3 France's unwanted gift to America: the Statue of Liberty

A new Statue of Liberty museum opened in 2019. It provided a new narrative of the iconic monument, which we took part in.[200] This rewriting of the narrative moved away from the silences and clichés found in the older museum presentation and came closer to historic reality. It is worth paying attention to a theme that re-emerged in a critical way: the reticent, not to say humiliating welcome the Americans gave to a work that was meant to embody the friendship between the two peoples, but which was actually used for political and geopolitical aims. Exploring this theme was a chance to examine the ontology of heritage which is combined in a chemically pure way in the monumental Liberty project.[201]

Even though the artist has been largely eclipsed by the lasting worldwide fame of his colossal work, we should not forget that *Liberty Enlightening the World* was first and foremost the project of one man, Auguste Bartholdi (1834–1904), who was seeking to show off his artistry (he spoke of achieving his 'great artistic dream') and to promote his humanist conception of the world.[202] But to grasp the originality and complexity of the Statue of Liberty, we need to bring out the triple ambition upon which it was based:

- a celebration of Franco-American friendship at a time when France had been defeated by Prussia (1871)
- a reminder of the important historical role that France has played in helping the Americans break free of the British crown and achieve independence

200 Robert Belot, *The Statue of Liberty. The Monumental Dream,* New York, Rizzoli, 2019.

201 The main sources used in elaborating this text come from the archives of the Colmar Museum (Bartholdi's letters to his mother), from the CNAM – Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers in Paris (mainly concerning the French and American press) and from the New York Public Library (Bartholdi's letters to Richard Butler; various documents about the American Committee of the Statue of Liberty and Bartholdi's notebook during his first stay in the US). We found a pioneering work helpful: Paul-Ernest Koenig, « Bartholdi et l'Amérique », *La Vie en Alsace*, Strasbourg, August 1934, n° 8.

202 Robert Belot, *Bartholdi, L'Homme qui inventa la Liberté*, Paris, Ellipse, 2019.

– an encouragement for republican and democratic values at a time when monarchies still prevailed.[203]

The ultimate issue is geopolitical, as Édouard de Laboulaye, the philosophical founder of the project, pointed out: 'More than ever, since fortune has betrayed us, we must strive to claim and to defend what we did not deserve to lose'.[204] In concrete terms, the aim for France was to regain its position in international relations, now that Germany had become the dominant power in Europe. It was also important to see that France's rivals (Great Britain, Russia, Germany) had already grasped the importance of a special relationship with America. In these conditions, would it be true to say that the Statue of Liberty is an 'empty icon'?[205]

The case perfectly reflects the process whereby a patrimonial initiative taking place in the present (in a specific context) and summoning up the past (a historic event), acts as a commitment to the future (affirming the friendship between two peoples and the development of democratic systems of government). Far from idealising the past, it is a promise turned towards the future. Far from being gratuitous, it aims to lay a foundation and be useful. The Statue was designed as a democratic monument in itself, needing the approval of the people (of two peoples) in its funding and communication. It thus embodies the first experience where a subscription, as such, was seen as matching the political stakes of a project and the meaning of the work's message. It corresponds to the rise of a mass culture where public opinion had become an independent force and the press a vital factor.

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203 A caricature by Alfred Le Petit highlights the philosophical/political meaning of Liberty. We can see the authoritarian face of Liberty contemplating a tiny globe with a crown facing a throne. Liberty's thumb is wiping away the crown. The Republic had to overthrow regimes which were, at the time, mainly non-republican: Touchatout, *Le Trocadéroscope. Revue Tintamarresque de l'Exposition Universelle*, Paris, 1878.

204 Letter from Laboulaye, written to the newspaper 'editors' on 30 June 1876. It comes with two notes of explanation. CNAM archives. Laboulaye explains that Great Britain, 'after one hundred years of rivalry and resentment, has the sole aim of beginning a new era of more cordial relations with America'; Russian diplomacy already has 'excellent relations with the great Republic'; Germany 'is competing with us for the old affections of Washington's countrymen and is striving to impose the prestige of its politics and the influence of its race'.

205 Albert Boime, « La statue de la Liberté: une icône vide », *Le Débat*, 1987, n° 44, p. 143.

But the appeal to the people(s) had very little resemblance to the hopes its promoters had placed in it. It was a great disappointment that almost wrecked the project and showed, along with the drawbacks of the subscription system, the lack of psychological harmony between the French and American peoples and the difficulty of 'selling' a monument with an abstract meaning to the peoples. The unvarnished history of the funding of this private, monumental and bi-national work, funded by public subscription, shows how a project filled with the idealism of its creators became 'an unwanted gift' that almost wrecked the idea the two people had of themselves and almost led to a diplomatic crisis.

To date, with few exceptions, narratives[206] have preferred to pass over in silence or to minimise this reality. One can see why: it is hard for myths to withstand the prosaic and critical eye of the anthropological historian. But the eventful genesis of the monumental statue can help us to see beyond the social imagination that it engendered and to examine the complexity of Franco-American relations based on a kind of 'reluctant fascination'.[207]

The French liberals' myth of Franco-American friendship

Auguste Bartholdi recalled the initial idea of sending a French monument to the United States in 1885, in a publication produced by the *North American Review* to help finance the Pedestal: *The Statue of Liberty Enlightening the World*. According to Bartholdi, the encounter with Laboulaye took place in 1865, in Glatigny, near Versailles, during a dinner.[208] The jurist liked to invite a circle of friends to his family home in Glatigny. The guests included the historian Henri Martin and Charles de Rémusat (who married La Fayette's granddaughter), a member of the French committee of the Franco-American Union. We have no written proof of this (apart from Bartholdi's own account), even though everyone who has written on the

206 Albert Boimelbert, *The Unveiling of the National Icons: A Plea for Patriotic Iconoclasm in a Nationalist Era*, U.K., Cambridge University Press, 1998; Robert Belot, « La liberté sans fard. Comment fut inventée l'icône républicaine la plus connue au monde », in *La Muse Républicaine. Artistes et pouvoir, 1870–1900*, Gand-Courtai (Belgium), Snoeck, 2010, p. 96 – 117.

207 Jacques Portes, *Une Fascination Réticente. Les États-Unis dans l'opinion française, 1870–1914*, Nancy, Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 1990.

208 In fact, their first meeting was in 1862, when Bartholdi gave Laboulaye a copy of *Curiosités d'Alsace,* a journal recently founded by his brother, Charles.

subject mentions the anecdote.[209] Auguste, who was not known for his success as a student and always remained at heart a provincial in Paris, was very impressed by the 'eminent political men of letters'. Laboulaye strongly appealed to the young Auguste, since the latter sculpted his bust in terracotta and exhibited the work at the 1866 Salon.

In the course of the evening, according to Auguste's own account, the conversation turned to international relations. Laboulaye put forward an idea he had long cherished, and which he developed in the letter he sent to Adolphe Schaeffer in 1867 for his book *De la Bonté Morale, ou Esquisse d'une apologie du christianisme*.[210] The professor at the Collège de France wanted to convince readers to take inspiration from the principle of friendship that Aristotle recommended as a way of improving relations between people and states. Laboulaye applied Aristotle's idea by explaining that the ideal of friendship 'is maternal love, the affection that asks for nothing in return, and which only aims at the loved one's happiness'. This is the definition of a liberty for liberty's sake, which is not based on any political ideology or a collective project that the State might implement. It was an individualistic form of liberty matching the liberal ideal and the prevailing view of the American system of government.

Someone might retort that a feeling of gratitude cannot exist between nations, due to questions of interests, power and geopolitics. Some of the guests thought that because of its Empire, France could no longer count on evoking a close and emotional past shared with the United States. A break had occurred in politics, strategy and friendship. Laboulaye pointed out that such a special link, proved in blood, did not exist between France and Italy. He was convinced, however, that the United States had more sympathy for France than for any other European country, since its sympathy was based on powerful memories of a 'community of thought and combat' but also on shared aspirations. Of their own free will, French people had fought and died for US independence. This was not only assistance given to an ally, but a 'fraternity of feelings', a 'community of efforts and emotions'. Such an urge from the heart could only have positive results and serve the future relations between the nations. In a clear allusion to the current situation in Europe (an Empire hostile to America), Laboulaye tried to explain that the actions of governments needed to be distinguished from popular

209 See in particular, Jacques Betz, *Bartholdi*, Paris, Minuit, 1954, p. 67.

210 Letter from Édouard de Laboulaye (2 December 1867), *in* Adolphe Schaeffer, *De la Bonté Morale, ou Esquisse d'une apologie du christianisme*, 1868.

feeling, where the memory of mutual friendship was still alive. He went on to declare, prophetically: 'If ever a monument were erected in America to commemorate its independence, it seems to me quite natural that it should be built through a shared effort from the two nations'.[211] Auguste pointed out that he was quoting from memory, but the conversation was not published until that day in 1885.

