

HELMS, HUNT, AND WHITENESS:  
THE 1984 SENATE CAMPAIGN IN NORTH CAROLINA

A Thesis  
by  
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## **Abstract**

### HELMS, HUNT, AND WHITENESS: THE 1984 SENATE CAMPAIGN IN NORTH CAROLINA

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In 1984, the Democratic governor of North Carolina, Jim Hunt, challenged Republican Jesse Helms for his seat in the United States Senate, and the contest between the two Tar Heel politicians proved to be the most expensive non-presidential election in American history up to that time. Two decades after the Civil Rights Movement of the mid-twentieth century, race continued to impact the politics of the American South. Helms won with a four percent margin over his Democratic rival by appealing to 63 percent of the vote cast by white Tar Heels, most of whom lived in rural North Carolina and the state's small towns.<sup>1</sup> The post-civil rights, emotionally-charged culture of whiteness in the Tar Heel state—the transcendence of anti-black racial prejudice and other cultural issues favored by white conservatives over class interests—informed the tactics used by the Helms campaign as well the response from Hunt's campaign. Only by giving equal attention to both campaigns, their strategies, and tactics—particularly within the advertising battle that flooded

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<sup>1</sup> William A. Link, *Righteous Warrior: Jesse Helms and the Rise of Modern Conservatism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008), 302.

media outlets in the state for over a year—can the irrational influence of whiteness on North Carolina politics be understood. Moreover, a better grasp of whiteness illuminates not only the effects the culture has on American politics but *how* race is used by those seeking power within American political culture.

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First, thank you to my thesis director, Dr. Karl E. Campbell, who suggested Jesse Helms as a research topic to a wide-eyed graduate student intent on answering all the questions pertaining to contemporary southern political history. His tutelage and guidance have been invaluable throughout this project. Secondly, the graduate seminars taught by Drs. Antonio T. Bly and James R. Goff helped open my eyes to the complexities of race, southern culture, and the inseparable combination of the two. I am grateful that both agreed to serve on the committee for this thesis. Thank you also to Drs. W. Scott Jessee, Timothy H. Silver, Michael Turner, and Mary Valante for their critiques and criticisms of my writing for the projects undertaken in their various seminars. A word of thanks, as well, to Cathy Dorin-Black, Jennifer Baker, and the staff in the Special Collections at D.H. Hill Library at North Carolina State University, as well as Sarah Carrier of the North Carolina Collection in the Wilson Library at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Without their help, I never could have navigated the incredible amount of source material from which this study grew. A special thank you to my parents James and Pam Kellam. They suffered a son whose favorite activity growing up was asking questions, and their interest and love of history fueled mine. Lastly and most importantly, thank you to my wife Amelia who read multiple drafts and suffered through endless late-night discussions on southern politics, race, and culture as I tried to refine my ideas and focus my thoughts on a topic that has proven to be infinitely more complex than I originally thought possible.

## **Dedication**

To my wife and my parents who encouraged me to pursue something I had only talked about  
for years. Thank you.

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## **Introduction**

### **Two Politicians, Two Souths, and One Group of People**

The political contest between Senator Jesse Helms and Governor Jim Hunt defined the way with which southern politicians approached the political culture of the South in the decades after the Civil Rights era of the mid-twentieth century. Prior to the 1984 Senate campaign, both men achieved success in North Carolina politics. Helms won his Senate seat in 1972 and was re-elected in 1978. The Tar Heel state elected Hunt lieutenant governor in 1972; put him in the governor's mansion in 1976; and re-elected him governor in 1980. In 1984, Hunt challenged Helms's Senate seat and lost by four percentage points, 52 to 48. It was the only loss Hunt experienced in his political career and the closest margin of victory in any election in which Helms ran. One Greensboro journalist wrote that the election was not just a contest between two politicians, but a showdown "between the conservative Old South and the progressive forces of the New."<sup>1</sup>

Though certainly a contest between the Old and New Souths, the campaign between Helms and Hunt, the two most powerful politicians in North Carolina during the last three decades of the twentieth century, represented something deeper within the South's politics. The two men pitched an eighteen-month political battle that conveyed two visions of the region. One sought the exclusion of others through the maintenance of the cultural status quo in order to appeal to white Tar Heels. The other attempted to gain the consent of white voters to expand the state's politics beyond the center of power within the cultural confines of the traditional South through the cautious political inclusion of cultural others. They approached

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<sup>1</sup> William D. Snider, *Helms and Hunt: The North Carolina Senate Race, 1984* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 3.

the state's electorate in different ways with different strategies heavily focused on attracting the votes of Tar Heel whites.

Historians, political scientists, journalists, and sociologists have analyzed the 1984 campaign in an effort to explain the forces at work within southern and North Carolina politics. Elements central to the campaign such as southern progressivism versus traditional conservatism, modernization versus traditionalism, and race have been thoroughly studied in an effort to show how and why Helms won the election. One point of broad consensus within the historiography was the influence of President Ronald Reagan's victorious coattails on Helms's victory. Another focus within the historiography, though with less consensus, has been Helms's use of race within the campaign.<sup>2</sup>

Though the issue of race has been included within the analysis of the election, it has been treated as a peripheral element of the campaign with other factors having greater influence on the Tar Heel state's electorate. Former editor of the *Greensboro News & Record* William D. Snider noted the role of race in the campaign, but argued that it was "the

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<sup>2</sup> For studies on the 1984 campaign see: See William D. Snider, *Helms and Hunt: The North Carolina Senate Race, 1984* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985); Ernest B. Furgurson, *Hard Right: The Rise of Jesse Helms* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986) 165-187; Paul Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics 2000* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998) 167-179, 184-188; Rob Christensen, *The Paradox of North Carolina Politics: The Personalities, Elections, and Events That Shaped Modern North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 248-255; William D. Link, *Righteous Warrior: Jesse Helms and the Rise of Modern Conservatism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008), 271-305; Earl Black and Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2002), 105-106; Jesse Helms, *Here's Where I Stand: A Memoir* (New York: Random House, 2005), 165-169; Gary Pearce, *Jim Hunt: A Biography* (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, Publisher, 2010), 148-189. For the consensus on Reagan's coattails see: Snider, *Helms and Hunt*, 205-207; Furgurson, *Hard Right*, 187; Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics* 176; Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 255; Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 302; Black and Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans*, 105-106; Pearce, *Jim Hunt*, 187, 192.

senator's vision" of less government regulation and strong enforcement of personal morals that allowed Helms to build a successful voter coalition with North Carolina business, blue-collar workers, and rural Tar Heels. Historian William A. Link, one of Helms's biographers, mentioned the senator's "injection of the race issue," but he only used that strategy to frame his campaign around a broad conservative ideology rather than addressing "concrete issues." Raleigh journalist Rob Christensen claimed that Helms used "racially charged issues" such as the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday to his advantage, but concluded that North Carolina's conservative core propelled Helms to victory. North Carolina politician and sociologist Paul Luebke touched on both the senator's use of race and the governor's move to the political right during the campaign, but, in his "final analysis," Helms proved to be a "one-of-a-kind" Republican that no North Carolina Democrat could beat in a statewide election.<sup>3</sup>

Political scientist Alexander Lamis noted the importance of racial attitudes, particularly those of white Tar Heel Democrats, in the election. Tensions surrounding race lessened in the two decades following the pinnacle of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. The ebb of racial tensions led to an "abatement of the race issue," according to Lamis. This abatement allowed southern Democrats to build coalitions among black voters and white racial progressives throughout the South, allowing for a gradual realignment of blacks into the historically white Democratic Party and white racial conservatives into the traditionally racially moderate Republican Party. Throughout his political career, Hunt succeeded in garnering a substantial amount of white support, but the combination of the

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<sup>3</sup> Snider, *Helms and Hunt*, 214-215; Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 303; Christensen, *The Paradox of North Carolina Politics*, 255; Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics*, 188.

senator's one-of-a-kind personality and, what Lamis called, "a polarized environment" kept the governor from being able to hold together his "diverse racial coalition."<sup>4</sup>

Saying that Helms was a racist who used strategies couched in racism, however, does not fully address the issue of race in southern political culture. Whether primary or secondary in the motivations of southern politicians, race existed as the central issue, regardless of political party, when it came to communicating with the electorate in the South during the late twentieth century. In order to address this, a more nuanced explanation that considers the cultural prejudices that underlay the use of race as a political issue is needed. In other words, race would not be an effective strategic tool if it did not appeal to the culture in which a society's politics exist. Those cultural prejudices constitute the foundation of the cultural hegemony of whiteness, the transcendence of anti-black racial prejudice and other cultural issues favored by white conservatives over class interests.<sup>5</sup>

With so much focus on Helms's strategy and his use of race, less has been noted of Hunt's strategy and the use of race in this campaign, which more fully displays the effect whiteness has on southern politics. Both candidates used race in order to persuade Tar Heel whites to vote for them. To understand how politicians used race in the decades following the 1960s however, one must understand how whiteness influenced southern politics after the Civil Rights Movement. The overt use of race in the creation of racial slavery and Jim Crow segregation evolved into language and imagery that proved to be more insidious with the

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<sup>4</sup> Alexander P. Lamis, *The Two-Party South*, Expanded Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 5, 131, 264.

<sup>5</sup> See Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1968); Michelle Brattain, *The Politics of Whiteness: Race, Workers, and Culture in the Modern South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010).

success of the Civil Rights Movement of the mid-twentieth century, the rise of the black power movement in the late-1960s, and the outbreak of the culture wars of the 1970s.

Whiteness during the late twentieth century relied less on overt racism and more on language and imagery couched in white middle-class values, such as “law and order” and “forced busing” during Nixon’s presidential campaign in 1972, and the use of “welfare queens,” “states’ rights,” and the reduction of “big government” during the Reagan campaigns of 1980 and 1984. White southerners, regardless of economic status, responded favorably to this new color-blind language, and though conservatives touted the universality of these values, they failed to appeal to the vast majority of southern blacks.<sup>6</sup>

Both candidates had found favor among North Carolina’s white electorate in their past elections. Jesse Helms exuded conservatism and traditionalism in his appeal to white conservatives. Prior to his switch to the Republican Party in September 1970, he was a member of the conservative wing of the southern Democratic Party. In 1950, he wholeheartedly supported the conservative Democrat Willis Smith in his campaign against the progressive Senator Frank Porter Graham. Following Smith’s victory, Helms went with Smith to Washington, D.C., and served as an administrative assistant on the senator’s staff. After winning his first Senate election in 1972, Helms campaigned for Ronald Reagan in North Carolina during the Republican presidential primary in 1976 and helped the up-and-coming Republican win the Tar Heel state. He did the same in 1980 and continued his unwavering support of Reagan in the general election later that year. His political organization, the Congressional Club, revolutionized the way in which conservative

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 5-6.

politicians raised money and conveyed awareness of conservative issues. He was a staunch anticommunist throughout his tenure as senator and his later chairmanship of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. His unwavering anticommunist convictions fueled his outlook and perceptions on foreign relations, particularly with respect to Latin America.<sup>7</sup>

Jim Hunt, by contrast, epitomized a new breed of southern progressive. He supported the development of North Carolina's economy and the continued transition from its traditional agrarian roots. He marketed the Tar Heel state as business-friendly, favored lower taxes, and pushed hard to bring in new businesses, especially those involving modern technologies. He also pushed for reform of the state's educational system in order to keep North Carolina competitive with other states. As Gary Pearce, Hunt's former press secretary and 1984 campaign co-chairman, noted, the governor "preached a message for economic growth through better education that dominated the state's agenda for years." Hunt also brought minorities into integral parts of his gubernatorial administration, as well as other branches of the state's government, including the state Supreme Court. He was the quintessential southern moderate and was careful to avoid being seen as too liberal by conservative elements within his constituency.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the differences between the two politicians, Helms and Hunt shared some common characteristics. Both men grew up in rural North Carolina and were raised in Christian households: Helms in Monroe, the seat of rural Union County in the southern Piedmont, and Hunt in Rock Ridge, a small agricultural community in Wilson County on the eastern Coastal Plain. Prior to 1970, they were both members of the Democratic Party, just as

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<sup>7</sup> Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 38, 95-104, 113-125; Helms, *Here's Where I Stand*, 203-216.

<sup>8</sup> Pearce, *Jim Hunt*, 7.

any successful southern politician was before the break-up of the Solid South. In reaction to the success of the Civil Rights Movement, President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society, and the Vietnam War, however, the politics of consensus that held the southern Democratic Party together became more difficult to maintain. This prompted southern conservative Democrats, including Helms, to cross the political aisle to join the Republican Party.<sup>9</sup>

The two men also had one other thing in common: the need for votes from white North Carolina conservatives in order to win elections. These voters bridged the gap of party support enjoyed by both Helms and Hunt. Though used differently, both Helms and Hunt employed the hegemonic nature of whiteness throughout the 1984 campaign in order to attract this prized group of voters. Helms employed the exclusive nature of the hegemony based on race and cultural distinction to attract white voters, whereas Hunt attempted to utilize the inclusiveness of hegemony by proclaiming a largely color-blind message to white audiences throughout the state and a hesitance to get involved in cultural debates where various prejudices flourished.

This thesis explores the use of the hegemony of whiteness in southern political culture by demonstrating its prejudice-based construction beyond the institutional existence of racism and examining the campaign strategies of both Jesse Helms and Jim Hunt during the eighteen-month long Senate campaign of 1984. The first chapter introduces the cultural elements of whiteness that neutralize class antagonism and shows how the hegemony has remained consistent within the political history of the South from the colonial era to the late twentieth century. Along with whiteness's consistency, chapter one analyzes the

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<sup>9</sup> Helms, *Here's Where I Stand*, 3; Pearce, *Jim Hunt*, 11; Sean P. Cunningham, *American Politics in the Postwar Sunbelt: Conservative Growth in a Battleground Region* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 76, 116, 120.

historiography of race in political culture to demonstrate how the tactics used to maintain the hegemony have evolved in response to challenges over time. The contribution of cultural intellectuals and the sciences of psychology and psychiatry included in the first chapter reveal the natural connections made through both human instinct and emotion that are involved in the formation of group formation, hegemony, and through that, the cultural construction of whiteness.

With an understanding of how the cultural hegemony of whiteness works, chapters two and three demonstrate how both Helms and Hunt used whiteness to garner the approval of much-sought-after white Tar Heel voters. The second chapter focuses on Helms's explicit use of race to neutralize class difference among white North Carolinians and Hunt's inability to construct a persuasive color-blind strategy that would bridge the gap between white conservative Democrats and the increased party participation of the state's African American population. Chapter three explores wider cultural elements of whiteness. Helms combined race with other cultural themes throughout the last four months of the campaign—including homosexuality, Christian fundamentalism, nationalism, and abortion—that Hunt only hesitantly addressed, if at all. Hunt continued with his color-blind and issues-based message in an effort to address the concerns of white North Carolinians without alienating them.

A critical appraisal of primary sources constitutes the narrative of both chapters two and three. An analysis of the advertisements produced by both campaigns in visual, audio, and print media that bombarded North Carolina for over a year shows the voter groups Helms and Hunt targeted, white middle- and working-class North Carolinians. In the television ads that assailed the state, analyzing the images, rhetoric, music, and recurring themes the campaigns addressed, one sees the overwhelming presence of white North



Carolínians. The advertisements targeted issues important to the state's white middle-class and working-class electorate—including agriculture, crime, Social Security, taxes, the size and scope of the federal government, and the threat of non-white and cultural others. With the whiteness of these television advertisements, one can readily see the near-total absence of black North Carolínians within the campaign's visual and linguistic discourse. The *News & Observer (N&O)*, in Raleigh, North Carolina, serves as the newspaper of record to help construct the narrative of the campaign, along with other news sources found in the James B. Hunt Papers in the Special Collections at North Carolina State University and the North Carolina Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Helms's memoir, *Here's Where I Stand*, and Gary Pearce's memoir of the campaign in his biography of Jim Hunt are used to provide a glimpse within the campaigns to see how they developed their strategies.

The contest between Jesse Helms and Jim Hunt took place during a pivotal moment in southern political history. After World War II, at the same time the Civil Rights Movement began climbing to its peak, the white middle-class exploded in the South. The region experienced incredible changes through the following decades. As the South became more economically sophisticated, so too did many of its white inhabitants. With the growth of a suburban middle class came a shift of political power that transferred the balance of power from the rural black belt into the southern metropolis and into the hands of white racial moderates and modern, pro-business conservatives. It remained, however, that white voters made up 83 percent of the electorate in the South in 1984, the plurality of whom described themselves as independent, regardless of registered party affiliation. In North Carolina, 80.1 percent of voters were white. Helms knew that to win he needed the

overwhelming approval of this group of people, since the other nearly 20 percent of nonwhite voters would be voting for Hunt. The governor knew he would need a substantial portion of the white electorate to vote for him, particularly white conservatives, since they largely outnumbered both the state's black and liberal white electorate.<sup>10</sup>

This knowledge and substantial majority gave white voters the power to influence the tactics used by Helms and Hunt to exercise their campaign strategies. Traditionally, most North Carolina politicians appealed to the overt racism of the eastern black belt. In the years after the demolition of Jim Crow, though the small cities of North Carolina had always been predominantly white, the political power of whiteness expanded into the suburban middle class in the twenty years after the Civil Rights Movement. Political scientist Tom Eamon called the 1984 campaign a “passion play,” and it indeed was. The target of both campaigns were the passions displayed through whiteness with regard to property and race. Both candidates knew it and responded with their appeals to Tar Heel whiteness to win.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Earl Black and Merle Black, *Politics and Society in the South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 44, 138; Frederick A. Day and Gregory A. Weeks, “The 1984 Helms-Hunt Senate Race: A Spatial Postmortem of Emerging Republican Strength in the South,” *Social Science Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (December 1988): 944; Ginny Carroll, “N.C. Voters Increase 18 Percent Since '80,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, October 20, 1984.

<sup>11</sup> V.O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), 217-218; Tom Eamon, *The Making of a Southern Democracy: North Carolina Politics from Kerr Scott to Pat McCrory* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 216.

## **Chapter One**

### **The Insidious Hegemony: Whiteness In American Political Culture**

In the late 1940s, political scientist V.O. Key published his study *Southern Politics in State and Nation*. Written prior to the breakup of the Democratic Solid South, Key's work attempted to explain southern politics and the uncompetitive one-party system that had held almost insurmountable power from the turn of the twentieth century. In the introduction to his landmark work he noted that "whatever phase of the southern political process one seeks to understand, sooner or later the trail of inquiry leads to the Negro." More than half a century later scholars still study southern politics, society, and culture, and the issue of race continues to emerge throughout the discussion, but their approach leads them not to black southerners, as Key believed. Rather, scholarly inquiry has shifted from focus on the "Negro" to the white South and its various attitudes toward southern blacks and the privileges inherent within white southern culture. Those attitudes and privileges have both changed and remained consistent over time and space, illustrating the shifting hegemonic foundation of the culture of whiteness.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, 5. For studies on whiteness see, for example, George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006); Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968); Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010); A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr., *Shades of Freedom: Racial Politics and Presumptions of the American Legal Process* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Michelle Brattain, *The Politics of Whiteness: Race, Workers, and Culture in the Modern South* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001); Angie Maxwell, *The Indicted South: Public Criticism, Southern Inferiority, and the Politics of Whiteness* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press); David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, Revised Edition (New York: Verso, 2007).

Rather than emphasizing the consequences of individual or systemic racism, be it the attitude of a white supremacist or the de jure/de facto systems of segregation maintained through collective white supremacy, the cultural roots of white privilege are the focus of studies on whiteness. Where Key believed that all inquiry leads to southern blacks, the thought is incomplete. To truly understand not only southern political culture but also that of the United States in general, inquiry must focus on the hegemonic culture of whiteness and the power dynamics within it and the hegemony's relationship with those from without it.

The insidious nature of whiteness exists almost invisibly within American political culture. Sociologist and professor of black studies George Lipsitz began his *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* by quoting Richard Wright, a black author and intellectual, who said about America, "there isn't any Negro problem; there is only a white problem." Lipsitz argued that one can see plainly the "hidden assumptions" that exist within American culture through Wright's statement. The primary assumption, Lipsitz noted, was that "racial polarization comes from the existence of blacks rather than from the behavior of whites, that black people are a 'problem' for whites rather than fellow citizens entitled to justice, and that, unless otherwise specified, 'Americans' means 'whites.'" The same assumption lies within Key's statement that any question regarding the politics of the South must lead to the "Negro," thereby singling out southern blacks instead of addressing the racist attitudes within the white South that provided the foundation for Jim Crow. His statement supports the hidden nature of the assumption further through the invisibility of the whiteness within as it is only inferred as the opposite of the blackness of the Negro. This is how whiteness is able

to maintain its hold on American culture, as Richard Dyer noted, “because it is not seen as whiteness, but as normal.”<sup>2</sup>

As a product of the culture from which it emanates, the politics of the United States has contributed to the power of whiteness in America through the legislation and execution of government policy. Following World War II, federal housing policy displayed favor toward whites by providing funding for private realtors who operated openly with discriminatory mortgage loans. Lipsitz noted that metropolitan areas utilized federal funds in order to pay for “‘slum clearance’ programs” as well as the development of postwar suburbia. As these policies either discouraged affordable development for minorities in cities or forced them to move altogether due to freeway construction, the voice of urban minorities diminished under new overpasses and calls for urban renewal. In the 1980s and 1990s, social welfare policy saw reductions that disproportionately affected minorities with the reduction in federal education funds and a decline in the willingness to confront segregationist school systems. White politicians used the foundation of whiteness during this period as a “wedge” in order to “divide progressive coalitions along racial lines” and further political gains in order to derail the civil rights achievements of the previous decades, especially when speaking out against affirmative action and legislation to strengthen voting rights.<sup>3</sup>

Knowing how those in power use whiteness to their advantage provides only a portion of the story. The only way to truly understand whiteness is to know both what it is and how it works. The roots of whiteness took hold in the British colonies of North America

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<sup>2</sup> George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 1; Richard Dyer, *White* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 10.

<sup>3</sup> Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, 6, 8, 15, 16.

and the Caribbean during the mid-to-late seventeenth century when the term “white” began to replace the term “Christian” to differentiate settlers of European descent from those of other, non-white colors. First used as a social distinction and method of social control, after 400 years whiteness has become part and parcel of American culture. To be sure, the manifestations of whiteness have changed in the four centuries of established European settlement of the New World. However, the primary symbol used to portray it, one’s skin color, has remained consistent and steady through myriad innovations of active white supremacy, expansions of those who have qualified to be white, and the suasive language of whiteness.<sup>4</sup>

In short, whiteness exists as a hegemony within American culture. Italian Marxist intellectual Antonio Gramsci defined the concept of cultural hegemony as “the ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group.” The definition itself is somewhat vague with little historical context through which to grasp the concept, for as historian T. J. Jackson Lears noted, “to give Gramsci his due, we need first to recognize that the concept of hegemony has little meaning unless paired with the notion of domination.” In this particular case, white people make up the “dominant fundamental group,” and it is this group that established order within American society.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race: Volume II, The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America*, with an Introduction by Jeffrey B. Perry, Second Edition (New York: Verso, 2012), 228.

<sup>5</sup> T.J. Jackson Lears, “The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities,” *The American Historical Review* 90, no.3 (June, 1985): 568; Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1975), 328; see also Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco & Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake 1680-1800* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 261-313; Jordan, *White Over Black*, 44-98.

Though culture is dictated from the top of the social hierarchy, hegemony requires, as Lears paraphrased Gramsci, the “consent of subordinate groups” that exist on the lower rungs of the social ladder. In order to achieve this, Gramsci suggested that the ruling group must establish “a worldview that appeals to a wide range of other groups within the society,” and ensure those whom it is attempting to persuade that its primary interests, both ideologically and economically, are aligned with theirs. According to Gramsci, as the ruling group matures in its worldview and gathers influence, it develops into a “historical bloc,” which allows for both “cultural and economic solidarity.” Once the historical bloc is achieved, the dominant group within the bloc has to develop its own “spontaneous philosophy” that supports its interests while allowing for the consent of others the group wishes to include and maintaining the exclusion of those from which the bloc seeks to remain separate. The group’s new philosophy is made up of rhetoric, “common sense,” “folklore,” being made up of a group’s “popular religion” and its “entire system of beliefs,” all of which are communicated through language. As the hegemonic culture gains power through consent and its own dictation of interests, it continues to serve the “interests of ruling groups” within the bloc “at the expense of subordinate ones” without it.<sup>6</sup>

Gramsci’s spontaneous philosophies find their original spark in what anthropologist Clifford Geertz defined as symbols which are “interworked systems of construable signs.” With the adoption of symbols, groups of people come together and create a culture by means of “webs of significance” through which people find common connection. The symbols used by those to develop common connections aid in the construction of ideologies, the function of which, Geertz explained, “is to make an autonomous politics possible by providing the

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<sup>6</sup> Lears, “The Concept of Cultural Hegemony,” 569-571.

authoritative concepts that render it meaningful, the suasive images by means of which it can be sensibly grasped.” Ideology exhibits itself as a “cultural symbol-system” when the rules of an institution that govern “behavior, thought, or feeling” become inadequate to maintain order within that institution. Once a group begins to feel strains within the connections of the group that are instigated by challenges from outside of the group, those who seek to maintain influence within the group create symbols to both keep the group together and preserve the structure of power within it.<sup>7</sup>

In order for an ideology to take hold as a cultural-system, it has to provoke a receptive response. Geertz argued that the “response capacities” of humans relate primarily to the culture within which the ideology develops, with “psychophysical” elements setting “the context within which precise activity sequences are organized” by already established “cultural templates.” Moreover, the “construction of ideologies,” in attempts to maintain order, are what make human beings “political animals.”<sup>8</sup>

The psychophysical elements, of which Geertz wrote, within culture provide the basis for the study of psychological phenomena that promote the construction of culture. Social psychologist Jonathan Haidt has analyzed the anthropological theories of culture put forth by Geertz and others and, combined with his own research, established what he calls Moral Foundations Theory. Through his theory, Haidt explained the similarities and differences with respect to cross-cultural experience and demonstrates the genetic predisposition to six moral foundations. Just as the bodies of human beings and the cultures in which they live have evolved over time, the human mind has experienced a “coevolution” that has been

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<sup>7</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), 5, 14, 218.

