

# **How many people died building the empire state building**

## **Unveiling the Human Cost of the Empire State Building: A Closer Look at Construction Fatalities**

The Empire State Building, a beacon of architectural prowess and a testament to human ambition, stands as a powerful symbol of the 20th century. Its iconic silhouette, piercing the New York skyline, whispers tales of innovation, engineering marvels, and, inevitably, the human cost of progress. This delves into the often-overlooked aspect of the building's construction: the number of lives lost during its creation. We will explore the tragic realities of early 20th-century construction, examine safety regulations, and analyze the surrounding cultural context to paint a comprehensive picture of this significant historical event.

## **The Unseen Toll: How Many Died**

## **Building the Empire State Building?**

Unfortunately, pinpointing an exact figure for fatalities during the Empire State Building's construction is extremely challenging. Detailed records, particularly those concerning worker demographics and precise causes of death, are not as readily available as one might hope. This historical void stems from a combination of factors, including the lack of comprehensive safety regulations and the often undocumented nature of worker fatalities in that era. While specific numbers are elusive, estimates suggest that between 14 and 29 workers lost their lives. *Lack of Definitive Records:* The historical record is fragmented. Newspaper accounts and contemporary reports, often incomplete or anecdotal, are the primary sources used to piece together the puzzle of construction fatalities. This makes a precise count remarkably difficult. *Difficulties in Attribution:* Many deaths during the building's construction period might not have been directly attributable to the building itself. Accidents occurring during the construction of the surrounding infrastructure or in other concurrent projects could have been incorrectly classified.

## **Navigating the Complexities of Early 20th Century Construction**

The early 20th century witnessed a surge in skyscraper construction, but with it came significant safety concerns. This was a period marked by rapid urbanization, technological advancement, and a relative lack of comprehensive safety standards in the construction industry.

## Limited Safety Regulations: A Recipe for Tragedy

Building codes were far less stringent than they are today. The construction industry lacked the comprehensive safety regulations, training programs, and worker protections that we take for granted in modern times. This lack of safety protocols left workers vulnerable to workplace hazards.

## The Immigrant Workforce: A Hidden Story

A substantial portion of the workforce involved in the Empire State Building's construction consisted of immigrants, many of whom were fleeing difficult circumstances in their home countries. These workers often faced language barriers, limited access to legal recourse, and potentially lower wages, making them particularly vulnerable.

## Workplace Hazards: A Constant Threat

Falls from great heights, collapsing scaffolding, and other workplace hazards were common risks. These risks were amplified by a lack of safety equipment, inadequate training, and the immense scale of the construction project.

## Comparing Safety Standards Then and Now

|                   |                                                                 |                               |                               |                          |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Feature           | Early 20th Century (Example: Empire State Building)             | Modern Construction Practices |                               | Fall Protection          |
| Limited or absent | Mandatory safety harnesses, nets, and other protective measures | Scaffolding Safety            | Often inadequate and unstable | Rigorous inspections and |

maintenance protocols | | Training and Education| Minimal or non-existent | Comprehensive safety training programs| | Equipment Safety | Limited testing or quality control | Regular maintenance and rigorous testing| (Visual Representation): A bar graph comparing the frequency of workplace deaths across different construction projects (e.g. 1930s, 1980s, 2020s) can be a powerful visual aid.

## **Beyond the Numbers: The Human Stories**

Understanding the sheer human cost necessitates more than just a numerical count. We need to acknowledge the families and communities impacted by the loss of these lives. The Empire State Building, while a symbol of progress, also stands as a reminder of the sacrifices made behind the scenes. Individual stories of the workers, their struggles, and their fate deserve attention and respect.

## **Cultural Context and Societal Impacts**

The construction of the Empire State Building wasn't just an engineering feat; it reflected the era's social and economic realities. The Great Depression and the subsequent societal upheaval significantly influenced the workforce. Furthermore, the public perception of the building's construction likely played a part in pushing for greater safety standards in subsequent projects.

## **Related Themes: The Lasting Impact of Safety Standards**

The tragic loss of life during the Empire State Building's construction played a pivotal role in shaping the evolution of safety standards in the construction industry.

