

FRANCISCO A. LOMELÍ  
KARIN IKAS  
Editors

# U.S. Latino Literatures and Cultures

Transnational  
Perspectives

Universitätsverlag  
C. WINTER  
Heidelberg

RUBÉN G. MENDOZA (CSU Monterey Bay / USA)

Cruising Art and Culture in Aztlán:  
Lowriding in the Mexican American Southwest

This technological manifestation appeared to pulsate and undulate in a rhythmic spectacle of light and sound. Then, as if to mimic the movement of the serpent, the vehicle dropped to its belly as the asphalt shown bright with the white-light of sparkling magnesium metal. And just as swiftly as this "vision" appeared before me, its visage was consumed by the darkness of the night ... [and] ... I found myself obsessed with the machine that produced the vision – "the Low Rider reality."

Rubén G. Mendoza (1981b)

INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Just prior to the advent of the Second World War, America was confronted by the incipient social evolution of a counter-cultural phenomenon emanating from the depths of the inner city, and characterized by highly distinctive modes of dress, behavior, and speech (Mazón 1984; Vigil 1988, 6). *Pachuquismo*, as known to Mexican American or Chicano youth cliques and "gangs" of the Los Angeles basin of Southern California - and other parts of the Southwest - was described by George C. Barker (1950, 8) as being characterized by highly discreet social variables, of which age, sex, and socio-economic factors were considered of particular relevance.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, Barker noted that there was "a strong trend among the younger Mexican-Americans to glamorize the *pachucos*

<sup>1</sup> The original investigations upon which this research is based were conducted for the purpose of obtaining data pertinent to an urban ethnography, in partial fulfillment of requirements for an undergraduate anthropology seminar at the California State University, Bakersfield. As such, I would like to thank Dr. George Guilemet, as well as the assistance and information provided by Joe Champion, Irene Torres, and members of the Lomasters Car Club of Bakersfield, California. That paper was first published in mimeographed form by the Anthropology Club of the University of Arizona, Tucson (Mendoza 1980). The paper was reprinted with minor modifications by *Minority Notes* of the University of Colorado, Boulder (Mendoza 1981a). The current paper is a substantially revised and expanded version of the earlier paper, and includes revised materials and excerpts from one other essay printed by *Caminos Magazine* (Mendoza 1983a). Finally, I would like to thank Drs. Francisco Lomeli of UC Santa Barbara, Karin Ikas of the University of Würzburg, Donald Urioste of CSU Monterey Bay, and David Shaul of the Tohono O'odham Reservation of Sells, Arizona, for assistance and editorial advice in seeing this manuscript through to publication. I would in addition like to thank Linda Marie Mendoza and Natalie Dawn Marie Mendoza for their infinite patience and understanding in support of the study in question. Ultimately, all errors of interpretation are the sole responsibility of the author.

<sup>2</sup> For a more extensive analysis of the *Pachuco* subculture, see George C. Barker (1950) for a contemporary account.

- or to see them as a type of beloved vagabond or Robin Hood," and furthermore, that "the jargon borrowed by the *pachucos* from the El Paso-Juarez underworld has become an important part of colloquial slang or jive talk, and thus has come to symbolize the ways and attitudes of the *pachucos* and of Mexican-American youth in general" (1950, 15). At the same time, the emergence of the term *Xicano* or *Chicano* - a contraction or hybrid street term for *Mexicano*, makes clear that Mexican American youth of this period were rapidly redefining their place, role, and identity in Mexican, American, and Mexican American social and cultural contexts.<sup>3</sup>



Figure 1:

A community mural depicting scenes from daily life in the Chicano barrios off of Central Avenue in Phoenix, AZ. Note that the mural depicts Latino youth "cruising" the boulevard with *paños* or headbands, and shades. Photo by the author (1981).

<sup>3</sup> According to Professor Donaldo Urioste of the California State University Monterey Bay (personal communication, July 2, 2000), the term "Chicano" is documented by way of literature of the time to have originated in the 1920s and 1930s. On the other hand, Aztlán - the Chicano term for the Southwest (including the states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Colorado, Nevada, and Utah) - originated with the *Aztláneca Mexica* or Aztec. The original location Aztlán, the legendary homeland of the *Mexica* (and thereby a cultural and spiritual anchor to the Chicano people), has yet to be identified with any degree of precision or certainty.

While one purpose of this essay is to illustrate that the socio-cultural phenomenon or counter-cultural trend alluded to by Barker (1950) and others has been maintained, and to a large extent revitalized and extended, within Mexican American or Chicano youth groups and lowrider<sup>4</sup> car clubs in Southern California and other parts of the Southwest more generally (Mendoza 1981a; Plascencia 1983; Griffith 1988; Vigil 1988),<sup>5</sup> other equally significant observations and findings can be advanced at this time. In essence, this study contends that:

- (a) The *pachuco* and *cholo* lifestyle - and its street dialect, *caló* - has been preserved and revitalized in the context of lowrider automobile clubs in Southern California, and throughout the Southwest more generally (Moore 1978; Mendoza 1981a, 1981c; Plascencia 1983; Horowitz 1983; Vigil 1988, 6); and as such, the low rider community perpetuates the more distinctive aspects of the tradition through language, dress, iconography, and behavior;
- (b) Lowrider automobile clubs are largely modeled after early Mexican American or Chicano mutual-aid societies, voluntary or community organizations or protective associations, social clubs, or *mutualistas* of the Southwest (Mendoza 1987b; Mendoza and Torres 1994, 75; Romo 1983, 148), and, like the *mutualistas* of old, have as a primary consideration the collective and voluntary social, cultural, political, and economic support of their respective communities and membership; and,
- (c) The "low rider" tradition, while of mixed Chicano *barrio* and African American urban origins in the United States, has proliferated on the local and regional scene under the guise of Chicano social art, custom, and ritual; and on the national and international scene under corporate and cultural sponsorship and related venues (such as *Lowrider Magazine*).

<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of avoiding confusion with the prevailing use of the term "lowrider", I will for the purposes of this essay distinguish "lowrider," the customized automobile, from "low rider," the aficionado, enthusiast, or owner. It should be noted that *Lowrider Magazine*, the premier source of information on the "lowrider" scene, does not distinguish or vary from the use of the term "lowrider" or "lowriding."

<sup>5</sup> The growing popular interest in the Lowrider phenomenon resulted in the publication of a monthly magazine, first distributed in January of 1977, and produced and published by and for Chicano lowrider enthusiasts. For those interested in the Lowrider worldview, *Lowrider Magazine* (Lowrider Publishing Group, Inc.; formerly published by ATM Communications) provides one basis for the analysis of the material culture, ethnographic, linguistic, and related social behaviors. In addition, during the late 1980's and early 1990's a number of other popular magazines regarding Lowriders or Chicano counterculture art were launched, and include *Orlie's Lowriding Magazine* (Orlie's Magazine Publications), *Lowrider Arte Magazine* (Park Avenue Publishing), *Lowrider Bicycle Magazine* (Park Avenue Publishing), *Teen Angels Tattoo Design* (Teen Angels), *Teen Angels Magazine* (Teen Angels), and *Lowrider Euro* (Lowrider Publishing Group, Inc). See <http://www.lowridermagazine.com> for one example of the growing presence of "low riders" and "lowriding" on the Internet.

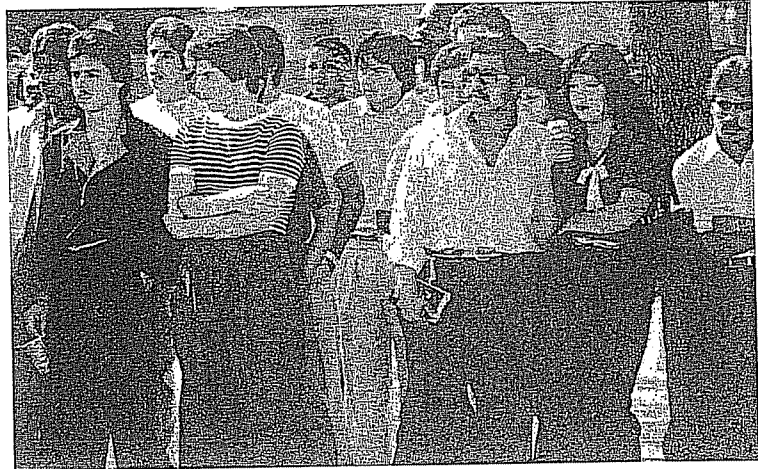


Figure 2:  
Chicano and African American youth observe a "car hopping" competition at a Delano, CA, area show and "Happening". Note "zoot suit" or "pachuco" style "drapes" or loose dress worn by males at left side of the image. Photo by the author (1982).

#### *DELIMITING AND DEFINING THE "LOWRIDER" REALITY*

Clearly, any attempt to provide a thorough ethnographic account of the "low rider" phenomenon would necessitate an appraisal of variables outside the objective of the study (e.g. Plascencia 1983). Nevertheless, the following discussion is intended to provide an analysis of ethnographic and linguistic data obtained during the course of fieldwork first begun in the spring of 1977, and continued on both an informal and formal basis since that time (Mendoza 1980, 1981a, 1981b, 1981c, 1981d, 1983a, 1983b, 1983c, 1987a, 1996; Mendoza and Torres 1994). Moreover, it should be noted that initial aspects of this investigation entailed the use of participant observation and field collections of *Chicanarte* (Chicano *barrio* art forms),<sup>6</sup> and field notes were supplemented by the use of interview data collected in the context of both structured and informal conversations and interactions with members of various "low rider" fraternities and *barrio* cliques.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Chicanarte* is in essence a widespread Chicano *barrio* art form intended to represent life in the *barrio*, on the streets, and within correctional facilities and other institutional settings. While the images themselves are largely Chicano and *Mexicano* in origin, the script used to convey messages is generally derived from the ornate Old Gothic script of Germanic origins. Common themes include sad-eyed *cholos*, *cholas*, "homeboys," and *pachucos*, elaborate lowrider automobiles, Aztec warriors and native women, voluptuous *cholas*, *huisas*, or *barrio* girls, graffiti logos, prison or penitentiary walls, barbed-wire, towers, body "tags" or tattoos, and *pintos* or Chicano inmates, and related themes (e.g. Davidson 1974; Mendoza 1981d, 1983b, 1983c).

