

MOMENT IN TIME

MARCH 23, 1775



American statesman Patrick Henry delivers his patriotic 'Give me liberty, or give me death!' speech before the Virginia Assembly in this artwork by Currier & Ives. MPI/GETTY IMAGES

PATRICK HENRY'S SPEECH FUELS AMERICAN PUSH FOR INDEPENDENCE

American politician Patrick Henry delivered an impassioned speech at a convention held at St. John's Church in Richmond, Va., finishing with the famous line: "Give me liberty, or give me death!" Henry had argued that war with the British Empire was inevitable and necessary, and the speech was aimed at persuading attendees, including future U.S. presidents George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, to agree to sending Virginian troops to battle for independence. Gaining support at the convention, Henry assembled and led a local militia that weeks later

fended off a British attempt to seize a stash of gunpowder at Williamsburg. Henry went on to become Virginia's first governor. Though Henry's speech did sway the influential audience, his exact words spoken are the subject of debate by historians. Biographer William Wirt created a reconstruction of the speech in 1817 after corresponding with attendees and others decades after it was delivered, based on their recollections. Historians question how much of the recreated speech was Henry's words versus Wirt's own version of what was said.

4/4/87



"For crying out loud, Patrick—sit down. ...
And enough with the 'give me the potatoes or
give me death' nonsense."

Somehow I have a memory of another Gary Larson "Far Side" cartoon in which Patrick Henry is a little boy rising up to exclaim "Give me the salt or give me death!" only to have his mother shush him. TJB