

TOM TRESSER'S WORK IN CULTURAL ORGANIZING & POLITICS



In 1990 I organized Greater Chicago Citizens for The Arts, a membership organization dedicated to electing candidates who supported the arts and freedom of expression. GCCA was a political action organization and we worked to get arts workers involved in the electoral process.

Some of our activities included - -

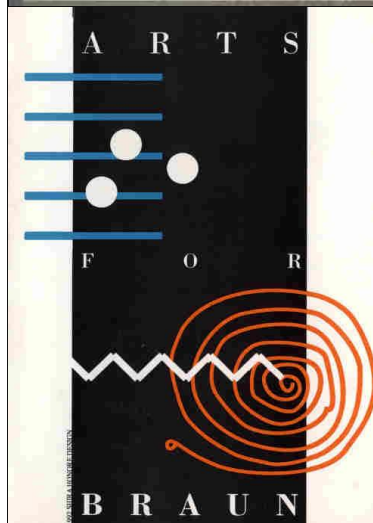
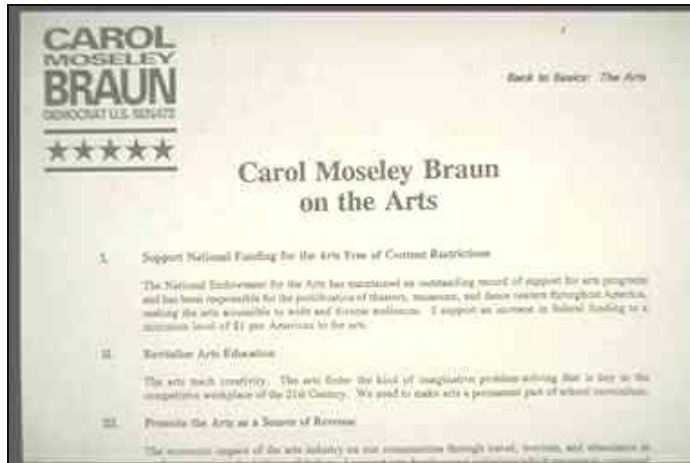
We trained over 60 artists to register people to vote.

GCCA deputy registrars registered over 1,200 people to vote. We did this in theater lobbies, at arts festivals, in front of post offices and at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.



We worked with candidates for Alderman, State Representative, U.S. Congress and the U.S. Senate to draft arts and culture policy statements. These statements contained both background statements about the impact of the arts in society as well as specific policy points that the candidate would pursue in the areas of arts support, arts in education and arts in the broad agenda of urban renewal.

We wrote the [arts policy statements](#) for candidates for local and federal office. We created a policy statement for Judy Erwin's first campaign for State Representative from Chicago's 11th District, which includes the Loop. She won that race and has been re-elected four times. We co-authored the arts policy statement from the campaign of Carol Mosley Braun for the U.S. Senate.

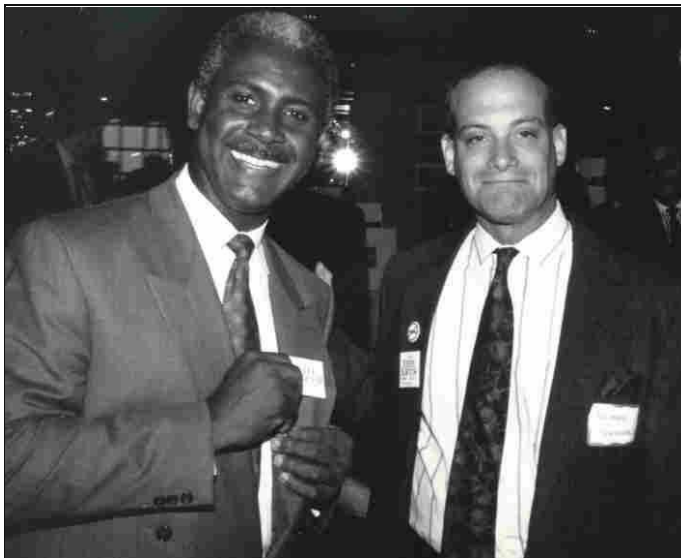


Everyone in the campaign wanted one of our cool "Arts for Braun" buttons! The designer was Shira Honore.

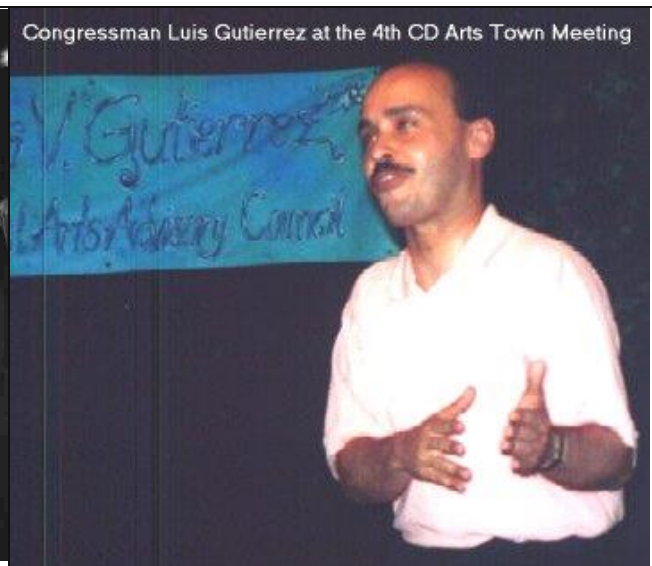


We endorsed candidates for office (22 candidates in the 1992 election cycle) and worked to get them elected. We helped to raise money (over \$25,000 for the Braun campaign), we collected signatures for our candidates at arts fairs, we sent volunteers to campaign offices, we printed and distributed over 12,000 pro-arts slate cards urging arts patrons to vote for our ticket and we held several public events to spotlight our candidates.

