

OPEN FORUM | On the Ground at the Democratic National Convention



Generations: Nakeda Strothers talks to an elderly woman before dictating his message to Sen. John Kerry. The 12-year-old boy was among dozens who recorded their opinions on postcards to be sent to the Democratic presidential nominee.

'To Sen. Kerry, I wish to say'

By Sheryl Oring

BOSTON
"I wish to say" is an interactive art show in which I set up a portable office — complete with a manual typewriter — and ask visitors what they would like to say to the president. After typing a postcard as dictated to me, I give the visitor the original to mail and keep a carbon copy for an archive of public opinion, an exhibition and a book. "I wish to say" began in the Bay Area in February when the First Amendment Project of Oakland invited me to present a new work. The idea for the project came out of my experience of living in Berlin for nearly six years and being confronted over and over by Europeans who believed that all Amer-

icans thought alike and that all Americans supported the war in Iraq unconditionally. After the first shows in the Bay Area, I decided it was important to hear what people in different parts of the country had to say. In April, I traveled some 3,000 miles from Texas to California, setting up temporary offices in Austin and El Paso; Mesilla, N.M.; the Navajo Reservation in Arizona; several places in Utah; the Las Vegas strip; the Fresh Start shelter in Walnut Creek and a park on Skid Row in Los Angeles. This summer, the show is being presented in various locations on the East Coast, and

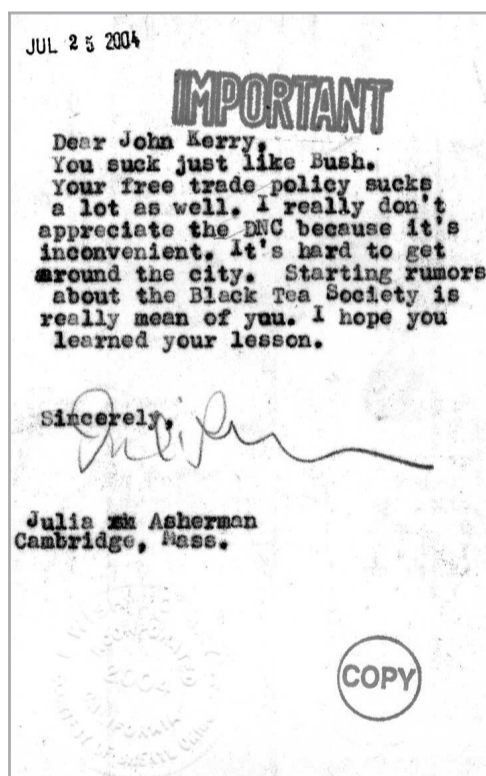
in the fall I'll have a temporary office in Atlanta. To date, more than 500 postcards have been written. During the Democratic National Convention in Boston, participants were given the option of writing a postcard to Massachusetts Sen. John Kerry, the Democratic nominee for the president. Some of the results, along with photos of the contributors taken by Damaso Reyes, are shown here.

Sheryl Oring (oring@iwishtosay.org) is an artist and writer who lives in New York City. Damaso Reyes (damaso@damaso.com) is a photographer who is documenting the "I wish to say" project. He lives in New York City. For more information on "I wish to say," visit the project Web site at www.iwishtosay.org.

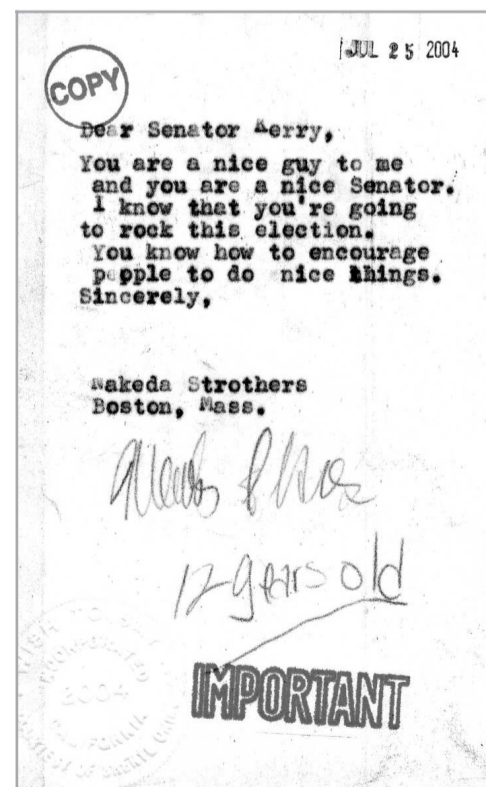
Photographs by Damaso Reyes
 Special to The Chronicle



