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William Barber II: Trump's Terrible Choice for Judge

By WILLIAM BARBER II DEC. 26, 2017



Credit Chris Kindred

GOLDSBORO, N.C. — Among President Trump's worrisome nominees to the judiciary, perhaps none is as alarming as Thomas Alvin Farr, a protégé of Jesse Helms, the former North Carolina senator, and a product of the modern white supremacist machine that Mr. Helms pioneered.

Mr. Farr, nominated to serve on the United States District Court for the Eastern District of North Carolina, began his career as counsel for Mr. Helms's Senate campaigns, where he participated in racist tactics to intimidate African-American voters. This alone is reason to reject his nomination, as is his [apparent lying on the topic](#) to the Senate Judiciary Committee. But Mr. Farr's connections to Mr. Helms's white supremacist causes and political network go much deeper.

Having lived in North Carolina since childhood, I know Mr. Helms's racist legacy and I hold no doubts that Mr. Farr perpetuates it. An unabashed segregationist, Mr. Helms was affiliated with the Council of Conservative Citizens, an outgrowth of the White Citizens' Councils that promoted white supremacy. Mr. Helms, who served in the Senate for 30 years, used his honorable seat to support the apartheid regime in South Africa while opposing desegregation, civil rights legislation and the creation of the Martin Luther King's Birthday holiday in this country. Mr. Helms also belittled Carol Moseley Braun, the only black senator at the time, by singing "Dixie" to her in the Senate elevator.

Mr. Farr's former law partner, Thomas Ellis, was Mr. Helms's top deputy for decades. He also served as a director of the Nazi-inspired, pro-eugenics Pioneer Fund and used funding from that organization to create and [bankroll a network](#) of interlocking organizations to support Mr. Helms and other political candidates who espoused the notion of a superior white race and opposed civil rights.

Together, Mr. Helms, Mr. Ellis, and their protégé Mr. Farr unleashed a huge propaganda machine that incited hostility toward African-Americans. Mr. Farr served as a lead counsel to Mr. Helms's 1990 Senate campaign, which ran the now-infamous "White Hands" TV television ad, designed to inflame white voter anxiety over Mr. Helms's black opponent, Harvey Gantt. It showed a pair of white hands balling up a rejection letter while a voice said: "You needed that job and you were the best qualified. But they had to give it to a minority because of a racial quota." The same campaign also sent more than 100,000 intimidating postcards to North Carolinians, most of whom were blacks eligible to vote, wrongly suggesting they were ineligible and warning that they could be prosecuted for fraud if they tried to cast ballots.

Mr. Farr represented the Helms campaign in 1984, when it circulated photos of his opponent, Gov. Jim Hunt, with African-American leaders in an attempt to foster white resentment. The racist nature of that campaign was so pronounced that a federal court cited it as an example of how bigotry in elections continued to flourish in North Carolina politics.