and the action of the hands and placement of the arms, with elbows locked, balances calmness and intensity.

From the outset French contemplated the final statue would be made of bronze, but before signing the contract on December 21, 1915, sculptor and architect hedged, asking that the statue be not less then 10 feet in height (rather than 12 feet), and inserting "or marble" after the word "bronze." The three foot model was finished by May 1916 and the seven-foot working model by October 1916. By the spring of 1917, French, having produced both three-foot and seven-foot working models, visited the nearly completed interior chamber of the memorial. He and Bacon were startled: the sculpture would be too small as planned. After several experiments, they agreed to a height of 20 feet and that the marble would replace bronze.

It was not until November 1918 that French learned that the carvers, the Piccirilli Brothers, had received the twenty-one blocks of Georgia marble at their Bronx, New York studio-shop. The carving took over one year to complete. The stones were shipped by train to Washington, D.C. and the last block was the forty-three-inch-tall head, was set in January, 1920. French then made several trips to the site to make carving refinements, reporting in May, 1920, "it is now as nearly perfect technically as I can make it."

While the statue officially became the property of the American people on August 9, 1920, the memorial was not dedicated until May 30, 1922. The *Lincoln* statue, which embodies Daniel Chester French's creative spirit, is his public-art masterpiece and the country's preeminent public monument. He spoke modestly of his achievement:

What I wanted to convey was the mental and physical strength of the great war President and his confidence in his ability to carry the thing through to a successful finish. If any of this "gets over," I think it is probably due to the whole pose of the figure and particularly to the action of the hands and to the expression of the face.

C. LESSON ACTIVITIES

1. Ask the students if they have ever visited the Lincoln Memorial in Washing ton, D.C. As most students should be familiar with this memorial, ask them to share their impressions with the class. Have students brainstorm the reasons that Abraham Lincoln should have a memorial of such grand dimensions. List student responses on the board or on an overhead.

2. Provide students with **Document 22, Letter from Henry Bacon to William Harts.** Have students read the document and then prompt them in a discussion with the following questions: What is the purpose of this letter? Why would Henry Bacon have written it? What issues does the letter address? What's the evidence?

3. Provide students with **Document 23, French's First Model of the Lincoln Statue.** Have students examine the image making certain to notice the placement of the feet and hands. Distribute **Document 24, French's Three Foot Working Model.** Ask students to compare the images between **Documents 23** and **24**. Ask them what differences they can determine and to speculate as to why these changes were made.

4. Provide students with **Document 25, Bacon's Letter to William Harts** and **Document 26, Harts's Reply to Bacon.** Ask students: What are the issues in this correspondence? Why? How much is French to receive for his work? What do those costs include?

5. Provide students with **Document 27, French's Six Foot Plaster Working Model.** Have students compare this image with **Document 24** and ask them if any additional changes have been made by the sculptor.

6. Provide students with **Document 28, Bacon's Letter to Harts.** Have the students read the document and then discuss the following questions: What are the issues of this letter? What problems have the sculptor and architect run into? Why? How do French and Bacon propose to solve the problem? Why do you think that French and Bacon decided to make a change from a bronze sculpture to a marble sculpture?

7. Provide students with copies of **Document 29, The Construction of the Lincoln Statue.** Have the students study the image and then start a class discussion with the following prompts: Is there anything about this image that you find surprising? If so, what? What observations can you make about the creation of public sculpture and monuments that are reflected in this image?

8. **Concluding Activity**
Choose some of Lincoln's speeches and have the students read them in part or in whole, particularly Lincoln's two inaugural addresses and his Gettysburg Address. Then ask students: Are the words and convictions of Lincoln measured in any way by his Memorial? If so, how?

9. Next provide students with copies of **Document 30,** a photograph of the **May 30, 1922 Dedication of the Lincoln Memorial** and **Document 31,** a close up image of the **Lincoln Statue.** Use the following prompts to begin a class discussion: Is Abraham Lincoln befitting a national memorial such as the one in Washington, D.C.? Why or why not? Explain.