<sup>8</sup> Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 218.



instrumental in allowing people to foster connections beyond the family and promoting the creation of social groups. The six foundations that Haidt uses to establish his theory are care versus harm, fairness versus cheating, loyalty versus betrayal, authority versus subversion, sanctity versus degradation, and liberty versus oppression. These moral foundations are, as Haidt noted, “innate” within human beings prior to any exposure to cultural elements. Once exposed to culture, those innate foundations are “revised” and produce the diverse moral systems that exist “across cultures” while providing people with the ability to identify with those whom their moral systems identify.<sup>9</sup>

Haidt applied these six foundations to the formation of social structures, stating that “*human beings are conditional hive creatures* [emphasis his].” He cited sociologist Emile Durkheim in his argument that while human beings are individuals with individual emotive responses, there are “social facts” that exist through the interaction of people. Haidt noted that through these interactions, referred to as “collective emotions,” based on individual moral foundations, develop and find connection through empathy toward others who share common interests based on similar moral matrices.<sup>10</sup>

Haidt further established Geertz’s symbol systems as powerful emotional connections established within a group of people. The symbols a group uses to identify itself are what he referred to as “cultural innovations.” These innovations allow the group to “cooperate and cohere in groups larger than the family” and provide advantage against competing groups. They are copied by those who identify with them, and, as Haidt noted, “cultural innovations can be driven by intelligent designers—people who are trying to solve a problem.” Those

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<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012), 124, 130-154, 170-185, 263-264.

<sup>10</sup> Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 223-226.

exhibiting similarities through cultural innovation empathize more strongly with one another, develop trusting relationships, and cooperate more readily. Within groups there is an innate expectation that “values and norms” will be shared.<sup>11</sup>

The symbol system, as Geertz would call it, of whiteness originated from the color of a white person’s skin. Haidt’s notion of cultural innovations or Gramsci’s spontaneous philosophy revealed itself through the practice of racism based on the ideology of white supremacy that grew out of already established cultural notions of whiteness’s superiority to the inferiority of blackness. These all contributed to the development of the hegemonic culture of whiteness within American society.

The cultural prejudices from which whiteness developed existed long before the establishment of the hegemony within American society. Historians such as Winthrop Jordan, Edmund Morgan, Nell Irvin Painter and others have provided careful study of the development of racism through the evolution of the prejudice-based culture of whiteness during the colonial period, and its continued existence in American political culture through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Prior to English colonization of North America, to racial slavery, even to the knowledge that “some men were black,” Winthrop Jordan noted that “the concept of blackness was loaded with intense meaning” for the citizens of England. Two centuries before Bacon’s Rebellion, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defined black as “deeply stained with dirt; soiled, dirty, foul ... Having dark or deadly purposes, malignant; pertaining to or involving death, deadly; baneful, disastrous, sinister ... Foul iniquitous, atrocious, horrible, wicked .... Indicating disgrace, censure, liability to punishment, etc.” The color white, by contrast, symbolized black’s antithesis. As an English poet mused, “Everye

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<sup>11</sup> Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 210, 223, 244, 358, note 65.

white will have its blacke,/And every sweet its sowre.” White represented cleanliness, pure spirit, and closeness to God. When the English first came in contact with men and women of African descent prior to colonization in North America, the people with darker skin seemed to be, as Jordan put it, “the very picture of perverse negation.”<sup>12</sup>

The blight of blackness felt by the English exhibited closely related characterizations designated for the poor in England. In other words, class stratifications existed in England, and animus between the aristocracy and the poor and working class fermented a bigotry that would lay the foundation of racial prejudice. With the age of discovery, the wealthy elite within English society viewed the laboring and merchant classes as “masterless men” with no conviction to accept the social hierarchy, and went about, as Jordan noted, “begging, robbing, and raping” in order to fulfill “a barbarous or slavish desire to turn the penie.” As Don Jordan and Michael Walsh pointed out, those of the white under classes—including “vagrant children,” “petty criminals,” the Irish, and those “spirited away” by kidnappers who sought to make money on the trade in colonial labor—provided the primary source of labor through their indentured servitude. During the first century of English colonization of the New World, these white men, women, and children worked side-by-side with black men, women, and children, as well as for black landowners whose indentures had expired.<sup>13</sup>

In the aftermath of Bacon’s Rebellion in the late seventeenth century, these interconnected attitudes about race and class emerged. The unity of white and black labor began to diminish as colonial governments sought to divide the laboring class racially in order to

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<sup>12</sup> Jordan, *White Over Black*, 7, 9.

<sup>13</sup> Jordan, *White Over Black*, 42; Don Jordan and Michael Walsh, *White Cargo: The Forgotten History of Britain’s White Slaves in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 13-14, 76, 127, 171.

maintain the balance of power within the colonies. As the primary labor source in the southern colonies evolved from indentured servitude to racial slavery, colonial whites began amalgamating traditional attitudes toward blackness with those of the English poor. Black slaves came to be seen as lazy, licentious, ignorant, and full of “almost every Kind of Vice.” Colonial governments passed laws to keep the two races of the laboring underclass separate, including the outlawing of miscegenation in Virginia in 1691. As the eighteenth century approached, the term “white” came to be used in order to differentiate between the new racial groups within the colony, or as Theodore Allen noted, the term “servant” applied to bond-laborers of European descent and “slave” for those of African descent.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the emergence of white skin privilege in the English colonies, there still existed a sizable white underclass. Lower-class whites, however, felt a sense of empowerment as the upper class used them to police their chattel, both black and white, who might take it upon themselves to run away or rebel. White colonists also sought to control and keep separate the blackness of slavery in order to quell the anxiety of possible slave rebellion and promoted the liberty of whiteness in colonial society in order to pacify any discontent felt among lower-class whites toward the upper class.<sup>15</sup>

This whitening of colonial America fueled the wave of populism that swept through the colonies during the second half of the eighteenth century. As landowners, both large and small, found a common interest in economic prosperity that wholly benefited the upper class,

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<sup>14</sup> Jordan and Walsh, *White Cargo*, 212; Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, 320-321, 335; Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race: Volume II, The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America* (New York: Verso Books, 1997), 228.

<sup>15</sup> Jordan and Walsh, 212; Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina From 1670 Through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1974), 271-273.

and the shared privilege of white skin color, the populist movement gave rise to the liberating philosophy of republicanism favored first and foremost by the Virginia gentry. Those who owned slaves and had servants paralleled the tyranny exerted by King George III on them with the lack of freedom experienced by their own labor force. Those who did not own bond labor or land had to be satisfied with knowing that, as Allen noted, liberty was the “birthright of the poorest person in England” even though such a birthright provided no realistic opportunity of upward mobility except their social position over black slaves.<sup>16</sup>

Accompanying the drive for independence during the late eighteenth century was the continued animosity between the upper and lower classes of American whites, though buffered by the institutionalization of what Judge A. Leon Higginbotham called the “precept of inferiority” toward blacks. The consummate Virginian aristocrat Thomas Jefferson exhibited the widespread distrust and fear felt by the American gentry toward lower class whites when he wrote that the landless manifested “the instruments by which the liberties of a country are generally overturned,” and fear of black slaves continued to pacify the discontent felt by less-affluent whites toward the ruling class. The close proximity in which lower-class whites lived and worked with black slaves and freemen, particularly in the North, provided the means that allowed for the further entrenchment of racist attitudes within the consciousness of the white working class as the United States progressed through the early nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, 369, 381-385; Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, 248-249.

<sup>17</sup> A. Leon Higginbotham, *Shades of Freedom: Racial Politics and Presumptions of the American Legal Process* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), xxv. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, 384; David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, Revised Edition (New York: Verso,

The whiteness of colonial America and the early decades of the republic went through myriad innovations and several expansions in response to challenges from those who did not fully benefit from the privileges of whiteness. In her work *The History of White People*, historian Nell Irvin Painter illustrated the innovative nature of what she has termed the “enlargement of American whiteness.” Originally, the privilege of whiteness extended only to those whites who were free and who owned the requisite amount of property necessary to participate in the political process. Thelma Wills Foote noted the hegemonic nature of whiteness within the Constitution, particularly the three-fifths compromise in the second section of Article I. The compromise, suggested by James Madison, required the consideration of nonwhite slaves as both people and property and was essential in finding a way for a majority of the states to ratify the founding document due to the interests of the gentry from the southern states and its desire to protect its wealth, property, and political power.<sup>18</sup>

Whiteness resided elsewhere within the governing document, particularly Section nine of Article I, the slave-trade clause, which prohibited Congress from ending the Atlantic slave trade prior to 1808, and Article IV, the third clause in Section two, the fugitive-slave clause. Together with the three-fifths compromise, all three of these clauses found their way into the constitutional debate due to what historian Don Feherenbacher called slavery’s “brooding presence in the land.” Though the three clauses, particularly the fugitive-slave

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2007), 34-36; See also Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia’s Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

<sup>18</sup> Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), 201; Thelma Wills Foote, *Black and White Manhattan: The History of Racial Formation in New York City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 227; Robin L. Einhorn, *American Taxation, American Slavery* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 5.

clause, had “corrosive effects on national unity,” the framers added them in an effort to promote cohesiveness within the union. It still remained, as Ferhenbacher noted, that the government’s founding document “dealt with slavery in several places but never once called the institution by name,” thus enshrining the insidious nature of whiteness into American constitutional law.<sup>19</sup>

The property qualification for voting remained in effect throughout the eighteenth century. During the first half of the nineteenth century, state governments began dropping the property requirement to vote, providing, Painter stated, “virtually all male Europeans and their free male children” their voting rights. She referred to this as the “first enlargement of American whiteness.” As those in power expanded whiteness, they maintained the exclusionary practice of whiteness at the same time. White Americans continued in their denial of rights to free blacks and Native Americans as the United States moved westward, and with the country’s manifest destiny came its inseparable relationship with, as Foote noted, “racial domination.”<sup>20</sup>

With white domination over black slaves and freemen, it remained that blacks, regardless of status, were inherently inferior, but an influx of Irish immigrants through the first half of the nineteenth century posed a new problem for those who benefited from their whiteness. As the sectional debate over racial slavery reached fevered pitch, resulting in the Civil War from 1861 to 1865, Europeans began immigrating to the United States in droves during the mid-nineteenth century. Among these were the Irish who moved into northeastern cities during the 1840s in large numbers. The presence of these new Catholic immigrants

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<sup>19</sup> Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government’s Relations to Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 36.

<sup>20</sup> Painter, *The History of White People*, 201; Foote, *Black and White in Manhattan*, 228.

provoked long-held resentment among white Anglo-Saxon Protestants of English stock. Though white-skinned, the Irish found themselves segregated from white America. Made the butt of jokes, white Anglo-Saxon Protestants saw the Irish as little better than blacks, either enslaved or free. The Irish, though economically and culturally disenfranchised, enjoyed political patronage in that, once naturalized, they obtained the right to vote and other basic rights of citizenship, which allowed for what Painter called the “second enlargement of American whiteness.” Black Americans, however, continued to live under the precedent established by Chief Justice Roger Taney, in the Supreme Court’s majority opinion in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857), that African Americans were a subordinate class of people and “had no rights or privileges but such as those” that white people allowed them to have.<sup>21</sup>

With the end of the Civil War and passage of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution following the Civil War, most Americans thought that the United States solved the contradiction of the subjugation of black people through the actions carried out and the legal framework formed by whites. Foote wrote that many believed the United States had “eliminated the aporia of American democracy.” However, following Reconstruction, white politicians in the South continued to use the cultural prejudices, fueled by the belief in black inferiority, inherent within whiteness in their quest to defeat the sustained challenge to white culture. Along with white aggression, the Supreme Court’s decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) laid the foundation for a new version of southern whiteness known as “separate but equal,” allowing Jim Crow’s racist hand to take

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<sup>21</sup> Painter, *The History of White People*, 201, 205; Higginbotham, *Shades of Freedom*, xxv, 64.



hold of southern law and politics and tightly maintain its grip through the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>22</sup>

With the hegemony deeply entrenched in the culture of the South and the region's politics, historians, political scientists, sociologists, and journalists have provided thoughtful study on southern politics and race in recent American history. The historiography of southern politics during the twentieth century shows the continued existence of whiteness. Also shown are the tactics used to maintain the hegemony that changed dramatically in response to challenges prompted by quickly moving social forces that threatened the white status quo that established southern cultural standards.

The partition of racial segregation and the outright denial of suffrage for African Americans that began with the institution of Jim Crow once again insulated whiteness from the challenge of the non-white other. Certainly, slavery had been abolished, but whiteness found new life full of vigor in the South. By 1898, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Louisiana had successfully eliminated the voting franchise for black voters. In North Carolina, white Republican governor Daniel Russell, who had been elected through what journalist Rob Christensen called the "pitchfork revolution," made up of the fusion of poor white farmers and blacks, in 1896, hid in the baggage car of the train that carried him through the eastern side of the state in order to avoid lynch mobs in 1898. He served as governor of the Tar Heel State until Charles Brantley Aycock replaced him in 1901. A Republican would not sit in the governor's chair in North Carolina until after Jim Holshouser's election in 1972.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Foote, *Black and White Manhattan*, 233; Higginbotham, *Shades of Freedom*, 108-118.

<sup>23</sup> Rob Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 7-10; 27-28.

Aycock, a Democrat and outspoken white supremacist, helped lead the charge of reinvigorated whiteness during the midterm election in 1898. Under his leadership, the Democratic Party won 134 out of 170 seats in the General Assembly and gave Democrats the power needed to maintain control of the state through the first half of the twentieth century. With their success came the disenfranchisement of Tar Heel blacks. The newly elected assembly passed a suffrage amendment to the state constitution that required all North Carolinian voters to reregister, “to pass a literacy test, and to write a section of the state constitution.” When the amendment was passed, 53 percent of blacks in the state could not read or write compared with 19 percent of whites. To ensure the suffrage of white Tar Heels, the amendment included exemptions for those who were allowed to vote prior to 1867, as well as their descendants. With a protective hedge surrounding the voting booth, the power of whiteness in the Tar Heel state was secure.<sup>24</sup>

In 1903, Governor Aycock gave a speech to the North Carolina Society of Baltimore, Maryland, and stated that it was time that “the negro learn once and for all that there is unending separation of the races . . . let the white man determine that no man shall by act or thought or speech cross this line, and the race problem will be at an end.” The fusion movement that elected Russell and sent Congressman George H. White, a black man from New Bern, to Washington, D.C. came to an end. Six years prior to Aycock’s address underlining the ideology of white supremacy, eleven blacks had served in the state’s General Assembly and were swiftly voted out of office with the wave of white supremacy that swept over the Tar Heel state. A black North Carolinian would not be sent to Congress again until the elections of Eva Clayton and Mel Watt in November 1992. Throughout the first half of

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<sup>24</sup> Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 23.

the twentieth century, the disenfranchisement of blacks provided the mechanism that allowed for the political suppression of challenges to the hegemony of whiteness.<sup>25</sup>

African Americans represented only a portion of the disenfranchised in American politics during the first half of the twentieth century, and this posed a problem for a balance of power in favor of those privileged in their whiteness. Immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, namely Italians, Jews, and Slavs, felt the exclusionary practices of whiteness as well. Due both to religious differences and the fear of Bolshevism, white America at first refused to accept these new Europeans through anti-Catholic, anti-Semitic, and anti-communist discrimination. However, as the labor-union movement grew through the first decades of the twentieth century, many of these immigrants found a home in the American working class and the Democratic Party, particularly with the advent of the Great Depression and the politics of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal.<sup>26</sup>

The coalition of working-class whites, ethnic minorities, and blacks that developed within the Democratic Party under Roosevelt's New Deal provided a means to crack the powerful, race-based institution of southern Democrats. The inclusion of blacks into the national Democratic Party directly confronted the whiteness of the party in the South. The cross-race coalition proved tenuous however in the southern states as white labor unions in the South failed to challenge the segregation of work places and remained staunchly in favor of the same Jim Crow policies favored by white factory owners that maintained the economic and political disenfranchisement of southern blacks.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Higginbotham, *Shades of Freedom*, 175-176; Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 14.

<sup>26</sup> Painter, *The History of White People*, 347.

<sup>27</sup> Michelle Brattain, *The Politics of Whiteness: Race, Workers, and Culture in the Modern South* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 7.

As African Americans found a place on the fringe of FDR's New Deal coalition during the Great Depression and World War II, the southern and eastern Europeans who planted roots in the United States earlier in the twentieth century earned their acceptance into the hegemony of whiteness. Already accepted by labor unions, these immigrants and their progeny enjoyed inclusion in the programs developed through the New Deal by Roosevelt and the Democratic Party, including the Federal Housing, Social Security, and Wagner Acts. Though none of the New Deal legislation explicitly mentioned race, the majority of African-Americans failed to receive the benefits provided by these programs due to the occupational restrictions within the Social Security and Wagner Acts. The bills excluded a large portion of the black labor force, including farm laborers and domestic workers, as well as teachers, librarians, and social workers. The Federal Housing Act allowed for the racial categorization of appraisals and applicants which provided a way for private mortgage companies to use local Jim Crow laws to discriminate on the basis of race.<sup>28</sup>

During World War II, frustrated African Americans sought to address their lack of freedom in the United States while they fought to free people oppressed in both Europe and the Pacific. Black Americans initiated the March on Washington Movement of 1941 and the "Double Vee" campaign, and their efforts provided limited success, provoking Roosevelt's Executive Order 8802 that demanded the practice of fair employment regardless of race. President Harry S. Truman established his Civil Rights Commission, signed Executive Order 9981 that integrated the United States military in 1948, and included civil rights for African Americans in his re-election campaign.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, 217.

<sup>29</sup> Painter, *The History of White People*, 373.

Following their service during World War II, the veterans of southern and eastern European descent arrived home as heroes and received the government's gratitude through their inclusion as recipients of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, or GI Bill, which constituted the "third enlargement of American whiteness." With this benefit, about half of the returning veterans received government subsidies that provided a total of \$14.5 billion to pay for college educations. The government also instituted the Veteran Mortgage Guarantee program that, with the Federal Housing Authority, provided veterans and their families with mortgages at substantially lower rates than those issued by private financial institutions. In thirty years, from 1934 to 1964, the two government programs financed over \$120 billion in home mortgages, with most of these new homes being built in the quickly developing suburbs that grew out of what Woodward called the "bulldozer revolution," and the growth of urban centers throughout the southern United States. As white people moved into the sprawling suburbs with federally subsidized mortgages, white southern politicians continued, within the color-blind legislation that authorized the housing subsidies, the practice of local residential laws. In the South, that meant neighborhoods with established color lines maintained the exclusion of black southerners from the suburban movement during the post-war era. From 1932 until 1962, 98 percent of the loans distributed by the FHA went to white Americans due to the racial categories stipulated by the federal government and the Jim Crow policies established by local mortgage companies.<sup>30</sup>

Though disenfranchised, black Americans continued to challenge whiteness, and, in May 1954, the Supreme Court presented its decision in the case of *Brown v. Board of*

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<sup>30</sup> Painter, *The History of White People*, 366, 371; C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History*, Third Edition (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 5-6; Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, 107.

*Education*. The Court concluded that “in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.” The overturning of segregation provided through the separate but doctrine established by the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision in 1894, and embraced by southern white supremacists set the stage for a decade long battle between the whiteness of southern politics and its opposition from southern blacks. As C. Vann Woodward noted, the *Brown* decision “marked the beginning of the end of Jim Crow” and presented southern whiteness its greatest challenge yet.<sup>31</sup>

Southern states reacted to the *Brown* decision in different ways and with various levels of anger toward what southern whites believed to be an overreach by the federal government. North Carolina’s neighbor to the north, Virginia, adopted a segregation strategy based on “massive resistance” to the *Brown* decision that sought to shut down the state’s public school system in favor of a private school system that could legally maintain segregationist policies. North Carolina took a different approach in 1956 that came to be known as the Pearsall Plan. The plan permitted the closure of state public schools in response to desegregation while providing aid to white families that wished to send their children to segregated private schools. Though it allowed for the closure of schools, the plan did not stop school districts from planning for desegregation. Black families bore the responsibility of petitioning for desegregation, thereby releasing white families and white school board members from any involvement in this latest opposition to white supremacy. With much of

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<sup>31</sup> Jacqueline Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” *The Journal of American History* 91 (March 2005): 1235; C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, A Commemorative Edition with a New Afterword by William S. McFeely (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 136, 144, 146-147.

the state withstanding the nullification of *Plessy*, schools in Piedmont cities such as Charlotte, Greensboro, and Winston-Salem carried out what sociologist Paul Luebke called “token desegregation,” with a total of twelve students in the three cities’ school systems. White Tar Heel progressives used such tokenism to claim that the state had responded as fast as it could. Tar Heel blacks, however, perceived the plan as a commitment to the racial status quo and attributed it to the state’s “shrewdness in opposing racial change.” As black North Carolinians lamented the state’s refusal to address inequality, other southern states applauded North Carolina’s ability to continue the practice of segregation and maintain its whiteness.<sup>32</sup>

The stringent divisions between black and white North Carolinians forced the state’s political leadership to continue its tightrope act, attempting to maintain the balance of power while giving an ear to the concerns of disenfranchised Tar Heels, and often failed doing so. Governor Luther Hodges helped establish the Pearsall Plan following *Brown*, but prior to his election, Governor William Umstead sent segregationist Sam Ervin to the United States Senate in 1954, and he arrived just after the Warren Court released its decision on *Brown*. Before he left for Washington, Ervin noted in a letter to a confidant that “Whoever goes to the Senate will be charged with direct responsibility for assisting in ending this political trend.” The senator believed segregation to be “a basic natural law” and that “whenever and wherever people are free to choose their own associates, they choose as their associates members of their own race.” To justify his segregationist beliefs at the same time when blacks were challenging the power of whiteness in the Tar Heel state, Ervin, like most white southerners, held responsible those “bungling busybodies who have no personal contact with

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<sup>32</sup> Angie Maxwell, *The Indicted South: Public Criticism, Southern Inferiority, and the Politics of Whiteness* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 6; Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics*, 133-134; Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 162.

the conditions out of which the problem arises,” namely, as historian Karl E. Campbell noted, “the meddling outsiders,” or northerners.<sup>33</sup>

The unrelenting protests of white supremacists continued, and even escalated, in North Carolina in response to *Brown* and the comparatively mild-mannered defense of segregation that Tar Heel politicians such as Hodges instituted. State senator Julian Allsbrook stated that the “fundamental issue [was] whether the Anglo-Saxon race [was] to become a mongrel race” at the annual convention of North Carolina’s Democratic Party in May 1956. The previous fall, four civil rights lawyers’ homes were bombed in Charlotte because of their advocacy for further social integration, and the perpetrators were never arrested.<sup>34</sup>

During the Senate hearings on civil rights legislation proposed by the Eisenhower administration in 1957, Ervin suggested what Campbell referred to as a “soft southern strategy.” This new strategy included a stance against civil rights equality based on conservative interpretation of constitutional law and upheld what William Chafe called the “progressive mystique” of North Carolina’s paternalistic attitude of race relations. The new strategy proved effective and led the way to weakening the bill with the successful addition of an amendment that struck at the heart of Title III within the legislation. The law would allow African Americans to file injunctions when making the claim that they were denied the right to vote. Such injunctions bypassed, in Ervin’s opinion, the constitutional right to a trial by jury. The senator who led the constitutionally-based charge against Richard Nixon nearly

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<sup>33</sup> Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics*, 134; Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 168; Karl E. Campbell, *Senator Sam Ervin, Last of the Founding Fathers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 84, 134-135.