<sup>7</sup> The term *barrio* is of Precolumbian origin, and originally served to identify Aztec wards or kin-based communities. Today, this term is commonly used to signify territorially

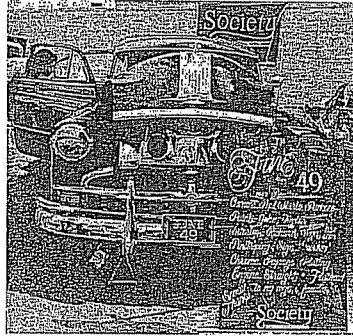


Figure 3:

A 1949 Pontiac Lowrider vehicle on display at a Tucson custom car show. The plexiglass panel to the right acknowledges the technicians involved in restoring the vehicle to its custom finish. Photo by the author (1981).

Briefly stated, the "lowrider" vehicle is an automobile that has been customized, or altered, in such a fashion as to permanently, or hydraulically, modify the overall height of the chassis with respect to the surface upon which the car is situated at any particular point in time. Typically, though not always, such cars incorporate non-standard (reduced-size) tire and wheel assemblies, single or dual-pump hydraulic "hookups" (hydraulic pump and hose systems) and "lifts" or "stems" (hydraulic "jacks" or "lifts" in place of "stock" or standard shock absorbers and automotive suspension springs), dashboard or cable-mounted "switches," a "switch-box," or "toggles" for activating the hydraulic assembly, and magnesium "scrape plates" or "bars" used in "scraping" the underbelly of the lowrider automobile while cruising; and used specifically for the purpose of showering the roadbed with magnesium sparks and white light during the course of an evening's "cruise." Both the custom lowrider vehicle and its "show car" counterpart may come equipped with crushed-velvet upholstery interiors, custom chrome, brass, or gold-plated interior and exterior features, fenders and other automotive metalwork, wrought-iron grills, chain or wrought-iron "donut" steering wheels, elaborate and expensive stereo music systems, window-glass etchings, crystal chandeliers, polychrome or multicolored paint jobs and elaborate "airbrush" murals, hand-rendered and painted "pinstripe" embellishments, swivel-based bucket seats, and sophisticated lighting and related electronic accessories.

---

discrete Mexican American or Chicano neighborhoods or communities, especially if in an urban context. The term *varrio*, on the other hand, is used by Chicano youth and clique members to identify "gang" or clique turfs and territories. As such, while a specific community may have a handful of traditionally acknowledged *barrios*, the number of *varrios* or "gang" territories located within the same urban area may far exceed the number of *barrios*. In a 1986 NEH-sponsored study, though I documented the existence of over one-dozen *barrio* neighborhoods, the same urban area held over fifty-one *varrios* recognized by "homeboys" and other clique or *clika* members.

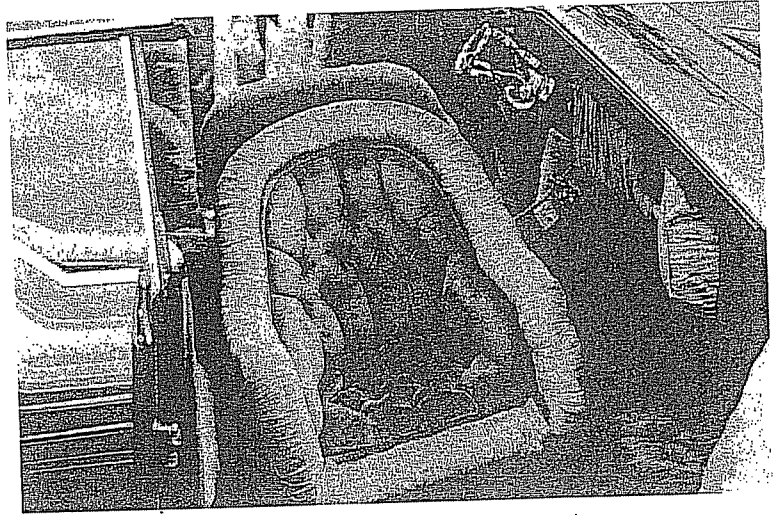


Figure 4:

Bucket-seats on swivel bases used in a late model "radical" custom car at a Bakersfield, CA, show. Note wrought iron steering wheel that suggests a throwback to Spanish colonial or Mexican wrought-iron craftsmanship. Toggle switches used to animate hydraulic "lifts" are located on floor panel just below the steering wheel. Photo by the author (1983).



Figure 5:

Chrome-plated "donut" steering wheel crafted from a heavy gauge chain. Note amulets and other souvenirs hanging from rear-view mirror. Donut steering wheels were once unique to the "low rider" tradition, but have since proliferated in the broader low-profile automobile traditions. Photo by the author (1981).

The "low rider" as owner, *aficionado*, or enthusiast, on the other hand, is far less easily defined and stereotyped. While the single most defining characteristic of those individuals who identify themselves as "low riders" is their respective ownership or operation of a lowrider automobile, the variability of those characteristics that constitute the "low rider" as *aficionado* or enthusiast are less precise, and at the very least, are very variable. While I would characterize myself as an "*aficionado*" or "enthusiast" of the lowrider tradition and its style, I am not, *per se*, a "low rider" in the sense of participating as an active member of a lowrider automobile club. As such, I generally distinguish between five primary categories of "low rider" enthusiasts or participants, including

- (a) "Solo cruisers" who own or operate a lowrider automobile but nevertheless hold no direct affiliation with an active or legitimate lowrider car club or association;
- (b) "Car clubbers" or "members" who both own and operate a lowrider automobile and are in fact members (in good standing) with an active or legitimate lowrider car club or association;
- (c) "Veterans" or *veteranos* who are former or current members of a lowrider car club or association, but who are essentially retired from the "sport" for all intents and purposes;
- (d) Lowrider club participants or companions (e.g. "homeboys" or clique members), including spouses and fiances, who may not own or operate a lowrider vehicle themselves, but are nonetheless active participants in good standing with such groups, and
- (e) Other members of the broader "low rider" fraternity, including "mini-truckers," "bikers," "two-wheelers" or lowrider bicycle owners or operators, and other "low-key" or "low-profile" enthusiasts (Mendoza 1987a).

As social clubs, lowrider "car clubs" serve to unite and recruit those *aficionados*, enthusiasts, and other *barrio* youth with a common interest in "lowriding," the lowrider vehicle, custom car building, and the "low rider" street scene. As mutual-aid societies, voluntary associations, or *mutualistas*, "low rider" car clubs serve to unite and network craftsmen and women devoted to "low rider" art and culture, or other forms of custom car modification and restoration. In this way, Chicano and African American youth are afforded the opportunity to recruit project participants and other "low rider" enthusiasts, assistants, and specialists – including, mechanics, upholstery, custom detail and auto body specialists, tire, wheel and hydraulics technicians, paint and mural craftsmen, and other invaluable sources of support; and this from the locally available pool of technicians or advanced amateurs whose automotive expertise and knowledge might not otherwise be available to the "solo cruiser" or other individual custom car enthusiast. As such, the popularity and financial success of lowrider car clubs, and their respective recruitment of members, often rests on the camaraderie, access, and actual technical support available through such an



organizational configuration (i.e. voluntary association or mutual-aid society). Ultimately, the pooling of collective community or associational resources – including access to technicians, technologies, and techniques, is of paramount importance to the origins and existence of formal lowrider "car clubs."

Given the variability and individuality inherent in some sectors of the world of lowriding, it should be clear that the actions, behaviors, and diversity inherent in the "low rider" tradition are not easily compartmentalized or described in a concise ethnographic format. Not surprisingly, then, though the media and the world of "show car" publications have produced a treasure-trove of materials for the aficionado, little exists at the level of the social and behavioral sciences that would adequately describe the social, cultural, and historical underpinnings of the phenomenon in question. As such, according to Luis Plascencia (1983), two primary, and diametrically opposed, perceptions exist with respect to "low riders" and "lowriding." The first, and most predominant of the two perspectives, is characteristically negative, stereotypical, and based on misinformed assumptions that contend that "low riding is a new, antisocial, gang-related, drug-promoting, crime-inducing, degenerative, self-indulgent, gaudy, and wasteful activity" (Plascencia 1983, 141). On the other hand, Plascencia notes that the second more positive perspective is not without its own problems and exaggerated preconceptions, including the perspective that "low riding is an unbroken historical phenomenon, a conscious rebellion against middle class ideology, a positive cultural assertion and identity, and an activity that will reduce the level of crime and gang fights and thus prepare the path for a lasting peace and brotherhood in the barrios" (1983, 141). Plascencia follows with the assertion that "to wholly dismiss or accept both positions is, of course, shortsighted" (1983, 141). Given my own extensive experience and frequent encounters with both supporters and detractors of the tradition in question, it is clear to me at this time that research into the Chicano youth counter-culture, and its phenomenal "low rider" tradition, is far from adequately complete, culturally and socially understood, or appreciated.<sup>8</sup> As such, one additional underlying intention of this paper is to further define and identify the parameters of the "lowrider reality" and its extended world of actual and symbolic communications and behaviors.