Letter from Henry Bacon to William Harts

HENRY BACON - ARCHITECT
101 PARK AVENUE - NEW YORK

June 30th, 1915

Dear Colonel Harts:

Your letter of June 25th received. It is possible that Mr. French may want to make the statue of statuary marble, and that he may not use any bronze at all, though of course he is the one to settle this matter. If the statue is to be of bronze the composition of the bronze should be approximately as follows: 90% copper, 3% zinc and 7% tin, though the proportions of these two last metals may vary without detriment to the composition. The thickness of the metal should be approximately 1/4". The general dimension of the statue as shown on my sketches was for a seated figure about twelve feet high.

Concerning the material to be used in the pedestal, I think this should be left an open question as this is a matter which should not be settled until Mr. French's model is well advanced, as the character the model assumes will influence the choices of a material for its pedestal. For the purpose of your contract I suggest that the material be mentioned as either marble or granite.

Mr. French says that he is now working on the sketch models so I think in all probability that within six months he will be able to submit this to the Lincoln Memorial Commission, but he will probably want at least a year and a half for finishing the full size model in plaster, and I suggest that you make an allowance of two and a half years from this date for the full completion of the statue and its pedestal in place.

Yours sincerely,

Henry Bacon

Colonel Wm. W. Harts,
1729 New York Avenue,
Washington, D. C.

P.S. John Williams Inc. 556 West 27th St. N.Y. who has one of the oldest and best bronze foundries, gave me the information about the composition of bronze and the thickness of the metal.

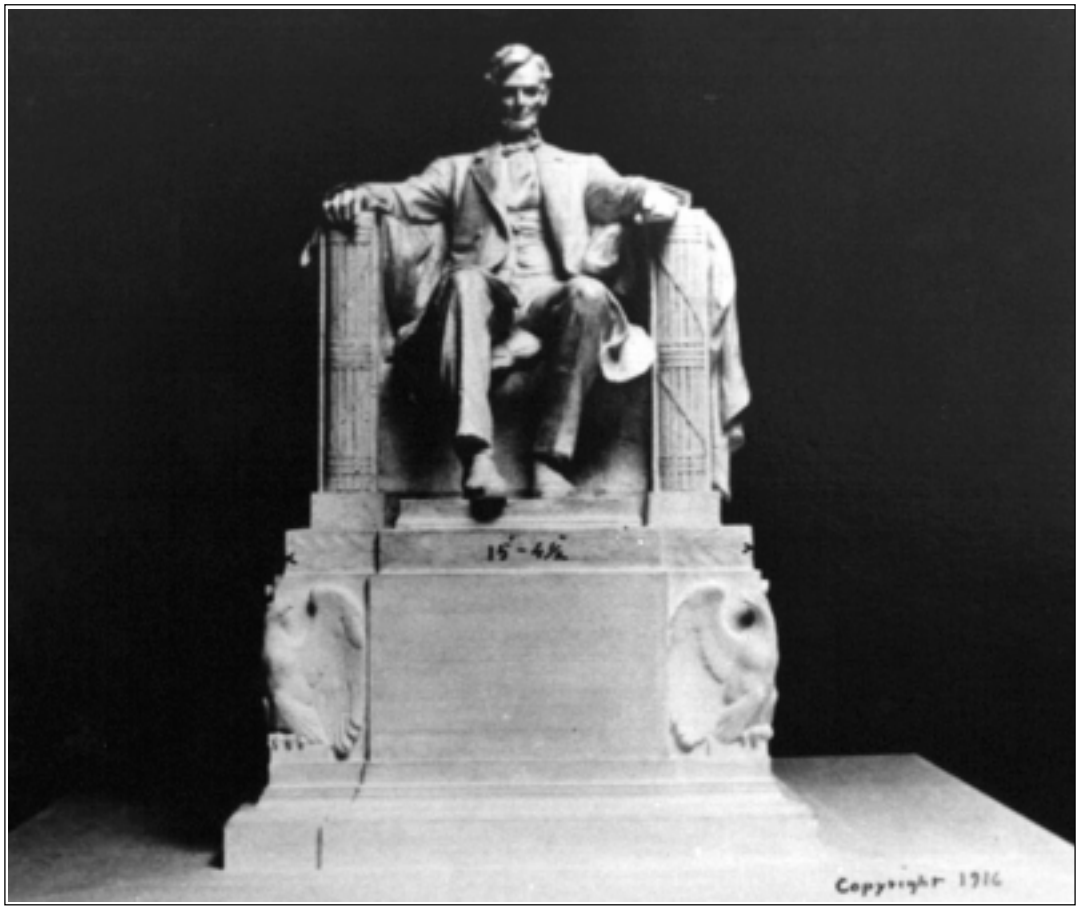
H.B.

