

# SELECTED TOWN HALL WALLS



## 1. The American Town Hall Wall Network, 1996

American Town Hall Wall Network was introduced to the DNC in 1996 as a grass-roots approach to Clinton's 2<sup>nd</sup> presidential campaign. It was received favorably, (outline available on request), and a series of conferences followed about whether the campaign would go grass-roots or high-tech.

In 2004, the sound of grass-roots is a roar. As democracy, technology and NGO's spread, the sound of "the voice of the people" has become an inevitable direction.

TOWNHALLWALL.ORG is one of the means that allows America to take the lead in how to do it.



## **2. The Hall of Issues, Judson Memorial Church, NYC, 1960-62**

**The Town Hall Wall, (THW) was born as the Hall of Issues. A simple hand printed text-only flyer announced it:**

**“The Hall of Issues will be open every Sunday afternoon from 2 to 5 o’clock to anyone who has any statement to make about any social, political or esthetic concern...who would bring that statement, in the form of \*paintings \*or poems \*or posters \*or essays \*or a sentence \*or a sculpture \*or a newspaper clipping \*or photos \*or an assemblage ...and...pin-it-tack-it-or tape it,-hang-it-or set-it-up...anywhere in the hall he\* chooses until the space is filled , or until 5’o clock” ...”and at 8:30 every Wednesday evening there will be a meeting so that issues can be discussed and action can originate.”**

**(\*At that time there was no sense that “he” did not apply to all of humankind). A young Ed Koch presided as the Wed. evening moderator.**

**The 60’s at the Judson Church revolutionized the arts and the way the arts participated in church life. Even so, a few years later, Esquire Magazine would write, “The undoubted star-event of those years was The Hall of Issues”, (Sally Kempton, Mar. 1966)**



### **3. A Cartoon Performance, Central Park, NYC, 1966**

The Town Hall Wall became a medium for pictures as the world's first "Paint-In". It became known as the first Hoving Happening. It was world famous for "15 minutes". (Sponsors: NYC Dept. of Parks and the American Craft Museum)

### **4. The Hoving Happenings, 1966-67**

The Cartoon Performance led to requests for a "Paint-In" coming in to the Parks Dept. from all over the city, and a year of approx. 22 public participatory festivals throughout the 5 boroughs of NYC. The official title of the events was *EIOA! (Events in Open Air)* but the people of the city called them "The Hoving Happenings" after Thomas Hoving, the then Parks Commissioner. The Town Hall Wall was part of many of the "Happenings" dealing with community issues and aesthetic experiments.

During the year of the Hoving Happenings, the Parks Dept became the N.Y.C. Dept of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs, Yampolsky became New York City's first Artist-in-Residence, the Parks Department received the New York State Council on the Arts Annual Award, and New York became known as "Fun City".

### **5. Portrait of Ten Towns, 1967-1970**

A statewide program for teens sponsored by the New York State Council on the Arts. Aside from focusing on the predominant art abilities of the teens in each town, the program guided each of the 10 groups of teens in setting up a Feedback Center designed to confront the whole town with their issues. Every month, the centers opened their doors to all the townspeople inviting them into a Feedback Room bordered with the questions the teens had chosen to represent the month's theme. Under the questions the walls gave ample space to the people, of all ages, to respond to the theme. Nearby writing tables were equipped with paper, markers and glue-sticks. Within a week or two, the Feedback Center session was followed by a Town Hall Meeting wherein the teens would invite whomever they thought should address their issue, be it the mayor, the police chief, the school superintendents, etc. Portrait of Ten Towns was incorporated into the New York State 7<sup>th</sup> grade social studies curriculum.

### **6. Searsmobile, Boston, 1967**

Mobile Town Hall Wall unit on the side of a truck riding through the neighborhoods of Boston for John Sears' Mayorial campaign. Under the area for messages was a fold-out counter for writing. The interior of the back of the truck was equipped with early IBM computers where people could respond to yes/no questions. John Sears responded to most of the messages.

