Introduction

My interest with Chicano Studies as an academic discipline originated with the struggle at the University of California at Los Angeles for a department of Chicana and Chicano Studies in the spring of 1993. While I had done some research in the area, I had never really thought out the assumptions, models, theories, and practices of the field. Chicano Studies as a discipline did not seem to differ from my own field of training (history). I had not thought about the formation and genesis of Chicano Studies. Just like history, its characteristics, terminology, and methods were assumed to be “neutral.” Chicano Studies appeared as an oppositional discipline that could coexist, albeit in tension, with other fields. While Chicano Studies had problems (what discipline did not?), they were resolvable. I expected that with effort Chicano Studies could be restored to a healthier manifestation. I was naive.

The 1993 struggle woke me from my intellectual slumber. The protest at the university made me realize that Chicano Studies could not be a singular subject, although many students, scholars, and activists acted as if there had always been a single Chicano Studies. During the protest, however, multiple articulations of Chicano studies appeared. The central questions that emerged were the following: Why was there only one acceptable Chicano Studies? Why did the field demand such compliance? How did it become singular? I came to appreciate that just as this homogenized Chicano Studies had silenced many at the 1993 protest, it was possible that other Chicano studies had existed in the past, different from the current orthodoxy. What happened to these other expressions? I was curious to explore and unpack the discursive formation of Chicano studies with its multiple dissensons, elisions, erasures, and silences that eventually resulted in Chicano Studies. The UCLA struggle made me concede that the Chicano Studies I had been practicing had a particular history with a set agenda. It had intentionally excluded (and continues to exclude) other visions and readings of
the Mexican American experience and denied its institutional relationship with the academic world.

Motivated by this protest, I decided to diagnose how and why Chicano Studies had become the practice that I had observed. The patriarchal practices and the politics of nationalism that occurred throughout the 1960s protest were not new. Yet why, after twenty-five years of teaching and practicing Chicano Studies, did Chicanos(as) still find themselves grappling with patriarchy, nationalism, and homophobia, together with chingón politics? Was the facile transformation of the protest into Chingón Studies inevitable? More disturbing, possibly reflecting the continued oppressive power of Chicano politics, the protesters did not question these exclusionary, antilibertarian, and homophbic practices. These practices appeared as second nature. All of this was made even more troublesome by the apparent ignorance over the production, control, and distribution of academic knowledge. Could this be the nature of Chicano Studies, at least as practiced at UCLA?

These concerns led me to this book, which interrogates the genesis, formation, and development of academic Chicano studies from 1967 to 1982. Throughout this fifteen-year period, I trace the maturation of Chicano studies from its initial equivocal and fluid character to its contraction into a unitary academic discipline. My story delineates a multiplicity of Chicano studies, exemplifying a diversity of intellectual and political positions. Like most intellectual enterprises, these early Chicano studies pushed particularity over homogenizing endeavors and theoretical constructs. Within this multiplicity, some Chicanos(as) wanted to corral the anarchy of particularism by creating a unitary theme and practice. They sought to construct, whether they stated it or not, a discipline as defined by U.S. higher education. As Chicano studies established itself in the academy, scholars' intellectual production became regulated and defined by the discipline's methods, methodology, and epistemology as well as by the institutional procedures and the system of academic hierarchy. Chicano studies, whether independently or as part of some type of inter- or transdisciplinary program, operated as a social science or humanities discipline.

I explore the association between Chicano studies and certain nondiscursive domains—in particular, Chicano(a) student politics and academic institution building. Chicano studies appeared during a period of campus struggles that reflected personal agendas, ideological beliefs, societal pressures, as well as institutional procedures. Some scholars have argued that there is a determinant relationship between the origins of Chicano studies and both campus politics and the larger Chicano movement. A few have suggested that effective programs retained this connection with nondiscursive practices. To avoid this position, I trace the emergence of Chicano studies without situating it within a particular political or institutional oeuvre. Therefore, besides laying out a discursive archeology of Chicano studies, my goal is to trace a genealogy that explores the nondiscursive tracts of Chicano studies and its development from a nonacademic though intellectual oppositional epistemology into a traditional, albeit alternative, academic discipline: Chicano Studies.

