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## Patrick Henry - Give Me Liberty Or Give Me Death

### Give Me Liberty Or Give Me Death

Patrick Henry, March 23, 1775.

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. It is only in this way that we can hope to arrive at truth, and fulfill the great responsibility which we hold to God and our country. Should I keep back my opinions at such a time, through fear of giving offense, I should consider myself as guilty of treason towards my country, and of an act of disloyalty toward the Majesty of Heaven, which I revere above all earthly kings.

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 till she transforms us into beasts. Is this the part of wise men, engaged in a great and arduous struggle for liberty? Are we disposed to be of the number of those who, having eyes, see not, and, having ears, hear not, the things which so nearly concern their temporal salvation? For my part, whatever anguish of spirit it may cost, I am willing to know the whole truth; to know the worst, and to provide for it.

I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided, and that is the lamp of experience. 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 with which gentlemen have been pleased to solace themselves and the House. Is it that insidious smile with which our petition has been lately received? Trust it not, sir; it will prove a snare to your feet. Suffer not yourselves to be betrayed with a kiss. Ask yourselves how this gracious reception of our petition comports with those warlike preparations which cover our waters and darken our land. Are fleets and armies necessary to a work of love and reconciliation? Have we shown ourselves so unwilling to be reconciled that force must be called in to win back our love? Let us not deceive ourselves, sir. These are the implements of war and subjugation; the last arguments to which kings resort. I ask gentlemen, sir, what means this martial array, if its purpose be not to force us to submission? Can gentlemen assign any other possible motive for it? Has Great Britain any enemy, in this quarter of the world, to call for all this accumulation of navies and armies? No, sir, she has none. 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 have been so long forging. And what have we to oppose to them? Shall we try argument? Sir, we have been trying that for the last ten years. Have we anything new to offer upon the subject? Nothing. We have held the subject up in every light of which it is capable; but it has been all in vain. Shall we resort to entreaty and humble supplication? What terms shall we find which have not been already exhausted? Let us not, I beseech you, sir, deceive ourselves. Sir, we have done everything that could be done to avert the storm which is now coming on. We have petitioned; we have remonstrated; we have supplicated; we have prostrated ourselves before the throne, and have implored its interposition to arrest the tyrannical hands of the ministry and Parliament. Our petitions have been slighted; our remonstrances have produced additional violence and insult; our supplications have been disregarded; 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-- if we mean to preserve inviolate those inestimable privileges for which we have been so long contending--if we mean not basely 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! An appeal to arms and to the God of hosts is all that is left us!

They tell us, sir, that we are weak; unable to cope with so formidable an adversary. 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 by irresolution and inaction? Shall we acquire the means of effectual resistance by lying supinely on our backs and hugging the delusive phantom of hope, until our enemies shall have bound us hand and foot? 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 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!

#### 18th Century Documents

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## The American Revolution, 1763-1783

### The Colonies Move Toward Open Rebellion, 1773-1774

#### Joseph Galloway's Speech to Continental Congress, September 28, 1774

*Joseph Galloway served as a delegate from Pennsylvania to the First Continental Congress in 1774. By 1776, Galloway had become a Tory and then left the colonies for England. In the following speech to the Continental Congress, what position does Galloway take concerning the relationship between Britain and its North American colonies? What arguments does he use to support his position?*

View the [original document](#) from the Journals of the Continental Congress in [A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation](#). Use your browser's Back Button to return to this point.

If we sincerely mean to accommodate the difference between the two countries, and to establish their union on more firm and constitutional principles, we must take into consideration a number of facts which led the Parliament to pass the acts complained of, since the year 1763, and the real state of the Colonies. A clear and perfect knowledge of these matters only can lead us to the ground of substantial redress and permanent harmony. I will therefore call your recollection to the dangerous situation of the Colonies from the intrigues of France, and the incursions of the Canadians and their Indian allies, at the commencement of the last war. None of us can be ignorant of the just sense they then entertained of that danger, and of their incapacity to defend themselves against it, nor of the supplications made to the Parent State for its assistance, nor of the cheerfulness with which Great-Britain sent over her fleets and armies for their protection, of the millions she expended in that protection, and of the happy consequences which attended it.

In this state of the Colonies it was not unreasonable to expect that Parliament would have levied a tax on them proportionate to their wealth, and the sums raised in Great Britain. Her ancient right, so often exercised, and never controverted, enabled her, and the occasion invited her, to do it. And yet, not knowing their wealth, a generous tenderness arising from the fear of doing them injustice, induced Parliament to forbear to levy aids upon them--It left the Colonies to do justice to themselves and to the nation. And moreover, in order to allure them to a discharge of their duty, it offered to reimburse those Colonies which should generously grant the aids that were necessary to their own safety. But what was the conduct of the Colonies on this occasion, in which their own existence was immediately concerned? However painful it may be for me to repeat, or you to hear, I must remind you of it. You all know there were Colonies which at some times granted liberal aids, and at others nothing; other Colonies gave nothing during the war; none gave equitably in proportion to their wealth, and all that did give were actuated by partial and self-interested motives, and gave only in proportion to the approach or remoteness of the danger. These delinquencies were occasioned by the want of the exercise of some supreme power to ascertain, with equity, their proportions of aids, and to over-rule the particular passions, prejudices, and interests, of the several Colonies.

To remedy these mischiefs, Parliament was naturally led to exercise the power which had been, by its predecessors, so often exercised over the Colonies, and to pass the Stamp Act. Against this act, the Colonies petitioned Parliament, and denied its authority. Instead of proposing some remedy, by which that authority should be rendered more equitable and more constitutional over the Colonies, the petitions rested in a declaration that the Colonies could not be represented in that body. This justly alarmed the British Senate. It was thought and called by the ablest men in Britain, a clear and explicit declaration of the American Independence, and compelled the Parliament to pass the Declaratory Act, in order to save its ancient and incontrovertible right of supremacy over all the parts of the empire. By this injudicious step the cause of our complaints became fixed, and instead of obtaining a constitutional reformation of the authority of Parliament over the Colonies, it brought on an explicit declaration of a right in Parliament to exercise absolute and unparticipated power over them . . .

In order to establish those principles, upon which alone American relief ought, in reason and policy, to be founded, I will take a brief view



**Patrick Henry**

1. Explain what Henry accuses the British government of doing in the first part of his speech. What words or phrases stick out?
2. Describe how Henry views the British reactions towards petitions made by the colonists.
3. Analyze what makes Henry's speech persuasive. List at least 2 examples.

**Joseph Galloway**

1. Galloway explains in the first part of his speech why the British government passed several acts leading up to the American Revolution. Explain what the British government has done for the colonies.
2. What does Galloway say about how the colonies reacted to the Stamp Act? Can you imagine how Galloway would have wanted the colonies to react?
3. Galloway thought that a war would ruin America. Why do you think he felt that way? Propose an action that the colonies could take that would satisfy Galloway.

**Should the colonies go to war with Great Britain?** Imagine you are a colonist in one of the 13 colonies. Consider the life you have lived with the British. (Remember you are British and a colonist.) There are benefits and drawbacks. List the pros and cons for going to war with Britain.

| Pros | Cons |
|------|------|
|      |      |