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Alena R. Pirok

Mrs. Satan's Penance: The New History of Victoria Woodhull

The first woman to run for president in the United States was a social outcast who believed she could communicate with the dead. While her actions were very unique, they were initially accepted relatively well by her peers. Sadly for Victoria Woodhull, her popularity did not last. Less than a year after she ran for president she became a walking scandal among her contemporaries. After having been called a "modern Joan of Arc," and a "social martyr," she became better known for the name famed cartoonist Thomas Nast gave her, "Mrs. Satan."¹ The details about her family life, open sexuality, and an exposé she published on an affair in the famous Beecher family, helped to earn her that, and became some of her most well known characteristics. Today, she is remembered as a woman who openly rejected the Victorian ideal, but what is often neglected in historical accounts of her life is the period after she left the United States and settled in England. In England, Victoria Woodhull successfully altered her image from a disreputable figure of scandal into a respectable philanthropist. This dramatic change adds an interesting twist to her rejection of social norms in the U.S.

Woodhull's life in England was not fully cleansed of the soils of her past; the issues from her life in New York haunted her wherever she went. Still, once she became wealthy in England she attempted to erase the blots on her reputation by dedicating her life to social reform, and by adhering to social norms. Woodhull was able to fund her image change by marrying a rich banker, publishing a monthly paper that focused on philanthropy, and giving a series of charitable donations to the town of Brendon's Norton. While her earlier life was wrought with scandal and public ridicule, Victoria Woodhull successfully altered her image and can now be remembered as having two histories, one on each side of the Atlantic: an outrageous pariah in America and an "ideal" woman in the U.K.

The story of Woodhull's life reads like a Hollywood movie plot. A young girl born into poverty was taken on the road by her

religious fanatic parents, where she was marketed as clairvoyant. Woodhull and her sister supported their growing family as fortune-tellers, healers and prostitutes. After marrying twice, Woodhull had a chance encounter with an extremely wealthy and well known business tycoon, Commodore Vanderbilt, which allowed Woodhull and her sister Tennessee Claflin to start their own stock brokerage, the first of its kind. Woodhull also ran for president, became a newspaper writer, spent many nights in jail, was blacklisted by the feminist movement, and in the end died alone in an English manor. She lived an extraordinary life and had a hand in the suffrage and equal rights movements in the United States, but she is often left out of common histories of her time. This paper will examine Victoria Woodhull's story beginning with a brief introduction to her life as a young woman, followed by an explanation of her most notable years in the U.S. The bulk of the paper will focus on her life in England, and the end will explore Woodhull's lasting memory.

Early Life

Victoria Woodhull was born on September 23, 1838 to Roxy and Buck Claflin, in Homer, Ohio. One biographer quoted her as saying she was a "child without a childhood."² Her mother was widely known as a fake clairvoyant and her father sold patent medicine. Interestingly, her experience as a child clairvoyant was not unique; during the same period the famous Fox children were being used as connections to the "other side" and went as far as the Lincoln White House.³ This movement, known as the Spiritualist movement, was at its beginnings when the Claflin girls were being peddled by their parents. The movement, along with their own clairvoyant powers, allowed the girls not only to support their family as children but was the core of all of their future success.

Woodhull's childhood is a dense story of winning and losing, hardship and occasional prostitution. Eventually, Woodhull's sexuality would become the central factor in her fall from social grace. At age fifteen she happily left her family and married Doctor Canning Woodhull, who was thirteen years her senior. Dr. Woodhull was known as an alcoholic, which was the cause of the abuse Woodhull faced at his hands. She gave birth to two children while married to the Doctor. Her first child Byron appears to have had a form of mental retardation, which some accounts attribute to a kick in the stomach from her husband during her

pregnancy. Her second child, Zulu Maude, to whom she stayed very close until her death, was her favorite. Due to her husband's abuse and other such events, Woodhull eventually divorced him.⁴⁵