---

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that my research with "low riders" has resulted in consequences and retaliatory actions that I could not have anticipated when I first began this work in 1975. While a graduate student in anthropology at the University of Arizona in 1980, the mimeographed publication of a previous version of this work (Mendoza 1980) resulted in attacks on my scholarship and person from both anthropology faculty and Mexican American community leaders. On the one hand, one faculty member made the assertion that "as a Chicano you cannot objectively study Chicanos." On the other hand, a Mexican American community center in Tucson, Arizona, contacted the department where I was matriculated as an anthropology graduate student so as to claim that my research was nothing more than another way of "glorifying punks and hoods." Needless to say, the stigma and stereotypes heaped upon "low riders" were soon something that I too had to contend with within the communities I chose to study.



Figure 6:  
Members of the "Old Memories Car Club" gathered at Gates Pass near Tucson/AZ for a group portrait. Note the club's emphasis on vintage automobiles of the 1930's through 1950's. Photo by the author (1990).

*HYDRAULICS AND THE ART OF "LOWRIDING": A BRIEF CULTURAL HISTORY*

Today, Chicano, Latino, and African American custom car builders install or otherwise make use of a wide variety of "show car" or related custom technologies, and Chicano material culture and art in their low-slung custom "street cruisers." Said technology can range from lowered suspensions and hydraulic "lifts" or "stems" to crystal chandeliers, in-dash televisions, glass-etching, wrought-iron metalwork, tuck-n-roll upholstery, airbrush murals and pin-striping, and "donut" or "chain" steering wheels. Aspects of the more artistic dimensions of this tradition - such as Mexican-styled murals and logos - hearken back to the elaborately embellished cars, buses, and trucks of Mexico and the Southwest (Fraser Giffords 1981).



Figure 7:

Lowrider rear-window glass-etching depicting a *vato loco* ('crazy dude' or *carnal* - brother in arms/comrade) wearing khaki pants and *campo* shoes. Note the depiction of the Virgen de Guadalupe tattooed into the chest of the individual portrayed. The American and Mexican flags and a guardian angel hover over the *vato* whereas the "Viva la Raza (Long live the people')-logo" graces the bottom of the image. Photo by the author (1981).

Despite an array of urban myths claiming lowrider origins in virtually every region of the continental United States, it is purported that the art of lowriding originated in northern California in the late 1930s and early 1940s (Plascencia 1983, 143; Trillin and Koren 1978; *Life Magazine* 1980; Patiño 2000, 104-11).<sup>9</sup> According to "Teen Angel,"

"low riding originated in 1938 in a small autobody repair shop in Sacramento, California. The shop's owner, Harry Westergard, customized a 1935 Ford convertible with many of the same features that a large number of contemporary low riders incorporate into their *firme carruchas* ("solid cars"). (*Lowrider Magazine*, cf. Plascencia 1983, 143).

Despite its relatively early start in custom car circles, lowriding as a cultural phenomenon and urban tradition would need to await the introduction (to the general public) of an efficient means of automatically or hydraulically adjusting the height of one's "ride" - a pivotal event purported to have taken place in 1969 (*Life Magazine* 1980, 92). Once introduced, hydraulics and radical custom car embellishments allowed lowriding to achieve the popularity that it knows today.

In the earliest days of the tradition (ca. 1930s through 1960s), Chicano and African American youth sought to express a mystique borne on the wheels of an automobile lowered to just above the surface of the asphalt pavements of the open road. The aura of "cruising" down the boulevards "low and slow" was the attraction of the times (West 1976; Gradante 1982). In those days, however, the owner of a custom "cruiser" merely employed a welder's blow-torch in order to heat, cut, melt, or otherwise reduce the automobile's suspension springs; thereby lowering the frame of the automobile in a single, but very permanent, operation. For those unable to meet the financial requirements demanded for maintaining a "tricked-out" or custom "cruiser," some "low rider" enthusiasts without access to hydraulic systems often found it necessary to load bags of cement, sand, rocks, and or bricks, or other suitably heavy material into the trunk compartment of the vehicle and chassis to be "lowered."

First introduced in the late 1950s - allegedly in 1957 by Ron Aguirre and his father, but not made publicly available until circa 1969 - hydraulic pump systems for custom "cruisers" largely replaced the standard automotive suspension and related technological fanfare of the classic lowrider automobile (Plascencia 1983, 143). In essence, recycled hydraulic "lifts" or "jacks" from a pickup dump truck were first used in the 1950s and 1960s in order to replace "stock" or standard automobile springs and shocks. By using hydraulic "lifts" in

---

<sup>9</sup> *Lowrider Magazine* has published several issues devoted to the history and origins of lowriding, and in several such issues the origins and innovations associated with hydraulics are often attributed to Southern or Central California custom car shops or specific club enthusiasts (e.g. the story of the "Gypsy Rose" in *Lowrider Magazine* (Aug. 2000). As of this writing, *Lowrider Magazine* is publishing a book-length treatment, and it is anticipated that the "official" history of hydraulics will appear in that context.

place of the standard automotive suspension system, the lowrider can be maneuvered about, above, and beyond the typical sorts of roadway obstacles that once plagued earlier "low rider" enthusiasts and their automobiles. Ultimately, the introduction of hydraulics ushered in a new era in lowrider art and culture. The demand for hydraulics took the market by surprise in the mid to late 1970s (Trillin and Koren 1978, 70), and soon hydraulics were marketed to Southern California "low rider" enthusiasts from such distant places as Kansas City, Missouri, and other sources much further afield.

In areas throughout the Southwest, the Chicano *Aztlán*, "low rider" *aficionados* have had to contend with vehicle codes that arbitrarily target lowrider cars and other "lowslung cruisers," and this despite the absence of similar laws targeting "high-rider" trucks or other "4-wheel" vehicles and off-road enthusiasts from largely affluent White or Anglo American communities. More often than not, the only way to get around such challenges to the "low rider" way of life was to install a reliable set of hydraulics so that when the "low rider" roamed through openly hostile territory, or conflict-ridden police wards or "beats," it was merely a matter of going hydraulic until "street-legal" status was attained.



Figure 8:

"Vagabonds Car Club"-member Ernie Saenz in the cockpit of his Chevy Impala. The 1960's era automobile was referred to as incorporating the "Batmobile"-style in its tail fins. In addition, the owner wired the hydraulics on this automobile with a remote control panel – rewired onto a recycled tomato box – that allowed the cruiser to activate the hydraulics while away from the automobile. Photo by the author (1986).

Despite the real or imagined obstacles of the social and political setting, the "low rider" enthusiast similarly must contend with a broad assortment of road hazards including road dips, potholes, speed-bumps, and hazardous materials and other litter that grace the back-streets and alleys of the "asphalt jungle." More often than not, the automobile's owner has been spared the cost of replacing mufflers, oil pans, and other undercarriage features with the simple flick of the toggle switch that effectively controls "cruising" height. At the same time, some drivers have suffered the loss of their "rides" to the malfunction or unsafe use of hydraulic systems on the open road. Moreover, it is not uncommon for the frequent usage of hydraulics to drain battery reserves, thereby leaving the driver or user stranded at the roadside.

Beyond the purely practical applications of the hydraulics system in negotiating the rough roads and "asphalt jungles" of the United States, there is a ritual dimension that plays a key role in the art of "cruising." While it is not uncommon to see "cruisers" slow their vehicles when in the vicinity of female pedestrians, it should be noted that such maneuvers are often accompanied by the repeated activation or "hopping" of the automobile's front-end. In some of those cases noted during the course of this study, some lowrider automobiles were observed to rear upward like spooked stallions when making use of the hydraulic system to convey a veiled sexual message or to challenge a rival "cruiser." Such hydraulic maneuvering is generally intended to impress upon female passersby the bravado and sexual prowess of the car's driver, thus serving as one aspect of a more complex courtship ritual, behavior, and engagement. More conspicuously, the repetitive activation of the automobile's front-end in a series of rapidly executed thrusting motions is meant to suggest the sexual act itself. As such, the female beneficiary of such an interaction may interpret the "drive-by" street "hop" or "snatch" in various ways.

In those instances observed, the drive-by "snatch" was intended as:

- (a) An act of lewd behavior intended to elicit a spontaneous response,
- (b) As a conspicuous display of sexual interest or attraction,
- (c) As an insult and affront directed at rival "cruisers," and
- (d) As an act of exhibitionism or ostentatious display taken to the extreme.

When performed so as to signify the sexual act to other cruisers - particularly other "low rider" males - the drive-by "snatch" was meant to salute or intimidate and challenge the vehicular bravado of rival car club enthusiasts. The resulting insult or offense has much the same effect as the aerosol *puto* ("male whore") "slash" has to the art of *barrio* graffiti (i.e. the *puto* "slash" consists in the aerosol paint "slash," defacement, or vandalism of a rival's *placa*, graffiti logo or "claim," or other territorial marker; Mendoza 1981d, 1983b, 1987a). More explicitly stated, a male-on-male drive-by "snatch" is intended to demonstrate that the driver performing the "snatch" (without the appropriate "snatch" or "scrape" response from the other driver) has symbolically forced the competing cruiser to concede the superiority of the driver performing the "snatch." This in

turn is intended to signify the relative impotence of the "street cruiser" *sans* hydraulics. As such, the driver who executes such a "snatch" without the appropriate hydraulic response necessarily forces the competing driver to acknowledge subservience or submission (as in that form of submission implied by way of an involuntary or coerced sexual act), while at the same time serving to accentuate the hydraulic operator's own perceived or demonstrated sense of *machismo*, bravado, and sexual prowess.

