

Sen. Jesse Helms was unquestioned racist

By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Jesse Helms, an unrepentant racist, died on July 4. When most racists die, public discussions generally center on other aspects of their life and their racial views are thrown in as an afterthought.

In the case of Helms, the former North Carolina senator, he was such a virulent racist that his unrelenting attacks on civil rights could not go unnoticed.

Writing in the *Charlotte Observer*, columnist Jack Betts observed, "He used the language of the Jim Crow era to fight for a culture that kept public schools segregated, public accommodations White and that regarded any government attempt to wipe out discrimination as un-American."

He referred to UNC — the University of North Carolina — as the University of Negroes and Communists.

Helms incorrectly claimed Dr. Martin Luther King was influenced by the Communist Party and credited that for everything King did, from leading protests to opposing the war in Vietnam. Prior to entering the Senate, Helms, then a television commentator, said, "Dr. (Martin Luther) King's outfit ... is heavily laden at the top with leaders of proven records of communism, socialism and sex perversion, as well as other curious behavior."

He dismissed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as "the single most dangerous piece of legis-

lation ever introduced in the Congress."

Passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were certainly dangerous to the political careers of White Southern Democrats who rose to power and seniority on the backs of disenfranchised Black voters. They ascended to power by blocking African-American access to the polls and fighting for what Jesse Helms lovingly called "the Southern way of life." Translation: White supremacy.

Helms sought to frame his opposition to civil rights in another context.

"I felt that the citizens of my community, my state and my region of the country were being battered by this new form of bigotry. I simply could not stay silent in the face of this assault — and I didn't."

Senator No, as he was called for his obstructionist tactics, got it backward. It was African-Americans who were battered, pulverized by violence, retaliation, bogus literacy tests, poll taxes and racists such as Helms.

When Helms retired from the Senate, *Washington Post* columnist David S. Broder called him, "The last prominent unabashed White racist politician in the country."

Helms' record reflected just that.



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He blocked the nomination of federal judges with whom he disagreed, held up funds to the United Nations as chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, conducted a 16-day filibuster against establishing the Martin Luther King federal holiday, opposed the 1964 Civil Rights Act, voted against the Voting Rights Act of 1965, railed against AIDS as a gay disease (he later softened his view on AIDS) and in 1990 boycotted Nelson Mandela's address to a joint session of Congress.

Even other Southern segregationists moderated their views over time. South Carolina's Strom Thurmond, for example, admitted that his past positions on race had been wrong and became the first Southern Congressman to add an African-American to his staff. After his famous "Stand in the Schoolhouse Door" at the University of Alabama, Gov. George C. Wallace asked Black voters for forgiveness and made a direct appeal to Black voters.

Over the years, Helms moved in the opposite direction.

In 1966, he mailed 125,000 fliers to heavily Black districts in North Carolina saying African-Americans would be imprisoned if they voted. When challenged by former Charlotte Mayor Harvey Gantt in 1990, the

incumbent unveiled an overtly racist television ad. It showed the hand of a White man balling up a rejection letter as the announcer intoned, "You needed that job. And you were the best qualified. But they had to give it to a minority."

Helms won the election.

As a native Southerner, I often think about how far the South would have advanced if it weren't for the likes of Jesse Helms.

I think about all the talented people that migrated North in search of employment or a better education.

I think about some brave Whites who stood up for fairness in my native Tuscaloosa, Ala., only to be socially ostracized or threatened with death.

If Jesse Helms had his way, Blacks would still ride in the back of the bus, we would be barred from the polls and we wouldn't be able to live anywhere we could afford.

Seeing Barack Obama march through the South, including North Carolina, during the primaries reminded me that an openly racist Jesse Helms probably could not get elected in North Carolina today. And it is only fitting that Jesse Helms died knowing that a Black man has a credible chance of becoming the next U.S. president. That's in spite of Helms, not because of him.

George E. Curry, former editor-in-chief of *Emerge* magazine and the *NNPA News Service*, is a keynote speaker, moderator, and media coach.

Has my beloved Detroit finally hit rock bottom?

By Harry C. Alford
Special to Sentinel-Voice

I love Detroit. Living in Detroit in the 1970's was indeed fascinating. The history and vibrant people were challenged with a growing drug problem that catapulted crime beyond belief. Everyone had at least one good friend or relative who was shot, robbed, brutally raped, etc. It was like the wild, wild west.

However, there was great entertainment and socializing. Night clubs like the High Chaparral, Kenny's, Burning Spear, Lafayette Orleans, Ten Gents and My Fair Lady created many nice memories. The beautiful women were abundant. I didn't date every beautiful woman in Detroit but it's not because I didn't try.