Following her separation from the Doctor in the mid 1860's, Woodhull began seeing Colonel James Blood, a married Civil War veteran from Missouri whom she met during a spiritualist conference.⁶ After Blood obtained a divorce from his wife, he and Woodhull were married and subsequently divorced, but this did not end their relationship.⁷ This confusing relationship with Blood, coupled with her loyalty to Dr. Woodhull (which spoke of her humanitarian nature, not her sexual perniciousness), caused a great deal of gossip. Her intentions were not seen clearly or understood by her peers. She wrote to the *New York Times* on this topic in 1871:

One of the charges made against me is that I lived in the same house with my former husband, Dr. Woodhull, and my present husband, Colonel Blood. The fact is a fact. Dr. Woodhull being sick, ailing and incapable of self-support, I felt it my duty to myself and to human nature that he should be cared for, although this incapacity was in no wise attributed to me. My present husband, Colonel Blood, not only approves of this charity, but co-operates in it.⁸

Woodhull also had a great loyalty to her family despite the fact that they had repeatedly tarnished any good reputation she had made for herself and lived off her earnings for the bulk of her life. After her sister Tennessee had been accused of murder in Ottawa, Illinois due to a botched attempt to cure a woman's cancer using her fathers' medicine, Woodhull took her sister away.⁹ When she gained more money and fame her family came to her home to once again live off of her earnings. As in their childhood, mother, father, sisters, brothers, and children once again lived under a roof built on the work of Victoria and Tennessee. Adding to their parasitic tendencies, the family fought often and sued one another many times, which caused a great deal of notoriety and further blackened Woodhull's image.¹⁰

Notoriety in New York

After moving to New York in 1868 and setting up shop as fortune tellers, Woodhull and Tennessee Claflin soon found

themselves in the good graces of business mogul Commodore Vanderbilt, who wanted to use the women's powers in his business endeavors.¹¹ Luck had been good to the sisters for once and Vanderbilt took a special liking to Claflin. Although their relationship was controversial, the sisters claimed it was strictly business.¹² An allotment of money from the famous mogul allowed the sisters to open a stock firm, where they encouraged women to take part in the stock market by providing them with a comfortable atmosphere and preferential treatment.¹³ It was not long before Woodhull and Claflin began to publish a paper, *The Woodhull and Claflin Weekly*. Their paper dealt with suffrage, spiritualism, and women's interests, the hot topics of the day.

In an 1872 issue of the paper, Woodhull famously announced her run for the presidency on the Equal Rights ticket. She had been chosen by the Equal Rights Party to be their candidate in the upcoming presidential election and gladly took the opportunity to challenge the social standards of the time. While women did not have the right to vote, there was no law specifically stating that a woman could not run for president, allowing Woodhull to run legally. Woodhull also felt that there was no legal documentation stopping women from voting, a position she expressed in a letter to the *New York Times* in 1896:

Section 1 of Article XIV, declares that 'all persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof are citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States....' The only question which can arise here is as to the meaning of the word 'persons,' but by no legal or verbal sophistry can it be twisted to exclude women.¹⁴

Though her run for president did not earn her many votes, she did successfully become the first female to officially run for president, no matter how unpopular her campaign was.

It did not take long before her failed attempt at the presidency helped to sour her public image. A speech she gave at Steinway Hall was interrupted by her belligerent older sister's heckling, forcing Woodhull to publicly admit to her views on free love.¹⁵ Free love, at the time, was defined as the ability to love whomever one chose, for however long one chose, repeating that cycle for as many times as one wanted. This idea completely defied the Victorian ideal, which prescribed that the sanctity and purity of

marriage should supersede emotions. Woodhull was already seen as an odd person, but after her statement confirming her open support of free love it was inevitable that she was dropped out of favor in society.

Compounding her fall from grace, the reverend Henry Ward Beecher, brother of famed author Harriet Beecher-Stowe, took it upon himself to defend mainstream Christianity against Woodhull's spiritualism by condemning her free love life style.¹⁶ Woodhull struck back with an exposé, printed in her paper, which highlighted the affair the reverend was having with a friend and fellow public figure's wife, Lib Tilton. Paradoxically, her exposé turned more people away from her and left her and her family on the street. The good times in Victoria Woodhull's life had come to a screeching halt. As he had once before, Commodore Vanderbilt came to the aid of Woodhull and her family. This time he gave his help postmortem. After his death, a major legal dispute arose about the odd divisions of wealth left to his children. While the mogul's family and friends were being questioned and taken to court, Vanderbilt's son contacted Woodhull and her sister and, in an apparent attempt to suppress the details of the sisters' relationship with the Commodore, sent them to England with a generous amount of money.¹⁷ The son's attempt to save his father's name provided the turning point that Woodhull and Claflin needed in order to reinvent themselves.