## **7. National Feedback Network for Senator Robert F. Kennedy, Feedback Station #1, 1968**

Sponsored by Steve Smith and the Democratic National Committee, By truck and by train, the feedback unit accompanied Senator Kennedy up and down California during his primary campaign until the assassination. The California primary was the National Feedback Network's test run for the rest of the campaign.

## **8. "Project 'Y'"; HemisFair, San Antonio World's Fair, 1968**

The Hall of Issues was a pavilion at the fair. Each week it was programmed by students from a different city high school. The students ringed the hall with their decoratively painted questions of the week. Custom designed stand-up writing counters invited the fair-goers to respond to them. In a corner of the pavilion, the students of the week performed their theme in ongoing mime. Barbara Walters reported that "The Hall of Issues was the best thing at the Fair".

## **9. "Impact", Marylerose Academy, Albany, New York, 1969**

A four week condensed summer course in the creative process for students 11 to 14, teaching, through classes in music, painting, drama, dance, and literature, that the creative process is the same no matter what the medium. Each morning began with an outdoor sunrise prayer under a tall ladder and a stop at the big Town Hall Wall in the lobby. The questions on the Wall were designed by the students, each week's answers evoking the next week's question.

## **10. "The New Millennium", Bennett College, Millbrook, N.Y., 1970 Sequel to "Impact".**

## **11. "Toward a Grass Roots Strategy for Peace"; American Friends Peace Festival, South Royalton, Vermont.1980.**

## **12. "Weekend Evacuation Exercise", State-Wide, Vermont, 1980**

Groups of people from out-of-state were assigned the town to which they would be instructed to evacuate in the event of a nuclear emergency. They were not able to simulate the conditions of escape from their city, but the rest of the weekend attempted to simulate what would happen when they got to their Vermont town.

Each town had a Town Hall Wall as its centerpiece for people's expressions of their experience. On Sunday, all the Town Hall Walls were exhibited together at the closing symposium in Brattleboro, Vermont.

**13. Security and Disarmament Conference, New Jersey Institute of Technology, 1982.**

**14. Bush-Dukakis Presidential Campaign, 1988**

Traveling to college campuses and other strategic locations in and around New York City. Sponsored by the NYC Dukakis Campaign

**15. NYPERG campaign for New York City Greenway, 1989**

Sponsored by NYPERG

**16. YMCA City Wide Leadership Training Weekend for teens, 1989 .**

**17. “American Town Hall Wall at America’s Reunion on the Mall”, Washington, D.C., 1993**

President Clinton’s first Inaugural Festival, Washington, D.C. 1993.

Afraid of such a broad based participatory project, the Democratic National Committee reluctantly agreed to install the wall one week before the event. A group of people from the DNC created the question:

*“What Are Your Dreams for America that President Clinton and Vice President Gore Can Help Make Come True? Please Answer in Words and/or Pictures on the American Town Hall Wall.”*

The ATHW was 10’ high x 80’ long. Since it was the only activity that invited people to do something other than look at exhibits, watch performances or eat, people were magnetized to it. In the 2 days of the festival the ATHW received over 12,000 messages. At the end of the two days the Wall was approximately five messages deep. The rest of the festival occurred inside white tents. The ATHW was outside and in the January landscape, it was the only oasis of bright color.

The ATHW was such an unexpected and unprecedented event to happen upon at a Presidential inaugural celebration, the location constantly teeming with writers, readers, celebrities and media, the thousands of messages providing the media and the press with beguiling text, that it, too, was world famous for “15 minutes”.

In the official Clinton Inaugural Book, the only photos of America’s Reunion on the Mall were of the American Town Hall Wall.

The ATHW was dismantled by the Smithsonian, each panel carefully catalogued in order to be reassembled. It was stored in the National Archives and is now part of the Clinton Library. (Sponsored by the Democratic National Committee)

## **18. “The American Bridge to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”; President Clinton’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Inaugural Festival, Washington, D.C., 1997**

For all the fears of the DNC in 1993, there had been only three negatives on the Wall. In 1997, after Clinton’s four years in office, out of over 7000\* messages, there were eight. Part of the reason is that a formal invitation to people to “say” what they think without chance of embarrassment or intimidation and then to exhibit it publicly, instantly, is intrinsically a “feel-good”.

