

## "Low and slow": Latino lowriders artfully cruise for community

By Chanté Griffin, *Christian Science Monitor*

Required Annotations	Student-Created Annotations	Summary / Questions / Reflection
Student-created		Required (bold)

When people tried to loot the Nike store and surrounding shops on Whittier Boulevard in East Los Angeles, California, last year, Juan Ramirez and his fellow lowriders stood guard.



Image 1. Juan Ramirez stands with his 1970 Cadillac Coupe deVille named Sugar in Downey, California, on November 18, 2020. For Ramirez, lowriding is about "la familia" and showing "my kids I was doing something good — a small little legacy I can give them." Photo: Maxim Elramsisy/Christian Science Monitor

The Los Angeles Lowrider Community (LALC) wasn't about to let the shop owners along the famous boulevard where they cruise bear the rage of people taking advantage of the unrest following George Floyd's death. "We weren't having that [looting]," says Ramirez.

He never questioned that the LALC members would answer his call to protect the neighborhood. Community is a key part of lowrider culture. And Whittier Boulevard is more than a famous boulevard where they cruise. It is the backbone of that community.

"A lot of these businesses were working real hard, trying to recover from the pandemic," says Ramirez. In appreciation, the shop owners responded in kind: "The community started feeding us," he says — seafood, pizza and tacos to nourish them as they stood watch. This **reciprocation** illustrates the symbiotic relationship between LA lowriders and their neighborhoods — a relationship that has spanned decades.

Born in Boyle Heights, California, and raised in South Los Angeles, Ramirez spends his days working as a welder and his nights cruising Whittier Boulevard with his wife and three kids. He drives a long, white and spotless 1970 Cadillac Coupe deVille named Sugar.

"My kids joke about stealing the car when I'm sleeping," Ramirez shares, while laughing, because their taunts indicate they recognize the significance of their dad's car, the significance of any lowrider's car.

"You're driving on artwork, so you want to be delicate," stresses Johnny Torres, an influential member of LALC who sports a baby blue '54 Chevy. Ramirez agrees.

## More Than Tricked-Out Cars

From the first time, as a little boy, that Ramirez sat in a lowrider, a family friend's '64 Chevy Impala, he quickly learned that "getting into a nice car – you had to be very proper." It's a lesson he instills in his kids, ages 5, 8 and 15.



Image 2. [Caption removed] Photo: Maxim Elramsisy/Christian Science Monitor

Respect – for property and for others – is a central **tenet** in the lowrider community. It's one of the reasons why in October 2019, Ramirez, president of Just Memories Car Club, joined with Mark Wilson, president of First Class Car Club, and Sergio Perez, president of Thee Illusions Car Club, to start the Los Angeles Lowrider Community – an association of lowrider car clubs in Los Angeles and **adjacent** cities.

For LALC members, lowriding isn't just a commitment to a tricked out car; it's a commitment to the well-being of the community.

## Lowriders And Chicano History

"A true lowrider rides from the heart. It's about family, respect and community," says Denise Sandoval, professor of Chicana and Chicano studies at California State University, Northridge. Sandoval, who curated two exhibitions about lowrider culture for the Petersen Automotive Museum in Los Angeles, seeks to document riders' history and commitment to their communities.

A desire to educate the broader culture about the lowrider community and Chicano culture is partly what prompted LALC member Edward Villa of La Puente, California, to host car shows for his city. Villa, president of the Veteranos Car Club, has hosted car shows for 15 years. He approached the city a few years ago because he wanted to bring Latino heritage to the city's car show, which featured hot rods and other classic cars, but few lowriders.

The shows he helped to curate ballooned from about 40 cars into one that now showcases hundreds of cars. On Halloween, 200 cars arrived for the city of Montebello's Trunk n' Treat. LALC served on the planning committee for the event, which was organized by the National Latino Peace Officers Association and the mayor pro tem of Montebello, Kimberly Ann Cobos-Cawthorne. Costumed kids and their families drove through the parking lot at the Shops at Montebello to receive candy and

to view lowriders' cars, which were decorated for the occasion.

Villa's and other members' **altruism** is motivated by their commitment to *la comunidad* and a desire to dispel myths about lowriders: "I want the different cities to realize that we're positive. We're just trying to bring the love for the cars," Villa says. "We just want to show that we have a lot of love for our community."