### **The Evolution of Occupational Safety: A Response to Tragedy**

The tragic losses spurred renewed efforts to address safety concerns. Following the initial construction of the Empire State Building, there was increasing pressure from advocacy groups and unions, and lawmakers were urged to increase the standards.

## **Conclusion: Remembering the Past, Shaping the Future**

The Empire State Building stands as a monument to human ingenuity and ambition, but it's vital to recognize the human cost associated with its creation. While precise figures remain elusive, the estimates highlight the severe consequences of inadequate safety measures prevalent in early 20th-century construction. Learning from the past is crucial. The tragic events surrounding the building's construction underscore the imperative for comprehensive safety regulations and worker protections in the construction industry today, so that future structures can be built with due consideration for the welfare of those who contribute to their creation.

## Frequently Asked Questions

1. **What were the primary causes of death during the Empire State Building's construction?** The primary causes of death were typically falls from height, collapsing scaffolding, and accidents involving heavy machinery. 2. **How did the construction of the Empire State Building reflect the era's social context?** The project reflected the era's rapid urbanization, economic realities, and, unfortunately, a lack of adequate safety protections for workers. 3. **Did the Empire State Building's construction have any long-term effects on safety standards?** Yes, the event significantly influenced the development of stricter building codes and safety regulations in the construction industry, leading to the adoption of safer practices. 4. **What role did the Great Depression play in the building's construction?** The Depression likely impacted the workforce, contributing to potential cost-cutting measures that may have compromised safety practices. 5. Are there any ongoing efforts to document and remember the workers who died during construction? Efforts to collect and preserve records of these workers and their stories are vital to preserving their legacy. However, much more could be done to ensure their experiences are not forgotten.

## The Shadow Beneath the Sky:

# Unveiling the Human Cost of the Empire State Building

The Empire State Building. Just uttering the name conjures images of New York City's iconic skyline, a beacon of Art Deco grandeur, and a testament to human ambition. It's a skyscraper that has graced countless movie screens, witnessed pivotal historical moments, and continues to stand as a symbol of resilience and innovation. But behind the gleaming façade and the awe-inspiring height lies a story often overshadowed by its architectural triumph – the human stories of the men who toiled, often in perilous conditions, to bring this colossal structure to life.

One of the most frequently asked questions, and one that often sparks curiosity, is: **how many people died building the Empire State Building?** It's a somber inquiry, but an essential one when considering any monumental construction project. The answer, while not as straightforward as a single, universally agreed-upon number, reveals a sobering reality that underscores the immense sacrifices made.

## The Official Count and the Murky Realities

The most widely cited official figure states that **\*\*five workers died during the construction of the Empire State Building.\*\*** This number is often attributed to the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, the entity overseeing the project. On the

surface, five deaths might seem remarkably low for a project of such magnitude, especially considering the era in which it was built.

However, like many historical records, this figure has been subject to scrutiny and debate. The definition of "worker" and the circumstances surrounding a fatality can often blur the lines. Were these solely construction workers directly involved in the erection of the building? Or did the count include accidents in and around the immediate construction site that might have been indirectly related? The 1930s, a period predating many of today's stringent safety regulations, was a time when workplace fatalities were unfortunately more commonplace.

## **Beyond the Headline Figure: Considering All Involved**

It's crucial to acknowledge that the construction of a skyscraper like the Empire State Building involved a vast workforce. This included not only those precariously balancing on steel beams hundreds of feet in the air but also ironworkers, riveters, bricklayers, electricians, plumbers, and countless others involved in the logistics and supporting operations. The sheer scale of the operation meant that thousands of individuals contributed their labor and their lives, in a broader sense, to its creation.

Furthermore, the historical context of the Great Depression cannot be ignored. The allure of a job, any job, was powerful. Men desperate for work would take on roles with inherent

dangers, often without the safety nets we would expect today. This desperation, coupled with the demanding nature of the construction, paints a picture of a workforce operating under immense pressure.

## **The Dangers of the Sky-High Construction**

Imagine standing on a narrow steel girder, the wind whipping around you, with nothing but a dizzying drop below. This was the daily reality for many of the ironworkers and riveters who were the true architects of the Empire State Building's skeletal structure. Working at such extreme heights, with rudimentary safety equipment, presented constant and palpable dangers.

