



The Bloody Massacre perpetrated in . . . Boston on March 5th, 1770 (1770), Paul Revere. Colored engraving. Private collection. /Art Resource, New York.

Sir, we have done everything that could be done to avert the storm which is now coming on. We have petitioned; we have **remonstrated**; we have supplicated; we have prostrated ourselves before the throne, and have implored
 50 its interposition⁶ to arrest the tyrannical hands of the ministry and Parliament. Our petitions have been slighted; our remonstrances have produced additional violence and insult; our supplications have been disregarded; and we have been spurned, with contempt, from the foot of the throne. In vain, after these things, may we indulge the fond hope of peace and reconciliation. There is no longer any room for hope.

remonstrate
 (rĭ-mŏn'strāt') v. to object;
 to protest strongly

6. **we have prostrated . . . interposition:** We have thrown ourselves at the feet of the king and have begged for intervention.

If we wish to be free—if we mean to preserve **inviolable** those inestimable privileges for which we have been so long contending—if we mean not basely to abandon the noble struggle in which we have been so long engaged, and which we have pledged ourselves never to abandon until the glorious object of our contest shall be obtained, we must fight! I repeat it, sir, we must fight! An appeal to arms and to the God of Hosts is all that is left us!

They tell us, sir, that we are weak—unable to cope with so formidable an adversary. But when shall we be stronger? Will it be the next week, or the next year? Will it be when we are totally disarmed, and when a British guard shall be stationed in every house? Shall we gather strength by irresolution and inaction? Shall we acquire the means of effectual resistance, by lying **supinely** on our backs, and hugging the delusive phantom of hope, until our enemies shall have bound us hand and foot?

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, and who will raise up friends to fight our battles for us. The battle, sir, is not to the strong alone;⁷ it is to the **vigilant**, the active, the brave. Besides, sir, we have no election.⁸ If we were base enough to desire it, it is now too late to retire from the contest. There is no retreat but in submission and slavery! Our chains are forged! Their clanking may be heard on the plains of Boston! The war is inevitable—and let it come! I repeat it, sir, let it come! **F**

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 north⁹ 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! **G**

inviolable (ɪn-vi-ə-lɪt) *adj.*
not violated; intact

supinely (sū-pīn-lē) *adv.*
in a manner with the face upward

invincible (ɪn-vɪn-sə-bəl) *adj.*
unbeatable

vigilant (vɪj-ə-lənt) *adj.*
alert; watchful

F Rhetorical Devices

Why do you think Henry repeats the word *sir* so often in this paragraph? Explain the likely effect of this **repetition** as well as that of the phrase “let it come!”

extenuate (ɪk-stēn-yō-āt) *v.* to lessen the seriousness of, especially by providing partial excuses

G Persuasive Speech

How might the speaker’s **pace** and **emphasis** have changed over the course of the speech? How might his audience have responded to these changes? Explain.

7. **battle . . . strong alone:** an allusion to Ecclesiastes 9:11 in the Bible, “the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.”

8. **election:** choice.

9. **the next gale . . . north:** Some colonists in Massachusetts had already shown open resistance to the British and were on the brink of war.