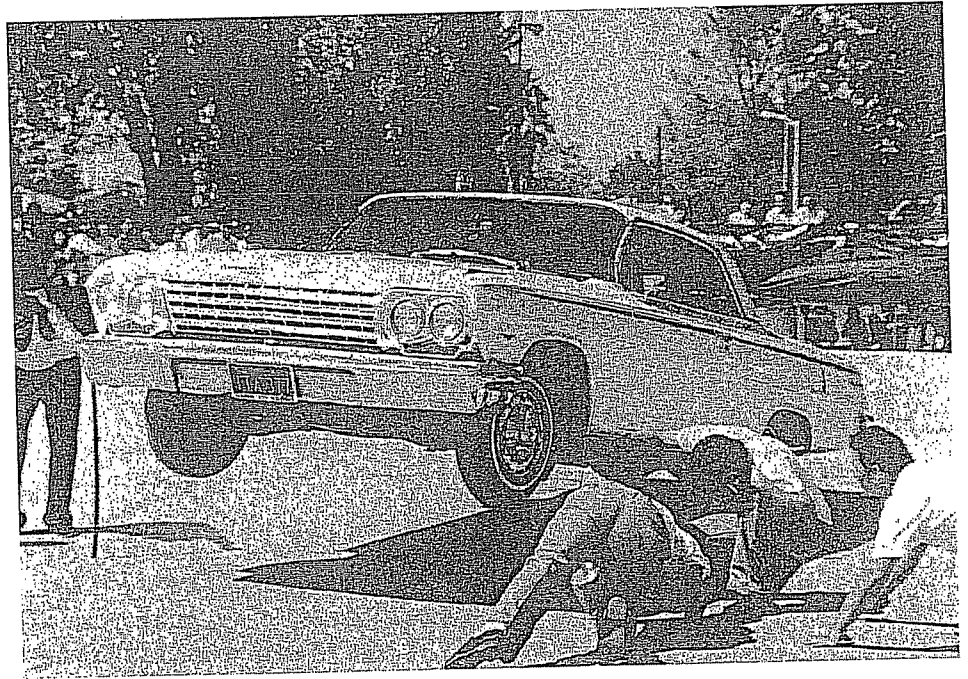


Figure 9:  
Lowrider car "hopping" competition at the Delano/CA car show and "Happening" of 1982. Note height of hop, approximately 24", and the positioning of the competition's judges who risk being injured in order to obtain the required height measurements. Photo by the author (1982).

*THE CLASSIC CHICANO-STYLE "HOP": A CASE STUDY*

Clearly, hydraulics have become the focus for a novel form of Chicano youth ritual and social engagement. "Hopping contests" or competitions, which entail "hopping" one's ride above and beyond heights set by competing cruisers, are one means of advancing or enhancing personal status or "rep" (i.e. reputation) in "low rider" circles. At a 1981 car show and "Happening" (i.e. lowrider custom car show event) sponsored by Crystal Productions of Tucson, Arizona, the "hopping competition" was the main event of the afternoon. At the "hop pit," or hydraulics competition staging area or "hydro pit," a group of "low rider" aficionados and contestants gathered about the open luggage compartment of a lowered Monte Carlo with chrome-plated dual-pump hydraulic system and talked of the record car hop of twenty-nine inches set at a 1980 "Happening" by Los Angeles "low rider" "Rag-top" Ralph (see *Life Magazine* 1980). The record set by "Rag-top" only fueled the excitement and anticipation of attending the competition that afternoon.

As the announcer introduced the afternoon's "car hop" contestants, and described the awards, spectators assembled *en masse* about the grandstands. The first contestants were briefly coached on "car-hopping" regulations by competition referees armed with long, clear plastic, measuring rods. As the referees stalked the fenced-in concrete courtyard area of the "hydro pit," and the first automobile moved slowly into the arena, the loudspeakers again echoed the "hopping contest" regulations for those assembled. In order to win the event, it was necessary for the winning contestant to propel the front-end of his or her car upward and above the pavement in a series of electrically activated hydraulic hops; the rules specifying that said "hops" be timed and measured by referees observing the event, and that the winning automobile be selected on the basis of the height and performance attained by the front-end hydraulic system of the car in question.

As the competition commenced the audience broke into a frenzy of wild cheering, whistling, and applause as the disc-jockey - the master of ceremonies for this particular event - announced the forthcoming challenge of the Calexico Kid. With all the bravado of a seasoned matador awaiting the kill, the white 1964 Chevy Bellaire from Calexico rolled into position. After consulting with officials, removing the automobile's storage battery from the engine compartment, connecting electrical cables to the hydraulic pump system in the trunk, and taking the hydraulic system's "switch-box" in hand, the Calexico Kid sent the front-end of his "hopper" sailing to a height of some twenty-four inches - a record hop for this particular car show. Several other cars were virtually destroyed in the act of attempting to challenge the "hop" of the Calexico Kid, and as such, it became clear early in the running that the best "hopper" was the car from Calexico, California.

Despite the odds, a black and blue Chevy Bellaire known as the Jumping *Chorizo* (i.e. Mexican sausage) rolled into the courtyard to challenge the hop of



the Calexico Kid. After a series of false starts and disappointments resulting from the failure of the hydraulic system, the operator of the Jumping *Chorizo* hit the toggle-switch and managed to send the front-end of his car rearing upon its hind wheels. With each subsequent click of the "switch-box" (i.e. "switching"), the car was sent rearing higher and higher above the heated asphalt pavement. With every "hop" of its front-end, the automobile came plummeting back to earth with increasing force. Within moments of the initial "hop," the vehicle's undercarriage began to shed large chunks of caked mud and debris adhering to the battered frame. Within minutes the loudspeakers announced a twenty-two inch maximum "hop" as the Jumping *Chorizo* came bouncing to an abrupt standstill. As the crowds parted, and the dust settled at the Tucson "Happening" of 1981, it was clear to those in attendance that hydraulics and the "hopping competition" had become significant aspects of the Chicano youth response to cruising the boulevards and *barrios* of *Aztlán*.

Today, lowrider "super shows" have become major corporate and cultural events with both business and individual interests at the heart of the action and its sponsorship. Such shows now engage both national and international audiences, with Japan now representing a major contender for lowrider "Happenings" and "show car" purchases and imports.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the traditional "hopping competition" has taken on a far greater complexity in terms of the available technologies, techniques, and automotive types and classes now competing in an ever-increasing range of events. For example, the "radical dance" competition pits vehicles against one another in an effort to force hydraulic systems and the vehicles within which they are installed to "hop" wildly to and fro, and back and forth, often with all four hydraulic "lifts" or "stems" engaged in rapid-fire succession. The "hop" itself, which once boasted twenty through twenty-four inch "hops" in the 1980s, has since been replaced with "jumbo air" and "high bounce" competitions where the record "hop" for a "Double-Pump" competition as of August, 2000 (cf. Trujillo 2000, 89) was recorded at sixty-three inches for a 1963 Impala wagon. At the same Tampa, Florida "hop" competition noted, the Single-Pump competitor won the event by posting a forty-two inch hop in a 1963 Chevy Impala. In addition to the "hopping competition" or "slamfest," today's "super shows" boast bikini and wet T-shirt contests, male hardbody (muscle) competitions, "luxury hops" (hydraulic competitions featuring Cadillac, BMW, Mercedes Benz, and other luxury vehicles), lowrider bicycle or "two-wheeler" competitions, "three wheelin'" lowrider car hydraulic contests, "Euroscene" shows and competitions (i.e. Mercedes Benz, BMW, and other European show cars), "street truck dances"

<sup>10</sup> Ironically, while Americans continue to import Japanese-made vehicles in record numbers, the Japanese have taken to importing "tricked-out" and vintage lowrider vehicles as show cars, collector's pieces, and as artwork. The Japanese scene now includes domestic "low rider" clubs consisting of Japanese nationals who "cruise" Chicano-origin or Chicano inspired lowrider vehicles.

(stock truck or pickup "hops"), "mural competitions" (airbrush, pinstripe, and related auto *muralism*), *Chicanarte* shows and contests (Chicano street or *barrio* art), "space age" or "futuristic" vehicle shows and competitions, mini-truck shows and competitions, vintage Caddy (Cadillac) shows and competitions, and the traditional "mud wrestling" and "beer chugging" or "beer down" competitions of yesteryear.

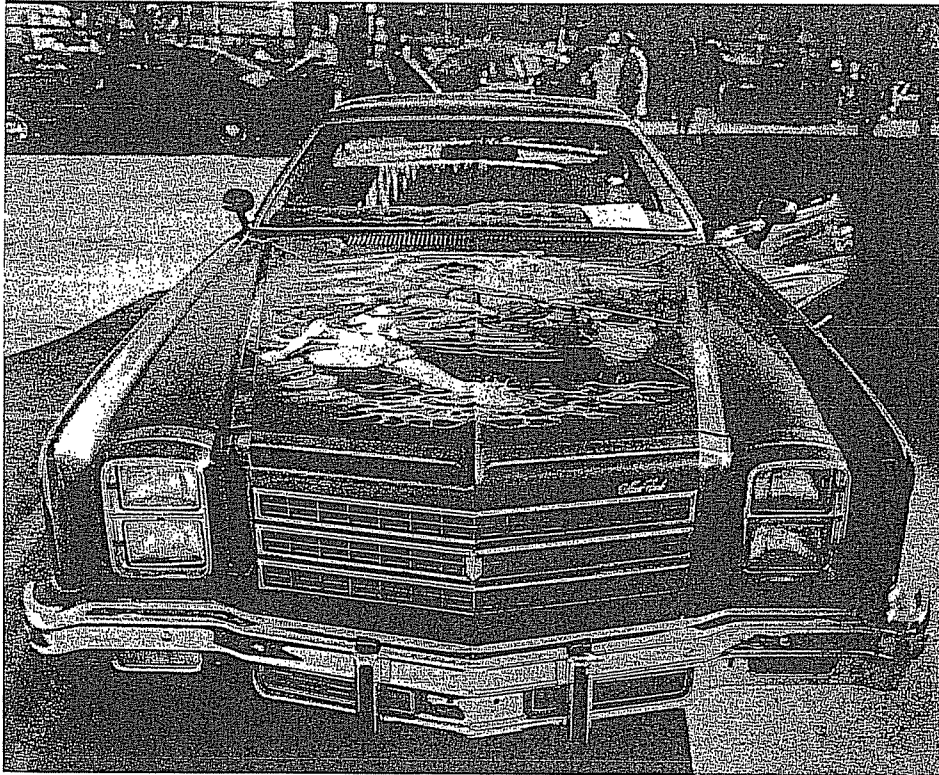


Figure 10:

A late model Monte Carlo Lowrider boasts an elaborate airbrush mural depicting a female "Dragonslayer" as the central icon of this specific club's logo and car club theme. The "Dragonslayer" theme was repeated in the door jambs of this car photographed at a Tucson/AZ area car show. Photo by the author (1988).

