

OPEN FORUM | On the Ground at the Republican National Convention

A tale of 2 cities

NEW YORK
THE BUSHIES have decided to use the Republican National Convention in New York to spotlight George W. Bush as a solid, regular guy. They saw that Boston didn't get a post-convention bounce in the polls. They want a bounce.

My theory: An unexpected consequence of the "John Kerry, reporting for duty" confab is that voters got sick of hearing about how great John Kerry is. They wanted to hear more ideas. They wanted to hear more about America's future (not Kerry's past) and what Kerry could do for them.

Instead, they heard: Vote for John Kerry, he's better than you are.

This is how the Republican and Democratic national conventions differ:

Boston. America meets Teresa Heinz Kerry. John and Teresa's paths crossed because her late husband was a Republican senator. After she became a widow, the two bonded at 1992's Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.

New York. Laura Bush had a less complicated and very American love story: She told the nation Tuesday that she met her husband "at a backyard barbecue in Midland, Texas, and married three months later."

Boston. Delegates did not warm to Heinz Kerry. No surprise. Looks-wise, there was a huge gulf between the would-be first lady and delegates of a certain age and income. I suspect some Democrats thought it wasn't natural for a woman in her mid-60s to look like Teresa Heinz Kerry.



Debra J. Saunders

New York. While many pundits panned Laura Bush, GOP delegates hung on her every word. They were so attentive that you could hear a cell phone ring on the convention floor. (A rarity, I assure you.)

Boston. Democrats were better dancers than the rhythm-challenged GOP delegates. No question about it.

New York. The Repubs, overall, dress better than the ruffled Dem delegates. It's not the Repubs are stylish — they just respected the event enough to wear pressed clothes.

Boston. Delegates cheered video vignettes that saluted Republicans who plan to vote for Kerry. They admired the Republicans' independence on principle.

New York. Delegates cheered Democrat Sen. Zell Miller of Georgia, who plans to vote for Bush. They admired Miller's independence on principle.

Boston. Even though Democratic Mayor Thomas Menino sharply limited where activists could demonstrate, protesters were low-key — they behaved as if they did not want to step on the Kerry message. There were fewer than 10 arrests.

New York. Republican Mayor Michael Bloomberg offered protesters more venues. Activists responded by trespassing, yelling at — even spitting on — conventioners and attempting to block roads; they had few scruples about stepping on other people's rights. The number of arrests numbers approached 1,000, as of my deadline.

Boston. Rich Dems bashed the rich.

New York. Rich Repubs bashed "economic girlie-men."

Boston. Kerry running mate John Edwards returned to his primary campaign theme of the "Two Americas" — invoking the Democratic mantra of rich versus poor, black versus white, citizen versus immigrant.

New York. Wrong, chided California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger Tuesday night. The poor-immigrant-turned governor noted that he has met U.S. troops fighting abroad, and, "They believe there is one America, and they're fighting for it."

Boston. Vietnam.

New York. Sept. 11, 2001.

Boston. Kerry talked about Republican Sen. John McCain of Arizona as if McCain's good name could rub off.

New York. McCain talked at the RNC. And he wants four more years of Bush.

