

The American Daily

Jesse Helms' Eye-Opening Memoir. Wow!

By [Rev. Austin Miles](#) (11/14/05)

Book Review by Rev. Austin Miles

Have you ever wanted to be a fly on the wall in the gold-leafed hallways and spaces behind the Senate Floor? To read Senator Jesse Helms' newly published memoir is the equivalent to having a backstage pass to an exclusive area where the private and most revealing conversations, spoken thoughts, and the interactions of those who make the most important decisions in the world are laid bare.

And best of all, reading this book is like sitting comfortably with the retired senator in front of a crackling fire, wearing plaid shirts and enjoying a folksy conversation with him, where words like, "schoolhouse," and the old exclamation, "Horse feathers!" bring a delightful charm to the visit.

Here's *Where I Stand*, (Random House, \$25.95) is not a book one can simply skim through to get an idea of its contents as this reviewer quickly learned. It is so fascinating, and informative, that the reader does not want to miss anything.

So you might as well kindle your own fire, prop up your feet, and enjoy the read. It is time well spent. And it will answer a lot of questions, such as why Senator Helms voted against having a national holiday for Dr. Martin Luther King.

Most of the negative impressions of Senator Helms were liberal-media-created perceptions that totally misrepresented him for their own purposes. What's more, a lot of people believed those bogus reports. Especially those regarding race.

When I first received the book, I told a friend that I planned to review it, [that] it appeared to be a very open and honest account of his life. The friend said, "Does it mention the white sheets hanging in his closet?" This widely held false perception of Senator Helms was a direct result of misleading journalism.

Jesse Helms was positively not racist as the democrats and their press made him out to be. In the account of his earlier life, he tells how he once got into a fuss with a black boy who called him a "white cracker." Helms retorted by using the 'N' word.

His father, a very upstanding man with high morals and ethics, and who believed in the dignity of every human life, "...happened by" as Helms describes it, "and heard what I said.

"He reached down, took my hand and led me into our home. Gently he taught me a lesson I've never forgotten: "There's nothing you did that made you white, and there's not a thing he did that made him colored. Son, I don't want to hear you say that word again. Do you understand?"

"I said, "Yes, sir." I've kept my word ever since. I don't care anything about the color of skin; I want to know what's in the head and what's in the heart." And it is to be noted that Senator Helms never advocated segregation.

When he hesitated to vote for a huge sum to be appropriated for AIDS research, since he felt it was out of proportion to money allocated for other diseases that affected a greater number of citizens, the "gays," fueled by the liberals, exploded into a hissy fit.

The democrats and their press quickly labeled him a 'hate-filled homophobe,' firing up demonstrators who stormed his home in Arlington, Virginia and draped a huge condom over the roof of the house. Senator Helms and his wife Dot were out of town at the time, but neighbors and police took care of the problem.

As the AIDS problem progressed, in March of 2002, Senator Helms along with Senator Bill Frist offered an amendment to add \$500 million for International Development's programs to fight the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

All of these "Hot Button Issues" are covered in Chapter 22, including the NEA and Arts Funding, School Prayer, and The Right To Life. He is totally transparent and truthful in his role in all of these issues. And should there be a United Nations? His answer may be surprising.

Helms could work with Senators on both sides of the aisle. He was always respectful and believed that he could disagree on issues but still be friends with the debaters when they left the floor. He stuck with the issues and never resorted to personal attacks or name-calling.

And he remained the southern gentleman even when others were hostile. For example, one time on the floor, an exasperated Senator Alan Simpson of Wyoming called him a "son of a (female dog in heat.)" Helms responded with calmness and dignity. Senator Simpson later apologized to him privately.

It was the second time Helms had been identified with that particular 'son'. Another time a woman having a difficult time dealing with the VA, regarding her husband, had tried to get help from other politicians to no avail.

When asked by a neighbor if she had worked things out, she said, 'no.' Her neighbor said, "Well, I hate that son of a (--repeat of negative identification) but it's time for you to contact Jesse Helms." He was known to be approachable and helpful to all that sought him out.

Senator Helms cut through the red tape for her when none of the other representatives could or would.

Jesse Helms could never be bought. He was (and is) one of the few men who do not come with a price.

He voted for (or against) a bill, on the basis of what he thought was right and for what he felt was good for our country. He had no personal ambitions for position or power.

One of his favorite people, and presidents, was Ronald Reagan. They enjoyed a close friendship. But there were times that he did not agree with a position Reagan took and would not hesitate to vote against it. He would never compromise principle-even for friendship.