Yes, but that all came to an end when I met my Kay. The spell was cast and I was hers forever. Eighteen months later, business led us away from Detroit. We still have that love for the city and have been quite disappointed over the last 25 years. This Chocolate City has economically spiraled into one big free fall.

When Blacks took over politically and

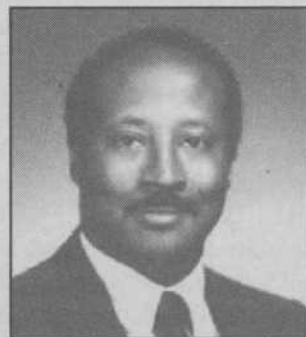
Whites immediately left the city's core, a significant change in the structure took place.

Mayor Coleman Young managed to change the City Council format. The whole city became one big district with no particular neighborhood having an elected official accountable.

For example, Indianapolis, a city of similar size, has distinct council districts, by the dozens, and is ruled by an elected official. Thus, every citizen has juice downtown. Potholes, bad cops, trash, stop signs, etc. are dealt with as problems arise.

Detroit, however, has only nine city council members and they are all at large — virtually appointed by the Mayor. There is no neighborhood representation. This worked well under a good dictator like Mayor Young. Under the subsequent mayors Archer and Kilpatrick it became a nightmare in a third world kind of way.

Detroit is still a one industry-town. It re-



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lies on the auto industry like Pittsburgh used to rely on the steel industry.

Unlike Pittsburgh, which decided to end its dependence on steel and develop another sector like the healthcare industry, Detroit is still "stuck on stupid" expecting the auto industry to come back when it is never going to come back like it once was.

Mayor Dennis Archer started this with his grand schemes of gambling casinos, football and baseball stadiums ("waterfalls"). All this did was skyrocket the city's debt load. What is even worse is that very few of the jobs related to this building went to Detroit residents. Very few of the contracting associated with it went to Detroit Black-owned firms.

All of that rebuilding and a city of 83 percent Black residents couldn't employ more than 20 percent on the workforce and single digit numbers on the business contracting. It was voluntary colonialism.

All the city residents are left with is a debt in the billions while all the money generated from the construction and development went outside of town benefiting those who couldn't care less about Detroit. Archer left and the poor people of Detroit were holding the "bag" full of debt. Moody's credit rating of Detroit has fallen from Ba1 to Baa3. This is dangerous.

The city struggles to pay its bills, which amount to billions. Over 800 teachers have been laid off with the Detroit Public School District being plagued with corruption and incompetence. Thousands of city worker jobs have been eliminated. There is no more 24-hour bus service. Funding of the arts, zoos,

fire fighters and EMTs have been greatly reduced to the point that they cannot fully function.

Retirees are becoming dubious if they will even have any retirement pay waiting for them. The sub-prime mortgage crisis hit Detroit in a massive fashion. Thirty percent of school funding comes from property taxes and that is shrinking quickly with the epidemic of foreclosures throughout the city.

Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick is totally ill equipped, morally or intellectually, to handle this enormous challenge. While Rome burned the incompetent Emperor Nero played his violin.

As Detroit goes into the abyss, Mayor Kilpatrick decided to physically play his Chief of Staff, Christine Beatty. They both denied under oath their sexual affair all while they memorialized it through phone text messaging. They are both indicted while five of the nine city council members are under some type of investigation.

One city council member, Monica Conyers, has had her phone wiretapped by the FBI for at least six months. This means that her husband, the Honorable John Conyers, Dean of the Congressional Black Caucus and Chair of the House of Representatives Judiciary Committee, is on the "wire." Mayor Kilpatrick's mother, the Honorable Carolyn Kilpatrick, is the current Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus and this is starting to rub off on her also.

Detroit has been mired in a crisis for more than a generation now. Maybe it can't get worse. Will the new leaders step forward quickly?

Harry Alford is the co-founder, President/CEO of the National Black Chamber of Commerce, Inc.

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count on the delivery of goods and services by a Black president who presence and message does not privilege his own community.

What concerns me is that we are involved in a great celebration without checking the guidepost that determine whether or not there will be sufficient returns to our community from a Black president in the White House. The irony is that

Obama is likely to win, we will have to accept him, but under circumstances where he is essentially a White candidate, so we should "bottom line" our public policy requirements now as every other community is doing.

Dr. Ron Walters is the Distinguished Leadership Scholar, Director of the African American Leadership Center and Professor of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland College Park.