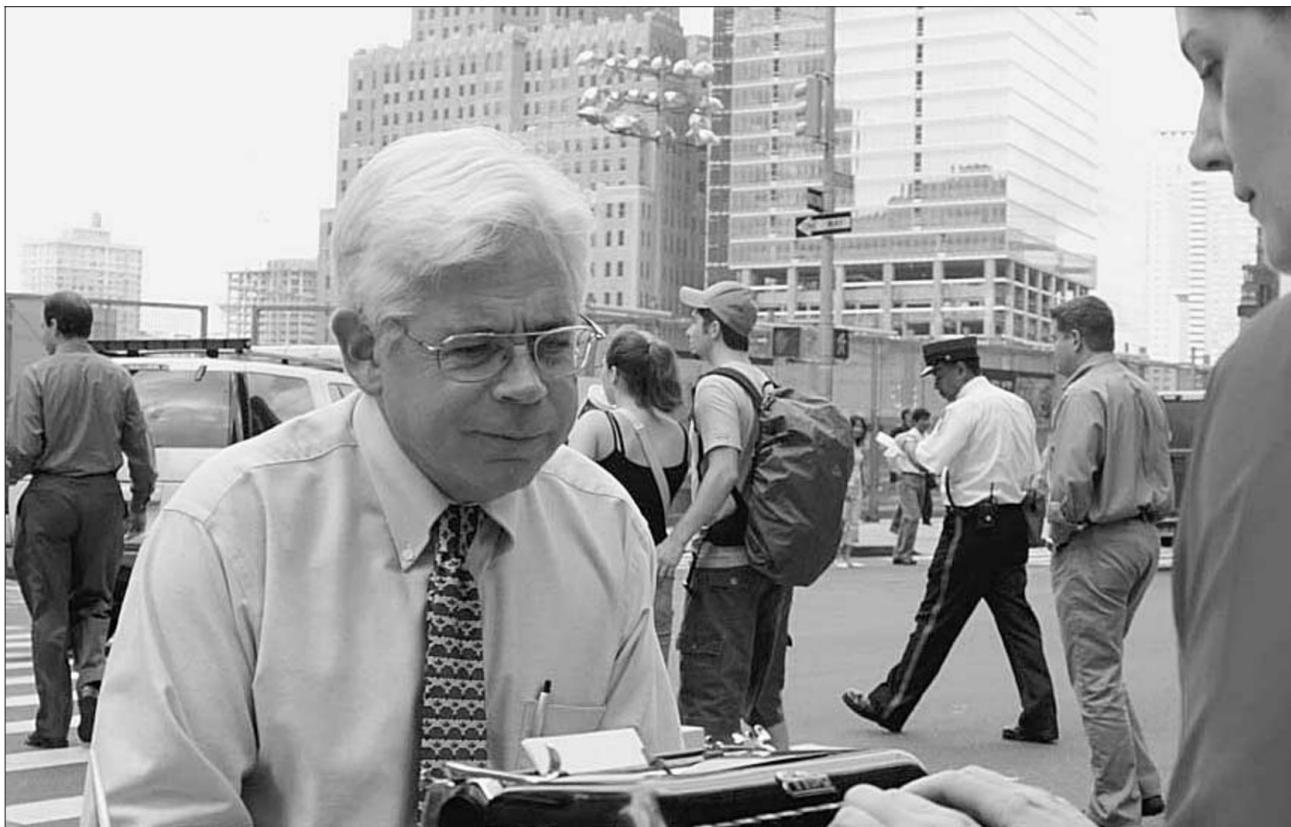
Boston. Top Dems, like former President Clinton, praised Kerry for being better than they are because Kerry volunteered for combat duty in Vietnam, when they avoided service.

New York. In his Monday night speech, McCain, a former POW, never mentioned Vietnam.

Boston. Kerry daughters Alexandra and Vanessa delivered serious, politically astute speeches. They, of course, spoke at length about Kerry the hero, who even once saved the life of the family's pet hamster, Licorice.

New York. Bush daughters Jenna and Barbara told flat jokes, eschewed partisan issues, and also had a hamster. The big dif, said Barbara, "Let's just say, ours didn't make it."

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Sept. 11 survivor: Terrence A. Kaliner saluted President Bush for his courage, faith, leadership and guidance in the war on terrorism.

'To President Bush, I wish to say'

By Sheryl Oring

I Wish to Say" is a traveling show in which I set up a portable "office" — including an old-fashioned typewriter — and invite people to write postcards 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. Below are some responses.

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 Americans thought alike and that all Americans supported the war in Iraq unconditionally. The show, first presented in the Bay Area in February in conjunc-

tion with the First Amendment Project, based in Oakland, encourages people to speak their mind.

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.

During the Democratic National Convention in Boston in July, participants were given the option of

writing a postcard to Massachusetts Sen. John Kerry, the Democratic nominee for the president.

