—INTRODUCTION—

"Your children's eyes are smiling, their life is just begun, and what will you be giving to your brown-eyed children of the sun?"

—Pedro Contreras, “Brown-eyed Children of the Sun”

In June of 1968, on the stage of the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, United Farm Workers union (UFW) co-founder Dolores Huerta stood behind Robert Kennedy as he claimed victory in the California presidential primary. Broadly smiling, Huerta, together with César Chávez and the UFW rank and file, had helped Kennedy win California by mounting voter-registration drives, staging rallies, and leafleting. Due to the UFW’s efforts many precincts in predominantly Mexican American areas voted 100 percent for Kennedy. Rather than attending the celebration with Huerta and Kennedy, César Chávez had decided to remain at a party for a local assemblyman in order to avoid the large crowds at the rally.

In the ballroom of the Ambassador, Kennedy concluded his victory speech: “I think we can end the divisions within the United States. What I think is quite clear is that we can work together in the last analysis. And that what has been going on with the United States over the period of that last three years, the divisions, the violence, the disenchantment with our society, the divisions—whether it’s between blacks and whites, between the poor and the more affluent, or between age groups, or in the war in Vietnam—that we can work together.” Within minutes after he left the podium, Kennedy had been shot several times. He died the next morning. In his novel Revolt of the Cockroach People, Chicano attorney and novelist Oscar Zeta Acosta captured the sentiments of the Chicano/a activist community at that moment: “I can feel it in my bones, that the ante has been upped.”

A little over one year later, a Mexican born in Tijuana, Baja California, and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area stood at center stage at the event most often recognized as the defining moment of the 1960s generation. Carlos Santana and his multiracial band at the 1969 Woodstock festival delivered its Afro-Cuban and pan-Latino sounds to a half million predominantly middle-class European American youth, at a
time when U.S. policymakers and intellectuals still referred to Mexican Americans as the “invisible minority.” Few in the audience or media knew that Carlos Santana was a Chicano. Because his music incorporated Caribbean instruments and styles, most North Americans took him to be Puerto Rican. But to young Chicanos and Chicanas across the United States, in the Southwest but also in Mexican communities in Omaha, Chicago, and Portland, he clearly was one of our own and his music was the soundtrack through which we were about to forge our collective identity.

These two iconic moments—Dolores Huerta with Bobby Kennedy and Santana at Woodstock—remind us that the 1960s marked the first time dominant U.S. culture witnessed Americans of Mexican descent on a national stage as self-determined agents rather than subservient and racialized others. As Rodolfo Acuña, the dean of Chicano historians, has written: “The youth and Civil Rights movements of the Sixties provided broader space for Mexican American involvement than other generations.” In Chicano communities across the Southwest during the era of the American war in Southeast Asia, this newfound agency would produce a political, intellectual, and artistic movement of unprecedented magnitude.

One of the objectives of this book is to remind us that the so-called Sixties were about more than “sex, drugs, and rock and roll” or middle-class white youth adopting alternative lifestyles or even the African American struggle for civil rights. In ethnic Mexican communities, the period between 1965 and 1975 produced dramatic changes. These changes were influenced in part by the aforementioned developments. But at the same time these changes grew out of local and regional traditions of survival and resistance whose origins lie in the Southwest, in Mexico, and in locations farther south.

It is my hope that the present study will help to restore to the national memory the accomplishments of Spanish-speaking communities in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This restoration of historical memory will be particularly important for young Latinas and Latinos in the United States born after the 1970s and for the thousands of Mexican and Latin American immigrants and their children who have arrived over the last three decades. For students of U.S. history and culture, this book offers an interpretation of several key episodes in the development of Chicano/a activism during the Viet Nam war period.

In the ten-year period surrounding the death of Bobby Kennedy and Santana’s historic performance or what has been called the “long
decade of the 1960s,” Mexican American activists developed a complex critique of traditional assimilation and melting-pot discourses in order to transform themselves into Chicanas and Chicanos. Taking a previously pejorative term that had existed along the U.S.-Mexican border for decades, these brown-eyed children of the sun rejected dominant versions of U.S. history, and began the arduous journey toward self-determination and self-definition. A diffuse movement cross-cut by regional, gender, and class issues, the Movimiento (also known as La Causa or La Movida) was a mass mobilization dedicated to a wide range of social projects, from ethnic separatism to socialist internationalism, from electoral politics to institutional reform and even armed insurrection.

For cynical observers of the Mexican American community such as Richard Nixon, who once remarked that “the Mexicans” would never rebel like the Blacks, the Chicano Movement came as a surprising and
disturbing development. In 1966, on the eve of the Movement's major events, one scholar suggested that a social movement led by ethnic Mexicans in the United States was highly unlikely: "It is not surprising that Mexican Americans have been unable to put to effective use the tool of the mass voice to promote the common good of their group. They are in fact not a group; they do not speak with a common voice; they do not have mutual agreement; they are fragmented first by their heterogeneity and second by the tradition of individualism."

A mere two years later, however, in her 1968 paper prepared for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Helen Rowan described the changes taking place in both the urban and rural areas of the Southwest: "The level of organization, of awareness, and of identity is constantly rising . . . In fact, every aspect necessary to the development and sustaining of a movement is being activated and, most importantly, obtaining financial support. La Raza has become more than a slogan; it has become a way of life for a people who seek to fully realize their personal and group identity and obtain equality of rights and treatment as citizens of the United States." Rowan's recognition that emerging Chicano/a identities were both individual and collective is an important point to which I will return often in this study.