*DEFINING THE CULTURAL SCENE AND ITS CONTEXT*

While the original objective of this study was to obtain a cultural text amenable to ethnographic and linguistic analysis, the study has moved beyond formal inquiry and has in addition become a long-term informal analysis of the growth and impact of "low riders" on the urban traditions of the Southwest. Ultimately, for the purposes of this review and analysis, those results reported below have been narrowed so as to provide a focused analysis of three critically important cultural domains deemed most diagnostic and specific to the counter-culture tradition in question; mainly,

- (a) "Cruisin'" or "cruising,"
- (b) "Hopping" or "snatching," and
- (c) The "Happening."

Each of these social and cultural events, as previously described, clearly dominate the "low rider" lifestyle, its "Happenings," and its overall *modus operandi*. The most characteristic aspects of the aforementioned cover-terms and cultural domains derive in large part from the central social, cultural, and economic activities of "low riders" in general, and those groups reported upon herein in specific. The cultural domains examined and described have been selected on the basis of their relative predominance in the ethnographic and linguistic repertoire of the "low rider" lifestyle; and in terms of their cultural and social relevance in the configuration of those cultural scenes and contexts identified and described here.

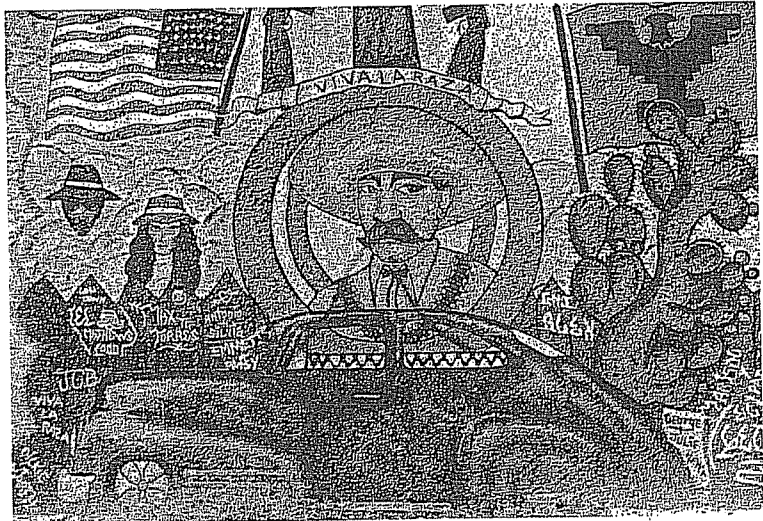


Figure 11:  
South Tucson/AZ barrio mural depicting the Lowrider at the center of images pertaining to Mexican and Mexican American culture and heritage. Photo by the author (1979).

As defined in the literature, "a cultural scene is the information shared by two or more people that defines some aspect of their experience" (Spradley and McCurdy 1972, 24). The principal cover terms in this context are highly variable terms for defining the more dynamic, publicly conspicuous, or active aspects of the lowrider reality or its traditions. On the one hand, the term "cruisin'" subsumes a range of activities engaged in by club enthusiasts throughout the course of the year. The term "cruisin'," as defined by those informants interviewed during the course of these investigations, refers to the action of "riding" (or "cruisin'") about in a customized automobile, and "flashing one's colors," or marking the social context of individual and group activity and identity. On the other hand, the "Happening" is largely a rite of intensification or community celebration that occurs infrequently, and tends to move from location to location in much the same fashion as does a carnival, mobile performance, or county fair. "Happenings" are essentially staged or formal community and corporate events in which car clubs, businesses, and individuals compete for status and rewards by way of such events as the "custom car show" and other "Happening" competitions such as the "hopping contest." Today, major corporate sponsorship of lowrider "Happenings" has rapidly transformed this venue into a national and international forum for "low rider" art and culture; and as such, it is no longer uncommon for such "Happenings" to occur in Japan, Mexico, and across the United States and Europe.

If we are to interpret the central tenets of "low rider" activity from the standpoint of social ritual, what we are fundamentally concerned with - a la Webster's Third New International Dictionary - is "any practice done or regularly repeated in a set precise manner so as to satisfy one's sense of fitness (i.e. social solidarity) and often felt to have a symbolic or quasi-symbolic significance."<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, those informants questioned about the overall significance of the act of "cruisin'" generally responded with indications that the maintenance of group solidarity and identity was the underlying theme.

In an overall sense, the cultural domain that subsumes the act of "cruisin'" necessarily entails a plurality of actions and or individuals involved in the highly ritualized context of said activity. In this instance, the principal object of ritualized veneration is the customized or "tricked-out" (customized, non-stock, or radically modified) automobile itself. Not surprisingly then, the lowrider automobile has become a highly valued status symbol among the members of the groups in question, and within the context of the larger world of the "low rider" *aficionado* in general. Moreover, the relative antiquity and importance of the custom cruiser in "low rider" and other custom car circles is made apparent by the variety of terms that have been coined in order to identify the vehicles themselves - from *carrucha* (ca. 1930s) to "low profile" (ca. 1990s) (see Table 1).

---

<sup>11</sup> As defined by the unabridged version of Webster's Third New International Dictionary (1968, 1961).

As illustrated in Table 2, a number of culturally and linguistically relevant terms fall within the cultural domain of "cruisin'." The subthemes indicated in the taxonomic hierarchy are references employed in discussing a specifiable type of activity falling under the category indicated by the cover term (i.e. "cruisin'"). The principal distinctions between the types of activity noted herein include:

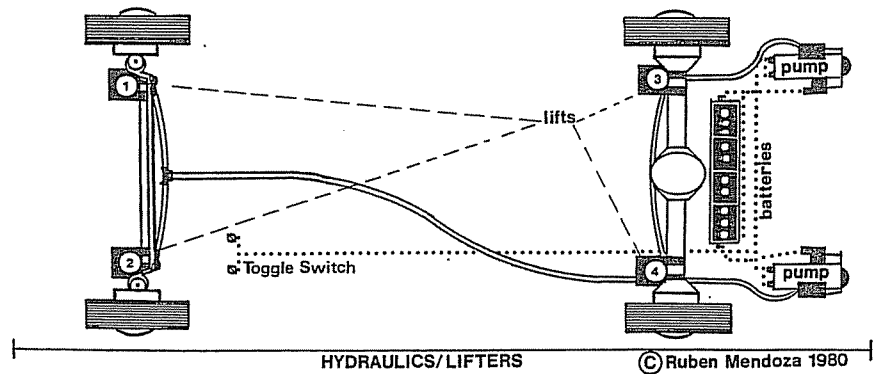
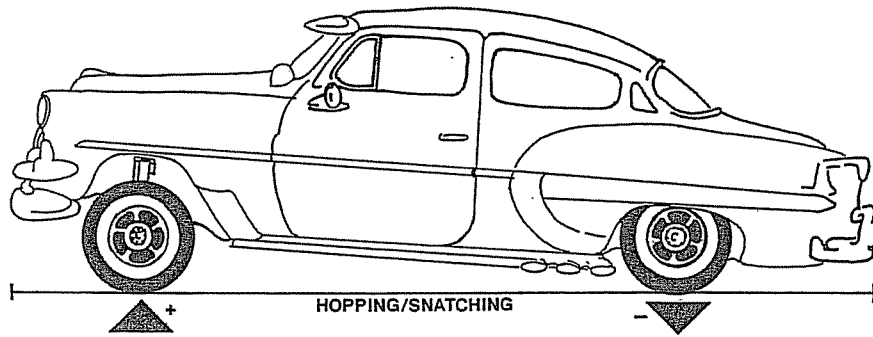
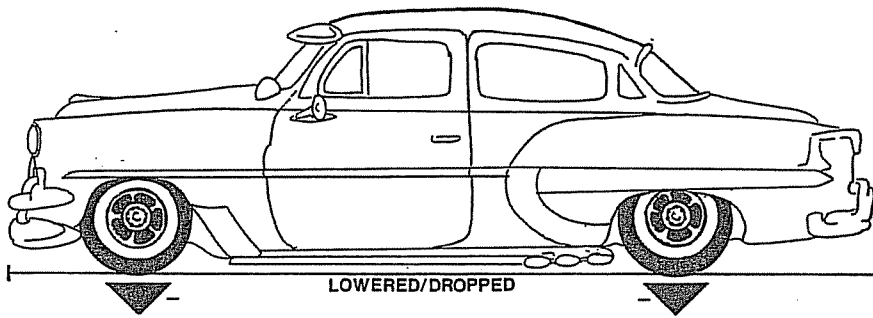
- (a) The nature of group or club structure and organization,
- (b) The number of individual members and non-members involved in the specified activity, and
- (c) The duration and type of event within which groups and individuals are engaged.

Likewise, the formality of the event is indicated to a greater or lesser degree by the use of cover terms in the context of phrases. For example, whereas to "throw a caravan" indicates a ritualized procession of at least three to five automobiles cruising in a structured or rather formalized manner, the use of the phrase "shootin' a cruise" is generally a contextually specific reference to a rather informal, and limited event or engagement. Furthermore, those terms and phrases employed in designating or identifying the act of "cruisin'" are further reduced to activities such as "blasting," "snatching," "pancaking," "scraping," "lowered," "lifted," "hooked-up," "juiced-up," "dancing," "humping," "laid" or "laid," and so forth (see Table 2; e.g. Steinfort 1980). Overall, most of the aforementioned terms tend to be distinctive, or at the very least mutually exclusive, means by which to specify the unique variations and elements of action or other vehicular maneuvers and hydraulic engagements observed in the context of "cruisin'." It should be noted that the relative complexity and inherent variability present in the array of hydraulically animated maneuvers noted is made apparent in the glossary identified with Table 2 (below).