From the beginning, the Monument's aim was to commemorate a historic event – US Independence – even though it also clearly aimed at reviving a shared ideal and looked towards a new common future. Laboulaye expressed himself on the subject in 1876 in the preface he wrote for Léon Chotteau's book, *La Guerre d'Indépendance (1775–1783). Les Français en Amérique*: 'To revive memories, to recall a glorious past and to give the union between the two peoples an eloquent symbol, *we had the idea* of erecting a colossal statue at the entrance to New York Bay that would convey to remote posterity the memory of the eternal friendship between France and America'.[212] So the aim was also to evoke the friendship between peoples and to revive links that had been temporarily weakened. The target was definitely 1876, the centenary of US Independence (but the aim was not achieved, since the inauguration finally took place 10 years later, in 1886). Is the 'we' used by Laboulaye an example of the 'majestic plural' or was he including the sculptor? In the speech he gave at the Paris Opera on 25 April 1876, during a musical evening organised by the Franco-American Union, the constitutional expert rendered to Auguste the things which were Auguste's: 'To celebrate these dates, a symbol was called for, and we were looking for this symbol when a talented artist, an artist who is dear to us, one of the sons Alsace who has remained French, Mr Bartholdi, had the idea of the monument you can see depicted at the back of the room [Applause]'.[213]

211 Allen Thorndike Rice, *The Statue of Liberty Enlightening the World*, described by the Sculptor Frédéric Bartholdi, published for the benefit of the Pedestal Fund, by the *North American Review*, New York, 1885, p. 14. In fact, Rice translated Bartholdi's text.

212 Édouard de Laboulaye, preface to Léon Chotteau, *La Guerre d'Indépendance (1775–1783). Les Français en Amérique*, Paris, Charpentier et Cie, 1876. Our emphasis.

213 « Le discours de M. Laboulaye », *L'Evénement*, 1 May 1876. CNAM archives.

Idealisation of the 'great Republic' under the Second Empire

The aim was to promote a certain idea of liberty, and since 1865, Laboulaye had seen this liberty with the features of a woman. As he said in a speech given in Versailles in December 1865, mentioned above, he saw her as the 'mother of a family', a protector, and not a fanatic 'in a Phrygian cap with a pike in her hand, dead bodies under her feet, disturbing the peace and filling the streets with blood'. The jurist repeated this theme, with very few variations, in his speech at the Opera.[214] For Laboulaye, the mother is the opposite of the vengeful woman portrayed by Delacroix in his famous '28 July 1830, Liberty Leading the People to the Barricades'. Two years earlier, in 1863, in *Paris en Amérique*, Laboulaye developed the metaphor of light and shade to show France plunged in darkness but glimpsing the light of resurrection from the other side of the Atlantic. The metaphor already combines the idea of a flame, liberty and a smile that the Statue was to symbolise and personify so well:

> 'Perhaps one day, in the light of my lantern, you will see all the ugliness of the idols you worship today; and perhaps, beyond the diminishing shadow, you will glimpse, in all the charm of *her immortal smile*, liberty, the sister of justice and mercy, the mother of equality, abundance and peace. On that day, dear reader, do not let *the flame be quenched* which I am handing on to you; *enlighten the youth* who are already hurrying and pushing us, asking us the way to the future'.[215]

The idea of associating the symbols of the flame and the woman with America was clearly an obsessive one for the jurist. From the beginning, the Statue of Liberty was more than a statue. It was the symbol of French-American friendship or the commemoration of Independence. It embodied the political thinking of the liberals during the Second Empire.

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214 'The statue was well chosen – Liberty, but American Liberty. It is not liberty with a Phrygian cap on its head and a pike in its hand, trampling over dead bodies. Our own is holding a torch – not a torch to burn things down, but the flame that enlightens others, the Tablets of the Law'. « Le discours de M. Laboulaye », *L'Evénement*, 1 May 1876. Bartholdi archive, CNAM.

215 René Lefebvre (pseudonym of Laboulaye), *Paris en Amérique*, Paris, Charpentier, 1868. The quotation is taken from the address 'To the reader' which begins the book, and which is ironically referenced: 'New-Liberty (Virginia), 4 July 1862'. In fact, Laboulaye had never set foot in the United States. The idea of 'liberty' was already central to his outlook.

A tragic event that took place a few days before the dinner in Glatigny explains this declaration of principle against political violence. The discussion could hardly fail to focus on the news of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, the man who had abolished slavery in the United States, on 14 April 1865. Laboulaye spoke of his vision of America at length. Everyone was celebrating the North's victory. Laboulaye recalled that during a debate in 1862 he had encouraged the French to 'line up behind Lincoln and the North, and to hold aloft with a firm hand the old French flag with the word Liberty written on it'. He summed up his position: 'Today, we have seen a great people rise up to abolish the infamous institution of slavery and, all over Europe, all hearts have been beating for Lincoln, the wood cutter who became the president of the United States and gave freedom to four million people'. Bartholdi, who was from a family of Freemasons and humanists, could only support Laboulaye's point of view and deplore the assassination. He took part in the collection to create a gold medal dedicated to Mary Todd Lincoln, the wife of the US president. In a recently discovered photo, we can see an event held in Bartholdi's honour on the property of Henry Spaudling in Maisons-Laffitte on 14 July 1888. Spaudling was a Francophile businessman, the treasurer of the Franco-American Committee, and a friend of Laboulaye and of the sculptor. In the photo, I have formally identified one of Lincoln's sons, Robert Todd Lincoln.[216]

The tragic assassination triggered strong emotions in the Grand Orient of France. J.-T. Hayère, honorary Superior Great Custodian of the Oriental Masonic Order of Misraim, pronounced the American's funeral oration. In his view, what Lincoln represented was a conception of the free man: 'Slavery! And to think that in the 19th century this social calamity still sullies part of the globe!' Thanks to Lincoln, America had attracted men of progress and become a reference in masonic culture. Thus, the Venerable leader of the Reunited Hearts Lodge in Paris, in 1869, declared: 'If you are asked which head of government has sacrificed his life to free the United States from shameful slavery, you will proudly quote, to all nations, our Ill. F∴ President Abraham Lincoln, whose generous blood fructified liberty on the American soil.' This event played no small part in Auguste Bartholdi joining the Grand Orient of France.

216 Robert Belot, *Bartholdi. Portrait intime du sculpteur*, Bernardswiller, I.D. L'Édition, 2016, p. 5.

A tendency to idealise the American Republic seized opponents of Napoleon III's regime.[217] Every Monday, five hundred young men came to the Collège de France to hear him praise the US institutions. Why is American 'fashionable', and why do we 'admire the American people?' he asked. First of all, because this people 'has vigorously overcome an unprecedented civil war and defeated sedition without taking refuge in a dictatorship, which is always fatal to liberty'; next, and above all, in his view, 'because America is an example of an all-powerful democracy owing its prosperity and greatness only to itself': 'Here is a model for old Europe, a constant focus for all eyes; the problem we have been facing for 80 years, with so much agitation and misery, has been resolved in the United States'. And to what do the Americans owe their success? To their capacity for moving away from the old European culture: 'As emigrants from the old Europe, they left behind royalty, the aristocracy, the Church, centralisation and standing armies: privilege has never set foot in their country'. For the historian, with his optimistic tone, America is 'the reign of perfect equality and perfect liberty' which has developed due to a shared effort in favour of education.[218]

In his public speeches, Édouard de Laboulaye liked to highlight two of America's main virtues.[219] Education, first of all: 'Instead of taking roundabout routes to boost the production of capital, the Americans get straight to the point and seek to perfect man himself. They address his intelligence, and they have taken the first place among civilised peoples'. Laboulaye especially appreciated and welcomed the fact that the citizens of Massachusetts had decided to build a statue to Horace Mann, the senator born in 1796 who was Secretary of the Massachusetts State Board of Education and a great innovator in education. Next, the abolition of slavery: 'Today, we have seen a great people rise up to abolish the infamous institution of slavery and, all over Europe, all hearts have been beating for Lincoln, the

217 The aim was not only to oppose domestic policy but also foreign policy. Napoleon III wanted to boost France's presence in America. From 1862, he developed the idea of setting up a conservative and Catholic monarchy in Mexico, in line with French interests. The Republic under President Benito Juárez was overturned in favour of the Habsburg Prince Maximilian, who was imposed as emperor of Mexico in 1864. But the move failed to take into account resistance from Mexican republicans, who succeeded in overthrowing the new regime in 1867.

218 Émile Jonveaux, *L'Amérique actuelle* (introduction by Édouard Laboulaye), Paris, Charpentier, 1869, p. 10.

