

FOREWORD

AS A PRODUCER AND HOST of *Nick News*, a documentary series for children that airs on Nickelodeon, I am in my 19th year of listening to kids speak about school, divorce, abuse, love, hate, racism, honor, religion, courage, life, and, yes, death. I've listened to their thoughts about wars, terrorism, politics, the environment and the behavior of nations. Most of all, I've listened to their hopes and dreams. And still the most common reaction I get from "grownups" when they watch one of our shows is, "But these kids are so smart!" This is almost always said with surprise if not downright shock.

The truth is, they are smart. And frighteningly honest. When Senators Barack Obama and John McCain sat down with us to answer kids' questions, most of the questions were about familiar issues and evoked familiar answers. But then one kid said, "Hello, my name is Kedric and I'm 13, and I know what it feels like to be picked last for the football team at school. I was wondering, have you ever been picked last and how did you handle it?"

The answers the two men gave to that question revealed more about them, more about who they are and what they're made of, than we saw in any of the "grownup" debates. But it took a kid to ask the question.

And that is the kind of honesty you will find in this book.



You see, kids get it. They really get it. And, after getting it, they often want to change it. They believe they can change their world. They believe they will. They understand that citizenship doesn't start when you're 18; it starts the day you're born. They are passionate and they want to participate. Never have we at *Nick News* seen this more clearly than in the presidential campaign of 2008 followed by the election of Barack Obama. I leave it to experts to explain why this particular campaign, this election, caught fire with the children of America. I know only that it did. For instance, here are the kinds of sentiments we heard from kids over and over, across the country, in cities and in small towns:

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Said Lara, "It sort of feels like it's a new dawn." Said Christian: "On Election Day, I got to pull the lever. To me it felt like I was like actually a part of the change." Said Olivia: "It's just kind of magical!"

Magical? Yes, I believe it was. Call it the American magic.

Certainly race played a part in the excitement. More to the point, races played a part. It took Americans of all colors and backgrounds coming together to elect a man who is both black and white, a man who has referred to himself as a "mutt." I like that. In this country, in the end, we are all mutts. And we ought to be proud of it. I know we like to talk about the idea of "color-blindness," but in doing so, I think we miss the point. What if, instead, we worked at embracing each other's diversity? Celebrating our differences. We know that inside we are all more alike than we are different, but our differences count, too. They matter. Especially when, rather than denying them or trying to erase them, we allow them bring us together.

When I was young, there was a song called "We Shall Not Be Moved." It was often sung during the civil rights movement because it was about strength and courage. The song had many verses. One of them said, "Black and white together, we shall not be moved." What it really meant was that, together, we cannot be stopped.

Reading these letters to President Obama, I consider what wonders we may see if the kids of today can hang onto this passion, this hope, this wanting to do the right thing; if they can come together to make change for the good, to fight for justice, and to never, ever stop caring about their country, its citizens and our beautiful, spectacular, inspiring, all-American differences. After all, as President Obama said, "There is not a black America and white America and Latino America and Asian America. There is the United States of America."

And here are the kids to prove him right. Pay attention to their letters. They are the future speaking to us.

Linda Ellerbee
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