<sup>34</sup> Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 193.



two decades later used the same document to add what Campbell called a “vener of respectability to the southern defense of racial desegregation.” Ervin’s leadership and constitutional argumentation provided for passage of a weak civil-rights bill with a vote of seventy-two for and eighteen against. As Campbell noted, predictably, all “nay” votes came from the “South’s die-hard segregationists.”<sup>35</sup>

Following Ervin’s appointment to the United States Senate and the creation of the Pearsall Plan, North Carolina elected white progressive Terry Sanford governor in 1960. Though progressive, the whiteness of the Tar Heel state limited the progress for which he campaigned. He supported continued segregation but sought to avoid the drama of massive resistance experienced throughout the South, notably the incursion of the National Guard to protect efforts at school integration in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957 or the closure of public schools Virginia carried out in response to *Brown*. Instead of massive resistance, Sanford said the Tar Heel state needed “massive intelligence.” Sanford later stated in an interview with North Carolina Public Television that he had not “wanted to avoid that issue [segregation]. I just didn’t want that issue to be dominant.” In order to win election, Sanford knew that he needed the votes of both blacks, who made up ten percent of voters, and whites, many of whom were segregationists. Sanford won the contest against avid segregationist I. Beverley Lake with 54.5 percent of the vote.<sup>36</sup>

Tar Heel blacks refused to back down to the government’s refusal to desegregate or the white power protests of white Tar Heels. In 1962 and 1963, the Congress of Racial

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<sup>35</sup> Campbell, *Senator Sam Ervin*, 112-122; William Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 6-8.

<sup>36</sup> Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 181-186.

Equality (CORE) organized protests against segregation and inequality in restaurants and hotels throughout the North Carolina Piedmont. In May 1963, the city of Greensboro arrested 1,200 protesters in just under two weeks, but the protests were successful in pushing city leaders to integrate businesses in the city. Though the state lacked the violence reported on television sets and in newspapers that occurred in the Deep South, Jim Crow maintained a tenuous hold on white Tar Heels, but the state's black population continued with its opposition to Tar Heel whiteness and its pressure on the state's government.<sup>37</sup>

At the same time that black students were organizing sit-ins and protests in North Carolina hotels and restaurants, a group of some 500 students from Shaw University took their complaints to the governor's residence, the Executive Mansion in Raleigh. The protesters chanted unrelentingly "We want the governor" until Sanford stepped away from a concert being held in the residence to address the disgruntled crowd. The governor waited for the crowd to die down, and when it did, he stated that he would be "glad to talk . . . about any of your problems, any of your grievances, any of your hopes. This is not the time or place." He continued, telling the students that they were not "bothering" him, and permitted them to stay because he "enjoyed the singing." He further charged that none of the students had "come to me with any requests," to which one of the protesters replied that he "should have known our troubles." The governor lectured to the students that "you're in a democracy." The crowd booed Sanford's response, but dissipated peacefully.<sup>38</sup>

With these newest attacks on Tar Heel whiteness in the 1960s, the Ku Klux Klan reemerged in North Carolina with its greatest influence occurring in the rural east but with

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<sup>37</sup> Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 181-186.

<sup>38</sup> Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 195-196.

limited appeal throughout the state. In 1964, the Klan burned a cross in Raleigh at the Executive Mansion, and the next spring carried out cross burnings throughout the state. It attracted attendances of 6,000 for a cross burning in Sampson County and 5,000 at a Klan wedding held outside Farmville. The House Committee on Un-American Activities performed an investigation on the resurgence in 1965 and noted that “North Carolina [was] by far the most active state for the United Klans of America.” The resurgence was not statewide, with the majority of the 112 active klaverns located in the eastern part of the state, which historically had been home to the largest segment of North Carolina’s black population.<sup>39</sup>

By the early-to-mid 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement in the South had grown considerably. The *Brown* decision had nullified the doctrine of “separate but equal” in 1954; Rosa Parks had taken her seat on the bus in Montgomery, Alabama, and launched the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955; Martin Luther King Jr. had shared his dream in Washington, D.C. in 1963; and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and CORE were organizing blacks of all ages and walks of life against the power of whiteness exhibited by the southern laws of Jim Crow. Southern racists were running out of ways to defend the whiteness within the evocative images and news coming out of the South.

To quell further activism against Tar Heel whiteness, North Carolina politicians used a method that had worked during the Graham-Smith primary of 1950, the tying together of the movement of racial equality with that of anti-communist sentiment, and produced the

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<sup>39</sup> David Cunningham, *Klansville, U.S.A.: The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights-Era Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 45-55; Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 193.

Speaker Ban Law of 1963. The law required state-funded institutions of higher learning to refuse the right of those who were “known to advocate the overthrow of the United States or the State of North Carolina; [or] has pleaded the Fifth Amendment of the Constitution of the United States in refusing to answer any question with respect to Communist or subversive connections, or activities” to speak on their campuses. Though the law was short-lived, having been deemed unconstitutional in 1968, it illustrated the desperate measures Tar Heel hardliners were willing to take in order to silence the challenge to the deeply rooted power of whiteness within state institutions.<sup>40</sup>

The Civil Rights Movement’s challenge to southern whiteness reached national prominence with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Prior to its passage, Sam Ervin passionately defended the status quo, recalling the influence of old southern grievances, the right of the states to govern themselves, and arguing the constitutional limits set on the federal government. In an exchange with Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, the Tar Heel segregationist argued, “I will admit that we have many unsolved problems down there. But I think we could solve them much better if we did not get so much interference from up here on the banks of the Potomac.” He also defended his past contributions to black equality in North Carolina as a member of various governmental institutions such as his local school board, the state legislature, and judge. However, as Campbell pointed out, while the senator “addressed some of the most grievous inequalities of the Jim Crow system . . . Ervin had

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<sup>40</sup> Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 197; Tom Eamon, *The Making of a Southern Democracy: North Carolina From Kerr Scott to Pat McCrory* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 108.

worked to improve the lives of individual African Americans within the system . . . [but] had never attempted to reform the system itself.”<sup>41</sup>

Tar Heel whiteness, having been dealt the blow of *Brown* and the continuous challenges from the Civil Rights Movement, was under attack from the federal government. Ervin described the bill as an “exaltation of government tyranny.” Governor Sanford maintained that the proposed civil rights bill was a matter not for the federal government to legislate but for the individual states to rectify. The long historical memory of southern whites no-doubt recalled the lessons of southern victimization of northern aggression and despicable carpetbaggers taught by their parents and grandparents. Their cultural memory informed them concerning how those outside forces attempted to defy southern tradition and the right of southern states to govern themselves while ignoring the plight forced on blacks through the exclusion of Jim Crow and the privilege of whiteness.<sup>42</sup>

The progressive nature of North Carolina had limits, and those limits have been no better depicted than when the whiteness of the Tar Heel state had to play defense rather than offense. As sociologist and representative to the North Carolina House of Representatives Paul Luebke noted, the progressive cause of modernization “recognized in theory the legitimacy of racial equality but hesitated to take the necessary steps to achieve it unless they saw no alternative.” With the avid protest and filibuster of southern white senators, including Sam Ervin, the Civil Rights Act passed on June 10, 1964, and just over a year later, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act of 1965. With these two landmark pieces of legislation, the last

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<sup>41</sup> Campbell, *Senator Sam Ervin*, 142.

<sup>42</sup> Campbell, *Senator Sam Ervin*, 146; Eamon, *The Making of a Southern Democracy*, 91-92.

desperate grasps of Jim Crow slipped away to become another instance of southern memory.<sup>43</sup>

With the overt whiteness of Jim Crow segregation abolished, blacks became more visible and more vocal in a politics that had been overwhelmingly driven by the whiteness of southern political culture. The overtly racist sentiment of segregationists became less popular among many racially-moderate whites who supported racial equality. As a result, since the Civil Rights Movement, whiteness has become more covert. During the post-civil rights era, Gramsci's spontaneous philosophy that roots a hegemony's foundation in language, as well as conventional wisdom, systems of belief, and cultural memory, forced the language of whiteness to change. Politicians who used overt whiteness as a foundation of power had a problem because the language previously used to defend Jim Crow no longer carried political favor with the majority of Americans. They found their solution in the rhetoric of color-blind politics. Evocative phrases such as the "Silent Majority," "law and order," "forced busing," and "welfare queens" roused middle- and working-class whites' antipathy toward racial equality in the 1970s and 80s without uttering any blatantly racial epithet. Such tactics gave an invisibility to whiteness with an appeal to the distinctly white middle-class notion of individual merit that had developed in white suburbia during the post-war era. Whiteness continued, but those using the hegemony for their benefit found a new method of employing it.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics*, 137; Campbell, *Senator Sam Ervin*, 147-148.

<sup>44</sup> Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*, 273; Jonathan Chait, "The Color of His Presidency," *New York Magazine*, <http://nymag.com/news/features/obama-presidency-race-2014-4/>; For a discussion of whiteness in rhetoric, see Thomas K. Nakayama and Judith N. Martin, eds., *Whiteness: The Communication of Social Identity* (Thousand Oaks, CA.: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1999), particularly Thomas K. Nakayama and Robert L. Krizek, "Whiteness as a Strategic Rhetoric," 87-106. On p. 91 they note, "The invisibility of whiteness has been

In order for whiteness to maintain its grasp on political culture in even the most subtle of ways, it has to appeal to the individuals through whom the power dynamics of the hegemony are exercised. One of the ways with which power is maintained in American political culture is through the individual citizen's behavior on election day, guided by his or her response to a candidate, and indicated by decisions made in the voting booth. In a representative democracy, the rhetoric used by a candidate, a candidate's party, and his or her campaign allows for emotional connections to develop between the politician seeking to win election and the citizen exercising his or her right when an election takes place. Once the emotional connection is set, be it positive or negative, the emotions fostering that connection guide one's rationale and help the voter identify with or against the politician. Since the disenfranchisement put in place by previous Jim Crow laws had been abolished, whites anxious to maintain the racial status quo turned to less offensive rhetoric in order to blur class distinctions and to attract working-class and middle-class white voters. This new brand of conservatism proved incredibly successful. Richard Nixon used it to garner the approval of the "Silent Majority" of the white middle class in both 1968 and 1972, and Ronald Reagan proved its worth in his elections of 1980 and 1984.<sup>45</sup>

Clifford Geertz noted, as had Aristotle long before, that human beings are "political animals." As such, human behavior is driven by instinct. Instincts enable people to make decisions on the fly, typically in the hope of evading danger, quelling a threat, or maintaining a sense of security. One method of finding security and pacifying the emotions fueling the

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manifested through its universality. The universality of whiteness resides in its already defined position as everything."

<sup>45</sup> Drew Westen, *The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation* (New York: Public Affairs, 2007), xv, 69-88; Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*, 1-3, 324.

anxiety of insecurity is an individual's instinctual need for membership within a group. As Haidt noted, human beings are "groupish." When one feels threatened, he or she seeks solace within a collection of people with whom they share a common sense of security. In order to become a part of the group, however, one must adhere to the group's principles, or ideologies. Being included within a group is conditional and, excluding membership dues, one must conform to the beliefs held by the group of which one wishes to be a part.<sup>46</sup>

However, the group has to protect itself from competing groups that adhere to contentious ideologies that may force group members to question the very fabric that holds the group together. The desire for power in order to preserve a sense of security is the primary need of any group, particularly one experiencing a perceived threat from another. One method used to solidify group security is the enforcement of uncompromising ideology so that the group continues to exclude those who do not hold similar ideologies. Doing so, however, means risking the alienation of others whom the group needs to attract in order to retain power. Group leaders may change the way through which the group's ideology is displayed or practiced in order to broaden the parameters of inclusion, allow more members, and ensure that the power the group holds maintains balance in its favor. Inclusion is the only way in which a group nurtures its long-term survival for both the group and the members within it. The practice of conditional inclusion and the innovations made by group leaders provide the basis of hegemonic power and the continued survival of the hegemony.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, 218; Rick Shenkman, *Political Animals: How Our Stone-Age Brain Gets in the Way of Smart Politics* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 21, 173-174; Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 191.

<sup>47</sup> Shenkman, *Political Animals*, 175; Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, note 65, p. 358.



Painter's "fourth enlargement" of the hegemony of whiteness began with the African-American Civil Rights Movement and the eventual passage of the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act of 1964 and 1965, respectively. At the same time, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 allowed for increased immigration from non-European lands, such as Asia, Latin America, and Africa. This most recent enlargement, according to Painter, continues into the present. Though skin color seems to be less important in determining whiteness, it still plays a part, and poor blacks remain at the bottom of the social ladder. Just as significant, as traced back to the establishment of American whiteness, is the privilege that comes with property and wealth.<sup>48</sup>

Jim Crow kept blacks of not only out of the political arena and the social mainstream but also the current of economic growth. African Americans in the South enjoyed little in the way of upward economic mobility, and the politics of segregation and disenfranchisement barred them from any sizable inclusion into the distinctly white middle class. Not until the Civil Rights Act and its Title VII did blacks receive government protection from economic discrimination and the guarantee of employment equality through the creation of the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC). Black Americans, particularly in the South, finally had the gates to whiteness opened to them. Yet, the Affirmative Action policies instigated by passage of Title VII, such as the Philadelphia Plan, drew the ire of conservative whites and their political representatives who added these policies to their list of grievances and expanded the color-blind rhetoric that further solidified white working- and middle-class support. Even with the gates of equal employment opened, the economic

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<sup>48</sup> Painter, *The History of White People*, 389.

disparity between African Americans, other minorities, and whites remained wide and continued to remain so until the opening decades of the twenty-first century.<sup>49</sup>

The politics of social and economic inclusion that provided the development of the latest enlargement of whiteness provided the fodder needed by southern conservatives to defend the normalcy of whiteness under the cover of color-blind political rhetoric in the 1970s and 80s. Howard Zinn noted that though white southerners had held white supremacist attitudes toward southern blacks during the decades of the Civil Rights Movement, their bigotry ranked lower on what he called their “hierarchy of desires,” referring to their economic well-being. With the institution of Affirmative Action, however, white southerners felt the threat of black encroachment on their ability to make a living. It also forced southern progressives to change their rhetoric. Rather than focusing rhetoric that displayed the differences of the people they wanted to include in the mainstream, inclusiveness without difference became the strategy of southern Democrats who attempted to lump working-class and middle-class whites and blacks into one group. Anyone who differed from the white, conservative mainstream—blacks, homosexuals, women, and others who were not white and male—were collected together under terms like “progress” in order to blur the distinctions between the “haves” and “have-nots” within the cultural construct of whiteness. While both parties attempted to appeal to the sense of fiscal security of southern whites, the Republican Party fared better among those who succeeded in moving up the economic ladder and proved to be the party that white southerners believed advocated for their economic self-interest.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Nancy MacLean, *Freedom is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 8, 259-260; Andrew Hacker, *Two Nations: Black & White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 40.

<sup>50</sup> Howard Zinn, *The Southern Mystique* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 8, 11; Earl Black and Merle Black, *Politics and Society in the South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard

Though the free-enterprise message preached by Republicans swayed southern white voters to the Republican Party, the influence of the rise of conservative Christians in the South's political discourse accompanied the party's appeal to the region's white conservatives. With the decision of the Supreme Court in *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, the proposal of the Equal Rights Amendment, and the increased participation of homosexuals in political discourse, the Republican Party embraced southern Christian conservatives who sought to counter these perceivable attacks on southern values. Even though many southern blacks held the same conservative Christian values against issues such as abortion and homosexuality, white evangelical Christians failed to accept the black struggle against continued institutional racism. This kept the vast majority of black Christians from identifying with these new cultural causes laced within the Republican Party's message and helped maintain the cultural divisions based on traditional whiteness within southern politics.<sup>51</sup>

In one instance, culture is defined as “the customs, arts, social institutions, and achievements of a particular nation, people, or other social group.” As Lipsitz noted, “whiteness is everywhere.” It exists in art, film, literature, and especially politics. Politicians campaign on it, white people benefit from it, and minorities are oppressed and differentiated by it. W.E.B. Dubois called whiteness an “Empire” that dominates “through political power built on the economic control of labor, income and ideas.” However one labels it, white

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University Press, 1987), pp. 292-316; Black and Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 5.

<sup>51</sup> Lyman A. Kellstadt and James L. Guth, “Religion and Political Behavior in the Sunbelt,” in *Sunbelt Rising: The Politics of Space, Place, and Region*, eds. Michelle Nickerson and Darren Dochuk (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), Table 4.3 on pages 123-124; Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 78.

people only knowingly experience the presence of whiteness when the privilege that comes with it is challenged.<sup>52</sup>

It is within the stealthy confines of whiteness that has existed in American culture since the dawn of the Republic, and its division from cultural others, where the construct of race in cultural contexts can best be understood. For most of its history, as historian James Cobb noted, the South has existed with the supremacy of the culture of whiteness and an oppressed culture of blackness. These differences in culture informed the historical memory of the regions white and black inhabitants in the last decades of the twentieth century.

Women and others who failed to conform to the traditions of southern whiteness also viewed southern history and the region's politics through a cultural lens wholly different from that of white southern conservatives. With a firm grasp of that understanding, and an analysis of the rhetoric and imagery used by the campaigns of both Jesse Helms and Jim Hunt during their race in 1984, a more complete story emerges. The story is not just one of an Old South racial conservative against a New South racial progressive, but rather one of two successful white politicians who fought for the white soul of a southern state within the hegemonic culture of whiteness.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> New American Oxford Dictionary; Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, 1; For studies on the influence of whiteness on culture see Richard Dyer, *White* (New York: Routledge, 1997). His study focuses on visual representations of whiteness in cultural mediums such as photographs and film. Also see Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness in the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992). Lipsitz describes her work as follows, Morrison "points out the way in which African Americans play an essential role in the white imagination, how their representations both hide and reveal the terms of white supremacy upon which the nation was founded and has been sustained ever since."; W.E.B. Dubois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 48; Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 219.

<sup>53</sup> James C. Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 288-317.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Setting the Tone With Whiteness: April 1983-June 1984**

In September 1983, Jesse Helms told sociologist and North Carolina politician Paul Luebke that “the big factor in this election will be whether there will be a balance to the efforts of Jesse Jackson, who came into this state earlier this year to meet Governor Hunt and then announced that he was going to register, I-forget-what-it-was, 200- or 300-thousand blacks for the sole purpose of defeating Jesse Helms.” The conservative senator was up for re-election in November of 1984, and Jim Hunt, whose second term was set to expire in January 1985, had unofficially thrown his hat into the ring as the prime challenger to Helms’s seat. In his political career, Helms had performed extremely well among white voters in the state, earning at least 60 percent of the group’s vote in his two previous campaigns. Though Hunt received nearly unanimous support from black North Carolina voters, he was also well-received among the state’s white liberals and moderates, as well as conservative traditional Democrats. Those white Democrats proved to be the primary focus of both Helms and Hunt during the first six months of 1984. The culture of whiteness within the Tar Heel state’s white electorate influenced how both candidates approached the much-needed white constituency. Helms solidified his support by continually pointing out the non-white other while Hunt attempted to neutralize those charges with a color-blind message of consensus politics. When the two successful politicians formally decided to run for the Senate seat, the media billed it, as political scientist Tom Eamon noted, the “battle for the soul” of the Tar Heel state. However, with the growth of black political activism that largely favored Hunt, it was not on the entire electorate that either candidate would place their attention, but on the

much-needed votes from white North Carolinians. The 1984 campaign pitted the two men against each other in competition for the white soul of North Carolina.<sup>1</sup>

Both Helms and Hunt were quite aware of the sensitivities of race that existed within North Carolina's white electorate, and the senator used those emotions to discredit Hunt and push the governor into a corner. Hunt, in response, carefully attempted to navigate the slippery slope provided by the senator. He worked to weave in color-blind, meritocratic conservatism with his moderate progressivism to attract white conservatives, but his tortured pragmatism contributed to the lack of integrity in which Helms had effectively framed the governor. By doing so, Helms succeeded in doing three things: he highlighted Hunt's support from the black community; by attacking his character and forcing Hunt to wrestle between social progressivism and political pragmatism, he tarnished the governor's own whiteness; and he elevated his own whiteness in terms of connecting with the state's white electorate.<sup>2</sup>

The campaign began almost two years before election day in 1984. Early polling data showed Jim Hunt leading Helms by twenty-five points in late 1982. Hunt enjoyed high approval ratings because of his help in leading the state's Democratic Party to win several elections during the mid-term year. Helms, however, had suffered a political defeat when his filibuster against a federal gasoline tax failed. The senator had sunk into a "blue funk" according to Carter Wrenn, the executive director of Helms's National Congressional Club, when he learned of the resulting low polling numbers. Helms's unfavorable rating rose "well into the high 30 percent range" and his favorable had sunk to near 40 percent, while Hunt

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<sup>1</sup> Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics*, 167, 169; Alexander Lamis, *The Two-Party South*, 138-139; Eamon, *The Making of a Southern Democracy*, 213.

<sup>2</sup> For an explanation of the evolution of color-blind meritocratic conservatism, see Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*, 231-232. A primary characteristic of one's individual whiteness is integrity, see Dyer, *White*, 21-22.

enjoyed a favorable rating of close to 70 percent and unfavorable around 20 percent. The senator had told his wife Dot that he did not plan to seek reelection and sought to head back to North Carolina with her. Tom Ellis, who Hunt's campaign co-chairman Gary Pearce called the "godfather" of Helms's Congressional Club, pushed Helms toward reelection, and when the Club's pollster Arthur Finkelstein asked that if a "magic wand" could help return Helms to his seat, "would he then want to run again," Helms said, "well, sure I would ... I love serving in the Senate." With the senator's response, Helms's campaign went to work and sought to "resurrect" Helms's image among North Carolinians while at the same time working to, as the Club's treasurer Mark Stephens recalled, "[transform] Hunt into a liberal and a liar." The battle for the white soul of the Tar Heel state was set to begin and would not end until late in the evening of November 6, 1984.<sup>3</sup>

The primary strategy of Helms's campaign sought to portray Helms as a political figure with integrity in the Tar Heel state and Hunt as weak and untrustworthy. As Wrenn recalled, "moving Hunt's unfavorable" rating "was really all [the] election was about." By the spring of 1983, the Congressional Club began advertising in 150 newspapers and seventy-two radio stations across the Tar Heel state with its appeal to white North Carolinians, and the ads, as historian William A. Link noted, "struck hard in issues of race." The radio ads produced by Helms's campaign ran three times per day throughout North Carolina's rural countryside. A North Carolina journalist estimated that Helms's opening political salvo hit the North Carolina voting public 14,000 times from April to June 1983. Coupled with twelve weeks' worth of advertisements in 150 newspapers, the barrage of ads

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<sup>3</sup> Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 248; Gary Pearce, *Jim Hunt*, 128, 148-49; Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 272-273.

cost the Congressional Club nearly \$20,000 per week through the spring of 1983, over a year and a half before Tar Heels would line up at the voting booth.<sup>4</sup>

The early ads produced by the Club associated Hunt with black civil rights leaders and white liberals to sway white conservative opinion of the popular governor. One of the ads showed a photo taken of Hunt sitting with African-American civil rights leader Jesse Jackson – whose campaign for the top of the Democratic ticket in 1984 “mobilized thousands of black voters” – and referenced a 1981 news story that said Hunt wanted to use the State Board of Elections to “boost minority voter registration in North Carolina.” The ad questioned the propriety of the use of state tax money to increase the number of voters in the state, many of whom proved to be black. Another ad showed a photograph of Hunt alongside a photo of Massachusetts senator Edward M. Kennedy and Georgia state representative Julian Bond. The ad stated that both Kennedy, a white Democrat and liberal, and Bond, a black Democrat, civil rights leader, and head of the Black PAC, were “helping Jim Hunt defeat Jesse Helms,” although the “Black PAC” did not exist. The ad further claimed that *The Atlanta Constitution* had quoted Bond as saying that his committee wanted to “run a picture of Jesse Helms in North Carolina newspapers with a rifle’s crosshair over his chest.” Another ad featuring Bond and Kennedy ominously asked, “why do Black PAC and Kennedy PAC want to elect Jim Hunt to the U.S. Senate?”<sup>5</sup>

Rather than responding to the charges put forth by Helms that tied the governor to northern liberals and black political activists, those in the Hunt camp, as Pearce recalled, “fought back with the powers of incumbency.” Hunt traveled back and forth across North

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<sup>4</sup> Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 272-273; Pearce, *Jim Hunt*, 152.

<sup>5</sup> Pearce, *Jim Hunt*, 152; “Helms Ads Take Early Shots at Hunt,” in “Under the Dome,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, May 8, 1983.