A new life and new opinions in England

In England, Woodhull took off on the same foot she left the United States on, lecture touring.¹⁸ *The New York Times* reported that in 1881 Victoria Woodhull's reception in England "especially among the higher classes, was very flattering, and wherever she lectured there were crowded houses to hear her."¹⁹ The popularity of her lecture series solidified the idea that her name was nowhere near as poisonous in England as it was in the United States and her public character overhaul could be accomplished. The articles written about her lecturing in Europe do not suggest that her views aroused opposition; this could be attributed to the fact that many of the speeches, letters and articles she wrote while in England took on a new approach to the opinions she had espoused while in New York. For instance, while in England Woodhull wrote in a letter, "Free love is not what I ask for nor what I pleaded for. What I asked for was educated love, that our daughters be taught to love rightly. . ." ²⁰ She also wrote in 1881

that she had never been an advocate of free love, and that what appeared to be support was only a creation of Colonel Blood, who she claimed had published falsities.²¹ Her new ideas were starkly different from what she had claimed to believe in New York, where she had asserted, "I advocate free-love in the highest purest sense, as the only cure for the immorality, the deep damnation by which men corrupt and disfigure God's most holy institution of sexual relations."²² In the first quote she stresses educated love, while in the second quote she stresses sexual relations, showing that her opinions had changed from a more physical interpretation of love to a more mental interpretation. Clearly, Woodhull either had a change of heart after her boat ride to England or she understood the change in image that was necessary to stay in the good graces of the English public.

Marriage, money, and a new reputation

In London at a lecture in the old St. James's Hall she was introduced to John B. Martin, whose recently deceased sister had shared many of Woodhull's views.²³ Martin was a wealthy London banker and heir to a large estate. It is debatable whether or not Woodhull made Martin her third and final husband for financial gain or for love, but it is known that in the Victorian era women were encouraged to marry for financial comfort. In the fall of 1883, Woodhull and John B. Martin were married. After fourteen years of undisputed monogamy, Martin died,²⁴ leaving to Woodhull his personal assets and the family land in Brendon's Norton, a small town outside of London.²⁵

Before his untimely death, Martin and Woodhull took great pains to mend her reputation. One of the first obstructions that came in the couple's way was disapproval of their secret marriage on the part of Martin's friends and family.²⁶ To counteract this, Martin and Woodhull attempted to show evidence of "good blood" in Woodhull's veins. As many status-seekers have done, Woodhull and Martin attempted to claim blood relations with United States founding fathers. In a document titled "The Washington Pedigree," Martin defended his family's own relation to the first American President, George Washington, and Woodhull defended her relation to Washington's close friend and fellow founding father, Alexander Hamilton. The evidence provided for Martin's side is plainly more concise and seems to be more valid than the spotty lineage presented by Woodhull, which was accompanied by a change in her daughter's name.²⁷ This large

scale attempt at laundering the family name also included her sister, whose first name was changed from Tennessee to Tennie C. Attempting to clean up Woodhull's family background was an important aspect of creating a character worthy of association with the Martin family and their friends.

Tennessee Claflin also married into a substantial amount of prestige and money in England. In the fall of 1885, not long after Woodhull was married, Claflin married Francis Cook, and became the first Cook Baronet—a proper English Lady and one of the wealthiest people in England,²⁸ a surprising twist from being a little girl who was peddled by her family as a fortune teller, healer and prostitute. Her 1923 obituary in the *New York Times* portrayed her first as the lady she had become, mentioning her previous life in veiled language that made it less of a scandal and more of an interesting fact.²⁹ Clearly, marriage became Claflin's social saving grace. Woodhull, however, had to work much harder to regain a good name for herself.