219 Upper Free Primary School, Versailles. Prize-giving ceremony. Speech by Edouard Laboulaye. Versailles, Imprimerie Aubert. 1866 and 1867.

wood cutter who became president of the United States and gave freedom to four million people'. The election of the Republican Grant, in 1868, was welcomed by French liberals, who saw in him anti-slavery personified, while his Democrat rival, Horatio Seymour, had denounced the slavery Emancipation Proclamation as 'unwise, unjust and unconstitutional'.[220] A political regime that permits these things can only be a model. For Laboulaye, as he wrote in 1871, 'the Republic best suited to France is the one resembling the governments of the United States and of Switzerland'.[221] Laboulaye introduced Bartholdi to an ideal America, forgetting the annihilation of the Indians, racial prejudice, the scale of German emigration[222] (we should recall that Bartholdi fought against the Prussians in 1870) and US neutrality during the war.[223]

We can see why Laboulaye became the first president of the Franco-American Committee, in charge of collecting funds to finance the gigantic project. Laboulaye was very well known on the other side of the Atlantic. His *Paris en Amérique* was a best-seller that was translated across the Atlantic. In 1866, he translated and provided notes for the *Memoirs of Benjamin Franklin; Written by Himself*. Laboulaye was a member of the New-York and Massachusetts Historical Societies, and his prestige and network within the US elite would be of great use to the sculptor.

The American dream to forget France's defeat by Prussia

During the Franco-Prussian War, Bartholdi served as a soldier-citizen as Garibaldi's aide-de-camp. His native Alsace, where his mother still lived, was under the German yoke. He lived in Paris, a witness to the violence of the Commune. He was filled with a feeling of bitterness. On 4 March

220 See Léon Chotteau, *Les Véritables Républicains. Biographies de Ulysses S. Grant, président, et Schuyler Colfax, vice-président de la République des Etats-Unis*, Paris, Degorce-Cadot, 1869.

221 Édouard de Laboulaye, *La République Constitutionnelle*, Paris, Charpentier, 1871, p.9.

222 At the beginning of the 20th century, the German-language press accounted for 80 % of foreign-language newspapers in the US, and German was the second most widely spoken language in the country. See: Denis Lacorne, *La crise de l'identité américaine*, Paris, Gallimard ('Tel'), 1997–2003, p. 160.

223 We sometimes forget the US declaration of neutrality during the Franco-Prussian war, signed by President Grant on 22 August 1870, and his letter of congratulations sent to Emperor Wilhelm II soon after his victory over France.

1871, he wrote: 'The decrepitude of our country has brought us to our current situation'. The Republic has risen from the disaster, but as it were accidentally. The reactionaries were in control of a Republic without republicans. And he sometimes feared that this National Assembly ('A horrible Assembly', in Gambetta's words), due to its conservatism, might trigger 'revolutionary reactions'. Auguste was not a revolutionary, but he hated the moral order that had been established in France. He criticised the project to build a basilica in Montmartre for the expiation of the French people. He would have preferred a huge monument dedicated to his hero, Léon Gambetta. True republicans wondered how France could reconquer the place it had once had among nations. With a heavy heart Bartholdi decided to go to America in 1871. He intended to take up a challenge, which was actually to implement Laboulaye's idea.

It was natural that Auguste should confide his decision to Laboulaye to 'get some fresh air elsewhere' in a letter on 8 May 1871:

> 'I thought it was the right time to make the journey, which I had the honour of discussing with you, and I made arrangements to leave this month for the United States. So I have come to ask, my dear sir, for the powerful support you were kind enough to promise me; I have come to ask you for a few letters that could give me credit among the Associations, in the press or the government. I hope to make contacts with art lovers, to find great works to do, but I hope most of all to carry out my project for a monument in honour of Independence. I have read and am again re-reading your works on this subject, and I hope to do justice to your friendship, which will support me. *I will seek to glorify the Republic and Liberty over there, until I find it again in our homeland, if possible...*'[224]

This letter proves that Bartholdi already had the idea of a commemorative monument before sailing across the Atlantic. But beyond the project's heritage aspect, there was a political goal: the Republic.

On 29 May 1871, the young sculptor was in Versailles. He met up with the French Americanist, who gave him the precious addresses of Americans who might help him. Auguste wrote to his mother: 'I have seen Mr Laboulaye, who encouraged me in person as much as he did in his letter. I cannot yet say what I will do, I will have to make contact with various

224 Bartholdi's letter to Laboulaye, Colmar, 8 May 1871. Bartholdi Museum archives. Cited by J. Betz, *op.cit.*, p. 98.

people…' In *The Statue of Liberty Enlightening the World*, Bartholdi also explains that Laboulaye encouraged him in his project and gave him a roadmap:

> 'Go to see the country. You will study it and you will come back and give us your impressions. Suggest to our friends to create a monument with us, a shared project, in memory of the old Franco-American friendship. We will organise a subscription in France. If you come up with a good idea, a plan that might arouse the enthusiasm of the public, we are convinced that success will be guaranteed on both continents, and we will undertake a job that will have a great ethical impact.'

The site where the project could be achieved was spotted by Bartholdi from the bridge of the French Line ship, the *Pereire*, on his arrival in New York at 4 o'clock in the morning on 21 June 1871. He told his mother that it was like an illumination: Bedloe's Island, just facing New York. An intuition of genius. So the Statue of Liberty was not a commission. It was the megalomaniac project of an artist alone, originally inspired by an intellectual, in a very specific political context. It would take 15 years for the work to be completed, after countless struggles (both technical and political) waged by Bartholdi and costing him a lot of money. As he told a journalist, once his work was complete: '*My* Statue of Liberty was purely a work of love which cost me ten years of work and 20,000 francs'.[225]

After his arrival in the United States, one of the first people Bartholdi met, on 23 June 1871, was Miss Mary Louise Booth, a translator, author and publisher, who played a major role in the New York intellectual abolitionist milieu. In fact she translated Édouard Laboulaye's ironic work, *Paris en Amérique*. Booth gave Bartholdi the names of several people who might support his project. On 5 July, Bartholdi visited Charles Sumner, who would be of great help to him later. Sumner was a Republican senator from the state of Massachusetts who had been recommended by Laboulaye. The latter praised him as one of the leaders of abolitionism at the first session of the French Committee for the emancipation of slaves, which was held in 1865.[226] Auguste saw him later in Paris, and introduced him to the great

225 Interview with Bartholdi by a New York journalist, quoted by André Gschaedler, *Vérité sur la Statue de la Liberté et son créateur*, Jérôme Do Bentzinger Editeur, Colmar, 1992, p. 26. Our emphasis.

226 Barry Moreno, *The Statue of Liberty Encyclopedia*, Simon & Schuster, New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Singapore, 2000, p. 95.

French politician, Léon Gambetta.[227] Bartholdi was also a guest of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, a poet translated by Baudelaire, a professor at Harvard, a figure in the abolitionist combat and a friend of Laboulaye. He received support from Colonel John Wein Forney, an exceptional resourceful aid to his project. Forney was an anti-slavery Democrat with extensive knowledge of the Senate, where he had served as a secretary from 1861 to 1868 thanks to the support of Abraham Lincoln. He founded the influential *Philadelphia Press* and was a backer of the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia. He was immediately won over to the cause and was present in 1875, in Paris, at the launch of the subscription for the Statue. He was also a pillar of the US Committee.

We can see that Bartholdi found himself among the friends of Laboulaye, intellectuals engaged in the fight against slavery and against the Confederates. But the sculptor soon noticed that they were not representative of American society as a whole.

Was America banking on a German Europe?

Laboulaye and Bartholdi sincerely believed that unconditional, lasting and free links of affection united France and America. But they also knew that after the French defeat in 1871 and the birth of a powerful Germany, France needed to find geopolitical allies. Their contemporaries did not necessarily share the idealisation of republican America and did not always understand their strategy.

Like Léon Gambetta, the republican left, which gained momentum from 1875, 'rejected any kinship, other than a formal one, with the regime of Washington or Lincoln'.[228] The right-wing press was generally little in favour of France and America drawing closer together, given the US positions during the Franco-Prussian War. This attitude was deplored in the French press in the United States, as seen in the *Courrier des États-Unis* (the main French-language paper in New York and a mouthpiece for the Franco-American population). It criticised *Le Figaro* which, 'like all the monarchist newspapers, has no great sympathy for the American republic and never misses a chance to make some poisonous remark about it'. But

227 We should note that Gambetta was an Americanophile under the Empire, like Laboulaye, but later became very critical towards the American model, like the rest of the French left.

228 Jacques Portes, *op.cit.,* p. 155.

Le Courrier des États-Unis recognised that the recent past in Franco-American relations did not justify the Committee's optimism. 'It is true that during the (Franco-Prussian) war, American sympathies were very generally in favour of Germany, which most newspapers described as "the champion of freedom and civilisation"'. But the journalist would like to believe that a 'major reaction' had taken place since then, especially due to the fact that France has introduced republican institutions.