Carolina as manufacturing plants opened, factories were built, and his political organization set roots throughout the state. He spoke to crowds gathered to see him talk about his tough stance on crime and his fiscal conservatism, noting that he instituted only one tax increase as governor. He noted the wage freeze for the state's public school educators as an example of his ability to stand up to lobbying influence. The governor, Pearce wrote, "was more moderate than most national Democrats," a fact he wanted North Carolina conservatives to remember. Hunt had released only two advertisements before the formal start of his campaign that attacked the senator for his vote on a bill that "included a doubling of the federal cigarette tax" and his "proposal to reform the Social Security system."<sup>6</sup>

By the summer of 1983, Helms continued in his appeal to Tar Heel whiteness through increased advertising. His campaign spent nearly \$700,000 on, as Link noted, "3,937 ads in 167 newspapers, 353 commercials on fifteen TV stations, and 25,542 commercials on one hundred radio stations" that sought to characterize Hunt as a liberal as well as link him to black political leaders. Most of these advertisements were broadcast and printed throughout rural North Carolina among the more conservative portion of the state's electorate. The senator's strategy had shifted course somewhat with ads that connected Helms with President Ronald Reagan, showing the president's approval of the North Carolina senator. Other ads connected Helms with other national Republican figures including Kansas Senator Bob Dole and Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker from Tennessee who "testified to Helms's integrity."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Pearce, *Jim Hunt*, 152-153; Christensen, "Helms, Hunt Prepare for All-Out Battle," *Raleigh News & Observer*, November 6, 1983.

<sup>7</sup> Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 274; Ken Eudy, "Ads Signal Helms-Hunt Race Is On," *The Charlotte Observer*, June 9, 1983, in *Jesse Helms: Newspapers and Magazine Articles on His Political Career, 1972-1987, Vol. 4, 1983-84*, North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library,

Helms's campaign continued to gain steam due to the massive fundraising drive of his Congressional Club and its revolutionary use of direct-mail fundraising while Hunt's campaign remained quiet. As Link noted, "Helms was better positioned than any other senatorial campaign in the country during 1984." Hunt's campaign, however, worried about getting into an advertising battle too quickly and sought to save as much money as possible for the critical last months of the campaign. The governor traveled across the state and the country to raise funds for his campaign. On one campaign stop in Asheville, the Hunt campaign collected \$221,000 in donations from the mountain counties of North Carolina. Pearce also recalled an "economic-development trip to California" during the summer of 1983 that included fundraising events in San Diego and Los Angeles.<sup>8</sup>

By the fall of 1983, Helms's campaign was spending up to \$50,000 per week on advertising focused on white conservatives, but his biggest boost occurred in early October when he proposed to filibuster passage of the bill creating the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday. On October 3, the North Carolina senator gave a speech on the Senate floor denouncing the civil rights leader as a radical who believed in "action-oriented Marxism" and arguing that those beliefs were "not compatible with the concepts of this country." Though Helms avoided labeling King himself a communist, he claimed in a report submitted to the Senate that King "welcomed collaboration with communists" during the civil rights

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University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Christensen, "Helms, Hunt prepare for all-out battle."

<sup>8</sup> Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 274-75; Pearce, *Jim Hunt*, 153; "Hunt Goes West for Big Contribution," in "Under the Dome," *Raleigh News & Observer*, November 3, 1983.

movement. Because of the civil rights leader's refusal to denounce communism, Helms stated that "King harbored a strong sympathy for the Communist Party and its goals."<sup>9</sup>

Helms further claimed that another federal holiday would affect business and offend Americans. He objected to the holiday because it would cost \$4 to \$12 billion in economic production. Helms noted moreover that "a national holiday ... is or should be an occasion for shared values ... While Dr. King, in his public image did appeal to many of those shared values, his very name remains a source of tension, a deeply troubling symbol of a divided society." Helms continued the theme of King, representing the slain civil rights leader as a "troubling symbol," and stated that "the veneer of religious imagery with which he cloaked his political concepts created the very tension which his name still evokes."<sup>10</sup>

Helms, however, failed to find consensus within his own party. Kansas Senator Bob Dole, a fellow Republican, questioned Helms's argument concerning the loss of productivity, asking, "since when did a dollar sign take its place atop our moral code?" The Kansas Republican further claimed that there was no comparison to the loss of production and remembering "the cost of 300 years of slavery followed by a century or more of economic,

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<sup>9</sup> Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 273; A.L. May, "Helms Links Communism, King to Halt Holiday Bill," *Raleigh News & Observer*, October 4, 1983, in *Jesse Helms: Newspapers and Magazine Articles on His Political Career, 1972-1987, Vol. 4, 1983-84*, North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Bill Arthur, "Helms Delays Senate Vote on Holiday for King," *The Charlotte Observer*, October 4, 1983, in *Jesse Helms: Newspapers and Magazine Articles on His Political Career, 1972-1987, Vol. 4, 1983-84*, North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

<sup>10</sup> A.L. May, "Helms Links Communism, King to Halt Holiday Bill," *Raleigh News & Observer*, October 4, 1983, in *Jesse Helms: Newspapers and Magazine Articles on His Political Career, 1972-1987, Vol. 4, 1983-84*, North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Bill Arthur, "Helms Delays Senate Vote on Holiday for King," *The Charlotte Observer*, October 4, 1983, in *Jesse Helms: Newspapers and Magazine Articles on His Political Career, 1972-1987, Vol. 4, 1983-84*, North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

political and social exclusion and discrimination.” Also, as Link noted, while Helms was lambasting the King Holiday bill, Reagan said he would sign it once it passed the Senate, and South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond and Majority Leader Baker provided their support as well. Regardless of bipartisan support for the bill, Helms stood strong in his convictions concerning the holiday bill but relented a day later when he struck a political deal that called for “accelerated action on a farm bill containing tobacco reforms” in the Senate that would aid North Carolina tobacco farmers in exchange for stopping his filibuster against the King holiday. When the press approached the Hunt administration in North Carolina, Gary Pearce, at the time Hunt’s press secretary, responded for Hunt that the governor favored the bill and that he “[did] not have any comment on what Jesse Helms says or does not say on this.”<sup>11</sup>

Notwithstanding the cancellation of his filibuster, Helms continued in his attempt to defame King. The senator filed a lawsuit that sought to unseal FBI surveillance tapes of King that the Bureau recorded between 1963 and 1968. Helms claimed that it was “imperative” that the tapes be released to uncover the “tremendous speculation over the years as to the contents of the records generated by the FBI regarding the surveillance of Dr. King” prior to any Senate vote on the King holiday bill. The Reagan administration opposed Helms’s request and challenged it in court, and the case was dismissed by Judge John Lewis Smith on October 18 because he did not want to “interfere in congressional affairs.” On the same day Helms gave another speech on the Senate floor and again attempted to connect King with communist subversion. He claimed that the American people had a right to know and that the

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<sup>11</sup> Dennis Whittington, “Helms Stalls Action on King Bill,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, October 4, 1983, in *Jesse Helms: Newspapers and Magazine Articles on His Political Career, 1972-1987, Vol. 4, 1983-84*, North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; A.L. May, “Helms Ends King Bill Filibuster Threat,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, October 5, 1983; Link, 264; Pearce, 159.

Senate had a “responsibility to know” what connections the civil rights leader had with the Communist Party. The Senate, however, under strong objection from Helms, passed the King Holiday bill by a margin of seventy-eight to twelve, and Reagan signed the holiday into law on November 2. Helms claimed that his stand against the bill was not the result of racist sentiment toward King nor any political motivations.<sup>12</sup>

As Helms railed against the King holiday, the Hunt campaign was paying close attention. Gary Pearce remembered that Hunt and his staff felt a “mixture of fear and fury” while they watched Helms’s tirade against the King holiday bill. As it happened, the Hunt campaign knew it would become part of the election. Helms immediately used his stand as part of a fundraising campaign with a letter that, along with rehashing his thoughts on King, said “the left-wing black establishment and the liberals in the news media have branded me a ‘racist.’ That’s how they smear anyone who disagrees with them.”<sup>13</sup>

By November 1983, Helms had begun closing in somewhat on Hunt. The Carolina Poll, conducted by the journalism school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, found that 56 percent of Tar Heel adults polled favored Hunt while 36 percent favored Helms, closing the thirty-point gap of a year prior by ten points. Likely voters, however, favored Hunt with only a thirteen-point margin, 54 to 31 percent. Families in higher income brackets making over \$25,000 a year favored the governor 52 to 44 percent, and those of lower economic status making less than \$15,000 preferred Hunt to Helms 64 to 21 percent. Not surprisingly, the poll found that black Tar Heels favored Hunt 87 to 6 percent, but whites also preferred the governor by a margin of nine points, 50 to 41 percent. In the Carolina

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<sup>12</sup> Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 265-67.

<sup>13</sup> Pearce, *Jim Hunt*, 156-160.

Caravan Poll conducted by Walter DeVries, a pollster living in Wrightsville Beach, voters who had voted in 1982 preferred Hunt to Helms by a six-point margin, 47.3 to 41.1 percent.<sup>14</sup>

As the Hunt camp and North Carolina Democratic Party saw the governor's polling margins shrinking, the party released a \$50,000 radio ad campaign that focused on attacking Helms as a "flip-flopper."<sup>15</sup> In February of 1983, Helms submitted the Social Security and Individual Retirement Security Act to the Senate to reform drastically the Social Security program, and went so far as to give a nearly thirty-minute statewide address on television to promote his legislation. In this address, Helms claimed that the system had "hoaxed" those paying Social Security payroll taxes, and stated that "there is no trust fund ... no vault" that held the money collected through those taxes. He further proposed a "private savings system" with "individual accounts" that would "supplement" the Social Security "taxation system." The proposed system, according to Helms, would "guarantee, once and for all, the security of all elderly Americans."<sup>16</sup> It was on this plan, and Helms's affirmative vote on a 1982 deficit-reduction bill that raised the federal tobacco tax, that Hunt's campaign based its attack. Nevertheless, according to Pearce, attempting to portray Helms as a flip-flopper did not work.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> "Hunt Outdistances Helms by 20 points, Carolina Poll Finds," *Raleigh News & Observer*, November 4, 1983; Christensen, "Helms, Hunt Prepare for All-Out Battle," *Raleigh News & Observer*, November 6, 1983.

<sup>15</sup> Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 275; Pearce, *Jim Hunt*, 155.

<sup>16</sup> Jesse Helms, *Here's Where I Stand: A Memoir* (New York: Random House, 2005), 259-260; "Jesse Helms-Social Security Presentation, February '83," Box 2 in the Video Collection in the James B. Hunt Papers, MC00003, Special Collections Research Center, North Carolina State University Libraries, Raleigh, NC (All citations from here on referring to the James B. Hunt Papers are noted "JBH Papers, NCSU Libraries").

<sup>17</sup> Pearce, *Jim Hunt*, 155.

The Helms campaign responded bitterly and claimed that the ads were false. The campaign released a letter drafted by Helms, stating that Hunt's ads "intentionally distorted my record." The senator prodded the governor, telling him, "Jim, stop trying to hide," and "it isn't right and it won't fool the people. Let's discuss the issues man to man." He attempted to provoke a response from Hunt concerning the King holiday, stating that "not everyone agreed with my opposition to the Martin Luther King holiday ... but they knew where I stood. Where do you stand?" Helms had started challenging Hunt to a debate since the beginning of 1983 and continued doing so periodically throughout the year. Hunt responded that he "[looked] forward to debating Senator Helms on all the issues facing the people of North Carolina, especially the economy, Social Security, and agriculture," with no response to Helms's provocation concerning the King holiday, but that he would not do so until after the Democratic Party primary on May 8.<sup>18</sup>

The letter of late November asking the question "where do you stand?" and addressing the senator's stance against the King holiday became the newest advertisements released by the senator's campaign in early December. Rather than focusing on Hunt as a liberal, the Helms camp changed its message and began going after Hunt's integrity. Hunt, as Pearce noted, "had a propensity to sound liberal before one group and conservative before another." Though he always sought progress, he shifted back and forth to reach his goals. Helms's campaign sought to illustrate the governor's pragmatism as flip-flopping. The Helms campaign's primary researcher, Bob Harris, began clipping and reading every article

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<sup>18</sup> Christensen, "Ads Add Sparks to Senate Campaign," *Raleigh News & Observer*, November 30, 1983; "News Release/ Jesse Helms United States Senator," January 31, 1983 in *Jesse Helms: Press Releases, Statements, Correspondence, and Polls on the Career of Senator Helms, 1972-1987, Vol. 2, 1979-1987*, in the North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

he could find concerning Hunt and his position on issues, and the campaign recorded coverage of his public appearances in order to keep track of any positions that might appear to change from time to time. Through his research, Harris produced several ad scripts and brought them to Tom Ellis and Carter Wrenn.<sup>19</sup>

The new ads became effective ten-second television and radio spots. They focused on such issues as foreign policy, taxes, budget cuts, and the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday. The ads, as Helms recalled, “pointed out the governor’s record of sitting on the fence or appearing to take both sides on an issue so he wouldn’t make anybody mad.” At the same time the ads showed Hunt as dishonest, they showed Helms as steadfast and principled. In response to the new ads, Hunt’s campaign spokeswoman Stephanie Bass noted the governor’s stance on school prayer, Social Security, and the governor’s support of the King holiday. The governor himself, however, remained silent on the issue with the press.<sup>20</sup>

The Helms campaign’s new offensive proved successful, so successful in fact that the new strategy remained intact for the remainder of the campaign. What had been a comfortable twenty-five-point margin in late 1982 for Hunt had all but disappeared after Christmas 1983 when Peter Hart, the governor’s pollster, took his first internal poll since the spring. The campaign rolled into the election year with a much closer margin, only three points, between the two candidates and there were still eleven months to go.<sup>21</sup>

Not long after Helms’s ads challenging, among other things, the governor’s position on the King holiday, Hunt attended a fundraiser hosted by the African-American elite from

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<sup>19</sup> Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 276-277; Pearce, *Jim Hunt*, 155.

<sup>20</sup> Pearce, *Jim Hunt*, 156, 158; Helms, *Here’s Where I Stand*, 162, 167; Christensen, “Helms Strikes Back at Hunt with Ads Questioning His Stand on 8 Issues,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, December 3, 1983.

<sup>21</sup> Pearce, *Jim Hunt*, 161.



throughout the Tar Heel state in Raleigh. The group of black educators, judges, and political figures, including Charlotte mayor-elect Harvey Gantt, provided the Hunt campaign with \$58,000. The governor noted his broad support for racial equality and vocalized his support for the King holiday to the group of black supporters. He further noted that he and nine House members from North Carolina supported the holiday because “we know North Carolina has climbed upward since we set aside the dead weight of discrimination in this country.” Hunt continued and spoke of the need for all North Carolinians to work together so that the state could “climb higher” and open “the doors of opportunity to those who in the past faced closed doors.” Hunt needed to energize the black community as he saw his white support steadily eroding.<sup>22</sup>

In January 1984, Helms continued his attack on Hunt’s integrity when he accused the governor of using his campaign staff to speak for him rather than disclosing his position on issues, referring to those raised in his ads concerning, among other things, the Martin Luther King holiday. Hunt responded by evading the issue of the King holiday and pivoted to the state’s economy, saying that “a big issue” was “people need jobs,” and that “farmers are in trouble.” He pointed out how the federal government had “cut the heck out of the tobacco program” which was crucial to North Carolina tobacco farmers, and that “more should be done for the elderly and the schools.” “Those,” according to Hunt, “[were] the real problems of real people.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> “Blacks Give Hunt’s Campaign a Boost,” in “Under the Dome,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, December 4, 1983.

<sup>23</sup> Associated Press, “Hunt Urges Helms to Address Issues, Not Denounce Senate Race Contender,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, January 20, 1984.

In late January, Hunt attempted to steer attention from the character attacks by Helms to his stance on policy and his moderate conservatism. The governor issued his first policy position and addressed broad support for Reagan's foreign policy initiatives, particularly with regard to Central America. He sought to take some of the wind out of the Helms campaign's sails when he appeased conservative anti-communist sentiment in North Carolina, stating that "Russian attempts to subvert nations ... and to assist communist takeovers is something we absolutely have to prevent without any question whatsoever." Rob Christensen noted that the governor spoke with a "conservative tone" when Hunt addressed the Chamber of Commerce of North Carolina, where he gave his support to Reagan's decision to invade Grenada and "a strong military presence or capability" for regions experiencing destabilization or "communist expansion." He further supported the Reagan administration's foreign aid policy and underlined its importance when he said, "I think we need to give the kind of foreign aid that President Reagan has indicated he thinks is necessary." Hunt did, however, criticize the Reagan administration regarding agriculture policy. He claimed that farmers in the Tar Heel state continued to suffer "a deep ... and growing recession" and that agriculture [was] not included in [the] recovery" that the rest of the country was experiencing. He further noted the administration's failure to balance the federal budget, and stated that his objectives fell in line with Reagan's desire to cut wasteful spending, close tax loopholes, and avoid tax increases. The governor further noted that regardless of Helms's political advertisements questioning Hunt's integrity, "I think the people know where I stand."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Christensen, "Hunt Backs Reagan's Latin American Policy," *Raleigh News & Observer*, January 25, 1983; Daniel C. Hoover, "Hunt Says Reagan Failed to Address Problems with Deficit, Agriculture," *Raleigh News & Observer*, January 27, 1984.

When it came time to announce his candidacy officially, the governor chose a place of symbolic and strategic importance when it came to the appeal of white Tar Heel Democrats, his hometown of Rock Ridge, North Carolina, a small farming community in the eastern part of the state. The governor's campaign kickoff took place at James Baxter Hunt, Jr. High School, only five miles from where he was raised. In front of nearly 2,000 political supporters who came from all over the state, Hunt, as Daniel Hoover noted, "set the stage for a classic political showdown."<sup>25</sup>

During the rally, Hunt delivered a short address that outlined his campaign platform and set the tone for the message he would convey to the Tar Heel state's electorate for the next ten months. He spoke about the economy and the need for tax cuts for "working families and the middle class," while insisting that he would close tax loopholes for the wealthy. Hunt took subtle jabs at Helms's record in the Senate, without ever naming the senator, beginning each sentence with the phrase "It is time we had a Senator who works for . . . ." He alluded to anti-Helms sentiment pertaining to his stance on Social Security, insisting that he wanted to "work for an America that offers dignity and independence, not fear – for our parents and grandparents." The governor passively noted Helms's position concerning civil rights legislation and promised to work "to see that equal rights and civil rights are treated as they should be – a moral imperative and the law of the land" without any mention of race or skin color. He spoke of the need for stronger and higher goals for education, assistance for farmers who were suffering due to recession, and environmental protection. Hunt also addressed foreign policy issues, noting that he believed in a "strong America" that would be

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<sup>25</sup> Daniel C. Hoover, "Hunt Returns Home to Challenge Helms," *Raleigh News & Observer*, February 5, 1984.

a “force for freedom,” and his willingness to negotiate with foreign adversaries, particularly the Soviet Union, to stop global nuclear proliferation. All the issues addressed became themes throughout the campaign, but what stood out most was Hunt’s desire to build consensus through bipartisanship and the need, as he said, to work “together.” Throughout the twenty-minute address, the governor used the color-blind, first-person plural pronouns “we,” “us,” and “our” over forty times, further underlining his belief in broad consensus politics.<sup>26</sup>

Hunt continued pushing his campaign’s agenda when he held a press conference a few days following the launch of his candidacy. He pledged “to get more things done for North Carolina in the United States Senate.” While Helms had continued to focus on issues such as foreign policy, abortion, school prayer, and the King holiday, Hunt said it was his “responsibility to talk about the things that are most crucial” to Tar Heels. North Carolinians, said the governor, were “most concerned about their jobs and making enough money to make ends meet to provide for their families.” Tar Heel farmers continued living through a sluggish economy, and he noted the importance of education and Social Security to the state’s citizens. He promised to “work hardest on jobs and opportunities; on having a fair tax system where tax cuts go to the working people and the middle class and not just the loopholes and tax shelters for the rich.” He also underlined the importance of managing the federal deficit and the need for spending cuts in the federal budget.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Daniel C. Hoover, “Hunt Returns Home.”; “Jim Hunt for Senate Campaign Packet: Announcement Speech, Governor Jim Hunt, Saturday, February 4, 1984,” Box 59 in the Document Collection, JBH Papers, NCSU Libraries.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel C. Hoover, “Hunt Formally Enters U.S. Senate Race,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, February 7, 1984.

Not long after announcing his candidacy, Hunt began his television advertising campaign with appeals to white North Carolinians. The first advertisements produced concentrated on the governor's ability to communicate effectively and relate to middle- and working-class Tar Heels. Hunt spoke about the need "to get things done" in terms of the economy, job growth, and technological innovation, as well as improving the state's education system. He continually underlined the necessity of "working together." With a narrator describing Hunt's accomplishments—including rising reading scores in schools, bringing 200,000 new jobs to the state, providing relief for small family farmers, and developing programs to bring aid to the state's elderly—various scenes flooded the television screen that showed the governor interacting with various groups of people such as students, the elderly, and blue-collar workers, most of whom were white. Hunt spoke on camera about his ability to bring "people together" and make all North Carolinians a part of the process to make the Tar Heel state a better state for all of its citizens. The slogan at the end of each ad was both written on the screen and stated by the narrator: "Jim Hunt for the United States Senate. He can do more for North Carolina."<sup>28</sup>

The governor attempted to begin his campaign with a positive focus on the state and the economic needs of his constituents. As Stephanie Bass told the *News & Observer*, the Hunt campaign wanted to stress the governor's political record and "the state's future, rather than criticizing Hunt's opponent." Bass continued, "The ads are positive ... we think they will make our people feel very good about why we are running for the Senate." The ads, she stated, "have a lot of North Carolina people in them," noting some of the specific groups

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<sup>28</sup> "Hunt Rough TV Spots, 1-30-84," Box 1 in the Video Collection of JBH Papers, NCSU Libraries.

featured in the ads. The campaign focused, she said, “on concerns and issues of the average citizens of North Carolina.”<sup>29</sup>

Another series of TV ads from the Hunt campaign focused on specific groups that predominantly featured the whiteness of the Tar Heel state. One ad entitled “Working People” that featured the working class claimed “these are his people,” and declared that the working people of the state needed “someone working for them” in Washington. It continued by showing Hunt speaking with a white farmer, telling him that the senator from North Carolina is “not the senator from New York or California somewhere” and that the “senator from North Carolina ought to stand up for North Carolina products,” taking a passive jab at Helms’s out-of-state support. Hunt also alluded to the tax increase on tobacco that Helms had supported, and told a group of farmers that they ought to fight the tax increases on their products “with everything you’ve got.” In another ad entitled “Farmer,” the screen opened with a white male, presumably a farmer, speaking positively about Hunt and continued with a narrator describing the governor’s ability to connect with and understand North Carolina farmers. Hunt was shown speaking with a group of white farmers and declared that “it’s wrong what they’ve done” in reference to federal agricultural policy, which pointed to both the negative effects of the policy on the state’s farmers and Helms’s position as chairman of the Senate Agricultural Committee. The ad concluded with the narrator declaring that “we need that fight in Washington, for our farmers, for North Carolina,” and a short snip of a farmer stating, “we need Jim Hunt up there.” Gary Pearce noted that the ads showed that Hunt knew the troubles of Tar Heel workers and farmers and that he was more in touch with

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<sup>29</sup> “Hunt Campaign to Hit TV Next Week,” in “Under the Dome,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, February 2, 1984.

their interests than Helms, who spent his time in Washington railing on communism and “conservative ideological crusades.”<sup>30</sup>

By mid-February, according to a poll conducted by North Carolina Opinion Research, Inc., Helms had cut Hunt’s lead to within two points. Walter DeVries conducted the poll from January 25 until February 5, and noted that Hunt enjoyed a margin of 50.9 percent to Helms’s 49.1 percent and did not take into account undecided voters or those who would not vote. Tellingly, Hunt lost two percentage points among Democrats polled, falling from 56.8 percent in an earlier poll to 53.4 percent. Helms received the approval of 72 percent of Republicans polled and that of 32.8 percent of Democrats. Helms’s campaign strategy targeted specifically to white North Carolinians was working, while Hunt’s message of color-blind inclusion was not.<sup>31</sup>

Helms’s strategy focused on Hunt’s political character continued chipping away at traditional Democratic support, and the senator knew it. A four-page letter from Helms’s campaign dated February 8 began circulating throughout the state. The fundraising letter targeted Jesse Jackson and connected the civil rights leader and candidate in the Democratic presidential primary to Hunt. The letter mentioned Jackson by name twenty-four times but did not mention Hunt once. As the *N & O* reported, Helms portrayed “himself as a candidate on the political ropes because of Jackson’s efforts to register black voters.” In the letter, Helms said that Jackson’s political activism “[had] hit me like a ton of bricks – a monumental blow to my campaign.” The senator accused “Jesse Jackson” of instigating “a

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<sup>30</sup> “Hunt Rough TV Spots, 1-30-84,” Box 1 in the Video Collection of JBH Papers, NCSU Libraries; Pearce, *Jim Hunt*, 164.

