Jesse Helms's Politics of Pious Incitement: Race, Conservatism, and Southern Realignment in the 1950s

By Bryan Hardin Thrift

In the South, a region where cultural and racial conservatism coexisted with loyalty to the Democratic Party and wide support for liberal economic policies, Jesse Helms became a pivotal figure in constructing the new conservatism of the 1950s and 1960s. Before his thirty-second birthday, Helms, a native of North Carolina, was an award-winning newspaper reporter, city editor of the Raleigh *Times*, news director for Raleigh radio station WRAL, administrative assistant to Senator Willis Smith, and campaign worker for conservative candidates, including media adviser to Senator Richard B. Russell Jr.'s run for the 1952 Democratic presidential nomination. In 1953 Helms left Washington, D.C., to serve as executive director of the North Carolina Bankers Association (NCBA) and edit its magazine, the *Tarheel Banker*. Helms differed from typical southern conservatives of the fifties. Out of his Washington experience a young Helms developed a national vision for conservative power. He not only recognized that southern Democrats had more in common with western and midwestern Republicans—like Richard M. Nixon or Joseph R. McCarthy—than with liberal Democrats, but he also wanted to build a national conservative party.

Although Helms's critics have often painted him as a fringe figure, such depictions represent wishful thinking rather than a serious appraisal of his influence. True, Helms—a polished, well-connected extremist in a banker's suit—expressed views labeled fringe during the postwar decades. He believed the liberal consensus was shallow, mainly an elite phenomenon. Many average voters shared his views. The problem was to determine how, with a moderate to liberal media, conservatives could reach these voters. He found solutions. By the 1970s, no one could doubt Helms's centrality to the conservative

Mr. Thrift is an assistant professor of history at Tougaloo College.

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movement. He signed a fund-raising letter for the Moral Majority, and the money streamed in. His North Carolina Congressional Club (later renamed the National Congressional Club) supplied Ronald Reagan with money and ideas during his 1976 and 1980 campaigns. In *My Life*, Bill Clinton charged that Helms was behind Kenneth Starr's appointment as a special prosecutor to investigate Clinton's activities.[1] Helms's influence in recent decades had deep roots. During the fifties, Helms began the work that made the fringe mainstream. He altered southern conservatism to make it acceptable outside the South, pushed for a national conservative party, and developed ways of communicating with common people—not only rural voters but also new suburbanites. Most of all, Helms nurtured the issues like opposition to desegregation that pushed southern whites toward the GOP.

Since President Ronald Reagan's victories in the 1980s, historians have investigated the rise of the New Right. Dan T. Carter and Thomas Byrne Edsall and Mary D. Edsall posit a top-down model with presidential candidates Richard Nixon and Alabama governor George C. Wallace leading the way. In Carter's view, Wallace's national campaigns exported Deep South politics to the rest of the country; Nixon's southern strategy simply stole the Alabama governor's fire. Carter depicts Wallace as a rock-star politician whose tour forged a new conservative majority.[2] In this standard narrative, the Wallace and Nixon campaigns molded a cross-class white constituency for conservatism that depended on racial anxiety, hostility to the cultural elite, anticommunism, and rejection of big government. This meant not only a new conservatism but also a southernization of American public life. More recently, Matthew D. Lassiter's *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* and Kevin M. Kruse's *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* have challenged this top-down, out-of-the-Deep-South version of southernization. Lassiter and Kruse also complicate southern class relationships, demonstrating that rather than unifying whites, integration debates exacerbated class conflict. Defending its interests and its neighborhoods, the white

[1] Bill Clinton, *My Life* (New York, 2004), 613. I want to thank Professor Bruce Schulman, who read numerous drafts of this article, and the anonymous reviewers at the *Journal of Southern History*. I am also grateful to Jo Jackson, the archivist at the Jesse Helms Center, and to the librarians at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

[2] Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York, 1995), 345–47; Thomas Byrne Edsall and Mary D. Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* (New York, 1991). Carter drew on Hunter S. Thompson's evocative imagery in Thompson's *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72* (New York, 1973).

working class resented the safely segregated middle-class suburbs. The key actors in Lassiter's and Kruse's narratives are working- and middle-class white southerners who organized a grassroots resistance to busing and neighborhood integration in rapidly growing Sun Belt cities such as Charlotte and Atlanta. Although opposition to desegregation began with massive resistance and explicit racism, these activists developed an ideal of color-blind individualism that obscured their defense of racial and class discrimination. In this bottom-up model, white flight gave birth to modern conservatism: private schools, the tax revolt, and the rejection not only of big government but also of public space.[3]

Jesse Helms was the prototypical politician of the new conservatism. He encouraged grassroots organizing and joined the New Right leadership. He listened to suburban concerns—taxes, annexation, and integration. Although Helms was sympathetic to Wallace and other segregationist candidates, Helms's national experience led him to the conclusion that an explicitly racist defense of segregation would fail. If George Wallace was a rock star, then Jesse Helms was an ad man. From the 1940s to the 1970s his career immersed him in traditional and emerging mass media: city editor of the Raleigh *Times*, news director for the WRAL radio station, editor of the North Carolina Bankers Association's *Tarheel Banker* while serving as the organization's director, and executive vice president of the WRAL television station. Helms's WRAL commentaries made him a television personality and represented the culmination of a career as a media insider. He advocated southern realignment to Nixon in the fifties long before the future president was listening—Nixon was never part of the New Right. Wallace remained a southern Democrat all his life, but Helms's desire for a conservative party was stronger than his partisan loyalty. The party most likely to purge its liberals, he recognized, was the Republican Party. And for Helms, any person, party, or newspaper that did not support his views was deemed liberal, whatever its views in a national context.

When he arrived back in Raleigh in 1953, Helms developed a new

[3] Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York, 2001); Carter, *Politics of Rage*; Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, 2005); Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, 2006). Lisa McGirr also demonstrates the centrality of grassroots organizing in Orange County, California. See McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, 2001). Recently William A. Link has published a biography of Jesse Helms that also contributes to some of these themes. See Link, *Righteous Warrior: Jesse Helms and the Rise of Modern Conservatism* (New York, 2008).

conservative style. He reframed southern conservatism in order to forge a national conservative party. Although profoundly disturbed by Supreme Court decisions and federal legislation undermining de jure segregation, he never directly defended segregation. Instead, he astutely devised campaign rhetoric that camouflaged his racism by avoiding the racial epithets typical of southern politicians. And Helms became increasingly aware of the emerging New Right, centered on William F. Buckley's *National Review*. In December 1960 Helms began touting Senator Barry M. Goldwater as a presidential candidate for the 1964 election and served as adviser to North Carolina Young Americans for Freedom. The conservative periodical *Human Events* published Helms's writing throughout his career; its publisher, James Wick, became a personal friend who recruited the young North Carolinian for a permanent position at the magazine.[4]

Organization and communication would prove as important to the New Right takeover of the GOP as the new suburban ideology would. When the New Right assumed national prominence in the 1970s, observers credited its effectiveness to the network that conservatives had assembled—one founded on technical sophistication in mass media and politics, willingness to place conservative principles above party affiliation, and active coalition-building among conservatives, including alliances with extremist groups. Helms embodied all these traits.

During the fifties, Helms supported the political efforts of conservatives from both parties: advising on strategy and fund-raising while praising and publicizing their efforts in editorials and news programming. He advocated southern realignment and praised the ticket-splitting independent. He pushed business executives, especially bankers, to get involved politically and tried to convince Vice President Richard Nixon that a conservative Republican could win

[4] Jesse Helms to James Wick, July 13, 1959, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1959 (Jesse Helms Center, Wingate, North Carolina; hereinafter JHC). The Jesse Helms Center is the repository for Senator Helms's congressional and personal papers. The material cited in this article has not yet been processed, but file labels are given. On Helms's touting of Goldwater, see Jesse Helms, *Viewpoint* #12, WRAL-TV, December 7, 1960. *Viewpoint* was Jesse Helms's five-minute editorial program broadcast after the local evening news on WRAL-TV, Channel 5 in Raleigh, North Carolina, from 1960 to 1972. The program was rebroadcast on WRAL-TV the next day and on various radio stations. It was available free to any radio station or for reprint in a newspaper or magazine. Many subscribers also received a newsletter version. *Viewpoint* episodes were numbered in sequence and dated. The Jesse Helms Center and the North Carolina Collection in Wilson Library at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill have nearly complete collections of *Viewpoint* transcripts.

North Carolina in 1960. Helms contemplated a run for a state senate seat and won two Raleigh city council elections.

But he was frustrated. Dissatisfied with the administration of Dwight D. Eisenhower, Helms saw liberals and communists in power everywhere and recognized few distinctions between them, while conservatives wandered in the wilderness. Experimenting with *Tarheel Banker* editorials, Helms crafted a style, language, and techniques suited to his personality and to modern media that allowed him to challenge liberal and moderate influence and to unify conservatives. He targeted liberal elites in media, government, and academics a decade and a half before the Nixon administration took office. His correspondence taught him how his actions on the city council played with average voters. He learned that opposition generated more support than good government proposals did. His ideological experiments reconfigured white supremacy for a media-saturated, universalist era. He mixed news with business boosterism, coded racial appeals, and New Right conservatism. Never criticizing white supremacy, Helms made white supremacy "safe" for successful campaigning. Helms's political style united the right: economic conservatives with social and cultural conservatives primarily concerned about race. This amounted to a white cross-class alliance, connecting the top to the bottom: country-club, suburban, working-class, and rural whites.

As the fifties came to a close, Helms discovered that television was the ideal medium for his personality and message. In 1960 North Carolina native Alfred J. Fletcher, an attorney and businessman, convinced Helms to join Fletcher's WRAL-TV as executive vice president, providing conservative political direction for the news and delivering daily commentaries. Helms interpreted the sixties for eastern North Carolina as they happened. All along he remained convinced that his state and nation would wake up to the dangers liberalism presented.

While in Washington during the early fifties, Helms became acutely aware of the ideological jumble of American political parties. Southern Democrats often favored conservative Republicans such as Richard Nixon and Joseph McCarthy over other Democrats. It was the Republicans who had reliably nominated conservative presidential candidates. Advocating political realignment once he was back in his home state, Helms complained that Americans had forgotten that parties formed around ideology: "Nowadays, a lot of our party leaders are trying to sell us on the idea that we should have the same ideas and philosophies because we belong to the same particular party." The

1952 elections demonstrated that "[t]he people of the Democratic South, fundamentally a conservative people, will never be able to reconcile their views with such people as Senator [Hubert H.] Humphrey, Senator [Herbert H.] Lehman, and—to a lesser degree—even Adlai Stevenson."[5]

For Helms, like most who joined the New Right, the modern Republicanism of the Eisenhower administration, although a welcome respite from the policies of liberal Democrats, was not conservative enough. "[T]he people of the South, believing as they do in states rights and basic conservatism, have no place to go," Helms protested; "on most of the issues which seem important, both parties may be observed going thataway." He felt the solution was "a complete realignment of the two parties—the sheep on one side, the goats on the other." Although hoping for change, Helms expected the parties to continue as usual and defended the independent voter, who was often labeled unstable in the conformist fifties. "Being a realist, we predict that the regular Democrats and the regular Republicans will continue to try to compromise among themselves, while the independent voter goes to the polls and really makes the decision for us," Helms wrote in 1956. "Makes that unstable, independent fellow look important, doesn't it?"[6] Most Democrats and Republicans put their party ahead of ideology. Ticket-splitting independents, Helms realized, made conservatives of both parties viable. As one of those independents, he supported the most conservative candidate regardless of party.