It should be remembered that after the fall of the Empire, France disappeared from the American's strategic horizons to be replaced by Germany, the only European power than counted for the US. In *L'Année Terrible*, Victor Hugo expressed despair in seeing President Grant praise the new emperor of Germany on 7 February 1871. Those who, like Bartholdi, had set sail for America from June 1871, were few and seen as 'bad' Frenchmen. In a letter to his mother written on board ship on 17 June 1871, Auguste wrote: 'There are not very many passengers, although it is the holiday season. This is probably due to France's troubled state'. The past seemed to have been overtaken by *realpolitik*. For the majority of French and American people, La Fayette is no longer anything but a figure of style for nostalgic men of letters and diplomats lacking in inspiration. Republican America was admirable, but during the Empire! The reactionaries in power do not like America.

The attitude of the US government during the war of 1870 was hard for some newspapers to accept. This was the case of *La Gazette*, which declared its 'patriotic antipathy' in April 1876, the day after the lyrical festivities at the Opera:

> 'We are asked for French money to build a colossal monument in New York Bay as a symbol of the indestructible alliance between France and the United States. It remains to be seen if this alliance has ever been real, effective or profitable to the serious interests of our dear homeland.'

The newspaper gave the example of the Franco-Prussian War and stated that France could not claim to have obtained anything more than dearly paid services:

> 'And shall we recall the distressing memories of 1870 and 1871? Shall we show the United States, remaining indifferent and as if ashamed of their old friendship, while the power of the modern Teutons invaded our France, betrayed by its leaders? Shall we describe, even briefly, the infamous agreements made between American citizens and the sinister

> reprobates in the United States who wore the honourable insignia of French civil servants? Shall we recall the wooden rifles, the guns without touch holes, the spoiled biscuits, the half-rotten clothes that our dear allies, including sometimes from the very highest official circles, sent us for astronomical sums? No, we won't. Because all of this is still present in the minds of each of us. The wound is not yet healed. We have seen, on this occasion, face to face, the emptiness of the pompous declarations and the dazzling promises.'

The journalist criticised Laboulaye for not understanding the America of today, for only seeing it from his 'peaceful study in Glatigny'. He particularly criticised him for failing to see that American public opinion no longer loved France. Why? It has undergone a 'radical' change in the past 30 years following the 'German invasion', which changed it into a 'docile serf under German influence'. If he was to be believed, 'our disasters hardly roused any pity', while 'each Prussian victory triggered a cry of joy'.

The journalist criticised the fact that the 'so-called liberals' were determined to base 'our young Republic' on the American example, which 'banks its entire future on domestic and material prosperity'. America, with its 'infamies' cannot correspond to 'our ideal of the true, sincere and honest Republic'. Laboulaye and Bartholdi's project thus seemed like a form of 'anti-patriotism'.

The difficulties of implementing history's first bi-national 'fund-raising' campaign

Right from the start, it was agreed that the statue was not a gift from the French government but from the French people. This was clearly shown in the first subscription appeal made on 28 September 1875: 'This monument would be jointly undertaken by the two peoples linked in a fraternal work, as they once were during the founding of American Independence. We will make the statue a homage to our friends in America; they will join us in paying for the cost of creating and erecting a monument for the statue's pedestal'.

The organisers wanted to obtain popular blessing: 'Let the number of signatories bear witness to the sentiments of France. The lists were to be collected in volumes and given to our friends in America'. So an association was put in charge of the 'fund-raising' campaign, as we would say today.

This was the Franco-American Union set up in 1875 with headquarters at 175 Rue Saint-Honoré in Paris. The first subscription forms show the memorial aspect of the project: 'Subscription to the construction of a monument in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of US Independence'. On 28 September 1875, the subscription appeal was launched and widely covered in the press.[229] The appeal aimed to be both a hymn of love to America (the 'great Republic'), a celebration of the past and of the 'old and strong friendship that has long united the two peoples' and an act of faith in 'French genius'. The political aspect was brought out discreetly. In the letter he sent to the president of the Cercle Français de L'Harmonie in New York informing him about the appeal and asking him to set up a committee in America, Laboulaye had no hesitation in saying that 'all the liberal press is warmly supporting us here'.

The first lists of subscribers were issued by the Committee and published by Parisian and regional newspapers. *L'Echo de la Creuse* expressed its joy on 4 December 1875 that 'public opinion in France has sensed everything that is great and useful in the work of the Franco-American Union, and all politicians truly worthy of the name are of the same mind on this subject'. On 10 December, and taken up by other newspapers, *Le Temps* cited a few 'interesting' subscriptions: the French President gave 500 francs, the ministers 1,000 francs, the city of Le Havre 1000, Rouen 500, Amiens 300, Meaux 200, the Marquis de Rochambeau 1000 francs, Casimir-Perrier 200 francs, Cernuschi 300 and the Valenciennes Chamber of Commerce 500 francs. The biggest sum was donated by the Paris City Council: 10,000 francs. Some papers, such as Le *Bien Public* (6 November 1875), welcomed the effort made by small contributors, which gave a 'truly national character' to the project, 'the work of all the French people': 'Great and small, rich and poor, all want to make a contribution, even a modest one'. In 1875, it was believed that the subscription would reach its goal in one year's time. But it was actually reached in 1880... A total of 100,000 subscribers was announced. The figure is unverifiable but probably exaggerated. In fact, by the end of 1875, thanks to a large donation from the Grand Orient of France, the subscription had collected 400,000 francs.[230]

229 We have used the press documents for the Statue of Liberty in the archives of the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers in Paris. They were donated by Auguste Bartholdi's widow.

230 Jacques Betz, *Bartholdi, op.cit.,* p. 128.

The members of the Committee proved to be particularly inventive in keeping the press on the alert and mobilising the country's elites. They understood that attention would decrease (as would the funds raised), if events were not organised to make the news.

On Saturday 6 November 1875, the Committee organised a grand 'banquet' at the Grand Hôtel du Louvre where, for the first time, the Statue was unveiled. This first major promotional event was presided by Laboulaye.[231] The Statue was projected onto a large, luminous screen in the centre of a wall at the back of the room. The projection was the work of Pierre Petit, the most famous photographer of the time, and was based on the canvas made for the Lion in 1873. There was also a model of the statue in the room. The speeches show the political aspect of a project that is still often presented as simply a historic commemoration. The political dimension of the project was affirmed during the great banquet organised by the Committee on Saturday 6 November 1875. A speaker explained that the idea of celebrating the centenary of the independence of the United States 'is a patriotic and even a political idea, as has been rightly said, but not the idea of a party'. The French MP, Henri Martin, who made the opening speech, had no hesitation in paying homage to the US model, 'a great political society' built 'on the principles of law and liberty'. He highlighted the fact that the memory of the help France had once given to America could reconcile two Frances: the 'new France' of 1789 and the 'old France' which could 'also claim its share'. This was of course a chance to point out that the grandson of La Fayette – 'a man who had the well-deserved honour of beginning the great era of 1789' – was a guest at the banquet.[232]

The elite of the period (especially in politics) answered the appeal: ministers (Léon Say, the finance minister, Henri Wallon, the education and religions minister), many MPs, mayors (from Nancy and Strasbourg, for example), city councillors from Paris, generals, members of the American 'colony' in Paris, diplomats, artists (Jean Léon Gérôme), architects (Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, who was directly involved in the Statue of Liberty project, but who died suddenly in 1879), writers (Alexandre Dumas fils), musicians

231 For a presentation of the banquet and the launch of the campaign, see: Catherine Hodeir, « La campagne française », *La Statue de la Liberté. L'exposition du centenaire*, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Sélection du Reader's Digest, 1986, p. 132–161.

232 Brochure published by the Union Franco-Américaine, *Discours de MM. Henri Martin, E. B. Washburne, Édouard Laboulaye et W. Forney, prononcés au banquet du 6 novembre 1875*, Paris. CNAM archives.

(Jacques Offenbach), bankers and, of course, French, British and American journalists, in all 200 people.

Events were organised to make an impact and to show that the project, although arising from the private sphere, would be decisive for France. A musical event was launched by Charles Garnier at the Paris Opera House, which had just been inaugurated, on 25 April 1876. But the press pointed out that 'the takings were not great', due to the fact that 'there was little response from the public to the Franco-American Union Committee's appeal'. Events for the general public were devised. On 19 December 1875, a 'Franco-American party' was organised by the Committee as part of the International Exhibition of Maritime and River Industries at the Palais de L'Industrie on the Champs-Élysées. For five francs, the public could attend a concert given by the Republican Guard band, hear poetry read by the Freemason poet Laurent Tailhade and watch a demonstration of maritime fireworks and signals. Parisians could see 'a vast image representing the gigantic statue' in the main hall of the palace. Bartholdi asked the landscape painter and decorator Jean-Baptiste Lavastre to portray the Statue from a perspective view on a 10-metre-high canvas. The aim was to unveil the Lady, put her on display and give people an idea of her gigantic scale to attract subscribers. Other initiatives had the same aim and aroused the interest of the press: a visit to certain parts of the Statue or a visit to the workshop from 1878.