Philanthropy in Brendon's Norton

Following the death of her third husband, Victoria Woodhull-Martin moved her life out to the town of Brendon's Norton and the estate she had inherited. Her time in Brendon's Norton encompasses the stage in Woodhull's life where she truly succeeded in becoming a figure well known not for her radical life style but for her acts of good will and financial donation.³⁰ One of the first things Victoria Woodhull did for the town was give a local reverend a house, rose garden, green house, and cow, along with £55 to the church for renovation.³¹ A local chaplain commented on her good deeds to the church saying, "No one next to our Lord has been more cruelly misjudged and spoken ill of than Mrs. Biddulph Martin."³² This was only the beginning of her attempt to use her money to gain favor with the people of Brendon's Norton.

One year later in 1903, Victoria Woodhull gave the town street lights, postal service, and telephone availability. One could argue that she simply furnished the town with her own comforts of home—an interpretation perhaps shared by a group of rioters who, disapproving of her donations, proceeded to destroy the newly planted gas lamps.³³ Also in 1903, she became known for being the first woman seen driving a motorcar in Hyde Park. She was known as a car enthusiast and in 1904 she started a Lady's Motor Club, to encourage the women of her town to take up

leisurely drives in the country.³⁴ Surely there must have been those in her quiet town who did not approve of her noisy pastime, but there seems to have been no public objections to her love of automobiles.

As a woman who lived in the United States and Great Britain, Woodhull developed a special liking for both of her residential nations. She was an active member in the Sulgrave Movement, a philanthropic effort to create friendly links between the United States and England—a perfect movement for the *new* Victoria Woodhull. The movement highlighted the link between American founding father George Washington and his ancestors who had lived in Sulgrave Manor.³⁵ Woodhull is said to have been a great contributor to the purchase of Sulgrave Manor as well as having donated another English manor to the movement.³⁶ In these acts, Woodhull created an image of herself as both a good American woman and a good English woman. Her good works as a wealthy donor had made an impact on her history in England in spite of her radical and notorious past.

Censoring the past

Many modern day celebrities have encountered great social misfortune, much like Victoria Woodhull did, whether because of a sexual scandal or simply absent-minded words. One key to self-reinvention after such scandals is to measure to what degree the people around believe in the transformation, and how willing they are to accept a new identity and to forgive past transgressions. Woodhull spent the latter part of her life living down her past through self-reinvention. A first step was reinventing her family. In a patrilineal society or in any society where grand fortunes are passed on through inheritance it is important to be connected to someone who is held in high esteem. Such connections not only give the aura of wealth but they also foster trust and fraternity on the part of others in the same social class. In the United States, Woodhull's family had not been of noble or famous birth, but in England she was associated with the American founding father Alexander Hamilton.³⁷ Moreover, though she had arrived with her own money from Commodore Vanderbilt's son, that wealth would not have gotten her far in society. In Victorian England, it was better to be associated with "old money," as opposed to "new money." Inherited wealth helped to build an image of class, sophistication, and birthright, while sudden recipients of money had were stained as lower-class

individuals who were unwelcome to the wealthy elite. Woodhull was wise in choosing the more honorable and respectable avenue to acceptance by marrying into "old" wealth and claiming Alexander Hamilton as her ancestor.

In order to ensure her respectability Victoria Woodhull also took steps to clear her name, or make sure her past was not leaked out to the people of England. In early 1894, Woodhull and Martin filed libel charges against the British Museum for allowing pamphlets discussing the Beecher-Tilton scandal to be open to public view.³⁸ In their libel case, Woodhull and Martin claimed that these pamphlets were incriminating to Woodhull's character and that the information in them was "falsely" written. Though they did not win the case they proved to the rest of the upper class society that they rejected using her name in a way that would harm her reputation. The lawsuit also allowed Woodhull to publically claim that other negative things that would eventually come out about her were mere fabrications, like the pamphlets in the British Museum. On many occasions she denied that she had held the controversial views she had been pinned with. Rather, she asserted, she had been misunderstood or taken advantage of, a claim that fit in well with contemporary images of women as helpless and impressionable beings. This seemed to be good enough proof for the upper class of England to take her seriously as one of their own.

