

The Statue of Liberty was first conceived by French law professor, politician, and anti-slavery activist Édouard René de Laboulaye. In 1865, as his dinner party was being enjoyed, Laboulaye presented his idea that a monument be created as a tribute to American independence and presented to the American people. He also proposed that to honor independence the tribute should be provided not by the government but by French people. The idea was well received by his guests, especially a young sculptor, Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi.

French politics kept the participants occupied. After the Franco-Prussian War, Bartholdi met again with Laboulaye to discuss the potential plans. Laboulaye proposed that Bartholdi travel through America, meet the people, get a feel for the land and promote the gift from France.

In 1871 Bartholdi arrived in New York. As soon as Bartholdi saw small Bedloe's Island at the entrance of New York harbor he knew it was the perfect spot for his statue. Armed with letters of introduction, Bartholdi met with many influential Americans. He spoke of his hopes for a new French republic and of a gift statue that would offer tribute to American independence. Among the people he met during his travels were President Ulysses S. Grant, poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Mormon leader Brigham Young. Bartholdi left America convinced that he had found the proper home for his newly designed statue, "Liberty Enlightening the World".

November 1875 Laboulaye, along with other like minded citizens, formed the Franco-American Committee to make plans and raise funds for the international memorial. Bartholdi's design was accepted by the committee. He began work on the statue as the funds were still being raised.