

Sen. Jesse Helms refuses to discuss any aspect of Meredith letter

RALEIGH (AP)--Civil rights pioneer James H. Meredith vowed to become "the most important Black leader in America and the World" in a letter he wrote to congressmen before joining Sen. Jesse Helms' staff.

"We need to know each other. ... I plan to take control of all NAACP branches. ... I plan to take steps to see that persons with AIDS, Hard Core Drug addicts, persons with Incurable 'Syphilis' and Lunatics be removed from the Black Communities and placed in institutions," he wrote in the same letter of January 1988.

A year later, he wrote directly to Helms, asking to establish a working relationship "with the North Carolina Republican."

"My goal is to become the base of the future leadership of the Black Race," the letter said. "In order to accomplish this mission I will have to make powerful allies."

A month later, Meredith asked Helms for a job, writing: "How can this benefit you? It will put your liberal adversaries on the defensive regarding their charges of Racism and bigotry ..."

Meredith joined Helms' Senate staff as a legislative assistant on Sept. 5, 1989 at a government salary of \$30,000 to \$35,000.

Since then, Meredith -- who gained renown in 1962 as the first black to attend the University of Mississippi--has stirred controversy with statements assailing mainstream black leaders.

On Monday, the Washington newspaper Roll Call published an article about the letters Meredith wrote before and after joining Helms' staff. Meredith had given the letters to the newspaper, and *The News and Observer* of Raleigh reviewed them.

The letters show that Meredith steadily lobbied the senator for a job, beginning with a December 1988 letter saying, "I consider you to be the strongest force in America today opposing the Liberal Agenda."

On Aug. 8, 1989 -- a month before Meredith joined the Senate payroll -- he reassured the senator that criticism from fellow blacks wouldn't bother him.

"I am the one now holding the club," he wrote to Helms. "I can send over 80 percent of all Black operatives to jail from information existing in my own intelligence apparatus"

In his January 1988 letter to Helms and other lawmakers, Meredith wrote of black political and business leaders, saying: "My intelligence sources tells me that more than 60 percent are involved in the Drug problem and over 80 percent are tied to political corruptions."

In July, several black leaders demanded that Meredith be fired because he made a similar accusation --on Helms' Senate stationery--against the 3,000 delegates to the NAACP national convention.

In an interview Monday, Helms defended Meredith and declined to discuss details of the letters.

"I'm not going to discuss my relationship with Dr. Meredith with you or anybody else," the senator said. "That's none of your business. I know you're trying to make something of it. But Dr. Meredith is a good man. He's motivated by Christian principles."

Asked about Meredith's call for putting AIDS and syphilis victims in institutions, Helms said: "I have no comment about that. I never saw the letter. If you're going to ask me questions about things that he's written in the past, forget it."

As for the aide's comments on black leaders, Helms said: "I know that Dr. Meredith has been greatly

concerned about the lack of action by the civil rights leaders relating to working with the black community to upgrade their morality, reinstate the strength of the family and that sort of thing."

Meredith, 58, declined to be interviewed Monday. "I'll talk with you after the election," he said, referring to Helms' Nov. 6 battle against Democrat Harvey Gantt, who is black.

In a Sept. 17 memo to fellow Senate staffers, Meredith outlined his objectives. "The main area of interest is domestic policy, especially regarding the Black Race from the colonial period to the present," he said. "Much of what is today considered history regarding slavery is in fact originally abolitionist propaganda."

He asked staffers to help him obtain information on 35 topics, including, "All major legislation on Slaves, Negroes, Coloreds and Blacks since colonial times," "National and State laws and policy on Addictive Drugs since colonial times," "All available official documents on American involvement in Slave Trade," and, "FBI, CIA reports, documents, etc., on the Black Race and National Security."

Service organizations question local grant procedure Continued from A1

those funds, except for about 7,000 in donations and contributions come from grants. And some that budget has not yet come in the foundations where that proposals have been submitted.

What our organizations want a fair hearing of our grant proposals. While we have gotten some of what we have asked for much more needed," Newell said. "We would like that the foundation leadership will be more responsive in the future."

She and others say more attention should be given to the kinds of needs that their service organizations are addressing rather than that the foundations see as the need since their organizations work the community daily.

But Delta Arts Center director, Gene Scipio, does not share the view that African-American community service groups are not getting grants because of their targeting or because of who is running the organization. "I think its about writing good proposals. I don't think foundations are obligated to

support any one ethnic group unless it is set up for that specific purpose," she said. "What I have a problem with is our own people not supporting programs set up for them. We have to start being more creative in our own fundraising so we can become less dependant on foundations and corporations. So don't knock the people who are giving us help."

Ms. Scipio pointed out that her organization has not had any significant problems in getting grants it has requested. The bulk of its \$100,000 budget this year comes from grants of local foundations.

Larry Leon Hamlin, director and founder of the North Carolina Black Repertory Company does not agree with Scipio. "Your proposal has to be four to five times better than a white organization's proposal to get the money, and you may not get it even then," he said. "I just want my proposal judged on its merit. I don't know what can be done about this situation."

Hamlin's organization is operating this year on a budget of about \$267,000. But more than \$120,000

is anticipated from public and private foundations from the national, state, and local levels. Other funding sources include ticket sales, memberships, individual and corporate donations.

One thing that really bothers Hamlin is not getting the support he thinks he should get from the local Arts Council. "We are the Winston-Salem Arts Council's only African-American fully funded member and it seems to me that they could do more to help us produce more of the types of shows and programs that would benefit the African-American community," Hamlin said.

Directors of three of the major foundations agree that not every request that comes to their foundation is granted. Two say race has never been a factor in any grant decision made by their boards. But another says in some instances race may have played a part in decision making for some foundations in other areas.

Thom Lambeth, executive director of Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation Inc., a statewide foundation based in Winston-Salem,

said the foundation has for years had a special program for issues impacting on minorities. He said his group spent 1.3 million dollars last year, or 13 percent of the grants issued statewide on minority programs. But he said he understood how some in African-American community service groups may feel.

"My guess is there are still funders who are not very responsive to African-American organizations," he said. "I think it is increasingly less a problem, but still a problem." He said some foundations have problems funding any so called advocacy group that might be viewed as controversial. It may have nothing at all to do with a group's ethnic makeup or with who that group is trying to serve.

Vance Frye, associate director of the Kate B. Reynolds Poor and Needy Trust, said in the 20 years he has been involved with foundations the issue of race has never come up. "We have a very defined purpose to assist the financially needy with their basic needs... food, clothing, shelter, and health care. This is the

first time that this matter of African-American has come into the equation," Frye said. He said his foundation does not key in on an agency but on its program.

"We think we have a fair process and at least three of our nine member board are African-Americans. We have members of the community on our board who are reflective of our diverse community," Frye said.

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