Helms recruited and supported conservative candidates from both parties, offering his aid behind the scenes with fund-raising and strategy and even running for office himself. He dispensed advice, edited conservatives' speeches, and hid his hand whenever desirable. "The reports that I constantly hear about your running for Governor in 1956 are very pleasing," Helms wrote Lieutenant Governor Luther H. Hodges. "While I don't have much to offer in the way of political strength, it will be a pleasure to have the opportunity of supporting and assisting you in any way." In 1955 Helms offered his political support to Edwin Pate, a bank executive, past president of the NCBA, and former state legislator, who was considering a run for lieutenant governor: "I just wanted to say, for the record, that you have a volunteer publicity man, campaigner and worker-at-large in case you decide to

[5] Helms, "That Important, Independent," *Tarheel Banker*, 35 (July 1956), 24.
[6] *Ibid.*

run. I would be limited only by the proprieties of my job and the number of hours in the night and on weekends."[7]

While a city councilman, Helms remained active in others' campaigns. In 1958 his close friend and future campaign manager, Thomas F. Ellis, ran for state senate. Helms arranged for Robert P. Holding Jr., chairman of First Citizens Bank and Trust Company, to lend Ellis his "automatic typewriter . . . to grind out some letters," and Helms helped assemble the mailing list. Ellis's letter promised to "encourage the development of agriculture, industry, and education in our county and state" but "without imposition of additional tax burdens."[8]

In the late fifties Helms organized an informal group within the North Carolina Democratic Party intended "to combat the leftwingers who have taken us over." Though often disappointed by the limited effort from other conservatives, Helms expressed optimism about the potential of this organization: "I am encouraged about the possibility of some of our potential leaders getting off their posteriors and putting some money and work behind an effective organization."[9]

Governor Luther Hodges called Helms to poll the group's opinion and court its support for Hodges's proposal to use a payroll-withholding plan for the state income tax. Helms reported "considerable silent objection to the withholding plan." A few conservatives even preferred a tax increase because withholding made taxing easy. Helms reassured them that Hodges grasped "the disadvantage of 'painless' taxation" and encouraged him to address the public on withholding's weaknesses. Conservatives' real fears, Helms elaborated, depended on the next governor. "If we could be sure that we would

[7] Helms to Hodges, June 3, 1954, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1953–1955, JHC (first and second quotations). Within a few months, Hodges became governor on the incumbent's death. Helms, "Quiet Effectiveness," *Tarheel Banker*, 32 (June 1954), 38; Helms to Edwin Pate, December 8, 1955, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1953–1955, JHC (third quotation); Pate to Helms, April 21, 1958, and Helms to Pate, April 23, 1958, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1958, JHC. After the death of Senator Kerr Scott, Helms lobbied Governor Hodges in favor of appointing Pate senator. Hodges instead appointed Everett Jordan to the Senate. Neither Helms nor Pate objected to the choice, but Helms assured Pate, "I like Everett Jordan a great deal, but I'd still rather have you in the Senate, ten-to-one." See Helms to Pate, April 23, 1958, *ibid.*

[8] Tom Ellis to Helms, April 2, 1958, Helms to Bob Holding, April 8, 1958 (first quotation), Ellis to Helms, April 23, 1958, and attached undated draft of campaign letter (second and third quotations), Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1958, JHC.

[9] Helms to Mrs. Cleo Birchett Liner, October 20, 1958, *ibid.* (quotations); Helms to Governor Luther H. Hodges, March 2, 1959, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1959, JHC. Helms's optimism over the possibility of activism among conservative Democrats resulted from their reaction to a film designed to motivate conservatives, which he borrowed from a Texas group called "Freedom in Action." Helms to Mrs. Cleo Birchett Liner, October 20, 1958, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1958, JHC.

have a man like you in the Governor's office always, I wouldn't care about the form of taxation. But, the other night, I heard a guy named Terry Sanford make a talk at Kinston. I don't mind telling you that it chilled my spine to hear him and consider that he has a pretty good chance to succeed you and make use of this 'painless' tax method."[10]

Helms felt a special connection to Georgia senator Richard Russell, a southern Democrat with national aspirations, whose ideology and style Helms praised and emulated. He served as the senator's media representative during Russell's "ill-fated bid" at the 1952 Democratic convention for the presidential nomination. Russell had little impact beyond exciting conservative southern Democrats like Helms. For a display of Russell's strengths, Helms in 1960 recommended an "unlikely source" of entertainment, "last month's civil rights debate" in the *Congressional Record*. Russell engaged in a filibuster, which prevented the Senate from voting on civil rights legislation. Helms characterized the Georgia senator as "an adroit parliamentarian" who "literally tied his colleagues in knots, time after time."[11] Russell's ability to paralyze Congress embodied Helms's understanding of a conservative's role. Helms wanted the federal government restricted on social issues—especially efforts to end segregation—but Washington should have a free hand in foreign policy and maintaining tradition.

In 1955 Helms offered to form a "Russell for President" organization in North Carolina, but the senator declined. "Ordinarily I would of course want to go along with you on anything that you suggest," Russell replied, "but in the circumstances I must ask you not to proceed with the forming of any 'Russell for President' clubs." Helms tried again in 1958, but Russell left no possibility of another campaign: "Though I have no intentions of again offering for the presidency, it is good to know of your confidence in my ability."[12] Recognizing the unlikelihood of southern Democrats' regaining significant influence in the party, Helms maintained ties to conservative Republicans forged during his years in Willis Smith's office.

In 1957 Helms attempted to use the North Carolina Bankers Asso-

[10] Helms to Mrs. Cleo Birchett Liner, October 20, 1958, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1958, JHC; Helms to Governor Luther H. Hodges, March 2, 1959, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1959, JHC (quotations).

[11] Helms, "It's the Same Old Applesauce, Warmed Over," *Tarheel Banker*, 34 (April 1956), 35 (first quotation); Helms, "Thoughts About Stories, Snow—and Cloture," *ibid.*, 38 (April 1960), 37 (second, third, fourth, and fifth quotations).

[12] Russell to Helms, November 28, 1955, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1955, JHC; Russell to Helms, July 3, 1958, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1958, JHC.

ciation's annual convention to further realignment. He invited Vice President Richard Nixon to address the meeting "of about 1000 of the top people in North Carolina of both parties." Helms was familiar with the future president and his staff. Nixon's Senate office was next door to Senator Smith's, and both Nixon and Smith were Duke University Law School graduates.[13]

Helms was frank about his political intentions: "We are not merely—or even primarily—interested in securing a top-flight speaker for the convention. My motive looks ahead to 1960, at which time I feel that North Carolina can and will be persuaded to abandon its prejudicial political partisanship. In short, Mr. Vice President, I hope and pray you will be elected President in 1960—and with North Carolina's electoral votes in your column." Helms offered a secret plan to allow the vice president to make a campaign speech appear to be a vacation. The Bankers Association will "not announce or otherwise make public the fact that you will address our convention." Pinehurst, North Carolina, is "a wonderful resort." The Nixon family could plan for "a weekend of rest and relaxation" and present the trip to Pinehurst as "a gesture of friendship to me if you like. . . . [I]t's pretty well known that your office and Senator Willis Smith's office were adjoining during the days I was with the Senator."[14]

Unlike most white southerners in the 1950s, Helms valued conservative ideology more than fealty to the Democratic Party. His call for party realignment and overtures to Richard Nixon in the fifties indicated his openness to the Republican Party and his willingness to make the GOP the vehicle for southern conservatism. A few years after leaving Willis Smith's office, Helms risked a *Tarheel Banker* commentary defending Nixon: "I like to think I've been a pretty good Democrat (Southern Variety, that is), but apparently I'm not well-informed enough, or else I'm not a strong enough Democrat, to hate Nixon. . . . My observation of Nixon and my knowledge of the kind of fellow he impressed me as being have made me a bit resentful of some of the epithets bordering on slander that have been thrown at him." Other Democrats howled. "I have been told," Helms explained to

[13] Helms to Richard Nixon, January 8 (quotation) and January 28, 1957, and Helms to Robert King, January 8, 1957, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1957, JHC.

[14] Helms to Richard Nixon, January 8 (quotations) and January 28, 1957, and Helms to Robert King, January 8, 1957, *ibid*. As he did on other matters, Helms worked through Nixon assistant Robert King. While it is tempting to view Helms's offer of secrecy as an insight into Nixon's personality, probably Helms's campaign speech masquerading as a vacation just seemed an appropriate strategy to entice the vice president to come to North Carolina.

Nixon, "that I am a liar, a dupe and a disloyal Democrat."[15] Before leaving the Democratic Party in the late sixties, Helms helped conservative Republicans win elections and build a statewide organization in North Carolina. After becoming a Republican, Helms confessed to never having voted for a Democratic presidential nominee.[16] The party never nominated his kind of Democrat.

Helms held out some hope for a conservative southern ascendancy in the national party well beyond any realistic expectation. His experience with Russell's 1952 campaign and the lack of southern influence at the top of the Democratic Party taught him the Democrats were no longer the party of the South, despite tradition. "I still think," Helms mused, "that Dick Russell is the best qualified man in the Democratic Party for the presidency, but there's an unwritten rule against Southerners being nominated. The Northern big-city bosses won't stand for it."[17] Helms remained a registered Democrat until 1970 not only because it was the party of the white South but also for practical reasons. Many other North Carolina conservatives were Democrats. The Democratic Party primary decided most North Carolina elections, and conservatives sometimes won. During the sixties Republicans grew more competitive in the state, but he delayed switching parties until Republicans under the New Right purged the party of moderates like Nelson A. Rockefeller and William W. Scranton.

Many of Helms's efforts in the fifties to promote conservatism led nowhere. Nixon did not visit North Carolina in 1957, nor did he make the state a priority in 1960. Ellis lost, a humble beginning for the team that would create what became the National Congressional Club and help conservatives win numerous elections with millions of dollars raised through direct mail. Pate remained in private life, and Governor Luther Hodges, a textile executive who Helms assumed was a conservative, became John F. Kennedy's commerce secretary. But in 1957 Helms won election to the Raleigh city council.

In the 1950s, Raleigh experienced civil rights protests in the midst of rapid economic growth. The infrastructure needs that attended the growth led the city government to take unpopular measures—annexing territory and raising taxes. Helms believed the average voter to be unconsciously conservative; Helms's key problem was how to tap into

[15] Helms, "In Politics, Maybe We Ought to be Specific," *Tarheel Banker*, 35 (December 1956), 27; Helms to Nixon, December 18, 1956, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1956, JHC.

[16] Ernest B. Furgurson, *Hard Right: The Rise of Jesse Helms* (New York, 1986), 89.

