

The Statue of Liberty

On an evening in 1865 Édouard de Laboulaye gave a party at his home in France. He and his guests talked about the friendship between France and the United States and recalled that France had given aid to the American colonies in their Revolutionary War. "Wouldn't it be wonderful," Laboulaye exclaimed, "if France and the United States joined together to build a monument in America celebrating that nation's independence!" Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi, a young sculptor and guest at the party, was **intrigued** by Laboulaye's idea. He believed that creating a monument for America would be a great project for him to undertake.

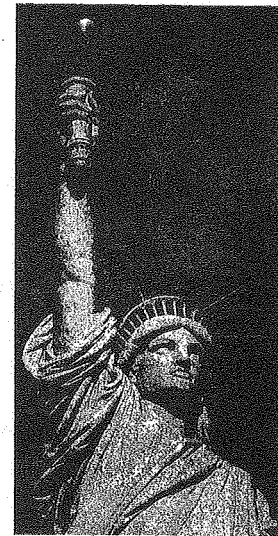
Hoping to promote Laboulaye's idea, Bartholdi went to the United States in 1871. As his ship entered New York Harbor, he saw tiny Bedloe's Island. What a perfect spot for the statue, he thought. Bartholdi stayed for five months, meeting with **prominent** Americans. "If France gave your country a statue, would America provide land and a pedestal for it?" he asked them. Although he received no firm agreements, he was encouraged by their interest.

Bartholdi returned to France and worked on his design for the statue—a gigantic figure of a robed woman holding up a shining torch in her right hand. He made sketches and clay models, but he would need money, he realized, to pay for Liberty's construction.

In 1875 a campaign was launched in France to raise funds for the statue. Bartholdi could now begin building his 151-foot-high figure. Meanwhile, in America, Congress agreed to accept the statue and to set aside Bedloe's Island for its site. Because Congress refused to approve funds for the pedestal, a committee was formed to raise the money. In 1881 Richard Morris Hunt was selected to design the pedestal, but fundraising went so slowly that its construction didn't begin until 1884.

By that same year, Liberty's copper skin and supporting inner skeleton of iron beams and bars stood completed and fastened together in a courtyard outside Bartholdi's workshop. She was the largest statue of her time, with a nose over four feet long and a mouth measuring three feet wide. In 1885 the statue was taken apart, packed in 214 crates, and shipped to Bedloe's Island. The crates sat there for nearly a year, waiting for the pedestal to be finished.

The dedication ceremony of the Statue of Liberty took place on October 28, 1886. There were parades, cannon blasts, and a speech by U.S. President Grover Cleveland. Bartholdi stood high up in the head of the statue, waiting to drop the enormous French flag that covered Liberty's face. When she was unveiled, the gathered crowds gazed in awe at this beautiful gift from France, a lasting memorial to America's freedom and liberty.



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