

Victoria Woodhull: Radical Approaches to Women's Equality

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Senior Division
Historical Paper
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Process Paper: 486 words

Process Paper

When brainstorming topics related to the NHD theme *Communication in History*, I started to think about Victoria Woodhull. I had discovered her when compiling a Herstory for my mom's birthday. Woodhull stood out to me because she was the first female presidential candidate half a century before women got the right to vote. I decided to create a project based on her in the paper category because her newspaper and speeches provided a wealth of primary sources created by her. Using the format of a paper let me use her own words the most effectively.

I started by learning Woodhull's biography using secondary sources. Then, I started to read her speeches and newspaper, as well as her congressional address, so I could understand more about her ideas. Reading the authorized biography by her friend Theodore Tilton and learning about the spiritualist movement helped me learn about her early life and how her ideology was shaped.

Creating the paper required me to take all the knowledge I had about Woodhull, and put it in the lens of communication. While she is important for the historic firsts she accomplished when speaking to a congressional committee, opening the first female-run stock brokerage firm, and of course, running for president, these events alone would not have connected closely to the theme. I was also worried that I had strong evidence that she did not run to win, and I did not know the importance of a campaign if not to be elected. But then I realized that the importance of a symbolic campaign was it gave Woodhull a platform to advocate for her beliefs of women's equality. She had no connections to the suffrage movement and no avenue to communicate with people, so by running for president, she gained a way to bring her ideas to an audience that did not know much about them.

This argument worked too. Woodhull gained access to talk to politicians who could create change. She also gained news coverage, which though it was mostly sexist criticism of her attire and private life, it was starting a conversation about women with careers. While she was one of many people working for women's rights, she was using a platform so more Americans were conscious of the movement and the idea of women's suffrage. This idea made me understand why she was significant in history and helped me make the paper more argumentative.

After I submitted to the city level, however, I discovered after Woodhull's campaign, she was involved in the eugenics movement. I was a little overwhelmed, and so I researched. I found Woodhull, like many in first-wave feminism, used eugenics as a way for women to have more control over their bodies, despite its problematic and racist principles. While this new information complicated my original idea of who Woodhull was, it challenged me to continue to make my portrayal of her more accurate and nuanced.

In 1872, more than a century before Hillary Clinton made history with her bid for the White House, the psychic and stockbroker Victoria Woodhull became the first female presidential candidate.¹ Woodhull used communication throughout her life to free women from patriarchal norms. As a psychic, Woodhull earned money that she used to start a business, which communicated that women could and should have financial independence. When she ran for president, she did so not to gain political office, but rather to use her campaign and her newspaper's platform to communicate her ideas about equal rights to a broader audience. Woodhull used her career, business, and campaign to communicate more expansive ideas of what women could do despite societal constraints limiting their independence.²

Woodhull's childhood was characterized by abuse and shaped her ideology on women's rights. In 1838, she was born Victoria Claflin, the seventh of ten children in an impoverished family in Homer, Ohio. After one of her brothers fled the family and their father's abuse, Woodhull wanted to do the same. In 1853, at fifteen, she escaped by marrying Canning Woodhull, a twenty-eight-year-old doctor from New York who had saved her life when she was ill.³ But, Woodhull discovered her husband was an abusive, adulterous addict. When their son was born with mental disabilities, Woodhull blamed her husband's alcoholism.⁴ Adding to her dissatisfaction, Woodhull had no independence. In 1853, marital abuse was legal, women were

¹ Eileen Horne, "Notorious Victoria: The First Woman to Run for President," *The Guardian*, July 20, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/jul/20/notorious-victoria-first-woman-run-for-us-president>; Meg Anderson, "From the Economy To Race, See Where The Candidates Stand On The Big Issues," *NPR*, October 18, 2016, <https://www.npr.org/2016/10/18/496926243/from-the-economy-to-race-see-where-the-candidates-stand-on-the-big-issues>.

² Ibid.

³ Horne, "Notorious Victoria;" Tilton, *Biography of Victoria C. Woodhull* (New York: The Golden Age, 1871), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/51861/51861-h/51861-h.htm>.

⁴ Tilton, *Biography of Victoria C. Woodhull*.

the legal property of their husbands, and could not own their land, wealth, or children.⁵ In Woodhull's view, marriage enabled men to oppress women. In a later speech, she addressed the lack of free will in marriages like hers, saying, "Refuse to yield to the sexual demands of your legal master, and [he will] give you personal violence."⁶ Amid this backdrop, Woodhull searched for an avenue for independence.⁷

Woodhull turned to spiritualism, a movement that focused on communicating with the dead, because it gave women agency. The mid-nineteenth century's high mortality rate, stemming from inadequate medical treatments and eventually the Civil War, created a grieving population that gravitated to spiritualism as a way to commune with deceased family.⁸ Importantly for Woodhull, spiritualism, a practice to which women were essential, encouraged female independence. Since women were considered more "sensitive," spiritualists believed only women could communicate with the dead. Woodhull thus gravitated towards a career path that offered female agency.⁹

⁵ "Historical Overview of Domestic Violence," *The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center*, <http://www.pacwrc.pitt.edu/Curriculum/310DomesticViolenceIssuesAnIntroductionforChildWelfareProfessionals/Handouts/HO3DomesticViolenceTimeline.pdf>; Mary Gabriel, *Notorious Victoria: The Uncensored Life of Victoria Woodhull: Visionary, Suffragist, and First Woman to Run for President* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 1998), 13.

