

Roots in Ripon

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Chuck Roots

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Homage to Patrick Henry

School was a drudgery for me. I don't mean the school itself. My teachers were very patient and helpful. The teachers I had throughout elementary, junior and senior high always dressed well. The men wore a coat and tie, and the ladies wore dresses or skirt/blouse combos. I wanted to like the subjects, such as math, science, English composition, and so on, but it was a continuous struggle for me to earn the barest of passing grades.

The one subject I always gravitated to was history. World history, Ancient history, American history – it didn't matter. It was fascinating to me how others lived their lives and dealt with life's challenges.

In particular, I loved American history, and still do to this day. Of special interest to me is the Revolutionary period from 1770-1790. This was the time of trial for an emerging nation faced with internal conflict and external threat from the parent nation, Great Britain, forcing the colonists to kowtow to the King of England and the pernicious offspring's of a self-absorbed monarchy . . . or else!

The colonists who were already settled in New England and the eastern seaboard enjoyed a thriving commercial venture with the parent nation, England. Tea, tobacco, and cotton were just a few of the products brought in or shipped out of the colonies. However, the government of England ignored the growing complaints from the slighted colonists who took umbrage to the fact that their attempts at being heard suffered a cold shoulder by a callous, uncaring monarchy. Instead, they were given short-shrift, often never giving audience to distant aggrieved loyal American subjects. Some historians suggest that as many as one third of the colonists were opposed to war with Britain.

These American colonists were faithful to the British crown, believing that their hard work and steadfast dedication as subjects to an ever-growing British influence world-wide would be to their benefit. Such wishful thinking was not to be.

Colonists struggled under the increasing taxation levied against them. In addition, they resented the heavy-handed manner imposed by a British military requiring by force the housing of troops in American homes against the will of the home owners. Further grievances included a deaf ear from the British parliament concerning a myriad of issues the colonists felt were wrongly imposed on them. Thus, the cry of "No Taxation without Representation" was given a voice. A forced

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religious acceptance (the Church of England), a free press, and a host of other protests were gaining traction within the American colonies.

So, on March 23, 1775, Patrick Henry stood to speak at St. John's Church, Richmond, Virginia. It is often listed as the "Give Me Liberty, or Give Me Death!" speech. The British army and navy had amassed along the shoreline of Virginia. This was not a church service, or a meeting of the congregants. No, this was a meeting of the Second Virginia Convention, meeting in a church far away from the capital which was then Williamsburg. In so doing, the delegates hoped not to incite reprisals from the British Lieutenant Governor.

Patrick Henry listened to various speakers, all recommending supplication to the British crown. Henry had heard enough of this blather. He is literally disgusted with the quisling attitude of his fellow Americans colonists.

In the remainder of this article I will share snippets of Patrick Henry's speech. It should genuinely stir a flow of patriotic blood coursing through your veins.

"MR. PRESIDENT: No man thinks more highly than I do of the patriotism, as well as abilities, of the very worthy gentlemen who have just addressed the House. But different men often see the same subject in different lights; and, therefore, I hope it will not be thought disrespectful to those gentlemen if, entertaining as I do, opinions of a character very opposite to theirs, I shall speak forth my sentiments freely, and without reserve. This is no time for ceremony . . . Should I keep back my opinions at such a time, through fear of giving offence, I should consider myself as guilty of treason towards my country, and of an act of disloyalty toward the majesty of heaven, which I revere above all earthly kings.

"They tell us, sir, that we are weak; unable to cope with so formidable an adversary. But when shall we be stronger? . . . Sir, we are not weak if we make a proper use of those means which the God of nature hath 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 . . . The war is inevitable and let it come! I repeat it, sir, let it come.

"It is in 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, give me liberty or give me death!"

What a patriot!