This week, during the Republican National Convention, I set up my office in various locations around New York City, including stops at a park in Brooklyn, a public square in Lower Manhattan and another square in Harlem.

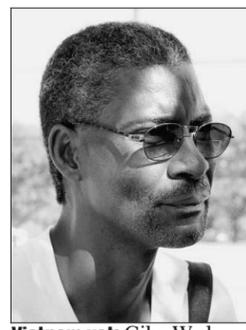
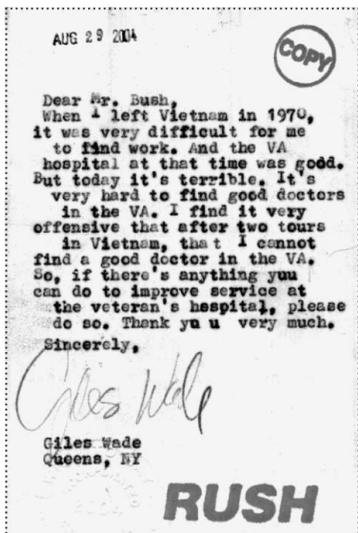
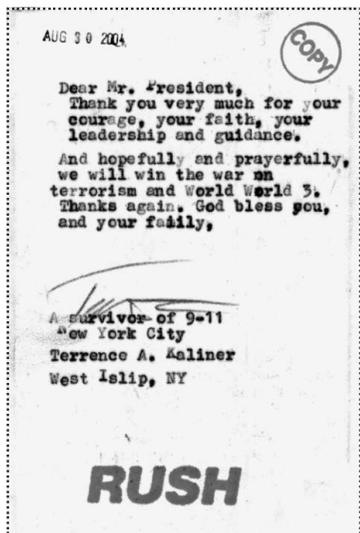
Sheryl Oring (oring@iwishtosay.org) is an artist and writer who lives in Brooklyn, N.Y. Damaso Reyes (damaso@damaso.com) is a photographer who is documenting the "I Wish to Say" project. He lives in Brooklyn, N.Y.

To view more postcards, go to sfgate.com and click on "Opinion." 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



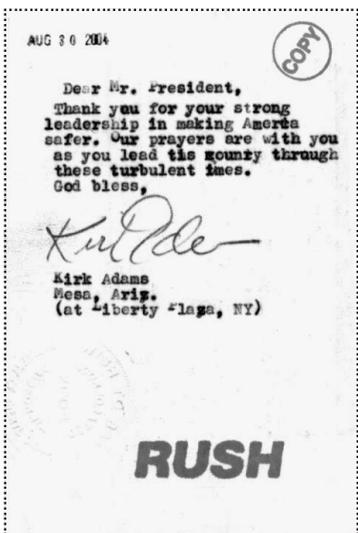
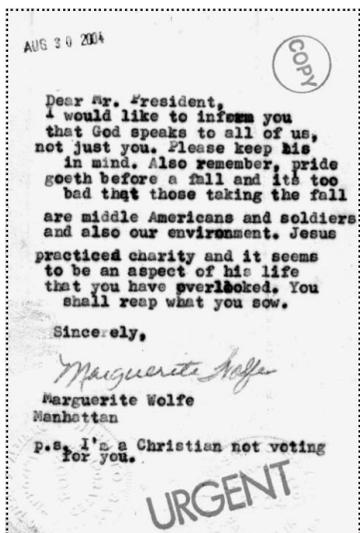
Bring 'em back: Francine Boglio wants the troops brought home.



Vietnam vet: Giles Wade asked for improved service at veterans' hospitals.



Hard times: Leroy Edwards said he works hard but still can't support his kids.



Right to read: Librarian Caroline Mavergames criticized the Patriot Act.



Reap what you sow: Marguerite Wolfe said she won't vote for Bush.



A safer America: Kirk Adams thanked Bush for leading the country in "turbulent times."



Work in progress: Carbon copies of the postcards will be saved as an archive of the project and used in a book, according to author/artist Sheryl Oring.



My turn: Author/artist Sheryl Oring hands the original postcard to a participant in her interactive "I Wish to Say" show in New York.