⁶ Victoria Woodhull, "And the Truth Shall Set You Free," (1871), in *Selected Writings of Victoria Woodhull*, ed. by Cari M. Carpenter (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2010).

⁷ Gabriel, *Notorious Victoria*, 13; "Historical Overview of Domestic Violence," Horne, "Notorious Victoria;" Tilton, *Biography of Victoria C. Woodhull*; Woodhull, "And the Truth Shall Set You Free," in *Selected Writings*.

⁸ Alexandra Kommel, "Seances in the Red Room," *The White House Historical Association*, April 24, 2019, <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/seances-in-the-red-room>; Daniel Bowlin, "The American Phantasmagoria: The Rise of Spiritualism in Nineteenth-Century America," (Master's thesis, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan, 2019), 10, 14.

⁹ Bowlin, "The American Phantasmagoria," 10, 14, 17; David Derbyshire, "The Psychology of Spiritualism: Science and Seances," *The Guardian*, October 19, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2013/oct/20/seances-and-science>; Grant Shreve, "When Women Channeled the Dead to be Heard," *JSTOR Daily*, February 2, 2018, <https://daily.jstor.org/when-women-channeled-the-dead-to-be-heard/>; Kommel, "Seances."

Establishing Financial Independence

Woodhull's career resulted in her ending an abusive marriage and communicating the importance of female independence by example. In 1859, Woodhull partnered with her sister Tennessee "Tennie" Claflin to become clairvoyants.¹⁰ She and Claflin became traveling psychics, and though their trips Woodhull met Colonel James Blood, another spiritualist. Meeting someone who shared her beliefs about women's independence led her to make a decision: in 1865, she divorced Dr. Woodhull to marry Blood.¹¹ Although divorce rates rose in the second half of the nineteenth century, divorce was still radical.¹² Once free from her marriage, Woodhull gravitated toward free love, which was the belief that people have the right to be in relationships free of oppression.¹³ She saw marriage, which she called "sexual slavery," as part of women's oppression.¹⁴ By contrast, Woodhull believed her marriage to Blood, someone who supported her independence, worked in accordance with the principles of free love.¹⁵

Woodhull used her career to communicate the importance of women's rights. In 1868, Woodhull and Claflin moved their psychic practice to New York, which proved so successful that they earned \$700,000 throughout their careers. By 1870, the sisters developed a new idea for a business: Woodhull, Claflin & Co, the first female-run stock brokerage firm in America.

¹⁰ Tilton, *A Biography of Victoria C. Woodhull*.

¹¹ Felsenthal, "The Strange Tale."

¹² Ashley Ross, "A Brief History of Divorce in America: From Legal Rarity to Dark Comedy," *Time*, October 7, 2016, <https://time.com/4521314/divorce-history-sarah-jessica-parker/>.

¹³ For two sources that explain the ideology of free love, see Michael Bronski, "The Radical Woman Whose 19th Century Ideas Still Undergird the LGBTQ-Rights Movement," *TIME*, June 25, 2019, <https://time.com/5612564/free-love-victoria-woodhull/>; Woodhull, "And the Truth Shall Make You Free," in *Selected Speeches*.

¹⁴ Victoria Woodhull, "The Scare-Crows of Sexual Slavery," (1873), in *Selected Writings of Victoria Woodhull*, ed. by Cari M. Carpenter (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2010).

¹⁵ Bronski, "The Radical Woman;" Felsenthal, "The Strange Tale;" Ross, "A Brief History of Divorce;" Tilton, *A Biography of Victoria C. Woodhull*; Woodhull, "And the Truth Shall Make You Free," in *Selected Speeches*; Woodhull, "The Scare-Crows of Sexual Slavery," in *Selected Writings*.

Woodhull's goal for the venture, backed financially by their client and railroad magnate Cornelius Vanderbilt, was to communicate the importance of equal rights.¹⁶ In 1870, she said, "while others of my sex devoted themselves to a crusade against the laws that shackle women of this country, I asserted my individual independence."¹⁷ Not only did Woodhull prove that women could have careers in male-dominated industries, but she also gave women a path to financial independence. This became key to her firm's success, as it attracted women as clients. By offering an entrance in the back of the building, women could sneak in to invest money without their husbands discovering.¹⁸ The business attracted press coverage, which called the sisters "the Bewitching Brokers."¹⁹ Outside the firm, men yelled insults at the sisters so they had to place a sign stating, "Gentlemen will state their business and then retire at once."²⁰ Woodhull used the business to communicate the importance of women's equality by example as well as by helping women to become financially independent.²¹

A Symbolic Campaign

In 1870, Woodhull decided to run for president to communicate to a wider audience the importance of women's equality. Even though she was not part of the women's suffrage movement, Woodhull had attended the 1869 National Female Suffrage Convention and

¹⁶ "The Woodhull Scandal," *The New York Times*, November 10, 1872, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1872/11/10/79025196.html?pageNumber=3>.

¹⁷ Victoria Woodhull, "The Woodhull Manifesto," *New York Herald* (New York), April 1870.

¹⁸ Barbara Goldsmith, *Other Powers: the Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism, and the Scandalous Victoria Woodhull* (HarperPerennial: New York, 1999), 191.