[17] Helms, "It's the Same Old Applesauce, Warmed Over," 35.

this latent conservatism. During his first city council campaign he outlined his concern for the "over-burdened taxpayer" and his perspective on "fluoridation" of city water. As a city councilman, he stood for tradition, low taxes, and limited government. His voter mail encouraged these positions and connected him to grassroots concerns and activists. Helms found his voice as a politician amid a steady stream of liberal—that is, not strongly conservative—speakers urging change on the South and a city council making unpopular decisions.[18]

Taxes and annexation became major issues in 1960 with Helms in the minority on the city council. "I would oppose any proposal to re-evaluate property which has the primary or even secondary purpose of increasing revenue," he insisted. The rapid growth meant the council faced demands for hiring new personnel, building a new city hall, and expanding services. On taxation Helms did not offer unwavering opposition in the 1950s. His *Tarheel Banker* editorials and city council proposals accepted big government at the state and local level along with the accompanying taxes. Helms explained, "Big government on the State level unquestionably is with us to stay. It seems painfully obvious that we cannot hope to reduce our total tax requirements."[19]

When the General Assembly passed a bill that allowed North Carolina cities to annex territory against residents' wishes, Raleigh annexed five new areas. In January 1960 Helms wrote an article for the *State* magazine, linking the problems of taxes and annexation and offering a local income tax instead of annexation. Cities and towns suffered "growing pains," he argued, because local tax systems were out of date. These local governments could not finance the infrastructure necessary for growth without annexing new areas to gain new revenues.[20]

Helms recognized that, as engines of growth, regional cities had a claim on the suburbs that their economies nourished. "We find it hard to muster sympathy for the citizen who lives in the fringe area of a city—a fellow who makes his living *in* the city while living just *outside* its legal boundaries. . . . This guy is willing to mooch off the taxpaying residents of the city. He makes his living *because* there is a city, but he

[18] Helms's City Council Campaign Statement, no date, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1957, JHC. In addition to the statement's being filed in his 1957 personal file, it is clear from context that this statement was written in the midst of the 1957 city council elections.

[19] *Ibid.* (first quotation); Helms, "It's Time for a Change," *Tarheel Banker*, 34 (November 1955), 24 (second quotation).

[20] Bill Sharpe to Helms, January 22, 1960, Helms to Sharpe, January 25, 1960, with attached article titled "Archaic Tax System" (quotation), Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1960, JHC.

does not want to bear his share of the cost." But the commentator insisted this was not the whole story. "When annexation takes place, the city begins to move ahead with laying water and sewer lines, regardless of the fact that the fellow who's just been annexed has bought and paid for his own well and septic tank." The city invariably expects the citizen with his own water and sewer in place to help pay for the city's expanding water and sewer system. "Thus, the statute enacted by the last General Assembly permitting forced annexation is an invitation to municipalities to place outside property owners in a strained financial situation." But Helms knew Raleigh's expansion and economic growth were connected: "If what we're seeking is 'orderly growth and progress,' and if extensions of water and sewer lines, streets, sidewalks, etc., are natural parts of progress, then perhaps we should assume that everybody should participate in financing this better-city-for-everybody."[21]

To solve this dilemma, Helms advocated a system of municipal taxation, which would spread the burden of taxation among the city's beneficiaries. Raleigh could reasonably expect financial contributions from the suburbs outside its city limits. "What is needed is a broader participation in the cost of operating a city," he argued. "That can be achieved only by letting the fellow who earns his living because there IS a city *help pay the cost*!" Helms wanted the state government to empower cities to pass "a city income tax, or sales tax or both." But from the General Assembly's perspective, granting the cities the power to annex territory, a method Helms found unacceptable, solved the problem.[22]

During the 1950s, annexation emerged as an issue in metropolitan areas throughout the nation. The American dream for the postwar middle class featured a house in the suburbs facilitated by cars and freeways, but this suburbanization reduced cities' population density and tax bases. The vanishing urban middle class made the "forced annexation" and taxes Helms opposed essential for maintaining the quality of life in growing cities. Those American cities that successfully captured a significant portion of the suburbanization maintained their tax base and their quality of life. Over the coming decades, municipalities with expansive boundaries like Raleigh avoided extreme income disparities between central city and suburb. Income gaps meant

[21] Helms to Sharpe, January 25, 1960, with attached article titled "Archaic Tax System" (quotations), *ibid.*

[22] *Ibid.*

concentrated inner-city poverty, high unemployment, segregation, and crime. The cities that incorporated their suburbs faced less severe problems than the cities that lost their tax base to their suburbs. Because of the permissive state annexation law, Raleigh expanded its borders by 550 percent between 1950 and 1990, avoiding these difficulties.[23]

His own tax proposal was "obnoxious," as Helms acknowledged, and received little attention, while his opposition to the existing tax structure and annexation drew considerable support. Helms made opposition to a tax increase his central issue. In a statement before the city council, he declared, "I feel that I must take exception, in the friendliest of spirit, to their [the mayor and city manager] repeated statements that an increase in the City of Raleigh's tax rate is inevitable." Helms insisted that "our present tax rate can and should be maintained and that no serious infirmity will result insofar as the city's services are concerned." A tight budget, he admitted, would require painful economies from city departments, including the inability to add needed employees. "But at this juncture, when we have thousands of citizens who will be paying Raleigh city taxes for the first time—and especially in view of the fact that the vast preponderance of them were brought into the city against their will—I feel it is important that members of the City Council show their good faith by doing everything possible to maintain the existing tax rate. . . . The tax burdens of the American people are nearing the intolerable point."[24]

Helms's ultimate sympathy lay with the taxpayer, not government agencies facing budgetary constraints. Voters expressed their gratitude. "We [are] glad to know there is one financially responsible councilman," a delighted couple telegrammed. Another citizen wrote, "I am of the opinion that you are the only member of the council that should be reelected as you are the only member who has the public interest at heart—if something is not done to cut the tax burden instead of increasing it—no one will want to come to Raleigh." Helms responded, "It is easy to spend the other fellow's money in the name of 'progress' but it seems to me that the federal government has demonstrated the folly of such nonsense."[25]

[23] *Ibid.*; David Rusk, *Cities Without Suburbs* (Washington, D.C., 1993), esp. 17, 28–38, 76–78.

[24] Helms to Sharpe, January 25, 1960, with attached article titled "Archaic Tax System" (first quotation), Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1960, JHC; City Council Meeting Statement, no date, *ibid.* (second, third, and fourth quotations).

[25] George and Constance Wey to Helms, June 24, 1960 (first quotation), Calvin Zimmerman

Those annexed against their will also turned to Helms. "I simply do not see any justification for inclusion of my FARM in the city limits," wrote Frank Parker; it is "taxes without services." Along with a tenant family, Parker, age seventy-five, and his wife lived on a farm, bought for their retirement. "We do all of our work. Even produce most of our food. . . . Our world is right around us. We want it so until I pass away. It has been so planned." Parker disposed of his garbage, had well water "far better than city water," and even maintained his roads with his tractor. Furthermore, the city's running water lines across his sixty acres had already left him angry. He felt the compensation for the land had been inadequate, while lowering the remainder of his property's value. Putting in the water line, the city broke "down pasture fences," left "tracks across wet fields," and killed or cut down trees. Despite the damages, the "'owner' of land has to pay taxes and suffer consequences. Such right of way forever handicaps sale of land—acting as barrier for development." Explaining he had "no lawyer" because he could not "afford one," Parker asked Helms for his help in blocking the annexation of his farm.[26]

Mrs. T. M. Bost thanked Helms "for your humane attitude in the city's annexation deal. We can think of nothing so useless, unfair and oppressive." She pleaded for help from Helms in a case similar to Parker's. "I am a widow. . . . I am now paying all I can pay. I chose this lot and built here because I wanted especially to live outside city limits. . . . The city should operate on its revenue just as we must live on our income." Helms acknowledged her anger and pledged that he was doing his best: "I am in full agreement with your comments and I assure you that I will continue to fight the extension of government force and control for so long as I hold public office. It is a bewildering experience to sit as a member of a public body and observe men who should be expected to stand up for the inherent freedoms of the individual and cast vote after vote which are contradictions of the very fundamentals that made this nation great."[27]

From a practical point of view, Helms could do little to stop taxes or annexation, but he found his work on the city council gratifying. He

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to Helms, June 30, 1960 (second quotation), Helms to Zimmerman, July 5, 1960 (third quotation), *ibid.*

[26] Frank Parker to Helms, March 1, 1960, with attached Raleigh City Limits Extensions Complaint, *ibid.*

[27] Mrs. T. M. Bost to Helms, June 17, 1960 (first and second quotations), and Helms to Bost, June 21, 1960 (third quotation), *ibid.*

relished his role defending the Frank Parkers and Mrs. T. M. Bosts of the world. Bost's sense of oppression and her feeling that Helms stood for humane individualism contrasted sharply with his opponents' view, but her outlook matched his and other conservatives' self-image.

Helms's local income tax proposal would have shifted the burdens of an expanding city to the people who benefited from it the most and away from retired property owners such as Bost and the Parkers, who received little benefit and possessed limited means to pay taxes. The proposal also raised the possibility of shifting the preponderance of power from the federal to local government. Income tax revenues remain a key source of federal power. But Helms opportunistically recognized that opposition to all taxes worked better as an issue. Good-government proposals required greater understanding of public policy discussions than most taxpayers were willing to gain.

When Helms won his first city council election in 1957, Raleigh had just decided in two referenda to fluoridate its water. Fluoridation aroused a politically active and conservative minority opposition, who embraced Helms. Still, the fluoride issue had limited appeal. The incumbent opponent lost his reelection bid. Raleigh's antifluoride voters saw communist conspiracies in what most voters understood as a public health measure. The new city councilman, however, found a way to keep these extremists' support without alienating others who found them threatening or ridiculous. He presented his opposition to "forced fluoridation" as a principled stand for freedom similar to his views on taxes and annexation. At the same time, he acknowledged fluoride's value. "I feel that fluoridation of water probably would be beneficial for my family, particularly my children. . . . However, I cannot convince myself that it is fundamentally right to force fluoridated water upon those citizens who do not desire it," Helms asserted. His opposition to a popular public health measure thus became a principled stand. "I feel that the rights of the minority should be protected even though it may be of personal benefit to me to disregard their rights."[28] His careful word choice appealed to these grassroots conservatives without alienating mainstream voters who wanted the benefits of fluoride.

Although he accomplished nothing toward reversing fluoridation, Helms worked hard to keep the support of two antifluoride grassroots organizers, Stella Barbee and Alvin Wingfield Jr., and their followers.

[28] Helms's City Council Campaign Statement, no date, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1957, JHC.

Barbee and Wingfield belonged to the Raleigh committee of the Fluoridation Educational Society of the Carolinas, which portrayed fluoridation as a grand conspiracy. A leader of the group declared, "We know this thing is unconstitutional. We know it is socialistic and even communistic." The society planned to continue the fight in the city council and to challenge fluoridation in the courts. "There will never be a time when it is too late to fight the many evils underlying this fluoridation hoax." Barbee and Wingfield pressured Helms to make the fluoridation issue a priority in the city council. Appearing before the council, Barbee argued that the fluoridation program "strikes at the very heart of the freedom of the individual." But the council considered the issue resolved and limited her time to five minutes.[29]

Helms patiently detailed to Barbee the impossibility of moving the city council to action. "I am in a six-to-one minority," he explained, on any effort to interrupt fluoridation. "The other council members feel that they have the local newspapers, plus two referendums, to back them up. Thus the possibility of what they consider a technical unconstitutionality doesn't bother them." This left a court challenge as the best option. Although he suggested that appearing before the council would be a wasted effort, he assured her, "As long as I am on the Council, you will always have as much time as you desire to discuss this or any other matter."[30]

In his dealings with the opponents of fluoridation, Helms faced a dilemma common for postwar conservatives: what to do with the extremists?[31] Facing a fringe element, Helms kept his distance, declaring he wanted his family to have fluoride. Yet recognizing the extremists' political commitment and fundamental conservatism, he never repudiated them or any other group of conservatives. Helms became adept at speaking to the fringe, energizing the grass roots, and quietly accepting their backing, without alienating mainstream conservatives. Despite his limited efforts, sensitivity on fluoridation paid off. He gained the support of fluoridation opponents and did not lose other votes. The fluoridation opponents' involvement in local politics made them reliable voters. This quiet courting of extremists grew in impor-

[29] Walker Worth to Alvin Wingfield, June 12, 1957 (first and second quotations); Stella Barbee to Helms, September 4, 1957 (third quotation), and September 16, 1957; Helms to Barbee, September 5, 1957, and September 18, 1957, *ibid.*

[30] Helms to Barbee, September 18, 1957, *ibid.*

[31] Jonathan M. Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing: The Rise of Modern American Conservatism* (New York, 2001), 3–13, 162–89.

tance for Helms and other conservatives. The fringe groups voted in larger proportions when their issues seemed at stake, and they reliably contributed money. While a city councilman, Helms also gained experience communicating with the grass roots particularly on race, an issue with much greater political potential than fluoridation.

