

B. Brian Foster, Ph.D. | 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. Grounded in the sociology of race and Black studies, his work engages debates on place, community, and culture to advance two commitments: reintegrating the rural South into conversations about race, mobility and inequality, and culture; and documenting and archiving the histories of rural Black communities. He pursues these commitments through sustained fieldwork that integrates ethnography, oral history, archival research, mapping, and visual practice. Through this multi-modal approach, he has authored two books, completed a three-part short film anthology, and founded a digital archive documenting Black culture and placemaking in the rural South.

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.

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 to interpret and contextualize the images, reflecting on themes of identity, memory, migration, and placemaking.

In collaboration 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 2022 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.

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.

His research and public scholarship have been supported by the Mississippi Humanities Council and internal grants from the University of Mississippi and the University of Virginia. His writing has appeared in national and public-facing venues including [CNN](#), [Veranda Magazine](#), [The Bitter Southerner](#), [Oxford Magazine](#), and [Mississippi Folklife](#). 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*](#). He currently serves as Director of Undergraduate Programs in the Department of Sociology at the University of Virginia and is affiliated with the Carter G. Woodson Institute for African American and African Studies and the Equity Center.

Foster earned his Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2017. During his graduate studies, his work was supported by fellowships from the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development, the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship Program, and the American Sociological Association Minority Fellowship Program.

Prior to joining the University of Virginia, he served as Assistant Professor of Sociology and Southern Studies at the University of Mississippi. There he taught courses on interviewing, oral history, ethnography, race and place, and storytelling. In 2021, he was named [Teacher of the Year by the Mississippi Humanities Council](#). During his time at the University of Mississippi, he also received several internal awards for teaching and mentorship, [including being invited to deliver the 2019 Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College Fall Convocation keynote address](#).