<sup>31</sup> Daniel C. Hoover, “Poll Says Helms, Hunt Nearly Even in Contest,” *News & Observer*, February 11, 1984.

liberal ‘voter registration drive’ to kick me out of the United States Senate ... and then, Jesse Jackson met with my opponent – who has just filed his candidacy against me.” Jackson’s goal, the letter said, was to register “300,000 more ‘straight ticket’ anti-Helms voters in North Carolina.” Helms claimed that black voter registration had increased by 37,000 in North Carolina with only a less-than-1 percent increase in conservative registrations. The letter concluded with a plea to conservatives to send Helms’s campaign donations to help overcome Jackson’s influence in North Carolina. Helms finished by writing, “Without your support, conservatives like me wouldn’t even be in the Senate fighting for President Reagan, wrestling against Ted Kennedy, or standing up against the budget busting legislation liberals like Jesse Jackson [who was not even in the Senate, nor running for a Senate seat] would love to pass each day – like the billion-dollar Martin Luther King Holiday.” Included in the fundraising mailer was a photo of Jackson by himself, a handbill with a photo of Jackson sitting with Hunt, and two quotes from Jackson: “We want it all” and “from the outhouse to the courthouse, to the state house, to the white house, March on March on.”<sup>32</sup>

The Helms campaign continued its assassination on Hunt’s character with an ad that swept the knees of Hunt’s campaign out from under it. At a meeting of the National Governor’s Association earlier in February, Hunt supported a measure proposed at the conference for a deficit-reduction package comprised of both increased taxes and cuts in spending, including both military spending and “a freeze on cost-of-living increases for federal employees.” Though he voted for the measure, he declared that he “strongly [opposed] any general increase in taxes, which might choke off the current economic

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<sup>32</sup> “Helms Zeros in on Jesse Jackson in Letter,” in “Under the Dome,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, February 22, 1984.



recovery.” Helms used Hunt’s perceived flip-flop against the governor in a new ad. The senator’s campaign acquired video of the meeting in which the measure was approved and caught Hunt raising his hand. With this image of Hunt with his hand raised frozen on the screen, the ad stated that Hunt voted to raise taxes. The ad, first broadcast in late February, became a staple of the Helms campaign, and would be shown in various forms and cuts, as Gary Pearce recalled, “thousands of times in the months ahead.”<sup>33</sup>

The Helms campaign kept with the theme of character assassination. Another ad broadcast in March from the Helms campaign showed a clip of Hunt claiming that Helms raised most of his campaign funding from out-of-state donors with his well-used line that he was not “a senator from New York or California somewhere.” The ad continued with an image of an invitation from a fundraiser held for Hunt in New York City and made the claim that there was a “New York Committee for Jim Hunt,” contrasting the governor’s image as a candidate from North Carolina while he attacked Helms for raising money out of the state. The new ads, Carter Wrenn said, “hit Hunt in the character solar plexus.”<sup>34</sup>

As Helms continued his attack on Hunt’s character, the governor released his deficit reduction plan that underlined the governor’s fiscal conservatism, connected him with President Reagan, and sought to attract conservative white Democrats. At a news conference, the governor stated that his plan would cut \$80 to \$100 billion from the federal deficit. Hunt’s plan called for the ratification of a constitutional amendment that would require a balanced federal budget to be approved by Congress and the president. He also called for a

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<sup>33</sup> “Governors Call for Tax Boost to Reduce Federal Deficit,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, February 27, 1984; “Sawyer DOB – Hunt-Helms 10/84,” Box 3 in the Video Collection of JBH Papers, NCSU Libraries; Pearce, *Jim Hunt*, 165.

<sup>34</sup> Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 279; United Press International, “Hunt gets \$130,000 at Two Events in N.Y.,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, March 1, 1984.

repeal of a portion of Reagan's tax cut affecting those with yearly incomes of more than \$50,000, limiting them to \$700 in yearly savings while allowing those under that threshold to continue saving more. Hunt claimed that the three-year tax cut, as reported by journalist Mary Anne Rhyne, "hurt middle-class and working people." The governor continued his swing of conservatism by giving praise to Reagan's deficit reduction plan, and his campaign also stated that the governor was in favor of a constitutional amendment supporting school prayer.<sup>35</sup>

In response to the earlier Helms ads displaying Hunt's out-of-state fundraising, the governor's campaign produced a barrage of ads in response to those attacks on his character. Rather than making vague inferences to Helms's misrepresentation of North Carolina's issues, these ads struck directly at the senator. In one ad produced in March entitled "Real Issue," Hunt spoke directly to the camera, stating that, while he was being accused of holding out-of-state fundraisers, 75 percent of the money Helms had raised came from "other states." He further challenged Helms to "come out from behind the negative ads and talk about . . . the future of North Carolina." In an attempt to deflect the ongoing character attacks, Hunt ended the ad by asking, "where do you stand, Jesse?"<sup>36</sup>

Hunt continued touting his moderate, pro-business conservatism in an effort to appeal to white conservatives. At a luncheon in Washington, D.C., for political action committees that represented trade groups and business, the governor bragged about the industrial

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<sup>35</sup> Mary Anne Rhyne, "Hunt Offers Way to Cut Deficit," *Raleigh News & Observer*, March 3, 1984; "Hunt Praises Reagan Deficit Reduction Plan, Calls for Even Stronger Action," *Raleigh News & Observer*, March 19, 1984; "Hunt Long Has Favored Public School Prayer," in "Under the Dome," *Raleigh News & Observer*, March 8, 1984.

<sup>36</sup> "D.H.S. Films, Hunt JHSEN-108 'Real Issue,' 3/16/84," Box 2 in the Video Collection of JBH Papers, NCSU Libraries.

development in the Tar Heel state under his administration, and claimed that his administration had a record of maintaining balanced budgets in North Carolina. He noted that he did not raise any general taxes in the state during the recession of the early 1980s, but rather “cut people off the payroll, put in a freeze on salaries, and cut back spending.”<sup>37</sup>

The governor continued toeing a conservative line in order to maintain a hold on white conservative Democrats in North Carolina through the beginning of April when he gave a policy address in which he declared support for Reagan’s rearmament program. Hunt stated that he believed “we must move quickly to strengthen out conventional military forces and improve their ability to respond when our interests are threatened around the world.” He also underlined the need for tough negotiations with the Soviet Union concerning nuclear arms control. He took a subtle jab at Helms, declaring “that arms negotiations [were] not a sign of weakness. They [were] a sign of sanity.” Hunt supported continued growth of the military up to 5 percent, slightly less than Reagan’s proposed 7.5 percent increase, and the administration’s desire to expand the Army’s manpower and expand the country’s naval armada. The governor rounded out his early spring conservative crusade by touting his tough record on crime and claiming that his administration “had helped ‘turn the tide against crime’” in the Tar Heel state.<sup>38</sup>

Through the winter into spring, Hunt and Helms worked arduously in their attempts to attract white conservative North Carolina Democrats to their respective corners. As mid-

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<sup>37</sup> “Hunt Shows Off Conservative Credentials,” in “Under the Dome,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, March 22, 1984.

<sup>38</sup> “Hunt Shows Off Conservative Credentials,” in “Under the Dome,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, March 22, 1984; Christensen, “Hunt Supports Defense Increases,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, April 4, 1984; Christensen, “Hunt Says Programs Turned the Tide on Crime,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, April 5, 1984.

April approached, Walter DeVries released the results of his most recent poll of 623 registered Democrats throughout the state. Hunt maintained a hold with 52.8, but Helms had gained the approval of 37.1 percent of the traditional Democratic Party's base. DeVries claimed that, based on this poll and one he conducted with 200 Republicans, the two candidates were "virtually tied, with Helms ahead by 1.8 percentage points," well within the 3 percent margin of error. Just days after the *News & Observer* released the results of DeVries's poll, Helms sent out a mailer to North Carolina Democrats that claimed the governor was "too liberal for North Carolina." The senator's mailer included a brochure that linked Hunt with Minnesota Democrat and Democratic presidential nomination contender Walter Mondale and noted the support given to Hunt by organized labor.<sup>39</sup>

With the campaign tightening as the calendar passed to May and the Democratic primary approaching, Hunt went on the offensive against Helms. Hunt wanted to hold as many as ten debates with Helms following the primary election on May 8. Foreshadowing his newest campaign advertisements, Hunt declared, "here is a man who has voted against our people on the economy . . . on education . . . on Social Security . . . on clean air and clean water . . . Everytime [sic] you turn around he's voted against the people of North Carolina." Hunt continued his offensive in a speech at a Fuquay-Varina tobacco storage warehouse where he held Helms responsible for the problems affecting North Carolina farmers. He told the crowd of tobacco farmers that when the voters sent him to Washington, he would fight for "greater federal support for exporting tobacco and other farm

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<sup>39</sup> Elizabeth Leland, "Hunt-Helms Senate Race on Minds of Democrats," *Raleigh News & Observer*, April 8, 1984; United Press International, "Hunt, Helms Switched in Poll Results," *Raleigh News & Observer*, April 11, 1984; "Helms Rips Hunt in Letter to Democrats," in "Under the Dome," *Raleigh News & Observer*, April 11, 1984.

commodities.” He also criticized Helms’s 1982 vote that doubled the federal excise tax on cigarettes, which, Hunt claimed, “pushed cigarette sales down 5 percent in 1983.” In a position paper released in conjunction with his address, Hunt declared that “farmers have seen the most dangerous . . . collapse of the congressional farm coalition in the twentieth century” under Helms’s chairmanship of the Senate Agricultural Committee. He further criticized the senator allowance of “nine times more assistance into Illinois than into North Carolina” when Helms voted against emergency aid that would help the Tar Heel state’s farmers.<sup>40</sup>

Following Hunt’s appeal to North Carolina farmers, he broadened his appeal to whiteness with a new series of ads, all of which attacked Helms’s voting record in the Senate. They focused particularly on Helms’s senate votes that had a negative impact on targeted, heavily white, constituencies in North Carolina, such as the elderly, farmers, and the working and middle classes. The first ad stated that it was “time to hear the truth” concerning Helms’s voting record and that the “fun and games are over.” Hunt had removed his gloves and was going after Helms. The other two ads expanded on the theme presented in the first one. In an ad entitled “Agriculture,” Hunt declared that “it’s time for Jesse Helms to cut out the negative ads and talk about his record.” Painting a negative picture for farming in North Carolina during Helms’s tenure as chairman of the Senate Agricultural Committee, Hunt stated, with accompanying text on the screen, that 5,000 farmers were out of business in the state and other farmers still operating were “deeper in debt.” He then noted the measures against which Helms had voted, such as bills supporting agricultural research and funding for

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<sup>40</sup> A.L. May, “Hunt Says Helms’ ‘Record of Failure’ Hurts N.C. Farmers,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, May 4, 1984.

disaster loans. The ad concluded with Hunt highlighting Helms's vote to double the tobacco tax and asking, "who's he fighting for?" The ad "Tax Cuts" opened much the same way, with Hunt bringing Helms's record front and center. Hunt compared the taxes paid, primarily between the lower and working classes and the middle and upper-middle classes. He also claimed that the tax measures Helms supported would raise taxes on the lower and working classes while providing tax breaks for the upper-middle class and wealthy. Hunt stated further that Helms voted for "tax loopholes for the wealthy" and "tax breaks for the big oil companies." Ending the ad, Hunt looked into the camera and told voters "when Jesse Helms asks for your vote, you ask him if he voted for you."<sup>41</sup>

As Hunt's ad campaign highlighted the color-blind domestic issues important to North Carolinians, the governor went after Helms on foreign policy with regard to what Hunt outlined as the senator's connection with Salvadoran right-wing political figure Roberto D'Aubuisson. Hunt claimed that Helms wanted to discredit the election in El Salvador that saw the moderate Jose Napoleon Duarte defeat D'Aubuisson. Helms had claimed that the United States government attempted to "rig the election." Hunt jumped at Helms's criticism of the outcome of the election because the Reagan administration had supported Duarte's efforts to win the election. Helms had sent a letter to Reagan asking for the resignation of United States ambassador to El Salvador Thomas Pickering prior to the election because the senator believed that Pickering tried "to rig the election" against D'Aubuisson. Helms further insisted that "the CIA and the State Department tried to bribe officials to give the election to

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<sup>41</sup> "DHS Films, Hunt JHSEN-110, 'Fun & Games,' 5/7/84," Box 2 in the Video Collection of JBH Papers, NCSU Libraries; "DH Sawyer, Hunt JHSEN-110 'Fun & Games,' JHSEN-111 'Agriculture,' JHSEN-112 'Tax Cuts,' 5/16/84," Box 2 in the Video Collection of JBH Papers, NCSU Libraries.

Duarte. Hunt railed against Helms's connection to D'Aubuisson and his right-wing ARENA political party. The *Albuquerque Journal* had reported earlier that aides to the senator had helped establish D'Aubuisson's political party, ARENA, and Hunt claimed that the party "[had] been linked to the right-wing death squads that have murdered thousands of civilians in El Salvador." Helms countered that he did not know of any evidence that linked D'Aubuisson to the death squads, saying that "the CIA doesn't have any evidence, the State Department doesn't have any evidence. Nobody in this city has any evidence." Hunt countered, "there was a great deal of evidence," ranging from "news accounts, testimony before Congress ... and a State Department denial of a visa to D'Aubuisson."<sup>42</sup>

Hunt continued to hammer Helms and his claim of rigged elections in El Salvador through May into June in an effort to deflect the consistent attacks on his character.

According to Link, the governor gave interviews and multiple speeches in which he criticized the senator's connection with D'Aubuisson and alleged that Helms was "sabotaging" the Reagan administration's foreign policy.<sup>43</sup> The Hunt campaign illustrated the link between Helms and D'Aubuisson, as well as other right-wing dictators, in its next series of ads. At the end of May, the governor's campaign produced a television ad that linked Helms to General Leopoldo Galtieri of Argentina, Major General Augusto Pinochet of Chile, Prime Minister Pieter Willem Botha of South Africa, and D'Aubuisson. The ad accused Helms of backing the Argentinians rather than British allies in the Falklands War, setting up D'Aubuisson's political party, and supporting the "right-wing generals in Chile and "racist leaders of South

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<sup>42</sup> Rob Christensen, "Hunt Says Helms Trying to 'Sabotage' Policy, Undermine Salvadoran Vote," *Raleigh News & Observer*, May 11, 1984.

<sup>43</sup> Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 281.

Africa.” While connecting Helms to these men, the ad concluded, “it’s no wonder he’s made enemies for North Carolina in the Senate.”<sup>44</sup>

In the midst of the attacks on Helms’s domestic and foreign policy positions, the senator rehashed the King holiday and Hunt’s connection to black Tar Heel voters as well as issuing a stringent denial of the foreign policy implications put forth by the governor’s campaign. Prior to a fund-raising dinner in Roanoke Rapids, Helms held a news conference where he labeled Hunt a “windshield wiper” because of his movement “back and forth on issues,” and opined that the governor was ashamed of his support of the Martin Luther King holiday. Helms claimed further that “Jim Hunt knows he won’t be elected unless there is a massive turnout of blacks.” With regard to the current campaign discourse concerning his response to the Salvadoran election, he stated that he denied the charges of leaking information regarding United States involvement. He stated, “I didn’t get one scintilla of evidence from the Senate intelligence committee,” and insisted that “in fact, I know more about what’s going on there than the committee.”<sup>45</sup>

By June, Hunt returned to addressing his domestic policy positions and criticizing Helms’s domestic record. In Raleigh at a news conference, Hunt claimed that Helms showed a “mean-spirited attitude” with his consistent votes “to weaken” Social Security and Medicare. He stated that “once [the elderly] find out what his record has been, I am convinced they will say, ‘I don’t want to have a person like that representing me in the Senate.’” The governor claimed that some of North Carolina’s elderly could not afford to buy

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<sup>44</sup> Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 281; “DHS, Hunt JHSEN-114A ‘Friends,’ JHSEN-114B ‘Friends,’ JHSEN-115 ‘Yes,’ 5/31/84,” Box 2 in the Video Collection of JBH Papers, NCSU Libraries.

<sup>45</sup> “Helms Says Hunt Needs Black Vote,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, May 19, 1984.



newspapers and that others could not afford to have vision problems corrected, causing them to “have trouble keeping up with events in detail.” Hunt cited twelve senate votes Helms had cast “against Social Security maintenance.” During the news conference, the governor also released a new ad that denounced Helms’s record concerning Social Security and that the senator had submitted a plan to “scrap” the program. Hunt further noted the issues of Social Security and Medicare in Asheville, and stated that his plan would require hospitals to set prices for basic treatments to keep the cost of earned benefits down in order to maintain the solvency for the two programs.<sup>46</sup>

Hunt continued his domestic policy theme through the first two weeks of June until the Helms campaign released an ad that claimed that “North Carolinians pay the highest state taxes in the South” and that “state taxes have soared to an all-time record high” under Hunt’s administration. The ad concluded with the narrator asking, “how can we afford Jim Hunt in Washington?” Two officials in Hunt’s administration denounced the ad. Mark Lynch, the state’s Revenue Secretary stated, “this ad paints a totally misleading picture of the tax situation in North Carolina” and noted that “the percentage of personal income tax that has gone to pay state and local taxes actually declined” during Hunt’s governorship. The ad claimed that the state’s yearly revenue “had increased from \$2.27 billion to \$4.32 billion” while Hunt had been in office. Deputy Budget Director Marvin Dorman stated that “it is

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<sup>46</sup> Ginny Carroll, “Hunt Raps Helms’ Social Security Record,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, May 31, 1984; “DH Sawyer, Hunt JHSEN-113 ‘Standing Tall’ 5/25/1984,” Box 2 in the Video Collection of JBH Papers, NCSU Libraries; Associated Press, “Hunt Offers Changes in Medicare to Hold Down Health Costs,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, June 1, 1984.

certainly true that we have experienced an increase in state revenues ... but that is primarily due to economic growth and inflation; not increases in tax rates.”<sup>47</sup>

With Hunt getting hammered by Helms for state tax revenues, during the last week of June his campaign returned to foreign policy, noting Helms’s connection with D’Aubuisson and attempting to show the divide between the senator and President Reagan on the issue. Hunt, noting a report in the *New York Times*, claimed that Helms’s accusations of United States involvement in the election held in El Salvador “may have endangered the life of the U.S. ambassador.” The *Times* had reported that D’Aubuisson and other ARENA Party members had “planned to kill Ambassador Thomas R. Pickering.” Of the news, Hunt said that this “[provided] further evidence that Senator Helms has picked the wrong friends in the country” and proclaimed that Helms should “come clean about his role in establishing El Salvador’s right-wing party.” Helms had reportedly been rebuked by the administration once Reagan learned of the assassination plot, but Helms disavowed any such report, claiming that he and the president met “at the request” of Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker. Baker, in order to quell the notion that Helms had angered the president, noted that the senator and the president had “a cordial and agreeable meeting.”<sup>48</sup>

In late June, the Hunt campaign produced a new television ad that centered on the relationship between Helms and D’Aubuisson and aired while D’Aubuisson was visiting

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<sup>47</sup> United Press International, “Hunt Reiterates Plan for Benefit Programs,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, June 2, 1984; “Hunt Tries to Sway Elderly by Targeting Benefits,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, June 4, 1984; Elizabeth Leland and Ben Sherwood, “Helms, Hunt Spar Via Television in Battle for Senior Citizen Vote,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, June 9, 1984; Rob Christensen, “Top Budget Officers Back Hunt Against Helms’ High-Tax Charge,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, June 19, 1984.

<sup>48</sup> Christensen, “Hunt Says Helms May Have Endangered Ambassador,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, June 24, 1984.

Washington, D.C. The ad opened to black and white photographs of dead women, children, and men. As the pictures panned over the television screen, the narrator declared, “this is what they do, the death squads of El Salvador” and proclaimed it the murder of “innocent men, women, and children.” The ad continued, showing a picture of D’Aubuisson and stating that he was “accused” of being responsible for the “death squads.” It then showed a picture of Helms with the narrator describing him as D’Aubuisson’s “best friend in Washington.” In response to what became known as the “dead bodies ad,” Helms gave a statement live on the evening news, stating, “I am just disappointed in the governor. I didn’t think he’d go that far.” He told the *N&O*, “it’s one thing to attack me on Social Security and taxes and school prayer. But when Jim Hunt starts involving me with murder, well ... I’m just absolutely astonished he would stoop that low.” Hunt’s campaign responded through its spokesman Will Marshall who said, “It’s disturbing because the reality it shows is disturbing ... Senator Helms has tried to bury his head in the sand and say that reality doesn’t exist.”<sup>49</sup>

Helms’s campaign responded with advertisements of its own that effectively nullified the desired effect of the governor’s provocative ad. In the television ad, former Wake County Commissioner J.T. Knott declared that he had “been active in the Democratic Party for many years” and that he had seen a lot of political advertising. He then proclaimed that Hunt had “crossed the line of decency and fair play” and demanded that he apologize to Helms and his family.” Another ad questioned Hunt’s integrity, asking “what kind of man ... would attempt to tie his opponent to murders just to gain political office?” Concluding, the narrator stated that Hunt’s ads “tell you more about Jim Hunt than Jesse Helms.” In the end, the “dead

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<sup>49</sup> “D.H.S. Films, Hunt, JHSEN-116 ‘Death Squads’ 6/25/84,” Box 2 in the Video Collection of JBH Papers, NCSU Libraries; “Hunt Ad Hits Hard at Helms, D’Aubuisson,” in “Under the Dome,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, June 28, 1984.

bodies ad” lost Hunt the high ground and allowed Helms to question his character, with Helms declaring that he “thought better of the governor than that.”<sup>50</sup>

With the shock of the dead bodies ad, the first six months of the campaign came to a close with another four months to go, but Helms and Hunt had already saturated media outlets throughout North Carolina. During the first three months of 1984, the Hunt campaign had raised nearly \$1.7 million and spent just over \$1.5, most of which went to advertising. Helms’s campaign raised nearly \$2 million in the first three months, totaling \$6.4 million since 1983 compared to Hunt’s \$3.2 million total. Helms spent just over \$2 million in the first quarter of the year with \$867,000 going toward advertising.<sup>51</sup>

Helms’s character assassination of Hunt through his campaign’s advertising was working. The spring 1984 Carolina Poll showed that the approval of white North Carolinians had shifted to Helms by a margin of 12 percent. In October 1983, Hunt had led that demographic by 9 percent. Predictably, Hunt maintained the support of black Tar Heel voters with a comfortable 86 percent. According to the Carolina Poll, Helms’s emphatic stand against the King holiday proved to be the most influential issue for voter behavior behind party loyalty. The majority of white North Carolinians did not support the King holiday, and Helms was winning that group of white people by 40 points over Hunt. Hunt won the approval of 70 percent of Tar Heel whites who supported the holiday, but they only

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<sup>50</sup> “D.H.S. Films, Hunt, JHSEN-116 ‘Death Squads’ 6/25/84,” Box 2 in the Video Collection of JBH Papers, NCSU Libraries; “Hunt Ad Hits Hard at Helms, D’Aubuisson,” in “Under the Dome,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, June 28, 1984; Pearce, *Jim Hunt*, 178-79; “News 6/26-7/1, New Helms Spot, Air 7/4/84,” Box 9 in the Video Collection of JBH Papers, NCSU Libraries; Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 283.

<sup>51</sup> Daniel C. Hoover, “\$1.7 Million Raised by Hunt’s Campaign in 3 Months of ’84,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, April 17, 1984; Daniel C. Hoover, “Helms’ Campaign Raised \$2 Million in 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter of ’84,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, April 18, 1984; Daniel C. Hoover, “Helms Lists Major Donors, Most Out of the State,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, April 19, 1984.

comprised 17 percent of the white population. In the eastern counties of the state, with black populations of over 40 percent, Helms held a 30 point margin and a 12 percent margin among white voters in counties with low black populations as one moved westward through the state.<sup>52</sup>

Political scientist Merle Black stated that it was not just the King holiday itself that Helms “tapped” with his defiant stand, but “it’s the feeling that’s associated with it . . . the feeling of paying too much attention to blacks, that it was unnecessary, that we don’t need another holiday.” That same feeling of “paying too much attention to blacks” reemerged throughout most of 1983 and the first six months of 1984. Helms repeatedly referred to Jesse Jackson in newspaper ads and fundraising mailers. He pointed out the importance of the black vote for Hunt. It was not lost on Helms or the North Carolina Republican Party that 113,575 black Tar Heels added themselves to the state’s voter rolls between October 1982 and May 1984. The rise of political engagement by black North Carolinians instigated a corresponding rise in white registered voters when 142,348 white Tar Heels registered. Rob Christensen noted that “on a return slip of one fundraising letter” distributed by Helms’s Congressional Club was noted: “Black Power Means Black Rule and Violent Social Revolution. VOTE HELMS.”<sup>53</sup>

Though Hunt believed that Helms “was appealing to the worst instincts in some of our people,” the governor shied away from the issue of race, and when he did confront the issue publicly, the statements were typically weak and wove either racial balance or color-

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<sup>52</sup> Mike McLaughlin, “King Holiday and Hunt-Helms Race,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, June 24, 1984.