¹⁹ "The Bewitching Brokers: Women on Change." Cartoon. *Harper's Weekly*, March 5, 1870. From HarpWeek.

<https://www.harpweek.com/09Cartoon/BrowseByDateCartoon.asp?Month=March&Date=5> (accessed February 14, 2021).

²⁰ "Wall Street Aroused," *The New York Times*, February 6, 1870, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1870/02/06/80254491.html?pageNumber=8>.

²¹ "The Bewitching Brokers: Women on Change;" Goldsmith, *Other Powers*, 191; "Wall Street Aroused;" "The Woodhull Scandal;" Woodhull, "The Woodhull Manifesto."

witnessed a movement splintered. Although members of the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) believed the movement should work for a constitutional amendment that would allow women to vote, other suffragists in the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) thought state-by-state campaigns for suffrage would have greater success.²² The convention was a forum for women who believed in suffrage but did not agree on how to achieve it.²³ Woodhull believed talking about women's rights would not accomplish anything and that action was necessary. In an 1870 *New York Herald* article, Woodhull announced she would run in the 1872 election against President Ulysses Grant and newspaper editor Horace Greeley. She argued that her campaign would advance the cause of women's rights and offered her own background as evidence:

While others argued in 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 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.²⁴

Woodhull's vice-presidential nominee was the formerly enslaved abolitionist Frederick Douglass, who was chosen to symbolize the impact of freedom and liberation from oppression.²⁵ Douglass never acknowledged the nomination and instead campaigned for Grant. Comparing slavery to female discrimination was problematic, but at the time, she saw it as a way to unite two movements that were once aligned in abolitionist causes.²⁶

²² "The National American Woman Suffrage Association," *Library of Congress*, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/national-american-woman-suffrage-association/articles-and-essays/the-national-american-woman-suffrage-association/>.

²³ Gabriel, *Notorious Victoria*, 37-38.

²⁴ Woodhull, "The Woodhull Manifesto."

²⁵ Felsenthal, "The Strange Tale."

²⁶ Felsenthal, "The Strange Tale;" Gabriel, *Notorious Victoria*, 37-38; Horne, "Notorious Victoria;" "The National American Woman Suffrage Association;" Woodhull, "The Woodhull Manifesto."

In 1870, Woodhull and Claflin started *Woodhull & Claflin's Weekly* to control the media narrative of the campaign and ensure there was coverage of her ideas. The newspaper endorsed Woodhull for president and published articles that communicated her ideas on women's equality. The newspaper reprinted her speeches and discussed free love and women's suffrage.²⁷ *Woodhull & Claflin's Weekly* not only amplified Woodhull's views and candidacy, but with its peak national circulation of 20,000, it allowed her to communicate the importance of women's rights to a large audience.²⁸

Even though Woodhull's newspaper communicated her ideas, it did not discuss the impossibility of her winning the presidency.²⁹ If she was elected, she would be thirty-four years old, but legally, a president must be thirty-five.³⁰ Furthermore, even if she was old enough, there was never a chance she would win. Woodhull was running as a candidate of the Equal Rights Party, a third party that had little clout in a two-party system. Woodhull knew she would not be taken seriously, but she was committed to her campaign as a platform to communicate her message. In 1870, she wrote, "I am well aware that in assuming this position I shall evoke more ridicule than enthusiasm... But this is an epoch of sudden changes."³¹ She wanted to use the candidacy to change how people perceived women and suffrage.³²

In 1871, Woodhull gained a national platform to communicate her view on women's right to vote. Representative Benjamin Butler invited her to address a congressional committee, and in doing so, she gained popularity among suffragists and became the first woman to address a

²⁷ Gabriel, *Notorious Victoria*, 59, 65; Horne, "Notorious Victoria."

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Horne, "Notorious Victoria."

³⁰ U.S. Constitution, art. II, sec. 1, cl. 6; Tilton, *A Biography of Victoria C. Woodhull*.

³¹ Woodhull, "The Woodhull Manifesto."

³² Horne, "Notorious Victoria;" U.S. Constitution, art. II, sec. 1, cl. 6; Tilton, *A Biography of Victoria C. Woodhull*; Woodhull, "The Woodhull Manifesto."

Congressional committee.³³ Woodhull argued that the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments ensured that “all people of both sexes have the right to vote.”³⁴ Although a Congressional report on the address argued that preventing women from voting was not a violation of the Constitution, the address brought Woodhull and her ideas to a wider audience.³⁵ She was able to communicate her ideas to the public and politicians able to affect legal discrimination. Days before her address, leaders of the suffragist movement first heard of Woodhull through notices in newspapers. Despite the factions in the movement, two leaders from the AWSA and NWSA, Isabella Beecher Hooker and Susan B. Anthony, attended the Congressional address to support Woodhull’s advocacy for women’s suffrage. Elizabeth Cady Stanton praised her, pointing out how Woodhull was called “the names that make women shudder, while she chucked principle, like medicine, down their throats.”³⁶ Anthony later had Woodhull deliver a speech at a NWSA convention and named her part of the National Committee of Women.³⁷

Despite the suffragists supporting Woodhull’s advocacy of women’s suffrage, they did not support Woodhull as a candidate because she wanted to use her platform to introduce other radical ideas too, from free love to wealth equality. Newspapers warned suffragists that “they must cut loose from the free love element or go to the bottom with it.”³⁸ The NWSA had already

³³ Gabriel, *Notorious Victoria*, 70, 73.

