

Adapted from fellow Virginian Patrick Henry's, "Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death" Speech March 23, 1775.



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Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death! (de nuevo)

Adapted July 4, 2016

Presented at January 5, 2017 Press Conference, The Methodist Building, Washington, D.C. by Rev. Dr. Madeline McClenney-Sadler, Ph.D, a Richmond, Virginia native location of the site where Patrick Henry delivered this speech to the 2nd Virginia Convention to Convention President Peyton Randolph. Press Conference covered by NBC Washington.

Dear President Obama:

No person thinks more highly than I do of the patriotism, as well as the abilities of the very worthy congressional representatives who have addressed the House and Senate regarding prison reform. But different people often see the same subject in different lights; and therefore, I hope it will not be thought disrespectful to those members, if entertaining as I do, opinions of a character very opposite theirs, I shall speak my thoughts freely, and without holding back. The delusion of my own freedom sickens me. I write as one who has been unfree from the invasions and predatory reach of the criminal justice system. I write as one

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who has watched fellow classmates, citizens and immigrants placed on the pipeline to the prison cage. I write as if I am one who cannot accept the unjust sentence I am serving in federal prison and beyond. If 2.2 million Americans are not free, and 60 million are stamped with a scarlet letter "F", then I am not free, even though I do not have a record nor have I been held in a cage. I cannot pursue my own happiness, a right guaranteed by the *Bill of Rights*, while so many Americans and immigrants are oppressed. This is no time for ceremony. The question before the White House is a watershed moment to this country. For my own part, I consider it as nothing less than a question of freedom or slavery. With respect to prison slavery and the evil disregard for the 14th Amendment, there must be a debate equal to the magnitude of this monster known as the prison-industrial-complex. It is only in this way that we can hope to arrive at truth and fulfil the great responsibility which we hold to God and our country. If I were to keep back my opinions at such a time, through fear of giving offence, I should consider myself as guilty of treason towards my country, and an act of disloyalty toward the majesty of Heaven, which I revere above all people with power.

Mr. President, it is natural to human beings to indulge in the illusions of hope--hope that prison reform is occurring at a steady pace--hope that the next president will build upon your legacy--hope that no economic downturn or war will delay the pursuit of justice for those in cages and their families. We are apt to shut our eyes against a painful truth and listen to the song of hope delayed till she transforms us into beasts who accept justice denied. Is this the part of wise leaders, engaged in a great and arduous struggle for liberty? Are we to be like those who hide their heads in the sand, who have eyes and do not see the slaughter, who have ears and do not hear the cries of children for their parents who grow old in our prisons for nonviolent or spurious charges? Are we dead to the things that concern our immediate salvation? For my part, whatever heartbreaking truth is revealed, I am willing to know the whole truth; to know the worst and to find a solution for it.

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I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided; it is "Ariyah," which in Hebrew means the LORD is my light. That Heavenly light bears witness to the reliability of experience. I know of no way of judging the future but by the past. And judging by the past, I wish to know what has there been in the conduct of the House of Representatives or the Senate, for the last 52 years, to justify any hope for a deplorable network of prison plantations to be reformed or abolished? With which hope may a President be pleased to solace himself? Is it that insidious marking up and marking down of the Sentencing Reform and Corrections act which has now lost its teeth and moves forward as all gum? Trust the legislative process not, sir; it will prove a snare to your feet. Some have predicted, if we continue this pace of reform, it will take 80 years to return to the prison population of the 1970's which was decried as outrageous at that time. Many will die in the cage before then! Do not let yourself be betrayed with a kiss. Ask yourself how the gracious reception of prison reform compares to proposals for more felonies and mandatory minimums which appear in odd legislation and cast a shadow on genuine care for human rights. Are solutions designed for implementation *inside* the prison cage necessary for a work of love and reconciliation? As I sit in this cage, am I so beyond redemption that I may not make things right in my community while living and supervised *in* the community with or near my loved ones? Have those of us in the cage shown ourselves so unwilling to be better people that cruel and unusual punishments with excessive force must be called in to win back our love for doing the right thing? Do not be deceived, sir. These are the implements of the War on Drugs and subjugation; the last arguments to which abusive leaders resort. I ask, dear Sir, what is this array of police in our towns and cities, if its purpose be not to force us to submission and capture us for the cage? Can gentlemen assign any other possible motive for it? Has the United States any enemy, in this quarter of the world, to call for all this accumulation of harsh laws and sentences? No, Sir, she has none. They are meant for us; working people with few resources, poor white people, and people of color. The data show these laws were meant for no other. These laws were designed to bind and rivet upon us chains of a political backlash designed to make emancipation, the New Deal and Affirmative Action of marginal benefit for the masses. I live as an animal caged by violent legal policies as