Source: Library of Congress

French's First Model of the Lincoln Statue

Photograph courtesy of Michael Richman

French's Three Foot Working Model



Photograph courtesy of Michael Richman

Bacon's Letter to William Harts, October 22, 1915

HENRY BACON - ARCHITECT
101 PARK AVENUE - NEW YORK

October 22, 1915

Dear Colonel Harts:

I have received the draft of the contract proposed to be entered into with Mr. French and suggest that you insert the words "or granite" in paragraph six. It is not unlikely that he may want to make this pedestal of granite with a rubbed surface, especially if the statue is to be in bronze.

In paragraph seven, I put a question mark against the word "one", as this is a very short time for the submission of a sketch of this importance. Mr. French, however, will be better able to give you information on this point.

In paragraph seventeen the payment is fixed at $45,000., it was my understanding that Mr. French was to receive $50,000 for this work which is certainly a small sum considering its importance and his attainments.

In all other respects, the contract is in my opinion satisfactory, and I return the draft herewith.

Yours sincerely,
Henry Bacon

Colonel W. W. Harts,
1729 New York Avenue,
Washington, D. C.

enclosure

Source: Library of Congress

Harts's Reply to Bacon, October 23, 1915

October 23, 1915

Mr. Henry Bacon
101 Park Avenue
New York City, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Bacon:

We are in receipt of your letter of the 22nd instant, returning with your comments the draft of the proposed contract to be entered into with Mr. French for the statue of Lincoln to be erected in the Lincoln Memorial.

We will, as you suggest, add the words "on granite" in paragraph six of the contract, in reference to the material for the pedestal.

In paragraph seven the time for submitting the sketch model was stated as one month on the assumption that Mr. French would be ready to submit this practically by the time the contract was executed. We will, of course, however, conform to such suggestion as he may make in this connection.

The amount fixed by paragraph 17, at $45,000 to be paid to Mr. French was determined upon the language of the resolution of the Commission, which provides that the statue and pedestal shall not cost in excess of $50,000. Out of this total you will be entitled to a compensation of six per cent on the amount paid to the sculptor. If this compensation is $45,000 your commission will be $2,700, making a total of $47,700, leaving a balance of only $2,300 for such contingencies as traveling expenses and the like, for representatives of the Commission.

We have not as yet heard from Mr. French, to whom we also sent a draft of the contract, but presume we will have a reply from him within a short time.

Sincerely yours,
Wm. W. Harts
Colonel, U.S. Army.

JFB-RSA

Source: Library of Congress

French's Six Foot Plaster Working Model

Photograph courtesy of Michael Richman

Bacon's Letter to Harts, September 17, 1917

September 17, 1917

Dear Colonel Harts:

Your letter of the 13th inst. received. Mr. French at the time the contract with him was made for the Statue of Lincoln, thought that it should be about ten feet high and submitted his estimate of the cost on that basis; and the contract states that the height of the statue is to be approximately ten feet high.

