



Give me liberty or give me death – March 23, 2015

Monday, March 23 2015, marks the 240 anniversary of Patrick Henry's "Give me Liberty or give me death" speech. My goal today is to implant within you a mindset of a Virginia colonist of 1775 in order to better appreciate that speech.

I will begin by describing some of the events leading up to that speech and I'll conclude by attempting to give with the same emotions a small part of that speech.

This speech was pivotal in 1775 because it convinced the Virginia colony to send a troop to support the revolution against England.

This speech is relevant today because governments across the world including our own have exceeded in many ways the abuses that the English governments did to the 13 colonies.

President John F Kennedy stated in 1962 that *"if peaceful revolutions are impossible then violent revolutions are inevitable"*.



That was the case in 1775. The tension was intense between England and the colony. Only a little spark was needed to set off a firestorm.

There had always been a tension between England and the colonies but it was amplified at the conclusion of the French and Indian war in 1763.

England made a proclamation in that year stating that the colonies were not allowed to expand into or possess any of the French and Indian Territory. This denied them property and wealth.

The next year in 1764, 11 years before the speech, England passed the **Sugar Act** which raised import taxes on raw material coming from non-British territories. This caused price increases and the colony exported less. The colonialist first used "No taxation without representation" as a result of this act.



England passed the **Currency Act** in 1764 as well. This abolished all the local colonial money and forced all taxes, duties, fees and fines to be paid in the pound sterling. This Act increased the trade deficit between England and the colonies.

The **Stamp Act** was passed in 1765, 10 years before the speech. Each piece of paper from playing cards, to greeting cards, to legal documents, to newspapers had to have a tax stamp on it.

2 years before the speech in 1773 England tried to dump millions of pounds of cheap tea from the British East Indies company. The colony blocked and turned back all tea from coming ashore in all the harbors except Boston.



On Dec 16, 1773 the Sons of Liberty dressed as Indians and boarded the ships carrying the tea and dumped 32 boxes of tea over board.

England was furious at this blatant act of rebellion and enacted punitive laws known to the colony as **the Intolerable Acts** to punish Boston for the tea party.

The English placed an embargo on the Boston Harbor In 1774. No ships could enter or leave.

The English changed the local government by placing an appointed royal officer in every position in the local government.

The English made it difficult to sue any royal official since the trial was across the Atlantic Ocean in England.

Tension in the colony was at the breaking point. The colonialist attempted to make peace with England, but peace never came. Patrick Henry spoke at the Virginia assembly.



In attendance was Thomas Jefferson, the drafter of the declaration of Independence. Also in attendance was George Washington, the general of the revolutionary war and 1st president of these united States.



The audience was stunned in silence after Patrick Henry spoke. Here what he said.

LIBERTY OR DEATH

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 that 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 towards 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 the 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 these 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 motives 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 on 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 longer. 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 the means which the God of nature hath placed in our power. Three 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!**