

Contents

- vii | List of Illustrations
ix | Acknowledgments
x | Note on the Text
xi | Introduction
- Chapter One**
1 | The Woodhull Manifesto
- Chapter Two**
5 | Killing No Murder
- Chapter Three**
7 | A Page of American History: Constitution of
the United States of the World
- Chapter Four**
21 | The Memorial of Victoria C. Woodhull
- Chapter Five**
23 | Constitutional Equality
- Chapter Six**
29 | The New Rebellion: The Great Secession Speech
of Victoria C. Woodhull
- Chapter Seven**
37 | My Dear Mrs. Bladen
- Chapter Eight**
40 | Correspondence between the Victoria League
and Victoria C. Woodhull: The First Candidate
for the Next Presidency
- Chapter Nine**
50 | My Dear Mrs. Mott

Chapter Ten

- 51 | “And the Truth Shall Make You Free”: A Speech
on the Principles of Social Freedom

Chapter Eleven

- 66 | A Speech on the Impending Revolution

Chapter Twelve

- 78 | The Correspondence of the Equal Rights Party

Chapter Thirteen

- 90 | Speech of Victoria C. Woodhull

Chapter Fourteen

- 98 | The Beecher-Tilton Scandal Case

Chapter Fifteen

- 125 | The Naked Truth; or, the Situation Reviewed!

Chapter Sixteen

- 147 | Dear Lucretia Mott

Chapter Seventeen

- 149 | Reformation or Revolution, Which? or, Behind
the Political Scenes

Chapter Eighteen

- 166 | The Spirit World: A Highly Interesting Communication
from Mrs. Victoria C. Woodhull

Chapter Nineteen

- 172 | The Elixir of Life; or, Why Do We Die? An Oration

Chapter Twenty

- 198 | The Scare-Crows of Sexual Slavery

Chapter Twenty-One

- 212 | Tried as by Fire; or, the True and the False, Socially

Chapter Twenty-Two

- 261 | The Garden of Eden; or, Paradise Lost and Found

	Chapter Twenty-Three
273	Stirpiculture; or, the Scientific Propagation of the Human Race
	Chapter Twenty-Four
284	The Rapid Multiplication of the Unfit
	Chapter Twenty-Five
295	I Am the Daughter of Time
	Chapter Twenty-Six
299	Woman Suffrage in the United States
305	Notes
321	Bibliography
325	Index

Illustrations

xii	Victoria C. Woodhull
xxiii	Thomas Nast cartoon, "Get Thee Behind Me, (Mrs.) Satan!"

Introduction

To the extent that anyone's life reflects the time in which she lives, Victoria Claflin Woodhull embodied hers. Born shortly after Samuel Morse developed the electric telegraph in the United States, she died not long after promising five thousand dollars to the first person to fly across the Atlantic. Like the inventions her life witnessed, she crossed what others deemed uncrossable. First and foremost a performer, her most extravagant crossovers occurred on stage, as she delivered speeches perhaps even more shocking by today's standards: speeches that espoused free love, a more equal distribution of wealth, and women's legal rights. In Amanda Frisken's words, Victoria Woodhull was "one of the most powerful speakers of the time. Her contribution was to act out the period's most extreme positions on a public stage" (5).

This collection offers a glimpse into the life of this complicated figure, affording us a sense not only of Woodhull's circumstances and accomplishments but of how they inform late nineteenth-century suffragism, reproductive rights, sexual politics, and spiritualism. While scholars tend to divide her life into two distinct phases—her early, progressive commitment to free love and her later conservative eugenics—I hope to show that the two are more connected than previously imagined, and that they need to be refigured in order to understand both her and her context.

Woodhull tends to be a marginal figure in many accounts of nineteenth-century women's rights, in part because of the disdain most suffragists ultimately felt toward her. Reformers like Susan B. Anthony, after a brief fascination with Woodhull, came to view her radicalism as a threat to the movement. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton's voluminous record of the women's movement only mentions Woodhull's memorial to Congress, and an early biography of Anthony ignores



Victoria C. Woodhull. By permission of the Billy Rose Theater Division, the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations. Photographer unknown.

