

# Patrick henry rhetorical analysis essay

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Colin Summers November 5, 2012 COM 340 Zulick " Give me Liberty or Give me Death! " The American Revolution was an extraordinary time filled with uncertainty and ambiguity and allowed Patriots such as Patrick Henry the opportunity to speak out against the discriminating behavior and actions towards American Colonists. In his most famous speech known as " Speech to the Virginia Convention", Henry illustrates the need to act out against the British and convince the Virginian delegates to send troops to fight back against the British.

In his speech, Henry uses rhetorical devices, questions, and emotional and logical appeals to help persuade action and revolt against the British. Patrick Henry was born May 29, 1736 in Studley, Virginia. He was educated at an early age by his father who had formal schooling when living in Scotland. He used this knowledge learned from his father to eventually become a lawyer as well as a politician. " Henry developed a reputation as a powerful and persuasive speaker with the 1763 case known as ' Parsons Cause'" () and his reputation continued to grow and allowed him to win a seat in the House of Burgesses. From the very beginning, Henry opposed many of the British doctrines being placed on the American colonists such as the Stamp Act. Other politicians called his comments and beliefs against the British rule as " treason" however Henry stood firm on his standing and his opinions on the Stamp act " helped spur discontent with British rule" throughout the rest of the colonies. Patrick Henry uses effective rhetorical language and devices in order to persuade the House of Burgess in Virginia to fight back against the British.

He begins by asking rhetorical questions to his audience “ I ask gentlemen, sir, what means this martial array if its purpose be not to force us to submission? ” (Henry, 1) as well as “ Has Great Britain any enemy, in this quarter of the world, to call for all the accumulation of navies and armies? No, sir she has none” (Henry, 1). These rhetorical questions allow Henry to emphasize and drive further his point that action is needed to be taken against the British. Each member of Henry’s immediate audience answers these questions in their own mind, further engaging them into Henry’s speech and draws their attention to what Henry needs to say.

Henry also uses imagery as a rhetorical device to engage his audience even further. Saying things like “ lamp of experience”, “ Betrayed with a kiss”, and “ Snare to your feet” illustrates a picture in his audiences mind. It paints a vivid picture allowing each individual to interpret the imagery in their own creative way; hence again drawing attention to the purpose of Henry’s speech. Henry understands the use and understanding of the concept of pathos or emotional appeal and clearly conveys it in his speech.

Again when he says “ Suffer not youelves to be betrayed with a kiss” (Henry, 1) is an example of imagery, but also a biblical allusion which may have appealed to people of faith in his immediate audience. Language choice affects the audience’s emotion response and pathos if used effectively like Henry had, can be used to enhance and persuade an argument even further. Another good example of pathos that Henry uses is “ 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" (Henry, 1). Phrases such as "armed in the holy cause of liberty" illustrate the importance of liberty and how it is the ultimate goal for the colonists and why it is necessary for "not only the Virginian delegates, but delegates and people all throughout the colonies to rise up against the trepidations of the British" ().

Lastly, Henry does a superb job of appealing to ethical issues surrounding how poorly the British have treated the American colonists. "'Have we shown ourselves so unwilling to be reconciled, that force must be called in to win back our love?' " (Henry, 1). By combining the use of a rhetorical question and ethical issues, Henry effectively juxtaposes "force" and "love" as two concepts which are clearly incompatible. Henry aggressively argues that the behavior in which the British act is wrong and unjust; the only way to respond is to resist, not accept such tyranny.

He argues that "love" is not a reasonable response to such "force".

Ultimately Patrick Henry is arguing that the "British are taking advantage of the colonists and will continue to do so until they are made to understand the price is too great" () His passion for liberty is evident throughout his whole speech. He stresses the importance of no longer depending on the British because it is an ethical issue. Henry then suggests 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! (Henry, 1) He uses flowing, logical language

to relate to his audience and create an emotional bonding between him and his audience. By using religion and the word " God" he is also able to create a spiritual connection to those religious members of the audience; stating " An appeal to arms and to the God of hosts is all that is left us! " (Henry, 1). He introduces this idea of violence and war, which is usually associated as unethical. However by including a religious symbol like " God", he is able to validate an unjust act such as war.

Patrick Henry uses extremely effective language, rhetorical devices, and usage of ethos and pathos to persuade his audience that action against the British is needed immediately. He believes it is a life or death situation; " Give me liberty, or give me death" (Henry, 1) and that the delegates and congress need to take action. Ultimately, Henry was successful in persuading his audience to take such action, even though some may have disagreed with him at the time. If it wasn't for Patrick Henry's ability to persuade and convince others, our nation as we know it today may be completely different.

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