Controlled by a "switch-box" located on the car's instruments panel, hydraulic "pumps" and "lifts" (see Diagram 1) serve to propel the "automobile's" chassis in either an upward, downward, side-to-side, or spiral motion (i.e. as in "dancin' around"). The driver of the lowrider automobile equipped with hydraulics is better prepared to initiate the more elaborate and socially meditated ritual performances identified with "cruisin'." The "switch-box," when manually engaged, electrically activates the hydraulic pump and lift system by means of storage batteries, voltage regulators, and hydraulic pumps housed in the automobile's trunk. Moreover, the car's "stock" or factory "springs" and "shock-absorbers" are removed in order to accommodate the hydraulic "lifts," or *caga palos* ("shit sticks"), as they are sometimes known in the parlance of the groups studied.

DIAGRAM 1:

An illustration of a lowrider and its undercarriage or chassis and a diagram of the hydraulic pump system and its "lifts" or "stems." Please use the description from the text section on hydraulics, in conjunction with the numbered "lifts" on the diagram, in order to identify the specific set of hydraulic "lifts" employed in the execution of any one particular hydraulic maneuver or "hop." Common terms associated with the alternate or sequential activation of hydraulic pumps and lifts on a hydraulically equipped lowrider automobile are noted on the diagram. Hydraulic "lifts" are numbered for reference and located adjacent to each wheel assembly noted on the diagram.



Concomitantly, lowrider car club enthusiasts and aficionados have developed a jargon or street terminology to accommodate the positional states or activity status of those automobiles engaged in hydraulic maneuvers. In other words, terms such as "snatching" are used to specify particular hydraulically assisted positional maneuvers, "hops," or "lifts." A "dual-pump" hydraulics system is illustrated in Diagram 1, and provides a schematic depiction of the specific set of "lifts" involved in producing a particular positional status or hydraulic maneuver. The activation of the automobile's front-end (see Diagram 1; "lifts" 1 and 2) to the upward position is known by several terms, of which "lifted," "juiced-up," "cocked-up," and "fork-lifted" are used to describe the upward thrust of the car's front-end. The activation of the car's rear-end (Diagram 1; "lifts" 3 and 4) is indicated by the use of the terms "juiced-up" and "lifted." Similarly, the raising of both the front- and rear-ends of the automobile in a single upward thrust (Diagram 1; "lifts" 1, 2, 3 and 4, simultaneously) is indicated by the use of the terms "hooked-up," "juiced-up," or "lifted." On the other hand, the repetitive activation of the automobile's front-end (Diagram 1; "lifts" 1 and 2) in a series of rapidly executed thrusting motions is known as "snatching" and or "humping."<sup>12</sup> And while each of these terms served as "sexual" metaphors at the time of the initial study, other terminology used by car owners in turn indicated that the custom cars themselves were imbued with feminine or female attributes, similar to the maritime tradition of naming ships or boats after women or in terms of feminine characteristics (e.g. Jesse's "lady," or "she's on the rag" when referring to an automotive malfunction). The alternate activation of the automobile's front- and rear-ends (Diagram 1; "lifts" 1 and 2, alternating with 3 and 4) is in turn signified by the use of the terms "dancing" or *bailando*. The repetitive sequential activation of "lifts" 1 and 3, or 2 and 4 - or the continuous rotation, gyration, or spiraling motion of the entire vehicle and its chassis that results from the sequenced activation of "lifts" 1 through 4 - is termed "sailing," "sailboat," "rocking," or *bailando*. "Side-to-side" is in turn identified with the alternate and repetitive activation of those pairs of hydraulic "lifts" located on both the driver's versus the passenger's sides of the vehicle (Diagram 1; "lifts" 1 and 3 and 2 and 4, respectively). The repetitive activation or "hopping" of the car's rear-end (Diagram 1; "lifts" 3 and 4) is in also referred to in some circles as "hopping booty," "gettin' down," "humping," or "slamming." The "lifting" or "juicing" of a single "stem" or hydraulic "lift" is referred to as "three-wheelin'" or "leanin' on three wheels." Lastly, the dropping or deactivation of all four "stems" in the hydraulic "lift" system is known by the terms "lowered," "dropped," "goin' low," and "layed" (with "layed" or "laid" also serving as symbolic referents or metaphors for the sexual act). During the

<sup>12</sup> "Snatching," according to various informants, is intended to mimic the sexual act. Interestingly, "cruisers" attempting to attract the attention of young women on the street were observed to employ such a maneuver. Accordingly, it should be noted that the metaphor is contextually relevant, and may serve to intimidate other "cruisers" during challenges.

course of the initial participant observation portion of this study, it was noted that the act of "snatching," "hopping," or *bailando* the car's front-end was frequently emphasized in the context of "cruisin'."

*"CRUISIN'" AND THE FORMATION OF THE "CARAVAN"*

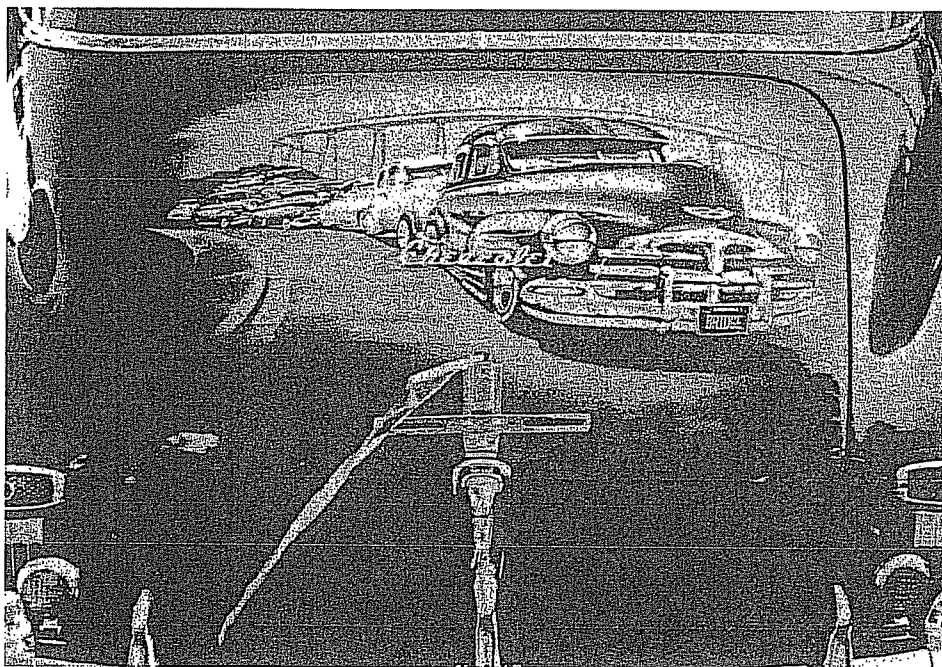


Figure 12:

Airbrush mural depicting a Lowrider "caravan" on the trunk of a vintage Chevy automobile. This automobile was part of a "Dukes" car club car show at Chicano Park in San Diego/CA. Photo by the author (1981).

The following discussion is derived from the cultural domain of "cruisin'," and conceptually articulates the cultural scene pertaining to the "caravan." As previously indicated, the "caravan" is viewed as a rite of intensification, and as a reaffirmation of group solidarity and identity among "low rider" aficionados. For purposes of illustration, the phrase to "throw a caravan" has been broken down to include those activities that engage the concept or domain of "cruisin'" in general, and "caravan" in specific. Those activities observed in the context of the "caravan" are not exclusively restricted to the performance venue of the "caravan," and may well be observed in other "show car," or related cultural or social contexts. For instance, the "caravan" generally involves a minimum of



three to five lowrider vehicles engaged in a procession or promenade enacting an array of hydraulic and other related vehicular maneuvers.<sup>13</sup> In this context, a single automobile may range through the actions of "snatching," "pancaking," "dancing," and so forth, in a series of preconceived and strategically executed maneuvers. In one such instance, the lead vehicle initiated a series of hydraulic maneuvers, the first of which involved "dancing" the automobiles front- and rear-ends by means of an electrically activated dual-pump hydraulic system. Soon thereafter, the entire procession of lowrider automobiles was engaged in mimicking the leader's initial actions and hydraulic maneuvers. After a series of such collectively executed hydraulic maneuvers, other drivers participating in the "caravan" each in turn hydraulically lowered the respective heights of their cars, thereby taking it "low and slow" (i.e. "low-profile" vehicles cruising at below the posted speed limits in their "mean and clean" or custom street machines). In this context, it should be noted that the California Vehicle Code (Section 24008) places restrictions on how low an automobile frame may be adjusted, as well as how slow an automobile may travel, and hence, "low riders" employing hydraulics for the purposes of "cruisin'" are often in violation of the vehicle codes in question. As indicated by one informant, if a "'hawk' (*chota, placa*, or police officer) wants to hassle you, the first thing he does is make you open the trunk." During the course of these investigations, one such incident was documented wherein a "black and white" (i.e. a policeman and his or her squad car) observed a "low rider" "snatching" (i.e. using hydraulics to hop the automobile's front-end), and subsequently "canned the *vato*" (cited and/or arrested the driver of the lowrider). In essence, the hydraulic system of the lowrider automobile sets the stage for the performance of the "low rider" ritual, yet the act itself presents a very real obstacle, as well as a political and legal challenge, to the maintenance of "low rider" group solidarity and identity.