³⁴ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on the Judiciary, *The Memorial of Victoria C. Woodhull*, 41st Cong., January 11, 1871.

³⁵ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on the Judiciary, *Victoria C. Woodhull*, 41st Cong., 3rd sess, 1871.

³⁶ “Elizabeth Cady Stanton on Women,” *Helena Weekly Herald*, (Helena, MT), February 17, 1876, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84036143/1876-02-17/ed-1/seq-1/>.

³⁷ “Elizabeth Cady Stanton on Women,” Gabriel, *Notorious Victoria*, 73-74; U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on the Judiciary, *The Memorial of Victoria C. Woodhull*, 41st Cong., January 11, 1871; U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on the Judiciary, *Victoria C. Woodhull*, 41st Cong., 3rd sess, 1871.

³⁸ “The Women Going Wrong,” *The Arizona Sentinel* (Yuma, AZ), June 29, 1872, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84021912/1872-06-29/ed-1/seq-2/>.

rejected her attempt to form a suffragist-backed political party to support her run.³⁹ Certain suffragists, particularly ones from the AWSA, also publicly denounced the campaign.⁴⁰ The tension between Woodhull and other suffragists increased when she widened her agenda from women's rights by critiquing wealth inequality and the powerful men who created it.⁴¹ Although her arguments for suffrage were accepted by the suffrage movement, the movement's leaders never supported her candidacy because of its radicalism.⁴²

Press Coverage and Consequences

Newspaper coverage, although extremely critical, still communicated and spread Woodhull's ideas. While newspaper coverage criticized Woodhull's campaign, it also ignited a discussion about women seeking high office. The press employed sexist language, calling her a "jezebel," and Tennessee paper *Public Ledger* said, "Woodhull is a bad woman, and glories in it."⁴³ Articles about her often highlighted details on her appearance. When newspapers reported that Woodhull lived with her husband and ex-husband, outrage grew.⁴⁴ Despite the criticism, coverage and cartoons also included some mentions of her ideas such as free love as seen in

³⁹ Herb Chesire and Maxine Chesire, "A Woman for President?" *The New York Times*, May 27, 1956, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1956/05/27/90506685.html?action=click&contentCollection=Archives&module=ArticleEndCTA®ion=ArchiveBody&pgtype=article&pageNumber=221>.

⁴⁰ Horne, "Notorious Victoria."

⁴¹ Victoria Woodhull, "A Speech on the Impending Revolution," (1872), in *Selected Writings of Victoria Woodhull*, ed. by Cari M. Carpenter (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2010).

⁴² Chesire and Chesire, "A Woman for President?"; Horne, "Notorious Victoria;" "The Women Going Wrong;" Woodhull, "A Speech on the Impending Revolution," in *Selected Writings*.

⁴³ Gabriel, *Notorious Victoria*, 88; *Public Ledger* (Memphis, TN), July 29, 1874, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85033673/1874-07-29/ed-1/seq-2/>.

⁴⁴ Woodhull, "A Speech on the Impending Revolution."

Appendix A.⁴⁵ Woodhull's campaign sparked conversations about women in the public and women who attempted to break barriers, even if it was mostly sexist scrutiny.⁴⁶

Woodhull used her newspaper to communicate her response to critics and expose their hypocrisy. By June 1872, after years of campaigning, Woodhull had so many financial problems that when she was sued for debts she owed, she claimed to not own the clothes she wore.⁴⁷

Woodhull asked her critic and well-known Congregationalist preacher Henry Ward Beecher for aid, saying "within the past two weeks I have been shut out of hotel after hotel, and... hunted down by a set of males and females who are determined that I shall not be permitted to live even if they can prevent it."⁴⁸ Beecher responded that he was not willing to help.⁴⁹ On November 2, 1872, desperate for money and frustrated by Beecher, Woodhull published articles in her newspaper exposing him and other critics.⁵⁰ The exposé revealed Beecher's affair with a married woman. Woodhull criticized the influential man not because of the affair itself, but because of his hypocrisy in practicing free love privately while castigating it in public.⁵¹ She wrote that the aim of publishing "this exposition will send inquisition through all the churches and... society."⁵²

⁴⁵ Thomas Nast, "Get Behind Thee, (Mrs.) Satan," cartoon, *Harper's Weekly*, February 17, 1872, from Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Online Catalog, <https://www.loc.gov/item/95512460/> (accessed January 8, 2021); "The Women Going Wrong."

⁴⁶ Gabriel, *Notorious Victoria*, 88; Nast, "Get Behind Thee, (Mrs.) Satan," *Public Ledger*; "The Women Going Wrong;" Woodhull, "A Speech on the Impending Revolution."

⁴⁷ Emanie N. Sachs, *The Terrible Siren: Victoria Woodhull (1838-1927)* (New York: Harper, 1928), 167, 280.

⁴⁸ Victoria Woodhull to Henry Ward Beecher, June 3, 1872, quoted in Gabriel, *Notorious Victoria*, 176.

⁴⁹ Gabriel, *Notorious Victoria*, 175.

⁵⁰ Horne, "Notorious Victoria."

⁵¹ Felsenthal, "The Strange Tale."