Woodhull altogether (Gabriel 169). Anthony's aversion to Woodhull was perhaps most obvious at the National Woman Suffrage Association convention of May 1872, when she turned off the stage lights to prevent Woodhull from addressing the audience.¹ Today, Woodhull's memory remains eclipsed by suffragists like Anthony, Stanton, and Sojourner Truth: with the exception of books like *Victoria Woodhull's Sexual Revolution*, she usually haunts the margins of "First Wave" histories. Martha M. Solomon largely dismisses *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly*, one of four suffragist newspapers of the 1870s, as a "racy, often even lurid, chronicle of gossip" (95). Moving Woodhull to the center of the late nineteenth-century United States opens up a series of questions: How would her inclusion change the landscape of American studies or women's studies? Is her relative invisibility due to the past (and even present) tendency to "write her out" of women's rights histories, or is there something about her that conflicts with our present-day narratives of early feminist movements? How might we understand her in terms of the racism and imperialism of the late nineteenth century? To give her the attention she deserves, that is, requires a critical eye toward her challenge of and complicity in the social inequalities of the time. She was, at once, more *and* less progressive than our historical memory has allowed.

NOTES ON A LIFE

At first glance, Woodhull seems to be a woman of great contradictions: she was the first to print Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto* in the United States even as she and her sister, Tennessee (Tennie), using Cornelius Vanderbilt's money, were the first known female stockbrokers in New York City; she condemned masturbation at the same time that she called for what we would now deem sex education; she described herself as a spiritualist and once spoke of the limits of "a Church's creed" while infusing many of her speeches with biblical scripture.² It is our twenty-first century lens, however, that makes these seem like contradictions; many of her ostensibly paradoxical beliefs were consistent with those of the time. In blasting "solitary vice," for example, she borrowed from the nineteenth-century hygiene movement that

deemed masturbation as dangerous in part because it wasted critical bodily resources. Consider *A Lecture to Young Men* (1837), a book by Sylvester Graham—a man now best known as the namesake of the graham cracker: “therefore that the emission of semen enfeebles the body more than the loss of twenty times the same quantity of blood,—more than violent cathartics and emetics:—and hence the frequent and excessive loss of it cannot fail to produce the most extreme debility, and disorder, and wretchedness, of both body and mind” (Graham 51–52). Woodhull’s “The Elixir of Life” (1873) expresses a similar sentiment: “With this knowledge [of masturbation], added to the stifled but still growing passion, they decline into a morbid sexual condition which, running into years, carries them beyond the possibility of a return to natural and healthy action to maturity, utterly ruined, sexually and physically” (chap. 19, this vol.).

While Graham and Woodhull ultimately reached different conclusions, both were preoccupied by what they saw as improper sexuality. Marshalling various medical and religious literature, Woodhull, not unlike the hygienists, sketched a vision of sexual health that seems rather draconian today. It is not difficult to draw a connection between such writing and a later eugenic preoccupation with the “fit” and “unfit.” Given these parameters on sexuality, “free love” becomes something else indeed.

Woodhull was, like anyone, a product of her surroundings, which in her case were those of a profound and transformative religious and spiritual revival. Victoria Claflin was born in Homer, Ohio, in 1838, a decade before the celebrated Seneca Falls Convention. It was a time when the Second Great Awakening held sway, dotting the landscape with revival tents and bringing people like Victoria’s mother, Rose, to their feet—and knees. It was a time when people had a fine (or perhaps an obtuse) sense of spectacle: the Fox sisters, two young girls who claimed to hear the rappings of a murdered salesman in Hydesville, New York, were soon exhibited by P. T. Barnum. It was a time when people knew both too much and too little: in this case, the ghost claimed to be Charles B. Rosma, who had been killed and buried in the cellar. Indeed, a skeleton was found in the cellar wall in 1904, long before DNA tests could have confirmed the ghost’s story.

Victoria's father, Buck Claflin, always looking for a get-rich scheme, took advantage of the spiritualist rage and installed Victoria and her sister Tennie as mediums from a young age. Well versed as a charlatan, he led them on exhibits throughout the country. Their departures were sometimes determined by customer dissatisfaction; in the most damaging case, an Illinois cancer patient claimed in 1864 that Tennie had sold her an ineffective treatment. Tennie left the state immediately to evade authorities. For Victoria, it was a seamless slide at age fifteen from such schemes to a hasty marriage with Dr. Channing Woodhull, a Civil War veteran more devoted to drink than to his new wife. Victoria's son, Byron, was born at home in 1854 with the assistance of his intoxicated father. Victoria would always blame Byron's mental disability on the fact that he was conceived and delivered in a dysfunctional marriage. Later writings like "Stirpiculture" and "The Rapid Multiplication of the Unfit" argue that loveless matches result in "undesirable" offspring. Although such theories are repugnant today, in her time they offered women like Woodhull a compelling defense against unsatisfying marriages and restrictive gender roles. Her theory did not hold out with her daughter, Zula Maud, however, who was born under similar circumstances in 1861. Zula would become Victoria's most devoted companion.

