

Lady Liberty: The Forgotten Woman



By Jerry Grzeca and John Sesini

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“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.”

These famous words
of American writer

Emma Lazarus are poignantly inscribed on The Statue of Liberty’s pedestal. The sonnet encompasses the true significance of Lady Liberty as she raises her torch over 300 feet in the air, welcoming individuals from all races and social classes to America. These words foretold the great wave of immigrants who made their way through Ellis Island, the United States’ main gateway for newcomers in 1892 and the resting place of America’s beloved Lady.

The Statue of Liberty was a gift of friendship from the people of France to the people of the United States, commemorating the Franco-American alliance during the American Revolution. But as the statue was taking shape, the U.S. was experiencing a long period of increased immigration, and in 1892, Ellis Island opened as the chief entry station for immigrants to the United States. For the next 32 years, more than 12 million immigrants were welcomed into the New York harbor by the sight of Lady Liberty, the statue becoming a welcoming symbol for immigrants across the world.

October 28th, national “Statue of Liberty Day,” has become a day that our nation can celebrate this symbol of freedom and democracy. On this day in 1886,

President Grover Cleveland accepted the statue on behalf of the United States. The statue’s torch was ignited for the first time, signaling to the rest of the world that the United States was a country where opportunities were plentiful and dreams were limitless.

With Lady Liberty standing by our welcoming gates, immigration levels began to peak during the decade between 1900 and 1910, with almost 1 million immigrants entering the country each year. Due to this influx of immigrants, “older immigrants” from Protestant Western Europe felt threatened and thus formed organizations urging laws to restrict immigration. Soon after, a succession of laws was passed adding restrictions such as quotas and literacy tests to immigration policy.

Over the years, quota systems and enforcement-only immigration policies have become an increasing trend for “fixing” America’s immigration issues. But what the nation needs is immigration reform which helps serve Liberty’s purpose - to illuminate the way for all of mankind.

On this year’s Statue of Liberty Day, let us not forget our Leading Lady’s purpose nor the words of President Grover Cleveland as he accepted this symbol on behalf of the United States: “Instead of grasping in her hand thunderbolts of terror and of death, she holds aloft the light which illumines the way to man’s enfranchisement. We will not forget that Liberty has here made her home, nor shall her chosen altar be neglected. A stream of light shall pierce the darkness of ignorance and man’s oppression, until Liberty enlightens the world.”

For more information on the latest immigration policies and issues, please contact Grzeca Law Group at (414) 342-3000 or visit our website at www.grzecalaw.com.

Milwaukee: 414-342-3000
Madison: 608-234-5004
Toll Free: 866-342-0445

GRZECA LAW GROUP, S.C.
1434 West State Street
Milwaukee, WI 53233

www.grzecalaw.com
clients@grzecalaw.com