



# Lowrider Space: Aesthetics and Politics of Mexican American Custom Cars

*Ben Chappell*

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Aren't lowriders always gangbangers? And, don't they always hold high status in their neighborhoods? Contrary to both stereotypes, the people who build and drive lowrider cars perform diverse roles while mobilizing a distinctive aesthetic that is sometimes an act of resistance and sometimes of belonging. A fresh application of critical ethnographic methods, *Lowrider Space* looks beyond media portrayals, high-profile show cars, and famous cruising scenes to bring readers a realistic tour of the "ordinary" lowriders who turn streetscapes into stages on which dynamic identities can be performed.

Drawing on firsthand participation in everyday practices of car clubs and cruising in Austin, Texas, Ben Chappell challenges histories of erasure, containment, and class immobility to emphasize the politics of presence evidenced in lowrider custom car style. Sketching out a partially personal map of the lowrider presence in Texas's capital city, Chappell also explores the interior and exterior adornment of the cars (including the use of images of women's bodies) and the intersecting production of personal and social space. As he moves through a second-hand economy to procure parts necessary for his own lowrider vehicle, on "service sector" wages, themes of materiality and physical labor intersect with questions of identity, ultimately demonstrating how spaces get made in the process of customizing one's self.

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