It was Zula's birth, and Channing Woodhull's continuing intoxication, that convinced Victoria to secure a divorce. She met Colonel James Harvey Blood in St. Louis in 1864 when he consulted her as a spiritualist. They applied for a marriage license two years later in Ohio. In 1868 she reported being called to New York City by the spirit of the Greek orator Demosthenes. Woodhull thus became one of the millions who were drawn to a city by its promises of financial and political opportunities during the last three decades of the nineteenth century.

Along with Tennie, Woodhull opened a stockbroking office in New York in early 1870. It was a time of many firsts for the burgeoning city; work on the Brooklyn Bridge began that month. The sisters made much of their money through an alliance with tycoon Cornelius (Commodore) Vanderbilt, who at one point asked Tennie to marry him. She declined, apparently satisfied with their extramarital relationship. Victoria and Tennie credited their spiritualist powers for their ability

to advise investors. They established their newspaper, *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly*, with stockmarket funds. Despite its claim to be the “only Paper in the World conducted, absolutely, upon the Principles of a Free Press,” it was forever linked both to their financial status and the sexualized image they acquired: men, who dominated the financial scene, could see these first lady stockbrokers in no other terms. As Amanda Frisken has shown, sporting newspapers contributed to their sexualization; *The Days' Doings*, for example, presented a suggestive image of the sisters surrounded by men (2–3). In another cartoon, Victoria and her sister Tennie, riding in a carriage on Wall Street, whip the submissive men who pull the carriage (4, 6).³ This cartoon indicates the anxiety their public positions aroused as they crossed into a male stronghold. On February 6, 1870, the *New York Times* expressed skepticism about the brokers' future: “The place was thronged from early morning until late at night by a crowd of curiosity hunters, who gazed at the females and besieged them with questions. The older and more respectable dealers of the street remained at their offices, discussing the advent of the female financiers in the street, and there was a strong popular feeling against the persons. . . . A short, speedy winding up of the firm of WOODHULL, CLAFLIN & Co. is predicted” (8). The *New York Herald* was far more laudatory: “Their extraordinary coolness and self-possession, and evident knowledge of the difficult rôle they have undertaken, is far more remarkable than their personal beauty and graces of manner, and these are considerable. They are evidently women of remarkable coolness and tact, and are capable of extraordinary endurance” (quoted in *The Human Body* 296). Likewise, the *New York Courier* agreed that they were “perfectly capable of taking care of themselves” (quoted in *The Human Body* 297).

Despite these votes of confidence, the financial world Victoria and Tennie entered as the “First Lady Stockbrokers” in 1870 was a tumultuous one. On one hand, with growing opportunities in oil and steel investments, Gilded Age fortunes were made overnight; on the other, speculation and shifting government monetary policies rendered such fortunes ever fragile. The market was just recovering from Black Friday of 1869, when thousands lost money after President Ulysses S. Grant

released gold into the market, thus lowering the value of gold held by private investors. The Woodhull sisters were initially able to survive market fluctuations because of their close relationship with Vanderbilt. By 1872, when that relationship came to an end following Victoria's criticism of him in speeches like "The Impending Revolution," they were more vulnerable. At that point, Victoria became dependent on income from her lectures. The newspaper and the brokerage fell into debt; *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly* briefly ceased circulation in 1872, and when landlords refused to rent to her, Woodhull was forced to move from a regal home to her office. Her financial situation was further impeded by the size of her large and often unharmonious household: her parents, ex-husband, and various other relatives lived with her. In May 1871 her mother, notoriously mercurial, sued Colonel Blood for alienating her from Victoria's affections and threatening her with bodily harm. The very public case did not help Woodhull's reputation. The *New York Times* records Woodhull's financial decline: in 1871 she offered ten thousand dollars to the struggling women's rights movement (an amount she did not in fact deliver), while the *Times* of August 28, 1872, recorded her testimony that she did not even own "the clothes on her back" (2).

