Overview: Carjacked: The Culture of the Automobile and Its Effect on Our Lives by Catherine Lutz and Anne Lutz Fernandez is a book that examines the impact of automobiles on American culture. Over the past century, cars have become a socio-economic staple of American society. Lutz and Fernandez shed light on the problematic realities that result from the rapid rate of automobile production in the United States and how this phenomenon affects both American individuals and society at large.

Lutz and Fernandez keep the book interesting and informative by including interviews, insightful analyses, and statistical backing to their argument. The book is a critique of “American car culture” and sets out to examine the cultural problems created by cars. As a culture, we view cars as symbols of freedom and exploration. In reality, car owners end up at the mercy of their vehicles. The authors look at how the media and film has glamorized the automobile industry in American society.

The discourse surrounding cars is loaded with stereotypical notions regarding gender. Many of the men interviewed in this book express the sense of power they feel from sitting behind the steering wheel as they drive with a woman riding in the passenger seat. Through interviews it becomes clear that many of our ideas about cars are in flux with the reality of their function. Cars become another item people purchase in hopes of expressing something about themselves. Carjacked contains engaging interviews that prove the claim that people choose particular car models in hopes of expressing something about their economic status or personality. Car companies use manipulative advertising to appeal to consumers who view their vehicles as extensions of themselves. I found the analysis surrounding car companies’ advertising campaigns to be some of the most interesting aspects of the book. Lutz and Fernandez detail who the car companies are profiling and the imagery and message they trying to convey in their ads. This brought to light realities about buying and selling cars that I had never taken the time to think about.

Additionally, Carjacked also reveals the social problems posed by cars in relation to class structure and politics, as the automobile industry precipitates a cycle that keeps low-income car owners in constant debt. Job options for those without a car are limited. This opened my eyes to the social problems

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surrounding automobile ownership, class structure, and politics. Lutz and Fernandez also touch on the more obvious problems cars cause, such as the harmful impact on the environment and the danger of accidents.

*How this work can be applied to American Studies:* While I am not particularly knowledgeable about cars, I found this book to be valuable and surprisingly interesting. It shows how an American commodity can have such a widespread impact across all facets of society. This book provides its readers with a new lens in which to view cars - a machine so ubiquitous that we often fail to take the time to place within in a larger cultural context. Finally, *Carjacked* concludes by offering its readers with a set of practical suggestions to follow in order to hopefully lessen our society’s unhealthy dependence on automobiles.