In the context of the "low rider" "caravan," the process of "flashing one's colors," or becoming socially conspicuous, entails the formal organization of the "caravan" procession in terms of membership rank and status. In other words, the group leader or "President" initiates the event by positioning his or her automobile at the forefront of the "caravan," with his or her "Sergeant of Arms" (i.e. the second in command of the club or "caravan") close at hand. The automobiles are thereby organized in single-file, as in the case of a military convoy or funerary procession, and as with the nocturnal "caravan," each driver activates "show lights" (located within the cabin and on the exterior panels of the automobile) in tandem with the stereo music system available to the driver. In general, "show lights" on the car's exterior are to be found at or adjacent to the front and rear axles, as well as beneath the corresponding fenders and wheel

<sup>13</sup> The "caravan" and its procession or "promenade" of vehicles has led some earlier culture historians and commentators to argue that lowriding originated with the Spanish colonial (or Mexican) tradition of engaging in courtship rituals that required couples to promenade about the community *zocalo* or plaza. Clearly, this is the more idyllic or romantic view of "low rider" origins and is not readily supported by the prevailing evidence.

hubs. Aside from those lights with which the automobile originally comes equipped, exterior "show lights" often include the addition of lights strategically placed so as to embellish otherwise standard or "stock" automotive features. With regard to the automobile's interior, "show lights" generally involve the use of stereo "color bars" and "color marks," sometimes referred to as "Musicolor" lighting (as named after the dominant manufacturer of the 1970s and 1980s). The "Musicolor" system, or other contemporary electronic lighting, is generally synchronized with the stereo music arrangement (i.e. cassette, eight-track tape deck, FM stereo radio, compact disk, digital video disk, or other contemporary music or multimedia systems) in such a manner that the tone and degree of the music's intensity - as in "blasting" (or maximizing the volume on) the stereo music system - results in variations in the intensity of light emitted by the "color bars" and "marks." Ultimately, the "caravan" is a spectacle of light, sound, and hydraulically animated movements that serves to produce the ritualized atmosphere by which social differentiation is defined and distinguished.

#### "STREETCRUISER STYLE" AND THE ART OF SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION

Ultimately, the use of automobile murals, light shows, and *placas* (bronzed club name plates), all serve as social and territorial marking mechanisms by which one group may instantaneously identify potential rivals or comrades through signs and signals (Mendoza 1981c, 1981d, 1983b, 1987a). In an atmosphere where clique and gang "turfs" and *barrios* are delimited by aerosol icons and other social, political, cultural, and territorial markers, as with the stylized graffiti and dress of East Los Angeles, diagnostics (such as *Chicanarte* or bronzed name plates or *placas*) serve as conduits of the cultural code within the *barrio* community, and among *barrio* cliques and clans (Mendoza 1981d, 1983b, 1987a, 1996). What may appear, from an outsider's perspective, to be exhibitionist, gaudy, or openly hostile and abusive language and behavior is - among *carnales* or *comrades* - a socially conspicuous and public statement of camaraderie and identity. Of course, inter-group rivalries and factionalism continue to plague elements of the "low rider" fraternity. Unfortunately, and quite typically, it is precisely these more idiosyncratic features that the news media have chosen to sensationalize with respect to the "low rider" lifestyle. Likewise, the persistence and recent popular revitalization of *pachuquismo* has created a deepening of the social divide that inhibits prospects that the "low rider," *cholo*, and *chuco* (*pachuco*) will ever fully submit his or her identity to either the Mexican American or Anglo community's prevailing cultural code. In sum, "low rider" culture has and continues to be characterized by an increasing tendency towards the enhancement and propagation of new and ever more complex social, territorial, and cultural identity and boundary mechanisms delimiting and distinguishing the "lowrider reality" from that of the "mainstream" culture that seeks to suppress the culture, traditions, and rituals of the Chicano-Latino community at large.



Figure 13:  
"Old Memories Car Club" graffito from a recreation hall wall in Barrio Anita in Tucson/AZ. Note the gothic character of the logo and stylized banner. Such graffiti is but one more aspect of the broader street or popular culture of the Lowriding in the American Southwest. Photo by the author (1981).

TABLE 1:

Terms used to identify the lowrider automobile in specific, and low profile automobiles, trucks, and bikes in general. Note use of *caló* versus Spanish and English language distinctions. Terms like *carrucha* derive from the *pachuco* dialect of *caló* (ca. 1930's), whereas crate, bomb, and low profile are relatively more recent terms.

### Caló

<i>bombita:</i>	An older vintage lowrider automobile; e.g. 1938 Ford or Chevy.
<i>bombita-style:</i>	Car with older vintage detailing and custom modifications.
<i>carro:</i>	Colloquialism for car or automobile.
<i>carrucha:</i>	<i>Caló</i> term for a fine old car or carriage.
<i>carruchita:</i>	Endearing version of <i>caló</i> term for a fine old car or carriage.
<i>carumfla:</i>	Rarely used <i>caló</i> term for a fine old car.
<i>chort:</i>	<i>Pochismo</i> ( <i>caló</i> or <i>Spanglish</i> ) form of the term "short" for car.
<i>deuce:</i>	Designates the decade of manufacture plus two; as in 1952.
<i>firme carrucha:</i>	Solid, or very fine and classy, car.
<i>ramfla:</i>	Rarely used <i>caló</i> term for a car or ride.
<i>tray:</i>	Designates the decade of manufacture plus three; as in 1953.
<i>troka:</i>	<i>Caló</i> or " <i>Spanglish</i> " version of truck or pickup.
<i>trokita:</i>	<i>Caló</i> term for small truck or pickup; also term of endearment.

### Spanish

<i>auto:</i>	Spanish contraction of the term automobile.
<i>automovil:</i>	Spanish term for automobile.
<i>camión:</i>	Truck, pickup truck, or station wagon.
<i>camioneta:</i>	Small pickup truck or wagon.
<i>coche:</i>	Formal Spanish term for coach, carriage or car.
<i>vehículo:</i>	Spanish term for vehicle.

### English

<i>bomb:</i>	An older vintage lowrider automobile; e.g. 1938 Ford or Chevy.
<i>Caddy:</i>	Cadillac automobile.

<i>car:</i>	Contraction of carriage, and equivalent of automobile or vehicle.
<i>Chicano-style:</i>	Car with older vintage detailing and custom modifications.
<i>city cruiser:</i>	Lowrider equipped to cruise the streets; not necessarily a show car.
<i>compacts:</i>	Small or medium-sized car or other foreign import.
<i>crate:</i>	1950's era street term for car or ride.
<i>cruiser:</i>	A lowrider automobile; see city cruiser.
<i>custom car:</i>	Customized, altered, or otherwise modified automobile.
<i>custom ride:</i>	See custom car.
<i>Euro:</i>	Lowrider automobile of European origin or style; Mercedes Benz.
<i>Euroscene:</i>	See Euro.
<i>G-ride:</i>	Contraction of "great ride."
<i>lady:</i>	Feminine reference for lowrider car - as in Jesse's "lady".
<i>load:</i>	1950's era street term for car or ride.
<i>low-key:</i>	A low slung custom automobile or lowrider.
<i>low-key cruiser:</i>	See low-key.
<i>Low-profile:</i>	White or Anglo-owned automobile with lowered suspension.
<i>low ride:</i>	See lowrider.
<i>low-roller:</i>	Lowrider, or at the very least, low-profile vehicle.
<i>lowrider:</i>	A low-slung vehicle with a modified suspension system.
<i>lowrider bike:</i>	A low-profile bicycle with custom modifications.
<i>lowrider truck:</i>	A low-slung truck or pickup with a modified suspension system.
<i>low show:</i>	A low-slung custom show car.
<i>maxxed ride:</i>	An ornate or classy lowrider with custom modifications.
<i>mean machine:</i>	An impressive, ornate, or technically sophisticated custom car.
<i>mean ride:</i>	See mean machine.
<i>mini:</i>	Small or medium-sized car or truck or other foreign import.
<i>mini's:</i>	Plural form of mini; as in mini-truck.
<i>mini-bike:</i>	Chopped or lowered custom bicycle.
<i>mini-truck:</i>	Small or medium-sized truck or other foreign import.
<i>radical:</i>	A vehicle that has been radically customized.
<i>rag:</i>	Vehicle with a convertible roof or cloth top; or inoperable vehicle.
<i>rag-top:</i>	See rag.
<i>ride:</i>	Common reference for most any vehicle, including lowriders.
<i>short:</i>	Endearing 1950's era reference for one's automobile.

<i>show car:</i>	Car customized for show purposes only; not always street legal.
<i>side-to-side:</i>	Lowrider with side-to-side hydraulics.
<i>'64 Impala:</i>	Year and make of vehicle, as in a 1964 Impala lowrider.
<i>slammin' ride:</i>	Nicely detailed and beautifully customized lowrider.
<i>space age:</i>	Vehicle with futuristic features; e.g. antennae, digital features.
<i>stock:</i>	An unmodified, original, or factory-equipped automobile.
<i>streetcruiser:</i>	Lowrider equipped to cruise the streets; not necessarily a show car.
<i>streetcruiser style:</i>	Custom lowrider styled with features for street cruising.
<i>three-wheeler:</i>	Lowrider capable of cruising on three wheels.
<i>tricked-out ride:</i>	Nicely detailed and beautifully customized lowrider.
<i>truck:</i>	Two-door truck or pickup; <i>trokita</i> or <i>troka</i> in <i>caló</i> .
<i>two-wheeler:</i>	A customized lowrider bicycle.
<i>vintage:</i>	Antique, or older model original auto; e.g. "vintage Caddy."
<i>wheels:</i>	Common reference for most any vehicle, including lowriders.

## TABLE 2:

Terminology associated with the action domain of cruising in its various manifestations. Principal distinctions obtain between the "ride," "caravan" or "convoy," and "snatching." Primary distinctions are based on individual versus group, formal versus informal, and the engagement or non-engagement of hydraulics while cruising.