Although Helms's *Tarheel Banker* commentaries allowed him to address readers without mediation by other news outlets, the regular audience for his editorials consisted exclusively of bankers. For instance, more people learned about his advocacy of private education through critical newspaper coverage than through reading "There Is Another Way," his commentary on the topic. His actions as a city councilman were also filtered through relatively liberal papers. Conservatives in every region of the nation faced this problem. How to communicate conservative ideas to regular people through what the conservatives called a liberal media? In the midst of the tax debate in June 1960, Helms responded to a critical Raleigh *Times* editorial. "Maybe the people of Raleigh, as has been suggested, do not care about their tax rate. But if I can render the service of raising questions about taxation, if I can cause even a few people to realize that nothing is 'free' when it comes from any government, then I shall be reasonably satisfied," he wrote.[32] Although often exasperated by newspaper coverage, Helms's experience in the fifties made him confident he reached the people despite the papers. He believed eastern North Carolinians were fundamentally conservative, although they often voted for moderates. The problem was tapping into their conservatism and making them angry enough to change their voting habits. In January 1958 Helms manipulated the state's major papers into unwittingly delivering a message calculated to engender racial fear, distrust of liberalism, and anger in white North Carolinians.

City councilman Helms wrote a letter to the Raleigh city manager, W. H. Carper, concerning threats directed at speakers scheduled to appear at the Institute of Religion, a list that included Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Senator Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota, and labor leader Victor Reuther, brother of United Auto Workers president Walter Reuther. The United Church of Raleigh, the Raleigh Woman's Club, the Parent Teacher Association, and the League of Women Voters sponsored the Institute of Religion. News of Helms's letter was leaked

[32] Helms to Herbert O'Keefe, June 24, 1960, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1960, JHC.

to the Raleigh *News and Observer*; it published an article and then an editorial accusing Helms of "Pious Incitement."[33]

The *News and Observer*'s article, "Institute's Speaker List Resented Here, Helms Says," quoted extensively from Helms's letter. The city councilman wrote that he was "concerned" about "the number of expressions of resentment I have heard regarding the series of speakers." He worried, "It would be most unfortunate if any untoward incident should occur during the visits . . . It would be a blot on the good name of Raleigh, which has a reputation of tolerance for the expression of views contrary to those of the majority of our citizens." He used his authority as a city councilman to recommend that Carper prepare for trouble: "I write this letter to suggest that you consult with our chief of police and make sure that sufficient law enforcement officers are inconspicuously available to keep order and to protect the rights of people with whom we may be in disagreement."[34]

The article also spelled out Helms's view of the Institute of Religion. The institute misused the word "Religion," Helms believed, because it "appears to be more political than religious." The city councilman questioned "the judgment of those who selected this year's speakers," yet he expressed support for "the unchallenged right of free assembly and free expression." Helms's letter not only prompted the *News and Observer* to detail his questioning of the institute and the speakers but also led City Manager Carper to make fearful statements about political unrest. "Mob violence will not be tolerated in Raleigh," Carper declared; the city would commit the whole police force, if necessary. "We're not going to have that."[35]

The next day the paper's editorial accused Helms of "Pious Incitement." "The concern of City Councilman Jesse Helms," the editorial began, "who helped put on the race-baiting campaign against Dr. Frank Graham, for protection of public speakers at the Institute of

[33] "Institute's Speaker List Resented Here, Helms Says," Raleigh *News and Observer*, January 31, 1958, p. 32; "Pious Incitement," *ibid.*, February 1, 1958, p. [4]. For more on this matter, see also Helms, "Mr. Pate Learned About Those Hitchhikers," *Tarheel Banker*, 38 (March 1958), 41; "The 1958 Concern Somewhat Puzzling," Raleigh *Times*, January 31, 1958, p. [4]; Helms to Herbert O'Keefe, January 31, 1958, Henry Dennis to Helms, March 12, 1958, Helms to Dennis, March 13, 1958, Helms to Jack Spain, February 7, 1958, Bill Sharpe to Helms, March 10, 1958, Helms to Sharpe, March 11, 1958, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1958, JHC; James Dees to Helms, August 27, 1959, and Helms to Dees, August 31, 1959, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1959, JHC. Copies of the newspaper clippings are in Helms's personal files.

[34] "Institute's Speaker List Resented Here, Helms Says." The ellipses here are in the original newspaper article.

[35] *Ibid.*

Religion, may seem a sign of civic enlightenment. Actually, the Councilman's letter was obviously an effort to stir up trouble where none existed." The *News and Observer* pointed out that the speakers were "well to the left of Councilman Helms," but they "have expressed their views in decorous fashion," and even "those who did not always agree with them" listened "with respect." The institute's speakers have "become a valuable, enlightening item on the Raleigh calendar." The newspaper dismissed Helms's warnings as "Bosh and nausea!" The institute's speakers "need the protection of Jesse Helms like they need holes in their heads. But Raleigh's good name for tolerance and fair dealing does need the prompt repudiation of a city official's slippery incitement of trouble in a sanctimonious stunt."[36]

While the *News and Observer*'s editorial accused him of incitement, the article publicized Helms's perspective. Jonathan Daniels, the editor of the *News and Observer*, must have felt the article to be balanced—giving Helms extensive coverage—while the editorial defended the institute and indirectly the city of Raleigh.

Helms found Daniels threatening. After agreeing to serve in a cold war media reserve force, which would operate the Voice of America from North Carolina in case Washington, D.C., was attacked, Helms learned he would report to Jonathan Daniels. "I do not propose to keep myself in a position wherein I will ever have to take orders from Jonathan Daniels," Helms wrote. He then made a specious comparison. "I would be almost as willing to work under Khrushchev. There is not a great deal of difference in their views." Helms often suggested that desegregation was part of a communist plot, and though the charge was groundless, it gained traction as the civil rights movement slowly advanced. Adviser to Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S Truman, Daniels was hardly a radical, and the *News and Observer* was a profitable family business. His paper advocated moderate to liberal policies. It denounced racial demagogues, encouraged compliance with Supreme Court desegregation decisions, and gave the civil rights movement fair coverage, but it fell short of open advocation of integration.[37]

[36] "Pious Incitement." The editorial charged Helms with turning the *Tarheel Banker* into "the journal of his personal prejudices" and circulating copies of the letter "after the old handbill fashion." *Ibid*. The most incendiary material directed against Graham during his 1950 U.S. Senate campaign had been printed on handbills.

[37] Helms to Richard Russell, December 15, 1959, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1959, JHC (quotations); Julian Bond, "The Media and the Movement: Looking Back from the Southern Front," in Brian Ward, ed., *Media, Culture, and the Modern African American Freedom Struggle* (Gainesville, 2001), 16–40.

Despite the *News and Observer*'s detailing of his views, Helms insisted on the paper's bias. Just as his advocacy of private schools created a media reaction that publicized his opposition to integration, the *News and Observer*'s coverage of his letter opened opportunities. Helms complained in the *Tarheel Banker*, "My little chums at *The News and Observer* . . . . wrote an editorial which was so absurd that even the folks who agree generally with the paper's editorial policy were calling me and expressing their contempt for *The News and Observer*. . . . [T]hree of their representatives called me and said the editorial in their own paper made them retch." He insisted, "I won't go into the details of the editorial here except to say that the entire thing was a falsehood." In contrast to the newspaper, Helms did not explain any of his opponent's perspective, but he boasted that the events increased his confidence. "Naturally I appreciate the fine reaction I have had to the incident, for I am all the more convinced that *The News and Observer* isn't fooling people any more. . . . I have received hundreds of telephone calls, letters, postal cards, telegrams and personal visits. Only two of these were unfavorable—one anonymous, profane telephone call, and one letter from Chapel Hill."[38]

Despite the paper's moderation, Helms accused Daniels of depicting the city negatively to further a radical agenda. "The City of Raleigh is constantly pictured by *The News and Observer* as a village of idiots, a backward, ignorant and reactionary community," Helms complained. The city councilman loved Raleigh as it was, except for its papers. "Raleigh needs only a good newspaper in order to become one of the best-rounded cities in the country. I think it is a beautiful and progressive city . . . . It is small enough to be friendly in the small-town tradition, but it is large enough to offer the best in education, culture, entertainment and business opportunities."[39] Helms's idyllic depiction of Raleigh carried significance for him. He enjoyed the opportunities a modern city brought, but he wanted authorities to maintain the social structure of the small-town South.

The Raleigh *Times* ran a less accusatory editorial but one equally dismissive of Helms's worries. "Of course it is what . . . would be called a 'liberal' series, especially so far as the matter of race relations is concerned," the *Times* conceded. "But, it has always been such a 'liberal' series and if there has been any great public outcry or other manifestations of civic dismay about it, such has not been shouted from

[38] Helms, "Mr. Pate Learned About Those Hitchhikers."
[39] *Ibid.*

the housetops before." Helms was a former Raleigh *Times* city editor, but in 1955 the Daniels family bought its afternoon competition. The antagonism between Helms and Jonathan Daniels ran so deep that Helms made the afternoon paper, edited by Herbert O'Keefe, a surrogate for Daniels. Helms wrote O'Keefe denying any intention beyond concern for public safety. "I simply wrote a letter to the City Manager of Raleigh, as I have a perfect right to do. I did not release the letter to the press, nor did I authorize its release . . . . If anybody 'shouted from the rooftops' it was your counterpart, *The News and Observer*, and yourself." Helms defended his actions as a straightforward, responsible concern for public security: "I felt it my duty to report to the City Manager the nature of several expressions I had heard so that we can be properly prepared to cope with an undesirable situation if it should arise." As he often did, Helms fretted over the South's national image. "The Northern press would delight in running front-page stories if an untoward incident should occur in Raleigh."[40]

Helms's attacks on the so-called liberal papers delighted conservatives. Henry Dennis, the editor of the Henderson *Daily Dispatch*, complimented Helms on his polemic against the *News and Observer*: "I thought it extremely clever. . . . I'm one of your faithful followers." Despite warning Dennis that the "story on my tiff with *The News and Observer*" would bore him, Helms told it. His concern began with "a great many telephone calls protesting the schedule of speakers for this year's 'Institute of Religion,'" including some "quite vehement" callers threatening to throw "rotten eggs." His anxieties, Helms's narrative revealed, centered on race. The United Church of Raleigh, a sponsor of the speaker series, "is a strange assembly of citizens with left-wing leanings. It is also an integrated church." The protest calls objected to the "use of the white school auditorium for an address by Dr. Martin Luther King . . . . I doubted the wisdom of using the high school for an integrated meeting." Despite his objections to the speakers' appearances in Raleigh, Helms declared, "I would never deny anybody the right of free assembly."[41]

Helms explained to Dennis how the events became public. Helms mailed the letter to Carper and sent a duplicate to his friend and lawyer James H. Pou Bailey. When a *News and Observer* reporter learned of

[40] "The 1958 Concern Somewhat Puzzling"; Helms to Herbert O'Keefe, January 31, 1958, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1958, JHC.

