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Typhoid Mary and Suck-Egg Mule:
The Strange Relationship of Jesse Helms and the News Media

In 1997 the Washington office of Jesse Helms, a five-term United States Senator from North Carolina, included several walls decorated with about fifty framed clippings of news articles and political cartoons. All the news clippings and political cartoons pertained to Helms, who retired from the United States Senate in 2002 at the age of seventy-nine. Some of the clippings, such as a news story about Helms' 1962 adoption of a nine-year-old orphan boy with cerebral palsy, appeared flattering. Most of the clippings, such as a political cartoon depicting Helms as the "Prince of Darkness,"¹ appeared less than flattering. On one wall hung nearly two dozen political cartoons drawn over a twenty-year period by the Raleigh (N.C.) *News & Observer's* political cartoonist Dwane Powell.² The political cartoons encircled a news clipping from the *Dunn Daily Record*, a small-town daily newspaper in North Carolina. In what appeared to be a thirty-inch bold headline for a front-page, above-the-fold story, the *Dunn Daily Record* screamed: "The Truth at Last!...Senator Helms Won, News Media Lost!" The date on the news clipping—November 7, 1984—came one day after Helms defeated the Democratic Governor James B. Hunt in an epic battle with 51.7 percent of the vote to earn a third-term as a Senator from a state that then historically produced more Senators in the mold of Sam Ervin, a moderate Democrat who oversaw the hearings on the Watergate investigation, than in the mold of Helms,

¹ Helms was first called the "Prince of Darkness" in 1984 by Charles Manatt, the former chairman of the Democratic National Committee.

² When Helms retired in 2001, the Raleigh *News & Observer* published a short memoir by Dwane Powell about Powell's relationship with Helms. In the article, Powell, who continues to be a political cartoonist at the *News & Observer*, indicated the number of times the Helms staff called his office to request original drawings of certain political cartoons Helms found amusing. Powell said neither Helms nor his staff ever complained or reacted angrily about the depictions of Helms, which nearly always had a negative slant.

a conservative Republican who former Kansas Senator Bob Dole, a Republican, nicknamed “the Rambo of the Geritol generation.”³

Though a plethora of literature exists about the transformations of presidential campaigns over the course of the twentieth century, less attention has been devoted to examining the transformation of congressional elections as these elections have become more expensive, more negative, more timely, and more national. This Helms-Hunt contest, which “will long be a case history for students of American politics,”⁴ serves as a watershed moment in congressional political history. Characterized as the “Great 1984 Train Wreck,” “the meanest campaign in history,”⁵ “rancid,”⁶ and, most popularly, bitter, the Helms-Hunt election became the costliest Congressional election in history up to 1984. Together, Helms and Hunt spent nearly \$26 million. Individually, Helms spent \$16.5 million (about \$27.9 million in 2000 dollars) compared to Hunt’s \$9.5 million (about \$16.5 million in 2000 dollars). The spending level of the campaign equaled the level of spending of “major fast-food, soft-drink and beer advertisers” in North Carolina.⁷ This price tag, though it since has been surpassed as the most expensive Congressional election, still makes the Helms-Hunt contest one of the five costliest Congressional elections. The two primary reasons for the expensive election also serve as a precedent for how modern Congressional elections, particularly high-profile elections, are conducted; these two reasons include the heavy inclusion of technology, specifically the heavy saturation of television advertising, and the length of the campaigning, which now oftentimes spans over a year.

Launching his campaign for the 1984 Senatorial seat on April 1, 1983, eighteen months before Election Day, Helms had already raised an unprecedented \$4.4 million through his

³ Bill Kruger, “Jesse Helms: The early years,” *The News & Observer*, August 23, 2001.

⁴ Vermont Royster, “Thinking things over: The Hunting of Helms,” *The Wall Street Journal*, February 21, 1985.

⁵ Bill Peterson quoted in David Broder, “Jesse Helms: White Racist,” *The Washington Post*, August 29, 2001.

⁶ “Punch-drunk politics,” *The Economist*, September 29, 1984.

⁷ David Sawyer, “TV Political Ads,” *The News & Record*, October 21, 1984.

Congressional Club, then the second largest political action committee in the nation.⁸ About why the campaign had been the longest and costliest in U.S. history, Helms explained:

I think you have to admit that for twelve years, I have been portrayed to the public by the newspapers as being four-feet-six inches tall, cross-eyed, with horns and fangs, a hand grenade in one hand and a saber in the other. Meanwhile, the governor [Hunt] has been portrayed as progressive and nice and all that. How do you counteract those two things? The only way you can do it that I see is to raise the money.⁹

According to Helms, thus, *Dunn Daily Record's* headline, “The Truth at Last!...Senator Helms Won, News Media Lost!”, serves as a telling illustration of Helms’ rise to the United States Senate and his rise as a national leader, perhaps becoming the most powerful senator in United States history to never sponsor or co-sponsor any significant bill that became legislation. Of Helms, the conservative *Weekly Standard* wrote: “No conservative, save Reagan, comes close to matching Helms’ influence on American politics and policy....”¹⁰ As the *Dunn Daily Record* headline suggests, the 1984 campaign was more than an election between Helms and Hunt; the election, in Helms’ and others’ eyes, was a contest between Helms and the news media. According to Helms, he served as a U.S. Senator for thirty years in spite of the news media. In reality, however, Helms won five-terms as a Senator because of the news media. This research study examines how Helms won elections because of the news media through an analysis of the groundbreaking 1984 Helms and Hunt Senatorial election. To explore this strange relationship between Helms, which the influential Raleigh (N.C.) *News & Observer* tabbed as a “Typhoid Mary”, and the news media, which Helms dubbed a “suck-egg mule” (a.k.a. annoying), this research paper presents a historical composite of Helms and the news media, weighs the influence of the news media on Helms’ campaigning style and success during the 1984

⁸ William Schmidt, “Governor Hunt of North Carolina to Seek Helms’ Senate Seat,” *The New York Times*, February 5, 1984.

⁹ Quoted in “And for the Senate...” *The News & Record*, November 4, 1984.

¹⁰ Quoted in Ronnie W. Faulkner, *Jesse Helms and the Legacy of Nathaniel Macon*. (Wingate, NC: The Jesse Helms Center, 1998).

Senatorial election, and concludes with a brief media content analysis of the 1984 Helms-Hunt contest, which led North Carolina to earn the infamous distinction as the “Freddy Krueger of American politics”.

Jesse Helms has been the most colorful and perhaps most polarizing figure in the modern history of North Carolina politics as well as one of the most publicized politicians in the history of the United States. When Helms announced his retirement from the U.S. Senate in August of 2001, political columnists, editorialists and historians across the nation referred to Helms as the “devil,”¹¹ “an anachronism,”¹² “the last unreconstructed southern conservative,”¹³ an “embarrassment and disappointment,”¹⁴ “a vitriolic agent of ill will,”¹⁵ “a foolish consistency,”¹⁶ “a mean, mean man,”¹⁷ “politically incorrect and incorrect politically,”¹⁸ “a bug-eyed troglodyte,”¹⁹ and the “last unabashed white racist politician in the country.”²⁰ In the early 1980s after Helms attempted to filibuster legislation to create the Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday, after he failed to support the extension of the Civil Rights Act, and after he angered Democrats and Republicans, including President Ronald Reagan, by filibustering legislation to raise the federal gasoline tax, Helms became the target of the media outlets for attempting to return the United States back “a century”. It was then that the *News & Observer*, in an editorial, referred to Helms as the “political version of a Typhoid Mary” who needed to be isolated because his views were poisonous to U.S. society.

