

## **B. Brian Foster | Full Bio**

[B. Brian Foster is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Virginia.](#) His scholarship centers Black community life in the contemporary rural American South, with particular attention to economic development and placemaking. His work advances two commitments: reintegrating the rural South into scholarship on race and culture, and archiving the histories of rural Black communities. He advances these commitments through sustained fieldwork that links ethnography, oral history, archival study, mapping, and visual techniques. Together, these methods form a unified infrastructure for recording, preserving, and interpreting Black community life across scholarly, public, and community settings.

Drawing on more than a decade of fieldwork and over 200 on-the-record interviews in rural Mississippi, he has written two books, directed three short films, and founded a digital oral history archive.

His first book, *[I Don't Like the Blues: Race, Place, and the Backbeat of Black Life](#)* (University of North Carolina Press, 2020), is an ethnographic study of blues tourism and economic development in Clarksdale, Mississippi. Extending Clyde Woods's theorization of blues epistemology, the book analyzes how local Black residents interpret and contest the town's blues tourism economy, engaging scholarship on racialized emotions, boundary work, and placemaking. It received the Eduardo Bonilla-Silva Book Award from the Society for the Study of Social Problems and the Ida B. Wells Book Award from the Association of Black Sociologists.

Working with filmmaker Ethan Payne, Foster is the creator of the three-part short film anthology *[We Do a Black South Way](#)* (*[We Travel](#)*, *[We Dance](#)*, and *[We Make](#)*), an oral and documentary account of Black placemaking traditions in the rural South. Each of the films has received festival recognition, including a 2024 screening at the Tribeca Film Festival. The trilogy draws on more than sixty oral history interviews recorded as part of *[The Black Volumes](#)*, his ongoing archival initiative documenting culture, history, and community life in the rural South.

His second book, *[Ghosts of Segregation: American Racism, Hidden in Plain Sight](#)* (Celadon Books, 2024), co-authored with photographer Richard Frishman and featuring a foreword by Imani Perry, is a photo-essay collection pairing large-format photography with interpretive essays. Frishman's photographs document landscapes shaped by segregation, exclusion, migration, and racial violence, demonstrating how racial histories remain embedded in the built environment and contemporary social life. Foster's essays draw from his archival, ethnographic, and oral history work in rural Mississippi to interpret and contextualize the images, reflecting on themes of identity, memory, migration, and placemaking.

Foster is currently writing *Casino Town*, a book-length ethnographic and archival study of the long-term social, economic, and political transformations produced by casino development in Mississippi.

Based on immersive fieldwork, extensive newspaper archives, and multi-generational oral histories, the project offers a narrative account of everyday life in a community shaped by the rise and decline of casino-driven development.

Foster's research has been supported by the National Science Foundation and the Mississippi Humanities Council. In 2024, he was awarded a [Shannon Fellowship](#) from the University of Virginia and served as Visiting Scholar in the Africana Studies program at Lehigh University. [From 2021 to 2026, he served as Co-Editor-in-Chief of \*Sociology of Race and Ethnicity\*](#), and he currently serves as Director of Undergraduate Programs in the Department of Sociology at the University of Virginia, where he advises four graduate students and teaches undergraduate and graduate courses on race, place, popular culture, and qualitative methods.