

# The Enduring Legacy of Jesse Helms

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They don't come along very often -- men of rock-solid convictions coupled with an indomitable will to see those ideals prevail. Whenever one of them does appear, however, they leave an indelible mark on their times and help define what is a "real man."

We lost such a man on Friday, one of the most independent thinkers -- taken from us on Independence Day.

Jesse Helms was, indeed, unique.

He stood like a rock in a time when most men in public life tended to sway like reeds in whatever direction the political and social winds happened to blow. As he once said, "I did not come to Washington to win a popularity contest." He came to Washington to wage war for what he knew to be the truth, and he fought for nothing less than absolute victory.

Like most giants in a time when lesser men prevail, Jesse Helms not only held strong beliefs but adhered fiercely to them -- even when his voice was solitary. That principled stubbornness earned him the undying enmity of hordes of lesser men who believe in anything, as Chesterton observed, and thus in nothing.

Nobody battled the scourge of political correctness that cripples men of principle more than Jesse Helms, and nobody paid a greater price. The Communist left despised him, the socialist left abhorred him, the radical left demeaned him, the political left feared him, and since all of them were dominant in the media and in academia, he was pilloried almost daily in the press, on the air and on the nation's campuses.

He shrugged it off.

Unlike Gulliver, he would not allow himself to be tied down by the mass of pygmies who surrounded him and shot their darts at him.

Like St. Thomas More, when the winds of change blew against him, he seemed to say, "Here I stand -- I will not be moved. You can slander me, you can kill me, but you cannot kill the truth."

Like another great Southerner, Stonewall Jackson, he lived the motto, "Duty is mine, consequences are God's." And he did his duty as his Creator gave him the light to see it.

And like Old Jack when he struck at his foes, he used everything he had.

When Jesse Helms came to the Senate in 1972, the Cold War was both real and frigid. Most of his congressional colleagues, the media, academics, and hosts of those in public life were shamelessly bullied by a belligerent Soviet Union. One of those tyrants even threatened to bury us, yet too many seemed eager to accept humiliating accommodations with the enemy.

They could not recognize what Ronald Reagan would someday call "The Evil Empire."

Jesse Helms knew a sworn enemy when he saw one, and for his wisdom was often charged with being a warmonger -- determined to set off a confrontation that would lead to a nuclear holocaust.

To Helms, Communism was an implacable foe that must be faced and defeated -- and recognizing a kindred soul in Ronald Reagan, he threw his considerable political weight behind him, encouraged him, and supported his presidency.

And the rest is history.

Helms lived and fought in an arena and in times dominated by what has now become the anything-goes social and political philosophy -- what Pope Benedict calls the dictatorship of relativism.

He stood against that blatant assault on human reason like Horatius at the bridge. It gained him few friends among the libertines.

He believed that killing babies in their mother's wombs was simply cold-blooded murder. He accepted without question the ordained distinction between the sexes.

Jesse Helms refused to join the globalists' worship of an imperfect United Nations -- and came close to forcing reforms in an otherwise unreformable institution dominated by forces who hated his country.

In this and in every other battle he chose to fight, Jesse Helms struck to his guns. He was one of a kind. Dear God find us more like him.

As John Fund wrote in the Washington Post, "Jesse Helms was a major influence on American conservatism, but his career provides a blueprint for anyone who represents an embattled minority viewpoint. You can, with persistence and unflinching determination, change the political odds in your favor."

That he did, and more.

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