

QNotes

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Volume 23 . Number 07 July 26 . 2008 Printed on Recycled Paper FREE

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Burying a fossil

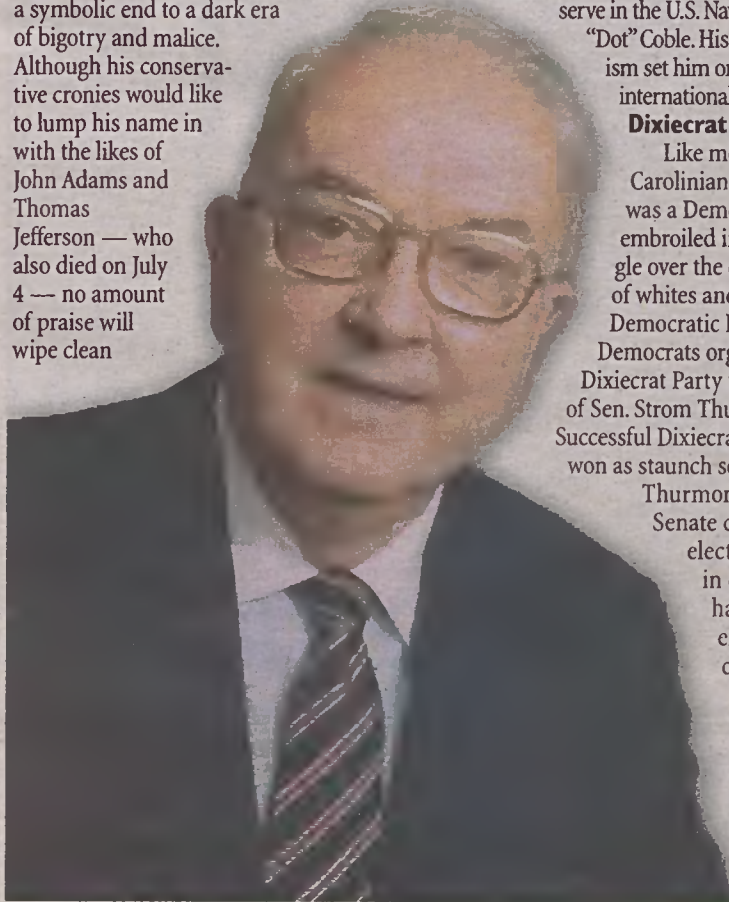
by Matt Comer . Q-Notes staff

Gone, but not forgotten. That's how most North Carolinians are thinking of the late former Sen. Jesse Helms, a segregationist Democrat-turned-Republican who held his seat in the U.S. Senate for 30 years.

But where the mainstream media, conservative Republicans and fundamentalist Christians have been busy whitewashing his past and glorifying his memory, LGBT people around the Carolinas, the nation and the world will forever remember the real Jesse Helms.

North Carolinians first sent the hateful TV commentator to Washington, D.C., in 1972. "I might not agree with him, but at least I know where he stands," was the rejoinder that echoed across the state every six years from voters who'd re-elect him five separate times, despite his racist, homophobic and AIDSphobic politics.

Helms' July Fourth death brings a symbolic end to a dark era of bigotry and malice. Although his conservative cronies would like to lump his name in with the likes of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson — who also died on July 4 — no amount of praise will wipe clean



Helms' record of pushing millions of racial and sexual minorities to the back of the bus during his reign as "Senator No."

The early years

Born Oct. 18, 1921, to Jesse Helms, Sr. and Ethel Mae Helms in Monroe, N.C., there was hardly a thought that small-town country boy Jesse Alexander Helms, Jr. would eventually become one of the most influential and longest-serving senators in the history of the nation.

Helms attended Monroe Public Schools, after which he matriculated to Wingate Junior College and Wake Forest College in Wake Forest, N.C. In 1940, he would leave Wake Forest without completing his degree and begin his journalism career as a sports editor for *The Raleigh Times*, now known as *The News & Observer*.

In 1942, the second World War hit America by surprise. As Helms was leaving his work to serve in the U.S. Navy, he married Dorothy "Dot" Coble. His 1945 return to journalism set him on a career path toward international infamy.

Dixiecrat Jesse

Like most white North Carolinians of the time, Helms was a Democrat. Deeply embroiled in the national struggle over the continued segregation of whites and blacks, the Democratic Party split. Southern Democrats organized their own Dixiecrat Party under the leadership of Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-SC). Successful Dixiecrats ran for office and won as staunch segregationists.

Thurmond, the only U.S. Senate candidate to win election through a write-in campaign, would have a weighty influence on Helms' political ideology.

After serving five years as the city editor at *The Raleigh Times*, Helms became an unofficial aide and researcher in the 1950 Senate campaign of arch-

conservative Democrat and segregationist Willis Smith.

When the Dixiecrat-in-all-but-name won his primary against the more moderate Franklin

Porter Graham, the election was a done deal. In those days, Democratic primaries were all that mattered.

During the campaign, Helms was instrumental in helping to frame a campaign ad that read, "White people, wake up before it's too late. Do you want Negroes working beside you, your wife and your daughters, in your mills

and factories? Frank Graham favors mingling of the races."

When Smith took office, he brought young Helms, the ever-diligent, unpaid campaign worker, along with him. Under the tutelage of a hardline segregationist and racist, Helms got

see Helms on 18



Racism and homophobia will forever be Helms' legacy

S.C. governor demands personnel and policy changes after ad flap

Employee who approved 'So Gay' ad resigns, SC Pride responds
by Gareth Fenley . Contributing Writer

COLUMBIA — When South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford learned that his state was being advertised as a gay tourism destination, he ordered a Cabinet-level department head "to do the right thing personnel-wise or process-wise to ensure this does not happen again," Sanford's spokesman Joel Sawyer told *Q-Notes*.

Sanford was reacting to U.S. media reports that a subway poster mounted in London, England, during Gay Pride week was announcing "South Carolina is so gay."

A state employee who approved the ads was called to a meeting with management and resigned, according to Marion Edmonds, spokesman for the state's Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism (PRT).

If the employee broke any rule in the conduct of her job, it was apparently an unwritten one.

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Just as deserving
Winston couple argues
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Crape Myrtle
is back
Festival still helping
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drama
Student production
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