Letter to Horace Mitchell Miner

Introduction to Sociology

My Dear Friend Horace,

Since following your research of the Nacerima people, including the publication of your 1956 essay on the *Body Rituals of the Nacerima*, I have been keeping a close eye on this culture. We have just entered the second month of the year 2020. I am writing to update and inform you of the alarming things I’ve seen in the past several years. The practices of which I am about to go into details may shock and disturb you, but please, read on. The world must know.

Firstly, I feel like I must brief you on the Nacerima’s instrumental advancement, as this seems to be the new foundation of the entire society. Almost 20 years post your original publishing, a boxy machine foreign to you and I began appearing in the dwellings of the Nacerima, around which family members would individually gather occasionally and prod at a pad of buttons connected to said machine. These machines produce light, sometimes of different colors and varied frequencies of flashes. It seems that the poking of the button pad controls these features. I do not know why the Nacerima began spending so much time behind these Light Machines, when the orbs of light placed in the ceilings of their homes and in various corners seem to produce the same effect, and a much better one at that. Over several years the Light Machines began reappearing smaller and thinner, with the button pads no longer a separate entity, and now are not confined to just the home. Some Nacerimas have been seen using these Light Machines in undesignated public places. They are usually kept in a rectangular satchel, supposedly for safe keeping and easy transport.

 About another 20 years since my initial sightings of these machines, another apparatus became prevalent. Similar to the boxes I previously described, these machines also produce light, but are much, much smaller, and flat. The Nacerima seem to utilize these devices as everyday tools, and are very important ones, I’ve noticed. “Tools,” not in the physically useful sense, I assume, because the owners of such handle the small boxes as if they are very fragile. Some even purchase protective shells for their Light Device that exist in various color and textures. Compared to the larger Light Machines, the Light Devices have become more common for Nacerimas to own, and especially more present in public spaces. When I first began seeing these machines used amongst the Nacerima, the devices frequently produced noise, and often the Nacerima who possessed the machine would speak in response to the noise. It was very odd to witness. Over time, the Light Devices began making less and less noise, which seemed to be substituted by a physical prodding similar to the action I’d associated with the Light Machines’ button pads. Those who still interact with the noise occasionally produced by their Light Device are usually of an older generation, or are verbally responding in an urgent or professional manner. The purposes of these tools, although still unknown to me, seem to have evolved quite a lot over the past 25 years. I don’t know if in my research I will ever understand their obsession with these Light Devices, but nowadays the Nacerima are more frequently seen with one of these objects in their hand than not.

 The descriptions of these instruments must positively perplex you, Horace, as they do I. But my aforementioned apparatuses merely preface the practices of which I will tell you next. There are many, hundreds probably, of rituals I want to tell you about, but I do not have the time. I so wish to fill you in on what you’re missing here! After shuffling through many of my notes I’ve recorded on the Nacerima people, I have settled on one topic I absolutely need to tell you about. It is by far the most unheard-of practice to those similar to you and I. I hope you have effectively processed (as much as one can) what I have already told you, Horace, because what is to come is far more puzzling and arguably disturbing.

 I will tell you about a specific mating ritual the Nacerima take part in. I would like to apologize in advance for discussing with you such a taboo subject—and to think, these kinds of activities being performed by *them*! I have lately been studying how the Nacerima people find a mate. I’ve estimated that about half of the individuals I have observed seem to have already acquired a mate, but usually this portion of my subjects are about middle-aged, or growing close. For the younger Nacerima people, finding a mate seems to become a stressor in early adulthood. I have observed many rituals the Nacerima perform in order to find a mate, but one specific type seems to heavily involve the utilization of the Light Device. I do not know how exactly the Nacerimas’ Light Devices are involved in this ritual, but I do know that they play a major role in the mate-choosing process.

In my studies, I have observed hundreds of Nacerima pairs in public. In most instances, a Nacerima male or female will be present in a public establishment, and can be observed keeping to his or herself while frequently looking up from their Light Device in the direction of the entrance. It seems that they are expecting to encounter someone specific. When this person ultimately arrives (and sometimes no one does, Horace! ha!) both Nacerimas will place their Light Devices out of sight. They otherwise very rarely do this, so it must be important—thus my connecting the mating ritual to their Light Device. Once both parties are present, and sometimes they contrast in visible gender, but other times not, the Nacerima pair can be seen partaking in a thorough verbal exchange. Sometimes, this verbal exchange happens in the presence of a meal, or another strange activity. These appointments can last for hours, but only when both parties appear to be enjoying themselves. Sometimes, the Nacerima pair will exit together. Other times, separately. It seems that the Nacerima people do not always find a mate after one meeting, and if they seem displeased with the partner chosen for this event, they will resort back to their Light Device and plan to begin the ritual again. Picky fellows they are.

Another perplexing and borderline offensive thing I have noticed is that many Nacerimas acquire temporary mates. These pairings can last months, to years, to decades even, but apparently can end at the drop of a hat. Why are the Nacerima so comfortable with this looming impermanence, considering the time and effort they apply to these rituals? I have struggled with this factor for quite some time. It seems that possibly the *majority* of the Nacerima population will acquire more than one mate over their lifespan. If my assumptions regarding the involvement of Light Devices with their mating rituals are correct, then I have witnessed the Naciremas’ Light Devices both create and destroy bonds with their mates. What a tawdry and wicked invention.

 I keep waiting to grow accustomed to these types of foreign concepts and behaviors, but the everchanging lifestyle and evolution of the Nacerimas I think will prevent me from ever fully understanding. Perhaps this is a blessing just as much as it is a curse. As I progress in my research, I will continue to write you about the astounding new practices and inventions I observe in the Nacerima culture. I thank you for your inspiration and permission of my involvement in this area of research you so effectively shined a light on, Horace. I look forward to sharing more of my own findings with you.

Sincerely,

[name removed]