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### African-American car culture

African-American car culture is a rich and multifaceted subculture that has significantly shaped broader automotive trends and social dynamics in the United States. From the rise of custom car scenes, including lowriders and muscle cars, to the significance of car clubs in fostering community and identity, African-American car culture reflects a blend of innovation, creativity, and resistance. History, social implications, and influence on popular culture, as well as its connection to issues of race, class, and freedom. The relationship between African Americans and automobiles dates back to the early 20th century, a period of intense racial segregation and systemic exclusion from mainstream economic opportunities. Despite these barriers, cars represented a form of mobility and independence for many African Americans. When millions of African Americans moved from the rural South to urban centers in the North and West, the car became a symbol of personal freedom, allowing Black families to escape restrictive Jim Crow laws. The invention of the "Green Book," a guide that listed safe places for African-American travelers to eat, rest, and refuel, underscores the racial dangers Black drivers faced on the road. Despite the obstacles, cars allowed African Americans to exert some control over their movement, fostering a sense of autonomy and pride. By the mid-20th century, African-American car culture began to thrive, particularly in cities like Los Angeles, Detroit, and Chicago, where the automobile industry had taken root. With increased access to cars, albeit often second-hand or cheaper models, Black drivers began personalizing and customizing their vehicles, giving rise to unique car styles. The most notable of these styles is the lowrider, which originated in Mexican-American neighborhoods but was quickly adopted and adapted by African Americans.

Lowriders, known for their lowered suspension and vibrant paint jobs, became iconic symbols of Black and Brown resistance against mainstream norms. African-American lowriders often embodied pride in their heritage and their ability to express individuality through creative car designs. These cars were about more than just aesthetic appeal—they were statements of identity, belonging, and defiance against a society that marginalized them. In addition to lowriders, muscle cars—powerful American cars like the Chevrolet Impala or the Ford Mustang—became deeply embedded in African-American car culture. By the 1970s, "donks" emerged in Southern cities, adding to the diversity within Black car culture. These cars became symbols of status, and the ability to own and modify a car served as a means of empowerment for many African-Americans. Car clubs also played a crucial role in solidifying this culture. These African American sense of community, and mentorship, African-American car clubs became spaces where individuals shared their love for cars while navigating racial, economic, and social challenges together. clubs like the Goodfellas and Majestics in Los Angeles contributed to the evolution of the lowrider scene, while others like the Detroit Street Kingz represented the muscle car culture in the Midwest. The significance of African-American car culture extends far beyond the vehicles themselves. It touches upon key themes of freedom, self-expression, and resistance to systemic oppression. Cars became a tool for self-determination in a society where other forms of power and mobility were restricted. For many, customizing and showing off their cars was a way to express pride in their community and challenge racial stereotypes. Moreover, African-American car culture has had a lasting impact on American popular culture, particularly in music and film. In the 1980s and 1990s, hip-hop artists embraced the car as a status symbol. Iconic music videos from artists like Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg, and OutKast featured lowriders and muscle cars, cementing the connection between African-American car culture and the burgeoning hip-hop scene. a hip-hop artist's lifestyle is fashion. From the oversized streetwear of the 1990s to high-end luxury brands like Gucci, Louis Vuitton, and Balenciaga, hip-hop artists have always used fashion as a form of expression and

status symbol. communities in cities like New York were grappling with poverty, crime, and the effects of deindustrialization. In this context, hip-hop emerged as a form of artistic resistance and self-expression, allowing marginalized youth to reclaim their voices.

This embrace of fashion was often rooted in the need to establish identity and personal style, and it became a central part of African-American youth culture. Hip-hop culture, born in the late 1970s in the Bronx, New York, emerged as a response to the hardships faced by African-American communities, such as poverty, systemic racism, and urban decay. Since its inception, hip-hop has evolved into a global cultural movement, with the lifestyle of hip-hop artists playing a crucial role in shaping trends, fashion, social norms, and political discourse, both within African-American culture and beyond. The lifestyle of hip-hop artists within African-American culture is a multifaceted phenomenon that reflects not only the music itself but also broader social, political, and economic dynamics. Hip-hop lifestyle. The music videos of this era showcased luxury cars, lavish mansions, expensive jewelry, and designer clothes—symbols of financial success and freedom. The opulent lifestyle that many hip-hop artists displayed was, in many ways, a form of resistance to a society that had historically denied African-Americans access to wealth and upward mobility. By flaunting their wealth, artists asserted their success and status in a country where African Americans had long been economically marginalized.

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lowrider culture, showcasing not only the cars themselves but also the community and pride surrounding them. The use of these vehicles symbolizes freedom and the joy of living, creating an enduring connection between the music and the cultural landscape. In "Big Poppa," The Notorious B.I.G. employs references to luxury vehicles, particularly the Cadillac Escalade, as symbols of wealth and success. His lyrics reflect a lifestyle characterized by affluence, where cars serve as extensions of personal identity. The music video enhances this narrative, featuring lavish parties and luxurious settings, all underscored by the presence of high-end cars. Through his artistry, Biggie illustrates how automobiles represent not just material wealth, but also a sense of accomplishment and status within the hip-hop community.

Jay-Z's "On to the Next One" prominently features the Bugatti Veyron, a car synonymous with luxury and exclusivity. Jay-Z's lyrics often emphasize the significance of success and the finer things in life, with automobiles serving as potent symbols of his achievements. The music video, characterized by sleek visuals and high-energy aesthetics, further reinforces the connection between cars and the hip-hop lifestyle. With such prestigious vehicles, Jay-Z not only affirms his own status but also elevates the cult with the significance of luxury cars within African-American car culture. Snoop Dogg's "Gin and Juice" is another quintessential track that showcases the lowrider lifestyle. The song's lyrics and music video show the enjoyment of cruising and socializing in customized vehicles. Lowriders, often featuring elaborate paint jobs and hydraulic systems, symbolize creativity and cultural pride. Snoop's portrayal of car culture reflects the communal aspects of cruising, where the automobile serves as a vehicle for social interaction and celebration, reinforcing a sense of belonging within the community. Automobiles in hip-hop music serve as more than mere props; they are integral to the storytelling and cultural expression within African-American car culture. Through songs like "California Love," "Big Poppa," "On to the Next One," and "Gin and Juice," artists not only celebrate their love for cars but also use them as symbols of status, identity, and freedom. These vehicles encapsulate the dreams and aspirations of individuals within the community narrative, reflecting both personal

and collective journeys. Lowriders, in particular, became synonymous with West Coast rap culture. This connection between music, fashion, and cars contributed to the mainstreaming of elements of African-American car culture, making it part of the larger American pop culture fabric. While African-American car culture has often been viewed as a source of creativity and community, it has also reflected the socio-economic challenges faced by the Black community. The customization and modification of cars required financial investment, yet many African Americans were historically excluded from higher-paying jobs and economic opportunities. African Americans' money on car modifications was a way to achieve a sense of success and visibility in a society that denied them other forms of recognition. However, this culture has also been criticized for sometimes promoting materialism or becoming associated with illicit activities. In some cases, car culture was linked to street racing or clashes with law enforcement putting money on the line, which exacerbated racial profiling and tensions between the police and Black communities.