

Linking Past and Present Activity 13

Lady Liberty

THEN

“Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free....”
These comforting words greeted

many beleaguered immigrants who sailed into New York Harbor. The words are part of a poem by Emma Lazarus inscribed on the Statue of Liberty.

The statue, officially titled “Liberty Enlightening the World,” was a gesture of friendship given by the people of France to the people of the United States. French citizens donated the money to build the proud, robed woman. Designed by French sculptor Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi, the statue was made of copper sheets, hammered into shape by hand. The sheets were fastened to a giant iron frame designed by Alexandre Gustave Eiffel, builder of the Eiffel Tower in Paris.

The United States raised the money to build the huge concrete, steel, and granite pedestal, or base. The statue was first displayed in Paris upon completion in 1884. It was then dismantled and shipped to its present location. President Grover Cleveland dedicated the statue in 1886 as a memorial to the alliance between France and the American colonists during the American Revolution.

Lady Liberty holds her uplifted, burning torch in her right hand. She wears a crown of seven spikes, representing the seven seas and seven continents. In her left arm rests a tablet inscribed with the date July 4, 1776. A broken chain lies at her feet.

NOW

The statue became a powerful national symbol during World War I. Its image appeared on war bonds, called *Liberty Bonds*, sold by the government to finance the war. As

a second wave of immigrants poured into the country after World War II, the statue took on another meaning from the Lazarus poem: the “Mother of Exiles.”

Today the statue stands as a global symbol of freedom. Over 4 million people from all over the world visit the statue each year. Standing 305 feet from pedestal base to torch, it is still one of the largest statues ever built. It was declared a national monument in 1924.

In the early 1980s, the French and Americans partnered again to restore the statue. They replaced the rusted iron frame with stainless steel. They replaced the torch with one that glows with reflected light. Repairs were completed in time for the statue’s centennial celebration, July 4, 1986.

Today ferries take visitors on a 15-minute ride to the island. Upon entering the statue’s base, you will see the original torch on display. You can take an elevator to the top of the pedestal. If you are fitness-minded, you can instead climb the 354 triangular steps (22 stories) that corkscrew their way up to the crown. From there, you have a magnificent view of New York harbor. A 42-foot service ladder inside the arm extends to the tip of the flame. The ladder was closed to the public in 1916 for safety reasons.



CHAPTER 13

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CRITICAL THINKING

Directions: Answer the questions below on a separate sheet of paper.

1. **Identifying the Main Idea** Why did the French give the statue to the United States?
2. **Analyzing Information** Explain the symbolic meaning of the main parts of the statue.
3. **Drawing Conclusions** What new meanings did the statue take on over the years? Explain these meanings and why they probably occurred.

Answer Key:

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1. The French people gave the statue to the people of the United States as a gesture of friendship. The two countries had been allies during the American Revolution.

Also, taking the analysis a bit further, the French and Americans both shared the ideal of liberty. The gift of the statue symbolized that shared ideal.

2. The uplifted, burning torch in the statue's right hand stands for liberty. It shines down on the seven spikes in her crown, representing the light of liberty shining over all seven seas and seven continents of the world. The tablet in her left arm bears the date July 4, 1776, the date of the Declaration of Independence, when the United States declared itself free of British rule. A broken chain, representing tyranny, lies at her feet, symbolizing escape from the bonds of unjust rule.

3. During World War I, the statue became a symbol for rallying Americans around the war effort. Use of the image on war bonds stirred patriotism and helped to sell the bonds to citizens. Many second-wave immigrants who arrived after World War II were "exiles," forced to leave their homelands by a harsh government, physical danger, or severe economic conditions, and they continue to come. Today many immigrants, desperate to escape severe conditions in Cuba or Haiti, flee in rickety boats. For these exiles, the Statue of Liberty probably feels symbolically like the "Mother of Exiles."