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A Colossal Gift: The Statue of Liberty

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If you were a country, what kind of gift would you give to a friend? The people of France had an idea to give the United States of America a colossal gift, the Statue of Liberty.

In 1870, French law professor Edouard de Laboulaye had the idea to present America with a magnificent monument to celebrate the 100th anniversary of American independence. Such a grand gift would honor the international friendship formed when France fought alongside American colonists during the American Revolution. The American people were thrilled with the idea and agreed to build a suitable pedestal for the monument.

Sculptor Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi was determined to make the dream a reality. Bartholdi sketched multiple designs inspired by classic structures of Greece, Italy, and Egyptian pyramids. He carefully considered the intended symbolism of the monument and the messages he wanted her to convey. Finally, his many ideas merged into a perfect, detailed design using

materials that would withstand storms and the ravages of time. He named his new project Liberty Enlightening the World but we know her as The Statue of Liberty.

Liberty would carry a torch as a symbol of enlightenment and hope. She would wear a crown with seven rays to represent the oceans and continents of Earth and twenty-five windows to symbolize gemstones of the world. She would wear Roman robes that flowed to the ground. Broken chains and shackles would lie at her feet to symbolize escape from oppression. A tablet in her right hand, inscribed July IV MDCCLXXVI (July 4, 1776) would honor the Declaration of Independence. The statue would be enormous. In fact, she would be called a colossus. But where would she stand?

In 1871, Bartholdi traveled to America to raise money and to search for the perfect location for his monument. As Bartholdi entered New York Harbor, the busiest port in America, he was struck at once by the twelve-acre Bedloe's Island.



What better welcome for travelers than to be greeted by the gaze of Liberty Enlightening the World? He had found Liberty's home, later renamed Liberty Island.

Bartholdi returned to France and continued experimenting with various models. In 1875, Bartholdi unveiled a four-foot tall complete scale model of the statue we know today. The wood and plaster model was doubled in size then doubled again until it towered over Paris at 151 feet tall. It was soon obvious that Liberty would not be completed by America's centennial celebration. So, Bartholdi's team of fifty artisans concentrated on the crown and torch first. Meanwhile, Alexandre-Gustave Eiffel (who later designed the Eiffel Tower) was hired to build Liberty's daunting iron skeleton.

The gleaming red copper skin of Liberty was hammered into shape through a process called "*repousse*." The literal French meaning is "to push back." By hammering or pressing the reverse side of the metal surface, a design and shape can be achieved. The thickness of the skin was no more than two stacked American pennies. More than 300,000 rivets held the 100 tons of copper sheeting together. Eventually, natural weathering of the copper would create a greenish crust called patina over Liberty.

In 1876, Bartholdi traveled to Philadelphia. Though he was too late for the opening of the centennial celebration, the exhibit of Liberty's massive right hand was popular. As many as two and a half million people visited the exhibit in a single month. Liberty's head and crown were later displayed, in 1878, at the World's Fair in Paris, where tickets were sold to earn even more money to complete the project.

Finally, eight years later, in 1884,

Fun Facts about Liberty

- The statue's overall height from ground to torch is 305' 6" (Fifty-five feet shorter than the length of a football field.)
- You would walk 392 steps to reach Liberty's torch.
- Liberty's height from her heel to her head is 111 feet. (The length of three school buses parked bumper to bumper.)
- You would climb 154 steps from the top of the pedestal to Liberty's head.
- The total weight of the statue is 225 tons (The weight of 41 male elephants.)
- The statue's head is 10' tall.
- Each of her gazing eyes is 2'6" wide and her nose is 4'6" long.
- Liberty's mouth is 3' wide (the length of a yardstick.)
- Liberty's hand is 16'5" long.
- One index finger is 8' tall
- Each of the seven rays on Liberty's crown weighs 150 lbs. and is 9' long.
- Special copper rods run through the statue and pedestal and into the ground. The electrical charge from a lightning strike would run straight to the ground instead of damaging the statue.
- During a 50 mph wind, the statue sways up to 3 inches. The torch, being the highest point, sways up to 5 inches.



Liberty Enlightening the World was finished. Sadly, Edouard de Laboulaye did not live to see his dream a reality. Still, it was time for Liberty to go home. The massive statue was then painstakingly reduced to 350 pieces and packed into 214 crates. Seven train cars were needed to transport the statue to a French harbor where the frigate, "Iserre" was waiting. After a month-long journey, Liberty arrived in New York harbor in June, 1885. Unfortunately, Americans hadn't raised enough money to build the granite pedestal so the crates sat untouched for nearly a year.

American newspaper man, Joseph Pulitzer (after whom the Pulitzer Prize is named), helped raise money by publishing cartoons and essays and by printing the names of every person who donated money. Soon, funds were pouring in from children, store clerks, immigrants and struggling artists until enough money was raised.

The pedestal was finally completed in 1886. It took six months for the Statue of Liberty to be re-assembled atop her perch. Bartholdi himself unveiled Liberty to the world on October 28, 1886, ten years late for the centennial. Thousands of people gathered to celebrate Liberty as fireworks lit the sky.

Millions of immigrants to America have sought the freedom symbolized in The Statue of Liberty's presence. Today, nearly five million visitors each year journey to marvel at this colossal symbol of America. The Statue of Liberty remains a gift to all people even today. **KZ**