### **Falls: The Ever-Present Threat**

Falls were undoubtedly the most significant and terrifying risk. A single misstep, a gust of wind, or a moment of fatigue could have catastrophic consequences. While the official count might be low, it's plausible that some incidents might not have been officially classified as direct construction fatalities. For instance, a worker falling and succumbing to injuries days later, or an accident occurring during transportation to or from the site, might have been categorized differently.

### **The Men of the Sky and Their Courage**

These men, often referred to as "skywalkers" or "high-riggers," were a special breed. They possessed incredible courage,

agility, and a remarkable ability to work at dizzying heights. Their contribution was fundamental to the building's very existence. Understanding their working conditions is key to appreciating the human element of this engineering marvel.

## **Rivet Guns and Flying Debris**

Beyond falls, other hazards were inherent to the job. The constant hammering of rivet guns, while essential for binding the steel framework, could be deafening and dangerous. Flying rivets or fragments of metal posed a risk of serious injury. Furthermore, the sheer weight and volume of materials being hoisted and maneuvered posed a constant threat of crushing injuries.

## **Myth vs. Reality: Addressing Common Misconceptions**

The dramatic nature of the Empire State Building's construction has inevitably led to some myths and misconceptions regarding the number of fatalities. The stories that circulate often paint a grimmer picture than the official records suggest. This is not to dismiss the potential for unrecorded incidents, but rather to acknowledge the power of anecdotal evidence and the human tendency to associate such a massive undertaking with significant loss of life.

Some sources have suggested higher numbers, sometimes reaching into the dozens or even hundreds. These figures often stem from broader interpretations of "deaths related to the project" or may be conflated with other large construction

projects of the era. It's important to rely on documented historical accounts and the consensus of reputable historical research when addressing the question of **how many people died building the Empire State Building**.

## **The Role of Safety Measures (or Lack Thereof)**

In the early 20th century, workplace safety was a far cry from what it is today. Regulations were minimal, and the emphasis was often on speed and efficiency. While some safety precautions were undoubtedly in place, such as safety nets strung between girders (a significant innovation for the time), they were not foolproof. The very nature of skyscraper construction in this period was inherently dangerous.

The construction of the Empire State Building, while tragically claiming lives, was also a period of learning and adaptation in construction safety. The innovations introduced during its build, like the aforementioned safety nets, did contribute to preventing more potential fatalities. This was a project that pushed the boundaries of engineering and, in doing so, inadvertently highlighted the need for improved safety standards in future endeavors.

## **The Legacy of the Builders**

When we gaze up at the Empire State Building, it's easy to be captivated by its architectural splendor and its enduring presence. However, it's equally important to remember the men whose sweat, skill, and, tragically, sometimes their lives,

were instrumental in its creation. The official count of five deaths is a stark reminder of the risks involved, even if the true number might be subject to historical interpretation.

These were not just anonymous figures; they were fathers, sons, brothers, and friends. They were individuals who contributed their labor to a project that would become a global icon. Their stories, though often untold or overshadowed, are an integral part of the Empire State Building's rich history.

## Remembering the Unsung Heroes

The next time you see the Empire State Building piercing the New York sky, take a moment to reflect on the immense human effort and sacrifice that went into its construction. The question of **how many people died building the Empire State Building** is more than just a statistic; it's a prompt to acknowledge the human cost of progress and to honor the lives of the men who helped build a legend.

Their legacy is etched not just in steel and stone, but in the very fabric of American ambition and innovation. The Empire State Building stands as a testament to what can be achieved, but it also serves as a powerful reminder of the individuals who made it possible, often at the greatest personal cost.

The Empire State Building, an iconic symbol of American ambition and architectural brilliance, stands not only as a testament to early 20th-century engineering but also as a poignant reminder of the human effort behind its towering presence. While the structure's gleaming spire and historic

significance capture global attention, a more somber narrative emerges when considering the lives intertwined with its construction. Understanding how many people died building the Empire State Building reveals not just a number, but a deeper reflection on labor, safety, and progress during one of New York City's most ambitious construction eras.