¹¹ Quoted in Furguson, p. 167.

¹² Robert Kuttner quoted on *Newshour*, PBS Television, August 21, 2001.

¹³ Earl Black quoted on *Newshour*, PBS Television, August 21, 2001.

¹⁴ Dennis Rogers, “Behind Jesse’s Bluster,” *The News & Observer*, August 25, 2001.

¹⁵ Barry Saunders, “Jesse, the agent of ill will,” *The News & Observer*, August 24, 2001.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Howard Troxler, “Jesse Helms’ legacy is today’s politicking,” *The St. Petersburg Times*, August 23, 2001.

²⁰ David Broder, “Jesse Helms: White Racist,” *The Washington Post*, August 29, 2001.

Helms, for example, often called the University of North Carolina, the first public university in the U.S., the University of Negroes and Communists. In 1994, Helms said AIDS was the result of “deliberate, disgusting, revolting conduct” spread by “people who deliberately engage in unnatural acts.”²¹ Helms opposed the Clinton Administration’s appointment of Roberta Achtenberg to a sub-cabinet position because she was a “damned lesbian.”²² In 1993, Helms whistled “Dixie” as he shared an elevator ride with Carol Moseley-Braun, the first black female to be elected to the U.S. Senate; he later boasted he would continue to whistle “Dixie” to her until she broke down and cried.²³ In 1995, Helms appeared on CNN’s “Larry King Live” television show in which a caller praised Helms for “everything you have done to help keep down the niggers”; to the caller, Helms replied: “Well, thank you.”²⁴ In 1999, ten female members of the House of Representatives interrupted a Senate Foreign Relations Committee chaired by Helms to demand support for a United Nations treaty to end gender discrimination; Helms told the women “to act like ladies” before he had the Capitol Police remove them from the chambers.²⁵ He referred to all black people as “Fred”²⁶ and developing countries as “foreign rat holes.”²⁷ He once said “a lot of human beings have been born bums,” and “crime rates and irresponsibility among Negroes are facts of life which must be faced.”²⁸

But Helms also became a “conservative icon”²⁹ and a political legacy. He is often credited for single-handedly resurrecting the political career of Ronald Reagan after Helms led

²¹ Quoted in Dennis Rogers, “Behind Jesse’s Bluster,” *The News & Observer*, August 25, 2001.

²² *Newshour*, PBS Television, August 21, 2001.

²³ Eric Bates, “What you need to know about Jesse Helms,” *Mother Jones*, May/June 1995.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ William Snider, *Helms & Hunt: The North Carolina Senate Race, 1984* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985); Ernest Furgurson, *Hard Right: The Rise of Jesse Helms* (New York: Norton, 1986).

²⁷ Bates.

²⁸ Grace Nordhoff, “A lot of Human Begins Have Been Born Bums”: *Twenty Years of the Words of Senator No.* (Durham: Carolina Independent Publishing, 1984.)

²⁹ Furgurson, p. 5.

the Republicans of North Carolina to overwhelmingly favor Reagan in the 1976 North Carolina primary. Republican strategists Robert Novak and Rowland Evans wrote near the end of Reagan's presidency: "Without his North Carolina victory, Ronald Reagan at sixty-five would surely have drifted into political oblivion."³⁰ The *Almanac of American Politics* concluded about Reagan's eventual success: "What would history have been without North Carolina?"³¹ But how did Helms receive such accolades for a state in which registered Democrats outnumbered Republicans three to one when Helms began his electoral career in 1972? And, how did Helms overcome his most promising challenger, Democratic Governor James B. Hunt, in 1984?

In seeking his third-term for the Senate, Helms faced Jim Hunt, the first governor in the history of North Carolina to be elected to serve back-to-back terms in office.³² In 1980, Hunt won his re-election bid with sixty-five percent of the popular vote—the greatest margin of victory in the history of North Carolina gubernatorial elections. Hunt had been mentioned as a possible presidential contender in 1984 because of his popularity as a moderate southern Democrat. The Democratic Party, however, focused its efforts on regaining control of Congress and elicited Hunt to oust Helms.³³ When it became clear in October of 1983 that Hunt and Helms would be facing each other in the 1984 general election, Richard Whitle of the *Washington Post* proclaimed: "Barring an act of God, Jesse Helms can't win."³⁴ Gary Pearce, Hunt's press secretary, also said: "If we don't win, it'll be because we're stupid."³⁵ Though Helms was the

³⁰ Quoted in Ronnie W. Faulkner, *Jessie Helms and the Legacy of Nathaniel Macon*. (Wingate, NC: The Jesse Helms Center, 1998), p. 36.

³¹ Quoted in *Ibid*, p. 37.

³² Hunt was elected governor again in 1992 and re-elected in 1996. Attempts have been made by some democrats to draw Hunt into the 2004 gubernatorial election; Hunt, however, has said he has no intention to run because the current governor, Mike Easley, is a democrat and has announced his intention to seek re-election.

³³ William Schmidt, "Governor Hunt of North Carolina to Seek Helms' Senate Seat," *The New York Times*, February 5, 1984.

³⁴ Quoted in Paul Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics: Myths and Realities*. (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1990).

³⁵ Ferguson, p. 166.

incumbent and Congressional incumbents historically fair well in re-election campaigns, it was believed Hunt's popularity could overcome Helms' record as a twice-elected Senator.

Early polls by the major news media outlets in North Carolina attest to Hunt's popularity; these early polls had Hunt leading Helms by at least ten points and by as much as nineteen-points.³⁶ Reportedly, Helms was so determined he would lose the election, he flirted with the possibility of not seeking re-election. Only after his campaign staff told him that Hunt had two major weakness that could easily be exploited did Helms decide to go forward with the campaign. According to Helms' advisors, Hunt's two weaknesses were credibility and his link to liberals, such as Jesse Jackson, Walter Mondale, and Edward Kennedy. To exploit these two weaknesses, the Helms campaign employed a campaign strategy that serves as a "striking lesson on the power of technology in politics."³⁷

Hunt officially announced his candidacy for the U.S. Senate seat on February 4, 1984—nearly a year after Helms ran his first television commercial that focused on Hunt's record as governor—through a traditional press conference and political rally. A week before, Helms announced his intention to seek re-election with a twenty-eight minute taped political broadcast, which aired in eastern North Carolina.³⁸ The twenty-eight minute taped political broadcast symbolizes the primary strategy the Helms campaign employed to target Hunt. The strategy included waging a media blitz campaign through the saturation of television ads. Whereas Hunt stumped across the nation, delivering stump speech after stump speech, shaking hands with potential voters, holding regular press conferences, and relying on courthouse politicking and

³⁶ *The Charlotte Observer's* survey in April of 1983 found Hunt to be leading Helms by nineteen-points. But *The Charlotte Observer's* surveys at the time had often been considered unreliable because *The Charlotte Observer's* final survey of the presidential race in 1980 had Jimmy Carter defeating Ronald Reagan. Most of the other media outlets in North Carolina reported Hunt's lead to be between ten and fifteen points.

³⁷ Vertmon Royster, "Thinking things over: The Hunting of Helms," *The Wall Street Journal*, February 21, 1985.

