My conceptual journey to this study began before I learned how to read and write. Growing up in the 1970s while the Igbo recuperated from the traumas of the 1966–1970 Nigerian Civil War, my grandmother, a keen host for our regular moonlight tales, would jokingly chide the kids arriving late from the composite households with the *au fait*: “He who arrives at the middle of a story leaves with a disjointed narrative.” Her words echo an Igbo saying: “When a man who was absent at a burial exhumes the corpse, the village should be prepared to deal with a disembodied cadaver.” While both proverbs underscore the imperative of complete and accurate mastery of a subject in general, they particularly challenge students of Africana Studies to ensure grounded knowledge of the complex and intricate nuances of the African roots of African American history and culture they market. Otherwise, the ominous risk is to produce incoherent and disjointed accounts.

In this book, I bring an African voice to the copious volumes of studies on African and African Diaspora linkages by focusing on African-styled masquerade carnivals. Taking into account the unique roles masquerades played in the indigenous society, the voice with African linguistic, ethnic, and cultural roots is crucial so not to have the details muddled in translation in an age of modernist thinking. The book informs the reader where, when, and how the African masquerade genre was invented and explains the life force behind the festival play.

Masquerading in the Africana world was a dynamic device of narratology. For the enslaved people, the art of masquerade *engagee* was one of the most potent survival devices in the Americas. By exploring the origins, religious idioms, symbols, internal and diasporic diffusions, and the music, dance, and drama that accompany the masquerade tradition, the result is to see beyond the jamboree displays, which most people have identified with carnivals everywhere today.

With a Pan-African approach contextualized in change-over-time-and-space argument, this book also speaks to the connection between Bantu migration and the ethnic complexity and spread of masquerade culture across the continent and beyond. In addressing this theme, I provide a richer and fuller account of both the internal dynamics and the multiple and multifaceted cultural
connections between Africa and the African Diasporas without reifying culture as something cast in stone. The Bantu-African masquerade genre that evolved from the Bight of Biafra hinterland is adaptive and was in constant flux prior to the beginning of the transatlantic slave trade. Its presence in the Americas was an extension of the fluid Bantuization process outside Africa by way of creolization.

Bearing in mind the agitated debates it conjures, the Bantu paradigm deserves further clarification. As employed here, Bantu as a concept is more than the language question; it is symbolic for precolonial cultural inventions and the hybridities that connect African societies across regional lines. Colonial scholars who pioneered Bantu studies and classified African languages into different families admitted that they did not understand fully the etymologies and complex nuances of African languages and the culture they carry. As a result, the early Bantu scholars placed the Igbo language among the Kwa subfamily of the parent Niger-Congo family. The colonial scholars discounted the fact that the Cross River Igbo (including Ábám, Ábiribá, Áfikpo, Aröchukwu, Èddá, Ezzikwo, Ihe, Igbère, Ikwo, Isu, Nkporo, Qháfiá, Qkpoši, Uburu, Unwáná, and Ututu) share similar history, culture, and language with their Èfik, Ibibio, Ijo, and Èkoi neighbors who were classified into the Bantu subfamily group of the Niger-Congo group. In a field of history where the word of the colonial scholar often carries the same weight as a papal bull, it is critical to start rethinking some of the serious flaws inherent in these received sweeping ideas in order to turn a new corner in African history. After eminent scholars such as Adiele Eberechukwu Afigbo, Ogbu Kalu, and Ebiegberi Joe Alagoa, I reiterate here that the Igbo language, particularly the various dialects spoken among the Cross River Igbo, align more to the Bantu subfamily than the Kwa subgroup.

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