<sup>53</sup> Mike McLaughlin, “King Holiday and Hunt-Helms Race”; Christensen, “Hunt’s Image Gets Political Beating From Helms Ads,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, June 17, 1984; Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 290.

blindness into the rhetoric. Just after passage of the King holiday bill, Hunt stated that the holiday was “an appropriate way to recognize the contributions of white and black Americans in the cause of equal opportunity.” He attempted to appeal to the racial sensitivity within the state’s electorate without alienating too much of the white Tar Heel vote. His campaign so far had focused on what he called “real issues”: agriculture, low taxes, fiscal responsibility, Social Security, Medicare, crime, and a strong foreign policy that would hopefully appease white southern conservative Democrats.<sup>54</sup>

From the beginning of the campaign, Helms used imagery, rhetoric, and the divisive symbols of the Civil Rights Movement, including its assassinated leader Martin Luther King Jr. and contemporary political figure Jesse Jackson, to curry favor with white conservative voters. Not only did the senator use them, he tied them directly to Hunt to illuminate the governor’s connection with the state’s black community. In order to maintain the fragile coalition through which Hunt had ascended politically, the governor rarely addressed the connection directly, and when he did, it was often done in front of audiences composed of black Tar Heels. Rather than focusing on the issue with white Tar Heels, he emphasized the state’s economy, foreign policy, taxes, and Social Security. The poll numbers showed that while Helms’s strategy was succeeding, Hunt’s strategy was failing. The senator had effectively tarnished the governor’s whiteness and tied him to the black community in North Carolina, and white voters responded favorably to Helms’s message. If Hunt wanted to keep the campaign competitive, he needed to tack another course for the last months of the campaign, and he needed to do it fast.

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<sup>54</sup> Christensen, “Hunt’s Image Gets Political Beating From Helms Ads”; Mike McLaughlin, “King Holiday and Hunt-Helms Race.”

### **Chapter Three**

#### **Culture Wars and the Expansion of Whiteness: July-November 1984**

At a fund-raising dinner in the eastern North Carolina town of Henderson in September 1983, Jesse Helms told those attending that “every pressure group known to man is converging on North Carolina, and they’re forthright in saying that their number one goal is to eliminate me from the Senate.” Helms had been a long-time leader of the conservative backlash against the rise of the gay rights movement as well as a stalwart opponent of the women’s liberation movement, both of which gained steam going into the 1970s following the success of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. He was adamant in his support of the rights of employers and vehemently opposed to organized labor. As William Link noted, “Helms’s conservatism was defined in reaction to the tumultuous 1960s: he resisted the sexual revolution, opposed feminism and the Equal Rights Amendment, and championed old-fashioned morality against the American counterculture.” The senator wove the issues of homosexuality, women’s rights, and race together, all of which threatened the traditional values of southern whiteness, into his campaign during the last four months, reinvigorating his divisive use of whiteness to maintain his appeal among white conservative North Carolinians.<sup>1</sup>

Jim Hunt represented the modern southern Democrat. He embodied what political scientist V.O. Key called the “Progressive Plutocracy” that North Carolina had become during the twentieth century. He built coalitions made up of business executives, white racial moderates, liberals, black voters, and white traditional Democrats. Paul Luebke wrote that

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<sup>1</sup> Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics 2000*, 169; Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 1, 290; For an explanation of the threat to whiteness posed by homosexuality and the challenge of traditional gender roles by women see Richard Dyer, *White* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 20-21.

the governor was one of the “prime promoters of modernizer ideology” during his first eight years as governor leading up to 1984. As Gary Pearce carefully noted, the governor was “the dominant progressive leader of his time.” He pushed for the North Carolina General Assembly to pass the Equal Rights Amendment for ratification through the 1970s and early 1980s. He was the first North Carolina governor to appoint a black judge to the North Carolina Court of Appeals and the North Carolina Superior Court. The governor also supported the right for a woman to abort her pregnancy, going so far as to support the coverage of abortions by Medicaid. The progress espoused by Hunt had limits however. He defended labor unions but also backed North Carolina’s right-to-work laws that protected business interests and, by 1984, had little to say concerning homosexuality, the sexual revolution, or the ensuing culture wars that came out of the 1970s. Social liberalism alienated much of the North Carolina electorate, and Hunt knew it. He had to tread a narrow path between tradition and progress with his inclusionary politics in order to keep from alienating the traditional base of his party, North Carolina whites.<sup>2</sup>

Through June 1984, Helms’s strategy sought to discredit Hunt by portraying the governor as a politician who lacked integrity. Helms’s character assassination highlighted Hunt’s perceivably shifting policy stances on taxes, defense spending, and foreign policy, while at the same time maintaining the connection between the governor and black political activists, such as Martin Luther King and Jesse Jackson. The strategy proved effective, and white conservative Democrats had begun abandoning Hunt in favor of Helms. In the spring, the Carolina Poll discovered that Hunt’s support among white Tar Heel voters had dropped

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<sup>2</sup> V.O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), 205-206; Lamis, *The Two-Party South*, 131; Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics 2000*, 20; Gary Pearce, *Jim Hunt*, 5, 100-102, 182-183



from a positive margin of 9 percent to falling behind Helms by a margin of 12 percent. The Hunt campaign could not agree on a clear message that would nullify Helms's effective use of race and character assassination. With the governor's camp unable to connect with white voters effectively, the senator's campaign worked hard to further its message through the last four months of the campaign. that included an increased barrage of advertisements, four debates televised on statewide television, and his vision of whiteness in the Tar Heel state that contrasted with Hunt's: an exclusionary divisiveness based on traditional cultural attitudes held by white conservatives versus a color-blind and culturally-vague message of inclusive progress.<sup>3</sup>

While the Hunt campaign wrestled with how to appeal to white North Carolinians, the Helms campaign and the Republican Party enjoyed the fruits of labor provided by the Moral Majority and other evangelical groups that sought to increase the participation of white conservative Christians in the political process. As political scientists Lyman A. Kellstadt and James L. Guth have noted, the Republican Party traditionally had appealed to "mainline Protestant churches, such as Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Methodists." Democrats, in contrast, "spoke for religious minorities: Catholics, Jews, and evangelical Protestants," particularly in the traditional South. Kellstadt and Guth, however, noted that by the 1980s, Christian voting behavior "had shifted, as Mainline Protestants dwindled in number, Evangelicals moved toward the GOP, the ancient Catholic-Democratic alliance frayed, and Black Protestants became a critical Democratic bloc." This change in voting behavior gave Hunt a solid block of support from black Tar Heel Christians and those who followed the call

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<sup>3</sup> Mike McLaughlin, "King Holiday and Hunt-Helms Race," *Raleigh News & Observer*, June 24, 1984.

of Jesse Jackson for increased black voter participation. At the same time however, Helms received crucial support from white evangelicals of whom the Moral Majority enlisted over 140,000 to register to vote by the end of May.<sup>4</sup>

White evangelicals proved to be the audience toward which Helms aimed the message of his campaign from July to November 6. Though historians Michelle Nickerson and Darren Dochuk have noted that the evangelical “born-again” movement included a cross-section of races and ethnicities in the Sunbelt South of the United States, there have remained, according to sociologists Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, divisive racial attitudes among white Christian conservatives. These divisions have remained within the evangelical movement according to Emerson and Smith because white evangelicals have failed to see the structural racial inequality within American society. This failure to notice institutional whiteness has “[increased] the divide between white and black Americans” because of the “free-will individualist tradition” that negates the influence of man-made institutions on individuals. This born-again movement among white evangelicals adopted the heavily conservative color-blind ethos of smaller government, low taxes, free markets, defense spending, and a classless vision of meritocratic individualism, all important elements of the culture of whiteness.<sup>5</sup>

With an influx of white evangelical political activism, homosexuality proved to be one of the more damning issues Helms and his supporters used to energize the tide of

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<sup>4</sup> Lyman A. Kellstadt and James L. Guth, “Religion and Political Behavior in the Sunbelt,” in *Sunbelt Rising: The Politics of Space, Place, and Region*, eds. Michelle Nickerson and Darren Dochuk (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 113; Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 290.

<sup>5</sup> Michelle Nickerson and Darren Dochuk, “Introduction,” in Nickerson and Dochuk, eds, *Sunbelt Rising*, 6; Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 77, 97.

conservative whiteness that was rising against Hunt. The debate on gay rights had existed only on the fringes of the Hunt-Helms campaign prior to the summer. By June however, the Helms campaign began working to tie Hunt to the homosexual community. Helms began weaving the connection into his news conferences, speeches, and printed newspaper advertisements, making the claim that Hunt accepted funds contributed by gay advocacy groups. In response to the claims, the Hunt campaign stated that it refused to take in contributions from homosexual advocacy groups, but did not know the sexual orientation of individual contributors. This response became the standard response as the Helms campaign hurled the accusation at Hunt for the remainder of the campaign.<sup>6</sup>

On July 5, a Helms proxy helped bring the issue of homosexuality to the forefront of the campaign. *The Landmark*, a small local newspaper in Orange County that had not existed before the 1984 campaign, published an article that brought homosexuality to the front page of the *News and Observer's* coverage. The paper's editor, Bob Windsor, published an article entitled "Jim Hunt is Sissy, Prissy, Girlish and Effeminate." He claimed that Hunt "had a lover who was a pretty young boy from North Carolina" and a "girl friend in his office," who "was a former high-priced call girl used by the banks and big companies in Winston-Salem to entertain their guests." In the article, Windsor asked "Is Jim Hunt homosexual? Is Jim Hunt bisexual?" and "has he kept a dark secret in his political closet all of his adult life?" The article further alleged that the Hunt campaign had received contributions from gay advocacy groups and that "it [was] that dirty money that is spreading lies and distortions about Jesse Helms on your television screen this very minute." Prior to the July 5 article written by

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<sup>6</sup> Rob Christensen, "Hunt's Image Gets Political Beating From Helms Ads," *Raleigh News & Observer*, June 17, 1984.

Windsor, *The Landmark* had published several articles connecting either Hunt or the state's Democratic Party to homosexuals, including those entitled "Jim Hunt Received Contributions from Gay Activists," "Jim Hunt Visits Limp Wrist Set Fund Raiser in N.Y.," and "Faggots Dominate Fourth Congressional District Convention."<sup>7</sup>

Both Hunt and Helms denounced the article. As Gary Pearce recalled, Hunt was "knocked off stride by the charge," but the governor stated that he was "going to file suit unless these people fully retract and apologize for what they've done." He claimed further that the Helms campaign was irrefutably connected with *The Landmark*. Hunt's office sent a registered letter to Windsor that demanded a full retraction of the article within ten days of the letter's receipt. The Hunt campaign's legal counsel, former North Carolina Supreme Court Judge J. Phil Carlton, stated that "we expect an apology and a retraction," and further noted: "what [Windsor] does won't preclude a lawsuit, but his failure to do anything will assure a suit."<sup>8</sup>

When Helms learned of the article and Hunt's charge of a connection with his campaign, he stated, "I had nothing to do, nor did I have any knowledge of, the newspaper article." He released a statement to the press and noted his "deep and abiding sympathy for the governor and his family in the wake" of Windsor's article. He strongly believed "Governor Hunt to be, personally, a moral family man," and he shunned any challenge of Hunt's personal principles. "Any suggestion to the contrary," Helms wrote, "is repugnant and unfair." He also hoped that the remainder of the campaign would focus on the real issues

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<sup>7</sup> Daniel C. Hoover, "Pro-Helms Newspaper Publishes Rumor that Hunt Had Gay Lover," *Raleigh News & Observer*, July 6, 1984; Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 291, 560, n. 75-77

<sup>8</sup> Pearce, *Jim Hunt*, 176; Daniel C. Hoover and A.L. May, "'I'm Not Going to Take It,' Hunt Says of Article," *Raleigh News & Observer*, July 7, 1984; Jesse Helms, "Statement From Helms on Article," *Raleigh News & Observer*, July 7, 1984.

facing the country, including the Cold War and continued economic growth fueled by capitalism.<sup>9</sup>

Following the criticism received from both candidates, Windsor apologized, but not before giving another 1,500 copies out at the Legislative Building in Raleigh, selling thousands of copies to the state Republican Party, and bragging about the popularity of the article and the possibility of printing another 20,000 copies. Windsor relented in a press conference, stating that he was “dead wrong” to publish the story and that “I humbly and sincerely apologize to the governor.” He emphasized that no one influenced his motives in writing the story. During his apology, he noted that he had voted for Hunt in all three of the statewide races of which he had been a part and for Helms in his previous two Senate races. He also endorsed Helms as “a man I much admire and respect.”<sup>10</sup>

With homosexuality thrust into the campaign, the candidates carefully responded to Windsor’s apology. When the press asked Helms if he accepted Windsor’s support, the senator stated that he “would welcome the support of anybody,” and that he “disavowed only the deed, not the doer and his methods.” In response to Windsor’s apology, Hunt stated that he was “glad he . . . apologized,” but did not rule out the possibility of a lawsuit against *The Landmark* publisher. Even with the apology, however, Windsor claimed to have sold 12,000 copies of the paper to the chairman of the state Republican Party, David Flaherty. The state GOP chairman bought the extra copies to have them distributed throughout North Carolina

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<sup>9</sup> Daniel C. Hoover and A.L. May, “‘I’m Not Going to Take It,’ Hunt Says of Article,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, July 7, 1984; Senator Jesse Helms, “Statement From Helms on Article,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, July 7, 1984.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel C. Hoover and A.L. May, “‘I’m Not Going to Take It,’ Hunt Says of Article,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, July 7, 1984; Daniel C. Hoover, “Editor says he was ‘dead wrong to publish,’” *Raleigh News & Observer*, July 8, 1984.

to, he said, “turn the race on issues that would play strong and get people’s adrenaline going.” Flaherty noted that Republicans sought to connect Hunt not only to black activism but to “gay rights, and that was our focus.”<sup>11</sup>

Though both Helms and executive director of the National Congressional Club Carter Wrenn noted that there was no connection between Bob Windsor and the Helms campaign, the article in *The Landmark* helped establish a theme of the perils of homosexuality in North Carolina and their connection to both the Democratic Party and Jim Hunt. The issue of gay rights promoted by liberals threatened the security of whiteness felt within the state’s white conservative population. With this threat, Helms’s campaign, the state Republican Party, and supporters of both seized on the moment to address broader cultural issues that helped continue the growth of political participation of white evangelical Christian fundamentalists.<sup>12</sup>

In an effort to alleviate charges against him, Hunt called on the national Democratic Party not to “get into every demand of every single special-interest group” in the country” and claimed that the “Democratic Party [had] gone too far in trying to promise everything to everybody.” He suggested that Democrats needed a platform that would not alienate the white voters that southern Democrats needed to win their elections. The national party’s platform, Hunt said, needed to attract “working people and moderate mainstream people,” ostensibly referring to the working and middle classes consisting primarily of straight white centrist voters. These white moderates sought by Hunt and other southern Democrats could

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<sup>11</sup> Daniel C. Hoover, “Editor says he was ‘dead wrong to publish,’” *Raleigh News & Observer*, July 8, 1984; Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 293.

<sup>12</sup> Homosexuality threatened both constructed gender roles in white society as well as reproduction. See Richard Dyer, *White* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 20.

minimize the gains made among white southern conservatives by Helms and other Republicans.<sup>13</sup>

The national party seemingly responded to Hunt's request and, according to *The New York Times*, "moved away from some hallmarks of its tradition of liberalism" when the Democrats announced their national platform at the national Democratic nominating convention. The new platform included policies that would help poor people find ways of supporting themselves without mentioning the words "welfare reform." Democrats also suggested a firmer, more conservative stance concerning the Soviet Union than it had in previous election years, and made only a vague reference "to reduce the rate of increase in defense spending" with no specific cost estimates. The party also hardened the Democratic position concerning the criminality of drug use and its support for the war on drugs. According to the *Times*, however, the party "bolstered support for abortion and homosexual rights," two issues that alienated the new evangelical voters in North Carolina.<sup>14</sup>

The Helms campaign jumped at the opportunity to exploit the national Democratic position to weaken white Christian support for Hunt. In a letter distributed by the Helms re-election committee in mid-August, ministers were strongly encouraged to back Helms and to begin registering congregants to vote following church services. In the letter that included the signatures of four popular Baptist ministers in the state, Helms was described as "a man who believes in traditional family values and morality." It continued, "every ultra-liberal organization – NOW (National Organization for Women), the national union bosses and even

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<sup>13</sup> "Comfortable Platform Needed, Hunt Says," in "Under the Dome," *Raleigh News & Observer*, June 23, 1984.

<sup>14</sup> Warren Weaver Jr., "Democrats' Platform Shows a Shift From Liberal Positions of 1976 and 1980," *The New York Times*, July 22, 1984.

[the] homosexual community – has targeted Sen. Helms for defeat,” urging that “conservative-minded Christians must fight back.”<sup>15</sup>

Sustaining the drive to instigate the participation of white evangelicals, the thrust of moral Christian conservatism continued with two fundraising letters circulated by the Helms campaign. One letter, signed by entertainer Pat Boone, repeated the same themes, noting that the same “liberal groups” noted above were out “to destroy Jesse.” It noted that Helms fought “to do God’s will” and that “you and I need Jesse in Washington. America needs him,” and “God needs him.” When the press asked Helms’s campaign press secretary Claude Allen about the letter, he replied that Helms “just [wanted] to see morality back in politics.” The second letter, signed by Helms, claimed that the senator “encountered the wrath of almost every liberal and welfare organization in this country.” Liberal groups that included “ruthless union bosses, abortionists, pornographers, homosexuals, and biased news commentators ... [wanted] nothing more than to ‘Get Jesse Helms.’” Helms implored supporters to donate money so he could combat advertisements paid for by these groups. The campaign also needed cash to combat Jesse Jackson’s addition of “250,000 new straight ticket, black voters.”<sup>16</sup>

The two letters never named Hunt nor referred to him in any way, but the implication that the governor received support from these groups was clear. Following an endorsement by Pastors for Helms, a newly formed organization of 220 pastors, Steve Sells, a North Carolina pastor, claimed that Hunt defended “special privileges for homosexuals” and that

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<sup>15</sup> Rob Christensen, “Baptists Protest Mailing List Use By Helms Group,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, August 24, 1984.

<sup>16</sup> “Letter’s Reference to God Miffs Hunt Aide,” and “Helms Asks Supporters For Special Donation,” in “Under the Dome,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, September 6, 1984.



both the governor and Democratic presidential candidate Walter Mondale “have ... gone on record as promoting a collective type of right for homosexuals to the point of making them a legitimate minority.” Sells also praised Helms’s position concerning “voluntary prayer in public schools,” neglecting the fact that Hunt had supported passage and ratification of an amendment allowing for the same earlier in 1984. Hunt’s campaign press secretary Will Marshall responded that what Sells had said was “typical Helms misinformation” and highlighted the governor’s support of school prayer on a voluntary basis. He evaded the accusation of the governor’s support of homosexuals, however, stating that the charge was “a smear campaign” against the governor and insisting that the senator was “engaging in personal attacks” that attempted to undercut Hunt’s desire “to help the people of North Carolina and the United States” as United States senator.<sup>17</sup>

In October, another set of letters surfaced that kept homosexuality and Christian evangelicalism within the focus of the campaign. The first letter, distributed by the group Southern Christians for Helms, appeared throughout the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill Triangle area, proclaiming that “homosexuality” was a “filthy sin” that was “devouring the minds and bodies of our young people.” It also claimed that “this sin is the most despicable perversion mentioned in all the annals of history.” The letter stated that “no Christian ... is permitted to even tolerate its existence, much less make excuses for it and pretend it doesn’t exist.” It also claimed that Coy Privette, a prominent Baptist minister in North Carolina, had “recently called Sen. Helms one of God’s Anointed [sic].” The signature on the letter belonged to a Rev. Harvey J. Doster III. The *News & Observer* reported, however, that it

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<sup>17</sup> The Associated Press, “N.C. Ministers Form Group Backing Helms; PAC Plans Ad,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, September 6, 1984.

attempted to track down Doster for comment but could not find any proof of his existence. Allen, Helms's campaign press secretary, emphatically denied any connection between the letter and the senator's campaign, calling it "tasteless" and raising the possibility that it was a "dirty trick or prank by someone opposed to Senator Helms." When asked about the quote attributed to him in the letter, Privette stated that he had "absolutely never heard" of the letter's author.<sup>18</sup>

The second letter from the same group surfaced on the campus of The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill but was signed by another fictitious minister, Rev. M. Maynard Wilkes. The writer of letter, like the other, railed against homosexuality and promised to name homosexuals on campus. The president of the University, William C. Friday, submitted the letter to the State Bureau of Investigation, which failed to find a pastor by that name, and called it "series of vile, vulgar and abusive statements intended to induce fear and harass people." Allen stated, as he had with the first letter, "we strongly denounce everything in that letter," and again raised the possibility that it was a "hoax designed to embarrass and hurt the Helms organization." As historian Link noted however, "many suspected that" both "letters came from the Helms campaign."<sup>19</sup>

Though Hunt never came out specifically in support of gay rights during the campaign, Helms succeeded in linking the governor with homosexuals through Hunt's membership in the Democratic Party. Neither candidate, it seemed, wanted anything to do with the state's gay community. White evangelicals responded favorably to the senator's

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<sup>18</sup> "Letter On Homosexuality Causes Campaign Stir," in "Under the Dome," *Raleigh News & Observer*, October 17, 1984.

<sup>19</sup> "Letter About Alleged Homosexuals Called Political Move," in "Under the Dome," *Raleigh News & Observer*, October 20, 1984; Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 294.

moral compass and his stand against “militant homosexuals” even though Hunt never advocated for gays in his public addresses or in his campaign’s advertising. Following their vitriolic denouncement of Bob Windsor’s article in *The Landmark*, the North Carolina Human Rights Fund released a letter that reprimanded both Helms and Hunt for their attitudes toward the gay community. The letter from the gay advocacy group stated, “it [was] unfortunate that both . . . campaign organizations have reacted to the fact that . . . Windsor’s allegations are untrue.” The letter continued by noting that though “it [was] not negative to be gay . . . both candidates refer[red] to their feelings as though this were a negative thing.” Leo J. Teachout, a member of the Fund stated that “gay people should not be the brunt of this type of stereotyping by . . . Governor Hunt or Jesse Helms.” The Helms campaign, according to Allen, took the statement “as an attack on the senator,” while Stephanie Bass, communications director for Hunt’s campaign, said that the governor “had no comment” on the letter and clarified that he “had not heard of the group before.”<sup>20</sup>

In another incident involving homosexuals and the campaign, *The Front Page*, a gay advocacy periodical based in Raleigh and distributed throughout North and South Carolina, published an article charging that there were conservative gay men who supported Helms regardless of his stand against gay rights. When asked about the possibility, Allen stated that “the whole concept . . . [was] about as ridiculous as *The News & Observer* endorsing Helms.” He claimed further that “it was a hoax . . . designed to help Governor Hunt in his election bid” and highlighted that “anybody who watched the Democratic Convention would know where the homosexual community stands.” Helms had benefited greatly from its portrayal of

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<sup>20</sup> “Gay Rights Group Attacks Hunt, Helms For Remarks,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, July 9, 1984.

Hunt linked with homosexuals. One insider close to Helms's campaign told David Flaherty, the state GOP chair, that "every damn time you hit those homos," the senator's poll numbers rose.<sup>21</sup>

The escalation of gay rights activism threatened conservative family values and the culture of whiteness within which those values were established. Not only did Helms and his supporters use homosexuality to persuade white evangelical Christians to become more political active, but the issue provided a way for Helms to expand the scope of the Senate race in North Carolina. Other conservative cultural issues important to the national GOP, including pornography, school prayer, and abortion, threatened the purity of whiteness and the security of the United States. With that in mind, the senator became increasingly more persistent in linking Hunt to the national Democratic Party and himself to the national Republican Party and its standard bearer Ronald Reagan.<sup>22</sup>

At a speech given at Northside Baptist Church in Charlotte, Helms addressed the 3,500-member congregation and reminded them that there was a "cacophony of voices" coming from politicians, entertainers, and the news media that "[blocked] the very moral and spiritual base from which America grew to greatness." He charged that within American politics, "there [were] . . . compromisers" who were "responsible for the deliberate destruction of one-and-a-half million of the most innocent, most helpless human beings imaginable – the unborn." Helms believed that Reagan, whom he called a "decent and honorable president," was disparaged because he felt that the country had to re-establish its

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<sup>21</sup> "Helms Camp Attacks Article On Gays," in "Under the Dome," *Raleigh News & Observer*, October 28, 1984; Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 293.

<sup>22</sup> Matthew D. Lassiter, "Big Government and Family Values: Political Culture in the Metropolitan Sunbelt," in Nickerson and Dochuk, eds, *Sunbelt Rising*, 101.