In 1871 the woman who would offer thousands to the women's suffrage movement became the first woman to speak before a U.S. congressional committee. Her memorial made an argument, known as the "new departure," that she had heard at the women's suffrage convention in 1869: the Constitution already grants women, as citizens, suffrage. Her goal was "to show that *to vote is not a privilege* conferred by a State upon its citizens, but a CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT of every citizen of the United States, of which they cannot be deprived" (*The Origin, Tendencies, and Principles of Government*, 37). She goes on to assert that "[t]he male citizen has no more right to deprive the female citizen of the free, public, political expression of opinion than the female citizen has to deprive the male citizen thereof." Woodhull argued that women have a race, and therefore are enfranchised thanks to the Fifteenth Amendment. The argument that women's suffrage is a constitutional right was made by suffragists with words and action as they attempted

to vote on a number of occasions. The majority of the committee was not convinced by Woodhull's argument, however, responding that the question of suffrage should be left up to the states. Woodhull and other suffragists were heartened by the minority opinion, which was penned by Representatives William Loughridge and Benjamin Butler.

One of Woodhull's first public statements on suffrage appeared in the *New York Herald* of April 2, 1870. The *Herald*, a major publication of the nineteenth century, was an interesting choice; its publisher was James Gordon Bennett, who has been called the father of yellow journalism. As Erika Falk notes, the paper's extensive coverage of Woodhull can be explained in part by its focus on financial matters (103). As New York's first female stockbroker, Woodhull was of obvious interest to such a publication. She begins her editorial by asserting that her actions to date have earned her the right to speak on women's behalf, while others have merely given lip service to equality: "I boldly entered the arena of politics and business and exercised the rights I already possessed" ("The Woodhull Manifesto," chap. 1, this vol.). The first part of the piece is filled with active verbs: she "asserted," "worked," and "proved," and she ends with words popular among politicians: "courage, energy and strength." After establishing her right to speak, she turns to the frequent argument of white women that if blacks (*black men*, that is) have the vote, of course "woman" should. The immensely complicated status of sectionalism and Reconstruction is here reduced to a single sentence: "The simple issue whether woman should not have this complete political equality with the negro is the only one to be tried, and none more important is likely to arise before the Presidential election." In this statement "woman" is implicitly white and "negro" is implicitly male. The alignment of women with whites and "negros" with men is also evident in Woodhull's later speech "The Scare-Crows of Sexual Slavery": "Tell me that wives are not slaves! As well might you have done the same of the negroes, who, as the women do not, did not realize their condition!" (chap. 20, this vol.). Such comments emerged within the Reconstruction era when tensions between whites and African Americans, northerners and southerners, Democrats and Republicans festered. The Fourteenth Amendment, ratified in 1868,

assured citizenship for former slaves, reversing the earlier decision of *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, while the Fifteenth Amendment of 1870 banned the prohibition of suffrage based on race, color, or previous servitude. The Enforcement Act of 1870 attempted to combat rising violence and discrimination against African Americans in the South. But by 1872, reconstruction efforts were waning; President Grant, who had begun to shy away from such policies, won another term. It was in this context that Woodhull argued that “women,” who were implicitly white, should be able to vote. This argument was unsuccessful in securing a sixteenth amendment for women’s suffrage; it was not until 1920 that they won the vote.

Woodhull’s racism took a number of forms, from claims that black men did not deserve the right to vote before white women to more subtle associations with whiteness. One of her most egregious statements comes in “The Scare-Crows of Sexual Slavery”: in response to the claim that free love would result in women’s unrestrained passion, she asks, “Did you not say that all the women would immediately rush into the arms of every man they should meet, let it be in the street, in the car or wherever else; that even negroes would not escape the mad debauch of white women?” Woodhull employs miscegenation, a primary fear of the time, as evidence for her own racist argument, suggesting how preposterous it would be that white women would desire black men. Her famous speech “Tried as by Fire” includes a more subtle call for women to embrace “their white-robed purity” (chap. 21, this vol.). These were powerful words, given that “pure white women” were “one of the central fictions of the antebellum southern aristocracy” (Friskin 58). In turn, the popular press produced several images suggesting that Woodhull’s ticket promoted a distasteful mingling of the races (Friskin 62–84). Again, we are faced with an apparent contradiction: Woodhull ran on the equal rights ticket even as she took advantage of her white privilege and depended on racist figures like George Francis Train, who offered her financial and emotional support during her battles with anti-obscenity crusader Anthony Comstock.⁴