⁵² Victoria Woodhull, "The Beecher-Tilton Scandal Case: The Detailed Statement of the Whole Matter by Mrs. Woodhull," *Woodhull & Claflin's Weekly*, November 2, 1872.

Woodhull disgraced Beecher and by the end of the day, copies of the paper were selling for \$40. However, publishing the article had consequences.⁵³

Backlash from the exposé revealed that Woodhull had little support left. The Beecher article contained words that were considered vulgar, such as “token” and “virginity.” As a result, on November 2, 1872, Woodhull and her sister were arrested for violating a federal statute that banned sending obscenity through the mail.⁵⁴ Although *The New York Times* reported that while in jail, “they received a great number of sympathizers,” on the day of their trial they did not. *The New York Herald* noted “not a single man spoke to them except their counsel, and only one woman... offered them the slightest recognition.”⁵⁵ She and her sister were plagued by death threats, and insulted by the press, most notably by Harriet Beecher Stowe.⁵⁶ On November 5, 1872, Election Day concluded with Woodhull in jail. With just several thousand votes and no electoral votes, Woodhull was hardly a contender against President Grant, who won reelection.⁵⁷ Though she was found not guilty, Woodhull’s focus on communicating her message cost her dearly. She lost the election, the wealth she acquired from her business, and the support from her community and the women’s rights movement.⁵⁸

⁵³ Felsenthal, “The Strange Tale;” Gabriel, *Notorious Victoria*, 175, 185; Horne, “Notorious Victoria;” Sachs, *Terrible Siren*; Victoria Woodhull to Henry Ward Beecher, June 3, 1872, quoted in Gabriel, *Notorious Victoria*, 176; Woodhull, “Beecher-Tilton.”

⁵⁴ Gabriel, *Notorious Victoria*, 185-186.

⁵⁵ “The Claflin Family,” *The New York Times*, November 3, 1872, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1872/11/03/79024263.html?pageNumber=1>; “The Claflin-Woodhull Difficulty,” *The New York Herald*, November 3, 1872, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn83030313/1872-11-03/ed-1/?sp=6&r=-0.136,0.903,0.704,0.412,0>.

⁵⁶ Felsenthal, “The Strange Tale;” Russel Crouse, “Victoria Woodhull’s Campaign: The Story of America’s First Female Presidential Candidate,” *The New Yorker*, October 20, 1928, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1928/10/27/that-was-new-york>.

⁵⁷ Cheshire and Chesire, “A Woman for President?”

⁵⁸ Cheshire and Chesire, “A Woman for President;” “The Claflin Family;” “The Claflin-Woodhull Difficulty;” Crouse, “Victoria Woodhull’s Campaign;” Felsenthal, “The Strange Tale;” Gabriel, *Notorious Victoria*, 185-186; Horne, “Notorious Victoria.”

In the years after the campaign, Woodhull's unyielding advocacy for women led her to get involved in eugenics, an inherently racist movement which asserted that selective reproduction would eradicate unwanted characteristics. It was used to argue certain groups were inferior. Like other first-wave feminists, Woodhull approached eugenics as a vehicle to continue communicating her ideas on women's rights. She lectured in England and America on eugenics, saying that sex "without regard to consent" would lead to the "utter demoralization" of future generations and prevent advancement of the human race.⁵⁹ She argued that rape and other abusive acts towards women demonstrated a man's bad traits and lack of love, which could be acquired by a child.⁶⁰ In 1892, Woodhull, with her daughter Zula, founded *The Humanitarian*, a journal devoted to eugenics, including its implications for women.⁶¹ Over time, Woodhull's interest in eugenics expanded beyond her view of its relation to women's independence, as evidenced by her support of state-supported sterilization of the mentally disabled in Virginia in the 1920s.⁶² In this era of her life, Woodhull's commitment to women's rights had a problematic turn when she became involved in a racist movement.⁶³

Victoria Woodhull's background shaped her beliefs, and her partnership with her sister provided her the wealth and platform to communicate her ideology necessary to run for president. As a symbolic campaign, it brought attention to women's rights and suffrage and she showed that women could run for high office. Although her candidacy never had significant

⁵⁹ Victoria Woodhull, *Tried as by Fire: or, The True and The False, Socially, an Oration Delivered by Victoria C. Woodhull, in All the Principal Cities and Towns of the Country During an Engagement of One Hundred and Fifty Consecutive Nights* (New York: Woodhull & Claflin, 1874), 7.

⁶⁰ Athey, "Eugenic Feminisms;" Woodhull, *Tried as by Fire*, 7.

⁶¹ "Manifesto," *The Humanitarian* 1, no. 1 (July 1892): 1.

⁶² Michael W. Perry, "Was Victoria Woodhull the First Eugenicist," in *Lady Eugenic Feminist Eugenics in the Speeches and Writings of Victoria Woodhull* (Seattle: Inkling Books, 2005), 9.

⁶³ Athey, "Eugenic Feminisms;" "Manifesto;" Perry, "Was Victoria Woodhull the First Eugenicist," 9; Woodhull, *Tried as by Fire*, 7.

support from the press, major politicians, or suffragists, her ideas still became more well-known. She used the campaign's platform to bring attention to women's rights and other radical ideology. She was able to discuss her beliefs in front of lawmakers who could change laws she believed oppressed women. Even when the press and suffragists attacked her, the criticism amplified her ideas and widened the discussion of women's roles outside of the home. Woodhull's beliefs were never going to win her the presidency, but by campaigning to be president, she amplified her beliefs to a wider audience and laid the groundwork for her ideas about women's equality to become more mainstream.

