

“The Voice of the ‘Little Man’: Jesse Helms’s ‘Southern Viewpoint’ in Conservative Media and Politics, 1960-1972”



Jordan Jenkins
Adviser: Jim Leloudis

The Voice of the Little Man is an exploration of North Carolina’s longest-serving senator, Republican Jesse Helms, with a focus on his journalism career from 1960 to 1972. Prior to becoming a senator, Helms was a journalist in Raleigh and the voice of the *Viewpoint* editorial series on WRAL. Helms was central to the transformation of North Carolina from a Democratic stronghold to a Republican-leaning swing state, and this thesis analyzes how he convinced his largely white, working-class audience in Piedmont and eastern North Carolina to vote Republican - and, most importantly, vote against welfare programs and anti-poverty policies that benefited them economically. Helms is also an important figure in the rise of conservative media in the 1960s. At that time, conservative media was very niche and limited, with the biggest figures being writers and editors of the journal *National Review*, like William F. Buckley. Compared to conservative journalists at the national level, Helms at the local level in North Carolina used a much more populist style to attract working-class whites to the conservative movement at the grassroots level. Over time, Helms’s style of populist conservative media has proved to be more resilient and effective than Buckley’s intellectual and academic conservative media - if you turn on Fox News, modern conservative journalists sound almost exactly like Helms did in the 1960s. Essentially, Helms was accusing mainstream media of being “fake news” long before the Trump campaign made that a household phrase.