Bartholdi exhibited the Statue's head (5.26 metres high) at the Universal Exhibition in Paris, inaugurated on 1 May 1878. Visitors could step inside the head and walk up a 43-metre-high staircase as far as the diadem. *Le Monde Illustré* published a drawing on its front page showing what could be seen inside the head. It immediately became an object of popular curiosity and was one of the main attractions at the Exhibition. Publicity and the search for funding were still closely linked, so that at the Committee's stand near the pedestal bearing the head, visitors could buy a fragment of copper stamped with the date of the Exhibition, a scale model of the head or an embroidered blue satin badge showing the whole Statue. In different issues, *Le Journal Illustré* gave a large place to pictures of Liberty's virile head. It was the beginning of the trend for spin-off products. At the same time, in the Tuileries Gardens, Parisians could see a diorama or illusionist panorama produced by painters on an 11-metre-long semi-circular canvas. It was entitled: 'View of New York Bay and of the monument commemorating the friendship between France and the United States'. Spectators felt as if they were on the rear bridge of an ocean liner leaving New York

Bay. On the bridge, models dressed as Yankees, chatted and smoked. The spectator could see the Statue close up. The illusion created by the diorama was perfect, the journalists said. Of course, admission cost 1 franc but on Sundays and public holidays it was only 50 cents. The colour posters for the event in Paris were designed by Jules Chéret, the period's great lithographer and father of advertising posters. The event was a success with 7000 visitors in two months. The work became well-known. It was caricatured in the satirical paper *Charivari*, for example, and its creator began to attract attention. One of the first portraits of Auguste was published the same year, 1878, in the popular newspaper *Le Monde Illustré*.

Indifference and ingratitude across the Atlantic

In the summer of 1880, the Franco-American Union announced that France had at last collected the funds needed to complete the Statue. It was thought that the inauguration could take place in 1883. But it remained to be seen whether the Americans had managed to raise the funds from their own subscription. Because these funds were to pay for the vast pedestal that would be the base for the statue.

Right from the start, Bartholdi understood that winning over American public opinion would be difficult. This can be seen in the diary he wrote during his first stay in the US (1871), and which I found in the New York Public Library. He knew that he would have to convince people, and that enthusiasm was lacking. The meaning of his project eluded the Americans he met. The first setback was that the statue could not be inaugurated in 1876. In 1876, during the Universal Exhibition in Philadelphia, only the arms and the head were displayed. The sculptor had the idea of creating a vast canvas to project the future statue on the façade of the *New York Club Building* in Madison Square. 30,000 people came to see it. And yet, as he wrote to Laboulaye, Bartholdi had the impression that 'things have not progressed much so far'. He also expressed his pessimism to his mother: 'I will strive to do everything that can be tried, and if later my efforts turn out to be fruitless, I will at least know that I did all I could'.[233] The effect of curiosity had little impact on the subscription: 'I would like to give an

233 Letter from Bartholdi to his mother, New York, 28 June 1876. New York Public Library archives.

impetus to the subscription. All the elements have been well prepared, and there is only the spark I need, that I am waiting for'.[234]

From 1880, US newspapers raised the issue of their compatriots' lack of enthusiasm.[235] In New York, the *Evening Telegram*, for example, wanted to see a little more warmth from Americans: 'It may be that by 1883 something resembling enthusiasm will arise; but that remains to be seen'. In 1881, the same newspaper (owned, like the *Herald*, by the Francophile James Gordon Bennett Jr.) expressed concern about the slow progress of the American subscription. It noted that the torch held up by the muscular arm of the future Statue, exhibited in Madison Square, seemed 'to cast light on American impecuniousness', and expressed regret that for a long time Auguste Bartholdi's name went unmentioned publicly in New York: 'The Americans are, to a sublime degree, ungrateful towards France and indifferent to the pedestal'.[236] The Francophile *Courrier des États-Unis* moved into action. The event that triggered the reaction was an exhibition at the National Drawing Academy organised to help finance the pedestal in 1883: the Art Loan Exhibition, launched by the editor of Art Amateur, Montague L. Marks. It was a collection of paintings and works of art which resembled a jumble sale. A profit of 12,000 dollars was expected. The organisers hoped it would be 'the beginning of a new ferment, taking different forms and leading to more subscriptions. The slow progress has begun to make intelligent people seriously lose patience. They were initially counting on greater willingness from their fellow countrymen'.[237]

At the same time, the *New York Times* published a supposedly humorous article criticising the very principle of the Statue's funding: France wants to make a gift to America, but it is apparently up to America to pay for part of it. France, which was putting its generosity on 'display', seemed quite 'miserly'! This viewpoint was widely shared by the Americans:

> 'The French informed us that we would not have the statue if we failed to provide the pedestal. Such miserliness is quite revolting. For several years now, they have been intending to take money out of our pockets, and the press has yet to criticise as severely as it deserves this audacious attempt to make us pay with our own money to embellish our port.'

234 Letter from Bartholdi to his mother, Philadelphia, 24 September 1876. New York Public Library archives.
235 See the press review in the *Courrier des États-Unis*, 19 July 1880.
236 *Telegram*, cited and translated by *Le Courrier des États-Unis*, 17 March 1881.
237 *Le Courrier des États-Unis*, 29 December 1883.

The caricaturists got involved in the shooting match. *Life*, for example, on its front page on 17 January 1884, had a drawing entitled: 'The *Statue of Liberty* as it will look when the pedestal is finished'. We see a hideous old woman with her skin scarred by deep wrinkles, a baleful look on her face, a sagging body and a skinny and feeble right arm having trouble holding up a puny flame.[238] On 30 August 1884, *Franck Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* published a drawing entitled: 'The Statue of Liberty, 1000 years later, it is still waiting'. Here we see a poor woman with a worn diadem, her head bent and seated feebly on a hillock, at the foot of which is the first stone of the pedestal which is completely cracked. And there were many other cartoons in the same sarcastic and delighted vein!

Suspicion was combined with the indifference and sarcasm. In 1884, the Suez project was mentioned: Bartholdi had always hidden the fact that he had redirected Laboulaye's intentions by designing a statue in the form of a beacon for the inauguration of the Suez Canal in 1869, and this project clearly heralded Miss Liberty. I have shown that the project was reused and that the sculptor had lied. The American press began to make fun of the recycling process believed to be at the origin of the *Statue of Liberty*. 'Liberty Enlightening the World' was said to have been bought 'at a discount' by the Franco-American Union, after having been rejected by the Suez Canal, which it was made for originally.[239]

The *Times* on 5 August 1884 even cast doubt on the Statue's artistic novelty: 'There remains... a vague doubt about the Statue's aesthetics, and some people wonder whether it would not finally damage their reputation if they publicly supported the subscription campaign; and this doubt is made to discourage capitalists looking for safe investments in the field of Art, no matter how open they may be'. Artists, in particular, remained very passive or prudent. On 26 April 1885, *The World* published interviews with artists, none of whom wished to comment on the Statue until they had seen it! In fact, the Statue does not stand out in terms of purely artistic originality. The formal elements included in it had already been used, and its neo-classical style was far from innovative. The revolution, which went relatively unnoticed at the time, lay in the technology used for the metal structure and for the mounting process, invented by Gustave Eiffel and his teams.[240] But what few people saw was that the Statue was less important

238 *Life*, New York, January 17, 1884. Volume III, number 55. CNAM archives.
239 *Le Courrier des États-Unis*, 15 July 1884.
240 André Chastel, « Nouveaux regards sur le siècle passé », *Le Débat*, n° 44, 1987, p. 74.

than the site it would reinvent and the urban scenery it helped to create. Bartholdi invented a landscape.

A diplomatic crisis was on the verge of breaking out. As the US ambassador to France, Théodore Roustan, a professional diplomat, said without protocol to his minister, 'the gift is indeed unwanted'.[241]

An unwanted gift

The American community in Paris was well aware of the seriousness of the situation. It organised events, but they had no impact on the other side of the Atlantic. The ocean seemed like a deep gap.

Henry F. Gillig, a wealthy American, gave a banquet at the Continental on 21 May 1884 to celebrate the event and to honour Bartholdi. The artist was usually quite prudent, but now spoke out to describe the difficulties he was facing:

> 'These difficulties were sometimes important, I admit; for a long time, ill-intentioned minds and critics believed that our project was, as they say in the United States, "an elephant", a burden that you cannot be rid of; but now we have left this period far behind us, and our task is almost completed.'

On 28 June 1884, the US ambassador, Levi P. Morton, organised a big dinner. The official transfer took place on 4 July 1884, US Independence Day. The ceremony was held at the Gaget-Gauthier workshop in Paris, at 25 Rue de Chazelles, where the statue was made. Two hundred guests were invited, both French and American. The Statue was presented, 'in the name of the French people', by Ferdinand de Lesseps (the successor of Laboulaye, who had died, as the head of the Committee). He praised the Statue as the 'Eighth Wonder of the World'! In response, on 5 August 1884, the first stone of the Statue pedestal was laid during a ceremony in New York.[242] In fact, it was due to take place on 4 July, US Independence Day, and at the very moment when France officially gave the Statue to America… Yet another

241 Dispatch from Théodore Roustan, Archives of the French minister of foreign affairs (Paris), CPEU 159, 18 December 1882.

