

COWBOYS AND INDIANS

Jose cruises Watts in his '74 chevy coupe that's lowered to the ground and painted burgundy. The other night he told me that he was going to buy some new rims. "It's good deal," he said. "My rims and fifty dollars." "What's wrong with the old rims?" I asked. "Nothing," he said. "But these rims are better. I got to be absent tomorrow." "To get the rims?" "Yeah," he said and smiled. That was too bad, since Jose was often the only student to come to class. But a couple of nights later he came back. It was raining, the wind pushing the rain inland. "Did you get them?" I asked. "Yeah," he said. "Want to see them?" "Sure," I said. "I think the mayates want to get them." "Not in the rain," I said. We went out to the parking lot where the chevy was parked under a light. The rain was beading up on the wax, the rims were shining. A couple of black students stood under a tree. They smoked cigarettes and talked. "Nice rims," I said. "Those fucking mayates," Jose said. "What?" "Didn't you hear those guys?" "Nope," I said. "They want to get me rims. Didn't you hear them?" "What did you get them for? Around here nothing's safe." "I have to have something," he said. "Those fucking mayates. They think I'm stupid." We went back inside, out of the rain.

I haven't seen Jose for awhile since then. Antonio, a guy from Salvador, said a guy with a rifle was chasing him the last time that he saw him. "Why's that?" I asked. "I don't know," Antonio shrugged. "I think they like those rims."