Appendix A



Woodhull (right) is depicted as Satan and holds a sign saying “Be Saved by Free Love.” A woman with children and an alcoholic husband on her back faces away, trying to get away from Woodhull.

Nast, Thomas. “Get Behind Thee, (Mrs.) Satan.” Cartoon. *Harper's Weekly*, February 17, 1872. From Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Online Catalog. <https://www.loc.gov/item/95512460/> (accessed January 8, 2021).

Annotated Bibliography

Primary

“The Bewitching Brokers: Women on Change.” Cartoon. *Harper’s Weekly*, March 5, 1870.
From HarpWeek.

<https://www.harpweek.com/09Cartoon/BrowseByDateCartoon.asp?Month=March&Date=5> (accessed February 14, 2021).

This cartoon depicted Woodhull, Claflin, & Co.’s busy opening day. This source gave me information on how the press covered the brokerage firm and the language it used towards Woodhull and Claflin.

“The Claflin Family.” *The New York Times*, November 3, 1872.

<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1872/11/03/79024263.html?pageNumber=1>.

This source from *The New York Times* discussed the arrest of Woodhull and Claflin. This article provided me information on how much support she had when arrested.

“The Claflin-Woodhull Difficulty.” *The New York Herald*, November 3, 1872.

<https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn83030313/1872-11-03/ed-1/?sp=6&r=-0.136,0.903,0.704,0.412,0>.

This article covered the trial of Woodhull. *The New York Herald* was a popular daily newspaper that circulated from 1835-1924. This source helped me understand how Woodhull was ostracized from people at the trial.

“Elizabeth Cady Stanton on Women.” *Helena Weekly Herald*, (Helena, MT), February 17, 1876.
Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers, Library of Congress.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84036143/1876-02-17/ed-1/seq-1/>.

This interview with prominent suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton discussed Victoria Woodhull and the Beecher-Tilton scandal. *Helena Weekly Herald* was created in part to support Republican politics, the more left-leaning party, in Montana. This article helped me learn about suffragists’ opinions on Woodhull and her advocacy.

“Manifesto.” *The Humanitarian* 1, no. 1 (July 1892): 1.

This manifesto of Woodhull’s newspaper on eugenics discussed the goals and purpose of creating it. It mainly focused on eugenics, but as time went on, it increasingly became

about psychics and spiritualism. This source helped me understand what type of eugenics Woodhull supported and the aims of the newspaper.

Nast, Thomas. "Get Behind Thee, (Mrs.) Satan." Cartoon. *Harper's Weekly*, February 17, 1872. From Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Online Catalog. <https://www.loc.gov/item/95512460/> (accessed January 8, 2021).

This political cartoon, as analyzed in Appendix A, depicted Woodhull as Satan, holding a sign that read "Be Saved By Free Love," and a woman burdened with her husband and children on her back walking away from her. Nast was a famous editorial cartoonist who worked for *Harper's Weekly* from 1862-1886. This cartoon helped me see how Woodhull and free love were being perceived.

Public Ledger (Memphis, TN), July 29, 1874. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85033673/1874-07-29/ed-1/seq-2/>.

This feature reflected on the Beecher-Tilton scandal two years later and commented on Woodhull's character. *Public Ledger* was a 19th century conservative newspaper that claimed to have the largest circulation of any Memphis-based newspaper. This article helped me learn more about negative and sexist media coverage of Woodhull.

Tilton, Theodore. *Biography of Victoria C. Woodhull*. New York: The Golden Age, 1871. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/51861/51861-h/51861-h.htm>.

This authorized biography detailed the life of Woodhull. Tilton was a newspaper editor and knew Woodhull, but later campaigned for presidential candidate Horace Greeley instead of her. Though it may not be a reliable biography as it was influenced by the subject herself, this provided me how Woodhull wanted her narrative to be and information on her childhood.

U.S. Congress. House of Representatives. Committee on the Judiciary. *The Memorial of Victoria C. Woodhull*. 41st Cong., January 11, 1871.

This memorial by Woodhull was a historic first as it was the first time a woman addressed a U.S. congressional committee. She argued that since the Fourteenth Amendment does not specify sex when saying citizens have a right to vote, women's right to vote is ensured by the amendment. This source showed me how historic Victoria Woodhull was before she was a presidential candidate and an argument of why women should be allowed to vote.

U.S. Congress. House of Representatives. Committee on the Judiciary. *Victoria C. Woodhull*. 41st Cong., 3rd sess, 1871.

This report by Representative Jonathan Bingham dismissed the claim Woodhull made in her memorial to Congress and future claims with this argument. It provided me information on what happened as a result of her memorial.

U.S Constitution. Article II, Section 1, Clause 6.

This section of the Constitution outlines the requirements to be president of the United States. This helped me understand how Woodhull would never be able to be president.

“Victoria Woodhull Returns.” *The Worthington Advance* (Worthington, MN), September 26, 1874. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85025620/1874-09-26/ed-1/seq-1/>.

This article was an interview with Woodhull where she responded to Theodore Tilton’s critiques of her. *The Worthington Advance* was a local newspaper that was progressive to reflect the political alignment of its region. This article gave me Woodhull’s response to heavy media criticism.