242 The pedestal was designed by Richard Morris Hunt, an architect with an excellent reputation across the Atlantic. He had studied architecture in France and knew Bartholdi's friend, Jean Léon Gérôme.

sign of incomprehension! What is more, the climatic conditions were not favourable. The weather was awful. Only five hundred people attended.[243] They were asked to pay 50 cents. It was a fiasco.

The *Daily Express* noted that the French press began to be amused by the Americans' 'indifference'. *Charivari* can be quoted, expressing sorrow and advising the 'brave Yankees' to reject the gift, considering that the pier in Le Havre better deserved the colossal statue. To which the *Commercial Advertiser* (July 1884) replied that the French had hardly done any better and were in no position to give lectures: it had taken them five years to collect the sum needed for the Statue! The French newspapers in France were not indifferent. For *Le Quotidien*, for example, the heart of the matter was American psychology: 'Our Americans are too down-to-earth to go as wild as the French at the sight of the Statue of Liberty. Their god is the dollar'.

The American press and the French press delighted in the incredible nature of the situation. They outdid each other in polemics without imagining they were sending out negative signals to a public that was already doubtful. As a result, the myth of Franco-American friendship was affected. But it was an American, a press baron, who reacted more than anyone, turning the issue both into a question of principle and a superb marketing operation. This was Joseph Pulitzer, a Democrat lawyer with Hungarian and Jewish roots, who bought the New York paper *The World* in 1883. He wanted to make it the 'newspaper of the people' and seized the chance to wage war against the US owning class, who were responsible for the situation in his view.

On 14 March 1883, he attacked the apathy of billionaires and warned: 'Who will save us from national dishonour?' He also criticised the 'anti-patriotic small-mindedness, miserliness and selfishness of our citizens who have kept a lock on their pockets and have left it (the statue) without a pedestal until, by begging, the money needed was collected in miserable little contributions'. To encourage 'little people' to make a donation, he decided to publish letters from donors as a homage to them. He launched a subscription for one dollar each, so that anyone could contribute to the work which he saw as in the national interest. But results were slow in coming. The fundraising campaign had stalled.

243 *Courrier de San Francisco*, 7 August 1884.

What did the sculptor think? He confided in Richard Butler, the General Secretary of the Committee of the Franco-American Union. On 3 August 1883, Auguste wrote to him to complain that some 'very stupid' French newspapers were rashly reporting 'gossip' from the United States: 'I see you are going to a lot of trouble, and I hope that you will succeed; in all these questions that are raised to represent *public opinion*, someone is needed to fan the fire. (…) Here, we have sometimes had difficulties with newspapers that repeat chatter from America; but we have many friends in the press and we correct the mistakes'. He is afraid 'that the newspapers only repeat that things are not going well in America and that our means have been reduced'.[244]

Auguste believed he was alone in resisting adversity on the French side, and complained about it. On 4 March 1884, he says he has 'very wounded feelings at the moment', although he has 'already done a great deal for (his) grown-up daughter, Liberty'. He experienced alternating phases of anxiety and optimism. On 17 March 1884, he said he was 'not worried' about the result of the subscription: 'the money will definitely be found'. He launched some ideas: for example, to grant someone the right to charge 25 cents to people who wanted to visit the Statue for the first 20 years! It remained for him to appeal to the patriotism of the Americans: 'Let's hope that the American patriotic spirit will awaken and the funds will arrive…'[245]

America threatened with 'eternal shame' and the French press disgusted

The Statue was ready. It had been dismantled and was waiting in the crates. But on the other side of the Atlantic, the funds had still not been collected. A serious affront seemed to be looming. Especially when the press announced on 24 March 1885 that the House of Representatives in Washington had refused to vote for the credit of 100,000 dollars requested by the 'Sons of Revolution' to complete the pedestal. Since the Franco-American work was private, and the French state had made no contribution, the Congress considered that it could not vote to apply state funds to a private work.

244 Letter from Bartholdi to Butler, Colmar, 14 October 1883. New York Public Library, manuscripts cabinet, Archives of the American Committee of the Statue of Liberty.
245 Letter from Bartholdi to Butler, 1 February 1884.

The French press was outraged. 'Why, I ask you, did we need to go and spend our talent, money and courtesy on people who are so ungrateful? Have we run out of room in our own country for statues, so we have to export them for free to peoples who, due to their education and lifestyle, are the least capable of appreciating the value of our attention and the beauties of a work of art, whatever it may be?'[246] The gravity of the situation was such that the American Committee expressed alarm in public about the slow flow of money. In early April 1885, the Committee made a new appeal to the public, where pessimism and anxiety were no longer hidden, since the question was now no more nor less than avoiding 'eternal shame'. The appeal contrasted the generosity of New Yorkers with the selfishness of other States, which were unaware that the project had become of national interest:

> 'Our efforts have not been successful. We have made a number of appeals to the people of the United States, but they have remained unanswered. Of the total subscription of 182,000 dollars, over 90 % came from the inhabitants of the New York area. We are forced once more to appeal to them to achieve this noble and magnificent undertaking that they have so gloriously begun. They will not fail us on a day when honour and patriotism are at stake.'[247]

The Committee asked Allen Thorndike Rice to write a short opuscule in praise of the merits of the Statue and to collect a few funds. The work became a special issue of the *North American Review*, published in New York in 1885: *The Statue of Liberty Enlightening the World, described by the Sculptor Frédéric Bartholdi, published for the benefit of the Pedestal Fund*. But a work of this kind could not reverse the trend. Despite the risks involved, Bartholdi decided that the Statue should set sail on Thursday 22 May 1885.

This time, the American press accused the engineer, Stone, in charge of building the pedestal, of mismanaging the budget. 'All this is due to a disappointed entrepreneur who was not given all the contracts he had hoped for', wrote the *Times* bitterly on 19 August 1885. *The World* finally provided the decisive impetus. Just as Joseph Pulitzer had done a great deal for the Democrat Grover Cleveland to be elected president, he was convinced that a new dynamic would make an impact on public opinion.

246 *Le Siècle*, 4 April 1885.
247 The *Journal des Débats*, 5 April 1885.

He wrote in his paper: 'Cleveland was elected and the pedestal will be built!' On 16 March 1885, he published a feisty editorial where once again he played the card of the People:

> 'Money must be raised to finish the pedestal for Bartholdi's Statue. It would be a permanent shame for the city of New York and for the American Republic if France should send us this wonderful gift without our having prepared a site to erect it... The Statue is now finished and ready to be shipped to our shores on a vessel that has been specially chartered by the French government. Congress, by its refusal to vote for the credits needed to complete the preparations to welcome and erect it fittingly, has passed the responsibility to the American people... The two-hundred and fifty thousand dollars that the Statue cost were donated by the French people as a whole, by workers, merchants, shop assistants, craftsmen, by everyone, irrespective of their social condition. Let us respond in the same way. Let us not wait for millionaires to give the money. (...) We will publish the names of all donors, even if their donation is tiny. So, let the people's voice be heard.'

If Americans 'at the top' had failed, the Americans 'down below' must take up the challenge. Pulitzer suggested that each reader of *The World* should give 25 cents and encourage their friends to do the same, guaranteeing that in a week the amount needed would be raised. Each donor would have his or her name published in the newspaper. Moving letters were published from ordinary people ready to make a contribution to the work and to the ideal, letters that were possibly written by... himself. Such as a certain Jimmy Palmer, who wrote: 'Since I quit smoking, I have gained 25 pounds, so I am sending you a penny for each pound I put on'. This technique of harassment, highlighting the gains obtained rather than complaining about the gap to be filled, produced positive results. On 11 August 1885, Pulitzer's newspaper featured the banner headline: 'One Hundred Thousand Dollars! Triumphant Completion of the World's Fund for the Liberty Pedestal.'

On 20 September 1885, Pulitzer had a letter sent to senator William Evarts, the president of the American Committee, with a cheque for 41,091 dollars (205,500 francs). Before this contribution, three other payments were made: two for 25,000 dollars and one for 10,000 dollars, with a total of 101,091 dollars, to which should be added sums from other donations. In all, thanks to Pulitzer, over 120,000 dollars were raised in record time. The journalist had come up with a new way of addressing his readers, while perhaps saving the Statue of Liberty and the honour of the United States.

The American Committee raised a total of 300,000 dollars, with one-third from Pulitzer's campaign. The members of Congress' reticence went as far as creating difficulties for President Grover Cleveland, who requested a loan to cover the costs of the inauguration (550,000 francs). He pointed out that the American Committee had been forced to pay costs linked to maintaining and taking care of the Statue, although these costs were meant to be paid by the State. He asked for these sums to be refunded to the Committee. An agreement was finally reached, but the total amount was cut!