Winning acceptance in Brendon's Norton

Woodhull had more difficulty winning over the people of Brendon's Norton, some of who took to the streets smashing the gaslights she had donated to the town.³⁹ In another attempt to win the townspeople over, she also tried to bring a Botanical Women's College to the area that would have access to the large gardens on her property for educational purposes. Woodhull also had dormitories built for the women who would come and learn about the plants. This plan did not succeed, however, and both Woodhull and her daughter Zulu gained a great deal of negative press for their failure.⁴⁰ Woodhull did not stop there, however. She also had inherited two school buildings when Martin had died. She gave a great deal of financial aid to the schools, but failed to be voted to the school board after a valiant attempt.⁴¹

After a widely publicized car wreck, however, Victoria Woodhull began to slow down her overhaul of the town of Brendon's Norton. This incident was apparently the turning point

for her popularity in the town. Not long after, Woodhull and her daughter began to give away more and more of their land, asking nothing in return. They began by turning a large part of their land into a country club where they sponsored many plays. They also were supporters of the youth movement, and gave generously to both the elderly and children.⁴² Once it seemed she was able to give to the town of Brendon's Norton without any implication of selfishness, she was then able to create for herself an identity that would leave the town with a positive lasting impression.

Reactions in the U.S.

In the United States the change that took place in Victoria Woodhull was more difficult for people to accept. Though she changed her own history, many American writers did not let her escape her past. In an 1890 article from the *Milwaukee Spiritual*, a journalist interviewed Miss Lockwood, a 1884 Presidential Candidate.⁴³ The topic was Woodhull's recent threat of a libel case against American papers for their writings about her and the Beecher-Tilton Scandal. Having met with Woodhull and Claflin, Lockwood concluded,

I think they are absurd, a piece of foolishness. They were too well known here, and all the bulldozing in the world that they attempt upon the press of the country will fall and fall flat. They are not dealing with English editors who are banished for telling the truth... Oh, no, their characters are too well known.

She also adds,

While I was in Woodhull's house in London she was then pasting up and editing a lot of the old newspaper scraps from American papers, preparatory to their publication in a book form showing in what great esteem she was held here, but I observed that she ran her pen through everything that was unfavorable.⁴⁴

Another article from the *New York Times*, which dealt with an 1895 case brought on by Woodhull against her niece, described her as a rascal bent on destroying the family. The article quotes one of her sisters' complaints:

Why does not Victoria devote her remaining years

to [charity] work, instead of running from Europe to America and back again, and spending her husband's money to achieve notoriety? See what she did in England? She sued the British Museum for having on its shelves a "Life of Victoria Woodhull," declaring that it was libelous publication. She was awarded £1 damages. At the same time she herself wrote the book, or rather, dictated every word of it. That is a fair sample of what she had been doing in years past.⁴⁵

It is certainly fair to say that at least two people in the United States had harsh words for Woodhull and her activities in England. Both women commented on her failed attempt to change her image or alter her past. While England seemed to have taken Victoria's protest as a sign of either innocence or redemption, America was not ready to let go of "Mrs. Satan," just yet.

Modern interpretations and historical significance

Victoria Woodhull managed to straddle the fence in between being a noteworthy trailblazer and an insignificant tabloid star many times. What was it, then, that makes her historically significant? What can be said of this woman who was truly a character of the times? Woodhull has played many roles in subsequent histories: she is currently a symbol of the women's rights movements and the sexual rights movements; she is also the patron of a small English town, the first woman to run for president, the first woman to own a stock firm, and a public woman who rubbed elbows with the rich and famous of Victorian New York. Victoria Woodhull was many things and there are many things she is noted for doing, leaving a lot room for different interpretations of her life.

One modern interpretation of Woodhull sees her as the woman who made significant advances for women in politics and finance. A web page dedicated to her called "Victoria Woodhull, The Spirit to Run the White House," provides a link to her campaign song, a store for Woodhull goods, and news about her remembrance as a trailblazer.⁴⁶ While this page does acknowledge her social wrongs, most of the information is full of errors. To the creators of this web page and its followers, Victoria Woodhull is the first woman to run for president, an innocent woman of good character. Though this web page advertises many books written

on her life, it would appear that the information of the web page itself does not reflect the research done in the books.

