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Thousands gather Sunday in Washington for outdoor festival

## Democrats reclaim Washington, festival kicks off inaugural events

By Bob Dart  
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WASHINGTON — "Hello, Hopeville," sang Michelle Shocked, posting the city limits sign on the community of change built Sunday on the faith of Bill Clinton's followers.

Geographically, this teeming temporary town was mired in the middle of the nation's murder capital. Spiritually, it was closer to Camelot, the Sequel.

This was a city of artists like Ms. Shocked, who sings searing truths in an East Texas drawl, and, of course, it was a city of Democrats. But mostly it was a place where the populace felt a welcome wind of change is blowing at last.

Under unseasonably sunny skies, an estimated 200,000 citizens of Clinton's Hopeville jammed tents and pathways at "America's Reunion on the Mall," a free festival of music and food and mood that opened a five-day inaugural celebration. Their smiles and hopeful comments offered testimony that the presidential election, if nothing else, has raised America's expectations.

"I've seen a lot of inaugurations, but I've never seen all this

going on before," allowed Grover Price, an aged barbecue cook from North Carolina. "Hopefully, it means good times for people."

Price and his buddies like Smokin' Murphy and Willie Davis had been up since dawn cooking collard greens and basting ribs to feed folks hungry for more than change. But hope was on their menu, too.

"Young people have got to have hope that they can come out of high school and find jobs, even if they can't go to college," said Davis. "People aren't lazy. All they want is work and fair wages."

The festival on several muddy acres between the Capitol and Lincoln Memorial was advertised as an inaugural event where ordinary folks could join in the celebration and legions of them accepted the offer.

Most in the cheerful crowd had been drawn more by the prospect of a good time than by politics, of course. They ate barbecue and jambalaya and bagels and fajitas and buffalo burgers. And they packed tents to hear singers like Al Green and Linda Ronstadt and to bop to bands like Booker T. and the MGs and Buckwheat Zydeco.

But they also congregated at the "Town Hall Wall," a huge,

sticky bulletin board where anyone could slap on a piece of paper with their "dreams of America" for Clinton to read.

There were some cynics and comics among the dreamers.

"Dear Bill: My prayer is for you to set me up with Gennifer F.," somebody wrote.

But most of the messages reflected serious thought and — once again — an abiding spirit of hope.

"Dear Bill: Remember, education counts," said a note signed "Jenny, Ga."

Michelle Deets, from Laguna Beach, Calif., had filled in every inch of her page of dreams: "We left Iraq. Let's not go back," she wrote. "Keep abortion legal and make education a priority."

She was optimistic as she added her square to this collage of change.

"I'm hopeful, yes, but it's going to take a group effort. It's not just up to the president," she said.

Earlier, Buckwheat Zydeco sounded this same note in a song that had the citizens of Hopeville up dancing in their chairs.

"This goes out to you from the president," the band said, before singing, "Make a change in your life and make it for the better."