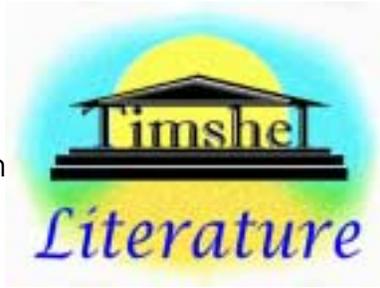


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Dear Presidential Hopefuls Bush and Gore,

I am nobody to you, and yet I ought to be everybody to you, if only for a moment of your time. I am a person who makes decisions based not on arbitrary affiliations or fleeting promises and insults, but after deliberation and consideration, a person, as well, who cares passionately for this country and this world, who takes humanity's incessant misunderstandings personally to heart. And yet I have never voted.

Yes, at the age of twenty-four, I have never voted. I've come close, but I've never registered. Partly, I guess, because it seems as if any candidate about whom I would be enthusiastic enough to cast in my weight's worth of support is elbowed out of the race, so to speak, long before I get the opportunity to have a say. This is no excuse, of course, and I know it. What's more, I'll admit to knowing it. In a limited way of looking at it, each vote I cast might make my next vote a little more important. Every time I state my opinion, somebody might listen a little more closely, if only because my message sounds familiar from so much repetition. So, if I might presume to request it, I'd like this note, and the time that it takes you to read it or to have it read to you, to count as my moment — the moment for which I actually matter to you.

I have a wish for which, were it possible, I would give up everything that I have in order to be reborn into a world in which that wish had come true. I wish that I lived in a world in which it would be possible that, having lost in their respective parties, Mister McCain and

Bradley might run together, on the same ticket. Sounds crazy, doesn't it? But is it? I don't think so. I think there's something that those two men share that all of you politicians, including, perhaps, those two men themselves, willfully fail to see: that there is something that I want and need, that Americans want and need, that is greater than any single issue, or any single party. I trusted them. I trusted Mr. McCain because he *had* to be making a point of being real to make the blunders that he did — it was not for lack of thought, I'm sure; I trusted Mr. Bradley because no liar could have been so reluctant to fight fire with fire and to have done it so half-heartedly when it became obvious that it was necessary — and here it was definitely not for lack of ammunition. But I guess I'm naming the exact reasons that neither McCain nor Bradley will be our next President: they are both too honest, too real, and too trustworthy to use irreconcilable promises and fallacious optimism to fool America into electing them.

I am of a generation that has seen one promised reality after another fall to pieces — that has looked forward to traditional life events only to find them gone or soured when it became our turn, with no replacements apparent. From silly images of high school and college life that we were shown in movies but could never experience to the promise of being able to make a difference, we now have the choice of complete filth or antisepticism. Our choice is between risking our lives in the frightening reality that a rebellious lifestyle has become or giving those lives up to easy causes or computer screens. With the former we can gain nothing because we must continually give everything away; with the latter we risk nothing and so can gain little of substance. The depth of the past's choices is an illusion to us now. Even what we are shown as the world at present is a lie as far as we are capable of being concerned. We are not rich; we were too young to invest in dot-coms; we were gathering debt, not earning credit toward our 401Ks, during this unprecedented era of prosperity. And now we are coming of age just in time

for this largest of promises to fall through, and all that this prosperity has done for us is to unfairly enlarge our hopes for the future. A future in which we cannot believe because our hope has been unfairly taxed by our predecessors. We are looking into buying houses just as interest rates are being raised to slow the economy; we are squandering precious hope on being able to invest money in a market that we fear will crash. We are struggling to find jobs that will satisfy us and pay the bills at the same time that some old guy on the radio is squawking about there being too much employment. We are watching companies lay off thousands of people because the year's profit margin did not grow ENOUGH! If we see at all, we see that we do not matter because reality and life are no longer substantial or tangible. If every generation from the "Lost Generation" to the "Beat Generation" and on has been disenchanted, then we are disenchanted with disenchantment. Lodged between the GenXers and the virtually marching CompuBabies, perhaps we can be called the "Meaningless Generation," because we want things to make sense again. To be real. We are trudging along and plugging in and playing catch-up and plugging in and all we really need is a heart.

So I need one of you, Mr. Bush and Mr. Gore, to give me something, and I don't mean promises and I don't mean money. I need to trust somebody to tell me when things are good. And I need to build this trust based on my being told when things are bad. I need to believe a government when it claims credit because it has told me before when it was to blame. I need you, personally, to come clean and say, "This is what I've believed all along. I am sorry that I lied." I need you to show some humility, to stop trying to get away with whatever you can, and to start realizing that there is more to the game than the prize. I will forgive you, and I like to think that the rest of America will forgive you, too.

But, to get back to my wish, the reason that I would want to live in this other world is not specifically because the two lost candidates would govern it, but because it would be a world in which that kind of kinship of the honest might mean something. I want to live in a world where people realize that so many of our reasons for choosing the groups that we do are superficial. I believe that people who allow themselves to feel and who *trust* what they feel will agree with me that we draw the wrong lines. And I want to live in a world, not where we draw no lines at all, but where we draw the right ones, and where we all have our say about where and when the lines can be crossed.

It is a fool's dream, I know. Mere moments after this piece of paper is removed from the fingers of whoever might be reading it he or she will forget it, no matter how much he or she, or you, agree with what I have said. I know this is true, because I, myself, have phrased it as a *dream* and as a *wish*. It is the very same principle that leads people to not vote for a candidate in whom they believe because that candidate is "unelectable." You and your like have been treating us like fools for so long that we don't know how to be otherwise when it comes to handling you. And we are to blame, too, because we refuse to see, ourselves, that if we want a particular candidate, then that candidate is, by definition, electable — perhaps we deserve the government that we get. But I, for one, am going to stop not acting because my actions might be futile, and I will neither be placated by a complacency that I do not have nor fight for a proscribed cause in which I do not believe, and I *promise* you that unless you change, too, you're not going to like me one bit if I ever do manage to become somebody meaningful.

With sincerity and hope,

Justin Katz