Preface

This book locates the study of Chicano/a literature in a broad cultural framework, going beyond literature to examine issues of expression and representation in folklore, music, and video performance art. Additionally, it looks at the recent theorizing about the U.S.-Mexico border zone as a paradigm of crossings, intercultural exchanges, circulations, resistances, and negotiations as well as of militarized "low-intensity" conflict. How do the discursive spaces and the physical places of the U.S.-Mexico border inflect the material reality of cultural production? By analyzing a broad range of cultural texts and practices (corridos, novels, poems, paintings, conjunto, punk and hip-hop songs, travel writing, and ethnography) and foregrounding the situated historical experiences facing Chicanos/as, Border Matters puts forth a model for a new kind of U.S. cultural studies, one that challenges the homogeneity of U.S. nationalism and popular culture. The seven chapters argue for inclusion of the U.S.-Mexico border experience within cultural studies and strive to show how to treat culture as a social force, how to read the presence of social contexts within cultural texts, and how to re-imagine the nation as a site within many "cognitive maps" in which the nationstate is not congruent with cultural identity. Although what follows is not a definitive statement about border discourses on a global scale, it is an attempt to place the histories and myths of the American West and Southwest in a new perspective—what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls "the emerging dominant" in American studies (1995, 179).

As I was bringing this project to a close, I found myself riveted by a Public Broadcasting System *Firing Line* debate in which William Buckley and Ariana Huffington faced Ed Koch and Ira Glazer on the topic of immigration, both legal and illegal. Buckley and Huffington called for new enforcement measures against the "hordes" of illegal immigrants flooding across our nation's borders. Huffington, a recent immigrant herself (from Greece), called, without irony, for more guards, more border fences, and the use of sophisticated military vehicles and technolo-

gies left over from Desert Storm to patrol the U.S.-Mexico border. Koch rebutted Huffington's position by reminding her that had the national borders been closed and more draconian restrictions placed on immigrants by the U.S. government in the 1960s, she would never have had the chance to become a hyphenated ethnic-American herself. This debate about immigration laws and border crossings highlights, I think, how the mass media are constructing a popular narrative of national crisis.

As I reflect on the hegemonic Proposition 187 passed by voters in California in 1994, a measure denying undocumented immigrants public education, health services, and other benefits, I cannot help but see such unconstitutional measures as fundamentally colonialist discourses whereby U.S. Latinos, Chicanos, Mexicanos, Central Americans, and Asian Americans are cast as an illegal outside force, an alien nation "polluting" U.S. culture. I wholeheartedly agree with the Panamanian activist-intellectual and salsero Rubén Blades, who contends in his border song "Desahucio" (Evicted) that "la ley aplicada mal deja de ser ley" (the law applied badly ceases to be law) (1995). How can we begin making connections between moral panic about border-crossing migrations and the drift into a militarized law-and-order society? Can these events be linked and articulated together in the construction of a narrative of reality in which "illegal aliens" become the signifiers of the present crisis in U.S. society? If this crisis is not a crisis of "ethno-race," is ethnorace the lens through which this crisis is seen in the American West?

Almost all of the artists and writers explored in *Border Matters* answer that we are here to stay and we are not going away (*aquí estamos y no nos vamos*).

In this time of anti-immigrant hysteria, when, as the border ethnographer Ruth Behar puts it, "stories of homelessness, violence, and suffering are falling on ears that no longer bear to listen" (1993, xii), border discourses about the United States and Mexico are destined to become more central in remapping American studies. I have written this book about the U.S.-Mexico border precisely because the government is gearing up to implement a new "battle plan" against border-crossers from the South into the North, a plan involving a complex network of support from the military, the National Guard, and local police departments. The border-control program, at a cost to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) of \$2.6 million a month, will militarize areas along the border in California and Arizona.³ This militarization

of the U.S.-Mexico border, as the historian Timothy Dunn has documented in detail, has a broader historical and political context, for "three different U.S. presidential administrations from the two major U.S. political parties" have implemented a doctrine of "low-intensity conflict" to enforce immigration and drug laws. According to Dunn, this doctrine, especially under the Reagan and Bush administrations, included the deployment of "military surveillance equipment by police agencies"—AH1S-Cobra helicopter gunships, OC-58Cs reconnaissance helicopters, small airplanes with TV cameras and forward-looking infrared night-vision sensors, and a variety of seismic, magnetic, and acoustic sensors to detect movement, heat, and sound as well as "low-tech" construction of chain-link fences. Even more, it involved the "large-scale" use of "military forces to maintain security and stability," that is, joint state and federal law enforcement agencies with military support (1996, 148).

What is significant about this intensive militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border is the extent to which it led not only to a "loosening" of the Posse Comitatus Statute (which outlawed the use of the military in the domestic sphere) but also to new alliances between the civilian police and the military to enforce drug and immigration policies. Briefly, for Dunn, the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border disciplined and punished "undocumented workers coming into the United States, and hence [led to] their economic subordination." Further, it extended Reagan's and Bush's undeclared wars in Central America, "signal[ing] and subject[ing] to especially punitive immigration enforcement measurements" refugees and immigrants from El Salvador and Guatemala (163).

