

Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death!

Patrick Henry

March 23, 1775

In the following speech, Patrick Henry, a highly respected politician from Virginia, convinced Virginia's House of Burgesses that all the acts they had done to achieve peace with the British government had not worked, were not working and would never work. The solution he saw was to fight, and to fight, not soon, but now.

... Sir, we have done everything that could be done to avert the storm which is now coming on. We have petitioned; ... and have implored its interposition to arrest the tyrannical hands of the ministry and Parliament. Our petitions have been slighted ... and we have been spurned, with contempt, from the foot of the throne! In vain, after these things, may we indulge the fond hope of peace and reconciliation?

There is no longer any room for hope. If we wish to be free ... we must fight! I repeat it, sir, we must fight! ... Will it be when we are totally disarmed, and when a British guard shall be stationed in every house? ... 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 ... 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.

... The war is actually begun! ... 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!