

# The New World Order

**The Goddess of Freedom: From Libertas to Lady Liberty**

**by Selena Fox Circle Magazine**





**The honoring of the Goddess of Freedom began more than two thousand years ago among the ancient Romans. They called Her, Libertas, the Latin word for Freedom. Libertas signified freedom of action, freedom from restraint, independence, rights, and related forms of personal and social liberty.**

**The Roman religion had a large and complex pantheon with a great assortment of Goddesses, Gods, and other sacred forms. Ancient Romans revered and deified certain values, known as Virtues, and Libertas was one of the most important of these. A few of the more than two dozen other private and public Virtues were Hope (Spes), Justice (Justica), Piety (Pietas), and Courage (Virtus). According to their religion, Roman citizens were to uphold Virtues in their personal lives as well as in the culture as a whole.**

**Libertas as a deity usually took the form of a Goddess. A temple to Her on the Aventine Hill in Rome was dedicated around 238 BCE. Sometimes She merged with the chief Roman God Jupiter, in the form of Jupiter Libertas, whose feast was celebrated on April 13. Libertas also was closely associated with the Goddess Feronia, and some viewed them as aspects of the same Goddess, including the Roman scholar Varro, a contemporary of Cicero. Feronia is thought to have been originally an ancient agricultural and fire Goddess among the Etruscan and/or Sabine peoples. During the Roman Republic, Feronia's feast day was November 13. She was honored in central Italy as the Goddess of freedwomen and freedmen, and She was associated with the granting of freedom to slaves. Part of the passage from slavery into freedom in Roman society involved having the head ritually shaved,**

**being ceremonially tapped by a magistrate with a rod, called a vindicta, and then wearing a cap, known as a pilleus, to symbolize freed status.**

**Some of the Roman depictions of Libertas have survived to this day on coins and other artifacts. Libertas usually is pictured as a matron in flowing classical dress. She often is shown holding both the Liberty Pole (vindicta) and Liberty Cap (pilleus). In some depictions Libertas wears the Liberty Cap or a crown of Laurel leaves. Sometimes She carries a spear instead of the Liberty Pole. Sometimes the Goddess Liberty is shown with a Cat at Her feet.**

**Although the Roman empire is no more, the Goddess Liberty still survives. Over the centuries and across cultures, She has continued to signify Freedom in Her appearances in paintings, sculptures, songs, stories, poems, and other literature. In recent centuries, the form She has most often taken is that of Lady Liberty.**

**Libertas as Lady Liberty began emerging in America during the colonial era as part of the American quest for political independence from Britain. American patriot Paul Revere may have been the first to depict Lady Liberty in that context. In 1766, on the obelisk he created in celebration of the repeal of the Stamp Act, he used the image of Liberty with a Liberty Pole surmounted by a Liberty Cap. Another patriot leader, Thomas Paine, included Her in his poem, the "Liberty Tree," referring to Her as "The Goddess of Liberty." Freedom Goddess depictions not only emerged in America during its Revolution, but a few years later in France during its own Revolution, with the female symbol of the French Republic, the Marianne, depicted wearing the Liberty Cap, and often accompanied by Liberty's Cat.**

**As the USA became a nation, Lady Liberty became part of the official symbology of some of its newly formed states. Holding Her Liberty Cap atop the Liberty Pole, Lady Liberty appears along with the Goddess of Justice on the New York State Flag. On the obverse of the Great Seal of the Commonwealth of Virginia, created in 1776, Liberty holds the Liberty Cap atop a pole in Her right hand and is flanked on Her left side by the Roman Goddess of Eternity (Aeternitas) and on Her right by the Goddess of Fruitfulness (Ceres). In addition, the Goddess Liberty, also with a Liberty Pole and Cap, appears with Ceres on the front of the Great Seal of New Jersey, adopted in 1777.**

**As more states were formed in the USA in the 19th and 20th centuries, some of them also chose to include Liberty imagery as part of their iconography. In addition, Lady Liberty images appeared on coins, paintings, stamps, and in sculptures throughout the land, including the colossal bronze Statue of Freedom, which was commissioned in 1855 and in 1863 set on the top of the dome of the US Capitol building in Washington, DC, where it can still be seen today. It is interesting to note that during America's Civil War era both sides claimed Liberty and sought to use Her images to promote their own causes. Among abolitionists, Liberty was depicted freeing slaves, while states rights advocates used Her image to signify independence from the "tyranny" of centralized government. Today, Liberty images are used in connection with a wide range of political parties, candidates, and positions on various issues.**

