BEFORE THIS BOOK WAS A BOOK, it was a dissertation completed under the guidance of four brilliant Harvard sociologists. Bill Wilson was my advisor—a statement that frankly is surreal to put in writing. Bill is an intellectual giant and it was an incredible privilege to be part of his most recent generation of advisees. We co-authored an article (my first publication) and co-taught a seminar (my first teaching experience). But Bill’s mentorship extended far beyond research and teaching. We talked about urban policy over meals at some of Cambridge’s best restaurants. Knowing that I was a Celtics fan, he even treated me to tenth-row, half-court seats at a playoff game. Bill showed me how to do sociology, but also how to live a fulfilling life as a sociologist.

Chris Winship was my dissertation co-chair and, like Bill, has advised an extensive list of urban sociologists. Chris is best known as an expert in quantitative methodology, but he is no less skilled in ethnography. He also has a deep interest in Boston politics with plenty of stories to share. All told, Chris helped make every aspect of this project better.

Compared to Bill and Chris, Rob Sampson was much more guarded with his time—a useful lesson in its own right as I move forward on the tenure track. His comments were always worth the wait though, and he went above and beyond the call of duty whenever I could nail him down. Rob took my work seriously and believed in my ability to make important contributions to knowledge. Perhaps most important, he had an uncanny ability to find all of the loose threads in my writing and give each and every one of them a good, hearty tug. One thing that always puzzled me was his fixation on certain phrases or small points that were unrelated to a paper’s core thesis. I didn’t understand what the big deal was until I started submitting my work to the peer review process. When it finally clicked and I could see what Rob saw, I knew I was starting to see like a sociologist.

Jocelyn Viterna rounded out my dissertation committee. One of the best compliments I can give Jocelyn is that she was an absolutely indispensable committee member even though she is not an urban sociologist. That speaks to both her generosity as a mentor and her intellectual breadth as a scholar. We shared similar perspectives about the discipline, and she supported the substantive focus of my research, even when others advised against it. I simply could not have completed this work without her.

I can’t say enough about my peers in the Department of Sociology at Harvard and the Multidisciplinary Program in Inequality and Social Policy at the Kennedy School. It was daunting, intimidating, and a little bit exhilarating to
be surrounded by so many smart, dedicated, and even helpful social scientists. I learned that I work best when I’m a little fish in a big pond—and Harvard was a massive ocean. I oscillated between imposter syndrome, unearned arrogance, and a little fake-it-til-you-make-it perseverance. Ultimately, I left graduate school with more perspective than I came in with, and far more humility (if you can believe it).

While in graduate school, a number of friends, colleagues, and faculty members provided feedback on various aspects of this research. Some read full drafts, others served as sounding boards for me to work out ideas. All were invaluable. I thank Monica Bell, Bart Bonikowski, Sarah Brayne, Steven Brown, Tony Chen, Carl Gershenson, David Hureau, Jackie Hwang, Carly Knight, Michèle Lamont, Caroline Lee, Theo Leenman, Paul Lichterman, David Luberoff, Michael McQuarrie, Alex Murphy, Rourke O’Brien, Ann Owens, David Pedulla, Kristin Perkins, Kim Pernell, Jim Quane, Eva Rosen, Jasmin Sandelson, Tracey Shollenberger, Mario Small, Ben Sosnaud, Mo Torres, and Rob Vargas. If I left out anyone who helped push this project forward, I’m sorry, it wasn’t intentional. It has just taken a really (really!) long time to get this book out.

My colleagues at Michigan—both past and present—have been overwhelmingly supportive. Elizabeth Armstrong, Beth Popp Berman, Nick Camp, Steve Garcia, Ashley Harrell, Arnold Ho, Sandy Levitsky, Mark Mizruchi, Steve Samford, Sara Soderstrom, and Al Young helped make this book possible by making all other aspects of life as an assistant professor painless.

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I was also fortunate enough to organize a book conference with four outside readers. Nicole Marwell, Andy Papachristos, Pat Sharkey, and Ed Walker read an early draft and provided excellent—if a bit overwhelming—feedback that made this a stronger, more cohesive book.

I presented this research at Stanford University, UC Riverside, the University of Chicago, the University of Michigan, UCLA, NYU, Drexel University, the University of Pittsburgh, and the Annual Meetings of the American Sociological Association. Thanks to everyone who attended these presentations and asked incisive questions, pushing me to clarify or refine my arguments.

Portions of chapters 4 and 6 are reproduced from articles published in the *American Sociological Review* and *Social Forces*, respectively. I thank the editors and reviewers from both journals for helping me develop these ideas.

I also thank the anonymous reviewers for helping make this book the best it could be.

Lindsay Hiser and Zoe Mankes provided crucial research assistance.

Letta Page made the prose crisper and clearer than I ever could have on my own.
The team at Princeton University Press has been first-class all the way. My editor, Meagan Levinson, skillfully ushered the manuscript through an unusually long and complicated review process. She’s a real mensch. Karen Carter was an awesome production editor, and Jackie Delaney did excellent project management work behind the scenes. Theresa Liu was an exceptional copywriter. Each of the teams handling the different stages of production and promotion have been an absolute pleasure to work with. My only complaint is that they did not honor my wish to use a photo taken when I was three years old, “reading” Bill Wilson’s classic *The Truly Disadvantaged* on my mother’s lap while she prepared to teach a class on social stratification, as my professional headshot. They sided with my wife, who thought it was a ridiculous request. I’ll concede that they probably made the right decision.

Of course, I cannot leave out the people who allowed me to attend their meetings and observe their work. To everyone trying to make the Fairmount Corridor a better place for its residents: Thank you.

We now come to the friends and family section—the people who helped me complete my research and writing mostly by doing things that had nothing to do with research and writing. Thank you for all of the skills, lessons, and privileges that informed who I am and what I have been able to accomplish. Allie Levine deserves special recognition—the most recognition, in fact. More than anyone else, Allie has supported me from the beginning of my fieldwork to the final production of this book. She is, without question, the most important person in my life. She is also responsible for our kids’ best traits. Abram is the kindest, sweetest, most empathetic person I have ever known. In just one year of life, Zara has proven to be remarkably determined, decisive, and adventurous. I write these words in the fall of 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to take a toll on our lives and the lives of those we care about. We are living in a moment of great uncertainty and unrest. At the same time—or perhaps because of it—we have grown closer than I ever could have imagined. While I wish the circumstances were different, I am forever grateful for the time we were able to spend together and the incredible bond we forged as a result.

I want to close by dedicating this book to my late grandmother, Rae Levine. When I chose to study the Fairmount Corridor, I knew there were connections to my family history. The Corridor includes the neighborhoods of Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan—formerly Jewish neighborhoods where my maternal family resided between the 1890s and 1970s. But I didn’t initially appreciate how closely the stories intertwined. As it turned out, the building where Rae spent part of her adolescence was redeveloped during my fieldwork. And not only that: The project was part of a major federal grant, awarded to a partnership between city government and four Corridor nonprofits, with supplemental funding provided by a number of philanthropic foundations. In other words, the story of Rae’s childhood apartment symbolizes many of the tensions and themes that animate my work. The intersection of fieldwork and family history was always in the back of my mind, and it made writing this book especially meaningful.
CONSTRUCTING COMMUNITY