Even social scientists sympathetic to efforts to expose and rectify the historic mistreatment of Mexicans in the United States were unsure of what to make of the emerging militancy. From their perspective, the Movimiento was not congruent with the "typical" Mexican American behavior they had come to expect. Joan W. Moore, for example, who was a faculty member at the University of California, Riverside, and enjoyed close ties to the Southern California Chicana/o community, collaborated with Alfredo Cuéllar for a book in the "Prentice-Hall Ethnic Groups in American Life Series." In the book's final chapter, Cuéllar wrote: "The masses of Mexican Americans in the large cities of the Southwest are politically inert. The very model of Mexican leadership has been the 'quiet fighter,' who does not create any public difficulties. Until the arrival of César Chávez in 1965 and the dramatic agricultural strikes in the San Joaquin valley in California and in the Rio Grande valley in Texas, the 'Mexican way' was quiet and private negotiation, no more. Demonstrations have been few."96

Carefully making their way through the calm before the storm, Moore and Cuéllar sensed that Chicana/o youth were about to create something unique in U.S. political history: "The importance of the
Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun: Lessons From the Chicano Movement

INTRODUCTION / 5

Chicano movement as an alternative to pressures from the majority society can hardly be overemphasized. It is a distinctively novel development in the Mexican American community. Surprisingly, even the New York Times reported on the transformations taking place. In a front-page story on April 20, 1969, reporter Homer Bigart wrote: “Five million Mexican Americans, the nation’s second largest minority, are stirring with a new militancy. The ethnic stereotype that the Chicanos are too drowsy, too docile to carry a sustained fight against poverty and discrimination is bending under fresh assault.” Bigart’s analysis proved to be prophetic. A little over one year later, Chicanas and Chicanos would organize the largest antiwar demonstration ever staged by a working-class ethnic group in the United States.

The fact that sectors of the Mexican American community had become radicalized did not quite compute for even the most progressive social scientists and historians. It is ironic that thirty years after the most dramatic events of the Chicano Movement, the history of that Movement has yet to be fully integrated into scholarship focused on the 1960s. With very few exceptions, retrospectives on the Sixties do not include the achievements of Chicana/o communities, a fact already recognized by Carlos Muñoz in 1989 when he reported how one conference organizer of a “60s symposium” told him that no Chicano/as were invited because “they were probably not involved in the struggles of the sixties.” A full decade after the incident recorded in Muñoz’s anecdote, little had changed. At a symposium held in Oakland in 2000 on the Viet Nam war’s impact on the state of California, presentations by Muñoz and myself (the only two Chicano participants) were greeted by Caucasian activists from the period with exclamations such as “Oh, I had no idea Chicanos protested against the war.” As the bibliography on social movements of the 1960s grows, it is clear that Chicano/a scholars will have to write their own histories in order to carry forward the arduous task of inserting ourselves into a recalcitrant national memory.

As is the case with most social movements, the Chicano Movement did not erupt spontaneously. The Mexican and Mexican American radical tradition can be traced back to a variety of originary moments. According to some Movement intellectuals and artists, the Spanish conquest of the indigenous people of Mexico in general and the Aztec empire in particular mark the initial point of conflict. Others would push the beginnings of that tradition back to the U.S. conquest and subsequent
6 / Introduction

colonization of the Southwest (the preferred origin for most Movement thinkers). In this scenario, the annexation of Texas, the U.S. war against Mexico, and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo were the decisive moments that marked the beginning of the longue durée of Chicano/a resistance. Cultural critic and Movement activist, Tomás Ybarra-Frausto summarized this position in the following manner:

The Chicano movement of the sixties was a recuperation of a project that had been going on since 1848, with labor strikes and mobilizations and people fighting for justice, dignity, and human rights. The difference between previous social movements and the Chicano movement was one of scope. That is, it was a national mobilization of people in New Mexico, Colorado, Texas, New Jersey, and California. It was a collective. It was also like a mythical movement—it was as if this fire of your identity was slowly going out. . . . It was cleansing at the same time as it was, for some people, destructive. So, the Chicano project of the sixties was the continuation of a long series of struggles of people in the United States. It was different because it was national in scope and also because it had this mythic quality about it.12

Many traditional historians have argued that it was the Mexican Revolution of 1910 that gave birth to a modern revolutionary consciousness among Mexicans in the United States, a consciousness that would persist in the trade-union movements of the 1930s and 1940s and the Mexican American civil-rights struggles of the 1950s. More recently, Raúl Fernandez and Gilbert Gonzalez have argued for a stricter separation between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, claiming that Chicano/a history can only be understood as a corollary to a later and more fully developed capitalist hegemony over Mexico.13

Ultimately we need not privilege any one of the hypotheses regarding the origins of the Movimiento. Each functions to produce an historical narrative with specific ideological and political objectives. I would suggest, however, that Ybarra-Frausto's claim that the two factors that distinguish the Movimiento of the Viet Nam war period from other periods were its national scope and "mythic qualities" must be qualified for the following reasons. Much more than the question of geographical scope is the fact that the Movement period produced a complex range
of organizing strategies and ideological positions that were unknown at earlier stages of Chicano/Mexicano resistance.

As I hope to show in the following chapters, the complexity of the Movement was the result of national and global developments that included the rise of Third World anticolonial struggles, “national liberation movements” within the United States, the existence of a youth counterculture as part of the new Chicano/a context (especially in the cities), and the multiple U.S. imperial interventions during the period 1965–75. Given the Movimiento’s complicated ideological terrain, I would argue that it was qualitatively different from earlier forms of Mexican contestation and that its so-called mythic qualities were in fact necessary elements of a concrete political project which despite the lack of a single ideological focus nonetheless posed a serious challenge to all previous models of citizenship, assimilation, and the role of racialized minorities in the United States.