The accepted narrative of Chicano studies begins with the social and political struggles of the 1960s, collectively referred to as el movimiento. As self-identified Chican(a) students arrived on campus, many became active in their educational institutions, initially working with white organizations but eventually establishing organizations that challenged their campus's policies on admissions, retention, and funding. They began to organize actions to "transform" their home communities. For these students, commitment to a more equitable world for Mexican Americans was central. Chicanos(as) were also concerned with curricular issues. If students were planning to change the world, they had to comprehend it. For many Chicanos(as), the explanations provided by higher education were wanting. Like white and black radicals, Chicanos(as) began to explore the meaning of education and the academic knowledge that resulted from the compact among faculty, academic institutions, and a selective intellectual tradition. They were critical of the academic culture and its institutional apparatus that provided nearly packaged knowledge—assembled by fields, disciplines, departments, schools and the like—to its consumers. They hesitated before an academic knowledge that privileged scientism and empirical methods and sought to establish the laws of nature and society—using a masculinist language. They suspected that this knowledge was part of the continuous reconstruction and defense of American exceptionalism. Chicanos(as) understood that the Mexican American had little space within this intellectual dynamic.

In the late 1960s, for most Chicanos(as), their conceptualization of knowledge had ensued from the culture of academic life and its "hidden curriculum." Knowledge was produced through academic disciplines and fields with their corresponding methods, methodologies,
and perspectives. The division among social science, humanities, science, professional programs, arts, applied science, public programs, and so on shaped their view of how knowledge was assembled and reproduced. Thus academic knowledge revealed itself in the curricular programs that fostered a selective intellectual tradition and canon. It therefore became impossible to detach concepts like “knowledge,” “discipline,” “social science,” and “humanities”—they were all involved in the building of the institution of higher education. The simultaneous connection among academic culture, knowledge, and the university system left limited possibilities for the germination of alternative (much less oppositional) perspectives or to conceive of knowledge outside the bounds of the academy.

At the center of American academic knowledge was a scientific and masculinist discourse. The social sciences and humanities privileged empirical and realist methods to ascertain the fundamental laws that operate in nature and society. This language was built on a gendered speech of hard facts, science, and power. This version of knowledge, as the historian Dorothy Ross has described, emerged in defense of American exceptionalism that had been challenged by the possibilities of change at the turn of the twentieth century. Furthermore, as historian and journalist Ruth Rosen has advanced, “Cold War culture and its ideas about gender patrolled the boundaries between men and women, gay and straight, patriotic and subversive.”

To avert this crisis, Ross explained, academic practices redrew the uniqueness of “America” and turned natural law and historical principle into the unchanging bases for American civilization. The faith in science was reinforced by an academic professionalism that provided an authoritative underscoring of the world. As the university system in the United States flourished, its decentralization nurtured the separation among the disciplines, reinforcing the antihistorical and antiphilosophical tendencies in American academic knowledge. Moreover the American university experience consecrated a covenant among professional instructors, a canon, and a group of young affiliates that reproduced the disciplines and legitimized American knowledge. The augmenting specialization and professionalization of the social sciences and humanities, bounded by academic cultural dogma and procedures, created a particular knowledge whose purpose was social control and empire building.

Firmly conjoined to American exceptionalism was race. Many public intellectuals had written the United States as the central figure in the universalist commitment to civil and human rights. In particular, U.S. history had become the mythic tale of a nonethnic national ideology, where ancestral (and racial) affinities meant little. As the historian Nikhil Pal Singh explained: “Civic myths about the triumph over racial injustice have become central to the resuscitation of a vigorous and strident form of American exceptionalism—the idea of the United States as both a unique and universal nation.” But he questioned this performance: “What if there is a recurring oscillation between universalizing abstractions of liberal democracy, in which individuals are considered equal with respect to nationality, and a persistent regression, in which the actual individuals and communities who benefit from national belonging are implicitly or explicitly constituted in white supremacist terms?”

