

COMMUNICATION THROUGH THE VEIL AND THE EVOLVING CONSCIOUSNESS OF VICTORIA WOODHULL: PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE AND FEMINIST

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Victoria Woodhull, (1838-1927) the first woman to run for president in 1872, has been studied from numerous scholarly lenses, with some attention to her spiritualist roots. She served as President of the American Association of Spiritualists, and her connection to Spiritualism was not simply for the purpose of thwarting the conventions that allowed mediums to speak in public when this was mostly frowned upon for 19th century women in the United States. By the 1870s, when public speaking was more acceptable, Woodhull did not have to use spiritualism as a crutch. Woodhull wrote, in an 1873 letter to the Pittsburgh Leader: “I should feel that all the blessings that make life worth having would be lost to me, were I now commanded to testify of my life, to attempt to arrogate to myself, what has been done through me by spirits.” How can scholars best understand the significance of Woodhull’s contributions and, especially what drove them, coming from nonmaterialist mystical roots, in a belief system which by definition, is inaccessible to the intellect? A useful framework to understand Woodhull is through the pragmatic and scientific tools and philosophy of Conscientiology.

Projection out of the body, hearing spirit, seeing spirit, and other similar experiences are known within the Conscientiology framework as xenophrenia, or the state of consciousness that is “outside the normal pattern of the ordinary, physical waking state.” These can be “induced by physical, physiological and pharmacological or parapsychic agents.” They are, as Waldo Vieira, a former spiritualist, medium and medical doctor has noted, “inherent in the history” of mankind.¹

Woodhull was one of numerous historical figures who have described xenophrenic experiences as an important part of her life and as catalyst for transformation, and like other historical figures, Woodhull’s were linked to traumatic life experiences. Most scholars have not focused solely on the links among trauma, xenophrenia and changes in social perception and political action; however, these

¹ Guilherme Soares Lima, FAQ of Conscientiology and Projectiology 2.0 p. 258. BA Brazil 2015. VIEIRA, Waldo. Projectiology: A Panorama of Experiences of the Consciousness Outside the Human Body, IIPC, 2002. Glossary of Projectiology, 1098-1111, p. 1111.

kinds of experiences are frequently inter-related. As Waldo Vieira has noted, xenophobia can allow a person who has had traumatic experiences, accompanied by grief, pain and suffering, to “eliminate the sense of insecurity” that can result from these experiences and instead attain “confidence,” as well as deal with “emotional problems...” that may have been caused by these experiences.² This study looks at the psychological causes that led Victoria Woodhull to this “altered state of consciousness,” while foregrounding trauma and grief which was an important aspect of her experience.

Victoria Woodhull, an example of this phenomena described by Vieira, was born in poverty in Homer, Ohio in 1837. Limited by a mere three year period of sporadic attendance in school, she was abused by her father, and later her husband, at a time when the lives of all women were severely hindered by the economic, political and social constraints that characterized women’s circumscribed roles in the 19th century United States. Despite this difficult early life, or perhaps because of it, Woodhull would exhibit the classic traits of one who appeared to overcome any remnants of insecurity tied to her roots, and the traumatic experiences that would come later, and exhibited the confidence of one who believed she had attained intuitive guidance from what she described as contact through the veil.

Woodhull identified mystical out of body projections as the force that led her to become the first woman to run for president in 1872, open the first female-run stock brokerage firm in the U.S., publish a newspaper, and vigorously challenge the circumscribed roles and obstacles faced by 19th century women in the United States. Woodhull’s self-descriptions, those of biographers during her time, as well as those of many contemporary scholars, demonstrate the ways that her understandings of the world, and her place in it, were inextricably linked to her xenophrenic experiences.

As mentioned, Woodhull identified herself as a Spiritualist, and most of her biographers do not doubt that this self-identification was believed by Woodhull to have been a genuine one; however, out of body projections, which have been described as encompassing the entering of the spirit world for the purpose of energy healing, communication with spirits, astral projection, and channeling, predated the formal beginnings of Spiritualism as described by scholars.

