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Document 18: Excerpts from "Free Love," *Handbook of the Oneida Community--1875* (Oneida: Wallingford Printing, 1875), pp. 40-43.

Introduction

The Handbook of the Oneida Community defined the Community's religious and social principles. A substantial part of the social principles were based on the concept of "free love." The handbook acted as a guide for members and prospective members. The theories presented in the handbook were often criticized by those who advocated the ideals of traditional society as previously illustrated in [Document 8](#). Free love was considered a liberating force by the women of Oneida, but many outside of the Community viewed it as oppressive. Noyes frequently refuted this type of criticism in the Community's newspaper.

2. Free Love

This terrible combination of two very good ideas--freedom and love, was first used by the writers of the Oneida Community about twenty-five years ago, and probably originated with them. It was however, soon taken up by a very different class of speculators, scattered about the country, and has come to be the name of a form of Socialism with which we have but little affinity. Still it is sometimes applied to our Communities; and as we are certainly responsible for starting it into circulation, it seems to be our duty to tell what meaning we attach to it, and in what sense we are willing to accept it as a designation of our social system.

The obvious essential difference between marriage and licentious connections may be stated thus:

Marriage is a permanent union; Licentiousness deals in temporary flirtation.

In marriage, communism of property goes with communism of persons. In licentiousness, love is paid for as hired labor.

Marriage makes a man responsible for his acts of love to a woman. In licentiousness, a man imposes on a woman the heavy burdens of maternity, ruining, perhaps to her reputation and her health, and then goes his way without responsibility.

Marriage provides for the maintenance and education of children. Licentiousness ignores children as nuisances, and leaves them to chance.

Now, in respect to every one of these points of difference between marriage and licentiousness, *we stand with marriage*. Free Love with us does *not* mean freedom to love to-day

and leave to-morrow; nor freedom to take a woman's person and keep our property to ourselves; nor freedom to freight a woman with our offspring and send her downstream without care or help; nor freedom to beget children and leave them to the street and the poor-house. Our Communities are *families*, as distinctly bounded and separated from promiscuous society as ordinary households. The tie that binds us together is permanent and sacred, to say the least, as that of marriage, for it is our religion. We receive no new members (except by deception or mistake) who do not give heart and hand to the family interest for life and forever. Community of property extends just as far as freedom of love. Every man's care and every dollar of their common property are pledged for the maintenance and protection of the women and the education of the children of the Community. Bastardy, in any disastrous sense of the word, is simply impossible in such a social state. Whoever will take the trouble to follow our track from the beginning will find no forsaken women or children by the way. In this respect we claim to be in advance of marriage and civilization.

* * *

The thing we have done, for which we are called "Free Lovers," is simply this: We have left the simple form of marriage and advanced to the complex stage of it. We have no quarrel with those who believe in exclusive dual marriage and faithfully observe it, but we have concluded that for us there is no better way. The honor and faithfulness that constitute an ideal marriage may exist between two hundred as well as two; while the guarantees for women and children are much greater in the Community than they can be in any private family. The results of the complex system we may sum up by saying, that men are rendered more courteous, women more winning, children are better born, and both sexes are personally free.

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