³⁸ Quoted in William Schmidt, "Governor Hunt of North Carolina to Seek Helm's Senate Seat," *The New York Times*, February 4, 1984.

grassroots organization, Helms largely used direct-mail advertising and television to reach voters.

The direct-mail advertising allowed Helms to raise nearly two-thirds of his contributions from outside of the state of the North Carolina. Additionally, the Helms campaign claimed the majority of its funds came from contributions of \$25 or less. To solicit the contributions, the Helms campaign sent letters to members of religious groups, largely writing letters with a tone of desperation and emotion, nearly begging for support as many direct-mail political advertisements do today³⁹. “We are in the fight of our lives,” one of the direct-mail letters said. “My opponent has distorted my record and our cause. I fear a defeat will be the beginning of the decline of the conservative cause.”⁴⁰ The direct-mail fundraising was coordinated through the Congressional Club, which was then the second largest Political Action Committee in 1984. The letters, direct-mailing and Congressional Club gave Helms “the proprietorship of the most formidable fundraising and propaganda conglomerate ever assembled around an elected official.”⁴¹

The success of the Helms television advertising can be attributed to repetition and frequency. In the final five weeks alone, the Helms campaign spent nearly \$1.1 million on 5,259 television advertisements.⁴² During the same time period, Hunt spent about \$970,000 for 2,536 television ads.⁴³ Of a sample of all the thirty-second television advertisements that aired in the 1984 Helms-Hunt campaign, scholar Montague Kern found in *30-Second Politics* that Helms’ ads were more negative than those run by Hunt. Specifically, Kern found that for every 19.5 minutes of positive ads aired by the Helms campaign, there were 32.5 minutes of negative ads

³⁹ Though politicians today generally engage in direct-mailing tactics, this trend has its roots with Helms.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Snider, p. 129.

⁴¹ Furgurson, p. 194.

⁴² Jim Walser, “Helms, Hunt To Close Race With TV Ad Extravaganza,” *The Charlotte Observer*, November 2, 1984.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

aired. In comparison, Hunt aired 14.0 minutes worth of positive ads for every 16.6 minutes of negative ads.⁴⁴ They also had a soap opera-like quality with the same characters, same storyline, and same theme played over and over again. The two themes the Helms campaign focused on in the advertisements were Hunt's credibility and Hunt's link to liberals while reiterating Helms' link to President Ronald Reagan. To destroy Hunt's credibility, Helms got on the airwaves first and put Hunt on the defensive, where Hunt remained throughout the campaign.

Regarding Hunt's credibility, Helms specifically linked this to Hunt's flip-flopping of the issues. Before the Helms campaign even began running ads, Hunt had been partially perceived as a politician who made decisions according to political polls. His position over the death penalty, for example, appeared to have shifted. During his term as lieutenant governor between 1972 and 1976, Hunt spoke out against the death penalty. Throughout the 1980s, news media polls showed at least sixty percent of North Carolinians favored the death penalty. When Hunt was faced with allowing an execution to proceed or be halted during the final weeks of the campaign, Hunt chose to not interfere with the execution, which resulted in the first execution of a woman (Velma Barfield) in the U.S. since 1962. As he announced his intention not to grant clemency, he spoke in favor of the death penalty. In the closing two weeks of the campaign, the Helms campaign ran an ad indicating Hunt's flip-flop on the issue; Hunt's apparent position change also made front-page news in the major North Carolina media outlets. Questions raised by Helms and generated by Helms became the same leads and issues raised by the news media, such as a Greensboro *News & Record* headline: "Did Hunt let a woman die for his political goal?"⁴⁵ Other flip-flop issues that received heavy attention were Hunt's position on school prayer. A television ad created by the Helms campaign began with a news headline by the *Durham Herald-Sun* that

⁴⁴Montague Kern, *30-Second Politics: Political Advertising in the Eighties* (New York: Praeger, 1989), 64.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Snider, p. 201.

exposed Hunt's opposition to school prayer legislation. The ad then included a newsreel clip of Hunt's speaking and claiming: "I've been speaking out in favor of voluntary prayer in schools for years, years and years." The announcer ended the ad: "Something's wrong here. Where does Jim Hunt stand on school prayer?"⁴⁶

Hunt's credibility also became a persistent theme in other aspects of the campaign beyond television advertisements. In stump speeches and interviews in the closing weeks of the campaign, for example, Helms often stated:

When I came home and I heard the steady stream of distortions and falsehoods by the governor of North Carolina, I decided then what the number one issue is. The issue is credibility: Who will tell the truth?"

Helms also suggested Hunt begin operating a 1-800 telephone hotline so "voters can dial a free number and find out (Hunt's) falsehood of the day."⁴⁷ Helms' relentless attacks on Hunt's credibility was evident during the debates as well. For example, Helms said during a debate Hunt's mother had been afraid of windshield wipers, "you know, flip-flop. That's all he does on positions."⁴⁸ Helms also repeatedly characterized Hunt as the "windshield wiper candidate" during speeches and interviews. Joe Grimsley, Hunt's campaign manager, said of Helms strategy:

They (the Helms' campaign) had to destroy his popularity; they had to destroy him personally. It was an integrity attack not based on any issue. Its theme was 'Where do you stand, Jim' on issues on which we'd already taken a position, such as the Martin Luther King holiday. But it was not just one ad, it was that every ad had a negative sense and was repeated for months and months and months. It was a masterful job of eliminating the history of Jim Hunt.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Quoted in Larry Smith, p. 249.

⁴⁷ Quoted in "Helms wants social security guarantees," *The News & Record*, October 22, 1984.

⁴⁸ The transcripts of all the debates between Hunt and Helms were published in their entirety by the N&O the day after the debate.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Snider, p. 205.

The other theme of the advertisements was Hunt's link to liberals and Helms' link to Reagan. An example of this includes a ten-second Helms television advertisement that integrated Helms' link to Reagan and Hunt's link to liberals.⁵⁰ In the ad, Helms sat in front of a U.S. flag and stated: "I'm Jesse Helms and I want you to know where I stand. I support Ronald Reagan for President." As Helms began talking, a slot machine with the images of Walter Mondale, Gary Hart and Jesse Jackson appeared on the scene, followed by the ad's message: "Where do you stand, Jim?" Ads such as this deflected direct attacks on Helms because Ronald Reagan was at the center of the story's ads; at the same, the ads reinforced a negative image of liberalism in a state that strongly backed Reagan in the 1980 and 1984 presidential election, massing nearly 60 percent of the popular vote in both elections.

Helms' campaign fliers too linked Hunt to Mondale and other liberals, including Massachusetts Senator Edward Kennedy and the Reverend Jesse Jackson. For example, George Mordecai, a Democratic farmer who lived in Nicaragua for thirty years before returning to Raleigh in 1981, sent a letter via certified mail to Democrats along with a Helms' campaign flier entitled "Jim Hunt's Report Card." The campaign flier graded Hunt according to issues such as voluntary school prayer, federal funding of abortion, gay rights, and support for Mondale. Beside an image of Mondale, the flier stated: "(Jim Hunt) Supports liberal Walter Mondale for President and wrote the rules for helping Mondale to be nominated." The accompanying letter written by Mordecai, who supported Helms because of Helms' vocal opposition to Marxist movements in Latin America, claimed: "Jim Hunt is not just a Mondale liberal. He's a lame duck. If he happens to get elected, he will have no patronage power, and he will have obligated himself to the same liberal special interests that nominated Walter Mondale."⁵¹

⁵⁰ A link to Reagan was crucial for Helms in a state where Ronald Reagan collected 62 percent of the votes.