[41] Henry Dennis to Helms, March 12, 1958, and Helms to Dennis, March 13, 1958, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1958, JHC. Dennis's Henderson *Daily Dispatch* occasionally reprinted Helms's *Tarheel Banker* editorials.

the letter, Bailey gave the journalist a copy ostensibly because he was going to do a story with or without it. Helms denied any prior awareness. Bailey "released the letter to the newspaper without my knowledge or consent. . . . I was away from the office when all of this occurred, and could not be reached. *The News and Observer*, without even attempting to consult with me, then ran a story" and the "editorial, 'Pious Incitement.'" Helms insisted he lacked control over the events surrounding the incident. "I take the position that if there was, indeed, any incitement, the *News and Observer* did the inciting. They didn't *have* to publish my letter." He reiterated that his "letter was not written for publication; nobody suggested that it be published. In fact, Pou Bailey told *The News and Observer* that he thought it would be improper for it to be published."[42]

Helms maintained this version of events even when writing to two political allies: Jack Spain, assistant to Senator Sam Ervin, and Bill Sharpe, editor of the *State* magazine, who had published Helms. "I guess you've noticed how *The News and Observer* has been treating me," Helms inquired of Spain. "Pou Bailey sort of fouled me up by releasing the letter as he did, but Pou thought he was doing the right thing." Sharpe was delighted: "I had meant before this to comment on the institute episode . . . . [Y]ou were 100 per cent right in your criticism of the type of people they are importing." Helms accused the "ultra-liberals" of playing with "two sets of rules—one for themselves, the other for their opponents," but he admitted feeling he had won a victory. "The reaction here—I believe—has been heavily in my favor except with the Negroes and the liberals whose votes I would never get anyhow."[43] Helms perpetrated this version of events every time he got a chance in the weeks surrounding the *News and Observer*'s "Pious Incitement" editorial.

Questions from a Statesville, North Carolina, minister, the Reverend James Dees, over a year after the brouhaha blew over, prompted Helms to relate a Machiavellian story of intrigue—a narrative substantially different from the one he told Dennis. "You may be interested in the details," Helms suggested. "While I do not object to anyone's exercising the right of free assembly, numerous persons in addition to myself did resent the attempt to lend respectability to the so-called

[42] Helms to Dennis, March 13, 1958, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1958, JHC.

[43] Helms to Jack Spain, February 7, 1958 (first and second quotations), Bill Sharpe to Helms, March 10, 1958 (third quotation), and Helms to Sharpe, March 11, 1958 (fourth, fifth, and sixth quotations), *ibid*.

'Institute of Religion' which was the vehicle for these appearances. So, when the threatening telephone calls began to come in, I wrote a memorandum to our City Manager suggesting that he have adequate police on hand to preserve the peace." Contradicting all his efforts to deny that he ever intended the letter for publication, he confessed to Dees that he had wanted it published. Moreover, he admitted the prominence of political concerns in his letter's release. "The presence of the police, I felt, would serve two salutatory purposes, (1) it would keep the peace and (2) it would remind those in attendance the speakers were not operating from a portfolio of sweetness and love." Helms had previously insisted on the purity of his concern for public safety, but he dropped the pretense. "As I had expected and perhaps hoped the memorandum fell into the hands of *The News and Observer* which ran excerpts from it, then attacked me in an editorial."[44] Helms's admission that political goals lay behind his letter's release revealed his indignation to be performance.

In his judgment, opinion had shifted to the right. He boasted of his political theater's success: "The ultra-liberals around the city, naturally, made me target for tonight in senseless neglect of the realization that everything they said caused more attention to be attracted to the ridiculous slate of speakers." Despite the attacks from "the ultra-liberals around the city," he won reelection to the city council in May 1959. He also felt "that the 1959 speakers at the 'Institute of Religion' were not nearly so objectionable."[45]

Helms's pious incitement demonstrated not only a cynical willingness to manipulate the Raleigh papers but also a sophisticated grasp of how modern media could function. Readers did not simply read a news item and an editorial interpretation and reach the same conclusion as the editor. He used this combination of cynicism and sophistication to set up the *News and Observer* and other media outlets to convey a message to a larger audience than he usually had access to. Helms created news. Supplying Pou Bailey with a copy of the letter was odd behavior, especially in conjunction with Helms's subsequent unavailability. If the letter were just from one concerned public servant to

[44] James Dees to Helms, August 27, 1959, and Helms to Dees, August 31, 1959, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1959, JHC. The *News and Observer* assumed political intent when it characterized the letter as incitement.

[45] Helms to Dees, August 31, 1959, *ibid*. In this letter Helms observed that the Institute of Religion invited "fellows like Ralph McGill and others to whom I object, but at least they were not so insulting as Humphrey, Reuther, and King."

another, why send a copy to a lawyer?[46] The vague concern for "physical demonstrations" in Helms's letter led the city manager to assert that the police were ready for "mob violence" even though the callers actually threatened only to throw rotten eggs. Helms created the impression that the Institute of Religion and its speakers, Martin Luther King Jr., Hubert Humphrey, and Victor Reuther, posed a threat. His actions revealed a willingness to abandon fair play. Helms objected to respectability being afforded speakers with whom he disagreed. He had a strong personal dislike for them, especially Humphrey and King. To diminish their reputations, he deceived the newspapers, the public, and even the police. Through it all, Helms successfully painted himself as the victim.

His pious incitement not only excited a racist conservative constituency but also led people of moderate views to question liberal institutions. Those making calls and writing letters taking his side against the *News and Observer* included people who usually agreed with the paper. Pious incitement ignored the rules of civil debate by denying legitimacy to alternative views and expressing outrage to drown out other voices. It claimed moral superiority for conservatism and discredited liberalism with fear, while undermining the basic processes of public discourse critical for democracy. The audience bought into his posture of fearful moral indignation. Pious incitement also succeeded at times in slipping exaggeration, distortion, and misdirection into mainstream media's political coverage. In his later television commentaries, Helms honed pious incitement into a powerful tool for tapping into viewers' anger and frustration over the civil rights movement, taxes, Supreme Court rulings, mainstream media, and liberal elites everywhere. He associated Democrats and the federal government with everything the viewers found unsettling. Despite Helms's repeated insistence that he supported free assembly and free speech, his behavior exposed a limited commitment to these First Amendment rights.

Helms no doubt thought that the pervasiveness of liberal influence justified his actions. He accused liberals of having a double standard and resented the way liberal media portrayed the South. He also firmly believed in conservative moral superiority. The Institute of Religion speakers were, from his perspective, dangerous radicals. With order

[46] Helms alternately characterized Bailey's actions as having "fouled me up" and as doing exactly what "I would do." Bailey seems to have been a co-conspirator because he knew Helms too well to be duped by him. They first met during the 1950 Willis Smith campaign and remained close friends and political allies. Helms to Jack Spain, February 7, 1958 (first quotation), and Helms to Dennis, March 13, 1958 (second quotation), Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1958, JHC.

and tradition as the highest values, he felt authorities should do whatever they could to suppress dissent.

The "Pious Incitement" incident demonstrated Helms's hunger for a larger audience than the *Tarheel Banker* afforded. An opportunity opened when his old boss at WRAL radio, A. J. Fletcher, added a television station to his Capitol Broadcasting Company. With years of experience in radio and a substantial fortune, Fletcher launched WRAL-TV Channel 5 in December 1956. Capitol Broadcasting's Tobacco Radio Network provided extensive news coverage, which translated smoothly to television. During the 1940s Helms was news director at Fletcher's WRAL radio station. In 1957 Fletcher tried to lure Helms back to Capitol Broadcasting for the new television station.[47]

Confident Helms could pin the label *racial liberal* on Democrats, Fletcher wanted him to add political commentary to the evening news. Recent *News and Observer* headlines such as "'Senate Votes to Take Up Ike's Civil Rights Bill'" annoyed him. Fletcher doubted Eisenhower was a strong backer of the civil rights bill and believed Jonathan Daniels was. The station owner inferred that the Democratic editor presented it as Republican legislation because the bill was unpopular with white southern voters. "I wish we had someone of sufficient stature," Fletcher declared, "to stand up on Channel 5 and tell the people the honest truth."[48] He wanted Helms because his ties to conservatives, his reputation for questioning liberals, and his style would lend credibility to the station and its perspective.

Fletcher was bullish on the possible influence of television in countering liberal newspapers. "If there are as many TV homes as there are newspaper homes after only a few years of TV operation, then what may we expect say in ten or fifteen years," he wrote. Helms found the offer from WRAL-TV "most flattering," but he worried over how leaving his position at the Bankers Association would affect his family. Helms had shown reluctance to give up secure positions in the past. Although involved with conservative candidates in every election cycle from 1950 to his 1972 election to the Senate, he rarely took an official role. The two exceptions were his position as Willis Smith's congressional aide and his stint as media representative for Richard Russell

[47] Helms, "He Was Billed for Office Rent Only Once," *Tarheel Banker*, 36 (May 1958), 33; A. J. Fletcher to Helms, July 17, 1957, July 22, 1957, and September 4, 1957, Helms to Fletcher, July 19, 1957, and August 28, 1957, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1957, JHC; Fletcher to Helms, July 2, 1958, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1958, JHC.

[48] A. J. Fletcher to Helms, July 17, 1957, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1957, JHC.

during the Georgia senator's brief 1952 presidential bid. The former he only accepted after the election and the latter did not require giving up his position with Senator Smith. By the fifties, Helms had made it, with a home in Raleigh—near good schools for his daughters—and a coastal North Carolina vacation home, but this prosperity depended on his salary.[49]

Fletcher granted more time to consider the offer, but after a month Helms declined, writing, "I have carefully and prayerfully thought about it . . . . And while I am declining a full-time connection with your television station, I hope that you will continue to be mindful of my interest in it and in you. Perhaps something can be worked out on a sideline basis." Fletcher offered a part-time Sunday editorialist spot. He envisioned Helms adding his "editorial flavoring" to a discussion of news stories. "Frankly we . . . would prefer that you deal with the significance of the news and combine that presentation with your own commentary." Helms's videotaped editorials began to be broadcast in July 1958 on Sundays at 3:45 P.M. WRAL-TV paid him around twenty-five dollars per commentary.[50]

Helms's WRAL editorials began six months after the *News and Observer*'s publication of his letter. Using pious incitement—especially fears rooted in challenges to the South's racial arrangements—to undermine liberalism was central to his method on television. As a member of the Raleigh city council and a Sunday editorialist, Helms attracted a growing audience once he began appearing on television. His attacks on the liberal media left many viewers with a sense of relief. One supporter wrote, "I agree with you 100% in your views in regard [to] the *Raleigh News and Observer*. They have made their vast fortune off the white people of N.C. and I do think that the least that they could have done would have been to support our Governor and our Legislature in their attempt to maintain our race purity without which no nation has long survived as a first rate power."[51] Helms and Fletcher shared a perception of biased liberal press coverage. Helms made this charge of bias a theme of his commentaries, but he also felt the paper's liberalism justified his tactics.

