**A speech, probably by John Neilson, transcribed by Ben Smith of the Public Sculpture Committee from the Rutgers Special Collections—Neilson Family Papers, Box 1. It appears that it was transcribed from an original, maybe many years later. We know that Neilson was one of the men charged with raising the Middlesex militia. This appears to be a recruiting speech, probably made at some point in 1775.**

Anxious for the safety of my country I would beg leave to address you in a few words on the present alarming situation of public affairs:

Distress and horror must fill the breast of every humane friend to this once happy country when he reflects on the unhappy controversy between us and the parent state—I say once happy and hope by the virtue of its inhabitants it will continue so to the end of time—Its owing to this unnatural contest we are now preparing ourselves in the use of arms to oppose the mercenary hirelings of an oppressive ministry from carrying into execution their abominable instructions –

Intentions, my countrymen, no less than enslaving a vast continent containing at least 3 million souls—Unnatural, unjust & injurious wretches who to satisfy their unbounded thirst after power are deluging their country in the blood of its Inhabitants, to prosecute their hellish designs are beholding with unrelenting remorse the subjects of the same monarch! Dying their swords in the blood of each other! And what is all this carnage for? Merely to satisfy the implacable and avaricious dispositions of few tyrannical villains, who with the plunder of the nation have brought over to their interest a venal Parliament that they may have some appearance of law in their favor. Unhappy land whose great bulwark of safety is made subservient to such diabolical purposes, and instead of protecting are murdering its people.

“The British Parliament has no right to tax America”, is a universal maxim and a subject so generally treated on, that its certain every person here well knows the moment we give up that point, that moment we plunge ourselves and all our posterity into the most abject slavery that can be imagined under an arbitrary Government; to carry into execution those intentions we find these vile usurpers taking every unfair unnatural and wicked steps which may sufficiently convince us we have nothing to expect from them but what we can indicate with our swords!

Come on then determined to be freemen or die in support in support of that heavenly character, let not all our vaunting declarations of valor and braveness be merely ideal but let it appear from our conduct we are determined to support the character we would wish to deserve and if it’s in our power we will preserve our privileges pure.

Be assured my countrymen there’s nothing left for us but victory or slavery. Fix this well in your minds and I am certain there is not a person here but will be determined to die or conquer and thereby frustrate the wicked designs of a despotic ministry. Can it be possible that we should suffer so shameful a reproach from our posterity that in our generation we had tamely given up all our ancient liberties and matchless privileges and by such disgraceful conduct had plunged them into all the difficulties of an arbitrary government? No, it’s impossible that we who know the happiness we enjoy under a glorious constitution should suffer it to be handed down to posterity contaminated or in a less degree of purity than we have enjoyed it.

Union and harmony, my countrymen, are absolutely necessary in carrying on in this grand opposition with any degree of success. Herein consists the great safety and strength of a people, let us then unite ourselves in the most strict and sacred manner, let nothing of ambition appear among us but the glory of appearing foremost in the great work of preserving our country! Let us suppress every private difference and party spirit, let not discord and animosities prevail among us, but let harmony and friendship be the standard of our conduct. In this situation, with the assistance of heaven, we may sit defiant to all the power of tyranny and despotism.

Let me entreat each of who have not already done it to be industrious in procuring the necessary articles recommended by the honorable Continental Congress to put you in a situation to oppose any force that may appear against us. I know it’s difficult at this time to provide those articles as sufficiently as could be wished, but I know as well we might be much better provided if we would work ourselves. Do not then be indolent about this matter of so great importance. No less a matter than your liberties is in danger. What is life without liberty to freeborn subjects? Is this a matter of so trifling importance that you can be indolent about the only means under heaven to preserve it?

If we are to be free, we must be determined at all events within the reach of human power to be so. If we will expect any favors from the divine directors and supreme general of the universe we must exert ourselves! Endeavour by our constant conduct in private life to ingratiate ourselves in his favor. In public, or in the character of soldiers, be valiant, brave, and determined that this is the only alternative we have left to slavery and wretchedness. Let me exhort you to consider that on your conduct at this time depends your future enjoyment of peace and liberty, or your subjection to a tyrannical government with all its grievous consequences.

Think at the same time of the vast difference of handing down to posterity freedom with all its beauties and happiness, or slavery with all its dreadful attendance. The Provincial Congress have though proper to honor me with the command of the battalion of Minute Men to be raised in the county, which appointment takes me off from the (illeg!) The Officers of this regiment we pleased to honor me with. It heartily thank you for the confidence you placed in me in that appointment and shall endeavor by my conduct to merit a continuance of your esteem in particular and the favor of my County in general. Agreeable to the Directors of the Congresses, a part of the militia are to be embodied as minute men who are to be ready at the shortest notice to march to the defense of this or the neighboring colonies.

These are to be such who cheerfully turn out and unite themselves for this purpose and thereby show their determined resolution to do all in their power to save their country from ruin. Here is an opportunity to show your patriotism. Here, my countrymen, is an opportunity for you to have your names recorded in the annals of American history as heroes in defense of their just rights and privileges and men determined to preserve the happy Constitution they live under free from the violation offered it by the foes of liberty.

Embrace this opportunity all you sons of liberty and true friends to your country, here is an opportunity for you to appear conspicuous and show that you are determined to catch at the first chance to render your country services. Here is true honor and glory to be acquired, not the glory of aggrandizing ourselves at the expense of others misery. No, my countrymen, but the noble, glorious and unparalleled honor of assisting to save your country from slavery and ruin! The glory of preserving and establishing for rising generations the happiness we enjoy under a glorious Constitution. These are considerations, my countrymen, that cannot but inflame your patriotic breasts with heroism and induce you to determine we will not be governed by tyranny and despotism. This, my countrymen, is sufficient motive to induce you to comply with the desire of our worthy representative.