⁵¹ *The News & Observer*, "N.C. Native who left Nicaragua backs Helms," October 14, 1984.

In mid-1983 the Congressional Club also sent out a letter detailing what occurred at a party hosted by Pamela Harriman that raised half a million dollars for liberal candidates for office. According to the Congressional Club, the half-a-million dollars was raised to “defeat Senators like Helms and ultimately make Ted Kennedy majority leader of the Senate.”⁵² He further stated that the “Eastern Liberal establishment” backed Hunt. Additionally, the tag line on every Helms-sponsored ad was “Jim Hunt, a Mondale Liberal.” Helms also linked himself to Reagan and Hunt to Mondale during the four debates. For example, in the third debate in September of 1984, Helms used Hunt and Mondale in the same sentence forty-four times. In the fourth debate in October, Helms used his name and Reagan’s name in the same sentence twenty-five times.

In comparison to Helms’ advertisements, Hunt’s ads had no unifying theme. The vast majority of Hunt’s ads in the beginning of the campaign attempted to remind North Carolina of Hunt’s record as governor. But after running this initial spurt of ads, the Hunt campaign did not run an ad for more than two months. When the Hunt campaign did return to the airwaves in the fall of 1984, the ads had a more negative tone. The most notorious of the negative ads featured slaughtered bodies of dead children and women with background sounds of machine-guns. A photo of Jesse Helms then appeared to superimpose the image of four Latin American dictators. As the images flashed on the screen, the announcer stated: “Jesse Helms has his personal causes all over the world. But when you look at his record on social security, education, protecting our farmers...don’t you wish he spent a little time on another cause? It’s called North Carolina.”

Other ads claimed Helms made “enemies for North Carolina” because of his support for apartheid in South Africa and right-wing regimes in Argentina and Chile; another ad also linked Helms to the “murder” of civilians because Helms allegedly backed these right-wing regimes in

⁵² Furgurson, p. 179.

South America. In on television advertisement linking Helms to Robert D'Aubission, the voiceover stated: "Jesse Helms may be a crusader but that's not what our Senator should be crusading for." Hunt tried to link Helms to right-wing radicalism in his campaign stump speeches as well. For example, drawing from his campaign stump speech, Hunt spoke before the N.C. League of Municipalities in Winston-Salem on October 31, 1984 and stated: "North Carolina should not be known around the nation as the home of right-wing radicalism and extremism."⁵³ In response to such ads and speeches, Helms argued that Hunt had "reached a new low in political campaigning.

While repeating this rhetoric and running the negative ads, Hunt also ran a series of sixty-second ads that outlined his position on various issues collectively referred to as the Four Es, such as the economy, the environment, the elderly, and education. Under the slogan of "He Can Do More For North Carolina," Hunt focused his campaign on these Four Es in all aspects of the campaign. In contrast to Hunt who focused on his record, Helms drew attention away from his record and focused on Hunt and his purported liberal pragmatism. Whereas Hunt wanted voters to feel good about him, Helms wanted voters to question Hunt's character.⁵⁴ This strategy was combined with a barrage of television advertisements that effectively undermined Hunt's credibility. As opposed to Helms' advertisements that had a thematic continuity and appeared to be a series of commercials that could be collected into a documentary, Hunt's advertisements had shifting plots with jumping storylines. When Hunt was once asked what he would do differently in future political campaigns, he answered: "My first emphasis would be a better

⁵³ A.L. May, "Hunt says campaign has hurt state's image, blames Helms," *The News & Observer*, November 1, 1984.

⁵⁴ See Luebke.

message, more sharply focused and more appropriately conceptualized.”⁵⁵ Hunt also tried to highlight Helms’ ties to right-wing dictators in Latin American countries, issues that North Carolinians largely do not make voting decisions on. Additionally, though Helms ran more negative ads in total minutes, the Hunt campaign aired ads with “an overwhelmingly negative tone” that painted Helms as a villain; this left Hunt more open to criticism for negative advertising. Helms too created a villain for the Hunt campaign.

But in contrast to Hunt, the Helms campaign simply identified Hunt as indecisive on issues, which was backed by newspaper clippings in television advertisements throughout the campaign. Furthermore, in direct-mail advertisements, the Helms campaign never mentioned Hunt by name. As opposed to making Hunt, the candidate, the villain, the Helms campaign painted Jackson, Mondale and Kennedy as villains. The Hunt campaign, on the other hand, mentioned Helms by name in direct-mail advertisements. For example, in response to the direct-mailing advertisement that Helms circulated regarding the half-a-million dollar fundraising party Pamela Harriman hosted, Hunt signed a letter circulated by the North Carolina Campaign Fund that called “Helms a political juggernaut who reaches far beyond the borders of North Carolina. He can tap the financial resources of every rabid, right-wing group clear across the country.”⁵⁶ Another direct-mail letter signed by Hunt referred to Helms as “an unscrupulous campaigner with a long history of grossly distorting his opponent’s record.”⁵⁷ The response of the Hunt campaign ultimately worked in Helms’ favor because the response appeared to be a departure from the positive campaigning style that Hunt pledged to engage in. As Helms’ biographer Furgurson

⁵⁵ Quoted in Larry Smith and James Golden, “Electronic Storytelling in Electoral Politics,” *The Southern Speech Communication Journal*, Spring 1988, 244-258.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Furgurson, p. 179.

⁵⁷ Quoted in *Ibid.*

indicates: “Hunt’s shift to such an uncharacteristic aggressiveness helped reinforce what became Helm’s most effective campaign line: ‘Where do you stand, Jim?’”⁵⁸

The positive/negative ratings carried out during and after the campaign uphold Furgurson’s assertion that the aggressive response employed by Hunt hindered Hunt more than it helped. A poll taken of North Carolina citizens in 1983, for example, found Hunt’s positive/negative rating to be strong at 60 to 21 percent whereas Helms’ rating was 55 to 29 percent. A similar poll conducted after the election reveals a drop of support for Hunt as Hunt’s positive/negative rating dropped, 45 to 45 percent. Helms was less hurt by the campaign with a 49 to 43 percent positive/negative rating. Helms effectively tore down Hunt’s image from a “clean-cut symbol of the New South to a wishy-washy ambitious pol;”⁵⁹ Helms successfully undermined Hunt’s credibility and image, and this cost Hunt the “moral high ground”.⁶⁰

In addition to its historical spending and television advertising, another factor of the Helms-Hunt campaign that serves as a precedent for succeeding campaigns includes the racial overtones of the campaign.⁶¹ Earl Black, a professor of political science at Rice University and author of *Politics and Society in the South*, concluded Helms “had an approach to politics that basically seemed to operate without acknowledgement that blacks worked in the political system.”⁶² Based upon the 1984 Senatorial election, however, it appears Helms did acknowledge the roles of blacks in the political system. Helms trailed Hunt by twenty-points in a *Charlotte Observer* poll in early 1983; then Helms launched a Senate filibuster to block a bill marking Martin Luther King, Jr.’s birthday as a national holiday. During deliberation over the Senate

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 186; See also Luebke.

