The research underlying this book represents my attempt to provide a more comprehensive portrait of the diversity within the black population of the United States and to recenter the importance of structural factors, rather than agentic concerns, in explaining the outcomes of black Americans. From studies of migrants from the Caribbean to the United States during the early twentieth century to research on African immigration of the 2000s, scholars have reported that groups of black immigrants tend to achieve better social and economic outcomes than black Americans. These findings have led some scholars and policymakers to dismiss the importance of racism and discrimination in shaping the outcomes of black Americans; they argue that because black immigrants and black Americans share similar racialized features, factors other than racism must explain the poor social and economic outcomes of black Americans. As a result, the cultural practices of black Americans have been pathologized for several decades.

My analysis in this book of social and economic disparities between black Americans and black immigrants from 1910 to 2014 challenges this view. The project brings new evidence to bear on the importance of selective migration in shaping the outcomes of both black immigrants and black Americans. I also analyze new data and show that the racial context of pre–civil rights America fundamentally shaped the outcomes of black Americans and put black immigrants and black Americans on different trajectories.

The book also highlights the growing demographic importance of black immigration to the United States and reveals the contours of the
vast diversity within America’s black population in the twenty-first century. By illustrating the many ways in which the U.S. black population is far from monolithic, the book cautions the research community about the consequences of failing to disaggregate the black population when measuring social and economic disparities. Given America’s long and, at times, state-sanctioned history of racial discrimination against blacks, a large body of American social science research has focused on measuring and tracking changes in social and economic disparities between blacks and whites. The goal of these studies is generally to examine whether the country is making progress toward improving the social conditions of black Americans. Although the significant increase in the number of black immigrants has changed the meaning of black-white disparities, researchers tend to aggregate all blacks, regardless of nativity, when measuring changes in a range of social outcomes, from health and marriage to voting and labor market outcomes. This failure to account for black immigration can lead to incorrect estimates of both the social progress made by black Americans and changes in the intensity of racism and discrimination experienced by blacks in the United States. As the black immigrant population grows and becomes more diverse, empirical analyses must account for the effects of immigration on changes in the social outcomes of blacks in the United States. Assuming the homogeneity of the black population of the United States, as many social scientists still do, is an error. To assume homogeneity within the black immigrant population is another error. This book hopes to correct some of these errors.

Throughout the completion of this book, I amassed many debts. Intellectually, I am indebted to William Darity, who taught me to seek out the structural factors that underpin the social conditions of oppressed groups. I am also indebted to the many scholars who have advanced the study of race and immigration and upon whose work I have relied.

I thank Patricia Fernández-Kelly, Robert Wuthnow, Angel Harris, and Alejandro Portes for their initial encouragement to write this book. I would also like to thank Alejandro Portes and Douglas Massey for the many conversations we had and the advice they gave about this project. I have also benefited from working with several amazing graduate students at Princeton, including Janeria Easley, Angela Dixon, and Megan Blanchard. Linsey Edwards, Mary Lou Delaney,
and Hye Jee Kim provided valuable research assistance on various parts of the project. I thank the Office of Population Research at Princeton University for providing financial and administrative support for the project. Many of the graphs and analyses in the book would not have been possible without the assistance of Dawn Koffman, a statistical consultant in the Office of Population Research. Of course, I am solely responsible for any errors or omissions.

I benefited from the feedback I received when I presented parts of this research at Duke University, Penn State University, the University of Pennsylvania, Ohio State University, the University of Michigan, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the University of Maryland at College Park, and Harvard University. I am particularly grateful for the comments I received from Robert Hummer, David Williams, Nancy Krieger, Ichiro Kawachi, Mark Hayward, Johnny Butler, and Mosi Ifutunji.

I made progress on the book at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton during the 2015–2016 academic year. I thank Didier Fassin for helpful comments on the project during my time at the institute, as well as my colleagues during the year for providing a stimulating intellectual environment in which to work on the project. I also acknowledge Princeton’s Kahneman-Treisman Center for Behavioral Science and Public Policy for providing valuable support and office space that enabled me to complete this project during the fall of 2017.

Chapters 4 and 6 contain aspects of my research that have been previously published in academic journals, including *Social Science and Medicine*, the *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, the *Review of Black Political Economy*, and *Demography*. I thank the editors and referees for their comments on these articles. Over the years, Amos Peters has provided an attentive ear and been an excellent academic sparring partner. Our discussions have helped sharpen many of my ideas. The insights on issues related to racial reporting among immigrants from the Dominican Republic in chapter 8 derives from collaborative research with Carmela Alcantara. The research in chapter 6 derives from collaborative research with Robert Hummer, Tia Palermo, and Tiffany Green. I have also benefited from my friendship and collaborations with Tiffany Green. She has provided steadfast encouragement over the years and critical feedback on issues related to immigration and health. Lefleur Stephens served as my writing partner at various
points while completing this project. I thank her for providing the motivation to work through many days of writer’s block.

I thank my editor at the Russell Sage Foundation, Suzanne Nichols, for seeing the merit in this work and for providing enthusiastic support for the project. While I completed the manuscript, Suzanne provided valuable guidance, encouragement, and ultimately friendship. I also thank Suzanne for enforcing deadlines, despite life’s unexpected challenges. Her commitment to the project helped ensure the completion of the book. The book was also enhanced by the excellent comments and feedback from the anonymous reviewers who reviewed the book for the Russell Sage Foundation. In addition, the project benefited from superb editing at various points by Karen DeVivo, Jennifer Eggerling-Boeck, and Tamara Nopper.

I am thankful to Ann-Marie Deanna Peters, Keisha Brown, Melvin Brown, Renell Ballard, Lionel Jenkins, Rodney Priestley, and Dr. Robin Wilson-Smith for helping with a range of unexpected challenges while working on this project.

I thank my parents for giving me the courage to face life and its challenges. Their early lessons continue to sustain me. I am grateful to my mother for nurturing an early love of learning. My wife, Tyneshia, has been my greatest supporter. I acknowledge that being married to a researcher is not always fun. Despite the many challenges along the way, she never lost faith in my ability to complete the book. She was patient through the long nights of work and encouraging during my moments of doubt. For this and her immense love, I am most thankful. She means the world to me. This is our accomplishment.

Lastly, I am grateful to my children, Lena and Ethan, for their unwavering enthusiasm about the mere fact that I was writing a book. I thank them for their encouragement and unconditional love. They help me find perspective.