Historians have identified the Fox sisters as igniting the spark that gave birth to spiritualism when they heard “strange, unidentified sounds” in their homes, from a series of “knocks and rattles,” which the young girls (aged 11 and 14) identified as voices from “beyond,” in Hydesville, New York in 1848. Indeed, after the

² Guilherme Soares Lima, FAQ of *Conscientiology and Projectiology* 2.0 p. 258. BA Brazil 2015. Luis Minero, *Demystifying the Out-of-Body Experience: A Practical Manual for Exploration*. Minero explains that “conscientiology is the science that studies the consciousness and all of its manifestations inside and outside the body.” P. 21. Minero notes that one of the well known of these historical figures to “report an extraphysical experience is the Greek philosopher Plato,” where he “describes the case of a soldier (Er, the Armenian) who had a forced OBE. P. 17

rappings were heard by the sisters, they began providing mediumship readings for a fee, and other mediums soon followed suit. Soon ladies, who explained that their words to promiscuous audiences of men and women, came, not from themselves, but from the spirit world, found a path to a degree of power and profit. These beginnings in the late 1840s led to the growth of a movement in the United States and beyond, which relied upon séances and other forms of communication through the veil in order to make contact with those who had passed into the world of spirit, thus aiding the grieving, and challenging the circumscribed place of women.³

At a time when a married woman was subjected to the laws of coverture, which meant that her identity, children and property would be subsumed under that of her husband, scholars have noted that Spiritualism provided women with a voice. However, even prior to the Fox sisters, women had the opportunity to experience a change in consciousness of their own power as a result of what were described as collective mystical experiences rooted in the Second Great Awakening (1790-1830).

SECOND GREAT AWAKENING: THE EMPHASIS UPON DIRECT PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

A significant number of women, otherwise relegated to a role of submission within the domestic sphere, enthusiastically participated in religious revivals, and reported feelings of heightened emotion. These emotions were linked to mystic connections to the divine, but they can also be understood from within the Conscientiology framework, as through these experiences, women, like men, could achieve a state of xenophrenia. This religious revival, conveyed the idea to many that it was now possible to communicate directly with God rather than through the formal intervention of clergymen. Previous beliefs regarding the need for a minister to interpret the nature of life and death were now replaced with the emphasis on direct personal experience. As conversions took place in the open air, and women could soon be seen as exhorters and preachers to a greater degree than was previously known, the notion that one could communicate with

³ Barbara Goldsmith, *Other Powers: The Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism and the scandalous Victoria Woodhull*, A Knopf 1998. Todd Jay Leonard, *Talking to the other side: a history of modern spiritualism and mediumship: a study of the religion, science, philosophy and mediums that encompass this American-made religion*, New York University Press, 2005. Barbara Weisberg, *Talking to the Dead: Kate and Maggie Fox and the Rise of Spiritualism*, NYC, Harper Collins, 2005.; Bridget Bennett examines the relationship between the emergence of spiritualism in 1848 and earlier kinds of supernatural phenomena, in *Transatlantic Spiritualism and Nineteenth-century American Literature*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. See also, Ann Braude, *Spiritualism in nineteenth century America*, Indiana University Press, 1989. Barbara A. McGraw, states that Woodhull was a “flamboyant opportunist” who took advantage of the popularity of Spiritualism at the time when that movement was beginning to wane, while Barbara Goldsmith believes that Woodhull genuinely believed that her connection to the world of spirit fueled her life’s journey. *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Religion and Politics in the U.S.*, Barbara A. McGraw ed., Wiley Blackwell, 2016, 178.

God was easily expanded upon to the idea that communication could also occur between an individual and the world of spirit. This would lead to a change in consciousness of what the physical body represented and was capable of achieving, which for women represented a belief in the women's abilities as energy healers.

