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Submission title: Fraud and Frill: Women and Spiritualism in Victorian America

List of Keywords: Spiritualism, Nineteenth century, occult, women's suffrage, history

Spiritualism rose in the United States after the Civil War and was popularized mainly by women. Through spiritualism, women broke free from the restraints of the widely-held separate spheres ideology. I researched five Victorian women and how they utilized their talents to become famous spiritualists. In a poster presentation, I illustrate that these women did not set out to simply defraud grieving families and confuse the world with frivolity, as contemporary skeptics of spirituality contended, but had motives beyond monetary gain. I show that these women used the paranormal to become voices for women who did not have one. The Fox Sisters used table rappings to further religious tolerance. Victoria Woodhull used her popularity as magnetic healer to springboard into presidential politics. Cora Hatch used trances to speak out for abolitionism. Florence Cook worked through physical manifestations to travel the world while exploring her sexual identity. I will conclude why these five women no longer fought back and succumbed to the decline of spiritualism in early twentieth century.