## **A Monument Built Amidst Ambition and Risk**

Construction of the Empire State Building began in 1930 during the Great Depression, a time when urban development was both an economic gamble and a symbol of national resilience. Rising 1,454 feet with 102 stories, the building was assembled at a breakneck pace, with workers assembling steel beams, concrete, and glass under intense pressure to meet a tight deadline. The project employed thousands of laborers, many of whom were immigrants or recent arrivals seeking opportunity in a struggling economy. While the building's completion in just 410 days is celebrated today, the human cost was significant—an often-overlooked aspect of its legacy.

## **The Unsung Toll: Deaths and Injuries During Construction**

Official records indicate that at least five workers lost their lives during the construction of the Empire State Building—a surprisingly low figure given the scale and danger of high-rise building in the 1930s. Experts suggest that with advancements in workplace safety protocols during the era, the number of

fatalities might have been higher, but the collaborative efforts of supervisors, safety officers, and labor unions contributed to keeping casualties minimal for such a massive project. Beyond the fatalities, hundreds more suffered injuries, from falls and equipment accidents to respiratory issues caused by prolonged exposure to dust and debris. These statistics, though modest compared to other industrial projects of the time, underscore the physical risks faced by workers who risked their lives to erect one of the world's most recognizable landmarks.

## **Key Insights: Safety, Progress, and Historical Context**

The relatively low death toll at the Empire State Building must be viewed within the broader historical context of industrial construction. In the 1930s, workplace safety standards were far less rigorous than today, yet the project's swift timeline and disciplined oversight reflect evolving industry practices. While no building is entirely risk-free, the Empire State Building's construction exemplifies a balance between ambitious engineering and emerging safety consciousness. This balance laid groundwork for future skyscraper projects, where worker welfare became increasingly prioritized without sacrificing architectural ambition.

## **Applications and Benefits Beyond the Statistics**

Understanding the human story behind the Empire State Building enriches its cultural and educational value. It serves

as a powerful case study in urban development, illustrating how public monuments are shaped not only by vision but by the labor and sacrifice of individuals. This knowledge informs modern construction ethics, emphasizing transparency about risks and the importance of prioritizing worker safety. Additionally, the building's legacy inspires architects, historians, and policymakers to honor construction heritage while advocating for humane working conditions in today's high-rise projects.

## **Future Outlook: Honoring the Past, Building Responsibly**

Looking ahead, the Empire State Building remains a living monument whose story continues to evolve. While no new deaths are associated with its upkeep, the narrative of its construction endures as a reminder of the human dimension behind architectural marvels. As cities worldwide pursue ever-taller structures, the lessons learned from the Empire State Building's construction—particularly the balance between speed, ambition, and safety—guide sustainable and ethical development. Future skyscrapers will not only reach higher but do so with a deeper respect for those who build them, ensuring that progress never comes at the cost of human life. In honoring the people who helped shape the Empire State Building, we celebrate both its towering form and the quiet courage of the workers whose contributions built the skyline we admire today.

# The Human Cost of an Icon: How Many People Died Building the Empire State Building?

The Empire State Building stands as an enduring symbol of New York City's resilience and ambition. Its soaring art deco silhouette has graced countless films, postcards, and imaginations. Yet, behind the gleaming facade and the awe-inspiring views lies a story of immense human effort, sacrifice, and, tragically, loss of life. When we gaze upon this architectural marvel, a crucial question often arises: **how many people died building the Empire State Building?** This is not merely a morbid curiosity; it delves into the historical context of construction practices, worker safety, and the sheer audacity of a project undertaken during the Great Depression.

Unraveling the exact number of fatalities is a complex endeavor, entangled with historical record-keeping, differing definitions of "on-the-job death," and the sheer scale of the undertaking. However, through diligent research and the examination of contemporary accounts and historical analyses, a clearer, albeit somber, picture emerges. The commonly cited figures, while debated, paint a stark reality of the dangers faced by the thousands of men who brought this iconic structure to life.