One of those women touched by the Great Awakening was Victoria Woodhull's mother Roxanna Claflin, described by biographer Mary Gabriel as a "religious zealot", but also a good example of the way that xenophobia predated and went beyond spiritualism. Roxanna took the message that one could speak directly with God and expanded upon it, receiving messages from the spirit world and using energy healing on Victoria and her nine siblings.⁴

According to Woodhull's biographers and her own accounts, during the half year preceding Woodhull's birth in 1836, her mother became "powerfully excited" by the religious revivals of the Great Awakening and went through the process known as "sanctification." She would "rise in prayer-meetings and pour forth passionate hallelujahs that sometimes electrified the worshippers."⁵ Like many 19th century women, Roxanna was touched by the rampant high mortality rates of the time period.

Infant and child mortality in the early nineteenth century, were high, and while rural communities were generally healthier than urban areas, children who did not survive the first year of life, was estimated at 13-15% for the years between 1840 and 1860. Children who did not survive to the age of 21, is estimated at 27-30%.⁶ Like some women who had been exposed to the Great Awakening, Claflin turned to healing from the world of spirit, after the loss of one of her ten children to typhus, and with this, was exposed to a form of healing that other women would take advantage of in order to keep their families healthy.

Theodore Tilton, Woodhull's close friend and biographer wrote that Woodhull's mother was impacted by her witnessing of a demonstration of mesmerism at a local fair. Woodhull's father, described by Tilton as "colder in temperament", was "equally inclined to the supernatural, and had set up his wife as a fortune-teller". Mesmerism had emerged in the late 1700s, after the Viennese physician Anton Mesmer treated a female patient suffering some fifteen ailments, including blindness and paralysis of her left hand by having her swallow a solution containing traces of iron and then attaching magnets to her legs and stomach. She was reported to have had waves of seizures and subsequently cured. This un-

4 Mary Gabrielle, *Notorious Victoria: The Life of Victoria Woodhull, Uncensored*. Algonquin Books, 1998. 8. The xenophobia of those in the Second Great Awakening can be understood from within the Scientology framework, according to the description of Luis Minero, p. 3.

5 Theodore Tilton, *Biography of Victoria Woodhull*, January 1, 1871. <http://www.victoria-woodhull.com/tiltonbio.htm>

6 http://resources.osv.org/school/lesson_plans/ShowLessons.php?PageID=R&LessonID=37&DocID=2042&UnitID= accessed October 15, 2016.

derstanding of the healing power of energy was conveyed to those in the United States during the time of the Great Awakening.¹

Biographer Tilton notes that Victoria and her sister Tennessee remembered that when they were ill, as children, their mother going into a trancelike state and transmitting electrical energy to their bodies through her hands to cure them. Utilizing the language of the Great Awakening, Mesmer's animal magnetism was described by many as "the power of the soul."⁸

Touched by her connection to what she defined as the world of spirit, through the Great Awakening revivals, and her exposure to mesmerism, Roxanna Claflin's consciousness expanded to the point where she viewed herself as having the ability to enter the world of spirit, use this spiritual power to heal her children with mesmerism, and pronounce them "sanctified", likewise a word utilized by revivalists. Sanctification is related to the emotional state that one would achieve as a result of participation in the revival and the emotional state, a new state of being defined as "regeneration...that was the ...opposite of willfulness, torment and anxiety...the convert would achieve a new spiritual state referred to as ... sanctification".⁹

Understood through the Conscientiology framework, however, Roxanna Claflin was practicing the healing of what has been increasingly recognized today as the energy body or energosoma.¹⁰

As a result of her exposure to the Great Awakening and mesmerism, and its energetic healing component, Roxanna would identify herself as clairvoyant. According to Conscientiology, Roxanna Claflin had accessed the extraphysical dimensions while awake, and subsequently had realigned her own energy body. This opened channels of communication that would enable her to access information hitherto unavailable to many others who had not engaged in this process, because in so doing chakras, or energy vortexes can be opened, allowing for clearing methods of accessing knowledge and healing.

7 <http://www.victoria-woodhull.com/tiltonbio.htm> "The Golden Age, Tract No. 3, "Victoria C. Woodhull, A Biographical Sketch." 1871.

