



Patrick Henry

1736 – 1799

Name _____

Patrick Henry was born in 1736 to John Henry and Sarah Winston Henry in Hanover County, Virginia. He did not attend school. He was taught at home by his father to read and to speak Latin. As a young man, he was unsuccessful at farming for he did not enjoy hard labor. Henry tried to open and run a store, but unfortunately he developed a large amount of debt and was forced to close his business. Henry married at the age of 18 and needed income to support his young family. At last, Henry decided to become a lawyer. He taught himself everything he needed to know for the Attorney's examination which he took and passed in Williamsburg, Virginia in 1760.

He was successful as a lawyer and developed the Parsons' Cause document which defended the colonies' right to set the price of tobacco instead of England. Henry was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses in 1764. From this point forward, he began speaking out against the rule of England. He was one of the most vocal supporters of the rights of the American Colonies. During this time, Lord Dunmore from Britain was the Governor of Virginia. The members of the House of Burgesses spoke out against the Stamp Act imposed by England. (The Stamp Act placed a tax on all printed documents, used or created by the colonists. The money from the tax funded the defense of the American frontier near the Appalachian Mountains.) This upset Lord Dunmore and he dissolved the Virginia House of Burgesses. As a result, the members of the House of Burgesses organized a meeting at a local tavern in Williamsburg. They sent out a request to the colonies to send delegates to the 1st Continental Congress.

On March 23, 1775, Patrick Henry called his fellow Virginians to arms against the tyranny of the British. It was then that he delivered his famous speech "Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death" which echoed the sentiments of every patriot. This speech is said to have been the factor that initiated the Virginians to march on Lord Dunmore and the British troops in retaliation for the British taking munitions from the Virginia armory. This was the beginning of the Revolutionary War in Virginia. This event occurred hours after the Battle of Concord in Massachusetts began. Although Henry was willing to engage on the battlefield, many officials felt that his actions were too erratic and he was better suited for positions in governmental office and delivering speeches rather than leading troops.



In June of 1776, Patrick Henry was elected the first Governor of Virginia. While in office, he made sure the colonial soldiers were supplied with clothing and food. He also made sure that Virginia produced ammunition and he arranged for the defense of the Virginia coast. Henry remained in office until 1779. He was elected as Governor again from 1784 to 1786. He ultimately served five, one-year terms as Governor of Virginia.

Patrick Henry was an eloquent orator who supported the rights of the colonies to govern themselves, however; he did not believe in a strong centralized government. He believed that each state should be granted the power to govern itself through elected officials without the interference of a strong centralized government. It was this belief that led Henry to organize the Virginia delegates to oppose ratifying the Constitution of the United States.

Upon his retirement from public office in 1794, Patrick Henry lived out the rest of his life on Red Hill Plantation in Virginia. This is where he assumed his private legal practice. Yet in 1795, George Washington convinced Henry to become a candidate for State Legislature in light of the fact that the young republic was then in danger. There were many who felt that each state should have the power to nullify the acts of the Federal Government. Soon, his failing health forced him to decline many other nominated positions such as, Secretary of the State, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Minister to Spain and France, and a sixth term as Governor. As his last public act, Henry delivered an inspirational speech pleading with government officials to preserve the unity of the nation.

Patrick Henry died on June 6, 1799; “The Voice of the Revolution” was silenced.

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Discussion Questions:

1. What career did Patrick Henry find himself best suited for?
2. What governmental offices did Patrick Henry hold?
3. What is an orator?
4. What does it mean to be patriotic?
5. What event preceded Lord Dunmore dissolving the Virginia House of Burgesses?

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Discussion Questions:

1. What career did Patrick Henry find himself best suited for?

A) *lawyer*

2. What governmental offices did Patrick Henry hold?

A) *member of the House of Burgesses*

3. What is an orator?

A) *A public speaker (Henry was a great one)*

4. What does it mean to be patriotic?

A) *love of country, civic virtue, thinking of the common good before that of yourself*

5. What event preceded Lord Dunmore dissolving the Virginia House of Burgesses?

A) *members of the Virginia House of Burgesses protested the Stamp Act*

6. The members of the House of Burgesses aided in forming what important governmental event as a result Lord Dunmore's actions?

A) *1st Continental Congress*

7. In March of 1775, Patrick Henry delivered a famous, inspirational speech which included the statement, “Give me liberty or give me death.” What do you think he meant by his statement?

A) *He would rather die than give up his freedom.*

8. What actions by the British led Patrick Henry to deliver this speech?

A) *Lord Dunmore dissolved the House of Burgesses.*

9. As Governor of Virginia, what role did Patrick Henry play in supporting the Revolutionary War?

A) *He supported Virginian troops by establishing factories to make supplies for the soldiers.*

10. What form of government did Patrick Henry firmly believe the colonies should operate under?

A) *One in which the states ran their own affairs.*