Whether or not the Chicano Movement constituted a break with the previous generation or was a continuation of earlier political projects is a question that has been debated by a number of scholars. In my opinion, what occurs roughly at the conclusion of the Eisenhower presidency is that Mexican American political activity experiences an acceleration in a different register. With the creation of the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA) in 1959, the formation of the Political Association of Spanish-Speaking Organizations (PASSO) and the activism of the Viva Kennedy! clubs in 1960, the appearance of César Chávez’s National Farm Workers Association in 1962, Reies López Tijerina’s founding of the Alianza Federal de las Mercedes in 1963, and the electoral victories in Crystal City, Texas, that same year, a more militant ethnicity-based politics emerged throughout the Southwest.

Moreover, international and domestic developments such as reaction to the U.S. war in Southeast Asia, the youth counterculture, the Black civil rights, and other radical movements quickened the pace of grassroots political activity across the nation. In March 1966, when several dozen Chicano activists staged a walkout at an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) conference in Albuquerque to protest the exclusion of Mexican Americans from a White House conference on civil rights that was to be held in June of that same year, it was clear that for many activists traditional approaches to change had run their course.

In most of its manifestations, the Chicano Movement participated directly in the Third World critique of Eurocentrism and white
8 / Introduction

supremacy that had its roots in the early twentieth century and exploded in the anticolonial victories after World War II. Whether or not we accept the notion that the Chicano community constituted an “internal colony,” there can be little doubt that the Movimiento shared a number of features with anticolonial projects around the world. If, as the ideologues of Manifest Destiny had declared, the United States was an extension, indeed an exceptional form, of European civilization (and according to “scientific racism” a creation of the superior Anglo-Saxon or Nordic races), then Mexicans in the United States were a base mixture of “inferior” southern European (Spanish) and “primitive” Amerindian stock and thus in dire need of salvation.

Represented by traditional U.S. historiography as a people without history, Chicano/as in the 1960s questioned the basic premises of what geographer J.M. Blaut has called “cultural diffusionism,” that is, the myths of European superiority and the inevitable march of civilization from east to west. Chicano/a activists and intellectuals reinterpreted the conquest of the Southwest and its aftermath and began to refashion their community’s history and to understand their relationship to the histories of other disenfranchised populations. What we shall learn in the following pages is that the Cuban revolutionary experience, the war in Southeast Asia, and even African American radicalism would all have a profound effect on the creation of a sophisticated Chicana/o internationalism.

Another objective of this book, then, is to understand the Chicano Movement not only as a chapter in U.S. history but also as an important consequence of what was a “window of opportunity” for liberation struggles around the world. I understand the term “window of opportunity” to be the thirty year period between the end of the Second World War and the end of the U.S. war in Southeast Asia. What the Cold War and the standoff between the two superpowers facilitated was a series of openings for developing nations and racialized minority groups in the West to attempt to chart an independent course toward greater self-determination and social equality. Such efforts would be limited due to the imperial agendas of both the United States and the Soviet Union. For minority communities in the developed countries obstacles to change arose from structural mechanisms of inequality and direct state repression. Nevertheless, it seemed evident to many in diverse national contexts that a different, more equitable, society was within reach.
One of the most perceptive analysts of this potential for radical and progressive change told a group of students in 1963: "The world is awakening and all the old truths are no longer accepted merely because they have been in place for centuries. What is demanded is evidence for what before was only asserted, the interrogation of what is asserted, and the scientific analysis of what is asserted. And from this questioning are born revolutionary ideas that are spreading around the world." Without exception, the youth subcultures that grew out of and fed back into the international social movements of the late 1960s participated in this new sense of questioning authority and the demand that long-standing promises about social justice and democracy be fulfilled.

At the heart of the diverse collective projects that arose in the United States was a critique of traditional liberalism that exposed the contradictions and the hypocrisies of a system that had promised equality to all groups but had refused to deliver it. Although still embedded in a capitalist framework, Third World and even cultural nationalist agendas in the United States promoted what Samir Amin has called a "social and national" vision that placed the rights and demands of working-class and racialized people at the forefront of political change. While it is true that the achievements of this moment were uneven and often short-lived, it is no less true that significant progress was made on many fronts.

In the present study I am particularly eager to demonstrate the ways in which collective identities at the local level could not be separated from wider global developments. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the former colonies of Europe and the United States asserted their self-determination, and national liberation and anticolonial struggles produced a culture of resistance that inspired young people around the world. In a variety of contexts, cultural nationalism, with all its blind spots, was a positive force for both developing nations and racialized minorities in the West. Its ideological power served to bring diverse groups together under the banner of independence from colonial exploitation, economic underdevelopment, and institutional racism. Moreover, for many young activists of the period, local forms of nationalism led logically to international solidarity work.

In Mexican American communities, these utopian and transformative possibilities came together most powerfully in the figure of Ernesto Che Guevara but also through Chicano reimaginings of Emiliano Zapata, Francisco Villa, and the women of the Mexican Revolution—las Adelitas. In its most complex manifestations, the Chicano Movement participated
in a global South-West dialectic that drew its inspiration from both the revolutionary traditions of the South (especially Cuba and Mexico) and social democratic reformist agendas in the West during the post-World War II period. Although the Movement did not produce a single ideology that could synthesize gendered, regional, and organizational differences under one banner, Chicana and Chicano activists agreed that a more just and peaceful world was not only possible but also necessary.

It was not long, however, before the most privileged countries decided to close the window of opportunity for the majority of the world’s population by reasserting their control over the economies and domestic policies of the former colonies. In a brutal last gasp of this particular stage of U.S. imperialism, the war in Southeast Asia devoured millions of Vietnamese and thousands of working-class American youth. Chicano communities were particularly hard hit. By the late 1970s, whatever gains had been made by the former colonies had been lost to economic downturns and foreign debt. In the wake of the Cold War and with the end of the century approaching, global capital, armed with a technological and military superiority that surpassed even its former imperial glory, reasserted its dominance over the developing world.