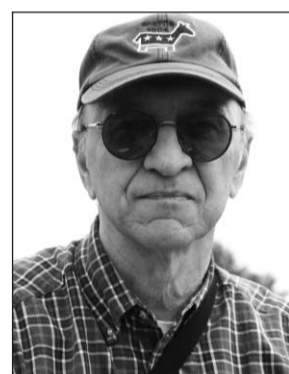
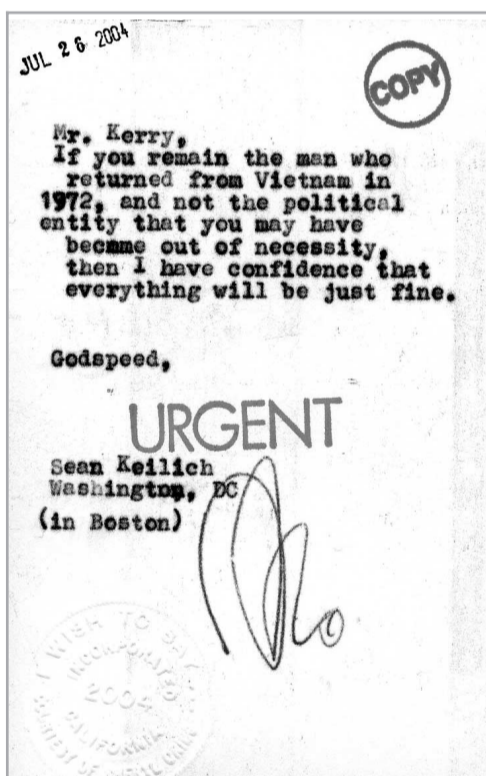
Julia Asherman voiced dissatisfaction with Kerry over trade policy.



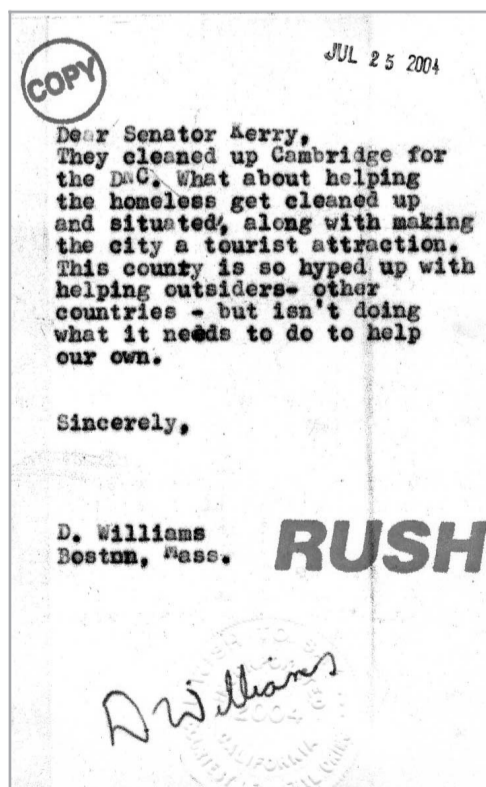
Winnie R. Huston, a resident of Washington, D.C., requested that Kerry remember his pledge to work to give a vote in Congress to the citizens of the U.S. capital.



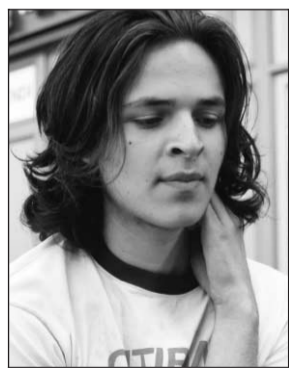
Q. Gaynor, an Army specialist, told Kerry she was "proud to serve my country" but "did not sign up to serve imperialistic, corporate interests. Please respect me."



Bob DeSimone told Kerry he thought an apt slogan for Democrats would be "Take back the flag."



Maureen Gilmore, an independent, was moved by ceremony with vets.