The Equal Rights Party, whose main goal was to secure women’s suffrage, was credited with a July 4th letter of nomination that Woodhull

actually wrote. The letter and Woodhull's response appeared in the *Weekly* in June 1872. At the May 1872 meeting, the 668 delegates nominated abolitionist Frederick Douglass as her running mate. For reasons that remain unknown, he never responded.⁵ As Frisken argues, the party's nomination of a white woman and an African American man in this period of extensive racial violence was, if nothing else, a symbolic testament to the equal rights it claimed to pursue. The fact that Woodhull could run on this ticket even when espousing such beliefs indicates the depth and complexity of the period's racism. Most sources indicate that Woodhull received some popular votes in the presidential election, but no electoral votes. She ran again, with much less fanfare, in the 1884 and 1892 races.

The height of Woodhull's speaking career was in the 1870s; according to Amanda Frisken, "By 1872, none of the suffrage lecturers could command an audience that compared to Woodhull's" (119).⁶ Even when—or perhaps because—her reputation was tainted by scandal, she made successful lectures across the country. Spectators often commented on her appearance, noting her magnetism, beauty, and the single rose that she often wore at her neck. In 1872 audience member Austin Kent described her as "[a] woman, small in stature, of good countenance, and feminine in manner, [who] took the liberty to think freely, write her thought, and read it to six thousand people,—six thousand more returning to their homes—not finding standing room in the Hall" (1). Accounts of her nervousness in her first lectures are rendered with a note of approval, suggesting that she was viewed as feminine enough to avoid outright censure. At the same time, in keeping with a larger move among suffragists to challenge the restrictive women's fashions of the day, Woodhull often wore men's clothing. Descriptions of her physical appearance indicate that at least at the height of her popularity, she was able to walk a fine line between being adequately feminine and, in wearing masculine dress, avoiding a debilitating sexualization. As a reporter from the *New York World* noted, she combined "a singular masculine grasp with the most gentle and womanly attraction" (quoted in *The Human Body* 272). Frisken notes that Woodhull was especially gifted at winning over hostile audiences, a valuable talent as she continued

to battle public opinion. She did so using a variety of tactics, appearing with a Bible to deliver “The Human Body the Temple of God” in the South; speaking directly to the mothers in the audience; and beginning lectures with a shaky voice (Friskin 137–41). Her rhetorical strategies, then, were as varied as the audiences she faced.

Key to Woodhull’s prominence—and her fall from the good graces of many other suffrage leaders—was her fierce adherence to free love. As she said at a dramatic moment in “The Principles of Social Freedom,” “Yes, I am a Free Lover. I have an *inalienable, constitutional, and natural* right to love whom I may, to love as *long* or as *short* a period as I can; to *change* that love *every day* if I please, and with *that* right neither you nor any *law* you can frame have *any* right to interfere” (chap. 10, this vol.). Free lovers disagreed, however, on how “free” one should be; some varietists, to the displeasure of monogamists, argued for multiple lovers. Joanne E. Passet captures the term’s ambiguity:

Mainstream newspaper editors and clergy, free love’s most vocal critics, called anyone who deviated from customary ideals of proper behavior a “free lover.” Nineteenth-century sex radicals further confused matters because they could not agree on the term’s application in daily life: for some it meant a lifelong and monogamous commitment to a member of the opposite sex, others envisioned it as serial monogamy, a few advocated chaste heterosexual relationships except when children were mutually desired, and a smaller number defined it as variety (multiple partners, simultaneously) in sexual relationships. Many who called themselves free lovers were married yet denounced marriage as an institution requiring women’s subordination to men. Yet no matter what their practical interpretation of free love, they shared two core convictions: opposition the idea of coercion in sexual relationships and advocacy of a woman’s right to determine the uses of her body. (2)

Indeed, Woodhull regarded sex within loveless marriages as coercive to women, and held that wives who remained in such relationships simply for the sake of convention were more “impure” than prostitutes. In turn, as Tennie argued in the *Weekly* on September 23, 1871, abortion

indicated that conception occurred not in love but in the shackles of institutionalized marriage: “Abortion is only a symptom of a more deep-seated disorder of the social state. It cannot be put down by law. Normally the mother of ten children is as healthy, and may be as youthful and beautiful, as a healthy maiden. Child-bearing is not a disease, but a beautiful office of nature. But to our faded-out, sickly, exhausted type of women, it is a fearful ordeal. Nearly every child born is an unwelcome guest. Abortion is the choice of evils for such women” (9).