[49] A. J. Fletcher to Helms, July 17, 1957, July 22, 1957 (first quotation), and September 4, 1957, Helms to Fletcher, July 19, 1957 (second quotation), and August 28, 1957, *ibid.*

[50] A. J. Fletcher to Helms, July 17, 1957, July 22, 1957, and September 4, 1957 (second and third quotations), Helms to Fletcher, July 19, 1957, August 28, 1957 (first quotation), *ibid.*; Fletcher to Helms, July 2, 1958, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1958, JHC. Capitol Broadcasting sought a sponsor to increase his compensation. Fletcher to Helms, July 2, 1958, *ibid.*

[51] Helms to Grady Harrell, September 30, 1958, and Harrell to Helms, September 28, 1958 (quotation), Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1958, JHC.

Clearly, racism was central to Helms's stance and to his wide appeal among white listeners.

Helms significantly influenced the station even before joining its staff part-time. Fletcher, for example, consulted him in 1958 on WRAL's coverage of the Institute of Religion's speakers. WRAL planned to emphasize the institute's "overtones of Socialism," identifying the speakers' philosophy with that of the *News and Observer* and stressing Martin Luther King's appearance as "a very disturbing factor in race relations." Fletcher and Helms suspected that Jonathan Daniels was involved in inviting the speakers to come to Raleigh. They wanted to use Daniels's role, if they could substantiate it, against the *News and Observer* and the speakers.[52]

Jonathan Daniels was aware of the potential threat posed by WRAL-TV. His *News and Observer* owned part of Raleigh's first television station, WNAO-TV, a UHF station with a limited broadcast range. In the spring of 1957, WNAO-TV and the *News and Observer* petitioned the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to convert WRAL-TV's VHF license to UHF. WRAL-TV's VHF signal reached most of eastern North Carolina. A switch to UHF's weak signal would reduce its influence.[53]

Helms coordinated Fletcher's defense of his VHF license through Helms's ties to conservatives in both parties. Insisting on his personal independence, he wrote Senator Sam Ervin about the crisis, explaining, "I don't own any stock in WRAL-TV, but I know of its potential value to the causes in which you and I both believe." Ervin expressed his support for WRAL to Helms and the appropriate federal authorities. With Ervin on board, Helms appealed to other Democrats, including Governor Hodges and key legislative leaders. He mentioned the senator's backing as an opening and explained, "a group of citizens are trying to help WRAL-TV build a file which could be used if and when necessary to argue against such FCC action." Helms reminded them of the "splendid job of public service" at WRAL-TV. He and Pou Bailey had moderated a WRAL-TV program that "offered legislators an opportunity to explain various matters being considered by the General Assembly." As Helms understood, this was public service that also promoted the incumbents. He closed the letter with a reference to WRAL's role in balancing the liberal perspective of the *News and*

[52] Fletcher to Helms, January 28, 1958, along with attached memo from Fletcher to Bill Armstrong, January 27, 1958 (quotation), *ibid.*

[53] Helms to Robert King, March 29, 1957, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1957, JHC.

Observer. "WRAL-TV is an independent medium, and a powerful one. We need to keep it so, particularly with the newspaper situation being what it is in Raleigh."[54]

Helms also contacted the most powerful Republican he knew, Vice President Richard Nixon. For Nixon he made his and Fletcher's political case explicit, particularly in regard to realignment of the state. Assuring Nixon assistant Robert King that "each of us knows where the other's heart is," Helms insisted the *News and Observer* "dominates eastern North Carolina." It has "hit all-time lows in its condemnation of Mr. Nixon." The paper's editor and publisher is "a former Truman waterboy named Jonathan Daniels." Daniels drove the effort, Helms assumed, to persuade the FCC to reduce WRAL-TV to a UHF channel. A. J. Fletcher was a "leading free enterprise advocate." Helms's overtures to Nixon revealed that WRAL was central to Helms's hopes for North Carolina's realignment. Helms, explaining Fletcher's motives, wrote, "I know personally that the main reason he wanted a good, strong television station was to present the *other* side of the story insofar as government and politics are concerned." WRAL-TV as a VHF station with a strong signal represents "our best opportunity to get the truth to eastern North Carolina." Helms drove home to King the payoff for the assistance to a Republican vice president considering a run for the presidency. "As I have mentioned to you before, Eisenhower and Nixon carried North Carolina from the west to Raleigh, but lost it because of the very liberal east which almost block-voted for Stevenson. This was true in both 1952 and 1956." WRAL, Helms implied, could help Republicans win votes in eastern North Carolina, maybe even allowing a certain ambitious vice president to carry the state.[55]

In his approaches to North Carolina Democrats and to Nixon, Helms suggested that eastern North Carolina needed WRAL as a counter to the *News and Observer*. But in his letter to Nixon aide King, he used more strident terms to characterize the political situation. In part Helms could rely on the Democrats' experience with the paper. But in the 1950s and for a long time after, conservative North Carolina Demo-

[54] Helms to Senator Sam Ervin, March 29, 1957 (first quotation), and April 3, 1957, Ervin to Helms, April 2, 1957, Helms to Governor Luther Hodges, April 30, 1957 (second, third, fourth, and fifth quotations), Helms to Senate president Luther Barnhart, April 30, 1957, Helms to Speaker of the House J. Kemp Doughton, April 30, 1957, Governor Luther Hodges to WRAL-TV manager Fred Fletcher, May 3, 1957, and Speaker of the House J. Kemp Doughton to WRAL-TV manager Fred Fletcher, May 2, 1957, *ibid*. Helms's initial letters to Hodges, Barnhart, and Doughton are identical.

[55] Helms to Robert King, March 29, 1957, *ibid*. Helms worked through Nixon aide Robert King on the FCC matter as he did on the speaking invitation.

crats usually put party before ideology. They had to deal with Jonathan Daniels, a prominent Democrat with an influential paper, and had no interest in alienating him. An appeal to their self-interest in having a powerful TV station cover their activities in the capital was more effective than an attack on Daniels. Daniels had many conservative friends whose respect he managed to keep and who did not see him as a sinister radical. But no matter what a North Carolina Democrat thought of Daniels, he could see the benefits of having both the *News and Observer* and WRAL-TV.

However thrilled Helms was by his new opportunity at WRAL-TV and his success in causing the *News and Observer* to publicize his fearful image of the Institute of Religion's speakers, relatively few people saw his Sunday afternoon commentaries as compared with the paper's circulation. Helms worried no one watched. He confided to one ally, "Occasionally I have some encouraging comment, but mostly I feel that I'm just wasting my time."[56] Like other conservatives, he remained on the fringe in two different senses: in front of a small audience and outside the mainstream. Such a position could be an uneasy one because many elites considered out of bounds his association of liberal activist government and an internal communist threat. Just as he began his Sunday editorials, the experience of another TV commentator reminded Helms that advocating conservatism, even in eastern North Carolina, could have detrimental consequences.

Dr. Earle LeBaron, a professor at East Carolina College in Greenville, wrote Helms in 1958 seeking material on "subversives in state, church and school." LeBaron had a fifteen-minute Sunday afternoon commentary called *History behind the News* on Greenville's WNCT-TV. Through Senator James O. Eastland, Helms arranged for the House Un-American Activities Committee to send the professor materials. LeBaron thanked Helms for his "fine letter to Senator Eastland of Mississippi. I know of old about Senator Eastland'[s] long fight for states rights and racial integrity."[57]

Recent events at East Carolina College troubled LeBaron, particularly a series of integrationist speakers. Among them was Gerald W. Johnson, a journalist and former University of North Carolina professor. Although Johnson "did not advocate forcing integration on the South at the point of a gun," the professor observed, "he advocated integration as a mark of progress." LeBaron feared Johnson and the

[56] Helms to Earle LeBaron, November 17, 1958, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1958, JHC.

[57] Earle LeBaron to Helms, November 13, 1958 (quotations), LeBaron commentary "Communism in State and School," and Helms to LeBaron, November 17, 1958, *ibid.*

other speakers' impact on southern campuses. "Unless the people of the South awake they are going to find their traditions and ways of life shattered by their own sons and daughters, victims of the vicious propaganda and 'brain washing' practiced on them by radical professors," LeBaron wrote. Helms warned LeBaron against underestimating Johnson: "I know a great deal about that citizen and any manifestation of moderation on his part is merely a part of a well-planned technique. I consider him most dangerous."[58]

Helms's Sunday afternoon editorials had only run a few months, so he inquired about the professor's experience. "I would be very much interested in the reaction to your telecasts. I do a similar sort of thing."[59] Before LeBaron responded, WNCT ceased broadcasts of *History behind the News*. "I was put off the air on television by the radical professors at East Carolina College, probably assisted by the local 'moderates,'" he related to Helms. LeBaron believed that President John D. Messick of East Carolina College and various professors had pressured WNCT's management to end his broadcasts. The "radicals" easily persuaded Messick, LeBaron pondered, because he "has long been a 'liberal(?)' and a great admirer of Eleanor Roosevelt." These events left LeBaron depressed. "I hope," LeBaron pleaded with Helms, "you will use some of this information in your Sunday broadcasts. Since they have silenced me, YOU are the only voice of freedom on TV."[60]

Helms joined other conservatives in writing to A. Hartwell Campbell, the general manager of WNCT-TV, to protest the cancellation of LeBaron's *History behind the News*. Helms framed LeBaron's firing as an issue of public service. Since LeBaron had broadcast on the station "for some time," Helms wrote, Campbell must have judged "there was some merit in presenting his views to the public. Whether you agree with those views is not important. Nor is it important whether many of your listeners agree with them. The important thing is that you and your station not bow to any pressure group."[61]

[58] LeBaron to Helms, November 13, 1958 (first, second, and third quotations), LeBaron commentary "Communism in State and School," and Helms to LeBaron, November 17, 1958 (fourth quotation), *ibid.*

[59] Helms to LeBaron, November 17, 1958, *ibid.*

[60] LeBaron to Helms, December 19, 1958 (quotations), with attached Kinston *Free Press* clipping, "LeBaron Answers Charges Fired by Fellow-Professor," and Helms to LeBaron, December 23, 1958, *ibid.*

[61] Helms to A. Hartwell Campbell, December 15, 1958, *ibid.* (quotations); Campbell to Helms, January 15, 1959, I. Beverly Lake to Campbell, January 15, 1959, Lake to Helms, January 15, 1959, and Campbell to Lake, January 13, 1959, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1959, JHC. LeBaron and Helms's mutual friend and perhaps their main avenue of acquaintance was I. Beverly Lake, but Helms also sent blind copies of his letters to Alvin Wingfield and A. J. Fletcher. Lake and Helms coordinated their protests to WNCT.