Christian foundation to continue as, quoting the Pledge of Allegiance, “one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” The president, according to Helms, was “under constant attack because he has dared to warn about the threat of godless atheism” and communism, “which [was] spreading its bloody hand around the world, including our own hemisphere.” The senator continued, stating that 1984 was “the year . . . when God-fearing Americans [could] assure the restoration of their freedom and make secure once again the faith of our fathers.”<sup>23</sup>

Ronald Reagan, having been used by both Helms and Hunt during the first months of their campaigns to curry favor among white voters, took an increasingly prominent position in the senator’s message to the white Tar Heel electorate as the Republican president led Walter Mondale by large margins throughout the South. In a Helms television advertisement released in August that featured only Reagan, the president noted Helms’s strength of character as a “senator we can always count on to stand up for his beliefs,” and declared his “courage on tough issues is an inspiration to all Americans.” Reagan stated that he “[cherished his] friendship with Jesse” and required the senator’s “honesty and . . . outspoken patriotism . . . in the United States Senate.”<sup>24</sup>

As Helms brought the national campaign into the Senate race in North Carolina, Hunt attempted to distance himself as much as possible from the national Democratic Party, particularly the party’s presidential nominee Walter Mondale. During his acceptance speech

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<sup>23</sup> Associated Press, “Convention In Dallas: The Republicans; Excerpts From Platform Adopted By Republican Convention,” *The New York Times*, August 22, 1984; Ginny Carroll, “Helms Combines Politics, Evangelism At Church Event,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, September 10, 1984.

<sup>24</sup> Ben Sherwood, “Reagan Extols Helms In Latest Commercial From Senator’s Camp,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, August 22, 1984.

at the Democratic convention, Mondale unabashedly stated that “Mr. Reagan will raise taxes, and so will I. He won’t tell you. I just did.” Gary Pearce stood on the floor at the convention during Mondale’s speech and questioned if he had “[heard] that right?” Hunt recalled to Pearce years later that when he heard Mondale promise to raise taxes, he had two reactions. The first was “that was clever,” but a moment later he realized the political implications and said to himself, “oh, hell.” He knew what was coming.<sup>25</sup>

The linking of Hunt to Mondale, particularly with regard to taxes and free-enterprise, and the national Democratic Party’s support of the African-American civil rights, women’s rights, and gay rights movements, continued as a theme of his advertising during the last months of the campaign. The senator highlighted the connection during the second, third, and fourth debates, that “Mr. Hunt doesn’t want you to know it, but he’s a Mondale liberal and ashamed of it ... I’m a Reagan conservative and proud of it.” The senator used some form of the phrase in nearly every television advertisement from the Democratic convention until the end of the campaign, as well as in most of his debates. As Pearce remembered, “the ads were so pervasive that the young daughter of one supporter thought Hunt’s first name was Mondale.”<sup>26</sup>

The governor attempted to separate the campaign in North Carolina from the narrative Helms had begun to construct. He focused on matters—as he noted in their second debate—that “put people first,” referring to issues such as education and the state’s economy, particularly the textile and tobacco industries, Social Security, and tax cuts for the working

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<sup>25</sup> Pearce, *Jim Hunt*, 181.

<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Leland, “Helms, Hunt Renew Attacks,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, September 10, 1984; “Third Debate,” Box 4 in the Video Collection of JBH Papers, NCSU Libraries; Pearce, 181.

and middle classes, rather than the cultural issues Helms had begun raising. He also continued to emphasize his fiscal conservatism and noted that under his administration North Carolina had a balanced budget and proved that it was possible to “have both a fiscally . . . and a fair and caring government.”<sup>27</sup>

Hunt’s effort to counter the charges brought forth by Helms that linked the governor to the national Democratic Party became a recurring theme in his television advertising. To attract white moderates, he portrayed himself as a southern Democrat with a fiscally conservative philosophy while at the same time portraying North Carolina as a state of “progress” while avoiding any mention of cultural issues. Television advertising began in July that featured Hunt on the North Carolina coast at Kitty Hawk, sitting on the front porch of a home in a white-picket-fenced neighborhood with an American flag waving behind him, and standing before a farmhouse with a white picket fence surrounding a pasture in the background. In the ads, the governor noted that the “American dream” had started in North Carolina with English colonization and then declared that it was the responsibility of each generation to “pass on a better America to each new generation.” With better schools, an advanced technological industry, and old-fashioned hard work, the Tar Heel state would continue, Hunt stated, to “set an example” that would lead the country. The southern Democrat also referred to the necessity of “freedom, justice, opportunity, [and] free

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<sup>27</sup> Elizabeth Leland, “Helms, Hunt Renew Attacks,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, September 10, 1984; Associate Press, “Hunt Differs With Mondale On Tax Boost,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, September 4, 1984.

enterprise,” while passively alluding to Helms’s positions on foreign policy, maintaining the charge that the United States should not support “ruthless dictators or political terrorists.”<sup>28</sup>

Hunt also introduced a popular celebrity familiar to white North Carolinians to emphasize the difference between him and the image of the national Democratic Party drawn by Helms. In three advertisements produced by the campaign, the former fictional sheriff of Mayberry, Andy Griffith, emphasized the necessity of a Hunt victory in November. In the ads, Griffith reminisced on the greatness of North Carolina, noting the rural beauty of the state, the “hard-working people,” and the state’s “progressive attitude.” The actor spoke favorably of the governor, pointing out Hunt’s sensibility, his commitment to family values, and his fiscal conservatism. In one of the ads, Griffith asked, “do you know what a North Carolina Democrat is?” Answering the question for voters, he stated, “it’s somebody that sometimes votes Democratic and sometimes votes Republican, but always votes [for the] best man.” He characterized Hunt as “tough” and stressed the governor’s fiscal conservatism, pointing out that “he knows how to squeeze a quarter ‘til an eagle squawks.” With children playing, pastureland, and farmhouses in the background, the ads represented the rural and simple character of the state. The ads reinforced the notion that the governor identified with such traditional qualities and juxtaposed those characteristics with the moderate progress Hunt sought to represent.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> “DH Sawyer, Hunt, JHSEN-121 ‘Dream,’ JHSEN-122 ‘Kitty Hawk,’ JHSEN-123 ‘America,’ JHSEN-124 ‘1976,’ 7/12/84,” Box 3 in the Video Collection of JBH Papers, NCSU Libraries.

<sup>29</sup> “DH Sawyer, Hunt, JHSEN-127 ‘North Carolina,’ JHSEN-128 ‘Voting for Kids,’ JHSEN-129 ‘NC Democrat,’ 8/15/84,” Box 3 in the Video Collection of JBH Papers, NCSU Libraries.



Within the progressive narrative the governor's campaign wove, Hunt emphasized the need for education and self-sufficiency, as well as his role to help develop the state into a technologically-driven economy, all within the context of whiteness. In an ad that targeted working class white men, photographs portrayed a white working-class male as he went about his day on the job and ended with him spending time with his wife and young son in and around their modest home. The commentary focused on education as the way for North Carolina workers to keep up with technological and industrial innovation. The governor proclaimed, "progress . . . it's North Carolina," and insisted that rather than waiting for it, one must "work to shape it." He addressed his record in this regard, stating that he worked "so hard" to attract new jobs and bring innovation to the state for "a better future."<sup>30</sup>

While he wove together his narrative of North Carolina progress, Hunt wanted to drive a wedge between his opponent and moderate conservatives in the Republican Party. He countered Helms's emphasis on religious issues by portraying the senator as a leader of the "radical right." At a news conference, the governor declared that he had "talked to some good conservatives who don't think [Helms is] a very good one." As campaign strategist J. Phil Carlton said, the strategy of linking Helms with the radical right sought to put side by side "Jim Hunt's solid record and show Jesse Helms' extreme record."<sup>31</sup>

Helms, in response, continued to double-down on his connection with Reagan as well as other prominent Republicans in the federal government. He also tried to link himself to North Carolina's popular former Democratic senator Sam Ervin. In an advertisement

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<sup>30</sup> "Sawyer DOB – Hunt-Helms 10/84" Box 3; "DH Sawyer, Hunt, 'Parents JHSEN-122, 'Training or the Future' JHSEN-131, 8/29/84," Box 4 in the Video Collection of JBH Papers, NCSU Libraries.

<sup>31</sup> Rob Christensen, "Hunt Links Radical Right, Helms In Final Strategy," *Raleigh News & Observer*, October 5, 1984.

produced by Helms's campaign, President Reagan was giving a speech at dinner celebrating Helms in which he quoted Ervin as saying that Helms had the "courage to stand up for what he honestly believes." The narrator continued: "on June sixteenth, in our nation's capital, the President of the United States, the majority leader of the Senate . . . 33 prominent senators, and over 700 leaders of business and public affairs honored a respected North Carolinian, Senator Jesse Helms." The scene then cut to notable conservative politicians such as Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker, Congressman Jack Kemp, and Vice President George H.W. Bush who all gave praise to Helms and his indispensability as the senior senator from North Carolina. The ad continued with Reagan reassuring Helms that the senator had all the support he needed and that they would all march with him to victory on election day. With an image of Helms and Reagan sitting together in the Oval Office, the narrator concluded: "respected leadership: Senator Jesse Helms." The senator not only included nationally-recognized Republicans in his advertising, but he had GOP office holders in the federal government come to North Carolina and speak on his behalf.<sup>32</sup>

Regardless of the party endorsements Helms received, Hunt continued to portray Helms as out of touch with North Carolina constituents (particularly the elderly) and Ronald Reagan. He tried to lessen Helms's appeal to moderate white voters by connecting the senator with notable right-wing conservative figures such as Jerry Falwell, Phyllis Schlafly,

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<sup>32</sup> "Sawyer DOB, Hunt-Helms 10/84," Box 3 in the Video Collection of JBH Papers, NCSU Libraries. Treasury Secretary Donald Regan and Congressman Jack Kemp both went to North Carolina to speak on Helms's behalf. They praised the senator for his support of Reagan and deflected the charges that Helms was more in line with the radical right. Kemp went so far as to describe Helms as "quite progressive" due to the senator's support of what he called an "open opportunity society. See Associated Press, "Helms Asset To Reagan, Regan Says," *Raleigh News & Observer*, September 8, 1984; "Kemp Praises Helms As Mainstream Republican," *Raleigh News & Observer*, October 18, 1984.

and Nelson Bunker Hunt. Hunt claimed in a television ad that the right-wing conservatism that Helms espoused sought to “push [its] views on religion into our public schools and into your public life.” He attempted to distinguish the right-wing ideology Helms advocated from the mainstream conservative appeal of Ronald Reagan, but the already effective message that Helms championed the principles of whiteness held dear by white conservative Tar Heels had helped establish a solid link between himself and the president.<sup>33</sup>

As the campaign between Helms and Hunt progressed, Social Security became a major attack issue for both as older North Carolina voters split evenly in their preference for the candidates. The governor’s campaign alone, as Link noted, “produced some eight different ads about” the program. In one of those ads, the governor attacked Helms’s position, claiming that Helms had “voted against Social Security again and again, even against the minimum Social Security benefits,” and “against President Reagan’s plan to rescue Social Security.” At a press conference, Hunt further declared, reflecting his campaign’s advertisements, that since his days as a television editorialist, Helms had labeled Social Security as “disguised welfare,” and insisted that his voting behavior in the Senate showed that he “has been a consistent and predictable foe of Social Security and Medicare.”<sup>34</sup>

Helms deflected the claims made by Hunt regarding his position on Social Security. In one television ad, the senator claimed that it was his “moral duty” to see that “no

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<sup>33</sup> “DH Sawyer, Hunt, JHSEN-145 :30 ‘They Win’; JHSEN-146 :30 ‘He Will’ JHSEN-147 :10 ‘Can’t run,’ 10-6-84,” Box 4 in the Video Collection of JBH Papers, NCSU Libraries.

<sup>34</sup> Rob Christensen, “Social Security a Focal Issue In Senate Battle,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, October 23, 1984; Link, 299; “DH Sawyer, Hunt, JHSEN-145 :30 ‘They Win’; JHSEN-146 :30 ‘He Will’ JHSEN-147 :10 ‘Can’t run,’ 10-6-84,” Box 4 in the Video Collection of JBH Papers, NCSU Libraries.

American suffers alone,” and that he was honest when he said that he would work to “strengthen Social Security.” He further noted that the same “sound solutions” that had reversed inflation and “revitalized America’s economy” would keep the program solvent, and that the Social Security system would be “guarantee[d].” In a public address, the senator declared that Democrats used Social Security for “partisan purposes.” In a fund-raising letter addressed to elderly voters, Helms wrote that Hunt supported the reduction of benefits for citizens “born after 1938 and [opposed] a guarantee of Social Security benefits.” Hunt replied that the senator’s charges were “sheer bunk” and further noted that he “stood with President Reagan and the great majority of Congress to save” the program while Helms “was voting not to save it.”<sup>35</sup>

With an increase in political activism among women through the 1970s into the 1980s, women had become an important constituency for both Helms and Hunt. As polling numbers remained tight between the candidates after Labor Day, both candidates broadened their appeal by targeting North Carolina white women. In mid-September, Helms’s wife Dorothy stumped for her husband in Wake County and Durham in the Triangle Area and in High Point and Lexington in the North Carolina Piedmont. She declared Helms “a symbol of the whole conservative cause” who fought against “labor unions, radical feminists, homosexual groups . . . and the liberal press” who “came into North Carolina from all across the country.” The senator’s wife also penned a fundraising letter in honor of her husband’s birthday. In the letter, she described her husband as a “decent and a kind-hearted man . . . who is not capable of a hateful act.” She wrote that she knew the “vicious personal attacks”

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<sup>35</sup> Rob Christensen, “Social Security a Focal Issue In Senate Battle,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, October 23, 1984; Link, 299; “Sawyer Dub, Helms-Hunt Coverage, September 16 – October 3,” Box 4 in the Video Collection of JBH Papers, NCSU Libraries.

perpetrated by Hunt “hurt” her husband, but that “Jesse’s tough. He has learned to smile and bear it . . . I know my Jesse Helms.”<sup>36</sup>

Another Republican woman, Secretary of Transportation Elizabeth Dole, returned to her home state to campaign for Helms at a fundraiser and appear in one of his television advertisements. At the fundraiser, she stated that she knew Helms extremely well and that he was “a man of great integrity, a man with courage and conviction” who will “deal straight with you.” Secretary Dole further noted that the president’s administration failed to communicate clearly that Reagan had worked to support women. She pointed out that Reagan appointed Sandra Day O’Connor to the Supreme Court, as well as her own appointment along with two other women to his cabinet. In the advertisement produced by Helms’s campaign, the secretary reminisced on a story she had read in a newspaper about the Helms’s adoption of their special-needs son Charles. Though she admired the senator for “a lot of reasons,” she said, this was the “reason I admire Jesse Helms the most.”<sup>37</sup>

The Hunt campaign addressed women through its advertising as well with a focus on economic mobility, domestic roles, and spousal relationships, all stressing the evolution in the gender roles assigned to women in the traditional South from homemakers and caregivers to an integral part of North Carolina’s economy. In an advertisement targeted for white working-class women, photographs of a white female textile worker followed through her day at work and then at home spending time with her family. The narrator opined that after

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<sup>36</sup> “Mrs. Helms Campaigns,” in “Under the Dome,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, September 22, 1984; “Helms’ Wife Seeks Birthday Donations,” in “Under the Dome,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, September 30, 1984.

<sup>37</sup> Associated Press, “Elizabeth Dole Campaigns For Helms in N.C.,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, September 26, 1984; “NGA Misery/Helms Ad, October 18, 1984,” Box 4 in the Video Collection of JBH Papers, NCSU Libraries.

“long hours in the mill, bone tired . . . she comes home to more work,” including “keeping a house” and “raising a family.” She was a “partner with her husband, working to keep their dreams alive.” “The working woman in North Carolina,” the narrator declared, had “new responsibilities and new possibilities,” and that “North Carolina people don’t try to hold back the future,” but “just work to make it better.”<sup>38</sup>

To define an alternative vision of a New South dedicated to women’s rights that contrasted with the traditional reproductive roles of women that southern culture embraced, the Hunt campaign addressed reproductive freedom and abortion in the last weeks of the campaign. Focusing on a 1981 Senate bill sponsored by Helms, a radio ad broadcast in late-October featured a female narrator who decried a “bill in the United States Senate called S-158.” According to the narrator, the proposed legislation that Helms sponsored “could outlaw many of the birth control devices that millions of American women use today.” The ad connected Helms with the Moral Majority, stating that “some people call it the Jerry Falwell bill,” because of its “sweeping attempt . . . to turn his personal religious views into the law of the land.” The narrator charged that the proposed law “would outlaw abortion even in a case of rape or incest,” and that the “woman would have to carry the child of a rapist or go to jail.” She underlined Helms’s connection to the right when she claimed that “S-158” was “one more part of the right-wing agenda that is Jesse Helms’s top priority in the Senate.”<sup>39</sup>

Though the radio ad was, as Pearce recalled, a “half-assed” attempt to address the abortion issue, the commercial worried the Helms campaign. Both Carter Wrenn and Tom

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<sup>38</sup> “‘Gov. Hunt TV Ads 1984,’ Greer, Margolis, Mitchell, Grunwald & Associates,” Box 8 in the Video Collection of JBH Papers, NCSU Libraries.

<sup>39</sup> “JHSEN-1034 ‘S-158,’ JHSEN-1033 ‘Big Spender,’” Box 50 in the Audio Collection of the JBH Papers, NCSU Libraries.

Ellis felt panic when the ad hit the radio waves, and Wrenn noted that “we dropped like a rock with women.” In an effort to slow the decrease in polling numbers, the campaign presented Dorothy Helms in a rebuttal ad for television in which she held an audio recording of the ad and attacked Hunt’s ethics and morality. She declared the ad to be an “out-and-out falsehood” that was both “disgusting and dishonest.” She admonished Hunt, stating that she would “never have believed Jim Hunt would stoop this low.” Helms himself emphatically denounced the ad and, though there was no mention of the president in the ad, stated that “the public should share my outrage over this cynical, insensitive and outrageous smear of the president and me.” He called Hunt a “consummate liar” and “the great manipulator” who “prey[ed] upon the fears of the people of North Carolina.” The senator, responding to the ad’s charge of a connection with the radical right, said that “he’d rather have those supporters than some Hunt has.” Mentioning a known homosexual who supported the governor, the senator, mocking a limp wrist, told a group of supporters that “he’s one of these . . . you know.”<sup>40</sup>

Another element in the traditional culture of the South was a strong commitment to national defense and the military and a fierce sense of patriotism. With both candidates in vocal support of a strong national defense, Helms and Hunt also closely courted the votes of Tar Heel veterans. They each had their own veterans support groups and attacked one another on policies affecting veterans, including funding of the Veterans Administration. During the third debate, Hunt accused Helms of voting in favor of reduced veterans’ pensions and medical benefits. The governor also claimed that Helms had “even voted for

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<sup>40</sup> Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 300; Pearce, *Jim Hunt*, 183; “New Dot Helms Ad,” Box 9 in the Video Collection of JBH Papers, NCSU Libraries; Elizabeth Leland, “Helms Calls Hunt a Liar, Criticizes Ad,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, October 30, 1984.

cuts that would force some VA hospitals and clinics to shut down.” Helms responded that he had been endorsed by the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), and that he “hadn’t cast any votes against veterans.” He said that veterans knew that Hunt would “flip-flop” and that “they’ve been dealing with me a long time.”<sup>41</sup>

As the two candidates argued over their support of veterans during the debate, Helms quipped, “governor, which war did you serve in?” Hunt, who had not served in the military, stated “I didn’t serve in a war,” to which Helms responded, “okay.” Hunt followed up angrily, “I don’t like you questioning my patriotism.” Prior to the debate, the North Carolina Veterans of Foreign Wars endorsed Hunt, and, according to Link, Helms took it as a “terrible blow.” The blows kept coming for Helms regarding veterans when in late-October, the national VFW withdrew its endorsement of Helms, blaming a computer error for tabulating the organization’s endorsement. Hunt used the endorsement withdrawal to underline his charge that Helms had “voted against the veterans every time he’s turned around,” noting “that’s exactly what he deserved.” When Helms learned about the loss of the endorsement, he charged that the head of the VFW supported Hunt. Regardless of the lost endorsement, Helms said, “I think the veterans of North Carolina agree with me and not the hierarchy in Washington.”<sup>42</sup>

With so much focus on various segments of North Carolina’s overwhelmingly white electorate, from homosexuals to evangelical Christians, the elderly, women, and veterans,

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<sup>41</sup> Ben Sherwood, “Retired General Says Veterans Back Helms,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, September 28, 1984; Elizabeth Leland, “Attacks Bitter in 3<sup>rd</sup> Debate,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, September 24, 1984.

<sup>42</sup> Sherwood, “Retired General Says Veterans Back Helms”; Leland, “Attacks Bitter in 3<sup>rd</sup> Debate”; Pearce, *Jim Hunt*, 171; Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 298; Leland, “VFW Withdraws Helms Endorsement,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, October 31, 1984.



race continued as an issue that both candidates used to stir voters' passions. While all the other themes within the campaign carried emotional weight, race remained as the foundational element in the candidates' competing brands of whiteness. Hunt's campaign distributed a flyer that quoted a report in the *Wall Street Journal* that claimed Helms used the "pet name" Fred when referring to blacks. Helms's black campaign press secretary Claude Allen, himself a black man, accused the Hunt campaign of using the charge to "incite emotions against Senator Helms." He continued, stating that Hunt had been advertising in black newspapers in North Carolina that attacked Helms's stand against the Martin Luther King holiday. The *News & Observer* reported that an ad in July editions of black newspapers, including *The Winston-Salem Chronicle*, stated that "Jim Hunt supported a federal holiday honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and blacks and whites who fought for civil rights and freedom." It also pointed out that "Helms opposed the bipartisan coalition of 10 of North Carolina's 11 House members and opposed the holiday." In response to Allen's charge, Will Marshall, Hunt's campaign press secretary, stated that Hunt supported "civil rights before all kinds of audiences."<sup>43</sup>

During the second debate, the King holiday re-emerged as a contentious issue when Helms repeated Allen's allegations that Hunt advertised in support of the holiday in black newspapers while not doing so in newspapers distributed in primarily white markets. He told the governor that "you were hiding your position from two-thirds of the people who oppose that holiday." Hunt responded that the allegation was "absolutely untrue" and that he had "been on record in news conference after news conference" in support of the holiday "in

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<sup>43</sup> "Hunt Flier Cites Reported Remark," in "Under the Dome," *Raleigh News & Observer*, September 8, 1984; Hunt Campaign Advertisement, *The Winston-Salem Chronicle*, July 5, 1984.

honor of all the citizens, black and white, who have worked for equal opportunity, have worked for the future of this state and this country, where people can work together.” Hunt continued, “this is 1984,” and that “we’re not going to go back now and open those old wounds.” When Helms pressed again on the issue, Hunt responded, “I’ll put ads wherever I choose to put them . . . Surely, you’ll let me decide where to put the little bit of money I have.” Though Hunt was passionate in his response to Helms’s challenge, in a post-debate interview political scientist Merle Black stated that the governor handily deflected the charges put forth by Helms concerning the holiday without responding to them directly.<sup>44</sup>

By late September, the Helms campaign began ushering black evangelical supporters into his campaign’s spotlight. James E. Johnson, director of the American Constitution Political Action Committee and a former assistant secretary of the Navy, arrived in North Carolina to stump for Helms on September 29. He told reporters that the idea that Helms stood against civil rights was “just not so.” He claimed that if the senator “did not do anything more than oppose abortion, he would go down as one of the greatest senators in history,” and that he “[believed] a person’s life should line up with Scripture.” He went further, underlining the senator’s evangelical positions, and declaring that those who supported “abortion, homosexuality, and lesbianism, which are abominations unto God, then a person is not lining up with Scripture.” He equated *Roe v. Wade* (1973), that Johnson said “ruled that the unborn child was not a human being,” with the Supreme Court’s *Dred Scott* decision in 1857 that stated, according to Johnson, “blacks were not legal human beings.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> “Complete Text of Second Helms-Hunt Debate,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, September 10, 1984; Rob Christensen, “Debate Less Lopsided Than 1<sup>st</sup>, Experts Say,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, September 10, 1984.

<sup>45</sup> Constance Laibe, “Black Former Official Praises Helms’ Civil Rights Record,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, September 30, 1984;

Helms continued in his attempt to appeal to black evangelicals in October when he welcomed former NFL star Roosevelt Grier into his campaign. Grier accompanied Helms at a campaign rally in North Carolina's Research Triangle Park where Helms said, regarding civil rights legislation, "we don't need legislation. We need the Ten Commandments." He referred to former Senator Sam Ervin, saying that much of the legislation put forth by Congress, including civil rights legislation and Affirmative Action, "has . . . been harmful to good race relations." North Carolina blacks, Helms declared, did not need to depend on the government for social and economic equality. When reporters asked Grier about his opinion concerning Helms's position on the King holiday, he replied that he had "nothing against Senator Helms for that" and believed Helms was a man who believed in "one nation under God." The Helms campaign featured Grier in a statewide television advertisement in which he professed his admiration of the senator for his "courage to fight for what he believes in" and declared, "count me in as one more American proud to stand tall with Senator Jesse Helms."<sup>46</sup>

Grier also accompanied Helms to a speech the senator gave at historically-black Livingstone College, a private college in Salisbury. Grier addressed a group of students, professing his faith that Helms would continue to lead the country as "one nation under God." The college had invited both Helms and Hunt to speak as part of a lecture series, but Hunt had sent a campaign surrogate to speak on his behalf on an earlier date. Helms accepted and told an audience of 130 students and guests that he hoped that "faith in the Lord" would be the "common denominator" that would bring people together. He claimed that there was a

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<sup>46</sup> Elizabeth Leland, "Helms Courts Blacks On Statewide Swing," *Raleigh News & Observer*, October 16, 1984; "Rosie Grier for Helms Commercial," Box 3 in the Video Collection of JBH Papers, NCSU Libraries.

