

Why France wanted to give the Statue of Liberty to America

France had helped America become free from England during the War for Independence and had supported the cause of the Union during the Civil War. In fact, America would not have won her independence without the help of France who provided arms, ships, money, and men to the American colonies. Some Frenchmen – most notably the Marquis de Lafayette, a close friend of George Washington – even became high-ranking officers in the American army. It was an alliance of respect and friendship the French would not forget.¹

In 1865 France had already endured 13 years of Napoleon III's dictatorship. France, who had suffered so much from the anarchy of the French Revolution and the tyranny of the Napoleon dynasty, was ready for the liberty America had achieved. There was a genuine flow of sympathy between France and America, and France wanted to cement their affections and inherit the blessings flowing from America.

The people of France wanted to give the United States a great monument as a lasting memorial to independence and thereby show that the French government was also dedicated to the idea of human liberty. They also wanted commemorate 100 years of friendship between the two nations. This is the reason France wanted to give the Statue of Liberty to America--France loved what America had done and desperately wanted the same blessings of freedom!²

Why the Statue of Liberty symbolizes liberty to the world

Edouard-Rene Lefebvre de Laboulaye was the original sponsor of the Statue of Liberty. He was a French politician, historian, professor of law, and chairman of a French anti-slavery society. He wanted a monument as big as the idea of liberty, a monument to celebrate victory over oppression for the common man, a monument that would give hope to the world that liberty is for all men! That is why he called it "Liberty Enlightening the World!"

Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi was the French sculptor of the Statue of Liberty. He had joined the French army in 1870 as a general in the Franco-Prussian War and fought for his homeland. After this experience the idea of "liberty" took on a whole new meaning for Bartholdi who wanted "Liberty Enlightening the World" to inspire the world to pursue liberty for their own nations.

Her Symbols

The meaning of the Statue of Liberty is found in her symbols.

¹ "History: Statue of Liberty, The Two Sisters" available from <http://www.americanparknetwork.com/parkinfol/sl/history/liberty.html>; accessed 24 January 2008.

² Bernard A. Weisberger, *Statue of Liberty The First Hundred Years*, (New York, NY: American Heritage, 1985) 116-120.

Torch: The torch was the first part of the statue sculpted and was built in 1876. It symbolizes that light and truth are the key to achieving freedom. Without seeing that freedom exists, one cannot obtain it. The torch is the strongest symbol that Bartholdi incorporated into the statue. In fact the statue's real name reflects its true meaning: "Liberty Enlightening the World."

Crown: The statue wears a crown with seven spikes. This represents the seven seas and seven continents of the world re-enforcing the universal concept of liberty.

Windows: The 25 windows around the crown represent heaven's rays of light that shine over the seven seas and seven continents of the world.

Tablet: Bartholdi chose to have the statue hold a tablet in her left hand. It is a book of law based on the founding principles of this nation, a nation based on law. On the tablet is the inscription *July IV, MDCCLXXVI*. These Roman numerals, which are symbolic of law, were added to the face of the tablet and represent July 4, 1776—celebrating both an event as well as a singular document—the *Declaration of Independence*.

Tablet Shape: The tablet is shaped like a keystone. In architecture, a keystone is the stone that keeps the others together. Without it everything would fall apart. The keystone of America is the fact that the USA is based on law. Without law, freedom and democracy would not prevail.

Robe: The Statue of Liberty wears a free-flowing robe or stola. The stola was the traditional garment of Roman women corresponding to the toga that was worn by men. This is what the Roman goddess "Libertas" wore. She was a symbol of liberty to the Romans, and slaves that were freed worshipped her.

Broken Chains: The broken chains are located at the statue's feet, and they symbolize the freedom that Lady Liberty offers. It demonstrates that the statue and therefore, the nation, is free from slavery and bondage. This important symbol can only be seen from the air or from the torch.

Sandals: Sandals represent the fact that Liberty is a free person. Also, she is not standing still. Even though the statue stands on a pedestal, she is represented as moving forward, the way free people are always progressing by their own creative genius.

Granite Brick: Richard Morris Hunt, who constructed the pedestal, incorporated symbolism as well. He placed 13 layers of granite brick in the body of the pedestal. These layers represent the 13 original states.

Shields: In the pedestal are ten shields on each of the four sides symbolizing the 40 states that were then in the Union.

She Welcomes Immigrants

The Statue of Liberty is the embodiment of the universal human desire to be free. Next to the Statue of Liberty stands Ellis Island, the Gateway to America for over 12 million immigrants. Ellis Island was the nation's principal port of entry between 1892 and 1954. Today over 100 million Americans can trace a relative who came through this facility. As immigrants came into New York Harbor, the first thing they saw was the Statue of Liberty. The site of this welcoming and magnificent statue made many immigrants break down in tears. The sight may have caused them to believe fabled stories they had heard about America, that it truly is the land of the free and the home of the brave!

In 1883 a Jewish woman named Emma Lazarus composed a sonnet entitled *The New Colossus* for an exhibition to raise funds for the Statue of Liberty's pedestal. The words welcome the whole world to America. Part of it reads

“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp” cries she
With silent lips. “Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to be free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me.
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

Emma Lazarus was not invited to and did not attend the inauguration of the statue. She died soon after in 1887 at the age of 38. Over time, the Statue of Liberty came to signify liberty to all immigrants partly because it was the first thing they saw as they came in to New York Harbor making Lazarus' sonnet even more meaningful. Finally, in 1903, *The New Colossus* was engraved on a plaque and placed inside the pedestal. Today the poem is nearly as well-known as the statue itself.³

³ Bernard A. Weisberger, *Statue of Liberty The First Hundred Years*, (New York, NY: American Heritage, 1985) 116-120.