For reformers like Tennie Claflin and Victoria Woodhull, abortion was one inevitable result of a society in which children were conceived in loveless unions without proper support. Thus abortion itself was not the primary crime, but the social system that made it necessary.

In contrast to opponents who equated “free love” with promiscuity, some who adopted the label urged abstinence. Woodhull made a number of attempts in her speeches to distinguish “free love” from “free lust,” at times preferring the more neutral term “social freedom.” Such attempts were not always successful. Thomas Nast’s infamous cartoon in *Harper’s Weekly* sports the caption “Get thee behind me, (Mrs.) Satan!” and features a sinister Woodhull with batlike wings clutching a sign that reads “Be Saved By Free Love.” Behind her a sickly woman is bent over with the weight of two infants and a whiskey-guzzling man. Nast emphasizes Woodhull’s full lips and eyebrows, characteristics that seem both sensual and dangerous. Inserting the title “Mrs.” here, the artist reminds readers that Woodhull’s sex is of vital importance; this is not just Satan, but his wife. So the very “free love” that Woodhull espoused, with its critique of institutional marriage, is erased in this title: she is effectively married off, stripped of her name in the usual patriarchal tradition.

An understanding of Woodhull’s conception of free love requires a consideration of Stephen Pearl Andrews (1812–1886), her most important mentor besides James Blood. Through lectures and writing, Andrews helped popularize Josiah Warren’s notion of “Individual Sovereignty,” the belief that each person was the only authority on his or her true sexual relations. Warren and Andrews had created the social experiment Modern Times at Long Island in 1851. Andrews wrote and distributed



Thomas Nast, "Get Thee Behind Me, (Mrs.) Satan!" *Harper's Weekly*, February 17, 1872. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

the 1853 pamphlet *Love, Marriage, and Divorce*, an argument for social freedom. He was an eccentric man with a long list of preoccupations: he developed a system of phonographic recording, learned thirty languages (even developing one of his own), and in 1843 proposed an unsuccessful plan to end slavery by having English abolitionists purchase and then free Texan slaves. One of his most famous inventions was “The Pantarchy,” a somewhat mystical free-love organization. *Woodhull and Claflin’s Weekly* was, at least initially, its organ (Stern 109). In Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz’s words, it was his “odd combination of anarchic liberalism and economic radicalism” that most influenced Woodhull (349). Andrews’s fingerprint is visible on Woodhull’s involvement in labor rights and antimonopoly work. Both were members of Section 12 of the International Workingmen’s Association, a socialist organization founded in 1864 and relocated to New York City in 1872. The *Weekly* ran regular updates on the association during this time, and its prospectus declares its commitment to a new land, economic, and industrial system “in which each individual will remain possessed of all his or her productions.” Victoria and Tennie received much press attention for their participation in a parade in December of 1871 on behalf of Louis-Nathaniel Rossel and other leaders who had been executed after the failure of the Paris Commune, a short-lived socialist rule of Paris. Woodhull also held an honorary post in the American Labor Reform League. Her interest in labor issues is evident in “A Page of American History: Constitution of the United States of the World” (1870), a revision of the U.S. Constitution that gives Congress the power of the “abolition of Pauperism and Beggary” and calls for a system in which “the producer is entitled to the total proceeds of labor, which shall prevent the accumulation of wealth in the hands of non-producers” (chap. 3, this vol.). Woodhull’s views on labor were shaped not only by Andrews but by political economists like Henry George, who argued that poverty resulted from the concentration of large amounts of land and natural resources in the hands of monopolies. Woodhull’s commitment to free love and women’s suffrage conflicted with the larger communist platform, however, and in 1872 her chapter was expelled from the International Workingmen’s Association.