⁶⁰ Luebke, p. 140.

⁶¹ Though much attention has been given to Helms’ use of racial overtones in his Senatorial campaigns against Harvey Gantt, a former mayor of Charlotte who is African-American, less scholarship has highlighted aspects of the 1984 Senatorial election that foreshadowed the 1988 presidential election and Helms’ successive campaigns.

⁶² Quoted on *Newshour*, PBS Television, August 21, 2001.

vote, Helms argued: “the legacy of King was really division, not love.”⁶³ He also delivered a 350-page stack of FBI documents about King to all the Senators prior to the vote. After the Senate vote, Helms sent a six-page direct-mail appeal out to potential supporters and summarized his disapproval of the King holiday, claiming he largely opposed the bill because of its cost to the government.⁶⁴ The next *Charlotte Observer* poll showed Helms had cut Hunt’s lead in half.⁶⁵ By March of 1984, Helms and Hunt were dead even. Bill Peterson, a former *Washington Post* political columnist, wrote of the 1984 Helms-Hunt election: “Racial epithets and standing school doors are no longer fashionable but 1984 proved that the ugly politics of race are alive and well. Helms is their master.”⁶⁶

Racial overtones were employed in the 1984 Senatorial election between Helms and Hunt largely due to the significant increase in the number of registered voters who were black. Voter registration for blacks climbed by sixty-one percent, or 247,000 voters, since the 1980 election. During the same time period, Jerry Falwell, the leader of the Moral Majority, led registration drives through churches to help increase voter registration for whites by twenty-six percent, or about 539,000 voters. Of the individuals who registered to vote during both registration drives, 515,000 registered as Democrats and 220,000 registered as Republicans.⁶⁷ Helms defeated his 1978 Senatorial opponent by less than 150,000. Under the assumption that at least ninety-five percent of black voters would support Hunt, which media polls throughout the election predicted, the Helms campaign needed to ensure all undecided voters and at least sixty-

⁶³ Quoted in Furgurson, p. 177.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ David Broder, “Jesse Helms: White Racist,” *The Washington Post*, August 29, 2001.

⁶⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*

⁶⁷ The percentage of registered individuals’ eligible to vote jumped from 59 to 77 percent during the campaign drives.

five percent of the white vote swung in favor of Helms. To attract the undecided, white voters, Helms used various techniques to appeal to them through racial overtones.

Helms' campaign literature grounded a drumbeat of warnings about black-voter registration drives. Examples of Helms' use of racial overtones included a direct mailing and television advertisement that featured a photograph of Jesse Jackson leading a campaign of registering blacks to vote. Under the photo, the text read: "Is this a proper use of tax dollars?" Another letter circulated through fundamentalist churches and through direct-mail campaigns stated: "Jesse Jackson wants to put Jesse Helms out of work, and you must decide which Jesse you want to represent you."⁶⁸ In the spring 1983, Helms issued a flier that was circulated to members of fundamentalist churches that stated: "Jackson/Hunt Voter Drives Endangers Re-Election of Reagan/Helms." Helms also often publicly said he feared a large "bloc vote" would push Hunt over Helms, in which "bloc vote" was inferred to mean the "black vote".⁶⁹ Another ad featured Hunt speaking about his support for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday, which Helms argued was too costly to the government. The television advertisement ended with images of Hunt, King, Jackson, and a picture of registering voters with the announcement: "This is where your tax money is going. Now you know who Jim Hunt stands with." But because the Helms campaign used the tax issue, a thinly veiled racial strategy, instead of flat-out racial connections, the Helms campaign could deny the racist underpinnings of their strategies to attract undecided

⁶⁸ Quoted in Furgurson, p. 169.

⁶⁹ The Helms campaign also allegedly attempted to "intimidate" black voters from showing up the polls on Election Day. The campaign sent out postcards to residents of areas that were predominately black; the campaign requested the postal service to return all undeliverable postcards to the campaign office. The Hunt campaign charged Helms with attempting to prepare a legal challenge to the election results and charge voter fraud if Helms lost. In 1992, Helms and the Congressional Club, which paid the postage for the undeliverable mail to be returned to the Helms headquarters, settled with the U.S. Department of Justice from a complaint stemming from the postcards that threatened to jail blacks if they voted; see Bates

voters. The Helms campaign could also deny the racial underpinnings by pointing to its campaign spokesman, Claude Allen, who is black.⁷⁰

Finally, Helms' relationship with the press became a theme of the campaign. Five of Helms' public outbursts with the press were reported by the local news media over the last two weeks of the campaign. Helms called a WRAL-TV anchorman a "jerk" for allegedly asking him harder questions after asking Hunt easier questions in a profile for each candidate; Helms told a *Chicago Tribune* reporter to "go back to Chicago" after the reporter asked a series of questions about Helms' "right-wing" tendencies; he swore at a reporter from *The Wall Street Journal*; he called a journalist a liar after the journalist asked Helms about his involvement with El Salvador; and he kicked the *N&O* out of several campaign parties after they reprinted or printed stories the Helms campaign found as attacks on Helms' character, such as a reprint of the *New York Times* stories linking Helms to South American dictators. These outbursts served to work in conjunction with Helms' constant ridiculing of the press on a daily basis in his campaign stump speeches during the final weeks of the campaign. Of the *N&O* specifically, Helms said on October 23: "I would have to say that the most intellectually irresponsible editor I've ever known is Claude Sitton of the Raleigh *News & Observer*. He doesn't make a stab at being fair—to Ronald Reagan or to anybody who is conservative. If that's the kind of toxin he's going to sound, he's going to continue to poison the atmosphere."⁷¹ When he was asked why he waged a costly campaign with a saturation of television advertising and negative advertising, Helms replied: "I had to offset all the free publicity Jim Hunt was getting from the liberal media."⁷²

⁷⁰ The Helms campaign also softened their image by pointing to Bob Harris, who was believed to be the brain behind the Helms' strategy. In a CBS *Sixty Minutes* interview with Mike Wallace that aired during end of the campaign, the ailing Harris had to speak through an electric voice-enhancer as he sat propped upon a bed with his mother to his side providing interpretations and drinks of water.

⁷¹ Quoted In Elizabeth Leland, "Helms criticizes news media in campaign appearances," *The News & Observer*, October 23, 1984.

⁷² Quoted in Furgurson, p. 156.

Helms' public attacks on the news media began in 1960 when he began serving as an editorial commentator for WRAL, a television and radio broadcast system in Raleigh, North Carolina. Helms served as an editorial commentator at WRAL until 1972, when he won his first term in office as a Senator. Helms not only gained local recognition with near daily editorials, he also gained national recognition as one of the first broadcast editorialists in the country to be syndicated across the nation.⁷³ In one of his first editorials in 1960, Helms stated:

There is substantial evidence to indicate that many North Carolinians are becoming increasingly distrustful of the major daily newspapers they read and that respect for the integrity of the newspaper profession may be on the wane. The surest death for the freedom lies down the road of unfairness, partiality and bias.⁷⁴

After the 1984 Senatorial election, Helms extended his criticism of a bias to the major news media across the nation.

