



The Statue of Liberty was dedicated in 1886. It was a gift of the French people to the people of the US. The American people funded the building of the pedestal. As part of the fundraising effort Emma Lazarus donated her poem about what the Statue of Liberty means which was later cast in bronze & affixed to the pedestal. Lazarus' family were Russian-Jewish refugees who had emigrated to the US to escape pogroms in Eastern Europe – like in “Fiddler On the Roof.” Lazarus' family prospered, & she worked to help other refugees of the pogroms to resettle in the US. This is a portion of her poem:

"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!" (1883)

The poem is an idealistic goal, not a policy, but is it an ideal we should aspire to? Fast forward to January 1989, & part of the final speech of a two-term president:

“Yes, the torch of Lady Liberty symbolizes our freedom and represents our heritage, the compact with our parents, our grandparents, and our ancestors. It is that lady who gives us our great and special place in the world. For it's the great life force of each generation of new Americans that guarantees that America's triumph shall continue unsurpassed into the next century and beyond.

Other countries may seek to compete with us; but in one vital area, as a beacon of freedom and opportunity that draws the people of the world, no country on Earth comes close.

This, I believe, is one of the most important sources of America's greatness. We lead the world because, unique among nations, we draw our people -- our strength -- from every country and every corner of the world. And by doing so we continuously renew and enrich our nation. While other countries cling to the stale past, here in America we breathe life into dreams. We create the future, and the world follows us into tomorrow. Thanks to each wave of new arrivals to this land of opportunity, we're a nation forever young, forever bursting with energy and new ideas, and always on the cutting edge, always leading the world to the next frontier. This quality is vital to our future as a nation. If we ever closed the door to new Americans, our leadership in the world would soon be lost..."

"...It is bold men and women, yearning for freedom and opportunity, who leave their homelands and come to a new country to start their lives over. They believe in the American dream. And over and over, they make it come true for themselves, for their children, and for others. They give more than they receive. They labor and succeed. And often they are entrepreneurs. But their greatest contribution is more than economic, because they understand in a special way how glorious it is to be an American. They renew our pride and gratitude in the United States of America, the greatest, freest nation in the world -- the last, best hope of man on Earth."

That was from President Ronald Reagan's final speech as president. It's not about race, ethnicity, religion or country of origin – it's about an idea. Are we still a beacon of freedom & opportunity?

(Submitted by Greg Stejskal)