

Primary Source - Victoria Woodhull, *The Truth Shall Make You Free* (1871)

Source: Victoria C. Woodhull, *And The Truth Shall Make You Free: A Speech On The Principles Of Social Freedom* November 20, 1871

... 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. Now 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. Nothing more, nothing less....

...To love is a right higher than Constitutions or laws. It is a right which Constitutions and laws can neither give nor take, and with which they have nothing whatever to do, since in its very nature it is forever independent of both Constitutions and laws, and exists-comes and goes-in spite of them. Governments might just as well assume to determine how people shall exercise their right to think or to say that they shall not think at all, as to assume to determine that they shall not love, or how they may love, or that they shall love.

The proper sphere of government in regard to the relations of the sexes, is to enact such laws as in the present conditions of society are necessary to protect each individual in the free exercise of his or her right to love, and also to protect each individual from the forced interference of every other person, that would compel him or her to submit to any action which is against their wish and will. If the law do this it fulfills its duty. If the law do not afford this protection, and worse still, if it sanction this interference with the rights of an individual, then it is infamous law and worthy only of the old-time despotism; since individual tyranny forms no part of the guarantee of, or the right to, individual freedom.

It is therefore a strictly legitimate conclusion that where there is no love as a basis of marriage there should be no marriage.... It is certain by this Higher Law, that marriages of convenience, and, still more, marriages characterized by mutual or partial repugnance, are adulterous. And it does not matter whether the repugnance arises before or subsequently to the marriage ceremony. Compulsion, whether of the law or of a false public opinion, is detestable, as an element even, in the regulation of the most tender and important of all human relations....

It can now be asked: What is the legitimate sequence of Social Freedom? To which I unhesitatingly reply: Free Love, or freedom of the affections. "And are you a Free Lover? is the almost incredulous query.

I repeat a frequent reply: "I am; and I can honestly, in the fullness of my soul, raise on my voice to my Maker, and thank Him that I am, and that I have had the strength and the devotion to truth to stand before this traducing and vilifying community in a manner representative of that which shall come with healing on its wings for the bruised hearts and crushed affections of humanity."

And to those who denounce me for this I reply: "Yes, I am a Free Lover. I have an inalienable, constitutional and natural right to love whom I may, to love as long or as short a period as I can; to change that love every day if I please, and with that right neither you nor any law you can frame have any right to interfere. And I have the further right to demand a free and unrestricted exercise of that right, and it is your duty not only to accord it, but, as a community, to see that I am protected in it. I trust that I am fully understood, for I mean just that, and nothing less!

...I claim that freedom means to be free, let the mob claim to the contrary as strenuously as they may. And I claim that love means an exhibition of the affections, let the mob claim what they may. And therefore, in compounding these words into Free Love, I claim that united they mean, and should be used to convey, their united definitions, the mob to the contrary notwithstanding. And when the term Free Love finds a place in dictionaries, it will prove my claim to have been correct, and that the mob have not received the attention of the lexicographers, since it will not be set down to signify sexual debauchery, and that only, or in any governing sense.

... The press have stigmatized me to the world as an advocate, theoretically and practically, of the doctrine of Free Love, upon which they have placed their stamp of moral deformity; the vulgar and inconsequent definition which they hold makes the theory an abomination....

...The false and hollow relations of the sexes are thus resolved into the mere question of the dependence of women upon men for support, and women, whether married or single, are supported by men because they are women and their opposites in sex. I can see no moral difference between a woman who marries and lives with a man because he can provide for her wants, and the woman who is not married, but who is provided for at the same price. There is a legal difference, to be sure, upon one side of which is set the seal of respectability, but there is no virtue in law. In the fact of law, however, is the evidence of the lack of virtue, since if the law be required to enforce virtue, its real presence is wanting; and women need to comprehend this truth.

The sexual relation, must be rescued from this insidious form of slavery. Women must rise from their position as ministers to the passions of men to be their equals. Their entire system of education must be changed. They must be trained to be like men, permanent and independent individualities, and not their mere appendages or adjuncts, with them forming but one member of society. They must be the companions of men from choice, never from necessity....

Primary Source - Victoria Woodhull Cartoon (1872)

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