Woodhull's vision of free love drew in part from the tenets of the Oneida Community, which she once described as "the best order of society now on the earth" ("Tried as by Fire," chap. 21, this vol.). Founded by John Humphrey Noyes in 1848, the community held that its highest purpose was the worship of God, and that "worship," in what today seems like a generous definition of the term, included polygamous sexual relations. Indeed, within his borders, monogamy was not allowed; in its place was "complex marriage," promiscuous sexual relationships. Young men had sex with postmenopausal women in order to learn the withdrawal method that was required of all men (unless they were given permission to reproduce). Jealousy among spouses was strongly discouraged. In keeping with a communist ethos, children were raised not by their parents—indeed, parental ownership of any kind was frowned upon—but by the community at large. If women could tolerate the lack of privacy and the autocratic rule of the commune, they enjoyed a freedom from the kinds of control that existed in the larger society: they could determine when, and even if, they wanted children; they were not limited to particular kinds of labor; and they escaped the patriarchal control of a husband (although this control was handed over, in many cases, to Noyes himself). When we try to fit Oneida into contemporary models of sexuality we are inevitably stymied: its progressive spirit was stunted by Noyes's rigid control, and the proto-eugenicist selection of "desirable" partnerships is likely to make anyone uncomfortable.

The structure of the Oneida Community, for better or worse, had a conclusive answer to one of the central questions posed to free lovers: what is the fate of the children of open relationships? In works like "The Scare-Crows of Sexual Slavery" (chap. 20, this vol.), Woodhull envisions a somewhat similar arrangement, but knowing that the Oneida arrangement was at once too local and too sweeping for the masses, she struggled to find a suitable answer. Stephen Pearl Andrews's letter in the *Weekly* of August 26, 1871, takes up this issue: "The third and last grand objection to Amorous Liberty relates to the maintenance and culture of Children. This objection assumes that the isolated family offers the only mode of properly caring for offspring. The family, as

Chapter One

The Woodhull Manifesto

Victoria Woodhull's announcement of her candidacy for president was originally published in the New York Herald in April of 1870. It also appeared in Woodhull's Argument for Women's Electoral Rights. A revised version was published in The Origin, Tendencies and Principles of Government as "First Pronunciamento." The following comes from the version that appeared in the Herald.

The disorganized condition of parties in the United States at the present time affords a favourable opportunity for a review of the political situation and for comment on the issues which are likely to come up for settlement in the Presidential election in 1872. As I happen to be the most prominent representative of the only unrepresented class in the republic, and perhaps the most practical exponent of the principles of equality, I request the favour of being permitted to address the public through the medium of the *Herald*. While others of my sex devoted themselves to a crusade against the laws that shackle the women of the country, I asserted my individual independence; while others prayed for the good time coming, I worked for it; while others argued the equality of woman with man, I proved it by successfully engaging in business; while others sought to show that there was no valid reason why women should not be treated, socially and politically, as being inferior to man, I boldly entered the arena of politics and business and exercised the rights I already possessed. I therefore claim the right to speak for the unenfranchised women of the country, and believing as

I do that the prejudices which still exist in the popular mind against women in public life will soon disappear, I now announce myself as candidate for the Presidency.

I am well aware that in assuming this position I shall evoke more ridicule than enthusiasm at the outset. But this is an epoch of sudden changes and startling surprises. What may appear absurd to-day will assume a serious aspect to-morrow. I am content to wait until my claim for recognition as a candidate shall receive the calm consideration of the press and the public. The blacks were cattle in 1860; a negro now sits in Jeff Davis's seat in the United States Senate.¹ The sentiment of the country was, even in 1863, against negro suffrage; now the negro's right to vote is acknowledged by the Constitution of the United States. Let those, therefore, who ridiculed the negro's claim to exercise the right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," and who lived to see him vote and hold high public office, ridicule the aspirations of the women of the country for complete political equality as much as they please. They cannot roll back the rising tide of reform. The world moves.