In late February of 1985, nearly four months after the conclusion of the 1984 Senatorial Helms-Hunt campaign, Helms spoke before the annual meeting of the Conservative Political Action Committee and called the major news media in the United States a "threat to democracy." "There are forces around the world eager to see America swept into a dustpin," declared the six-foot-two imposing figure. Helms, who began his third term of his Senate career by being named chairman of the influential Foreign Relations Committee, continued his fire-y and eloquent rhetoric before an applauding audience of supporters:

What we have today is a confrontation between tyranny and freedom, between spiritually and atheism, between justice and brutality. I find myself wondering, as I know sometimes you do, why the opinion-makers in our own land—the major news media—so often lead us to believe that communism is just another philosophy, just another political system.

⁷³ Though transcripts of Helms' commentaries exist and are included in the North Carolina Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the radio and television recordings of Helms' broadcasts have never been located. Bill Kruger, "Jesse Helms: The Early Years," *The News & Observer*, August 23, 2001.

⁷⁴ Quoted in Bill Kruger, "Jesse Helms: The Early Years." *The News & Observer*, August 23, 2001.

Helms, for the national audience, proceeded to list the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and CBS News as the major news media. He wondered out-loud “whether I’m on the same planet as the reporters and editors who put the [news] together.” This man, who built his pre-political career through the profession of journalism, continued: “There is a cacophony of extortions by cunning false prophets with overwhelming efforts to dictate what our people shall think and say and do.” How can the major news media be so wrong so often,” he asked. Then, he answered: “They are profoundly out of sympathy with the ideals and goals of the American people.” What makes the major news media so especially dangerous lays in the power they possess, he said. “The press has the power of character assassination, to set the national agenda, and wage a psychological warfare against the American people,” he added. Because of this power, the major news media (“who if they do not hate America first, they certainly have a strong contempt for American ideals and principles”) have thus become the real threat to freedom. There exists a liberal media bias, he said, and no outlet for the conservative voice. Helm’s solution to the grievances included giving the conservatives a voice in the major news media.⁷⁵

One week after the 1984 Helms-Hunt election, Helms tried to correct these grievances by forming Fairness in Media with North Carolinian lawyers Wrenn Carter and Thomas Ellis; both also served as campaign strategist for Helms during the 1984 election. The ultimate objective of the Fairness in Media (FIM) organization was to create an outlet for conservative perspectives in the major news media by making Helms the boss of Dan Rather, the nightly anchor of CBS News. In one of the United States’ most bizarre stories about the news media and one of the “oddest efforts in the records of corporate takeovers”⁷⁶, Fairness in Media attempted to buy fifty-one percent, or \$1.5 billion worth, of CBS’s stock beginning in early 1985. In papers filed with

⁷⁵ Quoted in Ernest Furgurson, *Hard Right: The Rise of Jesse Helms* (New York: Norton, 1986).

⁷⁶ Bill Abrams, “Jesse Helms’ Bid for CBS Might Not Succeed, But He Could Reap Large Political Reward,” *The Wall Street Journal*, March 29, 1985.

the Security Exchange Commission (SEC) on January 10, 1985, FIM requested a meeting with CBS management in order to address FIM's concerns about "CBS's liberal media bias in news reporting and editorial policies." The papers filed with the SEC further claimed FIM would "gain control of the company" if CBS rejected the FIM proposal.⁷⁷ Helms and company targeted CBS because of Dan Rather, who served as "the symbol of all that's anti-America on television."⁷⁸ To orchestrate the buyout of CBS, Helms wrote a series of letters to nearly one-million conservatives, urging them to buy CBS stock or donate at least \$500 to the "Beat CBS Legal Fund" of the Congressional Club, a Helms-created political action committee spearheaded by Carter.⁷⁹ Helms also met with Ted Turner, the cable conglomerate owner of stations such as TBS, TNT and CNN, to develop a joint strategy. Turner once said of the television network news: "The greatest enemies America has ever had, posing a greater threat to our way of life than Nazi Germany or Tojo's Japan, are the television networks."⁸⁰

After nearly three months of CBS's fate in limbo, CBS's expensive legal maneuvering ended the takeover efforts. Within the wake of Helms' attempts to buyout CBS, CBS laid-off one hundred-and-twenty-five employees and lost \$1 billion in revenue in a protective buy back of its own stock; all three major networks (CBS, NBC and ABC) also deepened their pockets by forming partnerships with larger corporations.⁸¹ Robert Entman, a communications scholar and former communications advisor to Ronald Reagan, referred to Helms' efforts as "the most influential manifestation of the conservative crusade campaign against liberal bias."⁸² A few years after his attempt to buyout CBS, Helms' biographer, Earl Furgurson, asked Helms to

⁷⁷ Quoted in Sally Smith, "Conservatives seeking stock of CBS to alter 'liberal bias,'" *The New York Times*, January 11, 1985.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Corry.

⁷⁹ Bill Abrams, "CBS Seems to thwart conservatives who sought to eliminate liberal bias," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 1, 1985.

⁸⁰ John Corry, "Is TV Unpatriotic or simply unmindful?" *The New York Times*, May 12, 1985.

⁸¹ Robert Entman, *Democracy without Citizens*:

⁸² *Ibid*, p. 32.

identify the roots for his crusade against the news media. Helms answered: “The (Raleigh) *News & Observer*.”⁸³

The Raleigh (N.C.) *News & Observer*, one of the most influential newspapers in North Carolina and one of the most well-respected in the nation⁸⁴, began with Josephanus Daniels, who served as the Secretary of Navy during the Woodrow Wilson Administration. Josephanus’s heir to the *News & Observer (N&O)*, his son Jonathan, served as a White House advisor to Franklin Roosevelt and as press secretary to Harry Truman. The liberalism of the *N&O*, which largely focused its coverage on politics, was apparent through editorials, which has never endorsed a Republican for president since it endorsed Dwight Eisenhower in 1952 and 1956. Up until the mid-1970s, the *N & O* accompanied every news report of a Democrat winning a national or state political office with a salutation of the symbol of the Southern Democratic party—a rooster. An outline of a rooster would span the front-page of the newspaper and be superimposed by the accompanying story about the election of a Democratic official. Until the 1990s, the *N&O* also ran a daily front-page column entitled “Under the Dome.” The column, which continues its existence to this day, reports the gossip and rumors about North Carolina politicians at the local, state and national level. Until the mid-1990s, the column had been written anonymously; historically, the column has a liberal slant, though it has become less so since the Daniels family sold the newspaper to the McClatchy Company, a newspaper chain, in the late 1990s; the editorial liberalism remains. Helms charged the editorial liberalism extended beyond the editorial

⁸³ Furgurson.

⁸⁴ The Raleigh *News & Observer (N&O)* was selected by the *Columbia Journalism Review* as one of the top twenty newspapers in the United States in its most recent ranking of newspapers in 2000; the *N&O* also was the first newspaper in the world to have its number of subscribers higher than the population of the city it serves. This represents the deep penetration of the *N&O* and also raises the potential of problems in politics because of few alternatives.

page as the news coverage denied the conservative voice an equal opportunity to promote its message and agenda.

