

**LENTEN DEVOTIONAL**  
**Monday, March 17, 2025**  
**Written by Rev Fred Garry**

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!”

—Emma Lazarus, *The New Colossus*”

**A Question of Chains**

In the completed design of the Statue of Liberty, at its base, are broken chains. It is as if the goddess is walking out of chains that bound her.



The original design of the statue as conceived by Frederic Bertholdi and Edouard Laboulaye placed chains in her left hand and her arm was at her side. This was to celebrate the emancipation of the slaves during the Civil War. When it came time to approve the final form of the statue, her left hand was pulled up closer to her chest and would hold a book with the date July 4th 1776. The chains were now at her feet.



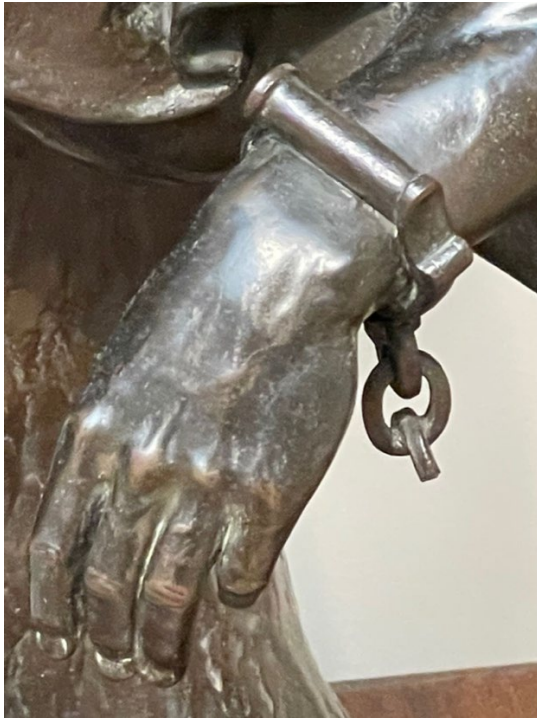
Above is the original version of the colossus compared to the edited version.

Below, at the Metropolitan Museum in Manhattan, you can see the scale model that was presented for final approval and get a sense of the placement of the chains.



The rationale for the edit was simple. The American backers of the project did not want any obvious reference to slavery. The French were supplying the statue and the cost of transport as their gift to America. But the pedestal and land where the colossus would be placed was covered by American funding. It was this shared expense that led to the changes with the chains.

What is interesting is the date on the book suggests that the broken chains are now a reference to Declaration of Independence. Liberation from colonial rule. America was the "land of the free" beginning in 1776.



In the American Wing of the Metropolitan you can find a similar example of the broken chain motif. *Freedman* by John Quincy Adams Ward was created in the year of Emancipation 1863. Here the chains are an obvious reference to the freed slave, a freedom achieved by the slave himself. Although the reference to broken chain might not equal "slavery" or emancipation in our eyes today, the reference would have been very clear in 1870s when the final design of Liberty was under consideration.

The final piece of this evolution of freedom in the statue can be seen in the famous poem of Emma Lazarus recasting the goddess Libertas as the "Mother of Exiles." With her lines

*Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore*

and the proximity of the colossus to Ellis Island in New York Harbor, the original intent of the statue, America as liberator of the enslaved, now becomes America the welcomer of the outcast.

By the time of the completion and installation of the colossus in 1886 it is interesting that statues celebrating the "Union" and the "Lost Cause" were already underway and public

statuary memorializing the casualties of the Civil were beginning to appear. Yet, like Grant's tomb and the dozens of fasces, the only cause of celebration allowed made no mention of slavery or emancipation. The rare exception of this is Thomas Ball's 1876 statue in Lincoln Park in Washington D.C.



Notice how Lincoln's hand holds a scroll that sits atop a column constructed of fasces with George Washington's image between them.

Although there are no recorded deliberations regarding the transition from Liberty as emancipation to Liberty as a "land of the free" we can sense the desire for oblivion. Slavery and emancipation were done; they were over. These difficult topics were now silenced as the nation rebuilds. The original intent of Bertholdi and Laboulaye is covered over with the reference to the Revolution.

The need for silence regarding slavery and the implication of oblivion can be interpreted as racism or denial of culpability. And surely these factors influenced the final design of Liberty. Yet, two other factors may influence the edits. First it could be that the cost of memorializing the Civil War, the price of memory, was too much when emancipation is included. It is as if weight is too much to bear. We can see this in how long it took to include slavery and racism as part of the historical narrative for the Civil War. An even greater possibility is the reality of Jim Crow. It could be argued that moving the chains to her feet is a way of forgetting the emancipation, or it could be that the placement of chains reflects that emancipation was not fully realized. We did not end slavery, we simply changed the form.

