

Patrick Henry's speech to the Second Virginia Convention 'Give me Liberty or Give Me Death'(1775)

...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 had 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 any thing new to offer upon the subject? Nothing....

...Let us not, I beseech you, sir, deceive ourselves longer. Sir, we have done every thing 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*...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 war is Inevitable – and let it come!! I repeat it, sir, let it come!!!'

'It is 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,' [cried he, with both his arms extended aloft, his brows knit, every feature marked with the resolute purpose of his soul, and his voice swelled to its boldest note of exclamation] 'give me liberty, or give me death!'

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

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.

... 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 and 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.

...we cannot deny--That the discovery of the Colonies was made under a commission granted by the supreme authority of the British State, that they have been settled under that authority. and therefore are truly the property of that State. Parliamentary jurisdiction has been constantly exercised over them from their first settlement; its executive authority has ever run through all their inferior political systems: the Colonists have ever sworn allegiance to the British State, and have been considered, both by the State and by themselves, as subjects of the British Government. Protection and allegiance are reciprocal duties; the one cannot exist without the other. The Colonies cannot claim the protection of Britain upon any principle of reason or law, while they deny its supreme authority.

As to the tax, it is neither unjust or oppressive, it being rather a relief than a burthen; but it is want of constitutional principle in the authority that passed it, which is the ground for complaint. This, and this only, is the source of American grievances. Here, and here only, is the defect; and if this defect were removed, a foundation would be laid for the relief of every American complaint...

...if we do not approve of a representation in Parliament, let us ask for a participation in the freedom and power of the English constitution in some other mode of incorporation...

Citations:

"'Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death': Patrick Henry." Inside American History. Abingdon/Cambridge: Helicon, 2007. History Study Center. ProQuest LLC. 19 Aug. 2009 <<http://www.historystudycenter.com/>>.

Joseph Galloway's Speech to the Continental Congress, September 28, 1774. The Library of Congress. 19, August 2009.
<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/amrev/rebelln/galloway.html>.