

thought disrespectful to those gentlemen, if, entertaining² 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. **1** The question before the House is one of awful moment³ to this country. For my own part I consider it as nothing less than a question of freedom or slavery; and in proportion to the magnitude of the subject ought to be the freedom of the debate. It is only in this way that we can hope to arrive at truth, and fulfill the great responsibility which we hold to God and our country. Should I keep back my opinions at such a time, through fear of giving offense, I should consider myself as guilty of treason toward my country, and of an act of disloyalty toward the majesty of heaven, which I revere above all earthly kings. **2**

Mr. President, it is natural to man to indulge in the illusions of hope. We are apt to shut our eyes against a painful truth, and listen to the song of that siren, till she transforms us into beasts.⁴ Is this the part of wise men, engaged in a great and arduous struggle for liberty? Are we disposed to be of the number of those who, having eyes, see not, and having ears, hear not, the things which so nearly concern their temporal salvation? For my part, whatever anguish of spirit it may cost, I am willing to know the whole truth; to know the worst and to provide for it.

2. **entertaining** v.: having in mind; considering.

3. **awful moment**: great importance.

4. **listen . . . beasts**: In Greek mythology, the sirens are sea maidens whose seductive singing lures men to wreck their boats on coastal rocks. In the *Odyssey*, Circe, an enchanter, transforms Odysseus's men into swine after they arrive at her island home. Henry's allusion combines these two stories.

1
In his opening remarks, Henry makes a respectful appeal to his audience. He anticipates their objections to what he is about to say.

? What effect might his appeal have on his audience?

B

2
Simply put, how does Henry describe the question or debate that is before the Convention?

I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided; and that is the lamp of experience. I know of no way of judging of the future but by the past. And judging by the past, I wish to know what there has been in the conduct of the British ministry for the last ten years, to justify those hopes with which gentlemen have been pleased to solace themselves and the House? Is it that insidious smile with which our petition⁵ has been lately received? Trust it not, sir; it will prove a snare to your feet. Suffer not yourselves to be betrayed with a kiss. Ask yourselves how this gracious reception of our petition comports⁶ with these warlike preparations which cover our waters and darken our land. Are fleets and armies necessary to a work of love and reconciliation? Have we shown ourselves so unwilling to be reconciled, that force must be called in to win back our love? Let us not deceive ourselves, sir. These are the implements of war and subjugation;⁷ the last arguments to which kings resort. **3**

I ask gentlemen, sir, what means this martial array, if its purpose be not to force us to submission? Can gentlemen assign any other possible motives for it? Has Great Britain any enemy, in this quarter of the world, to call for all this accumulation

D **3**
Henry asks his listeners to look back on past experiences. He lists the recent actions of King George III and the English army to support his main idea—that the colonists are mistaken in thinking that the British are ready to compromise.

5. **our petition**: The First Continental Congress had recently protested against new tax laws. King George III had withdrawn the laws conditionally, but the colonists were unwilling to accept his conditions.

6. **comports** v.: agrees.

7. **subjugation** n.: conquest; domination.

Vocabulary

solace (säl'is) v.: comfort.

insidious (in·sid'ē·əs) adj.: sly; sneaky.

martial (mär'shal) adj.: warlike.