

Susan B. Anthony's Return to the "Old Union" speech, 1863

There is great fear expressed on all sides lest this war shall be made a war for the negro. I am willing that it shall be. It is a war to found an empire on the negro in slavery, and shame on us if we do not make it a war to establish the negro in freedom— against whom the whole nation, North and South, East and West, in one mighty conspiracy, has combined from the beginning. Instead of suppressing the real cause of the war, it should have been proclaimed, not only by the people, but by the President, Congress, Cabinet, and every military commander. Instead of President Lincoln's waiting two long years before calling to the side of the Government the four millions of allies whom we have had within the territory of rebeldom, it should have been the first decree he sent forth. Every hour's delay, every life sacrificed up to the proclamation that called the slave to freedom and to arms, was nothing less than downright murder by the Government. For by all the laws of common-sense— to say nothing of laws military or national— if the President, as Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy, could have devised any possible means whereby he might hope to suppress the rebellion, without the sacrifice of the life of one loyal citizen, without the sacrifice of one dollar of the loyal North, it was clearly his duty to have done so. Every interest of the insurgents, every dollar of their property, every institution, however peculiar, every life in every rebel State, even, if necessary, should have been sacrificed, before one dollar or one man should have been drawn from the free States. How much more, then, was it the President's duty to confer freedom on the four million slaves, transform them into a peaceful army for the Union, cripple the rebellion, and establish justice, the only sure foundation of peace! I therefore hail the day when the Government shall recognize that it is a war for freedom. We talk about returning to the old Union—" the Union as it was," and "the Constitution as it is"— about "restoring our country to peace and prosperity— to the blessed conditions that existed before the war!" I ask you what sort of peace, what sort of prosperity, have we had? Since the first slave-ship sailed up the James River with its human cargo, and there, on the soil of the Old Dominion, sold it to the highest bidder, we have had nothing but war. When that pirate captain landed on the shores of Africa, and there kidnapped the first stalwart negro, and fastened the first manacle, the struggle between that captain and that negro was the commencement of the terrible war in the midst of which we are to-day. Between the slave and the master there has been war, and war only. This is only a new form of it. No, no; we ask for no return to the old conditions. We ask for something better. We want a Union that is a Union in fact, a Union in spirit, not a sham. (Applause). By the Constitution as it is, the North has stood pledged to protect slavery in the States where it existed. We have been bound, in case of insurrections, to go to the aid, not of those struggling for liberty, but of the oppressors. It was politicians who made this pledge at the beginning, and who have renewed it from year to year to this day. These same men have had control of the churches, the Sabbath-schools, and all religious influences; and the women have been a party in complicity with slavery. They have made the large majority in all the different religious organizations throughout the country, and have without protest, fellowshipped the slave-holder as a Christian; accepted pro-slavery preaching from their pulpits; suffered the words "slavery a crime" to be expurgated from all the lessons taught their children, in defiance of the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would that others should do unto you." They have had no right to vote in their churches, and, like slaves, have meekly accepted whatever morals and religion the selfish interest of politics and trade dictated. Woman must now assume her God-given responsibilities, and make herself what she is clearly designed to be, the educator

of the race. Let her no longer be the mere reflector, the echo of the worldly pride and ambition of man. (Applause). Had the women of the North studied to know and to teach their sons the law of justice to the black man, regardless of the frown or the smile of pro-slavery priest and politician, they would not now be called upon to offer the loved of their households to the bloody Moloch of war. And now, women of the North, I ask you to rise up with earnest, honest purpose, and go forward in the way of right, fearlessly, as independent human beings, responsible to God alone for the discharge of every duty, for the faithful use of every gift, the good Father has given you. Forget conventionalisms; forget what the world will say, whether you are in your place or out of your place; think your best thoughts, speak your best words, do your best works, looking to your own conscience for approval.