8 Anne Harrington, *The Cure Within: A History of Mind-Body Medicine*, W.W. Norton & Company, 2009, 42045.

9 <http://www.nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nineteen/nkeyinfo/nevarev.htm>

10 "Although the energy body is not officially recognized by conventional medicine, it has long been acknowledged by traditional Chinese medicine and is a vital component of several complementary therapies such as acupuncture, acupressure, homeopathy, Reiki and shiatsu massage. Interestingly, the British Medical Association, who used to call complementary treatments "alternative", as they were considered to represent an alternative to conventional medicine, changed the term to "complementary" in recent years as, increasingly, medical doctors and complementary therapists began working together using treatments that they both recognized to be of value. (Lewith, 2002). This suggests that the allopathic medical community has taken a small but significant step towards acknowledging the energy body and the important role it plays in healing." <http://www.o-books.com/blogs/obooks/we-are-not-just-the-physical-body-how-we-exist-in-multiple-dimensions/> Accessed October 15, 2016.

Woodhull and her siblings recalled that Roxanna used her “other eyes” to read their minds, thus indicating that her third eye chakra, for clear seeing was open. Once open, Roxanna Claflin gained entrance into the extraphysical community that Conscientiology points to as having been created by “like minded people”. Roxanna’s children also recalled her saying that she saw Jesus extending his bloody hands toward her, as well as the devil, with his small red tail and cloven hoof. Thus, from the perspective of the science of Conscientiology, Roxanna Claflin’s extraphysical community was that created by Christians.¹

Biographer Barbara Goldsmith, who has gone the furthest in examining Woodhull’s Spiritualist roots, notes that “no one has yet fully explained the extraordinary feats mesmerized subjects could perform, feats achieved by Mama Roxy and some of her children”²². Goldsmith explains that Roxanna’s children, beginning when young, experienced clairvoyant visions and healing powers. While it was true that Tennessee, seven years Woodhull’s junior, had most of the healing ability, Woodhull’s skills, purportedly in mind reading, finding lost objects, and describing events taking place where she had never been, or before they occurred, were also akin to those of other mesmerized subjects¹³. While the ability of these mesmerized subjects may be a mystery to scholars, the Conscientiology framework suggests that the extraphysical bodies of these children were aligned via the mesmerism performed on them. In the case of Victoria and Tennessee, these abilities were accentuated with a traumatic home situation that also led them to experience extraphysical dimensions.

TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES AND OUT OF BODY PROJECTIONS

According to the biographer Tilton, Woodhull’s father was “impartial, in his cruelty to all his children and her mother, with a fickleness of spirit that” rendered her “one of the most erratic of mortals, sometimes abetted him in his scourgings and at other times shielded the little ones from his blows”. Moreover, sources suggest that Woodhull would remark that her father made her “a woman before her time”, thus implying sexual abuse, and that in her home she was “treated with” “cruelty”⁴. Woodhull describes how, “worked like a slave” and “whipped like a convict,” at the age of fourteen, after an especially “savage” episode, she went down to the stream to wash herself clean. Not surprisingly, she must have wished for intervention from beyond to stop her father’s attacks. She describes viewing “a phosphorescent sparkling in the water that materialized into a powerful spirit,

11 Guilherme Soares Lima, FAQ of Conscientiology and Projectiology, 240. See Book Review, Multi-dimensional Man, Journal of Conscientiology, Vol. 14, No. 52, 143- 147, quotes on 144.

12 Goldsmith, *Other Powers*, 21.

13 Goldsmith, *Other Powers*, chapter two.

14 Goldsmith, *Other Powers*, 51-52.

“a majestic guardian” next to whom Buck Claflin was but a puny toy. Woodhull’s description of the viewing of a “a stalwart young man wearing a white toga and a laurel wreath in his tightly curled brown hair”, suggests that she achieved an out of body state, or altered state of consciousness as a result of the severity of the treatment she received at home. According to Luis Minero, ‘out of body projections’ such as that of Woodhull “seem to be coordinated by a more evolved being, called a helper (spirit guide)”¹⁵.

