Foreword

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The publication of *Afro-Mexico: Dancing between Myth and Reality* comes at an especially important historical moment in the study of peoples of African descent in Latin America, in particular, Mexico. The hemispheric-wide mobilization of social movements for Afro-Latin rights has fostered a political milieu that has created new stakes for scholarship while also opening new angles for study and research. These forces have been admittedly less prominent in Mexico, but still the nation's conversation on inclusion, antidiscrimination, citizenship, and *mestizaje* (racial mixture) has been influential in recent years in generating a broader space for the discussion of national blackness. Combined with increased interest in the topic by foreigners, the past fifteen years have witnessed an efflorescence of seminal publications on the Afro-Mexican experience, with key works being produced both in Mexico and in the United States. As never before, we have come to know the experience of Mexico's black colonial past more intimately, with a deeper appreciation of the influence of slavery, freedom, and the colonial caste system. Research on the nineteenth century remains sparse; however, our knowledge of more modern Afro-Mexican lifeways has improved. Building on the pioneering historico-anthropological work of Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, whose imprint on generations of Afro-Mexicanists is indelible, several key studies have now appeared on Mexican cuisine, literary production, folklore, music, and traditions. In light of the flurry of scholarly activity that has recently taken place, the corpus of scholarship on Mexico's black past is fast forming what might be called the field of Afro-Mexican studies.

Within this emerging field, Anita González's rich and insightful contribution is as pivotal as it is informative. *Afro-Mexico* is a wonderful study of braided, interethnic activity, transcending the usual European/African dichotomy often seen in African Diaspora studies to include meaningful and deep interrelationships with Amerindians. By using methodological approaches drawn from the dis-

ciplines of theater and dance studies, the book weaves a powerful interpretive framework by which to understand the influence of mythmaking and its relationship to nationhood and lived experiences. By the book's end, we begin to comprehend the subtleties of how an Afro-Mexican subtext can be found in the "national" dance tradition of Mexico. The book also helps us understand the complexities of race while centrally acknowledging that those whom we might identify as Afro-Mexicans may not actually subscribe to such an identity themselves. Photography is used strategically throughout the book to illuminate dance steps and performance audiences and to restage (as much as possible) performance events. This is among the best works published in English on the impact and meaning of Afro-Mexican dance in Mexico. In this regard, it is a pioneering work. Along with books such as *National Rhythms, African Roots* by John Chasteen and *Nationalizing Blackness* and *Music and Revolution* by Robin Moore, *Dancing between Myth and Reality* stands as part of a canon of texts designed to reinterpret the cultural legacy of people of African descent in the broader Diaspora.