Another website that highlights Woodhull's achievements as a women's rights fighter is published by "The Woodhull Institute for Ethical Leadership." Their page reads, "she spoke frankly of the need for women to take control of their reproductive life and health—so frankly that she was not received in the most respectable drawing rooms, even those belonging to the feminists of her day."⁴⁷ This group highlights Woodhull as a brazen woman who did not steer away from speaking her mind, and as a great leader whom women in the organization hope to embody. While they do acknowledge the fact that she was in some ways ostracized by her peers, they fail to recognize that it was not so much her words on women's rights but her thoughts on free love that brought her a large amount of ill fame.

A foundation dedicated to sexual freedom and women's equality also takes its name from Woodhull. The Woodhull Freedom Foundation does not highlight her run for president but instead highlights her as being a woman who was not afraid to be a free lover.⁴⁸ The foundation aims to protect and promote federal freedoms of sexuality and privacy in the United States. This foundation sees Woodhull as the woman she was in New York, when she believed strongly in free love and was not about to deny her stance on woman's rights or her sexuality. This image of Woodhull did not cross the sea with her though.

Even before her death she began to be seen as what Henry Frany would call one of the "First Social Martyrs in the C[ause] of Woma[n]."⁴⁹ The early 1900's were favorable years for Woodhull. She was involved with donating documents to the Statistical Society Library, for which she was generously thanked in a personal letter.⁵⁰ She was also asked to donate a copy of her signature to the Los Angeles Public Library, which wrote that Woodhull was qualified as someone who "has enriched thought interests [across] all classes, from children to philosophers."⁵¹ In her later years Woodhull was the gracious recipient of many favorable letters that thanked and honored her for her achievements. John M. Kullerman wrote to her that the United States was now catching up with her, as some people were now accepting the teaching of eugenics, sexual hygiene, and votes for women.⁵² Another Woodhull supporter wrote "I should think you would take great pleasure in contemplating the way th[e] world is coming round to the thing[s] you fought so lonely for when you

were in the United States.”⁵³ Despite having left the United States in almost total social ruin, Woodhull was able to maintain many followers.

A 2001 article from *The Times* highlights Brendon’s Norton, the town that Woodhull moved to after her last husband’s death.⁵⁴ The article focuses on the fear that the people of Brendon’s Norton had that their favorite benefactor might be shown in an unfavorable light in an upcoming movie based on her life. The article claims that Woodhull seduced Vanderbilt, that she herself claimed to have slept with Henry Beecher, and that she fled to England due to her cartoon portrayal as “Mrs. Satan.” While most of the “facts” presented in the article are not facts at all, they do show that the people of Brendon’s Norton and England have an extremely skewed view of her history, and that they have forgiven her for her past deeds, and have accepted her as their beloved benefactor. The people of Brendon’s Norton, while acknowledging that she had an ill-favored past, choose to remember her as their own hero rather than the woman who ran for president of the United States or otherwise. There are so many different aspects of Victoria Woodhull to choose from it would seem that any group could take her up as their champion.

Many theatrical performances have used Woodhull as a muse. “Onward Victoria,” “Victorious Victoria,” and “Spirit and Flesh,” are examples of the many plays and musicals written about her life.⁵⁵ Some concentrate on her presidential campaign, others, including “Spirit and Flesh,” center on her life as a spiritualist and clairvoyant. While this play in particular is cited as being a comedy, this does not discredit its honesty.⁵⁶ In fact, the play may be in many ways a more honest portrayal of her life, as it does not steer away from showing her in a light that might be less flattering.

