

## Madam President

Hillary Rodham Clinton wasn't the first woman to run for president-Victoria Woodhull was. If you are scratching your head wondering if I fell into some parallel universe and have forgotten where I am read on.



Born Victoria California Claflin (9/23/1838-6/9/1927) ran for President of the United States in 1872. Candidate for the Equal Rights Party, she supported women's suffrage and equal rights. Daughter of an illegitimate and illiterate mother and a con man snake oil salesman father, it is said that she only had three years formal education and was rumored her father physically and sexually abused her. At 15 she married 28-year-old Canning Woodhull who practiced medicine in Ohio without medical education or licensing (which at

the time was acceptable in Ohio). He turned out to be an alcoholic and womanizer. In 1866 she married Col. James Blood who she later found out was a bit of a ladies' man and was guilty of infidelity as well.

What you would call an individualistic self-starter and colorful figure, Victoria first made her living as a magnetic healer and was a member of the Spiritualist Movement in the 1870s. It is said she and her sister, Tennessee, went to New York City where Victoria circulated amongst the brothels, took laudanum and reportedly made \$20,000 from liaisons with Commodore Vanderbilt (although he proposed to her sister, Tennessee).

In 1870, Victoria and her sister opened, with the assistance of Vanderbilt, Woodhull, Claflin and Company which turned out to be a successful Wall Street brokerage firm. Its success was attributed to Victoria's skill as a medium. The New York Herald hailed Woodhull and Claflin as "the Queens of Finance" and "the Bewitching Brokers".

Taking the money made at the brokerage house, they founded in the newspaper, the Woodhull and Claflin Weekly. Its primary purpose seemed to be to support Woodhull's run for the Presidency. Feminism was the papers focused interest but was "notorious" for publishing controversial opinions supporting sex education, spiritualism, shorter skirts, licensing prostitution and vegetarianism.

In 1871 Woodhull testified before the House Judiciary Committee to argue that women already had the right to vote since the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> amendments guaranteed the protection of that right for all United States citizens. Though not an original argument, some members were impressed by her logic. Susan B Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Isabella Beecher Hooker, attending the hearing decided that Woodhull could be the new "voice" of their cause and welcomed her into the Suffrage Movement's inner circle.

In 1872 Victoria's nomination was ratified during the convention under the Equal Rights Party. The party's nomination for Vice-President was abolitionist leader Frederick Douglass which Douglass never acknowledged. This made Victoria Woodhull the first woman presidential candidate despite the fact that women didn't get the right to vote until 1920. Amongst controversy over the mixing of Whites and Blacks in public life and the nature of articles in her newspaper (she was actually arrested a few days prior to the election on charges of publishing an obscene newspaper and was held in jail for a month). Six months later she was acquitted on a technicality. Winning no electoral votes, Woodhull did receive popular votes although the specific number is not known since these votes were never officially recorded. Woodhull also tried to win presidential nominations in 1884 and 1892 without success.

I will let you decide whether Victoria Woodhull was qualified to run for the Presidency or if it was legitimately legal. Were details of her background and life entirely factual or filled with rumor and innuendo? Was her arrest contrived? In spite of this, the facts hold that Woodhull was nominated by the Equal Rights Party well before Hillary's nomination.

*With Gratitude,*

*Kai*