The IMF, World Bank, and other agencies offered bailouts but only if formerly sovereign nations submitted themselves to neoliberal programs of structural adjustment, that is, the stripping away of social safety nets and the selling-off of the public sphere to private entities. Backed by the increased willingness of the United States to intervene with force around the world, corporate globalization had arrived. Reactionary media pundits proclaimed the end of history, that is, the end of progressive change and the beginning of the recolonization of the world. With the ascendance of the neoconservative foreign policy of preemptive military action during the George W. Bush administration, U.S. attempts at domination of key strategic areas played themselves out most violently in the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the subsequent occupation of that nation.

On the domestic front in the United States, concerted efforts by conservatives successfully rolled back the meager gains made by disenfranchised groups during the Civil Rights era. In the media and the universities, revisionist historians recast the liberatory moment of the 1960s as foolish and misguided. Many portrayed the Chicano Movement as a flawed and failed experiment. The tremendous transformative potential of the Movimiento became a vague but potent
memory for those who had experienced it in their youth. For the vast majority of ethnic Mexican young people growing up in the 1980s, 1990s, and the early years of the twenty-first century and for the thousands of immigrants who had arrived in the United States during that period, the history and the lessons of the Chicano Movement were either poorly understood or completely unknown.

**Nationalist Obsessions**

"Enorme Transformación que de un nopal ya casi moribundo has dado fruto a tan ardiente árbol sin cesar."

("Great Transformation that from an almost dead cactus you have produced fruit from a tree endlessly ablaze")

—ratírsalinas, "Enorme Transformación"

My interest in doing research on the Chicano Movement began when I was teaching introductory courses on Chicano/a literature as well as courses on the Viet Nam war period with a focus on minority experiences of the war. The tremendous achievement of the Chicano antiwar movement, in particular the National Chicano Moratorium Committee, inspired me to learn more about the ways in which other organizations and individuals had challenged liberal and conservative forms of elitism or class racism, the legacy of economic exploitation of ethnic Mexican and other poor people, and recurring racialized media representations of Spanish-speaking communities. As the grandson of Mexican immigrants and the son of a World War II Marine Corps veteran, I had been taught to respect those in authority regardless of my personal opinions. My response to being drafted, therefore, was a passive one, and I soon found myself among thousands of young men sucked into the military in early 1968. Upon my return in 1970 from a tour of duty in Viet Nam, my political education was well under way. But it was not until several decades later that I understood the depth of the Mexican American community’s courageous resistance to an imposed status of second-class citizenship during the decade between 1965 and 1975.

I am struck continually by the efforts of many Mexican American professionals to deny any value whatsoever to the Movement period and to cast it in a completely negative light. I began to notice the ways in which
at academic conferences and even at the level of everyday community and campus politics something called “Chicano nationalism” had become the *cucui* or bogeyman against which those professionals who had achieved successful careers (a success inconceivable without the Movement’s contributions) constructed their public and professional identities. My desire to understand “nationalism” in a Chicano/a context was piqued when a Hispanic bureaucrat repeatedly used the term *nationalist* to discredit a group of Chicano/a staff, students, and faculty committed to contesting elitism and structural racism at their university campus. It was not clear what precisely the term signified for this individual—whether it was the militancy of the advocacy group that frightened him or whether the term was linked in his mind to attitudes like sexism and homophobia, attitudes that were nowhere visible in the group’s practices but nonetheless could be invoked in order to discredit one’s opponents. In any event, I realized then that the positive contributions of the Movement had become hostage to a scholarly preoccupation with a single ingredient of its complex ideological mixture—the nationalist impulse.

Early in my study of the many forms of nationalism, I found Tom Nairn’s definition potentially useful from a Chicano perspective. In his 1977 book, *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism*, Nairn suggested that a defining trait of all national struggles, whether they be designed to produce large nation-states, overthrow colonial regimes, or assert the rights of ethnic minorities, was their basic ambiguity. It is not so much a question of “good nationalism” vs. “bad nationalism” but rather, as Nairn puts it, the fact that “all nationalism is both healthy and morbid.”

Interestingly, a similar analysis had emanated from the inside of one of California’s maximum-security prisons in the early 1970s. Writing for a column entitled “Noticias de la Pinta” (“News from Prison”), Francisco “Güero” Estrada pointed to the contradictory nature of the nationalist moment: “Of all the political theories that I have been exposed to, I think that Nationalism best expresses my concept of *what is good and bad* for all oppressed people” (emphasis added).

By distinguishing between what he called “reactionary nationalism” and “revolutionary nationalism,” Estrada made a convincing case against the most regressive forms of nationalism even as he poignantly explained their origins: “The Pinto who becomes what I define as a ‘Reactionary Nationalist’ does so principally because the only positive response that he has received from people that he attempted to relate to was from other
INTRODUCTION / 13

Chicanos—exclusively! Consequently, the only people that have molded his life, in terms of ever having done anything to help him, were all Chicanos… He does not care what the troubles of other peoples may or may not be. All he is interested in is doing something for the only people that have ever done something for him, la raza, nosotros los Chicanos.”21

By extrapolating out from Estrada’s analysis, I would submit that the appeal of Chicano cultural nationalism was (is) always greatest for working-class people living in tightly knit urban or rural Mexican communities in the United States. But even in conditions where the potential for class mobility is greater, such as in university social relations, the tendency toward what seem to be narrow nationalist formulations (“Mi Raza primero” [“My People first”]) at certain key moments may be a necessary tactical decision in order to organize constituencies with limited resources, to defend the community from nativist or white supremacist attacks, or simply to gain visibility for Chicano/a issues in a context of institutional neglect or hostility.