We endorsed and passed endorsement literature for then Alderman Luis Gutierrez, who was running for Congress. We hosted a reception at a local gallery and the candidate spoke at our rally at the Royal George Theater and was a keynote speaker at our Politics 101 Conference and Exhibition at the Randolph Street Gallery. After his election, GCCA organized a town hall meeting for the arts at The Chopin Theater on Division Street, attended by over 150 people. We then went on to organize the 4th Congressional District Arts & Culture Advisory Council.



Tom with Harvey Gantt, who ran unsuccessfully against arch-conservative and frequent attacker of the arts, Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC).



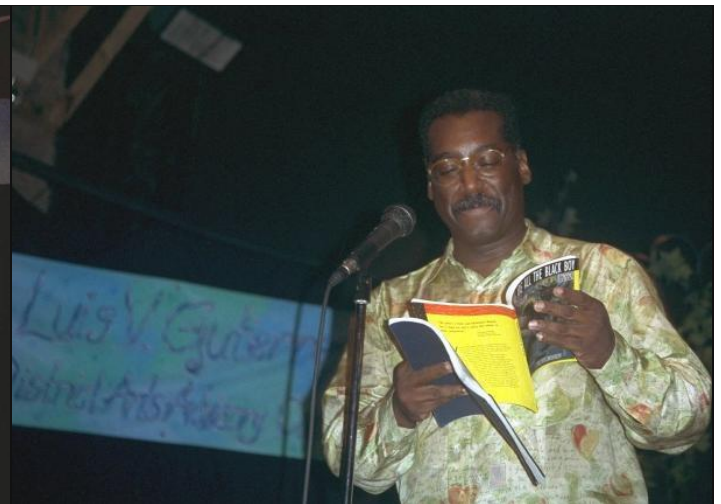
Congressman Luis Gutierrez at the 4th CD Arts Town Meeting

GCCA organized a packed Arts Town Meeting for newly elected Congressman Gutierrez in 1993 at The Chopin Theater.

I spoke out at meetings and arts conferences in Chicago and across the country on the need for the arts community and progressives in general to organize politically and create a unified vision for civic action. I tracked the progress of the Radical Right, including the Christian Coalition, which I felt was becoming alarmingly effective in organizing its base, mobilizing resources and getting people elected.

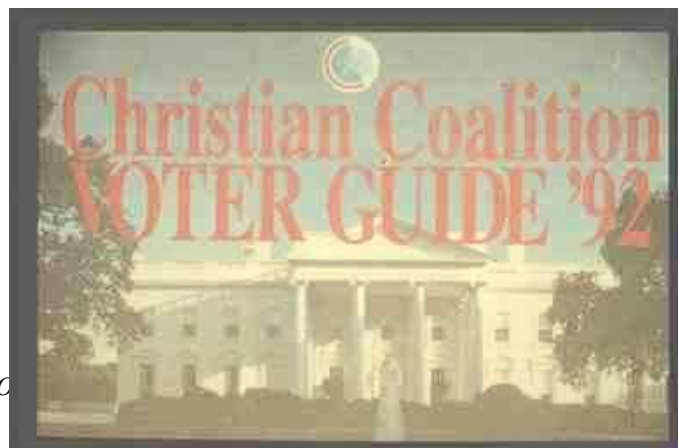


Aaron Freeman speaks out at a GCCA rally at Club Lower Links.



Michael Warr reads his poetry at the Gutierrez town hall meeting.

The Christian Coalition was founded following fundamentalist evangelical Pat Robertson's failed 1988 bid for the Republican nomination for President. By 1991 it had a well-organized and publicly announced political strategy for grassroots organizing at the county level in every state. It distributed tens of million voter's guides in the 1992 election cycle. The power of the Religious Right has grown since then and



has successfully inoculated the entire American political system with its agenda and adherents.

I wrote a bi-weekly column on arts and politics for PerformInk, a Chicago-based newspaper serving the entertainment industry here. [Here's a column from 1993](#) reporting on the defeat of pro-arts Illinois Congressman John Cox by Ron Manzullo with the help of the Christian Coalition.

GCCA disbanded in 1994 as I turned my attention to a new full-time job. I taught "Arts and Public Policy" for two years at Roosevelt University, where I organized a center for the study of cultural policy.

My efforts in organizing creative people to participate in civic and political work were rewarding and productive. But I think we only scratched the surface of the resources and power that can be unleashed from the creative community on behalf of progressive candidates for public office.



Thomas Tresser
312-804-3230
tom@tresser.com
www.tresser.com