To check on the progress of the pedestal, Bartholdi and his wife arrived in New York on 4 November 1885. His arrival attracted the attention of the press. He gave a number of interviews. When asked to react to the slow progress in building the pedestal, he remained unshakeably stoic. To the question whether it was true that the French had shown signs of impatience, Auguste replied: 'On the contrary, we have felt a great deal of satisfaction in seeing how quickly the money has been raised recently. The sum needed was large, and no one could expect that it would be collected in one day. I think America has done very well'.

The contemporary view of the meaning of the Statue of Liberty

Bartholdi returned to the United States one year later to attend the inauguration, which finally took place on Thursday 28 October 1886 in the presence of the US president, the Democrat Stephen Grover Cleveland in his first term of office (1885 to 1889). A day of liberation and glory for Auguste Bartholdi. A day of celebration for his Statue of Liberty. His efforts had been crowned with success. An incredible crowd (said to be one million people) came to celebrate the event. But what was said in the speeches given on the day? An analysis of the monument must always include the narratives greeting its birth. Then we can compare the speeches of the time with what the Statue's creator intended and with later perceptions, so we can detect discordances and concordances. A monument's identity is partly a narrative and is always changing.

The speeches made for the inauguration mainly evoke the principle and declared meaning of the project, recalling the help provided by the French to US independence and reaffirming Franco-American friendship. It was a way to leave behind the support given by Grant's America to Germany during the Franco-Prussian War. But from inauguration onwards,

this aspect give way to others: free trade and industry for some, individual and political liberty for others, but always a non-libertarian and non-revolutionary liberty, well protected by laws and respect for the consensus. This is what Auguste sought to show in the Constitution held by Liberty and the diadem on her head, rather than the Phrygian cap, seen as too violent. The broken chain at the foot of the Statue is very unobtrusive. The Statue of Liberty features the torch giving light and overcoming darkness: knowledge, learning and education finally win out over ignorance, religion (like the opium of the people) and superstition.

What did the French government see in this gigantic work? The plenipotentiary minister, Albert Lefaivre, specially delegated by the French government, spoke in the name of France, now embodied in a self-confident Republic. In his view, the Statue is a homage to a country that has displayed 'to such a dazzling effect, all the virile virtues of Liberty' and a recognition of 'the beneficial mission that your nation is accomplishing in modern society'. He evokes the fact that this liberty is a virtue shared by both countries, a doctrine, but also 'a family tie'. He went on to recall France's foresight in supporting the rise of America and 'understanding, from the first day, the grandiose perspectives that such generous ardour opened up for humanity'. He also gave his own view of liberty and his vision of the Statue of Liberty. In contrast to Ferdinand de Lesseps, who in his speech highlighted freedom of trade, Lefaivre underlined the fact that liberty is 'the triumph of reason and justice over material domination' and that it cannot be conceived without equality, tolerance, the rejection of racism and social progress. 'True' liberty must have a content, if it is to leave the realm of pipe dreams:

> 'The republics of Antiquity were based on violence and slavery, and even in the modern world, for a long time liberty was reserved only to the privileged castes. Our own Liberty is completely different, since it is based on the equality of rights and duties, it gives the same protection to all, and it extends its maternal care to all members of a civic family, *without distinction of class, rank, opinion or colour.* So, this symbol we are inaugurating today is not a chimerical allegory, but testifies to the fraternal union between the world's two great Republics, it is being celebrated by one million free men, holding out their hands across the Atlantic Ocean.'

For the representative of the French government, the statue is not so much a witness to the past as the promise of a brighter future for all mankind. He

thus highlights its universality and usefulness. The opposite of liberty, in his view, is war, violence and rivalry between nations:

> 'Liberty means, in the very near future, an end to bloody rivalries, the union of different peoples in a single family, through law, science, art and sympathy for the weak! Yes, these are the truths proclaimed by our Statue of Liberty! The beneficial light that its torch shines over the whole world! And among the thousands of Europeans that each day brings to these hospitable shores, not one will pass in front of this glorious icon without immediately understanding its moral grandeur, without greeting it with respect and recognition.'

Lefaivre underlined the pacifist and fraternal message of the future Statue, which he saw as an emblem 'of a new age where the nations will be led, not by the empire of force, but by the supremacy of wisdom and justice, making their irrevocable verdicts on all civil and international issues'. He goes as far as to present Liberty as a 'French immigrant'.[248] This meaning given to the monument was not what Bartholdi had in mind. But American Freemasons began to highlight this interpretation during the ceremony to lay the first stone of the pedestal, on 5 August 1884, an event organised by the Grand Masonic Lodge of New York.[249] In his speech, the Grand Master, William A. Brodie, underlined one of the meanings given to the Statue and of which its creator was not necessarily aware: this was Liberty as a symbol of welcoming men fleeing from poverty or persecution:

> 'A few years ago, when Auguste Bartholdi was sailing across New York Bay, he was struck by the greatness of the perspectives and of the city stretching out before him; but greater still was a thought that came

248 *Courrier de San Francisco*, 13 August 1884.

249 A study of the archives of the Grand Lodge of New York shows that direct financial aid allocated by the Lodge for the pedestal was quite small (1000 dollars), but it encouraged other lodges to raise funds and recommended its members to make individual donations. The New York 'brothers' were well aware of Bartholdi's membership of the *Alsace-Lorraine* Lodge of the Grand Orient de France (on several occasions the sculptor went to talk to his 'brothers' about the progress of his American project). We should point out that Auguste Bartholdi was initiated as a Freemason when he was designing the Statue of Liberty. An encrypted, secret note has been found that he wrote to his American 'brothers' during his stay in the US in autumn 1885. The title is: 'Notes on the mysteries of the Statue of Liberty to be revealed during a speech to the American brothers of our secret society. Novus Ordo Seclorum'.

> to him, of placing at our continent's gateway something that would be a symbol of welcome for everyone who loved and sought liberty. (…) Liberty enlightening the world… Yes, the whole world, since our continent opens its arms to men from all nations and gives them, along with the material goods provided by nature, the blessings of liberty.'[250]

This aspect of the Statue had appeared in 1883 in a famous poem by Emma Lazarus, 'The New Colossus', where Liberty appears as the 'Mother of Exiles'.[251] This is the interpretation that has held sway until today.

Conclusion: Popularity won at the cost of forgetting the work's original meaning

Édouard de Laboulaye and Auguste Bartholdi wanted to show the whole world, through this exceptional monument, that France had adopted the values of the liberal Republic, as well as its capacity for resilience after the Franco-Prussian War, the fall of the Empire and the Paris Commune, which was actually a civil war. Republican ideas, born in France, had developed better across the Atlantic than in Europe. In a draft of the first appeal to French subscribers, a sentence was deleted that explicitly mentioned the 'liberty' that the future work was meant to symbolise: 'It (this work) will express their shared faith in liberty, in the development of ideas that once arose on the old continent, and which have powerfully developed on the other side of the Ocean'. The change in position seems deliberate, to judge by another expression, which was also deleted: 'the celebration of *free* peoples' was changed to 'the celebration of *modern* peoples'.[252]

This search for recognition from America showed a geopolitical transformation in the balance of power between Europe and the New World. The aim was to regain esteem by recalling the past and reforging the links of friendship between the two nations, which recent history had separated. In a few years, the American Civil War, Napoleon III's intervention in Mexico and the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 had increased mutual misunderstanding. The hundredth anniversary of US Independence was a boon, the chance to heal old wounds. But it was not a foregone conclusion, and

250 « Lettres d'Amérique », *Le Temps*, 23 August 1884.

251 Her poem was later inscribed on a plaque in the corridor leading to the staircase below the Statue.

252 The first draft of the appeal is in the Bartholdi archives at the CNAM in Paris.

US public opinion was not immediately swept up in a spirit of unanimous recognition. Baron Edmond de Mandat-Grancey, in his book *En Visite chez l'oncle Sam* (where he showed a highly negative face of America, denouncing, for example, the policy of 'exterminating' the Indians), could not help expressing irony about the Statue of Liberty project and the Americans' lack of enthusiasm for it: 'We passed by the small island where the huge Liberty Enlightening the World is planned to be built in the middle of a fort that will be the statue's pedestal. We are giving it as a gift to the Americans – an idea that always seemed to me quite surprising, since they do not seem to want it'.[253]

The gift's usefulness was questioned, and suspicion cast on such gratuitous generosity. For a long time, the gift was not wanted, and the French, or at least their elites, had no qualms about saying that the children of Washington and Lincoln had only reached the earliest stages of civilisation. A people of sheep herders, on the whole, fanatically worshipping 'the dollar god'. On either side of the Atlantic, mistrust and arrogance continued undiminished despite heroic references to Rochambeau and Lafayette.