His relationships to those whose names are very familiar, and who were constantly in the news, provides details about their lives and decisions which is not only riveting but often unsettling to read.

Some of these are downright frightening, such as President Bill Clinton's dogged determination to shut down our missile defense system, which would leave us totally vulnerable to attack from our enemies.

The observations and conversations he had with President Jimmy Carter opens up a clear window to the Panama Canal giveaway that Carter engineered.

Even so, Senator Helms' observations and criticisms are not mean spirited or written in a derogatory manner. On the contrary, he writes with respect and also brings out positive things about each one.

And everything he writes is backed up with solid facts that cannot be disputed. This is what made him such a commanding figure on the Senate Floor. First of all, he thoroughly read through every law and bill that was due to come up in session.

Instead of going to parties and receptions, which happen every night in Washington, he remained behind to study the issues to be decided. Then he would gather facts to support his arguments.

And those facts drove his opponents up the wall. They had been out partying the night before rather than studying the material for the next day's debates.

Helms spent 30 years as a journalist before entering politics and learned to gather facts to back up every story he wrote. He was also a pioneer in broadcasting radio editorials where he presented all sides to an issue. Yet, he never considered himself an orator.

And he learned early on, to be able to get right to the point without too much delay. Nobody could talk him out of his point once he made it, which is why Senator Simpson called him what he did.

Those who know Senator Helms will readily agree that his book could not be better titled. It was clear at all times where he stood and he would never waver or waffle.

And those who intensely disliked him had to respect him for the solid stand he took for things he believed in. He was honest in all of his dealings and in all of his actions. He didn't play mind games or guessing games.

He was a moral man who loved his family, loved God, and would often slip away from the Senate Floor to a private room to pray for guidance and wisdom in voting on an important bill.

He was devoted to his work. The only receptions or parties he and Dot would attend were those that had to do with North Carolina, the state he represented. He made himself available to any of his constituents that wanted to talk to him and listened intently to their concerns.

Helms' memoir is not a puff piece. It is a true account. Those who know him will verify everything he wrote, including Christine Lamson White.

Newly settled in Washington, she wrote to Senator Helms and mentioned that she had attended Chapel Hill College, where his wife, Dorothy had attended. He immediately called her on the phone, and invited her to his office to talk. She found him warm, sincere, and genuinely interested in what she had to say. They've kept in touch ever since.

Helms is very candid about his life and takes no credit for his accomplishments. He gives

all credit to others including his "excellent staff", and especially to his beloved wife, Dot, whom he describes as his wife, best friend, truest love, and advisor. He dedicates his book to her.

It is an excellent book that takes us through his childhood, to becoming the first Republican Senator ever elected by the State of North Carolina and who would serve for 30 years...five terms. He served honorably and admirably. And he rubbed shoulders with everybody including Senator Joseph McCarthy and President Nixon.

Senator Jesse Helms left us a valuable legacy with his book. It shows what a Senator should really be. It gives a clear picture of what a senator's day is like, what they do, and the demands and decisions they face daily.

This should be required reading for every Congressperson and Senator in America. It should be read in Political Science classes. It is a great resource for history buffs. The public at large should read this book to learn what America is really about and to learn about a truly great American.

Jesse Helms always took pride in North Carolina. He writes: "Our industries include leaders in banking and finance, pharmaceuticals, research, and agriculture. Our young people are deployed across the world in military service. We are a state that welcomes the world, while at the same time wanting to preserve all that we love, all that makes North Carolina great."

Read that last paragraph carefully. That should apply to America itself. Jesse Helms would have made a great president. We hope that future presidents will pay close attention to the standards he set in his life and public service. It would be profitable to read, *Here's Where I Stand*, and then re-evaluate where you stand. For sure it will inspire you.

Rev. Austin Miles is an award winning writer-historian and chaplain. He was a writer-researcher and a technical consultant for the multi-award winning TV Specials, Ancient Secrets of The Bible. He has reviewed books, classical concerts and art shows, which earned him a Commendation for Critical Review from UC Fullerton, presented at Fresno State University in 2000. He has also been honored by inclusion in [the] Who's Who International Historical Society. He is the author of Santa's Surprising Origins," a story that received worldwide circulation and resulted in him being cast in the 2004 Hallmark Christmas movie titled, Single Santa Seeks Mrs. Claus. He played the Mall Santa who magically receives the gift of sign language. Rev. Miles who studied journalism at Los Medanos College (Pittsburg, California) is a working chaplain in Northern California.