In American academic practices, race is erased while simultaneously being at the center of intellectual production. In much of the public intellectuals’ engagement with “America,” the issue of race was envisioned as always being at the point of resolution and therefore no longer (or ever, for that matter) a concern. Singh, following on the work of others, has added that both American liberalism and race are connected to American imperial expansion. Imperial expansionism and Jim Crow at the turn of the twentieth century “gave new life to racist schemas of thought already deposited in the American past.” When higher education fostered the tale of “America,” it also asserted a racialized view of the United States and the world.

In the 1960s, students of color, following radical whites, contested American academic knowledge and laid siege to the pact among professors, their acolytes, and a selective intellectual tradition. Furthermore, they questioned the association among knowledge, American exceptionalism, and empire (though less clearly regarding race and often not at all looking at gender or sexuality). To undermine this bond, students sought to subvert the university as a political institution. Given the generation of this mythic universalism, students of color initially sought to disrupt academic knowledge. In its place, they wanted to design a new body of knowledge. They required a knowledge that could more honestly and truthfully explain the condition of people of color. For Mexican American activists, this often meant that a space had to be carved out of higher education—a space that would be controlled by Mexican Americans and driven by Mexican American social and political
concerns. This could only be accomplished by direct confrontation with the academic institution. This occupied territory of higher education would deal with student services, teaching, and research. This was to be Chicano studies—a liberated zone within the oppressor’s institution. From this liberated terrain, activists could then direct their attention to transforming the community. The political scientist Rick Olguin has asserted that ethnic studies was to have a distinct discourse from all academic models; it was to be grounded in its community orientation, its historical and social perspective, and self-reflexivity. 

As el movimiento progressed and the Chicano(a) student movements flourished, students and faculty constructed several formulations of Chicano studies. These perspectives reflected sundry regional, political, and intellectual currents. Nonetheless, all of these constructions sought to disrupt academic knowledge that had denied space to the Mexican American experience. In the process, Chicano studies produced a variety of intellectual tools required to express and analyze the experience of Chicanos(as). Many Chicano(a) students felt that institutional control was central to this intellectual revolution and the struggle for self-determination and liberation. In the academy, Chicanos(as) conflated political with intellectual concerns. What was left unclear was how their perceived need to separate Chicano studies (or ethnic studies) from academic work was due solely to the quest for autonomy or the inadequacy of academic practices as a way of knowing. 

To explore these various issues, I examine two expressions of early Chicano studies. Although other vistas existed, I believe what I have termed Empirical Chicano Studies and Perspectivist Chicano Studies are the most common. By examining the intellectual expressions of each thread, I show distinct practices of Chicano studies. To understand how these came about, I examine the intense intellectual discourse that took place in the late 1960s. From the first essays in El Grito: A Journal of Contemporary Mexican-American Thought (1967) to the appearance of El Plan de Santa Bárbara (1969) and the initial issues of Aztlan: Chicano Journal of the Social Sciences and the Arts (1970), this era reflected a maestros of academic Chicano studies. Through these writings, several expressions of Chicano studies appeared with various possible options of bringing Chicano studies to (and not only into) the academy. No univocal version of Chicano studies existed. Although these versions of Chicano studies overlapped, they expressed radically distinct meanings and approaches.

When I discuss Perspectivist Chicano Studies and Empirical Chicano Studies, I do not imply any necessary relationship to a particular philosophical orientation; my use of these terms is merely descriptive. When I use “perspectivist,” I want to point out the tendency of these scholars to center their research on a Chicano standpoint that arises from their particular, often cultural, experience in the United States. I contrast this with those intellectuals who center their analysis on the institutional mechanisms that result in inequity. Because of this latter perspective, these scholars saw the battle for Chicano studies as one of institutionalization of programs. This group I call the “empirics.” Of course to assume any clear-cut separation is to ignore the massive overlapping of these expressions and to miss the chaotic and complex history of the making of a discipline—especially one created in a hostile and turbulent environment. Nevertheless, only one of these visions would eventually become “official.”

The most successful expression of adapting to institutional control and intellectual production came from the empiric scholars, who molded Empirical Chicano Studies. They saw the battle for Chicano studies in two stages. The first and most important stage was the institutionalization of all programs that dealt with Chicanos(as) under Chicano control. The empirics visualized these programs as part of the overall political struggle for Chicano self-determination. Their second concern was to develop objective methods that could provide students with a structural knowledge of their historical and cultural inheritance. These curricular concerns supplemented the institution-building process. Empirics successfully replaced other potential versions of Chicano studies. By 1975, Empirical Chicano Studies had become the only legitimate vision of Chicano Studies and simultaneously matured into part of the American academic project.