# The Scale of the Empire State Building Project

Before delving into the human cost, it's essential to grasp the monumental nature of the Empire State Building. Erected at a breathtaking pace, its construction was a race against time and a testament to American ingenuity during a period of economic hardship. Designed by Shreve, Lamb & Harmon, the skyscraper was intended to be the world's tallest building, a beacon of hope and progress. The sheer number of workers involved underscores the magnitude of this undertaking. Estimates suggest that over **3,400 construction workers** were employed at the peak of construction. These individuals, often immigrants and skilled laborers from diverse backgrounds, toiled tirelessly for an average of **seven floors per week**. This relentless pace, coupled with the inherent risks of working at extreme heights, set the stage for potential accidents.

The project began in March 1930 and was completed in a record-breaking **one year and 45 days**, officially opening on May 1, 1931. This rapid construction timeline, while impressive, meant that workers were constantly under pressure, often working long hours in challenging conditions. The economic climate of the Great Depression also played a role. Jobs were scarce, and many workers were desperate to maintain their employment, potentially leading them to overlook or accept greater risks than they otherwise might have.

# Unpacking the Official and Unofficial Death Tolls

The question of "how many people died building the Empire State Building" is often met with a range of figures. The most frequently cited number, and the one often reported by historical societies and media outlets, is **five confirmed deaths**. This figure typically refers to fatalities that were officially recorded as occurring directly as a result of construction-related accidents during the project's active building phase.

However, many historians and researchers argue that this number might be an undercount. The definition of "on-the-job death" can be subjective. For instance, did workers who died shortly after leaving the site due to injuries sustained during their shift count? Were pre-existing conditions exacerbated by the strenuous work and then led to death considered a construction-related fatality? These nuances can lead to discrepancies.

## The "Five" and Their Stories

The five officially recognized deaths paint a grim picture of the daily perils faced by the ironworkers and other tradesmen. These tragic incidents, though few in number compared to the workforce, serve as stark reminders of the human cost. While specific details about each of the five are not always readily available in comprehensive public records, accounts often mention:

1. A worker falling from a scaffold.

2. An accident involving heavy machinery or materials.
3. Incidents related to the precariousness of working at extreme heights.

It's important to acknowledge that even one life lost is a tragedy. The fact that the number is relatively low for such a massive and rapidly constructed skyscraper is often attributed to several factors, including the bravery and skill of the workers, the developing safety protocols of the era, and perhaps a degree of luck.

## **Why the Discrepancy? Factors Influencing the Death Toll**

The disparity between the commonly cited "five" and the possibility of a higher, less documented toll stems from several critical factors inherent to construction in the early 20th century:

### **1. Record-Keeping Practices**

In the 1930s, accident reporting and record-keeping were not as standardized or as rigorously enforced as they are today. Fatalities might have been attributed to natural causes or happened off-site, making it difficult to definitively link them to the Empire State Building project.

### **2. Worker Safety Standards of the Era**

Safety regulations were nascent. While efforts were made to protect workers, they were rudimentary by modern standards. Concepts like extensive fall protection, mandatory hard hats

(though some workers did wear them), and stringent safety inspections were not as commonplace or as strictly enforced. The inherent dangers of riveting steel beams at hundreds of feet in the air, often in windy conditions, were a constant threat.

### **3. The "Accident" vs. "Occupational Illness" Debate**

Beyond immediate accidents, workers could have suffered from long-term health consequences due to the arduous nature of the work, exposure to dust and fumes, and the general strain on their bodies. These gradual declines in health, leading to death years later, would likely not be recorded as construction-related fatalities.

### **4. The Role of the "Skywalkers"**

A particular group of brave individuals, often referred to as "skywalkers" or "riveters," were the elite ironworkers who performed the most dangerous tasks. They navigated narrow beams, often without safety nets, securing the structural integrity of the building. Their skill was paramount, but their exposure to risk was exceptionally high. While the official count may not reflect it, the psychological and physical toll on these men was immense.

## **Comparisons to Other Large-Scale Projects**

To contextualize the Empire State Building's death toll, it's useful to compare it with other major construction projects of

its time and later. For instance, the construction of the Golden Gate Bridge, which was also an incredibly ambitious and dangerous undertaking, had a significantly higher official death toll, with **11 workers** dying during its construction (though some analyses suggest this number might have been higher if all incidents were accounted for). The Hoover Dam construction, another monumental feat, also saw a higher number of fatalities, with the official count often cited at around **96 men** dying during its construction, though some estimates are higher when including indirect deaths.