A notable pattern of thought appeared on this Wall; the recognition that love is now a technology of peace, and that peace begins within each person. The same pattern of thought had appeared on the “Women’s Wisdom Wall” at the U.N. Woman’s Conference in Beijing, 1995, and on the Hague Agenda Town Hall Wall, 1999.

The 1997 inaugural wall was also placed in the National Archives and sent to the Clinton Library. (Sponsored by the Democratic National Committee).

(\*There were only 7000 messages because the temperature those two days was 15 below zero)

## **19. “The Focal Point”, United Nations 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary , St. John the Divine, N.Y.C., 1995**

Weekend Study Conference and Celebration for 44 selected NGO communities and groups from all parts of the world.

## **20. Habitat II, U.N. Conference, Istanbul, 1996. Part of Best Practices Symposium**

## **21. “Reinvention Revolution Town Hall Wall” National Conferences, Washington, D.C., 1996/97.**

Each of the Reinvention Revolution Town Hall Walls asked four questions. Every answer was categorized and put on the Government Website, inviting people to continue adding to it. That web site may still be up. The 1997 Wall included a section for messages sent in by e-mail. The 1997 conference included a luncheon workshop on How-To-Do-A-Town-Hall-Wall.

## **22. March to Conquer Cancer, Washington Mall, Washington, D.C., 1998.**

Three Town Halls Walls, including their reverse sides, each asking a different question about cancer, formed a Town Hall Wall arena. The answers were in circulation over a year after the event. They may still be in circulation.

## **23. The Hague Agenda, The Hague, Netherlands, 1999.**

The Hague Agenda to Outlaw War marked the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the World's First Peace Conference, initiated by the Czar of Russia. In 1899, the conference was attended by heads of state. In 1999, the conference was attended by 10,000 members of the global community who organized by internet. Here too, in a global array of languages, the Town Hall Wall repeated the pattern of thought expressed on the Wall at President Clinton's second inaugural festival, that "love" is now an instrument of peace, and that world peace begins in within each person.

## **24. Main Street Millennium, New Year's Eve, New Year's Day, 1999/2000. Washington, DC**

Washington, D.C.'s official millennium celebration. At 10:30 PM, New Year's Eve, the operation was shut down for the evening because it was cold even tho', even on this momentous New Year's Eve, people were clambering over the Town Hall Wall, eager to write and find a space to post their messages. In a two paged article, The Washington Post reprinted 122 of the messages from the Wall, including colored reproductions of the squares in almost their original size.

## **25. Fight to prevent New York University expansion from obliterating the Judson House and the house of Edgar Allen Poe, New York City. 2000**

The fight produced successful concessions. Both houses still have a presence in their original locations. (Sponsored by the Historic Districts Council)

## **26. ImagineN.Y., New York City, 2002**

Thirteen Town Hall Walls mounted throughout New York City and outlying districts, gathering reflections on 9/11 and concepts to rehabilitate the city. (Sponsored by the Municipal Arts Society)

## **27. Union Square Town Hall Wall**

Town Hall Wall, in three sections, 140' long, on the south edge of Union Square, to mark the first anniversary of 9/11. All the messages have been organized by ESRI,

Environmental Systems Research Institute, to become part of the city's 9/11 data base. (Sponsored by NYC Dept of Parks and Recreation).



## **SELECTED TOWN HALL WALLS CARRIED OUT BY OTHERS**

**1. Two Town Hall Walls: “Take Our Daughters to Work Day” and “African-American Month; Lobby of the Humphrey Building, Washington, D.C. 1994.**

(Mounted by Dept. of Health and Human Services)

**2. The Women’s Wall, United Nations Women’s Conference, Beijing. 1995.**

**3. Million Moms March, Washington Mall, Washington, D.C., 2000**

**4 “Electronic Town Hall Wall”, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Ongoing**

**5. National Constitution Center, Philadelphia, Pa. Ongoing**



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