It is more difficult to provide a thumbnail sketch of Perspectivist Chicano Studies, however. This vision failed to become a successful and legitimate interpretation of Chicano studies. By the mid- to late 1970s, Perspectivist Chicano Studies had become a fragmented intellectual agenda, surviving in the periphery of teaching institutions, alternative educational institutions, the arts, and certain community organizations. As victorious Empirical Chicano Studies dominated the field, perspectivist writers were progressively pushed toward peripheral journals or self-publication. Because of this, Perspectivist Chicano Studies never matured into a concise intellectual style, and its practitioners
were often isolated. Their lack of success allowed much differentiation among perspectivists. Given these caveats, however, we can still provide a working definition for this intellectual style. Perspectivist scholars centered their work on formulating a Chicano standpoint that grew out of Chicano(a) experiences in the United States. Critical of social-science research and questioning academic work, these thinkers sought to establish an oppositional epistemology rooted in the process of Chicano(a) identity formation.

Empirical Chicano Studies progressively transformed itself into Chicano Studies by exorcizing all possible competitors and critics. After 1975, Chicano Studies had become a singular subject and began to accommodate itself within the academy, increasingly mimicking the behavior of traditional academic disciplines. While some scholars and campus activists have argued that the weakening of Chicano Studies was due to the demise of el movimiento, it can be argued that the incorporation of Chicano Studies resulted from the participants’ inability or unwillingness to understand the process by which the academy controls, produces, and distributes knowledge. In short, Chicano Studies was mainstreamed and its research depoliticized.

African Americans, Chicanos/as, feminists, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos/as expected that the assault on the academy would rupture the compact and initiate a transformation of knowledge and its production. What most did not comprehend, though, was how the academy composed knowledge. By drawing attention toward the various aspects of the university structure (such as “disciplines” and “fields” or “admissions” and “services”), these student activists unconsciously affirmed the process by which knowledge was assembled and distributed. In the end, the challenge to academic knowledge became incorporated and served to strengthen the very institutions that had manipulated knowledge production. Like the formation of ethnic studies, Chicano studies was incorporated into the academic institution. In the struggle for institutional power, many activists ignored how the academy composed and distributed knowledge. The initial desire to establish a discussion between various knowledges and life-situations was transformed into curricular objectives through which the academic institution reproduced itself. In effect, the community was replaced by the institution. Moreover, theories came to the fore that reduced thinking to the methods and epistemologies of academic knowledge.

Much like the narrative the cultural critic Raymond Williams has told about cultural studies in Britain, the various manifestations of ethnic and racial studies were incorporated into the academic institution. In comparing the formulation of Chicano studies with British cultural studies, we can discern a similar zeal to establish a discussion of literature and writing in relation to “life-situations . . . outside the established educational system.” Once in the university, however, curricular interests soon supplanted this bond; knowledge began to reproduce itself in the image of the institution. Cultural studies became disassociated from its community (adult education, in the case of cultural studies), and its development was reduced to textual analysis—expressed in academic jargon. “At the very moment when that adventurous syllabus became a syllabus that had to be examined,” Williams wrote, “it ceased to be exciting.”

Success was transformed into institutionalization. The same transpired in most ethnic studies programs in the United States. The rebelliousness and anarchy between students and discipline gave way to management (that is, the need to be “professional” and “organized”). Williams has remarked that at this point of institutionalization, “a body of theory came through which rationalized the situation of this formation on its way to becoming bureaucratized and the home of specialist intellectuals.” For him, this meant the arrival of theories that “tended to regard the practical encounters of people in society as having relatively little effect on its general progress.” For the case of ethnic studies, and in particular Chicano studies, it meant an initial return to academic liberal arts methods and principles, later followed by acceptable academic alternatives (such as colonial theory and Marxism).

