

CULTURE & HISTORY

Mother of Exiles

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Source: Emma Lazarus: Selected Poems and Other Writings (2002)

Mother of Exiles

Emma Lazarus, a New York poet and the descendant of Jewish immigrants, had spent her life writing about anti-Semitism and ethnic prejudice, and in the 1880s became a fierce advocate for Jewish refugees fleeing massacre in Russia. Her sonnet, "The New Colossus," reflected that conviction.

The New Colossus

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,

With conquering limbs astride from land to land;

Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch,
whose flame is the imprisoned lightning, and her name Mother of Exiles.

From her beacon-hand glows worldwide welcome;

her mild eyes command the air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.

"Keep ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
with silent lips.

"Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,

The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,

I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"