Woodhull indicates that her first introduction to her helper guide occurred at different times, such as, depending upon the sources, at the ages of three, four, and later, fourteen. Despite this inconsistency, in each instance, the encounter was linked to trauma, sadness, despair and the need to escape – all indicative of dissociation. Moreover, with each encounter, Woodhull indicated that she used her dissociative experiences in order to heal via the messages she was given. In one account she notes that her helper guide, which she would later identify as the Greek statesman Demosthenes, would tell her that she would:

rise to a great distinction, that she would emerge from her poverty and live in a stately house, that she would win great wealth in a city crowded with ships, that she would become the ruler of her people.¹⁶

While she would not become the “ruler of her people”, she certainly would command the attention of the nation, through her milestone accomplishments. While her guides offered her comfort through assurances of future successes, Woodhull’s visits to the extraphysical dimensions also gave her contact with deceased loved ones, like sisters and a beloved neighbor, in order to heal her grief and her body. Woodhull stated that “an adult friend, a neighbour who was very fond” of her, died suddenly, and within hours “her spirit” went to visit. Woodhull’s autobiographical accounts indicate that she was, from an “unconscious” state, aware of actually traveling to the world of spirit, accompanied by her deceased neighbor, where she would see Demosthenes, Napoleon Bonaparte and Josephine, who told her that “they were to constantly guide, guard, instruct and care” for her so that she could be, “when grown, fitted to do their work on earth”.

Woodhull reported visiting the extraphysical dimensions and speaking daily, beginning at the age of fourteen, with her two dead sisters, along with many angels who accompanied them who would become “gracious guests” and “constant companions”¹⁷. Subsequently, Woodhull’s life and that of her sister, Tennessee, became, what Woodhull would describe, as “one chain of spiritual phenomena.... directed by a single class or circle of spirits.”

15 Minero, 41, 128, 125. Emma Bragdon, *Spiritism and Mental Health: Practices from Spiritist Centers and Spiritist Psychiatric Hospitals in Brazil*, *Singing Dragon*, 2011, 214-216.

16 Tilton.

17 Goldsmith, 52.

While there, she saw that people were engaged in much activity, an impression corroborated by the works of Emanuel Swedenborg.

I saw the spirits descending to earth and mortals ascending to the spirit world and mingling in a common unity. They said all that I saw would be realised during my life, and that to make it possible was one part of their work, in which I would bear a prominent part. The people seemed to be much engaged as people are.¹⁸

As a result of these experiences, Woodhull reports being vividly aware of the constant presence of these helper guides, both during childhood and beyond. These guides were “constantly” with her, “assisting” in her “studies and duties” to the point where she could perform the “most laborious task ... without fatigue, and mastered studies only by magic”. Indeed, Woodhull remembered a “more singular experience... that when walking” her “feet did not touch the ground”. Having entered her astral body, she saw her physical body “going along” while her consciousness, at the astral body or psychosoma, was “two or three feet above in the air.”²⁹

The help of her helper guides, and intuition gained from visiting the spirit world, were used by Woodhull to support her family, as she and her sister worked as clairvoyants and healing mediums. Later Woodhull, at the age of 14, married 28-year-old Canning Woodhull, who portrayed himself as a doctor, but was, in reality, an alcoholic and a womanizer. Within one year, she gave birth to a son named Byron, who was mentally ill, a state which Woodhull later would attribute to the forced and unfortunate and strained union she had had with her husband.

After a brief period in San Francisco with her husband and child, where Woodhull worked as an actress, she returned home to Ohio, a decision which Woodhull, her sister, Tennessee, and their mother attributed to telepathic communication among them. Roxanna told Tennessee, “My dear, send the spirits after Victoria to bring her home”³⁰ and soon Woodhull would return. Woodhull would utilize her spiritual powers of mediumship while with her family, and, after healing her son Byron by holding him close to her heart while he had a fever, became convinced that her life purpose was to be a healer.

