

**I DON'T
LIKE THE
BLUES**



**RACE, PLACE
& THE BACKBEAT
OF BLACK LIFE**

B. BRIAN FOSTER

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Daddy used to tell my brother and me all the time, “Use three hands if you ain’t got nothing but two!” He was a carpenter and country, wanted me and my brother to be too. Made us nail nails and saw on stuff. Paint. Strip, wax, and buff floors. Lay fences. Buy, raise, and sell cows. And, goats. Whenever we moved too slow, whether “we” was me or my brother, or both of us, or the nailing, sawing, or any of the other stuff, daddy would lean into his truth. “Use three hands if you ain’t got nothing but two!”

There was no love, only the day, and only doing with two that which required three—or, with three that which required the day.

“Use three hands,” when he was mad, and when he was frustrated, and if he was trying to be funny. That was where things stood up to now.

Now, I tell myself a different story about daddy and his “three hands.” It is a lie, but sometimes lies sound like a poem. I tell myself that “use three hands” was not frustration but belief. “Use three hands,” because I know you can. Because you have always done three-hand work. Because humans have two hands, and you are something else. “Use three hands,” or do what is impossible. Thank you.

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I wrote this book with three hands, except not how daddy was talking about. My three hands have been many—so, so many people who poured into this work by pouring into me. Thank you is not enough, but it is what I have here.

To momma. You are the first and the last, the why and the how. The most important thing. Thank you.

To *all them people and all that time* in Clarksdale—for trusting me with your story, for not liking the blues. Thank you.

To the late Clyde Woods. *Development Arrested* is the big joker. I hope *I Don't Like the Blues* can be a small spade. Your work has become the root that you wrote so defiantly and precisely about. We are growing from it. Thank you.

To Zandria. However far I get and whichever way I get there, if there is any good in it, it will be because of you. I know you came from the future. When you go back, know that you showed us more of it than we would have otherwise seen. Thank you.

To Marcus. For modeling the world that you want to make, for giving us tools to model the worlds that Black folks have made; for being kind. Thank you.

To Karolyn Tyson, Andy Andrews, and Mosi Ifatunji. I will say the same thing now that I said back then, but differently. Thank you for having the faith that I would one day catch up with myself, and for giving me the map to cover the ground.

To some folks who write how I want to live—Regina Bradley (for writing how we talk, country), Tressie McMillan Cottom (for *Thick*, and do-si-do), Jamie Hatley (for “Hating the Blues”), Kiese Laymon (for *Long Division* and *How to Slowly Kill Yourself and Others in America* and *Heavy* and how you talk about “revision,” and so on), Kevin Quashie (for “quiet”). Y’all are the “makers of aesthetics” that Achebe talked about; and y’all are helping me make mine, such as it is. A footnote was not enough. This isn’t either. Thank you.

To Blake. Brother. I don’t know if we’ll ever get them three hands daddy was talking about, but I like to think that we can be each other’s. We are each other’s. Thank you.

To Zo (Dr. Hopper) and Steve (Dr. Harris). Brothers. Y’all do that thing that family does—like magic—lift me up and hold me down at the same damn time. We going white label for this one. Thank you.

To Felicia (Dr. Arriaga). Friend. You give so much of yourself to your dreams, and every day you fight to make what you dream be how you live.

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You fight so that other folks can dream and live too. We can learn from you. Thank you.

To Ty, Dom (Dr. Scott), and Lil' Bro (Gary). For helping keep me, for trusting me, for all them nights with words and laughter. Thank you.

To the institutions and people that helped facilitate both where this project started and where it has come after all this time—the Association of Black Sociologists; the National Science Foundation (Grant No. DGE-1144081); the American Sociological Association (Minority Fellowship Program, Cohort 42); the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (the Department of Sociology, the Graduate School, Kathy Wood and the Initiative for Minority Excellence, and “Team Tyson”—Atiya, Courtney, and Kari); the University of Mississippi (the Department of Sociology and Anthropology; the Center for the Study of Southern Culture; and Drs. Katrina Caldwell, Kirsten Dellinger, Shennette Garrett-Scott, Jeff Jackson, Katie McKee, Ted Ownby, Kirk Johnson, Willa Johnson, and J. T.); and some select people and institutions in Clarksdale (Amanda, Brad, BT, Cortez, Edward and Keisa Thomas, the late Mrs. Fair, Mr. Johnny, Randy, Ray, Rosalind, Sanford, Tieryaa, Tim A., Tim L., King's Temple, and Spring Initiative Inc.). Thank you.

To Ms. Demetria. I had to give you your own line. You helped me walk mine. I didn't know what a PhD was before McNair. Thank you.

To my tribe, my ancestors living. Tip (Dr. Mayfield), since day one, the streetlights, the pasture, the series, “You try'n'a get on these bones,” the backroads and the back way, since day one. Woods, for always making me remember where I came from. Bernard, DB, Enos, Grud, Princeton, and Travis for brotherhood, for still standing after all this time, for laughter, for balance. Carlin, for reminding me how good it is to be happy, for showing me. Allison (Dr. Mathews), E. (Dr. Claude), Kimber (Dr. Thomas), and Rufi (Dr. Ibrahim), for making North Carolina feel familiar. Piko (Dr. Edwoozie) for your brilliant mind, for making this project better, for always having a hip-hop metaphor handy. Thank you.

To my village and the land—Shannon, Baldwin, Booneville, Trice Street, Lee County, the Path, the Bottom, Johnson Chapel (the church) and Johnson Chapel (the community). For being what a village is, shelter and home. Thank you.

To the late Jesse Scott. I have kept all those papers from your senior capstone course. All of them. I still revisit your comments. Still. Sometimes for my day's seven laughs, sometimes for your pointed critique, sometimes to remember. And, I will—your affirmations, the Popeye's, what you said about

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being blue-chip and “decorum” and respectability and Tommie Shelbie. And, you, *The Black Fantastic*. Thank you.

To momma. You are the first and the last, the why and the how. The most important thing. Daddy said “Use three hands” ’til he died. You let me do what life called for with the two I already had. Showed me two are enough. You are more than that. Thank you.