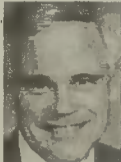


What Democrats can learn from Helms' memoirs

Almost 30 years ago I was eating breakfast in a Charlotte hotel with a group of lawyers, all Democrats.

One of our breakfast group suddenly whispered that Senator Jesse Helms had entered the dining room. I tried to look up to get a glance, without gawking. But the senator was walking directly towards our table. We stood. He shook our hands and told us that he thought he was supposed to join us for breakfast.



D.G. MARTIN

He was mistaken, of course, and I never learned how he wound up at our table. It was a funny situation. I suppose none of us knew how to say, "This is the last group you would want to eat with" without seeming totally rude.

So, he sat down at our table. The conversation was strained. We tried weather and sports. It was awkward for everybody, but

Helms was too polite to leave without finishing breakfast with us.

I finally confessed that I was "on the other side" politically. But, I said, my son, who was then 8 or 9 years old, had told me that he agreed with Senator Helms that we should not give up the Panama Canal.

As the breakfast broke up, Helms gave me his card on which he had written a short message to my son, thanking him for his support and promising to work to keep the canal.



Helms

I acknowledge that I admire that ability to find personal connections even with political enemies, as he did that day with me at breakfast.

When I learned that Senator Helms had written a memoir, "Here's Where I Stand," I was determined to read it to see what I could learn from him about how to win political contests.

Others can review and criticize "Here's Where I Stand" for some of its unbelievable claims, such as its assertion that Helms never supported segregation.

I will leave for another time a discussion of Helms' description of his "conversion" that led to his support for large amounts of American dollars to support the war against AIDS in Africa, except to share Helms' own explanation:

"I may have been late in seeing this need, but now that I have seen it, I feel committed to working as hard as I can to bring as many resources as possible to the resolution of the problem."

What can Helms' political opponents learn from his book? Here are a few things.

1. Throw away the speeches that are full of facts.

Instead, do what Helms says he did in Asheville at the first big speech in his first Senate campaign: Reach for the heart. "Suddenly it came to me. Do not talk to those people in Asheville about economics and give them a lot of facts and statistics. Talk from the heart. Tell them that we need for America to have a spiritual rebirth."

Listen to one of John Edwards' "Two Americas" speeches and you might think he's read Helms' playbook.

2. Know the difference between principles and preferences. "... [T]o be successful in politics and remain true to your principles is to know the distinction between your principles and your preferences. On your principles, you should never yield; you should be prepared to be defeated. Nobody likes to be defeated, but you should let everybody know in the most articulate and thoughtful and civil way you can... that in certain matters that you define as matters of principle you will not budge, you cannot yield, you will not compromise."

3. Learn the rules.

"I knew the value of amendments and how to keep things from being caught up in committees. I knew when and how to make the call for a voice vote so Senators would have to attach their name to the issues they supported or choose not to support. I knew how to introduce substitute bills and how to recruit cosponsors."

4. Know the value of helping your constituents.

"Whatever these folks in my office did, they did with skill and courtesy. In the process they developed a reputation as people who cared. They were, therefore, one of the best staffs in the Capitol for constituent services"

I am going to share these lessons with some of my favorite Democratic politicians, including one who received that special Panama Canal message from Helms so many years ago.

D.G. MARTIN is the host of UNC-TV's "North Carolina Bookwatch," which airs on Sundays at 5 p.m.

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Who was left in Katrina's wake?

The Children's Defense Fund's logo illustrated by 7-year-old Maria Coté is a drawing of a bright sun shining on a small boat with a tiny sail adrift on a very wide sea. Above the drawing, in Maria's handwriting, is the ancient traditional fisherman's prayer: "Dear Lord, be good to me. The sea is so wide and my boat is so small."



MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

These words have a poignant and tragic resonance today with so many American children, adults, and families adrift and in need. Across the Gulf Coast region, Hurricane Katrina left waves of devastation so wide and deep it is hard for any of us to bear but especially already fragile children and families.

So many questions have risen about what should have been done differently in the days leading up to the hurricane and just after the storm struck. In New Orleans, particularly, where so much of the most dramatic suffering happened after the hurricane, there is no question about two of the major causes behind the city's tragedy. The chronic quiet twin tsunamis of poverty and race that have been snuffing out the lives and hopes of millions of American children were laid bare there.

Many Americans were shocked that thousands of people trapped in New Orleans weren't able to leave the city during the "mandatory evacuation" because they did not have cars, credit cards, or the money to find another way out of the city. Who exactly was left behind? The television cameras have already shown us the plain truth: most of the residents left behind were Black, many were poor, and many were families with children. Let's look at the facts:

One out of every three children in New Orleans lived in a household that didn't own a vehicle, and nearly all of those children were Black. More than 98 percent of children in car-less households lived in minority households and 96 percent of them lived in Black households. Almost two out of five Black children in New Orleans lived in a household without a car compared to fewer than 4 percent of White children.

Not surprisingly, families who didn't own vehicles were also more likely to be poor. More than half of all poor households and nearly 60 percent of poor Black households in New Orleans didn't own a car. Without transportation of their own, these families had few choices to get out of New Orleans safely before the hurricane. In a city where almost two in five children lives in poverty, bus or train tickets would have been just as unaffordable for many families as a car note or gas money.

