The Statue of Liberty has been a symbol of freedom for over a hundred years. It was a gift from France to America to commemorate the friendship that was developed when they aided our young nation during the Revolutionary War, and to celebrate our mutual love of freedom.

History

Construction began on the statue in 1875. The French referred to the statue as "Liberty Enlightening the World." The French had the responsibility of raising the money and building the statue, and the Americans had the responsibility of raising the money and building the base for the statue. Lack of funds was a serious issue on both sides of the Atlantic and slowed down construction.



The Chief architect of the emerging base was

Richard Morris Hunt, and the largest fundraiser was Joseph Pulitzer, Hungarian Immigrant, and the well-known publisher of the "New York World", for whom the Pulitzer Prize is named. Newspaper publishers in particular were in a position to impress upon the American public the importance of donating money for the construction of such a symbol.

The statute was finished and so was the base, though several years behind schedule, and the statue was finally presented to the American people. Accepting the statue was President Grover Cleveland in October 18, 1886. In his speech, he said the following words:

"We will not forget that liberty here made her home;
nor shall her chosen altar be neglected".

The Symbol Opportunity for Immigrants

Ever since the presentation in 1886, the Statue of Liberty has been a beacon of freedom and democracy to the world. Most Americans have ancestors who saw the Statue of Liberty on their way to Ellis Island and a new life in America. Many immigrants faced terrible conditions in their former countries, including starvation and homelessness. Almost 34 million people came to America in this time period. It took courage for immigrants to leave their homes and families and everything they knew to start a

new life in a new country. Some immigrants had to save for many years just to be able to afford a ticket to come to America by ship.

Accommodation in steerage (or 3rd class) on ships at that time was generally unpleasant. Crowding made smells, seasickness, and general lack hygiene even worse. We can only imagine what those immigrants felt when they stepped out on deck and with a breath of fresh air, they first saw

the Statue of Liberty and knew that they finally had arrived.

A poem by Emma Lazarus, which was written 1883, helps us understand the fundamental difference between the American point of view regarding the immigrants and that of the countries they came from. The poem is forceful and makes a clear point: that we are a nation of immigrants

and often of those who were discriminated against, and are all the stronger for it. Below is the poem in full:

"The New Colossus" by Emma Lazarus

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;

Here at our sea-washed,
sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a
torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning,
and her name Mother of
Exiles.
From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide
welcome; her mild eyes
command
The air-bridged harbor that

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

golden door!"

Liberty Today

To this day, Lady Liberty holds her torch aloft for all to see. Liberty continues to be a symbol of freedom and democracy throughout the world. In several countries fighting for democracy, including in

Tiananmen Square in China, a version of a goddess of freedom was carried, leading the people forward.

A little known fact is that the statue itself shows us that democracy and freedom must always move forward. The Statue of Liberty includes a

difficult-to-see chain wrapped around her legs. The chain is broken and Lady Liberty steps forward, away from her past captivity and toward liberty.