Campbell rejected Helms's argument. When WNCT agreed to carry *History behind the News*, Campbell explained, LeBaron agreed to avoid controversy. This meant limiting his commentaries to "factual details." LeBaron failed to keep his side of the bargain. WNCT's cancellation of the show avoided Federal Communications Commission regulations requiring equal time for the other side in controversial matters. "In a practical manner," Campbell indicated, "this means that we at the station must actually seek out organizations such as the NAACP, advise them that we would be very happy to have them come and answer programs such as Dr. LeBaron's. Let me tell you very frankly that I have no disposition to put ourselves in such an impossible situation as this." WBTV in Charlotte had its license suspended "because the FCC did not think they were diligent enough in actively seeking out the opposition."[62]

Campbell's perspective angered LeBaron, who denied having promised the absence of controversy. He recounted to a friend, "I also informed Mr. Campbell that I am a Southerner, the grandson of a Confederate field officer who was a close friend of President Jefferson Davis . . . . I certainly gave him no reason to think that I would cringe before Communists and the NAACP." The goal of the NAACP, LeBaron insisted, was "mongrelization of the white race by intermarriage with blacks," and the group's leadership has been "cited for membership in Communist-front organizations."[63]

Commiserating with LeBaron, Helms affirmed LeBaron's sense of martyrdom and offered him hope that his sacrifice, their mutual sacrifice, as conservative editorialists, would impact the future. "I do sense," Helms wrote, "that we share one thing in common: we both feel that ours are voices in the wilderness. . . . The most we can hope for is that we may keep the spark of imagination alive. For freedom exists today only in the imagination of a few men." Helms consciously paraphrased Albert Jay Nock's idea of a conservative remnant preserving for future generations the libertarian ideals of the past. "The most we can do is to state the truth as we see it," Helms continued, "and hope that someday we will have each fashioned a tiny guidepost which will be of value if and when posterity decides to turn back down the road to freedom."[64]

[62] Campbell to Helms, January 15, 1959, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1959, JHC.

[63] LeBaron to Helms, January 28, 1959, and LeBaron to Sterling Booth Jr., January 18, 1959 (quotations), *ibid*.

[64] Helms to LeBaron, December 23, 1958, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1958, JHC.

His letter, written to comfort LeBaron, indicated Helms's despair over the pressure to integrate, a sign of liberal power, which he saw gaining strength. Many in the New Right subscribed to Nock's ideal of "a small Remnant" who would keep conservative ideals alive. Nock's writings from the twenties to the early forties became basic texts for the new postwar conservatism. His stark antistatism—one book was entitled *Our Enemy, the State*—soothed those pained by the growing federal government. This Nockian remnant's role was to preach, but the idea also prepared many conservatives to accept minority status. Helms alternated between euphoric resistance to conservatives' marginalization and, in despair, relishing Nock's sense of superiority.[65]

The 1960 elections were especially difficult. With support from "a substantial number of people," Helms considered running for a seat in the state senate. However, he thought a campaign unlikely. "I have given none of them any encouragement beyond the promise that I would earnestly consider the idea." Helms finally decided against it, citing his friendship with the incumbent. He stayed busy, however, particularly with the gubernatorial race.[66]

For governor, conservative North Carolina Democrats, including Helms, supported I. Beverly Lake, a former Wake Forest College professor and law partner of A. J. Fletcher. As assistant attorney general, Lake wrote the 1955 Pupil Assignment Act, the state's primary means of avoiding compliance with the *Brown v. Board of Education* desegregation decisions. By substituting numerous surrogates for race, the legislation eliminated race as an explicit factor in public schools. Lake, then, angered Governor Luther Hodges and other Democrats with a massive resistance plan—state appropriations for tuition grants for segregated private schools—should the Pupil Assignment Act fail to avoid integration. Lake's plan prompted Helms's "There is Another Way" commentary endorsing private schools. Lake and Helms presented a stark choice between integrated public schools and segregated private schools.[67]

[65] George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America, Since 1945* (New York, 1976), 14–21 (quotation on 15).

[66] Helms to Clifton Beckwith, January 22, 1960, Beckwith to Helms, January 21, 1960, and undated, untitled statement on possible state senate campaign (quotations), Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1960, JHC. Helms wrote Beckwith, "While I think I could win, judging from the expressions of support since the balloon went up, I am quite certain that winning would require that I conduct a vigorous campaign against John [Jordan] . . . I do not propose to do anything that would injure him or my friendship with him."

[67] I. Beverly Lake to Reed Sarratt, September 9, 1955, and Helms to Mason Yeager, September 12, 1955, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1953–1955, JHC; Helms to George Myrover, June 6, 1960, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1960, JHC; William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black*

In the Democratic primary Lake faced a difficult battle because his main opponent, Terry Sanford, was a skilled politician with a strong statewide organization and ample funds. Sanford managed to identify himself with the vigor of John Kennedy and progress in industry, education, and race relations, while avoiding being labeled an integrationist. He seized the tired southern images of the Lost Cause and made them serve his vision of progress. The South will "rise again and march again," but with textbooks, not bayonets: "We will not be firing on Fort Sumter but on the dungeons of ignorance."[68]

Lake's states' rights and segregationist campaign advocated a massive resistance strategy that allowed virtually no change in the segregation forged early in the twentieth century. He labeled the *Brown* decisions and Eisenhower's enforcement of desegregation in Little Rock, Arkansas, "tyranny." Lake's educational vision began with the certainty of black inferiority. The state must protect education "against the false assumption that because all children are equal participants in the love of God, they are also equal in the ability to learn." He added, "The Negro people of North Carolina do not need any agency of the Federal Government or any agency of that vicious New York organization, called the NAACP, in order to obtain for themselves and their children opportunity commensurate with their ability." Leaving no possibility of integration, however gradual or limited, Lake insisted on state inculcation of racial identity and separateness in black and white children. "The State of North Carolina must conserve and develop that spirit of neighborliness and friendship between these two great races by conserving them as separate, identifiable racial groups . . . . We must recognize and teach the children of North Carolina, white and Negro, the value of pride in racial heritage and the distinction between race pride and race hatred, the distinction between separateness and discrimination." The intrusive nature of his proposal apparently never dawned on him or his supporters, including Helms. Southern segregation had always relied on big government at the state and local level.[69]

Duplicating his dual role in the 1950 race for the Senate between Willis Smith and Frank Porter Graham, Helms served as a key Lake adviser and a reporter covering the election. He strongly supported the

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Struggle for Freedom (1980; paperback ed., New York, 1981), 49–60; Helms, "There Is Another Way," *Tarheel Banker*, 34 (September 1955), 24, and "Let's Face the Issue," *ibid.* (October 1955), 28.

[68] Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 103–7 (quotations on 103); Paul Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics: Myths and Realities* (Chapel Hill, 1990), 27–29.

[69] Lake to Helms, January 19, 1959, and attached speech "Conservation and Development" (quotations), January 19, 1959, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1959, JHC.

die-hard segregationist positions of Lake. Lake solicited Helms's "suggestions or criticisms" regarding his political speeches. He also consulted Helms on raising campaign funds. "I am satisfied," Lake explained, "that we can win if we can raise the necessary money." Helms suggested a state legislator, who might be "a contact man in Florida for some funds."[70]

Helms's coverage of the election on WRAL-TV was criticized as pro-Lake. Lake's finishing second behind Sanford in the May Democratic primary meant supporters hoped for a Willis Smith–like upset in a runoff. George Myrover of the Fayetteville *Observer* accused Helms of making "the first speech . . . for Dr. Lake" of the runoff election. Helms "really plugged for the professor, on television, while at the same time he slapped at newspapers which opposed Lake." The president of the Bankers Association fielded questions about whether the organization had endorsed Lake. WRAL-TV also received complaints. Helms answered his critics in the *Tarheel Banker*. "Maybe the television boys also have some advice about neutrality in gubernatorial elections. I'm here to tell you that neutrality *doesn't* pay." He explained that WRAL switched him from commenting to reporting at the last minute and claimed, "I tried to be objective." When it seemed evident that Lake would finish second, "the atmosphere developed into pure bedlam . . . . I shouted and I screamed, trying to tell the television audience what was going on."[71]

Lake lost the runoff to Sanford. But in the September and October 1960 issues of the *Tarheel Banker*, Helms remained hopeful for Republican victories. In September he wrote, "In a solidly Democratic state—which North Carolina unquestionably is—speculation about who will be the next governor never comes up after the Democratic primary. Yet, this year the question is a very real one among Democrats and Republicans alike." Usually the Democrat wins "by at least a two-to-one margin," but in 1960 neither party took this for granted. "A veteran newspaperman in Raleigh, incidentally a dyed-in-the-wool Democrat, already is forecasting that Nixon will carry this State. Further, he says, Nominee Sanford is in trouble . . . ."[72]

[70] Lake to Helms, January 19, 1959, and attached speech "Conservation and Development," January 19, 1959, Lake to Helms, June 8, 1959, Lake to W. H. Reedy, June 8, 1959, and Helms to Lake, June 9, 1959, *ibid.* It was Lake's proposal for private schools as an alternative to compliance with the Supreme Court desegregation orders that "There Is Another Way" praised.

[71] George Myrover, "A Little of This—A Little of That," Fayetteville *Observer*, May 30, 1960; Helms, "This Business of Being Neutral Is Dynamite," *Tarheel Banker*, 39 (July 1960), 29.

[72] Helms, "Will Terry Sanford Win?" *Tarheel Banker*, 39 (September 1960), 34. For Helms's optimism regarding Republican chances in North Carolina, see also Helms to James Powell, September 8, 1960, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1960, JHC.

Darkly apprehensive of the liberalism he perceived in the national parties, Helms protested the lack of "choice of philosophies and principles." The only differences between the Republicans and Democrats were "semantical." "It is obvious that the political animal in America is convinced that the something-for-nothing approach is the only way to win an election," he mused. Helms had anticipated that the nation would realize "that free enterprise is mankind's best hope for survival, not to mention progress. But as to our two political parties, the I-Can-Do-Anything-Better-Than-You-Can attitude prevails in the area of government paternalism. The sky is the limit for promising our people more comforts, more solutions to their problems, and less personal responsibility." Any "unenlightened citizen" questioning the promises "is exposed as another reactionary who was born a generation too late." When Americans rejected conservative candidates, Helms's ideological faith and conflation of liberalism and communism led to apocalyptic conclusions. "America's peril lies within, not without," he avowed. "The real question before us is no longer whether we can bring liberty to the rest of the world, but whether we can regain it for ourselves. . . . Perhaps it is unpatriotic to say so, but we rather imagine the principal beneficiaries of this legacy—the fellows in the Kremlin—must be in a state of restrained jubilation."[73]

In the next issue of the *Tarheel Banker*, Helms clarified whom he believed to be the most dangerous candidate, despite his insistence on the parties' ideological convergence. Anxiety over John Kennedy's Catholic faith was merely a distraction. Voters should "wonder about Senator Kennedy's relationship with Walter Reuther," Helms protested, "the Americans for Democratic Action, and others whose philosophies bear only a faint resemblance to the fundamentals of America. It would be helpful to have forthright and unequivocal statements from Senator Kennedy regarding these people and their possible influence with John Kennedy as President of the United States."[74]

Not only did Sanford win the governor's office in 1960, but his endorsement also helped Kennedy, not Nixon, win North Carolina's electoral votes. While governor, Sanford sent his children to one of the few integrated schools in the state, symbolically endorsing the integrationist goals of civil rights protesters. But Kennedy and Sanford won the state by fewer votes than Democrats typically had. Republicans and conservative Democrats noticed.[75]

[73] Helms, "What November Will Decide," *Tarheel Banker*, 39 (September 1960), 34.
[74] Helms, "The Religion Issue," *ibid.*, 39 (October 1960), 30.
[75] Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 103–7; Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics*, 27–29.