In contrast to the legend that the Liberty project's designers wanted people to believe, the historian must agree that from 1870 to 1914, Franco-American relations were generally very frosty. The French were a notorious exception in Europe in holding the too youthful country in contempt. They had no feelings of admiration for the US or any wish to emigrate there. The sentiment was widely shared by the public. It should be recalled that in 1872, the French government was forced to ban Victorien Sardou's popular comedy, *Uncle Sam*, which was considered as insulting to America and its way of life! The play's heroine proclaims to the Americans at the end of the first act: 'Let this madness cease of setting yourselves as an example to us'. As for the Americans, they showed complete indifference to old Europe. For America, France was no longer a reference, if it had ever been one, except in the imagination of a Francophile elite. We can see why the German party in the US was treated well at each presidential election, which helped to slow down Operation Liberty. At the same time, there were many cases of corruption in the US Republic, and it failed to bring about progress in a society that discriminated against minorities. The Americans extended their

253 Edmond de Mandat-Grancey, *En visite chez l'oncle Sam: New York et Chicago*, Paris, Plon, Nourrit et Cie, 1885, p. 23.

imperialism over their continent on the basis of the Monroe doctrine.[254] They worried about the opening of the Panama Canal (work began in 1881) as a way of reducing their influence. They had no hesitation in saying to de Lesseps that they saw the project as a threat. They would be helped by the catastrophic financial situation of the Universal Inter-Oceanic Panama Canal Company (declared bankrupt in 1889), which helped bring about the fall of Ferdinand de Lesseps, the project's promoter, although de Lesseps himself had proclaimed closer Franco-American ties during the inauguration of the Statue of Liberty. The 'real' United States seemed far removed from the ideal of its founders and the idea Laboulaye had of it.

One man, very early on, asked the terrible question. This was the journalist Frédéric Gaillardet, who, in 1883, published *Aristocratie en Amérique*. The former editor of the *Courrier des États-Unis* wondered: 'Do the Americans like the French?' His answer was negative. In his view, the Americans had only ever had 'purely formal sympathy' towards them. Their only criterion is their geopolitical interests: 'The Americans only sympathise with us in cases where our interests are not in conflict with them, with the Chinese, with the Mexicans or with any other people, in fact, which they use as tools and as markets'.[255] And he confirmed America's determination to break free of Europe and to acquire a new status as an emerging world power: this 'obscure satellite of British power aspires to nothing less than attracting all of humanity into its orbit'.

The Statue of Liberty project showed the limits of the capacity to give heritage status to 'the friendship that the blood shed by our fathers once sealed between the two nations'.[256] It undermined the belief that creating a monument based on an 'enduring memory' could influence the strongest trends in geopolitics or could foster the unity of cultures. It is for this reason that the history of the Statue of Liberty interests us. It exemplifies the delicate relations between France and the United States, always marked by mutual curiosity, confusingly blending fascination – a 'reluctant fascination' – and muted hostility. It does not appear that things have greatly changed in the 21st century, with regular ruptures and reconciliations according to

254 Aïssatou Sy-Wonyu, « Le prélude à l'impérialisme (1865–1897) », *Les États-Unis et le monde au 19e siècle (ed.* Aïssatou Sy-Wonyu), Paris, Armand Colin, 2004, p. 245–279.

255 Frédéric Gaillardet, *Aristocratie et Amérique*, Paris, E. Dentu, 1883, p. 123, p. 146.

256 Brochure published by the Franco-American Union in 1875 and entitled: *Discours* ('Speeches'). It features speeches made on 6 November 1875 at the Union's founding banquet.

circumstances, like a spiral in which the inward and outward movements end up more or less balancing each other out. Finally, the complex history of the Statue may help to cast light on the present.

Liberty Enlightening the World was meant to glorify the love between the two nations. Finally, it seems like a sad illustration of the definition of love given by the great psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan: 'To give what one does not have to someone who does not want it'. [257] Giving heritage status to the friendship between two nations assumes that the question of gift exchange has been resolved. In a survey on the Statue of Liberty carried out by the Parisian correspondent of the *New York Evening Mail* in October 1877, an American artist named Story evoked this psycho-political issue: 'You tell me that both nations should share the costs. This would be valid if it had been clear from the beginning. (…) But I think that sometimes they (the French) exaggerate our share of the debt. Haven't we already paid a large part of the debt in the sense of bearing witness to the memory of La Fayette and Rochambeau?'

The leaders of the Statue of Liberty project wanted to make a gift to America. Any gift calls for a 'counter gift', explained the sociologist Marcel Mauss,[258] since the thing that we give has such a force that the beneficiary must give something back. If only to escape from his status as a debtor. For Mauss, a gift is 'a service mutually obliging giver and beneficiary, and which actually unites them in a sort of social contract'. Has the Statue of Liberty managed to escape from this conception? In the end, the 'liberty' that the Americans showed by resisting the logic of the 'counter gift' may come from the fact that they did not feel truly concerned by the gift. Or the positive version is that they exercised their liberty… the liberty of not giving anything back.

Let us not forget that the work's popularity was slow in coming. We should note that in 1890, the number of visitors was only 88,000, and half that number in 1902. Visitor numbers only rose above 500,000 in 1945 and reached one million in 1964. The centenary, which gave rise to large-scale restoration work and spectacular festivities, brought the figure up to 3 million. Today, there are over 5 million visitors a year. The paradox is that the process of appropriation was achieved at the cost of forgetting the meaning

257 Philippe Roger, *L'Ennemi Américain. Généalogie de l'anti-américanisme français*, Paris, Seuil, 2002, p. 145.

258 Marcel Mauss, *Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques*, PUF, coll. 'Quadrige Grands textes', 2007 (1st edition: 1925).

that its creators (Bartholdi and Laboulaye) wanted to give to the donation. The original meaning of the 'unwanted' gift was changed to become a purely national, self-centred and naturalised icon. Is the Statue of Liberty the expression of the 'non-existent French-American relations', 'a fallow symbol', whose 'colossal success' is 'filled with ambiguity'?[259] The paradoxical force of the statue is that it has a sufficiently nondescript meaning and historic and ideological references to provide endless appropriations but also unexpected new directions and purposes. It is a kind of 'semiological Golem',[260] a polysemous mirror which each of us can fill with fantasies or fears, and which adapts itself perfectly to all periods and all events. It owes its worldwide and permanent success to its remarkable ductility. An extraordinary act of generosity that gave it its initial semantic neutrality and its status as an 'empty icon', to borrow the expression of the American art historian Albert Boime, permitting all kinds of reinterpretations and uses (in art, advertising, politics).[261]

It is still true that the Frenchman had reinvented New York. He had created a landscape. As one of the members of the French delegation said at the inauguration: 'To tell the truth, Liberty Island was created for Bartholdi's Statue and not the Statue for the island'. Here lies the revolution. Auguste's aim was not to be colossal for the sake of it. His aim was to break with a classical system of statuary art where, as François Loyer said, 'a monument is fundamentally an *object*: isolated, heterogeneous, autonomous and centred on itself'.[262] The revolution comes from the fact that it stands at the heart of an urban scene, giving it a new line of horizon, a new focal point. The other virtue of the monument is to forge a link between the ocean and the city. The sculpture becomes something other than a sculpture: it is designed as the 'accentuation of a space vaster than itself' and pits itself 'against the immensity of nature'. Here, the statue is not only an object or a symbol – it is a landscape, a cultural landscape. The Frenchman had thus invented what would later be called *land art*.

259 Philippe Roger, *op.cit.*, p. 148, p. 147, p. 144.

260 Philippe Roger, « L'édifice du sens », in *La Statue de la Liberté, l'exposition du centenaire*, *op. cit.*, p. 282.

261 See on this subject: Robert Belot, *La Liberté. Histoire d'un hyper-monument*, Saint-Étienne, Presses universitaires de Saint-Étienne, 2018 (chapter: « Une puissance iconique qui défie le temps »).

262 François Loyer, *Paris XIX^e siècle : l'immeuble et la rue*, Paris, Hazan, 1994, p. 292.

This was the spirit inspiring the new museum, inaugurated on 14 May 2019.[263] Until that date, the Statue of Liberty museum had been on the ground floor of the statue pedestal. A dark and cramped setting with a staging focused on the statue as a symbol of America and on objects. Today, the museum is outside. The architect, Nicholas Garrison, immediately had the idea of designing the museum as an extension of the park. The goal is to unite the landscape and the building to create fluidity and harmony. Hence the idea of a green roof, the rain garden and the wide picture window giving a glimpse of the outside of the original torch and a new view over New York. The interior staging was entrusted to the designer Edwin Schlossberg and is in harmony with this aim. Again we encounter the question of meaning. The *Inspiration Gallery* brings us back to ourselves and to the present time. 'What does Liberty mean to you?' Liberty as a value and as an aim that is more relevant than ever. Visitors can follow the museum narrative via a continually changing gigantic mosaic. The visit concludes with *Liberty's Torch*. A moving experience for the spectator, face to face with the monument's original torch, piously preserved. So this is a new approach and a new reading of the monument, showing that heritage is a reality in the making.

263 Survey made in New York in November 2018 and January 2019. Accounts collected by the author in New York from Nicholas Garrison, Edwin Schlossberg, Stephen Brigandi, president of *The Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation,* Diane von Fürstenberg, patron for the fundraising campaign.