Looking back at my personal history, I realize that I have had the opportunity to experience both the morbid and the healthy side of the nationalist sentiment. As a graduate student in Madrid in the mid-1970s I witnessed the final throes of the Franco dictatorship. One day in 1974, I was unwittingly caught up in a street demonstration of Falangist youth. Working my way through the crowd on the Gran Vía, I hurried to nearby side streets in order to escape the palpable intensity of extreme nationalist, i.e. fascist, fervor. A full quarter of a century later as a visiting scholar in Havana, I felt the upsurge of nationalist pride as the young Cuban boy, Elián González, who had been held in Miami for several months, returned to his country. Walking through downtown Havana, I watched as Cubans of all ages smiled and embraced one another in an expression of joy and national solidarity.

In his description of nationalism as the “modern Janus,” the Roman god with two faces, Nairn reminds us: “In short, the substance of nationalism as such is always morally, politically, humanly ambiguous. This is why moralizing perspectives on the phenomenon always fail, whether they praise or berate it.”22 In other words, it is rarely useful to isolate the nationalist impulse as an abstract category and often more productive to “fill it in” with a specific historical and geographical content. Only then may we be able to judge the effects of a nationalist project and decide whether or not it has served to improve a community’s condition.
It is not my intention to either praise or berate, romanticize or discredit, the Chicano Movement although I do believe that despite the faults one can attribute to it in retrospect the benefits produced by the Movimiento still outweigh its ideological blind spots. I agree enthusiastically with Robin D. G. Kelley’s recent writing regarding African American social movements: “Unfortunately, too often our standards for evaluating social movements pivot around whether or not they ‘succeeded’ in realizing their visions rather than on the merits or power of the visions themselves. By such a measure, virtually every radical movement failed because the basic power relations they sought to change remain pretty much intact. And yet it is precisely these alternative visions and dreams that inspire new generations to continue to struggle for change.”

Put another way, the claim that the Movimiento “failed” reduces its scope to an instrumentalist interpretation in the political realm where, as Kelley suggests, relations of power were stacked overwhelmingly against activists demanding rapid change. Such reductionism is certainly one scholarly prism through which to view the past, but in the case of Chicano/a insurgency it blocks out a large part of the ideological field and erases the Movement’s numerous accomplishments. The Movement’s successful broadening of a Chicano/a collective and militant identity beyond the narrow confines of isolated groups of ethnic Mexicans where it had resided in previous decades was in itself a major success. On this point I am reminded of William Gamson’s claim that “the creation of an ongoing collective identity that maintains the loyalty and commitment of participants is a cultural achievement in its own right, regardless of its contribution to the achievement of political and organizational goals.” Or, as Chicana writer Cherrie Moraga puts it: “What was right about Chicano nationalism was its commitment to preserving the integrity of the Chicano people.”

To ask in the first decade of the twenty-first century whether or not the Chicano Movement “failed or succeeded” is a profoundly antihistorical question, for it necessarily judges the desire and praxis of a previous moment against the values and conditions of possibility of the present. A statement such as the following—“Though subversive activities on the part of local and federal government agencies hindered the insurgency’s attempts to change the status quo, the Chicano Movement also failed to achieve its goals because of its essentialist imaginings of community driven by an ideologically bankrupt cultural nationalism”—vastly
oversimplifies the intellectual complexity of the Movement. By reading a rich social movement through the academic critique of a caricatured “nationalism” that dominated elite Chicano/a Studies programs in the 1990s (but interestingly had far less resonance in other locations such as state and community college programs where most working-class youth were found), the potential for historical understanding is diminished.

As we shall see, the dismissal of a mobilizing frame as “ideologically bankrupt” understates the effects of changes in the historical context itself. Moreover, the concept of “bankruptcy” inverts the chain of causality leading to the “decline” of Movement organizations by rhetorically equating a Chicano philosophical “failing” (a blanket concept of “cultural nationalism” essentialized by the historian himself) with the well-orchestrated and violent campaign by law enforcement to destroy the insurgency. Social-movement theorist Alberto Melucci reminds us: “An organization may fail to achieve its objectives for a great number of reasons, both internal and external; but, ultimately, the action (or inaction) of the adversary is always decisive, due to the relative or absolute advantage of its position in the power relationship.” From the corporate growers who challenged the UFW to the full force of federal and local law-enforcement agencies, the adversaries who confronted Chicano/a mobilizations wielded a decisive and overwhelming advantage.

In the pages that follow, I will attempt to capture some of the positive aspects of the collective vision created by Chicano/a activists and organizations. We also will see how sectarian forms of nationalism could lead to a wide range of counterproductive attitudes and harmful practices, first and foremost among them sexism and homophobia. As I have suggested, these negative aspects are what most contemporary Chicano/a scholars have chosen to emphasize. But many aspects of cultural nationalism could also produce positive results for women and men, young and old, queers and straights. One of my goals, then, is to elucidate the tension inherent in this double-sided potential and thereby free our understanding of the Movement from the narrow nationalist straitjacket in which it has been placed so that we can begin to reevaluate it in all of its complexity.

In the language of contemporary technology, I understand cultural nationalism to be a networking hub into which diverse input ports feed and from which multiple output ports exit. In other words, cultural nationalism or ethnic pride (“Brown Power”) functions as the site of a community’s collective identity, organization, and passage into praxis as an
historical agent. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, numerous traditions and agendas of ethnic Mexicans in the United States as well as the example of past and contemporary social movements from the Latin American and U.S. contexts entered the hub. Leading out were an array of Movement agendas and political and cultural positions ranging from sectarian nationalism and ethnic separatism to militant reformist programs and coalitions to revolutionary stances on the left espousing strong internationalist solidarity to various forms of socialism. That traditional notions of gender, sexuality, and the family permeated all of these positions should not surprise us given the deep-rooted patriarchal structures that determine U.S., Mexican, and Mexican American social relations. The point is to adapt the lesson of how discriminatory practices debilitated Movement organizations not in order to dismiss the entire period but in order to avoid repeating those practices in the present.