However, it was while Woodhull, (now a mother of two, and having given birth to a girl named Zula) worked as a medium in Saint Louis, Missouri, in 1864, that she met Colonel James Harvey Blood, a Civil War veteran²¹. Blood had gone to Woodhull for a reading, and while in a trance, informed Blood that “his future

18 Victoria Woodhull, Chapter nineteen: The Elixir of Life; or Why Do we Die? An Oration, 169.

19 Victoria Woodhull, Chapter nineteen: The Elixir of Life; or Why Do we Die? An Oration, 170.

20 Kate Havelin, *Victoria Woodhull: Fearless Feminist, Twenty-First Century Books*, 2006, 18.

21 Havelin, *Fearless Feminist*, 21, 22.

destiny was to be linked with hers in marriage”. It was while she was with Blood, who would, according to biographer Tilton, faithfully write down the political concepts of her guides, that the ideas some scholars have attributed as having their origin with Woodhull, were articulated. It was also, to pursue a career as a medium that Woodhull and Tennessee, together with Blood, and once again, upon the advice of Woodhull’s guide Demosthenes, would relocate to New York.²²

At this time, the U.S. government began to prosecute spiritualists who “claimed to have healing powers”, and this marked the beginning of the waning of spiritualism in the subsequent decade; however, it was while offering their services as mediums, that the sisters, together with Blood, met Cornelius Vanderbilt, then eager to contact his deceased wife²³. This collaboration, between Vanderbilt, Woodhull and Tennessee, would lead Woodhull to articulate ideas that would challenge the existing place of women.

CHANNELING SPIRITS PROVIDE POLITICAL IDEAS

Arriving in New York in a dismal economic state, and at a time when most women were relegated to few opportunities to make an income, Woodhull and Tennessee opened their brokerage firm, Woodhull, Claflin & Co., aided by Cornelius Vanderbilt. Blood, trained as an accountant, was paid \$75 per month and provided invaluable help to the sisters. Viewed as a source of amusement and curiosity by male onlookers, the sisters supervised an endeavor that allowed women to enter through the back door of the stock exchange and find a means to wealth hitherto unavailable, no matter what their current income level was. Aided by Cornelius Vanderbilt, the sisters purchased stock which had fallen, watched it go up, and soon told reporters that within two years, they had earned \$700,000.

Buoyed by their financial success, Woodhull and Tennessee, together with Blood, established their newspaper, shortly thereafter. *Woodhull and Claflin’s Weekly*, took on the most progressive causes of the day, which resonated with the goals of most Spiritualists. Tilton, as well as other biographers suggest that the content of the newspaper was believed by Woodhull and Blood to have derived for the most part from contact with the spirit world. Blood, a Communist and Spiritualist, would take dictation while Woodhull would go into a trance, because Woodhull, limited by a mere three years of sporadic education, never learned penmanship.

According to Tilton, in the evening, around eleven or twelve o’clock, Blood and Woodhull would “hold parliament with the spirits”. Blood explained that his

22 Havelin, *Fearless Feminist*, 26.

23 Havelin, *Fearless Feminist*, 26.

wife would “go into a trance, during which her guardian spirit takes control of her mind, speaking audibly through her lips, propounding various matters for our subsequent investigation and verification and announcing principles....detached thoughts, hints of systems, and suggestions for affairs... in this spiritual night-school.” Despite her scant three years of education, Woodhull was a brilliant speaker who could now espouse complex political ideas.

Biographer Tilton noted that this was the means by which Woodhull had “risen to her present position as a political economist and politician.” Her entranced states usually lasted one hour, but at times two hours. Through this all, Blood would take “copious notes of all” she said and when “her speech” was “unbroken,” he would write every word and “publish it” in the newspaper “without correction of amendment.”

Blood’s Communist and Spiritualist beliefs resonated with the messages that Woodhull received from the spirit world in the areas of free love and the concept of citizenship for women, which Tilton and Woodhull traced to the influence of the Greek statesman, Demosthenes, her spirit guide, who, like Victoria Woodhull, had honed his speaking skills, lecturing on democracy.

As a popular speaker and newspaper writer during the 1860s and 1870s, Woodhull would lecture and write about free love, woman’s right to citizenship and the right to vote. Despite her limited education, audiences flocked to see her and noted that she was an exciting speaker. Woodhull’s lectures and her writings were focused to a great degree upon the concept that a woman unhappy in her marriage was akin to a prostitute and that women and men should have the freedom to choose the spouse that she desired.