Nathaniel Joseph Vogel regretted that he was not old enough to vote but pleaded with Kerry to prove that he was a "vastly better option" than Bush.

Author Sheryl Oring (left) types the words of Nakeda Strothers (right, whispering in his friend's ear) at Central Square in Cambridge, where she had set up her interactive art show.



Sen. Frank Lautenberg, D-N.J., wrote Kerry that "we're all so proud of you" and that Democrats "want you to win, win, win!"

Herding cats

BOSTON
EVERY TIME I like a speaker here at the Democratic National Convention, the delegates are less than enthusiastic.

Teresa Heinz Kerry, I thought, gave a pretty good speech Tuesday night, largely because her story is different and interesting. If she isn't likely to win many converts, I figured, she might snag a few undecided voters for the Kerry/Edwards ticket — and this is a race in which every vote counts.

Yet as I left Boston's Fleet Center at the end of the would-be first lady's speech, I saw a pretty young woman in a pink dress. Pink is the color of the anti-war group, Code Pink, whose followers stand on the convention floor occasionally displaying women's undergarments with the message that voters should "give Bush a pink slip." And the woman in pink was dutifully waving her "We Love Teresa" sign with all the ardor of a slow metronome. She should have had joy on her face, but she didn't.

The delegates, of course, applauded Heinz Kerry, but not with the fervor they projected back at, say, Illinois state Sen. Barack Obama.



Debra J. Saunders

I asked a convention operative why the crowd wasn't going cheesehead-crazy over Heinz Kerry. He tactfully answered, "I thought the crowd was pretty energetic. It was sort of a lighter crowd than you'd normally find; usually the Tuesday crowd is a lot lighter than the Wednesday and Thursday crowd."

Nice try. But an e-mail memo sent out Tuesday by Tikkun's Rabbi Michael Ler-

Kerry's anti-war supporters have had to decide: Are they more anti-war or more anti-Bush?

ner of San Francisco, offered this: Many delegates are anxious, Lerner complained, because, "Though the delegates overwhelmingly oppose the war, speakers have been warned to stay away from critiquing it, and so far only Sen. Edward Kennedy, kept from prime time by the Kerry people, was willing to make a sharp statement of opposition."

Thus, the Democratic Party is at odds with itself: Its members are hungry to win, but not enthusiastic about how they're getting there. Conventions usually fire delegates up, but many here instead have to cool their passions down.

You see, the nominee's support of the war has left his many anti-war supporters in a dicey position. They've had to decide: Are they more anti-war or more anti-Bush?

Code Pink's Medea Benjamin, a Green Party member from San Francisco, doesn't hesitate in her answer: "More anti-Bush." She added, "We've got to join forces now with all those people who want to get rid of Bush. It doesn't mean we don't put pressure on Kerry."

Rabbi Lerner lamented, "The war-makers in both parties should rejoice, but the peace forces are being isolated, all in the name of 'winning.'"

The Democrats have a great saying: Don't let the perfect get in the way of the good.

In that vein, the anti-war Kerryists must figure it is better to elect a challenger who voted for the war resolution, but then distanced himself from that vote, than to reelect the incumbent who led America to war because he believed it was the right thing to do. But they can't believe it is really good to work for a candidate who has said he would send more troops to Iraq. It must be a bitter pill.

P.S.: Kerry running mate John Edwards voted for the war resolution, too. And the most he can offer is a script with the promise that if elected, Kerry and Edwards will fight to make sure that "American soldiers don't have to fight the war in Iraq and on terror alone." (Excuse me, but U.S. troops are not alone now, but that doesn't seem to matter to this crowd.)

Allow me to correct my opening sentence. There was one convention speaker who was an exception: I liked her and the delegates loved her. They loved her even if she didn't talk against the war in Iraq; she nonetheless enthralled the Fleet Center.

I refer, of course, to Ilana Wexler, the 12-year-old from Oakland who founded Kids for Kerry. As Wexler told the convention, Vice President Dick Cheney used "a really bad word" in the Senate recently, for which, she quipped, "I think he should be given a time out."

Wexler may not be aware that there are also Republicans who would like to see Cheney have a time out — because he's a drag on the GOP ticket.

And there is a downside to her solution: There are many on the left who, as I can attest from the e-mails from angry partisans — and some genius who thinks I'm a liberal — also deserve time outs. So much for civil discourse.

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