Victoria Woodhull is not only a pop culture icon; she has been the subject of much historical research. Many histories focus on her life as an interesting and somewhat odd Victorian woman who made great strides in women’s advancement, ignoring her life after New York. This may be caused by the fact that Woodhull was a woman of many hats. For instance, in *Other Powers: The Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism, and Scandalous Victoria Woodhull*, Barbara Goldsmith tells Woodhull’s life through the lens of spiritualism’s impact on her life and on Victorian America. Amanda Friston, on the other hand, examines Woodhull as a “public woman” in an article in the *Journal of Women’s History*. The phrase “public

woman" refers to a woman/women's emergence from out of the home sphere and into the public. Friston highlights Woodhull's presence in the public eye, and suggests that the reason she was left out of many histories of the Suffragist movement was because her poor public image embarrassed other suffragists.⁵⁷

Most histories focus on the part of her life that had the greatest effect on the United States. They fail to give her full life story, which leads to a kind of "heroification."⁵⁸ This type of selective history allows historical figures to be remembered more as deity-like figures, free from moral or ethical judgments of society. While claiming that someone recanted all their previous statements that gave them their fame might be in bad taste in an obituary, the same statement in a historical context gives a more honest and significant idea of the person in the time they lived. Without examining the full life of Victoria Woodhull, we cannot understand how much social disdain she earned and how it affected her personally. The loss of her later life's history leads to a misinterpretation of her as a person, creating an image stuck in time with no evidence of change, which is, after all, the key to any history.

Victoria Woodhull successfully created a double life for herself, making her own history open to interpretation. History has been very kind to her. Many writers have portrayed her as a "woman beyond her time," allowing her Victorian-era sins to be washed away in hindsight, and leaving her with a past that looks more like martyrdom than a series of character flaws. She has been left out of history, given new histories, and has become a significant character in history and in the study and discipline of writing history.

Notes

- 1 Letter to VW from Henry Frany & "A Few facts not generally known regarding this 'modern Joan of Arc.'"
- 2 Theodore Tilton, *Biography of Victoria Woodhull*, (New York: Golden Age, 1871).
- 3 Barbara Goldsmith, *Other Powers: The Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism, and the Scandalous Life of Victoria Woodhull* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1998), 28-29.
- 4 *Oxford National Dictionary of Biography* (hereafter ONDB), "Woodhull, Victoria Claflin" (January 2010), <http://www.oxfordndn.com/view/printable.98231> (accessed March 2010); Goldsmith, *Other Powers*, 52.
- 5 ONDB; Goldsmith, *Other Powers*, 64. Goldsmith calls Byron a "Sixteen year old with the mind of an infant."

- 6 ONDB; Goldsmith, *Other Powers*, 107.
- 7 ONDB, Goldsmith, *Other Powers*, 107.
- 8 Victoria Woodhull, "Letter to the New York Times," *New York Times*, May 20, 1871.
- 9 Goldsmith, *Other Powers*, 82.
- 10 "Again Victoria Woodhull," *New York Times*, June 16, 1895.
- 11 ONDB; Goldsmith, *Other Powers*, 156.
- 12 Goldsmith, *Other Powers*, 158; Julia Flynn Slier, "The Tides of Fortune," 19 December 2007, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB1198011762564337829.html> (accessed March 2010).
- 13 ONDB; Goldsmith, *Other Powers*, 191.
- 14 Victoria Woodhull, "Women Suffrage In America," *New York Times*, May 28, 1896.
- 15 Goldsmith, *Other Powers*, 303.
- 16 Woodhull, "Letter," 1871.
- 17 ONDB
- 18 "Mrs. Woodhull In New York," *New York Times*, November 27, 1881, N.P.; "Woodhull, Suffragist Dies," *New York Times*, June 11, 1927.
- 19 "Mrs. Woodhull," *New York Times*, 1881.
- 20 Victoria Woodhull, "Free Love Is Not What I Ask For," Victoria Woodhull Papers. Special Collection Research Center, Morris Library. Southern Illinois University Carbondale, IL. Hereafter VWP.
- 21 Owen Stinchcombe, *American Lady of the Manor; Brendon's Norton; The Late Life of Victoria Woodhull Martin* (Cheltenham: Adprint, 2000), 19; Goldsmith, *Other Powers*, 441.
- 22 Woodhull, "Letter," 1871.
- 23 Stinchcombe, *American Lady*, 19.
- 24 "John Biddulph Martin Dies," *New York Times*, March 22, 1897.
- 25 Stinchcombe, *American Lady*, 19; Goldsmith, *Other Powers*, 445.
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