“situation in America today where minorities and particularly the black race [was] being used and has been used politically.” He stated that Democrats were “jerking” black voters around and that “you are taken for granted.” He repeated his belief in the importance of the “free-enterprise system” to lift black Americans economically and socially. He also told the audience of black students that “people who brought slaves over here were blacks themselves.” He told the group that neither he or anyone in his family ever “owned a slave.” Leland noted that the senator’s address began “calmly” and that Helms emphasized the importance of listening to “people with whom you disagree,” but that “he became agitated” when asked questions that focused on his past statements about blacks and civil rights. Overall, as Elizabeth Leland reported, the senator’s address “elicit[ed] whispered comments from the audience” of black college students that showed their dissatisfaction with Helms.<sup>47</sup>

Helms’s inclusion of Grier drew sharp criticism from the black North Carolina elite. The vice president of the state’s NAACP, Kelly Alexander Jr. called Grier a “black carpetbagger” and noted that because Helms “couldn’t find anyone in North Carolina who lived here and voted here,” the senator “had to bring in some hired guns.” Irving L. Joyner, the president of the North Carolina Association of Black Lawyers, said that he did not blame Grier for his support of the senator, but that he was “misinformed about the history of Jesse Helms.” He further alleged that Helms used Grier to show that he was “not as bad as he has been painted to be on the race issue” and to win the votes of white moderates. The black

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<sup>47</sup> Elizabeth Leland, “Many Blacks Don’t Listen to Helms’ College Talk,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, October 19, 1984.

lawyer claimed further that “Helms’ record” could not be “erase[d] merely by” Grier “appearing in some commercial.”<sup>48</sup>

Hunt worked to encourage the inclusion of the wider black community in North Carolina politics in the closing weeks of the campaign. Before speaking at a rally at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, he spoke to a crowd of some 600 black North Carolinians in early October and noted the progress that had been made during his eight years as governor, including the black judges he had appointed and black officials elected to various local offices including sheriffs and education board members. He told the group that North Carolinians had “learned to live together, to work together, to play together.” He emphasized that Helms sought to instigate racial animosities between whites and blacks who had overcome traditional racial animosities to become a “brotherhood.” Later in the same month, Hunt addressed the North Carolina NAACP, telling 150 supporters that Helms “[had] been trying to tell you that you don’t know where I stand.” The governor contrasted his positions concerning the growth of the black electorate and civil rights, declaring that “you know where I stand and you know where Jesse Helms stands.”<sup>49</sup>

The governor also addressed black North Carolinians who had become complacent with regard to voting by producing seven radio advertisements featuring black North Carolinians. Wake County Sheriff John Baker, Charlotte Mayor Harvey Gantt, pop singer Roberta Flack, and University of North Carolina basketball player Sam Perkins narrated the ads and stressed the importance of black participation in the election. John Baker declared in

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<sup>48</sup> “Black Leaders Assail Grier Endorsement,” in “Under the Dome,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, October 20, 1984.

<sup>49</sup> Associated Press, “Hunt Stresses Brotherhood To Blacks,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, October 4, 1984; Associated Press, “NAACP Delegates Voice Support For Hunt,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, October 20, 1984.

one that he “was elected sheriff in Wake County by people who cared enough to get involved.” In another, Baker noted that he supported Hunt, and that “Hunt has always been there fighting for us.” Gantt noted that “it amazes me that some people say they don’t plan on voting.” He also pointed out that he never would have been elected had the black community in Charlotte not voted for him. Flack reminded black voters of “the trouble so many people went to to win the right to vote freely.” She invoked King, “how can they forget the dream our fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers fought to keep alive for us?” The ad that featured Perkins also invoked the memory of King when Perkins spoke of King’s dream, declaring that “we can only keep that dream alive if we exercise” the right to vote.<sup>50</sup>

With the election close at hand, Helms and Hunt continued working for the white votes they needed to win, and the race to the finish was close. During the weekend before the election, the Gallup Organization released a poll taken the week before that showed Helms leading Hunt by 3 percent, 49 to 46, among likely voters. The poll of 1,873 registered voters claimed that Helms had picked up some ground among Tar Heel blacks, people with less than a high school education, and voters under the age of fifty. Hunt led by 5 percent in the eastern part of the state, Helms led in the mountains by 24 percent, and the two split the Piedmont with Helms at 48 percent and Hunt at 47. In the last days of the campaign Helms

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<sup>50</sup> “John Baker – Voter Registration :60/John Baker – Pro-Hunt :60/Harvey Gantt – Voter Registration :60/Harvey Gantt – Pro-Hunt :60”; “Jim Hunt – DHS Films: ‘Roberta Flack – Voter Reg.’ :60, ‘HUNT Robert Flack on Hunt’ JHSEN 1030 10/17/84 Radio :60”; “JHSEN 1025 ‘Sam Perkins on Voter Registration – REVISED,’ JHSEN-1026 ‘Robert Flack on Voter Registration – REVISED’ Radio :60 9-26-84 HUNT - #31,” Box 50 in the Audio Collection of JBH Papers, NCSU Libraries.

held the lead, but there were still three days to make their final appeals and show that they represented the best interests of North Carolina.<sup>51</sup>

On the Sunday and Monday prior to Election Day, the Hunt campaign aired a thirty-minute message for prime-time television that sought to re-emphasize both his fiscal conservatism and Helms's connection to right-wing ideologues, including Jerry Falwell, Phyllis Schlafly, and Sun Myung Moon. Hal Linden, a television actor and narrator of the program, noted Helms's desire to institute school prayer and the senator's connection with military dictators. Reminding viewers of Helms's stand concerning Social Security, Medicare, and veteran's benefits, Linden declared, "his position is consistent with his overall priorities." The narrator posed a question, asking why the right-wing "network" raised "over \$18 million" for Helms, and answered, "Jim Hunt." Changing course, Linden declared that Hunt was among a "new breed of southern Democrats who have shaped their political philosophy around a new pragmatism that puts economic growth, jobs, and education at the head of their priorities." Hunt, according to Linden, fought the fight against the "Helms network" in order to bring people together. In the narrator's conclusion, the ad highlighted Hunt's status as a fiscal conservative and declared that he would keep the Tar Heel state "moving ahead."<sup>52</sup>

Hunt himself concluded the advertisement, beginning with his regret that the campaign had become so negative. He touched on all the original themes of his campaign: the progressive tradition of the Tar Heel state, the ability that North Carolinians had to come

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<sup>51</sup> Rob Christensen, "Helms, Hunt Close, Gallup Poll Shows," *Raleigh News & Observer*, November 4, 1984.

<sup>52</sup> "Jim Hunt – Campaign 84 64," Box 8 in the Video Collection of JBH Papers, NCSU Libraries; Ben Sherwood, "Hunt's Half-Hour TV Ad Aimed at Sharpening Candidates' Contrast," *Raleigh News & Observer*, November 4, 1984.

together and work for common purpose, and the capacity of the state and its people to “move forward” through any adversity. He spoke about his accomplishments as governor, pointing out the state’s fiscal conservatism during his tenure in office and noting that he supported an amendment to the Constitution that required a balanced federal budget. He pointed out the economic expansion the state had experienced and the improvements to education under his administration. After his continued profession of “progress,” Hunt made mention of the danger that Falwell and other right-wing conservatives posed to individual freedom and proclaimed that the fight against radical ideology was “fundamental” to the upcoming election. The lengthy advertisement ended with Hunt repeating a line from his most recent television ads that harkened back to the evocative phrases spoken by Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy, stating that “if we don’t believe and don’t care, nothing can save the nation; if we believe and care, nothing can stop us.”<sup>53</sup>

The inclusive message Hunt sought to convey in this last appeal to a statewide audience mirrored the color-blind message he had championed since February. He spoke passionately about black leaders including Martin Luther King among black audiences and within black media markets. When it came to addressing mixed or white audiences however, Hunt used the color-blind rhetoric of whiteness to avoid stoking racial animosities among the white North Carolina electorate and advocated for a more inclusive politics.

Hunt had railed against Helms’s ties to the religious right for months, and Helms responded to charges that he was a fundamentalist, saying, “That’s right. I plead guilty” to the North Carolina Christian Educators Association. He claimed to be “intrigued that I have

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<sup>53</sup> “Jim Hunt – Campaign 84 64,” Box 8 in the Video Collection of JBH Papers, NCSU Libraries.



been repeatedly called the Prince of Darkness because of my efforts to restore school prayer,” and noted that he was a “right-wing extremist because I try to stand up for the most innocent and helpless of humans – the unborn children.” Summing up his campaign as a “cause” of religious nationalism, the senator said his campaign was “the conservative cause, the free-enterprise cause, but most of all, the cause of decency and honor and spiritual, moral cleanliness in America today.” He suggested that North Carolinians responded favorably to him because they loved both “their country and . . . their God.” The senator, recalling the successful character assassinations his campaign had run against Hunt, emphatically stated, “the man is not to be trusted,” and declared that he hoped “that he never has another day in public office after he’s finished his term as governor.” He characterized Hunt as “desperate,” “frustrated,” and “frightened,” and claimed that the negativity of the campaign was the governor’s fault.<sup>54</sup>

Helms also continued his divisive politics of whiteness and persisted in provoking racial animosities held by the white electorate. In the closing days of the campaign the senator pointed out that the only way Hunt would win the election was if he won “an enormous bloc vote,” in reference to black North Carolinians. He further invigorated white evangelicals and other white cultural conservatives when he declared that he was “proud” of his relationships with the religious right and contrasted that relationship with the “homosexuals that support[ed]” Hunt.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Elizabeth Leland, “Helms Proud of Label as Fundamentalist,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, November 3, 1984.

<sup>55</sup> A.L. May, “Helms Bitterly Assails Hunt in Tour of State,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, November 6, 1984.

As the campaign approached Election Day, both candidates had to wait and see whose message North Carolina voters would prefer. Was it Helms, who worked tirelessly to energize white evangelicals and connected Hunt with the state's homosexual community, feminists who supported abortion, and the black bloc vote? Or, would it be Hunt, who attempted to appeal to blacks, moderate whites, and traditional Democrats through a message of fiscal responsibility, moderate progress, and economic innovation, all of which he claimed would maintain North Carolina's hope for the future? Both candidates campaigned through the end of the day on November 6 to spread their messages among the white North Carolina electorate. The two campaigns spent a total of over \$26.5 million in their efforts to attract white voters. They bombarded the state with nearly 8,000 television ads in the last five weeks of the campaign in their attempts to attract white Tar Heel votes, with Helms's ads playing at a margin of over two-to-one. Only one, however, would emerge victorious when the haze of the nearly two-year-long battle over the white soul of the state settled and the votes cast were counted.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 302.

## **Conclusion**

### **Holding onto Traditional Whiteness: Helms Wins**

At around midnight on November 6, Jim Hunt told a crowd of followers at The Raleigh Inn, the “long and difficult battle [was] over,” and that, regardless of the result, “we must respect it.” At the North Raleigh Hilton, Jesse Helms proclaimed that voters “sent a signal throughout the world that North Carolina is a God-fearing, conservative state . . . where the majority of the people believe in the free-enterprise system and believe that it ought to be allowed to function.” With the election over and the votes counted, for the first time in over eighteen months the airwaves throughout North Carolina were void of political commercials from the campaigns of Jesse Helms and Jim Hunt.<sup>57</sup>

The senator narrowly defeated the governor with nearly 52 percent of the vote, 51.7 to 47.8 percent for Hunt, a margin of just under 87,000 votes out of over two million cast. The senator, however, overwhelmingly won over white North Carolinians with 63 percent of the white vote. Though the overall results proved to be the narrowest margin of victory for Helms in his political career, he won the battle for the white soul of North Carolina, beating Hunt by 26 percent among white voters.<sup>58</sup>

Ronald Reagan won North Carolina’s electoral votes for re-election and provided Helms with huge coattails on which to ride back to Washington. Tar Heels voted for the Republican president with 62 percent, an overwhelming rejection of the Democrats’ choice of the Minnesotan Walter Mondale. Only one other Republican, Richard Nixon in 1972, had

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<sup>57</sup> Christensen, “Helms Tops Hunt to Win Third Term,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, November 7, 1984; Elizabeth Leland, “Helms Says His Victory Shows N.C. is a ‘God-Fearing’ State,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, November 7, 1984.

<sup>58</sup> Pearce, *Jim Hunt*, 188.

won North Carolina with more Tar Heel approval. The Reagan influence proved important. All the counties Helms won supported Reagan with voting margins of at least 60 percent.<sup>59</sup>

In the days that followed, key players within both the Helms and Hunt campaigns offered explanations for the election's outcome that varied from economics to party loyalty. The Congressional Club's Tom Ellis said, "it was the mood of the country that helped," and added that "Helms was as much a part of . . . the mood as Ronald Reagan was." Both Joseph Grimsley, co-director of Hunt's campaign, and Carter Wrenn, executive director of Helms's Congressional Club, agreed that taxes posed the critical issue for the election. Gary Pearce, Hunt's other co-director, said, "the lesson of this election is what the national Democratic Party is going to have to do to appeal to a broader spectrum of voters in the South." Though none of them came out and said it, the campaign came down to race and an appeal to the whiteness within the state's political culture. Noting the issue of race, Grimsley added that, though their campaign turned out the state's black vote, "more people came that nobody turned out. They had a message to send, and they sent it."<sup>60</sup>

Those who helped craft Helms's message credited the senator's victory to their successful advertising strategy. Though both campaigns combined spent over \$26 million, Helms outspent Hunt by over six million with much of that going toward his television advertising. The Helms campaign believed that television offered the only way Helms could effectively communicate with the Tar Heel electorate. The day after the election, Carter Wrenn told a reporter that "none of the media was going to carry our message . . . Every one of them endorsed Hunt." Tom Ellis echoed Wrenn's statement, noting that Helms succeeded

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<sup>59</sup> Eamon, *The Making of a Southern Democracy*, 210; Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 302.

<sup>60</sup> Elizabeth Leland, "Pocketbook Issues Decided Race That Had Everything," *Raleigh News & Observer*, November 8, 1984.

by “telling the truth,” and asserted that the campaign “[used] enough television, radio, direct mail to go over the top of the North Carolina news media.”<sup>61</sup>

Years later however, Wrenn experienced what he called a “shift in my own thinking.” With regard to the *Raleigh News & Observer*, the former executive director of Helms’s National Congressional Club said that “when I was really active politically, I thought they were biased, but the truth is I was just wrong.” A careful reading of the editorial pages of the *News & Observer* reveals that while the newspaper offered scathing opinions about Helms and generally more positive opinions for Hunt, the paper’s actual coverage proved to be just as critical of Hunt as it was of the senator.<sup>62</sup>

Both campaigns and their supporters succeeded in increasing voter registration among supporters of both candidates. The state’s voter turnout in 1984 exceeded that of the previous presidential election in 1980 by 1.57 percent, 68.45 to 66.88 percent. Black voter registration grew from 451,000 early in 1983 to roughly 619,000 by Election Day in 1984, an increase of some 168,000 voters. But, the actual turnout of black voters decreased slightly from 63 percent in 1980 to 61 percent in 1984. The efforts of Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority provoked the registration of 200,000 evangelical fundamentalist voters during the election year. Most of these new white voters resided in blue-collar areas spanning the Piedmont Interstate 85 corridor from Raleigh to Charlotte. Lamarr Mooneyham, former North Carolina director for the Moral Majority, said that the churches in the rural and small-town

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<sup>61</sup> Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 302; Elizabeth Leland, “Pocketbook Issues Decided Race That Had Everything,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, November 8, 1984.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Carter Wrenn by Joseph Mosnier, December 18, 2007, R-0429, in the Southern Oral History.

communities throughout the Piedmont “did the same thing on Sunday on Tuesday” by organizing and driving conservative Christians to the polls on Election Day.<sup>63</sup>

Helms’s greatest support came from white voters in the western Piedmont and the traditional Republican stronghold of the mountain west. The senator received between 60 and 73 percent of the vote in the heavily white Piedmont counties of Stanley, Cabarrus, Gaston, Randolph, Davidson, Rowan, Davie, Yadkin, Catawba, Iredell, and Alexander. He carried the same margins in six mountain counties: Wilkes, Caldwell, Burke, Avery, Mitchell, and Henderson. The senator also garnered majorities of 50 to 59.9 percent in the largely rural Piedmont counties of Rockingham, Alamance, Stokes, Surry, Person, Montgomery, Moore, and Lee. All of the Piedmont counties Helms won, with the exception of Davie, Randolph, and Yadkin, had a majority of registered Democrats and a large population of white blue-collar workers.<sup>64</sup>

Hunt performed best in the traditional Democratic stronghold of the eastern Coastal Plain and the metropolitan Piedmont counties of Wake, Guilford, Forsyth, and Mecklenburg. He won an overwhelming 90 percent of the black vote, particularly in black belt counties of the northeast—such as Northampton, Gates, Hertford, Bertie, Edgecombe, and Greene—where the nonwhite population approached or exceeded 50 percent. The governor also won the racially diverse counties of Robeson, Scotland, and Hoke on the Coastal Plain, and Anson

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<sup>63</sup> North Carolina State Board of Elections, “Turnout Statistics For Presidential Election Years: 1972-Present,” <https://www.ncsbe.gov/voter-turnout>; Elizabeth Leland, “White Fundamentalists May Have Offset Turnout by Blacks in Hunt-Helms Race,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, November 9, 1984; Elizabeth Leland, “Pocketbook Issues Decided Race That Had Everything,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, November 8, 1984.

<sup>64</sup> Frederick A. Day and Gregory A. Weeks, “The 1984 Helms-Hunt Senate Race: A Spatial Postmortem of Emerging Republican Strength in the South,” *Social Science Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (December 1988): Table on 947.

County in the southern Piedmont. The only counties Hunt won that were largely white were Orange, Durham, Wake, and Forsyth, which had nonwhite populations of about 10 to 25 percent. Those metro-Piedmont counties, however, consisted of large white liberal and racially-moderate populations. Guilford and Mecklenburg counties, which the governor also won, had nonwhite populations of between 26 and 45 percent, along with comparably more white liberals than surrounding rural counties. The sizeable number of white liberals and blacks in these metropolitan counties provided Hunt with an edge and gave Helms less than 50 percent of their vote, though not enough to counter the rural support given to the senator.<sup>65</sup>

Helms's message proved persuasive in the traditional land of Democratic control. He succeeded in attracting a considerable number of white Democrats in the Coastal Plain who had come to be known as "Jessecrats." He managed to win small majorities in the eastern counties of Harnett, Johnston, Nash, Wayne, Lenoir, Craven, Beaufort, Currituck, Dare, Onslow, New Hanover, and Brunswick. All those counties, except New Hanover, had substantial Democratic majorities among registered voters, ranging between 70 and nearly 90 percent. Most of those counties also had nonwhite populations ranging from 10 to 45 percent, with the exception of Dare. In seven Coastal Plain counties, where Hunt had done well in the past, Helms won over 75 percent of white voters, but he also won the majority of white voters in all 41 counties in the eastern part of the state. These "disenfranchised Democrats," as Helms called them, proved to be crucial to his victory. With Helms's appeal to white

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<sup>65</sup> See Figures 3, 5, and 6 in Day and Meeks, "The 1984 Helms-Hunt Senate Race": 947-49; Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics 2000*), 185.

conservative Democrats, race played a major role in determining the outcome of the election.<sup>66</sup>

The cultural war of whiteness beyond race, including the debate over women's reproductive rights and conservative evangelicalism, showed in the election results as well. Hunt performed extremely well among women, winning with a margin of 14 percent, 57 to 43. Christians who described themselves as born-again voted for Helms by a 20 percent margin, 60 to 40, and self-described conservatives voted for the senator by a margin of 75 to 25 percent. In one telling instance, when the governor was talking with voters waiting at a polling location, a young woman said that both she and her husband planned to vote "for the Christian," meaning Helms, despite the fact that Hunt, too, was a life-long Christian. As Phil Carlton noted, those involved with the Hunt campaign knew this group proved to be a "problem." He followed up, stating that "a lot of those people were first-time registered [voters]—your fundamentalist church folk."<sup>67</sup>

Helms's divisive use of whiteness proved more convincing to North Carolina's white electorate than Hunt's desire for inclusive politics. Though Hunt campaigned on tax cuts for the working and middle classes, fiscal conservatism, and a strong national defense, all important issues to white North Carolinians, white blue-collar Tar Heels and middle-class conservatives, particularly in the Piedmont and Coastal Plain, voted overwhelmingly for Helms. Helms's classless language of the free-enterprise system and his use of anti-black

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<sup>66</sup> Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 203; See Figures 3, 5, and 6 in Day and Meeks, "The 1984 Helms-Hunt Senate Race": 947-49; Eamon, *The Making of a Southern Democracy*, 212; Jesse Helms, *Here's Where I Stand: A Memoir* (New York: Random House, 2005), 169.

<sup>67</sup> Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 302; Pearce, *Jim Hunt*, 189; Elizabeth Leland, "Pocketbook Issues Decided Race That Had Everything," *Raleigh News & Observer*, November 8, 1984.



prejudice, which has always benefited those with more property, lessened class conflict and brought the white working and middle classes together with Tar Heel business owners, a key characteristic of whiteness. The senator's character attacks proved successful in lessening the governor's integrity and tarnishing his whiteness in the eyes of white Tar Heels.<sup>68</sup>

Hunt did all he could to keep from alienating white voters in his quest for a more inclusive whiteness with his largely color-blind message to white audiences, but his efforts did little more than add fuel to Helms's character attacks. His attempt to energize black voters in conjunction with his color-blind appeals to white conservative Democrats reflected the flip-flopping characterization illustrated by Helms's question, "where do you stand, Jim?" The governor distanced himself from a national Democratic Party that was too liberal to win statewide elections in the South. In only a few instances did the word "Democrat" show up in his advertising or addresses to white audiences, and when it did there were always the qualifiers "southern" or "North Carolina" to illustrate the governor's moderate conservatism. Hunt failed to engage directly in a debate on race and, when pressed by Helms, evaded the issue. Hunt's use of consensus, color-blind politics played against him when Helms challenged the governor on racial issues such as the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday and his connections with Jesse Jackson. The governor's appeals to the state's black electorate in black media markets remained largely absent from his campaign's advertising in white media markets. In the end, his class-based and quasi-color-blind tactics failed to convince white conservative North Carolinians to vote for him.

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<sup>68</sup> Day and Weeks, "The 1984 Helms-Hunt Senate Race": 957; William D. Snider, *Helms and Hunt: The North Carolina Senate Race, 1984* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 214-215.

Hunt later admitted that the issue of race hurt him in the end, telling Gary Pearce in 2010 that his connection with Jesse Jackson affected the relationship he had “with the kind of rural conservative vote that I’d always done pretty well with before.” Hunt knew that many conservative white North Carolinians had what the governor called “strong feelings against integration.” White conservative Tar Heels resented the successes of the civil rights movement of two decades prior, the last substantial affront to southern whiteness. With that last assault, white conservative North Carolinians sought the political means with which to protect it and found it in Jesse Helms.<sup>69</sup>

The blowback against racial integration only provided part of the animus felt by white Tar Heels in 1984. The economic revolution that benefited blacks and women through Affirmative Action endangered the opportunities experienced by the traditionally white-male working class. This instigated white resistance to Affirmative Action programs that sought to extend opportunity and greater economic mobility to underprivileged minorities and women. In addition, the cultural weight of the sexual revolution among women who sought to take control of reproductive rights and homosexuals who were becoming more visible in the country’s political discourse threatened the very existence of whiteness through a blurring of traditional gender roles and lower rates of reproduction.<sup>70</sup>

Jesse Helms represented a whiteness that sought to quell any attack to the status quo by maintaining whiteness’s purity with regard to both race and culture. Jim Hunt, by contrast, sought a cautiously more inclusive whiteness based on racial diversity, the protection of

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<sup>69</sup> Pearce, *Jim Hunt*, 186-187

<sup>70</sup> Nancy MacLean, *Freedom is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006), 336; Richard Dyer, *White* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 20-21.

women's rights, and a silent, passive acquiescence toward cultural others. Nevertheless, the governor's desire for the political inclusion of cultural others required the consent of much of the state's white population. By a narrow margin, North Carolina elected Jesse Helms to represent the state as a conservative Republican in the United States Senate. By a much larger margin, however, many white North Carolinians elected a standard-bearer in their ideologically-driven senator and rejected the inclusion of racial and cultural others in order to protect against further attacks on the culture of whiteness they were unwilling to see changed.

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## Vita

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