

## Did Radical Patrick Henry Start the American Revolution?

### Did Radical Patrick Henry Start the Revolutionary War?

Our country would not be the same without those courageous enough to speak out. These fearless people spoke their minds and convinced others to follow them in their plight. One of our most famous speakers of all, Patrick Henry, was a surprise to many.

When Patrick Henry was younger, his parents were bothered that their son seemed a bit lazy. He did not devote all his time to study as they had hoped, and he even ruined his father's business. But after Henry got married and had children, he began to change. He was always bright, but finally he began to shine. He studied for and passed an exam to be a lawyer in only six weeks. Through his job as a lawyer, he began to notice things about the government that bothered him

In 1764, Henry moved to Louisa County, Virginia. There he worked with the House of Burgesses in support of voting rights because most people had no rights at that time. He was elected to the House of Burgesses and became somewhat of an outcast. The House of Burgesses was a group of well-to-do landowners who were not extremely opposed to English rule over them. Patrick Henry changed their minds, though, often calling Great Britain's king a tyrant and comparing him to other historical tyrants.

May 29, 1765, Henry proposed radical resolutions to the House of Burgesses in response to the Stamp Act. The Stamp Act required colonists to pay new taxes to the British government. Henry was among the first to stand up against this. Four out of Henry's seven resolutions were passed.

In 1774, Henry was part of the first Continental Congress. This group wrote the Declaration of Rights. They demanded no taxation from the British.

In March 1775, Henry demanded that fellow Virginians arm themselves in self-defense. He did this in his famous speech, "Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death." Some say that this speech was the invisible shot that started the American Revolutionary War.

## Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death (Excerpt)

By: Patrick Henry

### ***Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death***

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:** *"Give me Liberty, or Give me Death!" is a quotation attributed to Patrick Henry from a speech he made to the Virginia Convention. It was given on March 23, 1775, at St. John's Church in Richmond, Virginia, and is credited with having swung the balance in convincing the Virginia House of Burgesses to pass a resolution delivering the Virginia troops to the Revolutionary War. Among the delegates to the convention were future U.S. Presidents Thomas Jefferson and George Washington. Reportedly, those in attendance, upon hearing the speech, shouted, "Give me liberty or give me death!"*

**March 23, 1775**

**By Patrick Henry**

No man thinks more highly than I do of the patriotism, as well as abilities, of the very worthy gentlemen who have just addressed the house. But different men often see the same subject in different lights; and, therefore, I hope it will not be thought disrespectful to those gentlemen if, entertaining as I do opinions of a character very opposite to theirs, I shall speak forth my sentiments freely and without reserve. This is no time for ceremony. The question before the house is one of awful moment to this country. For my own part, I consider it as nothing less than a question of freedom or slavery; and in proportion to the magnitude of the subject ought to be the freedom of the debate.

Mr. President, it is natural to man to indulge in the illusions of hope. We are apt to shut our eyes against a painful truth, and listen to the song of that **siren**<sup>7</sup> till she transforms us into beasts. There is no longer any room for hope. If we wish to be free--if we mean to preserve **inviolable**<sup>8</sup> those inestimable privileges for which we have been so long contending--if we mean not **basely**<sup>9</sup> to abandon the noble struggle in which we have been so long engaged, and which we have pledged ourselves never to abandon until the glorious object of our contest shall be obtained--we must fight! I repeat it, sir, we must fight! They tell us, sir, that we are weak; unable to cope with so formidable an **adversary**<sup>10</sup>. But when shall we be stronger? Will it be the next week, or the next year? Will it be when we are totally disarmed, and when a British guard shall be stationed in every house? Shall we gather strength but irresolution and inaction? Shall we acquire the means of effectual resistance by lying **supinely**<sup>11</sup> on our backs and hugging the delusive phantom of hope, until our enemies shall have bound us hand and foot?

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<sup>7</sup> Siren – From Greek mythology, one of several sea nymphs, part woman and part bird, who lure mariners to destruction by their seductive singing.

<sup>8</sup> Inviolable – Not subject to change; unaltered.

<sup>9</sup> Basely – Morally low; dishonorable; cowardly.

<sup>10</sup> Adversary – A person, group, or force that opposes or attacks; opponent; enemy.

<sup>11</sup> Supinely – Lying on your back in a lazy, passive manner.

Sir, we are not weak if we make a proper use of those means which the God of nature hath placed in our power. The millions of people, armed in the holy cause of liberty, and in such a country as that which we possess, are invincible by any force which our enemy can send against us. Besides, sir, we shall not fight our battles alone. There is a just God who presides over the destinies of nations, and who will raise up friends to fight our battles for us. The battle, sir, is not to the strong alone; it is to the vigilant, the active, the brave. Besides, sir, we have no election. If we were base enough to desire it, it is now too late to retire from the contest. There is no retreat but in submission and slavery! Our chains are forged! Their clanking may be heard on the plains of Boston! The war is inevitable--and let it come! I repeat it, sir, let it come.

It is in vain, sir, to **extenuate**<sup>12</sup> the matter. Gentlemen may cry, Peace, Peace--but there is no peace. The war is actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms! Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand we here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!

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<sup>12</sup> Extenuate – to serve to make seem less serious (a fault, an offense, etc.)

**Extended Response  
Scoring Guide  
Graded as Formal Assessment**

<b>Score Point 4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You complete all important components of the question and communicate ideas clearly.</li><li>• You demonstrate in-depth understanding of the relevant concepts and/or processes.</li><li>• Where appropriate, you choose more efficient and/or sophisticated processes.</li><li>• Where appropriate, you offer insightful interpretations or extensions (generalizations, applications, analogies).</li></ul>
<b>Score Point 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You complete most important components of the question and communicate clearly.</li><li>• You demonstrate an understanding of major concepts even though you overlook or misunderstand some less-important ideas or details.</li></ul>
<b>Score Point 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You complete some important components of the question and communicate those components clearly.</li><li>• You demonstrate that there are gaps in your conceptual understanding.</li></ul>
<b>Score Point 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You show minimal understanding of the question.</li><li>• You address only a small portion of the question.</li></ul>
<b>Score Point 0</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Your answer is totally incorrect or irrelevant.</li></ul>
<b>Blank</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You did not give any answer at all.</li></ul>