Was this unavoidable? Was Chicano studies destined to incorporation just like Marxism, women’s studies, and cultural studies? I am not certain. I believe that the life of Chicano studies as oppositional could have been extended by the continuation of a multiplicity of voices within Chicano studies itself. Contradiction and conflict kept various manifestations of Chicano studies from simply following some teleological or set pattern. The oppositional quality of the variety of early Chicano studies rested in their rhizomic character and in the belief that utopia was possible. The tension between Empirical Chicano Studies, Perspectivist Chicano Studies, and other Chicano studies was essential for its autonomy; this made it more difficult for academic incorporation and allowed a necessary academic unruliness. However, with the
dominance of the empiricists, Chicano Studies soon began its negotiation with the academy.

Yet there was an undercurrent that bared the weaknesses and contradictions in Chicano studies. Chicana critics of el movimiento questioned the patriarchal practices they were forced to accept—especially in its nationalist garb. Their political rebellion challenged the narrow vision of both el movimiento and the student movements, generating a potential alternative insight. This Chicana perspective established a foundation for a critique of Chicano studies and eventually an alternative Chicano(a) studies that would provide the hope of a new Chicana(o) academic project. In the groundbreaking collection *This Bridge Called My Back*, women of color, drawing on their political activism, provided the tools to disrupt Chicano Studies as an academic discipline. *This Bridge* echoed philosopher María Lugones’s use of *mestiza* as a central name for impure resistance to interlocked, intermeshed oppressions by complicating notions of identity, especially sexuality.26

In chapters 1, 2, and 3, I establish the core of the book: the genesis of academic Chicano Studies. Chapter 1 details the initial Chicano works that emerged and sought to understand the Mexican American experience. Many of these endeavors started from a rejection of scholarly assumptions, methods, and theories. By examining some of these writings, I introduce two potentially conflicting expressions of Chicano studies: Empirical and Perspectivist. Chapter 2 develops Empirical Chicano Studies with particular emphasis on the attempt to develop the internal colonial model as the research method for understanding the Mexican American experience. The endeavor to push this model as the academic method in Chicano studies was assisted by the rise of the journal *Aztlán*. In contrast, chapter 3 traces the contradictory evolution of Perspectivist Chicano Studies. Given its inability to hold off the success of Empirical Chicano Studies, perspectivists never formulated an academic camp with a particular methodology. Rather, we encounter a myriad of individual expressions of Perspectivist Chicano Studies, often centered on personal standpoint, cultural nationalism, and artistic expression.

Chapter 4 focuses on the success of the empirical camp in the 1970s. In addition to tracing the various new intellectual layers of Empirical Chicano Studies, I examine the institutional grafting of Chicano Studies onto the academy. By acknowledging the subordination of Chicano Studies to academic practices, Chicano Studies legitimated its position within the academy. We turn to the case of UCLA to understand this process. Ironically, as an academic expression of the "loyal opposition," Empirical Chicano Studies provided legitimacy to American exceptionalism.

The last chapter heralds the demise of Chicano Studies by examining the rise of a gender critique and its transformation into a feminist epistemology. Women, as participants in both expressions of Chicano Studies (Empirical and Perspectivist), found themselves physically and intellectually excluded. Female scholars drew attention to the central contradiction: How could Chicanos talk about a Mexican American experience without speaking about women? Some of these scholars further complicated the Chicano(a) understanding of women, resulting in a two-level critique. On the one side, women, even as participants in either view, wanted to draw attention to the Chicana-story that had been excluded. Female empirics and perspectivists rejected how these vistas framed their analysis within a masculinist language and set of assumptions that had subordinated women and excluded any gender analysis. On the other side were women who rejected both outlooks as simply yet another example of academic patriarchy; they too called for Chicana-story.

Hidden in herstory was the ground for an oppositional feminist epistemology. The story of Chicana experiences threw light on the onedimensionality of any struggle for unity; rather, the Chicana narrative drew out the multiplicity of lived experiences and identities. Thus at the same time that Empirical Chicano Studies was establishing its singular definition of the discipline, some Chicanas were preparing the ground for a feminist epistemology that would lead the charge against Chicano Studies in the 1980s and create the conditions for a renewed multiplicity of Chicano, Chicana, and Chicano(a) Studies.