

## Four Overrated Speeches

We know these speeches for their historical importance. But were they really any good? Try struggling through them online and see for yourself.

**1. PATRICK HENRY’S “GIVE ME LIBERTY OR GIVE ME DEATH” SPEECH, 1775.** That Henry didn’t write it isn’t important. But he didn’t even speak it—except perhaps for the last line. Forty years after Henry’s utterance, a biographer fabricated this wordy piece of fiction, with its obsequious opening, abstract litanies, and overwrought comparisons with slavery attributed to the slaveholding Henry.

[bit.ly/Patrick\\_Henry\\_Liberty](http://bit.ly/Patrick_Henry_Liberty)

**2. GEORGE WASHINGTON’S FAREWELL, 1796.** There were great eighteenth-century prose stylists—Franklin, Dryden, Swift. But Washington wasn’t one, nor was Hamilton, who helped with this speech. Filled with clichés, an example of argument by assertion, the farewell could be clearer and more graceful at half the length.

[bit.ly/George\\_Washington\\_farewell](http://bit.ly/George_Washington_farewell)

**3. FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT’S FIRST INAUGURAL ADDRESS, 1933.** What is so noteworthy about the one famous line? Weren’t there lots of things to fear in January 1933? Meanwhile, the rest of it, written by Roosevelt and his aide Raymond Moley, describes sensible policies with a mix of abstractions, clichés (“Nature offers her bounty”), and bromides (“Happiness lies not in the mere possession of money”). [bit.ly/FDR\\_inaugural](http://bit.ly/FDR_inaugural)

**4. HUBERT HUMPHREY’S DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION SPEECH ON CIVIL RIGHTS, 1948.** I wish we could give high marks to this pioneering speech by the loquacious Humphrey, whose wife once rebuked him by saying, “Hubert, to be immortal a speech doesn’t have to be eternal.” But the speech is devoid of concrete detail or story, pretends that civil rights is about “no single racial or religious group,” and includes interminable and insincere praise for the Strom Thurmond–backing white racists preparing to walk out.

[bit.ly/Humphrey\\_1948](http://bit.ly/Humphrey_1948)