## A History Of Social Justice

Sandoval notes that community activism within the lowrider culture dates back to the 1960s. She says that during the civil rights movement, "Lowriders were empowered to take pride in their community, fighting for social justice and using their culture not just to represent positivity, but to give back."

She credits the Dukes – LA's oldest car club, which started in 1962 – for being the first car club to embrace community activism; members organized car shows that benefited Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers movement to improve the conditions of agricultural workers.

Sandoval **laments** that so much of this history is unknown. She says lowriding emerged from the hot rod culture established in the '30s and '40s in Southern California. While "hot-rodders" preferred to ride fast and furiously, lowriders – who emerged shortly after – preferred to drive "low and slow," so they could be seen sporting nice cars and brown skin. It was important to be seen representing their families and neighborhoods.

The low and slow culture represents cultural pride: I'm proud of my car. I'm proud of my community.

This pride is on display most weekends, as unofficial cultural parades roll through Whittier Boulevard – not to mention the numerous neighborhoods throughout greater Los Angeles. It's quite the spot: The boulevard provides the venue, the neighborhood provides the crowd, the cars and their drivers are the main attractions, and the shop owners and street vendors cater to them all. Marco Antonio Villalobos, whose East Los Boy Apparel shop is a community staple and popular tourist spot, says that celebrities often come by to check out the scene. "Mario Lopez is always here!" he brags.

LALC's goal is to continue to host events that highlight and enhance the larger community. "We're not going to stop," Johnny Torres says. "We're going to take this culture into schools, into museums, into the mainstream."

Ramirez hopes his children preserve the lowriding lifestyle and tradition when they're old enough to drive. For him, it's all about *la familia*: "[Lowriding] is the only thing I can do to show my kids I was doing something good – a small little legacy I can give them."

## Questions

1. Read the list of sentences from the article.
  - a) For LALC members, lowriding isn't just a commitment to a tricked out car; it's a commitment to the well-being of the community.
  - b) A desire to educate the broader culture about the lowrider community and Chicano culture is partly what prompted LALC member Edward Villa of La Puente, California, to host car shows for his city.
  - c) Costumed kids and their families drove through the parking lot at the Shops at Montebello to receive candy and to view lowriders' cars, which were decorated for the occasion.
  - d) She credits the Dukes – LA's oldest car club, which started in 1962 – for being the first car club to embrace community activism; members organized car shows that benefited Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers movement to improve the conditions of agricultural workers.

Which two sentences taken together provide the BEST evidence to support the idea that lowriders are assets in their communities?

- e) A and B
- f) A and C
- g) B and D
- h) C and D

2. Read the paragraph from the section "Lowriders And Chicano History."

Villa's and other members' altruism is motivated by their commitment to la comunidad and a desire to dispel myths about lowriders: "I want the different cities to realize that we're positive. We're just trying to bring the love for the cars," Villa says. "We just want to show that we have a lot of love for our community."

What can be inferred from this paragraph?

- a) Cultural traditions are essential aspects of lowrider groups.
  - b) Lowriders are naturally generous to others in their community.
  - c) Some people have formed negative impressions about lowriders.
  - d) Communities are ambivalent about having active lowrider groups.
3. Which statement BEST represents Juan Ramirez's approach toward protecting Whittier Boulevard from looting in the article?
  - a) Because he values community, he never hesitated to protect the businesses on Whittier Boulevard.
  - b) The fear of his cruising place being destroyed prompted him to step in and protect Whittier Boulevard.
  - c) He believed that if the LALC made a strong show of support for Whittier Boulevard, the lowriders would gain respect in return.
  - d) He worried that Whittier Boulevard would no longer be a safe place to take his family if the shops and other businesses left.
4. Why did the author conclude the article by describing how Ramirez wants his children to preserve the lowriding lifestyle when they are older?
  - a) to inspire readers to explore examples of lowriding communities in the Los Angeles area
  - b) to show lowriding as a monetary as well as cultural legacy passed on to an owner's family
  - c) to reiterate the claim that lowriding teaches the values of family, respect and community
  - d) to suggest that lowriding will soon spread to broader groups outside of its current culture
5. Image 2 has had the caption removed. The original caption was essentially a two-sentence summary of the whole article. Write such a caption below.