Victoria Woodhull to Henry Ward Beecher, June 3, 1872. Quoted in Gabriel, Mary. *Notorious Victoria: The Uncensored Life of Victoria Woodhull: Visionary, Suffragist, and First Woman to Run for President*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 1998.

This letter from Woodhull asks Beecher for financial aid. The quote used was found in Mary Gabriel’s biography of Woodhull. It helped me understand how impoverished Woodhull had become and how this influenced her publishing a scandalous article on him.

“Wall Street Aroused.” *The New York Times*, February 6, 1870. <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1870/02/06/80254491.html?pageNumber=8>.

The article covered the opening of Woodhull, Claflin & Co. It helped me learn what fellow brokers thought of Woodhull and Claflin, as well as learn about the throngs of men who tormented them outside the building.

“The Women Going Wrong.” *The Arizona Sentinel* (Yuma, AZ), June 29, 1872. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84021912/1872-06-29/ed-1/seq-2/>.

This newspaper article covered a recent suffrage event featuring a lecture from Woodhull, and discussed how she threatened the success of the women's rights movement. *The Arizona Sentinel* focused on being ideologically independent and circulated from the late 19th century to early 20th century. This source gave me a window into what newspaper criticism on Woodhull was like, and how blunt it was.

"The Woodhull Scandal." *The New York Times*, November 10, 1872.

<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1872/11/10/79025196.html?pageNumber=3>.

This article covered the hearing into a complaint against Colonel James Blood. Victoria Woodhull testified in this examination and her testimony provided me with the information that Cornelius Vanderbilt also financed *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly* as well as Woodhull and her sister's brokerage firm.

Woodhull, Victoria. "And the Truth Shall Make You Free." 1871. In *Selected Writings of Victoria Woodhull*, ed. by Cari M. Carpenter. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2010.

This speech by Woodhull was given to an audience of around 3,000 and was on her ideas of free love. This helped me understand what free love was.

Woodhull, Victoria. "The Beecher-Tilton Scandal Case: The Detailed Statement of the Whole Matter by Mrs. Woodhull." *Woodhull & Claflin's Weekly*, November 2, 1872.

This article detailed the affair between Henry Ward Beecher and Elizabeth Tilton. This source helped me understand her aim for publishing it and why this was considered scandalous.

Woodhull, Victoria. "The Scare-Crows of Sexual Slavery," 1873. In *Selected Writings of Victoria Woodhull*, ed. by Cari M. Carpenter. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2010.

This speech, while after Woodhull's campaign for president, discussed Woodhull's views on marriage and the oppression women face in it. This source helped me understand what specifically Woodhull opposed in marriages.

Woodhull, Victoria. "A Speech on the Impending Revolution," 1872. In *Selected Writings of Victoria Woodhull*, ed. by Cari M. Carpenter. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2010.

This speech was about wealth inequality and the role magnates played in it. This source provided me another way how Woodhull was different from the suffragist movement and more of her political ideas.

Woodhull, Victoria. *Tried as by Fire: or, The True and The False, Socially, an Oration Delivered by Victoria C. Woodhull, in All the Principal Cities and Towns of the Country During an Engagement of One Hundred and Fifty Consecutive Nights*. New York: Woodhull & Claflin, 1874.

This pamphlet was a written version of a speech delivered by Woodhull around the country. The speech discussed the issues of marriage and its relation to eugenics. This source gave me information on how she used eugenics as an argument for women's rights.

Woodhull, Victoria. "The Woodhull Manifesto." *New York Herald* (New York), April 1870.

This article is Woodhull's announcement of her candidacy for president. The *New York Herald* was a widely-circulated daily newspaper that was around for 90 years. It helped me learn about why she wanted to run for president.

Secondary

Anderson, Meg. "From The Economy To Race, See Where The Candidates Stand On The Big Issues." *NPR*, October 18, 2016.
<https://www.npr.org/2016/10/18/496926243/from-the-economy-to-race-see-where-the-candidates-stand-on-the-big-issues>.

This article was a policy comparison of the candidates running in the 2016 general presidential election. Anderson is an associate producer at *NPR*, and has contributed to Peabody Award-winning work. This helped me understand what female presidential candidates in modern history campaigned and advocated for.

Bowlin, Daniel. "The American Phantasmagoria: The Rise of Spiritualism in Nineteenth-Century America." Master's thesis, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan, 2019.

This paper discussed why spiritualism became popular through, among other factors, the breaking of gender norms and the Civil War. This thesis helped me understand how spiritualism attracted women, and how death increased the popularity of the movement.

Bronski, Michael. "The Radical Woman Whose 19th Century Ideas Still Undergird the LGBTQ-Rights Movement." *TIME*, June 25, 2019.
<https://time.com/5612564/free-love-victoria-woodhull/>.

This article highlights how many of Woodhull's ideas and language in speeches are similar to themes in the modern LGBTQ+ rights movement. Bronski is a women, gender, and sexuality professor at Harvard. This article gave me a clear explanation of what free love is.

Chesire, Herb, and Chesire, Maxine. "A Woman for President?" *The New York Times*, May 27, 1956.
<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1956/05/27/90506685.html?action=click&contentCollection=Archives&module=ArticleEndCTA®ion=ArchiveBody&pgtype=article&pageNumber=221>.

