

Q120 – Where is the Statue of Liberty?

DOUGLAS GINSBURG, Federal Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals, D.C. Circuit:

The Statue of Liberty stands on Liberty Island in New York Harbor – at the mouth of the Hudson River near New York City. It stands more than three hundred feet tall. A Frenchman conceived the statue to celebrate Franco-American friendship, and to mark the centennial of the United States – 1876 – though the statue wasn't dedicated for another decade.

French citizens paid for the statue and Americans paid for the mammoth pedestal. Its full name is "Statue of Liberty Enlightening the World." In one hand, Lady Liberty raises a torch to light the path to freedom. The tablet in her other hand records America's birthday: July 4th, 1776.

The American author Emma Lazarus wrote a poem to raise funds for the pedestal – and the final lines of that poem are known worldwide.

"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-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Six years after the dedication, an immigration station opened on Ellis Island – just across from the Statue. In six decades, twelve million immigrants passed through on their way to becoming Americans. Many were poor, tired, homeless. And all surely yearned to breathe free. All passed by the Statue of Liberty: the "Mother of Exiles."

Almost 40 percent of Americans today have an ancestor who arrived at Ellis Island.

At the doorstep of New York City – a metropolis of immigrants – the Statue of Liberty stands as one of the world's greatest symbols of freedom.