That great governmental changes were to follow the enfranchisement of the negro I have long foreseen. While the curse of slavery covered the land progress was enchained, but when it was swept away in the torrent of war, the voice of justice was heard, and it became evident that the last weak barrier against complete political and social equality must soon give way. All that has been said and written hitherto in support of equality for woman has had its proper effect on the public mind, just as the anti-slavery speeches before secession were effective; but a candidate and a policy are required to prove it. Lincoln's election showed the strength of the feeling against the peculiar institution; my candidature for the Presidency will, I confidently expect, develop the fact that the principles of equal rights for all have taken deep root. The advocates of political equality for women have, besides a respectable known strength, a great undercurrent of unexpressed power, which is only awaiting a fit opportunity to show itself. By the general and decided test I propose, we shall be able to understand the woman question aright, or at least have done much towards presenting the issue involved in proper shape. I claim to possess the strength and

courage to be the subject of that test, and look forward confidently to a triumphant issue of the canvass.

The present position of political parties is anomalous. They are not inspired by any great principles of policy or economy; there is no live issue up for discussion.

A great national question is wanted, to prevent a descent into pure sectionalism. That question exists in the issue, whether woman shall remain sunk below the right granted to the negro, or be elevated to all the political rights enjoyed by man. The simple issue whether woman should not have this complete political equality with the negro is the only one to be tried, and none more important is likely to arise before the Presidential election. But besides the question of equality others of great magnitude are necessarily included. The platform that is to succeed in the coming election must enunciate the *general* principles of enlightened justice and economy.

A complete reform in our system of prison discipline, having specially in view the welfare of the families of criminals, whose labour should not be lost to them; the rearrangement of the system and control of internal improvements; the adoption of some better means for caring for the helpless and indigent; the establishment of strictly neutral and reciprocal relations with all foreign Powers who will unite to better the condition of the productive class, and the adoption of such principles as shall recognize this class as the true wealth of the country, and give it a just position beside capital, thus introducing a practical plan for universal government upon the most enlightened basis, for the actual, not the imaginary benefit of mankind.²

These important changes can only be expected to follow a complete departure from the beaten tracks of political parties and their machinery; and this, I believe my canvass of 1872 will effect.

With the view of spreading to the people ideas which hitherto have not been placed before them, and which they may, by reflection, carefully amplify for their own benefit, I have written several papers on governmental questions of importance and will submit them in due order. For the present the foregoing must suffice. I anticipate criticism; but however unfavourable the comment this letter may evoke I trust

4 | that my sincerity will not be called in question. I have deliberately and of my own accord placed myself before the people as a candidate for the Presidency of the United States, and having the means, courage, energy and strength necessary for the race, intend to contest it to the close.

Victoria C. Woodhull

Chapter Two

Killing No Murder

The following item appeared in Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly on June 11, 1870 (8). Like many women's rights advocates of the time, Woodhull used temperance arguments to advance her cause. At this time, wives were often considered the property of their husbands, subject to their rule under the law. A North Carolina Supreme Court case of 1864 overturned a lower verdict and declared a husband's beating of his wife as allowable. It was not until 1882 that Maryland became the first state to make "wife-beating" a crime. This piece reflects the common strategy of using temperance arguments to make a case against domestic violence. The final paragraph is omitted here.

A man in Brooklyn . . . has been killing his wife. The occurrence is so commonplace—it happens every week in Brooklyn, or Boston or some other good place—that it is hardly worth mentioning as news. But we should like it better understood that when a man is insane, or when a man is drunk, the law holds him harmless. If he beats or shoots or knife[s] another man it seems objectionable, though not surprising. But if he brutalizes his wife it is the most natural thing in life; it is just what we expect from a drunken man. If he comes home in the dead of night, and because his wretched slave is asleep, or his supper is not ready at an impossible hour, or, being ready, is not cooked to his liking; or if, for any reason, or for no reason, he should beat and kick and pound that slave, why, of course, nobody interferes—it is only a man licking his wife, and as he is drunk he is not to blame, and the laws of

6 | domicile, the home and the castle, and so on, are so sacred that even a policeman may not interfere. Perhaps after a long night, dragging her about by the hair of her head, beating, throwing her round, stamping on her and otherwise giving the devilish brutalism of his nature full swing, he succeeds in torturing the wretched life out of the wretched body. Then, but not till then, a policeman feels justified in making his appearance (the law may punish, it may not prevent), and with the remark that the man was drunk, the monster's hellish cruelty is wiped out. He was drunk! She is dead, it is true, she died of torture so brutally outraged that Indian torture would have been a mercy; but then the man was drunk! Mind you it is the fault of the party stabbed, shot or tortured that he or she should get in the way of a drunken madman. Why does a woman live with a drunken man? Why, indeed? What else can she expect.