This article from *The New York Times* discussed the two female presidential candidates that occurred at the time: Woodhull and Belva Lockwood. This gave me information on how Woodhull was nominated for president.

Crouse, Russel. "Victoria Woodhull's Campaign: The Story of America's First Female Presidential Candidate." *The New Yorker*, October 20, 1928.
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1928/10/27/that-was-new-york>.

This article published soon after Woodhull's death covered specifically her campaign and arrest. Crouse was a writer and playwright who wrote for *The New Yorker* for years. This source informed me of death threats and media insults Woodhull received after her arrest.

Derbyshire, David. "The Psychology of Spiritualism: Science and Seances." *The Guardian*, October 19, 2013.
<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2013/oct/20/seances-and-science>.

This article covered why people have continued to enjoy spiritualism and psychics, even though the legitimacy of the predictions have been debunked. Derbyshire is a freelance science reporter and has written numerous articles for *The Guardian*. This source introduced me to the Fox sisters and their importance in America's infatuation with spiritualism.

Felsenthal, Carol. "The Strange Tale of the First Woman to Run for President." *Politico*, April 09, 2015.

<https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/04/victoria-woodhull-first-woman-presidential-candidate-116828>.

This article covers some of the elements of Woodhull's life that may have caused a lack of recognition for her historical importance and the history of women running for president. *Politico* is a political journalism company with content distributed in the form of its newspaper, website, podcasts, television, and more. It helped me understand the long history of women attempting to become president and her historical importance besides being the first female presidential candidate.

Gabriel, Mary. *Notorious Victoria: The Uncensored Life of Victoria Woodhull: Visionary, Suffragist, and First Woman to Run for President*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 1998.

This biography covers Woodhull's life, including less discussed eras of her childhood and time in Britain. Gabriel is a critically acclaimed author who has written several history books. This helped me learn about her relationship with the women's rights movement as well as an overview of her life.

Goldsmith, Barbara. *Other Powers: the Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism, and the Scandalous Victoria Woodhull*. HarperPerennial: New York, 1999.

This book on Woodhull is a thorough biography of her entire life. Goldsmith is a critically acclaimed historian and author who has written several biographies on famous women. This biography demonstrated how she worked to help make women financially independent.

"Historical Overview of Domestic Violence." *The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center*. <http://www.pacwrc.pitt.edu/Curriculum/310DomesticViolenceIssuesAnIntroductionforChildWelfareProfessionals/Handouts/HO3DomesticViolenceTimeline.pdf>.

This curriculum from the Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center has a concise timeline on domestic violence in the U.S. Part of the University of Pittsburgh, the Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center provides resources for people who work in the child welfare system. This helped me learn more about the legality of Woodhull's father and husband's beatings.

Horne, Eileen. "Notorious Victoria: The First Woman to Run for President." *The Guardian*, July 20, 2016.

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/jul/20/notorious-victoria-first-woman-run-for-us-president>.

This article is an in-depth look into Woodhull's biography. It provided me information about how the suffragist movement originally embraced her but later distanced itself from her. This source also demonstrated how she was subject to scrutiny that was often sexist.

Kommel, Alexandra. "Seances in the Red Room." *The White House Historical Association*, April 24, 2019. <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/seances-in-the-red-room>.

This article explored First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln's seances and the White House's overall interactions with spiritualism. The White House Historical Association, founded by First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy, is an organization that records the history of the White House through records and artifacts. This helped me learn about Mary Todd Lincoln's spiritualism in the White House and how it started.

"The National American Woman Suffrage Association." *Library of Congress*. <https://www.loc.gov/collections/national-american-woman-suffrage-association/articles-and-essays/the-national-american-woman-suffrage-association/>.

This article provided an explanation for the merger between the National Woman Suffrage Association and the American Woman Suffrage Association. This source helped me understand the factions of the suffrage movement.

Perry, Michael W. "Was Victoria Woodhull the First Eugenicist." In *Lady Eugenic Feminist Eugenics in the Speeches and Writings of Victoria Woodhull*, 7-26. Seattle: Inkling Books, 2005.

This chapter was an introduction to a collection of Woodhull's speeches on eugenics. Perry has edited and contributed to multiple books on eugenics. This source helped me understand more about Woodhull's eugenics and what the eugenics movement was in general.

Ross, Ashley. "A Brief History of Divorce in America: From Legal Rarity to Dark Comedy." *Time*, October 7, 2016. <https://time.com/4521314/divorce-history-sarah-jessica-parker/>.

This article covered divorce in American history and how it evolved. *Time* is a credible news magazine and website that was created in 1923. This source provided me information about 19th century divorce.

Sachs, Emanie N. *The Terrible Siren: Victoria Woodhull (1838-1927)*. New York: Harper, 1928.

This biography published soon after Woodhull's death discussed her whole life, but specifically her free love driven actions. Sachs was a feminist writer active primarily in the late 1920s and 30s. This source gave me additional information on Woodhull's debts.

Shreve, Grant. "When Women Channeled the Dead to be Heard." *JSTOR Daily*, February 2, 2018. <https://daily.jstor.org/when-women-channeled-the-dead-to-be-heard/>.

This article discusses how spiritualism gave women independence. Shreve writes about race, religion, and politics in American history. This helped me understand the importance of women in spiritualism.