Dynamic Hydraulic Maneuvers

<i>bailando:</i>	Alternating front and rear-end, and or side-to-side hydraulics use.
<i>big air leapin':</i>	High jump hydraulics use (front or rear-end systems).
<i>booty hoppin':</i>	Repetitive rear-end hydraulics hop.
<i>bumpin':</i>	Subtle and repetitive front-end hydraulics hop while cruising.
<i>dancin' around:</i>	Alternating front and rear-end, and or side-to-side hydraulics use.
<i>dancing:</i>	Alternating front and rear-end, and or side-to-side hydraulics use.
<i>double-pumpin':</i>	Simultaneous use of both hydraulic pumps on a dual-pump system.
<i>high bouncing:</i>	High jump hydraulics use (front or rear-end systems).

<i>hopping:</i>	Front-end hydraulics use while cruising or stationary.
<i>humping:</i>	Subtle front-end hydraulics hopping while cruising.
<i>jumbo air:</i>	High jump hydraulics use (front or rear-end systems).
<i>pancaking:</i>	Repetitive front-end hydraulics hop while cruising or stationary.
<i>radical dancin':</i>	Alternating front and rear-end, and or side-to-side hydraulics use.
<i>scraping:</i>	Use of hydraulics to drop moving car on magnesium scrape-plate.
<i>single-pumpin':</i>	Use of a single-pump hydraulic lift system.
<i>slammin':</i>	Repetitive front-end hydraulics hop while cruising or stationary.
<i>side-to-side:</i>	Alternating side-to-side hydraulics use.
<i>snatching:</i>	Repetitive front-end hydraulics hop while cruising or stationary.

#### Static or Stationary Hydraulic Maneuvers

<i>bajito:</i>	Lowered chassis on cruising or stationary lowrider vehicle.
<i>cocked-up:</i>	Front-end lift on moving or stationary vehicle.
<i>fork-lifted:</i>	Front-end lift on moving or stationary vehicle.
<i>hooked-up:</i>	Front or rear-end lift on moving or stationary vehicle.
<i>juiced-up:</i>	Front or rear-end lift on moving or stationary vehicle.
<i>layed or laid:</i>	Front and rear-end lowering of moving or stationary vehicle.
<i>leanin' on three:</i>	Single-wheel front or rear-end lift on moving or stationary vehicle.
<i>lifted:</i>	Tandem front and rear-end lift on moving or stationary vehicle.
<i>lowered:</i>	Front and rear-end lowering of moving or stationary vehicle.
<i>three-wheelin':</i>	Single-wheel front or rear-end lift on moving or stationary vehicle.
<i>two-wheelin':</i>	Tandem lift of both wheels on driver or passenger side of vehicle.

#### Club or Group Cruising

<i>caravan:</i>	Collective and formal group or club procession of vehicles.
<i>caravanning:</i>	Act of engaging in a caravan.
<i>convoy:</i>	Collective and formal group or club procession of vehicles.
<i>throwin' a caravan:</i>	Act of engaging in a caravan.

*makin' the scene:* Group or club gathering, activity, or procession of vehicles.

#### Individual and Group Cruising

*city cruisin':* Individual or group cruising along the boulevards of the city.

*cruise:* The act of cruising.

*blasting:* The act of playing a stereo at high volume while cruising.

*cruisin':* See cruise.

*cruisin' bombita style:* Cruising the boulevard in an older model or vintage vehicle.

*cruising:* Driving a vehicle along the boulevard for pleasure.

*flashing:* Putting one's ride and club or clique identity on public display.

*flashing colors:* The act of signaling to rivals one's club or clique identity.

*let's roll:* The call or command to cruise.

*low-key cruisin':* The act of cruising about in a low slung or low profile vehicle.

*low-profile cruisin':* See low-key cruisin'.

*lowriding:* The act of cruising low and slow in a lowrider vehicle.

*low rollin':* See low-key cruisin'.

*mini-truckin':* The act of cruising about in a lowrider mini-truck.

*ride:* The act or sensation of cruising; the or the vehicle itself.

*riding:* The act of cruising, particularly as a passenger.

*rolar:* *Caló* term for roll; as in "let's roll."

*raiton:* *Caló* term for a ride or a cruise.

*shootin' a cruise:* The act of cruising about in a low slung or low profile vehicle.

*showin' all:* Formally exhibiting one's ride, club, or clique identity.

*street cruisin':* Individual or group cruising along the boulevards of the city.

*suavecito:* A smooth and easy, as opposed to a rushed and rough, ride.

*takin' it easy:* A calm, as opposed to a rushed and rough, ride.

*three-wheelin':* Cruising with three wheels to the pavement; with one wheel lifted.

*two-wheelin':* Activating two "lifts" (on driver or passenger side) while cruising.

#### *low and slow, mean and clean:*

The art and objective of "low rider" cruising - i.e. riding slowly and with class and dignity in a lowered and elaborately detailed and immaculate cruiser.



## WORKS CITED

- Barker, George C. 1950. *Pachuco: An American Spanish Argot and its Social Functions*. Tucson, Arizona. Social Science Bulletin No. 18, University of Arizona, Tucson, pp. 5-38.
- Davidson, R. Theodore. 1974. *Chicano Prisoners: The Key to San Quentin*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.
- Fraser Giffords, Gloria. 1981. "Soul of the Mexican Trucker." In *El Palacio* 87/1 (Spring): 3-17.
- Gradante, William. 1982. "Low and Slow, Mean and Clean." In *Natural History* 91: 28-39.
- Griffith, James S. 1988. *Southern Arizona Folk Arts*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Horowitz, Ruth. 1983. *Honor and the American Dream: Culture and Identity in a Chicano Community*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
- Life Magazine. 1980. "Low Riders of the Urban Range: A Chicano and His Car are a Fiesta on Wheels." In *Life Magazine* 3/5 (May 1980): 88-94.
- Mazón, Mauricio. 1984. *The Zoot-Suit Riots: The Psychology of Symbolic Annihilation*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Mendoza, Rubén G. 1980. "The Low Rider Ritual: Social Mobility on Wheels." In John Andresen and Edward Staski (eds.). *Atlatl: Occasional Papers*. Mimeograph. Tucson: Anthropology Club, Department of Anthropology, University of Arizona.
- . 1981a. "The Low Rider Ritual: Social Mobility on Wheels." In *Minority Notes* 2(1/2): 10-11; 30. (reprint)
- . 1981b. "Journey to Aztlán: An Anthropologist Among the Lowriders." In *Q-vo Magazine* 3/2: 18-9.
- . 1981c. "The Lowrider Reality: Social Ritual and Cultural Diagnostics in the Barrio." Paper presented before the Arizona-Nevada Academy of Science, University of Arizona, Tucson.
- . 1981d. "Barrio Graffiti: Territoriality, Paint Intoxication, and Social Symbolism." Paper presented before the annual meeting of the Arizona-Nevada Academy of Science, University of Arizona, Tucson.
- . 1983a. "The Lowrider Happening: Hydraulics and the Hopping Competition." In *Caminos Magazine* 4/7: 34, 44.
- . 1983b. "Pinto, Placa, and Clika: The Social Trappings of a Chicano Counterculture." Paper presented before the annual meeting of the National Association for Interdisciplinary Ethnic Studies, Ontario, California.
- . 1983c. "Le Project du Graffiti: Tracking the Trappings of the Chicano Counterculture." Paper presented before the annual meeting of the National

- Association for Chicano Studies XI, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti.
- . 1987a. "Chicano Youth Identity and Counterculture in a Binational Context: The Case of the El Paso-Ciudad Juarez Area." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Social Science Association, El Paso, Texas.
- . 1987b. "Exploitation, Resistance and Social Disruption: An Ethnographic Account of a Mexican Enclave Community in a Copper Mining District." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Pacific Coast Council on Latin American Studies, Arizona State University, Tempe.
- . 1996. "Mural Art." In Richard Chabran and Rafael Chabran (eds.). *The Latino Encyclopedia*. New York: Marshall Cavendish Corporation, pp. 1084-8.
- Mendoza, Rubén G. and Cruz C. Torres. 1994. "Hispanic Traditional Technology and Material Culture in the United States." In Thomas Weaver (ed.). *Handbook of Hispanic Cultures in the United States: Anthropology*. Houston: The University of Houston and Arte Publico Press, pp. 59-84.
- Moore, Joan. 1978. *Homeboys: Gangs, Drugs, and Prison in the Barrios of Los Angeles*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Patiño, Marco A. 2000. "Lifting a Legend: Gypsy Rose Gets a New Set of Stems." In *Lowrider Magazine* 22/8: 104-11.
- Plascencia, Luis F. B. 1983. "Low Riding in the Southwest: Cultural Symbols in the Mexican Community." In Mario T. Garcia, Francisco Lomeli, Mario Barrera, Edward Escobar, and John García (eds.). *History, Culture, and Society: Chicano Studies in the 1980's*. Ypsilanti, Michigan: Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingue.
- Romo, Ricardo. 1983. *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Spradley, James P. and David W. McCurdy. 1972. *The Cultural Experience: Ethnography in Complex Society*. Science Research Associates, Inc. Chicago.
- Steinfort, Cissy. 1980. "Lowriders: The World of Cruising, Hydraulic Suspension and Throwing Scrapes." In *Road & Track* 31: 146-9.
- Trillin, Calvin and Edward Koren. 1978. "Our Far-Flung Correspondents: Low and Slow, Mean and Clean." In *The New Yorker* 54, July 10, 1978: 70-4.
- Trujillo, Nathan. 2000. "Tampa Hop: Intense Moments in Tampa." In *Lowrider Magazine* 22/8 (August 2000): 87-91.
- Vigil, James Diego. 1988. *Barrio Gangs: Street Life and Identity in Southern California*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- West, Ted. 1976. "Low and Slow." In *Car & Driver* 22: 47-51; 74-6.