The giant statue titled Liberty Enlightening the World has become a symbol of the United States and of freedom to oppressed people everywhere. It stands on Liberty Island in New York Harbor. The statue was a gift from the people of France to the people of the United States commemorating the alliance of the two nations during the American Revolution. The majestic sculpture in Upper New York Bay is one of the largest statues ever built and attracts about 2 million visitors each year.

Édouard de Laboulaye, a French historian, proposed in 1865 that his country present a suitable memorial to the United States on the 100th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The Franco-Prussian War intervened, but in 1874 an Alsatian sculptor, Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi, went to New York City to confer with American officials.

The Franco-American Union was formed to collect the funds. The total cost of about 1 million francs was contributed in France by popular subscription. Americans subscribed $250,000 for the pedestal. The statue was dedicated on October 28, 1886.

In her uplifted right hand Liberty holds a gilt torch illuminated by lights on the balcony. In her left hand is the tablet of law bearing in roman numerals the date July 4, 1776. A broken shackle representing tyranny lies at her feet. The seven spikes in her crown represent freedom’s light shining on the seven continents and the seven seas. The star-shaped wall around the base of the statue is the wall of old Fort Wood, which was built on Bedloe’s Island from 1808 to 1811. The statue was made a national monument in 1924 and is maintained by the National Park Service. In 1956 Bedloe’s Island was renamed Liberty Island, and in 1965 nearby Ellis Island was added to the national monument. The American Museum of Immigration in the base of the statue was opened in 1972.

On the pedestal appears the following sonnet by Emma Lazarus, entitled “The New Colossus”: 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!”

The figure is composed of more than 300 copper sheets 332 of an inch (2.4 millimeters) thick and weighing a total of 31 tons. It is supported by an iron framework designed by Alexandre-Gustave Eiffel, builder of the Eiffel Tower in Paris. Bartholdi first built a 9-foot (3-meter) model. This was enlarged to a figure 36 feet (11 meters) tall, which was divided into sections. Each section was further enlarged to full size, and the copper was hammered over patterns. In the assembled statue each section of the shell was bolted to the central framework.

Liberty’s 154-foot (46.9-meter) pedestal was completed in 1886 and was for a time the largest single concrete structure in the world. The base contains stairways and a passenger elevator. The overall height of the structure, from the base of the foundation to the top of the torch, is 305 feet 1 inch (92.99 meters). Liberty herself is, from the feet to the top of the head, 111 feet 1 inch (33.86 meters). Two spiral stairways, one for upward traffic, the other for downward, extend inside the sculpture from its base to Liberty’s crown, where there is a small observation deck. The total number of stairway steps, from ground level to the crown, is 354. Visitors are not permitted to ascend to the torch. A four-day festival centering on July 4, 1986, marked the 100th anniversary of the Statue of Liberty and the end of a four-year repair and restoration program costing $66 million.

After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on U.S. soil, the inside of the Statue of Liberty was closed to visitors for security reasons. In 2004 the public was allowed entrance to the pedestal portion, although it would take another five years before the crown was once again open for visitors. In 2011 the Statue of Liberty was closed for yearlong, multimillion dollar renovations that included safety improvements, although visitors still had access to the island.