So many of these children and families were forced to stay and try to ride out the storm as best they could. These were the people stranded on the roofs of their homes, on the exit ramps of highways, or in the unspeakable conditions at the city's "shelters of last resort." And as we know, there wasn't just one child left behind in New Orleans during the "mandatory evacuation," or just a few, but thousands and thousands.

The whole world was horrified by the images of all of the desperate people left behind in the hurricane. But they are the same poor children and adults America has left behind for decades to weather social and economic storms - faceless and voiceless - without help and just treatment in our rich nation. Now that the veil of neglect and inequality has been torn off showing that the American empire and emperor have no clothes, it is time to act. Not to know is bad. To know and to do nothing is inexcusable. It is time to reset our nation's moral and political compass.

We must work together not only in Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi, but throughout the country to help working families hanging on the precarious razor's edge poverty creates. Crumbling schools, lack of health care, and loss of food stamps, after-school programs, and childcare are daily hardships for millions of children across the nation. We don't want to send the thousands of dislocated people who deal with extreme hardships every day back to the same life that they had before the hurricane. They need decent paying jobs and job training. They need a safe, stable place to live. They need good schools to send their children to. They need quality childcare and after-school programs when they work. They need safe and healthy communities. This time when God has troubled the waters, as our slave forebears sung, can and must become a time of hope and action to ensure access to opportunity for the 37 million poor Americans, including 13 million children.

We must keep this story alive after the water recedes until the needs of our children and families are met. We must not forget the anguished faces when they no longer occupy the front pages of the newspapers. And we must say over and over again now to our political leaders in Congress: stop the tax cuts for the rich and budget cuts for poor children and families.

Bennettsville, S.C., native MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN is CEO and founder of the Children's Defense Fund.



Government incompetence

By Randolph B. Muhammad
SPECIAL TO THE POST

It is evident that the Bush administration lacks the appropriate level of leadership to govern. Bottom line up front (the BLUF), the Bush administration is dysfunctional.

Death toll for 11 September 2001, approximately 2800; death toll as of 13 September 2005 in America's war on terrorism precipitated by the hunt for weapons of mass destruction, Iraq and Afghanistan collectively, approximately 2100 with numbers rising, GOD forbid; death toll as a result of diminishing government funds for infra-structure maintenance and the failure to heed scientific evidence for a potential hurricane and subsequent flood in America's gulf states - still counting.

How many more will have to die before Americans acknowledge that the Bush administration is incompetent? Is it when each household suffers a personal loss in the name of disorganization, lies, and ignorance? The uncertain death toll of Americans due to the ineffectiveness of Bush's administration, domestic and international, inclusive of both terms is unconscionable and unacceptable.

Government is charged to protect and if nothing else mitigate potential and or probable harm to constituents. In a country as great as the United States of America this is not hard to do. American government definitely has the material and human resources available to be effective and therefore compliant to its charge.

Today, national news is reporting that President Bush is accepting full responsibility for slow and inadequate government (Federal Emergency Management Agency), response to Hurricane Katrina. Surprisingly this is newsworthy. Why?

As a former career/professional soldier, five leader reference points are indelibly etched in my mind and on my heart:

- You can delegate authority, never responsibility (leader is always responsible for his or her charges actions, especially if appointed, hired, or selected by he or she)

- Lead by example
- Be present immediately when those you lead are affected by an event; if unavailable, ensure all know you are aware and expeditiously enroute

- Communicate effectively
- When in charge, be in charge

"Collateral damage" was a catch phrase a few years ago. A catch phrase akin to acceptable. Is loss of life that you are charged to protect acceptable knowing you have the resources and power to mitigate? Emphatically, no! Is loss of home, culture, and livelihood acceptable? Again, no! Political spin and rhetoric given over and over and over again, and yet people keep dying. How many will have to die?

With this latest show of ineptness (incompetence, ineffectiveness, lack of ability, lack of skill), our government's response to the catastrophic hurricane Katrina has revealed to the world its lack of concern for its citizenry's safety. These unfortunate American's caught in a natural event, the majority, by circumstance happened to be the poorest and subsequently most helpless and vulnerable to such a catastrophe. And yes, majority by demographics in and around New Orleans, were African-American.

Is not citizen safety part of the democratic process? American government's "messianic spirit" of espousing democratic benefits to the world revealed its (America) hypocrisy to its own at such a crucial time (Katrina) - life versus death.

Hard questions have been asked of the Bush administration after each horrific event noted in the opening of this dialogue/opinion, only to be answered by passionate deflection (redirect, sidetrack, divert). Partisan and bi-partisan "pundit rhetoric" comes to the forefront and we the public, constituents, Americans, irrespective of economic status and hue, become lost as to what is most important - we the people! Bush's administration has not shown that people are important or at least not as important as geo-strategy and money, which are the two most prevalent issues during this presidency.

How many will have to die due to government incompetence before Americans speaking through their respective elected representatives say - enough Mr. President; enough! How many will have to die before our elected representatives in one of their continuous, monotonous (droning, repetitive) meetings demand accountability of the Bush administration. Yes, government accountability that is owed the public by virtue of our often touted, rhetorically shouted democratic process.

RANDOLPH MUHAMMAD lives in Charlotte.

THE
BOONDOCKS
by Aaron McGruder