These comparisons highlight that while the Empire State Building's death toll of five is tragic, it was relatively low compared to other massive infrastructure projects of the era, particularly when considering the sheer number of workers and the speed of construction. This often leads to discussions about what safety measures, however rudimentary, might have been in place and how effective they were, or if the project was simply fortunate.

## The Legacy and Remembering the Workers

The Empire State Building stands as a testament to human endeavor and architectural innovation. However, it's crucial to remember that this achievement was built on the backs of thousands of workers who risked their lives daily. The low official death toll of five, while a point of statistical interest, should not overshadow the bravery and potential dangers faced by every individual who contributed to its construction.

The story of the Empire State Building is a powerful reminder of the evolution of worker safety standards. The advancements in construction safety, from fall protection to rigorous training and oversight, are direct descendants of the lessons learned from past projects like this. While the exact number of lives lost may remain a subject of historical inquiry, the impact of these workers' sacrifices is etched into the very fabric of this iconic skyscraper. Future projects, even those employing cutting-edge technology, still rely on the dedication and skill of human hands. Remembering the human cost of iconic structures like the Empire State Building ensures that we honor the laborers who made them possible and continue to strive for safer working conditions for all.

The enduring image of the Empire State Building should not solely be one of architectural grandeur, but also a somber reflection on the individuals whose sweat, toil, and sometimes lives, made its existence a reality. The question of **how many people died building the Empire State Building**, while answered with a commonly accepted figure, invites a deeper consideration of the realities of large-scale construction and the human element at its core.

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accessible, efficient, and inclusive, empowering individuals to pursue lifelong learning in an increasingly connected world.

## Questions & Answers About how many people died building the empire state building

| <b>N<br/>o</b> | <b>Question</b>                                                                   | <b>Answer</b>                                                                                                                                                                                |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1              | So, how many lives did it actually cost to build the Empire State Building?       | Official records indicate that five workers died during the construction of the Empire State Building.                                                                                       |
| 2              | Is the number of deaths on the Empire State Building unusually high for its time? | Considering the dangerous nature of skyscraper construction in the late 1920s and early 1930s, five deaths is considered a remarkably low number.                                            |
| 3              | Were there any fatalities beyond the official worker count?                       | While the official count is five workers, there were some unconfirmed reports and historical accounts that mention additional accidental deaths, though these are not officially documented. |
| 4              | What made the Empire State Building construction so dangerous?                    | The extreme heights, limited safety equipment, the fast-paced construction schedule, and the sheer scale of the project all contributed to the inherent dangers faced by workers.            |

|   |                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|---|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5 | How did they achieve such a low fatality rate for the era?                      | The construction company implemented a rigorous safety program, including safety nets and strict protocols, which were considered advanced for the time and likely contributed to the relatively low death toll. |
| 6 | Are there any urban legends or myths about the number of deaths?                | Yes, some urban legends claim a much higher number of deaths, often citing hundreds, but these are not supported by historical evidence or official records.                                                     |
| 7 | Were the families of the deceased workers compensated?                          | The construction company had an insurance plan that provided compensation to the families of workers who died on the job.                                                                                        |
| 8 | Does the low death toll make the Empire State Building construction remarkable? | Absolutely. Achieving such a feat with minimal loss of life during that period is widely considered a testament to the safety measures implemented and the management of the project.                            |
| 9 | Where do the official numbers for construction fatalities come from?            | The official figures are derived from records kept by the construction companies involved and historical documentation from the period.                                                                          |

Empire State Building death toll, how many people died constructing Empire State Building, death toll of Empire State Building construction, Empire State Building construction fatalities, history of deaths during Empire State Building build, Empire State Building worker fatalities, construction deaths Empire State Building, facts about Empire State Building deaths, Empire State Building building casualties, Empire State

Building worker fatalities history

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eBooks help bridge the gap between theoretical concepts and practical application.

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The adaptability of How Many People Died Building The Empire State Building eBooks supports evolving learning needs.

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Creating a How Many People Died Building The Empire State

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