

# PATRICK HENRY CALLS FOR A FIGHT

---

*Boston harbor was closed by the Intolerable Acts, but no fighting had yet occurred when Patrick Henry delivered his famous speech in March of 1775. The presence of British troops in the colonies, however, convinced him that war was coming. He made the speech (condensed here) at a meeting of Virginia's leaders called to consider the situation.*

The question before the House is one of awful moment [importance] to this country. For my own part I consider it as nothing less than a question of freedom or slavery.

I ask gentlemen, sir, what means this martial array [the British military force], if its purpose be not to force us into submission? 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 sent over to bind and rivet upon us those chains which the British have been so long forging.

And what have we to oppose them? Shall we try argument? Sir, we have been trying that for the last ten years.

Sir, we have done everything that could be done, to avert the storm which is now coming on.

There is no longer any room for hope. If we wish to be free, we must fight! I repeat it sir, we must fight! An appeal to arms and to God is all that is left to us!

They tell us, sir, that we are weak; unable to cope with so formidable an adversary. But when will 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?

Sir, we are not weak, if we make a proper use of the means which the God of nature has 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 [no choice]. If we were base [coward] 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 [delay] the matter. Gentlemen may cry peace, peace – but there is no peace. 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!

**Group Discussion:** *What does Patrick Henry claim is the choice that confronts the colonies in 1775? What arguments does he make to persuade his listeners that the colonies could win against the far superior forces of Great Britain?*