

PATRICK HENRY'S SPEECH, MARCH 23, 1775 EXCERPTED and with Annotations

No man thinks more highly than I do of the patriotism, as well as abilities, of the very worthy gentlemen who have just addressed this House. But different men often see the same subject in different lights; I shall speak forth my **sentiments**¹ freely... For my own part, I consider it as nothing less than a question of freedom or slavery.

I know of no way of judging of the future but by the past. And judging by the past, I wish to know what there has been in the conduct of the British ministry for the last ten years to justify those hopes [of peace]

Ask yourselves how this gracious **reception**² of our **petition**³ comports with those warlike preparations which cover our waters and darken our land? Are (England's) fleets and armies necessary to a work of love and reconciliation? Have we shown ourselves so unwilling to be **reconciled**⁴ that [British] force must be called in to win back our love? Let us not deceive ourselves, sir. These are the implements of war... They are meant for us: they can be meant for no other. They are sent over to bind and rivet upon us those chains which the **British ministry**⁵ have been so long forging. And what have we to oppose to them? Shall we try argument? Sir, we have been trying [argument] for the last ten years.

Sir, we have done everything that could be done to avert the storm which is now coming on. Our petitions have been **slighted**⁶; our **remonstrances**⁷ have produced additional violence and insult; our **supplications**⁸ have been disregarded; and we have been **spurned**⁹, with **contempt**¹⁰, from the foot of the throne!

In vain, after these things, may we indulge the fond hope of peace and **reconciliation**¹¹. There is no longer any room for hope. If we wish to be free--we must fight! I repeat it, sir, we must fight!

They tell us, sir, that we are weak; unable to cope with so **formidable**¹² an **adversary**¹³. 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**¹⁴?

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. The battle, sir, is not to the strong alone; it is to the **vigilant**¹⁵, the active, the brave. Besides, sir, we have no **election**¹⁶. 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**¹⁷ and slavery! Our chains are forged! Their

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clanking may be heard **on the plains of Boston**¹⁸! The war is inevitable--and let it come! I repeat it, sir, let it come.

Gentlemen may cry, Peace, Peace-- but there is no peace. Why stand we here **idle**¹⁹? Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!

¹feelings ²response ³plea ⁴repair our relationship with Britain ⁵Parliament and King George
⁶scorned and ignored ⁷protests ⁸request or pleas ⁹rejected ¹⁰disrespect ¹¹compromise ¹²powerful
¹³enemy ¹⁴Henry is reminding them of the Quartering Act of 1774 that required colonists to host British soldiers with lodging and food ¹⁵watchful ¹⁶choice ¹⁷surrender or giving in ¹⁸Henry likely refers to the Boston Massacre ¹⁹doing nothing

Source: Henry, P. (1775). Patrick Henry, give me liberty or give me death. 18th Century documents collection.

Avalon Project: Yale Law School. Retrieved from: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/patrick.asp