As my anecdote about the Hispanic academic suggests, over the last two decades a professional buffer class has emerged in the academy and elsewhere whose dual purpose is to keep militant activists at bay and by so doing manage their personal success. The shift from Chicano politics to Hispanic politics that began in the 1980s and peaked at the turn of the century is in essence the shift from a grassroots, working-class agenda to a business and professional class agenda. The apparent successes of a relatively small group of Latinos and Latinas means that an individualized and depoliticized version of an ethnicity-based identity (a collective variant of which Movimiento activists had created) can be retained and strategically deployed in order to reap the financial rewards offered by U.S. society. This new “identity” is crafted carefully in order to purge it of the specific demands (self-determination, serious structural reform, access to resources, and inclusion in policy decisions), historical narratives (“Aztlán” or the indigenous past and present), and ideological affiliations (Latin American revolutionary thought) associated with the Movement period.

As one astute Mexican observer put it “El hispanismo venía a proponer la aceptación plena del ‘American Way of Life’ como la única posibilidad de triunfar en los Estados Unidos y a desplazar el radicalismo cultural y político del chicanoismo. El hispanismo alejó a los méxicoamericanos de una idea del México popular y lo cambió por una relación con quien ofreciera mutuos beneficios políticos, comerciales y financieros visibles a corto plazo” (“Hispanic identities promoted the full acceptance of the
INTRODUCTION / 17

‘American Way of Life’ as the only option for success in the United States and the displacement of the political and cultural radicalism of Chicano/a identities. Hispanic identities distanced Mexican Americans from the Mexican grassroots and in exchange offered many visible political, commercial, and financial benefits in the short term).30

In its relations with Mexico and Latin America in general, the Hispanic sector cast its lot with ruling parties and powerful elites, and abandoned the Movement’s concept of international solidarity with exploited communities. To paraphrase Martin Luther King, Jr., we might say that it is disappointing that the Hispanic professional class had sailed out of rough waters into the relatively calm sea of the mainstream, and in the process had forgotten the storm in which their sisters and brothers were still drowning.31 Eager to celebrate the surface characteristics of their ethnicity, Hispanics were far less sanguine about taking up the mantle of the struggle for social and economic justice.

In a visionary moment in 1972, the great Chicano educator and organizer Ernesto Galarza wondered aloud about the future of what was then the first large cohort of Chicano/as entering the universities and eventually the professional class:

The Mexican moving into American urban society is moving into an extremely complicated culture. The community needs people who know their way around in it but if you can learn your way around a complicated culture you can easily be tempted to exploit it on your own behalf and to make a career out of it. Careerism is one of the temptations and pitfalls which faces the Mexican graduate student, he has to make up his mind what his responsibility is. Now if enough such guys come out of the universities who go back well-trained, competent, and capable who use their skills to help the community to find its way through this maze, this meat grinder which is American society, their training will be justified. I will be very interested to see how many men and women [like this] this generation can turn out.32

In the early 1980s, the rise of Reaganism marked the beginning of a vicious attack on the public sphere that would continue through the so-called Gingrich Revolution into the new century under the guise of neoliberalism and finally produce the gutting of state and local economies realized
18 / Introduction

by the Bush/Cheney administration under the guise of a “war on terror” without end. Throughout this twenty-year period, a concurrent development was the expansion and solidification of Hispanic markets and identities. Careerism and hyper-professionalization went hand in hand with the adage coined in the 1980s—“Greed is good”—or its later variant popular in the first decade of the new century—“It’s all about me.”

As early as the late 1970s, it seemed that Galarza’s worst-case scenario had come to pass. During the Carter years, a handful of Chicano scholars noted that a Hispanic managerial class already had asserted itself to an extent previously unimaginable in virtually all the major professions. Mario Barrera, in his now classic Race and Class in the Southwest (1979), used an internal-colonialism model in order to show how Chicanas//os tended to occupy a separate sector of each class because of racialization mechanisms, gender bias, and other institutionalized discriminatory practices. What Barrera called the “Chicano Ascriptive Class Segments (CACS),” Patrick Carey-Herrera jokingly referred to as the “Chicano Ascriptive Class Assimilants” (CACA), that is, Mexicans assimilated into mainstream professions or even the capitalist class but held in check by what in another context would be called the “glass ceiling.”30 Barrera’s intuition that there existed the potential for a Hispanic ethos, however, led him to point out that “the various Chicano subordinate segments have certain interests in common, their colonial interests, and certain interests in opposition, their class interests.”34

Extending Barrera’s model to include all Spanish-speaking groups in the United States, it was clear by the 1980s that class interests had superseded whatever cultural commonalities might have existed. Cuban Americans in Miami, as the beneficiaries of special federal programs in place since the early 1960s, were among the first to break through the barriers outlined by Barrera and they actively promoted the new Hispanic identity. The role of Miami-based Cubans as an “Hispanic” front for neo-conservative attacks on multiculturalism as “victimization studies” cannot be underestimated. As one successful Cuban American television executive put it: “I don’t even say anymore that I’m Latin, I say I’m Cuban. Because Cubans don’t have that woe-is-me-I’m-a-minority thing that keeps other Latinos down. We don’t whine.”35

By the time conservative agendas were repackaged by Bill Clinton and the “New Democrats,” even the Mexican American community had a growing number of members convinced that racism and other
structural impediments to their success were a thing of the past and that their Chicana/o cousins who continued to advocate for progressive structural change were simply “whiners” and malcontents. About the plight of Mexican and Chicana/o workers who continued to function in the role of exploited labor, the successful “Hispanic Americans” had precious little to say.

