

American life according to horace miner



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Not less than fifty years ago, one anthropologist named Horace Miner has demonstrated a feat of bravery by coming up with a not so typical description of a group of people known as the Naciremas. In the June 1956 edition of *American Anthropologist*, he published a paper entitled *Body Ritual Among the Naciremas*. It is actually a paper description of the Americans, as he discreetly nicked them as Naciremas, (the original people's name spelled backwards) in terms of their physical hygiene and appearance.

It was written in such a way that the reader would feel as if he is discussing about an unknown, primitive, and distant tribe by replacing common cultural artifacts with codes, for example, the medicine kit as a charm-box, the hospital as a latipso, a community water reservoir as a Water Temple, and the dentist as a holy-mouth-man (Miner, 1956). Most prominent here are his sarcastic commentaries and ironic descriptions.

In this article, Miner (1956) might have appeared to be very critical of the American's way of keeping themselves clean and beautiful which is based on the "belief that the human body is ugly and that its natural tendency is to debility and disease. Incarcerated in such a body, man's only hope is to avert these characteristics through the use of ritual and ceremony" (Miner, 1956, ¶ 4). With much sarcasm, he went over the different "Body Rituals of the Nacerimas" who are a magic-ridden kind of people.

The most controversial part of his discussion on their body rituals is when he said that people go to hospitals to die. Thus, he ended by saying, "it is hard to understand how they have managed to exist so long under the burdens which they have imposed upon themselves" (Miner, 1956, ¶ 20). However, at the end of the essay, he left a high note to what he has already said. He

quoted Malinowski (1948) who believed that magic is crude and irrelevant, yet vital to guide man to go through difficulties and reach advancement in this civilization (cited in Miner, 1956, ¶ 21).

Having read the paper, I cannot find any other account more accurate. Americans have even introduced their ways among the different cultures of the world and have actually tied the people to consumerist principles which involve buying a lot of products to make them beautiful and undergoing treatment for all bodily imperfections in terms of health and beauty. We have Olay, Clinique and the like. We use hair sprays, hair gels, facial firming lotions, slimming teas, rejuvenating lotions, facial hair removal cream, etc.

Technology taught man to produce medicines for almost all ailments including the simplest sneezing spree or smallest insect bites. We have Pfizer, Wyeth, among others. Advertising their products entails the use of women who are inflicted with “ hypermammary development,” and if there are terms that we can add to the article, they would be “ hypoabdominal development” and “ unexplained protruding of the rectum protection area” (Miner, 1956, ¶ 18). Try watching MTV or Bikini Watch for a more vivid example.

Americans devise ways to make their skin darker or lighter and have influenced other races to believe that having fair complexion is a standard for beauty, in as much as they wanted to either gain or lose weight if they are under or overweight or simply not that “ sexy. ” The funny thing here is that, after fifty years, the same article still speaks for the Nacerimas and the whole world included as well. Let us take one TV program, “ America’s Next

Top Model,” to speak for the American culture itself. It is a reality TV show where the prettiest woman, in terms of being a model, wins.

Watched by a global audience and already had local versions among different countries, this TV program showcases the day-to-day life of a model, including her hygiene and beauty secrets. They have to maintain a specific weight requirement and need to be beautiful and excellent in terms of being a good fashion model. Considering this, one question may come to mind: Is this not the standard of beauty that is being imposed upon the world, among different cultures? It just tolerates the insecurity among the young and among our women.

American culture simply imposes upon us the idea that we all have to be young, beautiful, and sexy. We might say that this can exist even among other cultures, be it Chinese, Egyptian, European, Indian, and even African. However, nothing could ever topple the body rituals that America has given to the world. It has become a screaming culture of consumerism that feeds the concept of physical insecurity. Thus, after 50 years, Miner’s (1956) idea still holds true: “ It is hard to understand how they have managed to exist so long under the burdens which they have imposed upon themselves” (¶ 20).