



The Washington Monument was the first monument built in Washington, D.C., to honor a U.S. president. George Washington was one of the leaders who helped form the United States of America. He also served as the first president of the nation. Unfortunately, many arguments surrounded the creation of this beautiful monument.

In 1783 Congress wished to erect a statue of George Washington sitting upon a horse to commemorate his leadership. Shortly after Washington's death in 1799, some people wanted to create a different kind of a memorial. They argued that a tomb would be more fitting and that it should be created inside the Capitol building. Washington's family disagreed.

Still having no memorial in Washington, D.C., to honor the first president, a group of citizens formed the Washington National Monument Society in 1834 and began collecting money. They held a contest asking architects to submit designs for an appropriate memorial. Architect Robert Mills submitted the winning design. His design was modeled after Egyptian obelisks and would be made entirely of white marble. Mills's obelisk was to sit upon a building surrounded by a circle of columns. On the building's roof would be a statue of Washington driving a Greek chariot. Between the columns would stand statues of several Revolutionary War heroes. The total cost would be one million dollars. This amount was much more than the \$87,000 the committee had raised. In 1848 the group decided to start building an obelisk, hoping that once people saw the monument being built, they would generously donate money to complete the building and circle of columns. However, in 1854 money ran out. The obelisk was only one-third of the way built. People had different ideas on how the work should proceed. Years of arguing among the different groups caused the memorial to stand unfinished for nearly twenty years.

Finally on October 9, 1888, the monument officially opened. What should have taken four to five years took nearly forty years to complete. Today close to a million people visit the monument each year. Few visitors realize that different groups that wanted their opinions to be the only opinions nearly kept the monument from being built.

Do You Know?

During one of the phases of arguing, Congress wanted everyone to participate in the actual construction of the monument. Congress invited organizations to submit blocks of stone with inscriptions on them. In the interior of the monument there are blocks of stone from 192 different organizations, each with a unique inscription.

WOWSER!

The very top of the monument is made from aluminum. At the time, molded aluminum cost more than silver or gold. It was the largest, most expensive single piece of aluminum cast during that period.

Discussion questions

1. Why do you think arguing can slow a process down?
2. Choose a position and argue for it. Does the Washington Monument look fine the way it is or does it look unfinished? How would you change it?
3. How are different cultures that make up the United States shown in the Washington Monument?



THE WASHINGTON MONUMENT