The new Hispanic class sincerely believed it was living proof that “bootstraps” and Horatio Alger ideologies worked and that the American Dream was alive and well. As early as 1978, conservative Mexican Americans had articulated what would later become a full-blown Hispanic individualism. In a curious book purporting to be a history of Chicanos, Manuel A. Machado, Jr., a professor at the University of Montana, lamented the fact that he felt obliged to report on the Chicano Movement: “While necessity dictates that we deal with Chicano noise-makers in this section, it should be noted that the Mexican-American who is merely ‘doing his own thing’ is not very well represented. Why? Simply because he is too busy to become excessively involved in divisiveness and dissension, two things that would detract from the search for his individual aspiration.” By the mid-1980s, a prerequisite for corporate and academic success was a required distancing from collective projects, especially those that appealed to Movement ideologies and principles.

In a 1985 working paper, Renato Rosaldo stated: “Chicano Studies, for the most part, shares in the broader endeavor of combating ideological, political, and economic forms of oppression confronted by their research subjects.” Although elsewhere in the paper Rosaldo unfairly criticizes early activist scholars such as Octavio Romano, he could not have stated more succinctly my view of the past and future mission of Chicana/o studies. But the personal and professional cost of maintaining an activist vision of Chicana/o studies is high, for institutions and traditional academic departments most often dismiss as “unscholarly” teachers who are politically engaged beyond campus walls and research that challenges long-standing and racialized disciplinary assumptions. The case of Dr. Rodolfo Acuña v. the University of California, for example, turned on the issue of age discrimination although many people in the Chicano/a community understood that what was really at stake was the University of California system’s elitist opposition to a world-renowned, widely published scholar who was fully committed to improving the life chances of his community.
The Reagan-Bush-Clinton-Bush years, then, were triumphalist ones, first for the Cold Warriors who celebrated the demise of the “evil empire” and immediately thereafter for the corporate ideologues, neocolonialists, and right-wing Christian fundamentalists who assumed power in the George W. Bush administration. Even before the so-called era of globalization and the “new economy” of the late 1990s, however, academic historians and cultural theorists had begun a full-scale revision of the 1960s in order to prepare the groundwork for the final pronouncement by neoconservative thinkers and politicians that mass social movements were a thing of the past and that the end of history had arrived. Newscaster Tom Brokaw’s best-seller *The Greatest Generation* (1998), bolstered by such box-office hits as Steven Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan* (1999), waxed nostalgic over the World War II period and implicitly erased the Viet Nam war period in order to return the nation to a time of unquestioned “unity.”

As one commentator pointed out: “Behind the sepia-toned nostalgia for the war years [World War II], one finds a longing to pretend the 1960s never happened, to turn back the clock to a simpler time before Vietnam poked holes in the perceived infallibility of American Empire, before the civil rights movement and feminism ruined everything, back when family, work, god and country formed the four corners of American life.”40 By the time the Supreme Court awarded George W. Bush the presidency in 2000 it was clear to most people that in the new millennium there would be no repeat of Paris, Chicago, or Mexico City 1968 or even of East Los Angeles 1970. The passage of the so-called Patriot Act and other assaults on civil liberties fashioned by Attorney General John Ashcroft and his Justice Department were the structural implements designed to ensure that mass mobilizations would become a thing of the past. The state’s desire to make progressive social movements impossible in the new millennium was the practical realization of the philosophical positions promulgated by neoconservative and poststructuralist intellectuals from the 1980s onward.

In 1985, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe published an English translation of their *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, a book that would have an almost immediate influence in the U.S. academy, especially in departments of literature and ethnic studies. On the opening page of his study, Laclau informs the reader that “an avalanche of historical mutations” have displaced “the evident truths” of progressive thought.
INTRODUCTION / 21

Writing at the height of Reaganism and a few short years before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Laclau argued that this new multiplicity of social struggles held the potential “for an advance towards more free, democratic and egalitarian societies.”

From our vantage point a decade and a half later, Laclau’s cautious prediction was clearly wrong. Rather than a “long revolution” toward social and economic justice, we have witnessed the increased polarization of poverty and wealth, the imposition of economic arrangements controlled by wealthy nations and backed by U.S. military power, the reemergence of religious fundamentalisms, and the rise of state and free-lance terrorism around the world. In fact, the poststructuralist critique of liberatory projects coincided perfectly with the “end of history” thesis and the loss of hope for a more just social order. That culture critics in the United States posing as radicals bought into Laclau’s vision so easily was perhaps predictable but no less scandalous given that they were aiding indirectly both the rise of the New Right and the corporate university. By the late 1990s, history had indeed stopped or so it seemed given the lack of alternative visions of the future and the widespread dismissal of Viet Nam War era social movements for being hopelessly “out of date.”

And yet by the end of the first year of the new millennium, there had been massive demonstrations (and police riots that followed) against the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and other representatives of a global economic order that judging by contemporary objective conditions had condemned the vast majority of the world’s population to poverty and misery. Indeed, on September 11, 2001, the atrocities committed in New York and Washington, D.C., radically jumpstarted history, at least for those self-satisfied Western elites who thought history had come to an end. In December of 2001 in Argentina (Laclau’s own country of origin), members of the middle class rioted and looted in the streets of Buenos Aires, victims of four years of recession and the kind of economic restructuring mandated by transnational agencies. In the autumn and winter of 2002–3, as the Bush administration prepared for war against Iraq and a prolonged occupation to follow, large antiwar mobilizations took place across the United States with even larger antiwar protests in Europe. Laclau and his followers, it now seemed, had completely misread their crystal ball.