**The most famous of the Freedom Goddess' American depictions, the Statue of Liberty, was a gift from France to the United States in honor of America's 100th birthday. Originally called "Liberty Enlightening the World," the Statue of Liberty was designed by French Freemason and sculptor Frederic-Auguste Bartholdi with the assistance of engineer Alexandre Gustave Eiffel. The head of Lady Liberty's statue wears a crown with solar rays, similar to the crown on the Colossus of Rhodes, a magnificent monument to the Sun God Helios that once stood astride a Greek harbor and was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The seven rays on Liberty's crown represent the seven continents and seven seas. The torch Liberty holds in Her right upstretched hand is the Flame of Freedom, and underneath Her feet are broken chains representing overcoming tyranny and enslavement. The tablet Liberty holds in Her left hand is inscribed with July 4, the date of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the birth of the USA as a nation. Her flowing gown is similar in design to depictions of Libertas in ancient Rome.**

**More than 100,000 people in France contributed money to the creation of the 151 foot (46 meters) high copper clad Statue of Liberty. In the USA, in a grass-roots effort spearheaded by newspaper magnate Joseph Pulitzer, thousands of Americans contributed money for the creation of the 65 foot high granite pedestal to serve as the Statue's base. The Statue was completed in Paris in May of 1884 and shipped in pieces to the USA where it was reassembled. Work on pedestal construction began in**

**August 1884 following the laying of the cornerstone by Masons of the Grand Lodge of New York in a traditional Masonic ritual. The Statue of Liberty was erected on top of Her pedestal in New York Harbor on Bedloe Island, which was renamed Liberty Island in Her honor seventy years later. Thousands of people attended the dedication ceremony held on October 28, 1886, including Suffragettes, who, while circling the island in a boat, loudly proclaimed through a megaphone their freedom demand that women have the right to vote. A plaque was added in 1903 to an interior wall of the pedestal containing "The New Colossus," the poem written by Emma Lazarus in 1883 as a tribute to the Statue and to immigrants coming to America for freedom. In the twentieth century, in preparation for the one hundredth birthday of the Statue of Liberty, an extensive renovation project was undertaken from 1984-1986. On the weekend of July 4, 1986, a great centennial celebration was held and the newly restored Statue was re-opened to visitors. The Statue of Liberty continues to be one of the most beloved of America's civic shrines. The United Nations designated it as a World Heritage site in 1984. The Statue of Liberty receives over 5 million visitors each year.**

**Lady Liberty images can be found not only throughout America, but elsewhere in the world. She sometimes makes appearances at political rallies, usually in Her Statue of Liberty form. Such was the case in May, 1989, when She gained worldwide attention as She emerged as the Goddess of Democracy in student demonstrations in Beijing, China. Pro-democracy demonstrators erected a 33 foot styrofoam and plaster Liberty Goddess with torch image in Tiananmen Square, and this became a powerful rallying symbol of their quest for Freedom. Although, a short time later, tanks moved in and crushed this statue as well as demonstrators and their demonstrations, their vision and work for Democracy continues within and outside of China.**

**Images of Lady Liberty now abound in American popular culture. In addition to the variety of Statue of Liberty replicas, postcards, t-shirts, and other souvenirs at tourist shops in New York City and elsewhere, Lady Liberty imagery can be found in movies and on television, on postage stamps and posters, in books and newspapers, in art museums and theaters, in poems and songs, in cartoons and advertisements, in public squares and private homes, in pageants and costume parties, plus in many other contexts. Lady Liberty's biggest Feast day in the USA is Independence Day, July 4. She is honored on other occasions as well, such as having Her own float in the globally televised Rose Parade which**

**took place on January 1, 2000 in Pasadena, California, USA. The float, "Liberty for All," was sponsored by the Family of Freemasonry and included a 50 foot high replica of the Statue of Liberty.**

**To many contemporary Wiccans and other Pagans, Lady Liberty is more than a symbol. She is a powerful and ancient Goddess who can guide, inspire, protect, and comfort. Pagans have invoked Lady Liberty in rituals for personal and/or social liberation. Some Pagans include Her image in their household shrines and altars. Because of Her ancient Pagan origins, Lady Liberty is an excellent Goddess to work with in support of Pagan religious freedom.**

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**"God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16. "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Romans 10:13**

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