At the beginning of last April, Mr. French set up in the Memorial a plaster model of the statue ten feet high, and we found it was too small; and after experimenting with enlarged photos of the statue, of varying sizes, it was determined that the statue should be nineteen feet high, and that it would be best to have it cut in white marble. Several artists have been consulted about this proposed change, and they, including the Fine Arts Commission, approve of it.

The unusually large scale of the interior of the Lincoln Memorial, becoming apparent as the building approaches completion, conclusively shows that a larger statue is necessary, than the one first planned.

As the statue is the most important feature of the Memorial, and as the extra cost of its enlargement can be paid out of the money authorized for contingencies, and saved on the contracts for the necessary approaches, etc. I hope the matter can be settled at an early date.

Your sincerely,
Henry Bacon

Source: Library of Congress

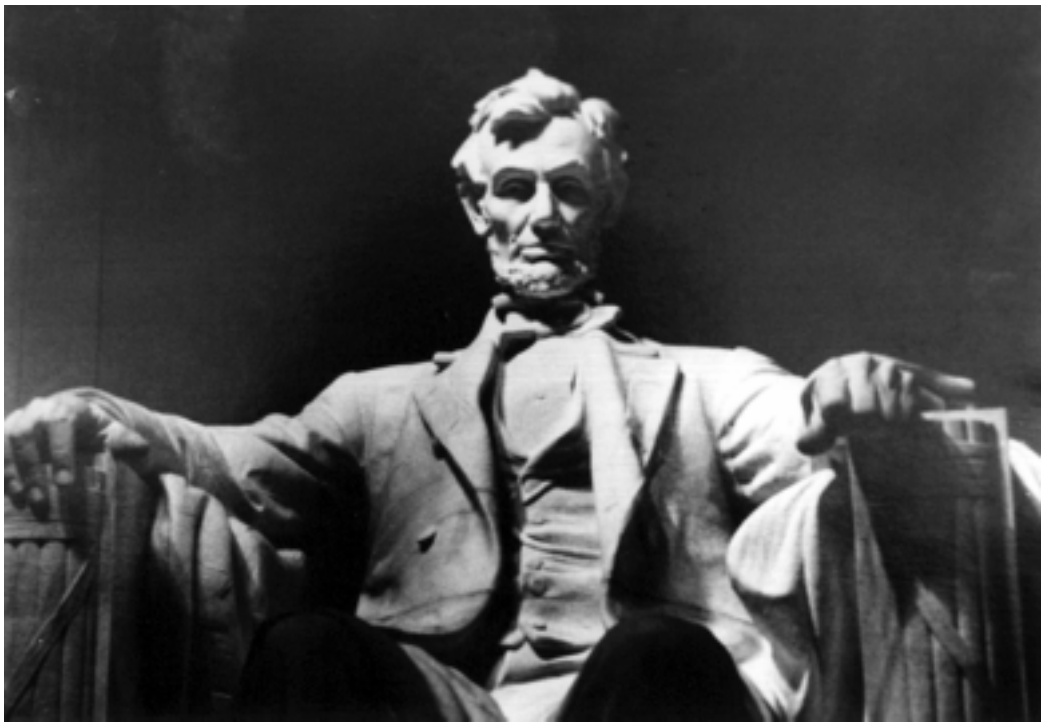
The Construction of the Lincoln Statue

Photograph courtesy of Michael Richman

May 30, 1922 Dedication of the *Lincoln Memorial*

Photograph courtesy of Michael Richman.

Lincoln Statue



Photograph courtesy of Michael Richman.

Unit Closure Activity

Have the students select a person or an event from American History and ask them to design a fitting and appropriate memorial to that individual or event based on what they have learned studying the material in this teaching unit. Be certain that students can back up their selection with appropriate historical evidence as to why this person or event deserves to be commemorated in a public sculpture.