To often demonstrate his point of a liberal media bias and to signify where his frustrations with the news media developed, Helms pointed to the *N&O*'s coverage of the 1950 Democratic primary runoff between Frank Porter Graham and Willis Smith for the United States Senate. Then a Democrat, Helms unofficially served as an advisor of Smith.⁸⁵ In the runoff, the *N&O* often spoke out against the racial overtones the Smith campaign employed in the 1950 primary against Graham, the then-President of the University of North Carolina System. One print advertisement, for example, featured a picture of the South Carolina legislature during Reconstruction when many blacks had been elected to office. The text of the ad accompanying the picture read:

Did someone make a deal? Has Dr. Graham raised the race issue? The individual must interest him and her self in the runoff primary, or else find the actual control of their party and state taken over by THIS group. Can we forget so quickly THEIR REIGN not so many years ago?⁸⁶

Another ad featured a photograph of Graham's wife dancing with a black man. The accompanying text read: "White people wake up before it's too late. Do you want Negroes working beside you, your wife and your daughter in your mills and factories? Frank Graham favors mingling of the races." The photograph of Graham's wife dancing with the black man was later determined to be doctored and linked to Helms. In an editorial, the *N&O* said the Smith campaign committed "political arson" by exploiting the race issue and doctoring photos. Helms, who was then the assistant city editor of the *Raleigh Times*, an afternoon rival paper of the *N&O*, denied working for the Smith campaign. Helms, however, later joined Smith in Washington as his top aide when Smith won the general election. Helms charged the *N&O* with character

⁸⁵ Helms officially switched to the Republican Party in 1970.

⁸⁶ Quoted in Furgurson.

assassination for its coverage of Smith.⁸⁷ He charged the N&O was once again committing character assassination in 1984 by denying Helms the opportunity to be heard on its pages due to a “deliberate liberal media bias.”

Two analysis of local network news and local newspapers coverage of the 1984 campaign, however, showed no liberal media bias. In a study of the local television network broadcasts in North Carolina during the final week of the campaign, Montague Kern found in *30-Second Politics: Political Advertising in the Eighties* that issues raised by Helms dominated the issues covered by the local networks. These issues were abortion, religion and school prayer. In an example provided by Kern, the local network news coverage “was almost a benediction on his major campaign theme—that he, unlike his opponent, was not ‘just another politician.’” In the final story before the election about Helms on one local network station, for example, Helms spoke about school prayer. In the newscast, Helms said he shared the view of the president in that the issue of school prayer and religion, in general, was more important than winning an election; he would not back away from speaking on one of his fundamental beliefs regarding school prayer that his campaign advisors had suggested he avoid. Rather, Helms said “some things are more important than winning elections. President Reagan gets kicked around a lot for raising such ideas as prayer in the school just as you do, just as I do, but it doesn’t bother him and I know it doesn’t bother you.”⁸⁸

In comparison to the coverage Helms received on the local network broadcasts, Hunt was “embroiled in stories about what he would do”.⁸⁹ Examples of this included how Hunt would handle the execution of Velma Barfield. Network coverage of Hunt also focused on his charges against Helms, such as Helms voting to cut Social Security benefits and violating Federal

⁸⁷ The *News & Observer* later endorsed Smith in the general election and wrote several flattering profiles of him.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Kern, p. 64-65.

⁸⁹ Kern, p. 67.

Elections Law. None of the networks did an investigative or editorial piece examining the charges Hunt made. Rather, Hunt accusations were followed by a response from Helms followed by a response from Hunt followed by a response from Helms and so forth. The charges and counter-charges of Helms' campaign finances ended with Helms stating the federal elections will be resolved with the Hunt forces having "egg all over their faces."⁹⁰ Based upon her analysis of the network coverage of Hunt and Helms, Kern concluded:

There was no bias against the conservative candidate [Helms]. Rather, the Helms media blitz threw Hunt onto the defensive, and he appeared this way on the evening news counterattacking on a set of issues that received no additional credibility from either reporter legwork or commentary or anticonservative editorials by local stations.⁹¹

A brief content analysis of the three largest newspapers in North Carolina also shows no bias against Helms. The three newspapers selected for this analysis include the *Charlotte Observer*, the *Greensboro News & Record*, and the *Raleigh News & Observer*. The *Charlotte Observer* was selected because the newspaper serves the largest city in North Carolina, has the largest total number of subscribers, and is the dominant media outlet for the western part of North Carolina. The *Greensboro News & Record* was selected for similar reasons; the newspaper serves the third largest area in North Carolina—the Triad region consisting of the cities Greensboro, Winston-Salem and Burlington—and had the second largest number of newspaper subscribers during the 1984 Senatorial election. Both the *Charlotte Observer* and the *Greensboro News & Record* were also selected in order to compare the findings with the final newspaper analyzed, the *Raleigh News & Observer*, whose purpose of inclusion is obvious due to Helms' constant criticism of the *News & Observer* throughout his Senate career and specifically throughout the 1984 Helms-Hunt campaign. Finally, it should be noted all the newspapers included in this analysis endorsed Hunt in the Senatorial campaign.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 65.

⁹¹ Ibid.

In contrast to Kern's analysis that focused on television news reports, this research analysis concentrates on how the three largest newspapers in North Carolina reported the Helms-Hunt contest. To conduct this analysis, both a news diversity index and an editorial liberalism index were conducted to compare the newspapers and determine how the newspapers covered the two candidates during the final two weeks of the campaign as well as the three days on or after the four debates that were held between July and October of 1984. The news diversity index attempts to evaluate how many different perspectives the news coverage offers about issues and candidates. To determine the index, each news item or issue within a story was awarded either zero, one or two points. A zero was awarded if only one perspective, or one candidate's voice, was presented for each issue mentioned in an article; a two was awarded if both perspectives are offered about an issue; and a one is offered if at least two people are cited but they offer the same perspective or opinion about an issue. Every issue mentioned in an article was evaluated and awarded points. Issues mentioned in articles that were evaluated included: the candidates' stated position⁹² on campaign issues, such as school prayer, abortion, tax rates, and foreign policy; political scientists' and other so-called experts' comments about each candidate's campaign and performance in the debates; and each candidate's campaign statements about the opposing candidate. After all the issues were analyzed for all the news articles, the total number of points awarded for each issue mentioned in a news article was added together. The total number of points awarded for each issue mentioned in the news article was then divided by twice the total number of issues mentioned.⁹³ The greater the diversity index is to one, the greater diversity the news coverage is.

⁹² The candidates' positions were evaluated if they were stated by the candidate or by a candidate's spokesperson.

⁹³ The index was divided by two because two is the highest number of points that can be awarded for an issue or item.

The editorial liberalism index was determined by awarding a zero, one or two points for positions in editorials that supported a liberal issue or a liberal candidate or denounced a conservative issue or conservative candidate. A two was awarded if the issue was directly connected to the support of a liberal candidate, in this case Hunt, or the denouncement of a conservative candidate, Helms. A one was awarded if the issue was connected to a liberal cause, but not explicitly linked to the liberal candidate, or if a conservative cause was denounced but not explicitly linked to the conservative candidate. This raw score was then subtracted from the points awarded for a statement of support of a conservative candidate or issue or a statement of denouncement of a liberal candidate or issue. The closer to one the editorial liberalism index is, the more liberal slant of the editorials.