FREE LOVE

Woodhull, like other Spiritualists, believed free love was a core principle that would improve society and challenge patriarchal domination in marriage and society. Both Blood and Woodhull did not believe in sexual exclusivity and accepted “with equanimity the exchange of sexual favors for politics, pleasure or profit” and both Tennessee and Woodhull would say they received money for sex; however, most importantly, they believed that while “people may be married by law” this law could not compel people “to love” and where there is “no love as a basis of marriage, there should be no marriage”. When she spoke about free love at Steinway Hall, in New York, to three thousand people, a “capacity audience”, Goldsmith wrote that “Victoria’s passion lifted the audience to a spiritual frenzy as an almost sexual ecstasy gripped the crowd. Caught in her spell, they burst into wild applause and cries of “Hurrah!”²⁴.

24 Goldsmith breaks down the Free Love speech of 1871 and its circumstances, 298-301. *Other Powers*.

Free love principles of Woodhull were inextricably linked to the issue of woman's rights and constitutional principles. Speaking to a New York audience in Steinway Hall in 1872, Woodhull said:

Our government is based upon the proposition that all men and women are born free and equal and entitled to certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. What we, who demand social freedom ask is simply that the government of this country shall be administered in accordance with the spirit of this proposition.²⁵

Biographer, Goldsmith noted that "Victoria could feel the spirits all about her" and that she seemed "unaware of the rapt audience drinking in her radical doctrine..." However, Goldsmith also remarked that Woodhull was naïve, as became disillusioned that the spirits would lead her time and time again down the wrong path. Free love would result in many illegitimate children, and when Woodhull would run for president, she was the only one who believed that it would be possible for her to win.

Woodhull's political ideas centered upon what was deemed the New Departure. While historians have traced it to Woodhull, the concept, which originally was espoused one year prior, was introduced to congress in 1871, and expressed the view that the 14th amendment, by granting citizenship to those born in the United States, simultaneously granted women citizenship, and that the 15th amendment, granting black men, as citizens, the right to vote, automatically gave women that right to vote.

Woodhull would run for president in 1872, but her passion for free love and truth, and her political aspirations would come together. In September 1872 in an episode which would not bode well for her political success in the U.S.. Woodhull heard rumors that the popular minister Henry Ward Beecher was having an affair with the wife of Woodhull's biographer, Elizabeth Tilton. First Woodhull spoke of their infidelity at a meeting of the American Association of Spiritualists. Later, on November 2 she published it in her newspaper. Woodhull indicated that she exposed Beecher, not because he lived the principles of Free Love that she and other Spiritualists espoused, but because he denied doing so. She felt that his crime was not his adultery but his failure to acknowledge publicly that he lived a free love lifestyle. Woodhull saw him as a hypocrite because he practiced free love in private while publicly denouncing its followers. While she benefited because her newspaper sold copies of this for as much as forty dollars each, and the newspaper became a bestseller, Anthony Comstock, purity crusader, saw Woodhull as a direct threat to public morality. Consequently, on November 2, 1872, Woodhull, Tennessee and Colonel Blood were arrested on obscenity charges for the Beecher-Tilton article and sent to the Ludlow Street Jail, where they would spend Election Day.

25 Goldsmith, *Other Powers*, 300.

While Woodhull's presidential campaign was unsuccessful, and she may have been disappointed with the advice she received from the world of spirit, her life illustrates the ways that her perception of communication through the veil led to a change in her own consciousness of 19th century gender roles. Her confidence fueled, as a result of spirit communication which rescued her from horrific trauma, she addressed large audiences at a time when a woman speaker was not considered in a positive light because public speaking went against the dictate that a woman should be serving society rather than leading. Woodhull introduced new ideas, such as the New Departure, adopted by advocates of Woman's suffrage, and by running for president, she shed light upon the concept that a woman could lead the nation, thus challenging the gender constraints espoused by her contemporaries. Thus, belief in contact through the veil led to a change in consciousness of what Woodhull's world should be.

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