

Patrick Henry

1736–1799



WHY HE MADE HISTORY Patrick Henry was a political activist and gifted speaker. His actions helped energize the colonists to seek freedom from England. He continued to serve his country after the war by holding several leadership positions.



As you read the biography below, think about how Patrick Henry's patriotism made him a leader in the fight for America's freedom.

“I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!” These famous words spoken by Patrick Henry in 1775 represent his tremendous passion for freedom. A native of Virginia, Patrick Henry was a self-taught trial lawyer who developed his famous speaking skills by presenting cases in court. In 1764 Henry argued in front of Virginia's House of Burgesses in favor of broad voting rights. The next year Patrick Henry was elected to serve in the House of Burgesses. He became known as it's most radical and outspoken member.

In 1765, Great Britain forced the Stamp Act on the colonists. The Stamp Act was the British government's first attempt at taxing the colonists directly. Henry, like many others, did not agree with this tax. He stood before the House of Burgesses and boldly argued against the Stamp Act. The House passed four of his resolutions in opposition to the Stamp Act. The tax was **repealed** by Parliament the very next year.

Patrick Henry urged his fellow colonists to challenge the British government. His **fiery** speeches moved many colonists to arm themselves against



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VOCABULARY

repealed to revoke or cancel a law

fiery charged with emotion

the British. In 1775, he led the call for a Continental Congress, where he argued for independence from Great Britain.

After the outbreak of the American Revolution, Henry served as the governor of Virginia and helped create that state's constitution. Henry's dedication to public service led him to serve five terms as Virginia's governor.

Following the war, Patrick Henry continued his leadership in the newly formed United States of America. A fierce supporter of individual rights, Henry played an important role in adding the first ten amendments, or Bill of Rights, to the Constitution. While Henry was asked to serve in other important leadership positions, such as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, his declining health forced him to turn down the offers. He died in 1799 at Red Hill Plantation, his home in Virginia.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. Drawing Conclusions Why did Patrick Henry oppose the Stamp Act?

2. Supporting a Point of View What do you think was Patrick Henry's greatest accomplishment? Provide reasons or examples to support your point of view.

ACTIVITY

3. Patrick Henry is remembered for his bold and empowering speeches. Choose a topic you feel strongly about. Do research. Write a short speech expressing your feelings about your topic. Be sure to support your position with facts from your research.