

2014

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Recommended Citation

O'Neill, Ian, "Expressing the Chicano Culture: A low riding experience" (2014). *2014 Symposium*. Paper 32.
http://dc.ewu.edu/srcw_2014/32

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Expressing the Chicano Culture: A Low Riding Experience

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Abstract:

This research paper focuses on the rich heritage of the Chicano people who chose to express their culture through the customization of vehicles and other means of transportation. I discuss the history of the automobile in the Chicano culture and the reasons why low riding became such a dominant idea for Chicanos. This paper shows how customizing in terms of painting, lowering, sculpting, and fabricating gave the Chicano's a favorable alternative activity instead of joining a gang or participating in other harmful exercises. I will further discuss how this positive movement motivated and generated a generation of workers who excelled in the field of automobile customization through their artistic capabilities and/or their skilled labor learned during WWII. My paper shows how customizing helped integrate art and politics especially during the Chicano Art Movement. Many of these gifted vehicle modifiers chose to express their needs and also the needs of their community through their designs and intricate paintings found throughout their vehicles. I utilized popular Chicano magazines, books on Chicano art, and history books focusing on the low riding generation.

Lowrider Myths

- All lowrider members are gang members and therefore must be associated with drugs, etc.
- You must be Chicana/o to join a lowrider club
- Only old cars can be considered a lowrider
- All lowrider fanatics are men
- Lowrider vehicles will never be in a museum

Lowrider Facts

- The majority of lowrider members are upstanding citizens with stable jobs.
- All backgrounds are welcome and encouraged to join a lowrider club as long as you have an affinity for beautiful cars.
- Many old and new vehicles are used as an open canvas for lowrider members
- The San Diego Automotive Museum is currently displaying several lowrider cars.

For many of the Chicana/o population, a lowrider isn't just a mode of transportation that simply moves you from place to place. It is much more than that. Hundreds and quite often thousands of hours are gladly spent transforming a typical vehicle into what is known as a lowrider. The rise of the lowrider started during the Great Depression when expensive hot rods were no longer attainable in the eyes of many. Chicanos took this opportunity to create custom cars utilizing scraps and spare parts typically found in junkyards. World War II began and civilian vehicle production quickly turned to military vehicle production. Chicanos who helped their country by working in these factories or serving in the military quickly learned essential skills needed to further modify vehicles. When the war ended, cities rapidly became overpopulated from the returning soldiers overseas. This meant housing developments needed to expand which also meant more vehicles needed to be produced to help with the longer commute to the cities. A quick growth of vehicles manufactured during this time along with the new skills many Chicanos learned during WWII meant a fast rising in the lowrider scene. During the Chicano Art Movement (1960's) many Chicanos chose to express their cultural values, histories, folklore, personal stories, and religious beliefs through their delicately created artistry found throughout their vehicles. The ideology of driving low and slow helped the artists who created these elaborate murals make sure all were able to view their work.

Gangs are often associated with the word lowrider.

Although some gang members choose to modify their vehicles in a lowrider fashion, the majority of lowrider fanatics are not associated with a gang. To help differentiate themselves from the accidental assumption of association with a gang, many lowriders join lowriding clubs. These clubs usually have rules and regulations that must be followed by each member. "As a matter of fact a lot of the car clubs in Northern New Mexico have strict guidelines about who can join. A lot have no alcohol and no drugs guidelines. According to the New Mexico Council of Car Clubs there are more than 3,000 lowrider enthusiasts and 70 car clubs statewide." (focusdailynews)

Many artists choose to incorporate their family, religion, and history in their murals.



<http://focusdailynews.com/destination-nowhere-exploring-lowrider-culture-in-new-mexico-p7191-84.htm>