

Give me liberty or give me death: the famous speech of patrick henry

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“ Give me liberty or give me death.” These famous words were uttered in the speech, “ the Speech In The Virginia Convention,” when Patrick Henry addresses the Virginia convention, specifically President Randolph in the March of 1775. Henry is respectfully expressing his opinion on what action America should take in regards to their conflict with Britain. Most of the other members in the convention think that they should approach the conflict peacefully, but Henry deems it necessary to prepare for war if Britain does not meet the commands of the colonists. In Patrick Henry’s speech in the Virginia Convention, he argues that there is no choice but for America to go to war and break away from Britain by confronting the actuality of how the colonists are being treated and by addressing the harsh reality of what will happen if they don’t go to war.

Patrick Henry argues to President Randolph and the Virginia Convention that the colonists should break away from Britain and go to war by confronting the way in which they are being currently treated. Henry urges the convention to “ listen to the song of that siren till she transforms us into beasts.” The mention of a siren is a mythological allusion to the Odyssey. Henry is metaphorically comparing the false hope that the British gave the colonies to Circe luring men onto her island. This false hope from Britain dehumanizes the colonists, playing on their emotions like anger and sadness, relating to pathos. Henry also explains how the British have an “ insidious smile with which our petition has been lately received.” Henry’s reference to an “ insidious smile” creates diction that appeals to pathos because it suggests that the British are misleading which would anger the colonists again with this idea of false hope. In addition, he confronts how the

colonists are being treated by saying that the colonists, "having eyes, see not, and, having ears, hear not." Henry is making a biblical allusion to Ezekial 12: 2 in order to create an appeal to pathos. This bible verse says that those who can't see or hear the truth about God, then they will lose their spiritual salvation. He relates this to how the colonists can't see or hear the truth of what the British are doing. Patrick Henry utilizes many rhetorical strategies such as allusion, biblical references, and pathos to confront the way the colonists are being treated by the British in order to convince the convention that going to war is the only option.

Patrick Henry urges the Virginia Convention that the colonists should break away from Britain by addressing the harsh reality of what will happen if they don't go to war. For example, during his speech, Patrick Henry speaks of how Britain will be "the next gale that sweeps." He metaphorically creates an appeal to pathos as he describes the advancement of the British military as a gale that will sweep from the north. Through this metaphor, Henry is explaining that just as a storm can't be stopped by man alone, the British will not be stopped by man alone either. This makes the point that only through God's power will they win the war and if they don't put all their force into fighting, they are going to get crushed. Patrick Henry also shows what will happen if the colonists don't go to war by explaining it as a, "question of freedom or slavery." He is referring to the need to fight for freedom. This appeals to pathos because he is trying to convince them that the only alternative to going to war is British rule/slavery. An idea of slavery would stir up fear and anger within the minds' of the colonists. Patrick Henry used

many rhetorical appeals to address what will happen to the colonists if they don't go to war.

Patrick Henry connects all of his points about confronting how they are being treated and what will happen if they don't go to war, by explaining that it is their divine, god given right to go to war with Britain. First, Henry states that the colonists must, " fulfill the great responsibility which we hold to God." He is using ethos because he is appealing to the authority of God. He is placing God on the colonists' side and calling on God's truth which shows that it is the colonists' divine right to break away. In addition, Patrick Henry also explains that if they don't go to war, it would be " an act of disloyalty towards the majesty of Heaven." He is explaining that if the colonists do not make an effort to break away or go to war, they would be dishonoring God. There is diction being used to show how God's authority is way above that of the king of Britain. Henry intertwined many references to God throughout his entire speech to connect all of his points by explaining that it is their divine right.

Patrick Henry argues that the colonists have no other choice but to break away from Britain by confronting the actuality of how the colonists are being treated and by explaining the reality of what will happen if they don't go to war. Henry strengthened these arguments by using many rhetorical appeals such as pathos, ethos, diction, metaphors, and many others. The words of Patrick Henry still resonate with people today in many issues in their fight for freedom; " give me liberty or give me death."