If Reagan's and Bush's low-intensity conflict doctrine in the 1980s largely targeted racialized border-crossers from the South, it also led to the creation of what the Native American novelist Leslie Marmon Silko calls "the Border Patrol State." "Since the 1980s," Silko writes, "on top of greatly expanding border checkpoints" in the Southwest, "the Immigration and Naturalization Service and Border Patrol . . . implemented policies that interfer[ed] with the rights of U.S. citizens to travel freely within the U.S." (1996, 118). To support her claims, Silko turns to the powerful evidentiary form personal testimony, describing how in December 1991, when traveling by car from Tucson to Albuquerque for a book signing of her border-crossing novel Almanac of the Dead, she was detained at a border checkpoint near Truth or Consequences, New Mexico, despite presenting a valid Arizona driver's license and

conversing with the government agents in English. Meanwhile, other travelers who were "white," she recalls, "were waved through the checkpoint" (121). For Dunn and Silko, immigration and drug enforcement laws single out for punishment racialized border-crossers from the South while they simultaneously target "people of color" from the North by restricting their free movement within the nation's borders.

I hope that the writers, activists, musicians, and artists I have brought together in *Border Matters* can help begin to undo the militarized frontier "field-Imaginary" in American culture by reconfiguring it within an emerging U.S.-Mexico *frontera* imaginary, where migration and immigration do not mean what Silko calls locking the nation's door.

In the past ten years the terms border and borderlands in Chicano/a studies have come to name a new dynamic in American studies—a synthesis of articulated development from dissident folklore and ethnography; feminism; literary, critical-legal, and cultural studies; and more recently gender and sexuality studies.⁶ The impact of all this on American studies has been broad and deep. As Carl Gutiérrez-Jones argues in "Desiring (B)orders," "throughout Chicano/a Studies as a field, the figures of the border and the borderlands have acted as central components in a revisionary project that has been largely motivated by historiographic designs" (1995a, 99). While Gutiérrez-Jones is absolutely right about Chicano/a studies' revisionist historiographic project, I also believe that the paradigm of the border involves us in an ontological question: What kinds of world or worlds are we in? As we will see in the chapters that follow, U.S.-Mexico border writers and artists such as Los Tigres del Norte, Américo Paredes, Carmen Lomas Garza, and John Rechy work through the issue of what happens when different social worlds confront one another, or when boundaries between worlds are crossed.

If (since Frederick Jackson Turner's 1893 address, "The Significance of the American Frontier in American History") the frontier field-Imaginary in mainline American culture has become, in the historian David Wrobel's words, "a metaphor for promise, progress, and ingenuity" (1993, 145), the Chicana/o studies invocation of *la frontera* has a "more realistic" potential for understanding what the historian Patricia Nelson Limerick calls "the legacy of conquest" in the American borderlands, where "trade, violence, . . . and cultural exchange" shaped nineteenth-century America and where "conflicts over the restrictions of immigration, disputes over water flows, and . . . a surge of industrial

developments [such as *maquiladoras*, or assembly factories] punctuated late twentieth-century America" (in Grossman 1994, 90).

For many new Americanists, the field-Imaginary of Chicano/a studies has begun to redress what the literary historian Amy Kaplan sees as "the conceptual limits of the frontier, by displacing it with the site of the borderlands" (1993, 16). For Kaplan, Chicano/a studies links "the study of ethnicity and immigration inextricably to the study of international relations and empire" (16). In other words, the invocation of the U.S.-Mexico border as a paradigm of crossing, resistance, and circulation in Chicano/a studies has contributed to the "worlding" of American studies and further helped to instill a new transnational literacy in the U.S. academy.

If the Chicano cultural critic Rafael Pérez-Torres is correct that "the borderlands make history present . . . the tensions, contradictions, hatred, and violence as well as resistance and affirmation of self in the face of that violence" (1995, 12), a quick look at the way in which the paradigm of the borderlands has traveled, shifted, and been appropriated by official U.S. culture indicates how enmeshed the American frontier field-Imaginary continues to be in our culture. It seems that everyone, from traveling performance artists to writers of television commercials, has started "running for the border," often with their "blue suede huaraches," as the Chicano singer El Vez puts it (1994). Only by "contextualizing" the borderlands paradigm within a Chicana studies subaltern tradition—as Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano suggests—can we begin to "avoid the temptation to pedestalize or fetishize" it (1994, 9).

With these criticisms and lessons in mind, *Border Matters* begins by mapping a discourse about the U.S.-Mexico borderlands that has emerged from the historical experience of the American West, to provide a broad genealogy in which a range of border writings operate across both nineteenth-century and late twentieth-century contexts. Indeed, this book is fundamentally shaped by Michel Foucault's famous statement that "it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together. And for this very reason, we must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. To be more precise, we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated discourse; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies" (1980, 100).

It is precisely this uneven discursive terrain of the border in the Amer-

ican western field-Imaginary of the American West that Border Matters reconstructs: the things said and concealed about migration and immigration; the enunciations required and those forbidden about the legacy of conquest in the Americas. In my view, border discourse not only produces power and reinforces it but also undermines it, makes it fragile, and allows one to map and perhaps thwart the cultures of U.S. empire. Because this message about the legacy of conquest has not gotten through to official American culture, Border Matters joins the dynamic work of new western American historians, new Americanists, and cultural studies workers in critiquing how the American imaginary continues to hold to the great discontinuity between the American frontier and la frontera.

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xvi Preface

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