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businesses begin to make billions of dollars engaging in the same activity, the sale of marijuana, for which I was labeled as public enemy number one. And what have we to oppose these harsh laws? Shall we try argument? Sir, policymakers, activists, and legislators of goodwill have been trying that for the last 52 years. Have we anything new to offer upon the subject? Nothing save the complete abolition of the federal prison system to be replaced by a Restorative Justice System as outlined in the "Sense of the House Resolution" that we have already submitted to Congressional members. We have held the subject up in every light of which it is capable; but it has been all in vain. Shall we resort to entreaty and humble supplication? What terms shall we find which have not been already exhausted? Do not, I beseech you sir, be deceived. Sir, we have done everything that could be done as imprisoned persons, activists, family members and advocates to avert the storm which is now coming on our national budget and public welfare. We have petitioned; we have remonstrated; we have supplicated; we have prostrated ourselves before the White House, and have implored its interposition to arrest the tyrannical hands of the War on Drugs. Our applications for commutations have been slighted; our remonstrances for 2nd Chances have led to lower levels of funding for programs and budgetary neglect for the White House office of Pardons; our remonstrances around predatory policing have produced additional violence and insult for unarmed citizens and immigrants; our supplications have been disregarded; and we have been spurned with contempt from seats of power. In vain, after these things, may we indulge the fond hope of peace and reconciliation. There is no longer any room for hope. If we wish to be free, if we mean to preserve inviolate these 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 to release all nonviolent and overcharged persons in federal prison and to replace federal prisons with locked mental health facilities where rehabilitation and not punishment carries the day. You sir, can end this war with the stroke of your pen and the ingenuity of the Exodus Coalition plan. Let *not* these overcharged dying prisoners lives be all that is left to us. Instead, let us

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enter into the most holy of communions and appeal as one race, the human race, to the God of Hosts to lead us in this struggle for liberation at lightning speed to secure a peaceful transition from criminal justice to restorative justice by first liberating those unjustly sentenced and pardoning those already released.

They tell us, sir, that those of us behind bars are not worthy of liberation, unable to cope with so formidable a transition from the cage to freedom. But when shall we be stronger? Will it be the next week, or the next year? Will it be when there is martial law in every town and city? Shall we gather strength by irresolution and inaction? Shall we acquire the means of an effective re-entry by lying supinely on our backs in our cells and hugging the delusive phantom of hope, until those who dehumanize us have our children bound up too in your prisons—hand and foot? Sir, we are not weak, if you issue federal re-entry debit cards toward our housing, education, and maintenance for 5 years through qualified 501c3's we will rise up, do better, and contribute as tax paying citizens. We are not weak if we make proper use of those programs and ministries which the God of nature hath placed in our power. Eighty thousand federally convicted inmates classified as nonviolent can set an example for 1.9 million state inmates leading to mass freedom in the states, set by your example. Armed with resources, in the holy cause of liberty, and in such a country as that which we possess, we are invincible to any force which the War on Drugs can send against us. We are the ones this nation has been looking for to restore peace to the streets. We will bring our wisdom and street credibility to the gangs of Chicago, Detroit, Baltimore and Charlotte, and show them a better way. Besides, sir, we shall not fight our battles alone. There is a just God who presides over the destinies of prisoners and who will raise up friends and advocates like the trained mentors at Exodus Foundation.org to fight our battles for us. The battle, sir, is not to the strong alone; it is to the vigilant, the active, the brave. Besides, sir, we have no choice. If we were downtrodden enough to desire it, it is now too late to retire from the struggle for freedom. Those who have no fight, can stay in the cage. But as for most of us in prison, there is no retreat but in submission and slavery! Our chains are forged. Their clanking may be heard at Allentown FCI and Butner FCI. Their clanking may be

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heard from Florence ADX to Danbury FCI. The end to slavery in U.S. prisons is inevitable and let it come! I repeat sir, let it come by your pen! *Release all nonviolent federally convicted and overcharged persons using the Exodus Coalition plan, restore voting rights while incarcerated to all federal prisoners, pardon those already released, utilize savings to free us with five year re-entry debit cards for housing, education, health and maintenance, declare a moratorium on all juvenile arrests and arrests for all nonviolent offenses, issue an order to bring the Bureau of Prisons under the Department of Education, declare an end to the Department of Justice and the beginning of the Department of Restorative Justice, order the retraining of all corrections officers to become restorative justice officers, order the minimum wage for prison labor in federal prison to be equal to the minimum wage for the general public.*

It is in vain, sir, to continue to discuss the matter. Politicians and preachers may cry, peace, peace, but there is no peace. The resistance to the War on Drugs is actually begun! The next reform bill will bring to our ears the clash of insincere leaders who take up this cause for personal gain and dedicated legislators who fight for those of us used and abused by prison profiteers paying us pennies an hour for our labor. Your supporters are already in the field Mr. President. Do not let us stand here idle! What is it that Presidents 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! Time's Up Mr. President-Let Us Go! I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!

This concludes the adaptation word for word and style for style of Patrick Henry's speech with only subject matter changes. January 5, 2017, begins the national Sacred Fast/Hunger Strike. In symbolic union with prisoners dying in federal prison with long sentences, Dr. McClenney will refuse both solid food and water if there is no response, adoption of the Exodus Coalition Plan, adoption of something better or at a minimum an explanation of refusal from the White House by January 16th. "And if I perish, I perish." Esther 4:16, says Dr. McClenney.