

# Jesse Helms and the 'big lie' theory

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Adolf Hitler practiced what he called the "big lie" theory of propaganda. Recognizing that people want to believe their leaders tell them the truth, Hitler reasoned that he could get away with saying preposterous things—indeed, that, for a leader, "the bigger the lie, the more likely it is to be believed."

Thus, Hitler and the Nazis systematically disseminated the Big Lie that Aryans—blond-haired, blue-eyed white people—were a master race, deserving to dominate all others. The Nazis also argued that Jews were the basic cause of all Germany's troubles; hence, the Jews had to be exterminated.

It seems impossible today that anyone in the 1930s could have fallen for such insane rabberousing. Yet the horrible results of the war fought to extend these beliefs are well known to everyone.

The Nazis in Germany were never more than a tiny minority of the total population, and the "true believers" in Aryan superiority among party members may have been even fewer.

er. Yet Hitler could not have succeeded without at least the tacit support of millions of Germans—people who must have been able to see through the Big Lies, but who could not or would not do so until it was too late.

The "big lie" theory takes an utterly demeaning view of the masses of people, assuming they are gullible and incapable of discovering the truth for themselves. Like all theories, it is subject to the test of experience. One might argue that the success of the Nazis in Germany is proof that the "big lie" theory works. In fact, one who might do so is Senator Jesse Helms, Republican of North Carolina, who clearly is practicing the "big lie" theory in his attempt to keep Democratic Gov. Jim Hunt from taking his seat.

On Oct 7, the *Greensboro News & Record* reported that Helms had called Hunt a "racist." For those familiar with Helms' record as a public figure, going all the way back to the beginning of his career as a television editorialist in 1960, the statement was a ludicrous falsehood. Helms made a name for himself at Raleigh's Channel 5 in large part because of

his belittling of the civil rights movement, particularly the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.; and he has voted against every major piece of civil rights legislation, including the Martin Luther King Jr. national holiday, to come before the Senate during his two terms.

In 1984 the Helms campaign has paid for newspaper and television advertisements that employ photographs of Hunt and the Rev. Jesse Jackson; the ads call Jackson a "radical," they complain that Jackson has tried to register black voters in the South, and they demand to know whether voters want to send to Washington a man like Jim Hunt, who dares to associate with Jesse Jackson.

Helms told the *News & Record* that Hunt is "trying to appeal to black citizens, but he's trying to hide it." Thus, he concludes, it is Jim Hunt, not Jesse Helms, who is the "racist."

Who does the senator believe will be convinced by this lie? Certainly not blacks, who recent polls show will probably vote against Helms by at least 15 to 1. Certainly not well-informed people who have followed Helms' long record of hostility to progress for minor-

ities, and who know of Hunt's efforts to work harmoniously with people of all races. Who, then?

Jacques Ellul, author of *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, points out that all successful propaganda must have an aspect of truth to it. It is true that Hunt has met with Jesse Jackson. It is true that Hunt must have black votes to defeat Helms. But, says Ellul, we must make "a radical distinction between a fact on the one hand and on intentions or interpretations on the other," for the realm of intentions and interpretations is "the real realm of the lie."

"If one falsifies a fact," Ellul writes, "one may be confronted with unquestionable proof to the contrary." (For example, Helms could not get away with saying he voted for the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday, and he has not tried to do so.) "But," Ellul continues, "no proof can be furnished where motivations or intentions are concerned or interpretation of a fact is involved. A fact has different significance, depending on whether it is analyzed by a bourgeois economist or a Soviet economist, by a liberal historian, a Christian or a Marxist historian."

Jesse Helms appears sincerely to believe that Jesse Jackson's drive to register black voters is evidence of the desire of blacks as a race to seize power from the white fundamentalist Christians whom Helms sees as the majority of Americans and whom he claims to represent well. He interprets the situation as a power struggle between whites and blacks; his intention is to reawaken submerged racial prejudice in white people so that they will participate in the struggle to maintain the dominance of their race. And this appeal to divisiveness is the most damning thing of all that can be said against Helms.

Like many Americans, I have had to consciously try to purge myself of the racism and sexism which permeated every aspect of my environment as a child growing up in the 1950s. Psychologists tell us that a great deal of our significant learning—those bedrock attitudes and values which are the most resistant to change—is acquired by the age of six. Thus, it is probably impossible completely to "un-learn racism and sexism, though these negative traits can be controlled by a continuing effort of the will.

See Helms, page 8

## Letters

continued from page 4

the general noise level in the library. With regard to the first issue, the library custodian has a three-story building to clean every day Monday through Friday. Beginning at 7:00 a.m., an hour before the library opens, the library custodian finds it impossible to finish her cleaning routine by 8:00 a.m. The library administration has determined through studying library patterns that the early morning hours between 7:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. are best for the major cleaning tasks such as vacuuming and emptying trashcans. Library traffic is at a minimal level during this time period. Incidentally, since there are three floors in the library and only one custodian, it is always possible to find two floors where the noise of cleaning

does not cause a disturbance.

The second concern has been addressed by library policy and by action. The basement and second floor have been designated quiet study areas. There are signs throughout the library which reinforce this policy. A monitor has been hired to keep these floors quiet at night when library traffic is at the maximal level. The main floor is reserved for group study since many students prefer to study in groups.

I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the issues raised by Mouche Maggio and to encourage others to share their concerns with me.

Plummer Alston Jones, Jr.  
Head Librarian

## Parents Weekend scheduled for Nov. 2

To the Editor:

Parents Weekend has evolved into one of the major campus-wide events of the academic year. Judging by the number of inquiries received in the Office of Alumni and Parent Programs during the past several weeks, a record number of families will visit Elon this year to participate in the activities that are planned. November 2-4 is Parents Weekend.

A dance on Saturday evening called the "5th Quarter Social" will be held at the Alamance County Club, and students and their parents should be aware of two important restrictions that apply at this function:

1. Because club regulations disallow the sale of tickets to this event on the premises, tickets MUST be purchased in advance. No one will be admitted

that evening without a ticket.

2. Because the dance honors the parents of Elon students, students will not be admitted unless accompanied by their parents or the parents of another student.

This year the event is open to all students, including freshmen, and I am certain that everyone who attends will thoroughly enjoy the "5th Quarter Social."

Other events for which family members may desire tickets include a picnic lunch and the football game. Students may purchase tickets for their family in the Office of Alumni and Parent Programs, located in Powell Building, Room 101.

J. King White  
Director of Alumni & Parents Programs



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