The chart below indicates that the *News and Observer* had the highest news diversity index (0.96), which means the *N&O* did the best job in presenting both candidates' perspectives and issues in proportion to each other. Of the *Charlotte Observer* and *Greensboro News & Record*, the news diversity index favored Hunt. During the coverage of the four debates, the *Greensboro News & Record* also gave Hunt (945) significantly more words of direct quotes than Helms. (The number in parentheses under the Helms Direct Quotes and Hunt Direct Quotes refers to direct quotes of campaign spokespersons.) The *N&O* gave both Helms and Hunt significantly more direct quotes than either of the two other publications, even though the number of stories analyzed for all the newspapers were comparable. The *N&O* published ten total stories about the four debates; the *Charlotte Observer* published twelve; and the *Greensboro News & Record* nine. The editorial liberalism index returned results expected as the *N&O* and *News & Record* had high editorial liberalism indexes; the *Charlotte Observer* appears

to be more balanced in its editorials. This can largely be attributed to the *Charlotte Observer's* primary focus on the negative of the campaign.

The news stories were typically reported as a straight source, counter-source fashion, or back-and-forth quotes between the accuser and the accused. For this reason, the candidates determined how the campaign would be covered. Whereas Hunt focused on Helms' negative campaigning and Senate record as "radical right", Helms focused the news media coverage on Hunt's flip-flop of issues, distortions, and links to unions, homosexuals, blacks, and Walter Mondale. Bases upon this evidence, Helms assertions that the news media had a liberal bias in its news coverage and denied him equal opportunity in having his voice heard through the news media were misguided. Instead, Helms' outcry over the liberal bias of the news media was part of his

Newspaper	News Diversity Index	Editorial Liberalism Index	Helms Direct Quotes	Hunt Direct Quotes
Charlotte Observer	0.79 (73/92)	0.48 (21/44)	464 (363)	453 (447)
N&O	0.96 (92/96)	0.70 (66/94)	1097	945
News & Record	0.67 (58/86)	0.80 (59/74)	630 (148)	945 (182)

campaign strategy.

The constant attack on the news media as liberal by the Helms campaign worked to create seeds of doubts in the objectivity of the news media. Gary Pearce, Hunt's campaign manger, explained:

They (Helms) performed judo on the mass media, destroying its credibility so that whatever it said about the race became suspicious. It was a brilliant campaign—liberal politicians connected with liberal news media, which cast everything into doubt, playing on people's natural suspicions.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Quoted in Kern, p. 64.

But the Helms' campaign raised not only suspicion about the news media slant toward favoring Hunt in the minds of voters, the Helms' campaign also used clippings from newspapers and news footage to support its accusations against Hunt. By using these sources, Helms' arguments about a liberal bias in favor of Hunt gained greater credence because the evidence Helms used was provided by the media that allegedly supported Hunt.

Newspaper headlines were often used in television ads by Helms to provide evidence for a shift in position of Hunt. For example, a headline entitled "Hunt condemns Reagan economic policy" flashed onto a television screen before footage of Hunt speaking out in favor of a balanced budget and tax cuts. During the debates, Helms used a total of eighteen news articles to ask Hunt a question or to back up an argument that challenged Hunt's record. Hunt only quoted from one newspaper in comparison. The television political advertisements also used news footage as much as possible to make the ads look like news to make the ad more credible. Helms' political advertisements often had grainy images, and many ads began with... "this is real news footage." As a result, though Helms claimed he had to bypass the news media through television advertisement, he also used the news media to his advantage. He used the news media to validate and legitimate his arguments to Hunt's record. He used attacks on the news media to create doubts in some voters' minds if the news media reported a story unfavorable to Helms. He controlled the message to the news media by beginning the campaign in April of 1983, and he controlled the issues that were defined by the news media through putting Hunt on the defensive by airing television advertisement early and saturating the audience throughout the campaign with television advertisements. The Helms-Hunt contest "played out largely in barrages of tough television ads."⁹⁵

⁹⁵ A.L. May, "Hunt says campaign has hurt state's image, blames Helms," *The News & Observer*, November 1, 1984.

The Helms-Hunt contest provides several lessons about campaign strategies. First, the campaign demonstrated that voters will accept political advertising for a sustained period of time. Charlie Black, a Helms' campaign strategist, argued that the "old adage that people get tired of campaigns if they go on too long is not true....McDonald's advertises three-hundred-and-sixty-five days a year. People never get tired of that. And they keep going to McDonald's."⁹⁶ Hunt's inaction during the first six months that Helms ran television ads also demonstrated that opponents must begin countering negative ads immediately. According to well-known Democrat campaign consultant Robert Squier, "an unanswered charge that is on that long is agreed to. By the time Hunt got on, the war was over."⁹⁷ In *30-Second Politics*, Montague Kern also writes: "It is not wise to husband resources for the final period, when a candidate's credibility may be gone, the agenda set, and the airwaves cluttered."⁹⁸ The Helms-Hunt contest also proves that negative advertising, if done correctly, can work. Helms was largely successful because he painted not Hunt as the villain, but by linking Hunt to villains that Helms had created. Wrenn Carter, a Helms campaign advisor, stated of the negative campaign: "They [voters] say they don't like it, but they respond."⁹⁹ Finally, the campaign demonstrates how over the year the news media has increasingly become a part of the story of electoral campaigns and candidates can struggle if they fail to adopt an effective press management style. Helms' achieved largely in 1984 due to his ability to draw attention to the issues he wanted covered.

One after another, scholars and journalists concluded that Helms won the 1984 election and his other four elections because of his willingness to be open and to never compromise his

⁹⁶ Quoted in Alan Ehrenhalt, "Technology, Strategy Bring New Campaign Era," *Congressional Quarterly*, December 7, 1985.

⁹⁷ Quoted in Ibid.

⁹⁸ Kern Montague, *30-Second Politics*, Montague Kern, *30-Second Politics: Political Advertising in the Eighties* (New York: Praeger, 1989), p. 158.

⁹⁹ Quoted in David Rodgers, "Bitter Battle," *The Wall Street Journal*, October 18, 1984.

position. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, Helms was a “man not afraid to speak his mind or champion unpopular causes in an age when most politicians speak with many tongues; that inflexibility of mind and purpose was his greatest vulnerability and his greatest strength”¹⁰⁰ Sam Ervin, the former Democrat Senator from North Carolina and the ideological counterpart of Helms, called Helms “one of the few men in public life who’s got the courage to stand up for what he honestly believes.” Ervin added, “Courage is the rarest trait among public men. Many of them are intelligent, but there are very few of them who are courageous.”¹⁰¹ Larry Sabato, a noted political science professor at the University of Virginia who specializes in Southern politics, once said that unlike “most politicians who want one-hundred percent of the people to love them, Jesse Helms is perfectly happy to win fifty-one percent of the vote. He revels in having the other big group hate him.”¹⁰² His political legacy, as a result, is showing how a “determined minority of one can influence the national agenda.”¹⁰³ Helms influenced the national agenda through employing a long, television-saturated campaign and an effective press management style that became a blueprint for successive campaigns. He further re-energized and sustained the attacks against a “liberal media bias” that has not yet been silenced. And, he gave a voice to a right-wing, conservative coalition that remains active and influential. Though Helms claims he achieved these feats in spite of the news media, which he dubbed a “suck-egg mule”, he never would have achieved his status as a five-term Senator without the image as a “Typhoid Mary.” Helms served the news media just as the news media served Helms.

¹⁰⁰ Vermont Royster, “Thinking things over: The Hunting of Helms,” *The Wall Street Journal*, February 21, 1985.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Faulkner, p. 37.

¹⁰² Quoted in Bill Kruger, “Jesse Helms: The early years,” *The News & Observer*, August 23, 2001.

¹⁰³ Bates.

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