



Eleven years before the American Colonies signed their Declaration of Independence from Britain, their legislative representatives—in places like Virginia's House of Burgesses—were debating how the King and Parliament were treating Americans.

Many were very unhappy about the various Parliamentary laws, including the Stamp Act.

On the 30th of May, 1765, Patrick Henry—ever the fiery orator—ended his remarks with strong words considered, by some, to be treason. He had just turned 29 years old, the day before, and had been a representative in the House of Burgesses for just a few days.

What were the words which people considered treasonous? They came near the end of his speech—his very first in the House of Burgesses—when he was criticizing Parliament for the Stamp Act.

Expanding from his criticism of Parliament to direct criticism of King George III, Henry said:

*Caesar had his Brutus, Charles the First his Cromwell and George the Third ...*

When he reached that point, other representatives in the chamber realized that Patrick was talking about leaders who'd been assassinated: Caesar by Brutus, Charles the First by Cromwell.

Was Patrick Henry suggesting that the very-much alive George III would (or should) also face such an end?

Several individuals must have *thought* so because they interrupted Henry with cries of "Treason!"

Undaunted, the speaker calmly continued with his point and ended with a statement he likely hadn't planned to make:

*... may profit by their example. If this be treason, make the most of it.*

This speech was about a decade before Patrick Henry said some more memorable words in a different speech:

*Give me liberty or give me death!*

This painting, by Peter Rothermel, depicts Patrick Henry before the Virginia House of Burgesses in 1765. Rothermel created the work in 1851.

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