Helms's election-eve commentaries were his last at the *Tarheel Banker*. In the fall of 1960, Helms joined Capitol Broadcasting as vice president of programming and news. Abandoning his lonely Sunday afternoon time slot, Helms editorialized five days a week during the evening news, reaching not only the Raleigh-Durham area but also most of eastern North Carolina. His commentaries, called *Viewpoints*, were repeated the following day on WRAL-TV, broadcast on numerous radio stations, and reprinted as newspaper columns. Stella Barbee was among those who congratulated him: "I have been delighted to see you moving up in the world of Television and Radio. This country needs to hear more of *your* views." Helms left the Bankers Association, a position of "absolute security," reluctantly. Television seemed uncertain in the fifties. It was less than a decade old, while the *Tarheel Banker* had been around since the 1920s.[76]

Two factors overcame his worries about leaving—money and his desire to promote conservatism. Fletcher made the position irresistible with "a stock consideration" and a salary guaranteed in a "long-term" contract. This more lucrative offer freed Helms to follow his heart's desire, promoting conservatism. "My duties primarily will be to establish policy, political and otherwise, for the television and radio stations. . . . [T]he compelling factor in my decision was the opportunity to provide 'another' voice for this area. At present, our people are being brainwashed by a press monopoly which constantly slants down the left-wing line." He held high expectations for his ability to offset the *News and Observer*. "I *hope* it will be rewarding to the extent that the people will know that freedom and socialism are two entirely different things. At the moment, so many of our people are wedded to the idea that no progress is possible without government." Other factors only confirmed his urge to join WRAL-TV. Helms's successes during the three-year interval since Fletcher's initial offer encouraged his move. He won two city council elections and gained over a year's experience as a TV editorialist. The station was a proven success by 1960. Moreover, Helms knew that A. J. Fletcher shared the urge to boost conservatism. The criticism over Helms's coverage of the Lake campaign had not shaken Fletcher's desire to recruit him. Fletcher was "an open and avowed conservative" whom Helms described as a "sort of second father to me."[77]

[76] Stella Barbee to Helms, September 21, 1960 (first quotation), Helms to Hanes McFadden, August 30, 1960, Helms to G. Russell Clark, September 5, 1960, Helms to Hilliard Wolfe, September 13, 1960, and Helms to Dr. Preston Scott, September 19, 1960 (second quotation), Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1960, JHC.

[77] Stella Barbee to Helms, September 21, 1960, Helms to Hanes McFadden, August 30, 1960

Helms's pious incitement in support of conservatism was a new mix of race-baiting and McCarthyism. Fletcher sought this for his station. Above all, Helms wanted conservative dominance in the South and a national conservative party. These goals, Helms understood, required flexibility in defending the South's peculiar racial arrangements and maybe even some changes. But any national conservative party would also need racial conservatives—I. Beverly Lake's supporters—to win elections.

Helms shared the worldview of LeBaron and Lake. His commiseration with LeBaron revealed how deep his racial anxieties ran. Helms admitted, "We are losing the so-called racial fight, and it is not defeatism to recognize the situation. We will continue to lose it because forced integration and socialism feed on one another." For Helms, the existence of public schools posed a threat to freedom, at least after the *Brown* desegregation decisions. "There are some who would pretend that public schools are not socialistic, but their argument is trapped before it is started." The urgent question is "whether public schools are a form of socialism which we desire and can live with." Recent events suggested to Helms the answer was no. "The educators who cry there is 'no other way' are destroying the very goal toward which they say they are striving. Sending masses of children to government-controlled school buildings is one thing; educating children is another."[78]

Helms's public commentaries were rarely so strident as to declare public schools socialism. He was, nonetheless, as adamantly southern as Lake or LeBaron and just as racist. His desire for realignment and conservative dominance led him to a different strategy, which reconfigured southern racial rhetoric. Helms's speculation over whom conservative North Carolinians should back for governor in 1964 revealed his strategizing. The candidate should not be "burdened with the 'race issue' thing, as was Beverly Lake last year," Helms reasoned in 1961. "Beverly lost a lot of conservative support because they thought he was too strong on the race thing."[79] Lake's campaign insisted on preserving

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(first and second quotations), Helms to G. Russell Clark, September 5, 1960 (third and fourth quotations), Helms to Hilliard Wolfe, September 13, 1960, and Helms to Dr. Preston Scott, September 19, 1960 (fifth and sixth quotations), *ibid*. The stock consideration was apparently an option to buy stock in Capitol Broadcasting. In August 1960 before his new relationship with Capitol Broadcasting was made public, he wrote Alvin Wingfield to request other arrangements for a loan Helms had guaranteed for Wingfield. Helms explained he was making a change, "which will necessitate my borrowing a fairly substantial amount of money for investment purposes." Helms to Wingfield, August 10, 1960, *ibid*.

[78] Helms to Earle LeBaron, December 23, 1958, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1958, JHC.

[79] Helms to Ben Sumner, October 16, 1961, Spindale Mills file, WRAL-TV, 1961–1968, JHC.

the racial views and race relations forged early in the twentieth century. LeBaron's undisguised racist fears were even further out of bounds.

Helms's pious incitement amplified some aspects of southern racial politics—allegations of communism, immorality, and criminality—and dropped or minimized others. He never fretted about racial purity or race-mixing on air—it smacked of Nazism—and he rarely sang the praises of the Confederacy. Sometimes he followed Lake in discussing threats to southern traditions and questioning black students' abilities. Typically he advocated a conservative view of freedom, decried federal involvement in desegregation, and deployed the cold war rhetoric of infiltration. Most of all, Helms insisted on conservatives' moral superiority. He also could be unexpectedly innovative. He even employed the antiracist liberal rhetoric in vogue nationally when he could bend it to assist conservatism. His WRAL-TV *Viewpoint* opposing the appointment of Robert Weaver as the first black to serve in a president's cabinet declared, "while a qualified Negro should not be rejected because of his race, neither should an unqualified Negro be accepted because of his race." Helms accused Weaver of communist-front associations and avowed that his efforts at integration in New York led to failure. Helms did not, however, directly raise the specter of race-mixing.[80]

Helms's defense of segregation relied on such indirect attacks. Instead of worries over race-mixing, he assailed low standards in public schools and praised private academies. A decade after his first run for governor, Lake, now a state supreme court justice, delivered a commencement address at an all-white private academy. Helms's *Viewpoint* praised Lake not for his past insistence on segregation but for his warnings that an "unwarranted abuse of federal power will destroy public education absolutely." Private schools offered an alternative that provided a "truly quality education . . . free from the strife and turmoil elsewhere."[81] Helms's worry over lost support included Chamber of Commerce leaders troubled about investors' reaction to massive resistance, but it probably also involved potential donors from outside the South. Conservatives uncomfortable with explicit racism would find Helms's language acceptable regardless of their region. Many viewers, he knew, equated low standards and strife not with limited spending on public schools and racism but with desegregation and race-mixing. Helms's emphasis on quality spoke to their concerns too.

Helms also allowed for limited racial change, which he hoped local

[80] Jesse Helms, *Viewpoint* #60, WRAL-TV, February 15, 1961.
[81] Jesse Helms, *Viewpoint* #2350, WRAL-TV, June 3, 1970.

white elites could control. At WRAL-TV, he supported a privately controlled affirmative action program and advocated other businesses do the same. He boasted that the station's best film editor was black. Again pious incitement allowed him to co-opt an apparently liberal idea for conservative advantage. When Governor Terry Sanford criticized employment discrimination and the liberal newspapers supported him, Helms touted WRAL's "pretty fair record insofar as job opportunities for Negroes are concerned." Then he emphasized the hypocrisy in liberal support for African American employment. "But while the politicians and editors are complaining about the clutter around everybody else's doorsteps, their own front porches are a mess." Sanford had changed neither the state's employment practices nor those of his private law offices, and the state's liberal newspapers still had all-white professional staffs. They counseled, Helms's *Viewpoint* insisted, "Do not as I do, but as I say do."[82]

Helms delighted in chastising such liberal lapses, while tapping into racial anxiety in eastern North Carolina to make the case for conservatism. A little bit of workplace integration furthered this goal and made resistance to more ambitious integration efforts viable. Helms routinely rejected calls for affirmative action required by the government as unwarranted force.[83] If forming national conservative alliances meant shifts in racial rhetoric and acceptance of some change, it at least allowed a ditch-to-ditch fight rooted in limited government ideology. Helms not only wanted southern conservatives to join the Republican Party but also wished for the most conservative party possible. His desire for a probusiness, antitax party that would enforce traditional religious values was just as strong as his urge to protect racial hierarchy. He wanted a party so conservative that it could make criticism of the private sector unacceptable, command obedience to authority, and undermine spending on the public sector. Voters needed to fear their government to make this party viable.

Helms wanted his WRAL commentaries to lead viewers to question government. His task required drama. He accused WNCT general manager Campbell of shirking his "responsibility" when he canceled LeBaron's *History behind the News* to avoid racial controversy. Helms wrote, "You are avoiding controversy, to be sure, but does a powerful medium like a television station—or a newspaper—really serve the people by avoiding controversy? If I were a station manager, I would

[82] Jesse Helms, *Viewpoint* #539, WRAL-TV, February 5, 1963 (quotations); Helms to A. T. Spaulding, August 23, 1965, Chronological Letter File, WRAL-TV, 1965, JHC.

[83] Jesse Helms, *Viewpoint* #1079, WRAL-TV, April 13, 1965; Jesse Helms, *Viewpoint* #2538, WRAL-TV, March 10, 1971.

try to view my outlet as an educational medium—and education to me is a matter of stimulation of thinking. Thinking people learn; unthinking people do not—they just roll with the tide."[84] The pious incitement incident confirmed Helms's suspicion that controversy generated attention for the speaker and his ideas. Helms's idea of educating the public differed from liberal journalists, admirers of the welfare state, and the governance of the Democrats. He intended not only to convince viewers that conservatives represented them but also to stoke his audience's doubts about liberal activist government and its supporters in the media into a white-hot flame.

As the sixties unfolded, Helms's despair and euphoria fed on each other. Minority and student protesters; riots; Supreme Court rulings on school-led prayer, "smut," and busing; liberal impotence in the Vietnam War; rising taxes; and the growing welfare state supplied drama. His WRAL commentaries interpreted it all for North Carolina's voters. The developments that caused him the most anxiety gave him the most hope for a conservative future. Helms became convinced that the eventful decade would drive voters into conservatives' arms.

Today's conservative Republican Party is the institution Jesse Helms envisioned in the fifties and sixties and then helped create. By the 1970s Helms exploited pious incitement on a national stage. His 1972 winning U.S. Senate campaign took advantage of the antibusing mood and implied that his moderate opponent, Congressman Nick Galifianakis, held views on the Vietnam War, welfare, and integration similar to Democratic presidential nominee George S. McGovern. Once in office, Helms counted federal inaction a victory, earning him the nickname Senator No. During his five Senate terms, conservative strength grew steadily with the issues, language, and techniques Helms pioneered. He financed the spread of pious incitement through his North Carolina Congressional Club, funneling money to other conservatives who adopted a similar style. The most important recipient of his largesse was Ronald Reagan. White southerners became the most reliable conservative voters, switching their allegiance to the GOP. As conservatives expanded their power, Helms's pious incitement became a national strategy. White racial fears and moral outrage have been central to Republican strategy since the nation's shift to a conservative consensus.

[84] Helms to A. Hartwell Campbell, January 19, 1959, Personal file, North Carolina Bankers Association, 1959, JHC.