One of the objectives of the chapters that follow is to map the complex ideological field that was the Chicano Movement of the Viet Nam war era. Given its heterogeneous nature, what I am calling the “Movimiento”
is an analytical construct necessary to understand an otherwise disunified discursive and material field made up of diverse practices and agendas. Although the varied sectors of the Movement shared certain characteristics ("ethnic pride" being the most obvious and working-class origins among the most important), they did not constitute a traditional social movement based on a single issue. One theorist of social change has suggested that the empirical reality of most movements is always "messier" than its interpreters would like, and thus exceeds any attempt to categorize on the basis of fixed typologies. This is certainly true in the case of Chicano/a insurgencies in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Although they contribute more to a cultural than a political history of the period, the studies included here are grounded in the material conditions of Chicano/a communities and the actual practices deployed by activists within the context of multiple and often contradictory agendas. As interpretations of a limited discursive field, therefore, my research does not fully develop every contradiction at play in a social movement that was unusually fragmented by region, gender, and other issues. Rather, I focus on some of the areas that to date have been insufficiently discussed by historians and cultural theorists either because they were thought to be unrelated to what was taken to be the essential thrust of Movement practices or because they contrasted too sharply with a shared common sense (produced primarily in elite universities during the 1980s and 1990s) about the "true nationalist nature" of the Movement.

This book will disappoint those readers interested in a chronological history of the Chicano Movement. My decision to avoid a strict chronological narrative is not due to any "postmodern" approach as one historian colleague suggested to me. It is true, however, that I believe ideological and discursive formations do not march as self-contained units through time. Rather, they constitute noncontinuous systems of social knowledge, at times complementary and often contradictory, that function according to local contexts and needs.

The work of two seminal thinkers guide me here—Raymond Williams and Michel Foucault. From Williams I take the fundamental concept of ideology as "the general process of the production of meanings and ideas." In this view, material conditions produce ideologies even as material effects are produced by ideologies and their discursive manifestations (ideology as both constituted and constitutive). Williams also teaches us that the complex origins of ideological attachments that
motivate activists are often beyond the grasp of objective description ("structures of feeling") and therefore cannot always be located in a specific document or archive. Moreover, ideological and discursive fields are intersected by residual, emergent, and dominant traditions that may interact simultaneously in unexpected and unintended ways.

It is on this point that Foucault’s contribution is crucial, for rather than imitating the traditional historian’s construction of a chain of historical events based on the privileged data of the archive, the cultural “archeologist” attempts to map “systems of dispersion” in which overlapping ideologies and discourses produce figures, practices, and languages functioning under a generalized rubric. In the present study, that rubric is the Chicano Movement. A system of dispersion does not imply chaos and lack of organization in terms of actual practices but does suggest that we will be hard pressed to construct the kinds of linear typologies and periodizations associated with traditional historiography. What post-Movement historians have called a “lack of coherence” in the Movement is in my opinion the natural outcome of the overdetermined centrifugal set of actions and ideas that was Chicano/a militancy in the Viet Nam war period.

Rather than seeking access to “what really happened” during the Movement period construed as a totalized and “objective” historical whole, I am interested in charting the ideological systems that generated a diverse array of organizational styles, political languages, and leaders. The reinsertion of well-known historical figures such as César Chávez or Reies López Tijerina into the rich discursive archive that was the late 1960s and early 1970s will help us to understand the interplay among various sectors of the politicized Chicano/a community. The contrasting agendas and even the apparent contradictions within single organizations on one level suggest “points of incompatibility” (following Foucault’s archaeological method). However, what seem to be incompatible historical agents and agendas are in fact all consequences of the same general set of social relations and discursive matrix that I will call the Chicano critique of liberalism.

The fact that diverse Movement figures and organizations assumed different forms in their realization of that critique does not mean there was a “weakness” or “failure” in the Movement. According to Foucault’s concept of discursive formations, the relationships among cultural and political objects or statements that appear to be in conflict are not gaps or flaws: “Instead of constituting a mere defect of coherence, they form
an alternative... [and] are characterized as link points of systematization... One describes it rather as a unity of distribution that opens a field of possible options, and enables various mutually exclusive architectures to appear side by side or in turn. What is at issue, therefore, are not historical figures as metaphors or images created by subjective "perceptions" but rather the manner in which discursive objects participate in political projects and thereby exercise a direct impact on material conditions, in this instance as part of a richly textured social movement created by ethnic Mexicans in the United States.

Chapter One outlines some of the basic issues that have preoccupied academic commentators. I attempt to contextualize those issues so that we may understand the contemporary political projects that have employed the concept of the Movement in order to further specific agendas in the present. Chapter Two develops the connection between so-called nationalist practices and a more explicitly internationalist position in order to argue that the Movimiento cannot be understood as a simple manifestation of "nationalism," especially in the impoverished definition with which that term is used in current debates within Chicano/a and American Studies. Chapter Three investigates a crucial moment in the genealogy of 1960s Chicana/o radicalism—the Cuban Revolution of 1959—and provides analysis of Chicano/a cultural production having to do with the Cuban experience. The ideological repertoire that underwrote events in Cuba resonated uncannily with certain key discursive elements of the Movimiento, and coalesced in the figure of the Argentine Ernesto Che Guevara.

In Chapter Four, I trace the construction of another key figure of the Movement—César Estrada Chávez. By interpreting the discursive field that produced Chavez as the "father" of all Chicano/a activism, a field created by Chávez himself but primarily by the entire repertoire of cultural products that represented him, we begin to better understand some of the tensions at play in the Movement. Chapter Five outlines the ways in which some Chicano/a activists sought to make alliances across ethnic boundaries, specifically with Black militant groups during the late 1960s. Finally, Chapter Six looks specifically at one attempt to democratize the system of higher education in California. Led by an impressive coalition of Chicano/a, African American, and Asian American activists, students at the University of California, San Diego, for a brief moment challenged the elitist assumptions of one prestigious university.