

## **4.The Fall of the Nacirema and the Cult of the Rac**

This vigorous people's obsession with altering their landscapes, air and waterways may have caused their own extinction and death.

By Neil Thompson and others

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THE revival of concern in the recently extinct culture of the Nacirema is perhaps a result of the increasing state of concern for own society. (Aspects of the Nacirema culture were first described by Horace Miner in "Body Ritual Among the Nacirema.") By using a multi-disciplined approach in deciphering this puzzling culture, the fragments of evidence in our possession can help us understand the history and then disappearance of this apparently vigorous but short-lived society and people.

Through exploratory digs by our archeological expeditions, we are able to say with some confidence that the Nacirema were the dominant group in the complex of North American cultures. Although the Nacirema left a large number of documents, our linguists have been unable to decipher any more than a few scattered fragments of the Nacirema language. Eventually, with the complete translation of these documents, we will undoubtedly learn a great deal about the reasons for the sudden disappearance of what, from the physical evidence, must have been an explosive and expansive culture. For the present, however, we must rely upon the physical evidence we have uncovered and analyzed in order to draw any conclusions concerning its extinction.

When we examine the area occupied by these people in a single overview, it is immediately apparent that the Nacirema considered it of primary importance to completely remake and transform the environment of the lands, waters, and air around them. One is struck by the energy that they expended on this task.

Trees, if in large enough numbers and size to influence the appearance of the landscape, were removed and hills often were leveled. In some areas, however, trees were replanted or areas were allowed to reforest themselves without assistance. Apparently, the fetish against trees went by fits and starts, for the Nacirema would sometimes move into a reforested area and again remove the trees.

Most of the land was sowed each year with a limited variety of agricultural plants. Esthetic considerations must have led to the cultivation of species poisonous to human life because, while the products of the cropland were sometimes used as food, few were consumed without first being subjected to long periods of complicated processing.

The Nacirema pused purifying chemicals to radically change the appearance and form of the agricultural and mineral products. These purification rituals were performed in a

series of large temple-like factory buildings devoted to this purpose. A vast hierarchy of priests devoted their lives to this liturgy. Members of another group, the powerful Ssenisub community supervised or arranged all of this. The largest of these were called Snoitaroproc, or Sproc for short.

The Nacirema also spent great time and energy constructing narrow ribbons, called Steerts, across the landscape. Some Steerts were arranged in connected patterns, and in regions with a great concentration of people, the patterns, when viewed from the air, increased in size and became more elaborate. Other ribbons did not follow any particular pattern but aimlessly pushed from one population center to another. In general, their primary function seems to have been to divide the landscape into units that could be manipulated by a few people. The Steerts also served as environmental dividers; persons of a lower caste lived within the boundaries of defined areas while those of the upper caste were free to live where they chose. Exploratory digs have shown that the quality of life in the different areas varied from very luxurious to poverty stricken.

The task of completely altering the appearance of the natural environment to fit the Nacirema's ideology was given such high priority that the Ssenisub community completely controlled the amassing of resources, manpower, and intelligence for this purpose. This group, whose rank bordered on that of a nonregimented priestly caste, lived in areas that were often guarded by electronic systems. There is no evidence to suggest that any restraints—moral, sociological, or engineering—were placed on their self-determined enterprises.

For a period of about 300 solar cycles (or Sraey), the Nacirema devoted a major part of their effort to the special environmental problem of changing the appearance and the temperature of the air and water. Until the last 75 solar cycles of the culture's existence, they seemed to have had only limited success. But during the short period before the fall of the culture and the destruction of their natural environment, they mastered their art magnificently. They changed the color of the waters and the air from the cool end of the spectrum (blues and greens) toward the warm end (reds and browns). The Nacirema and other peoples together also raised the temperature of the air and waters so high that increasing areas of the whole planet became too warm to sustain human life.

This alteration of water and air was effected by building enormous factories in strategic locations. These are usually found by our archeologists in or near large population centers, although, as success rewarded the Nacirema's efforts, they seem to have built smaller factories in outlying areas where environmental changes had not yet been effected. These enterprises constantly produced a variety of substances which were then pumped into the rivers and lakes or released into the atmosphere in the form of hot gases.

The idea of a re-made or transformed environment was so pervasive that in some areas the Nacirema even tried to alter the appearance of the ocean. In some regions they erected steel sculptures in the sea itself and through them released a black and slick substance, called Loi, which stained the waters and the beaches. In their later years, the Nacirema became more successful at filling the oceans with a substance called Citsalp which never degrades.

Early research has disclosed the importance of ritualistic observance among the Nacirema. In support of these observations, we should note the presence of the quasi-religious Rac Cult (or the Elibomotua Cult), which sought to create an intense sense of individual involvement in the community effort to completely transform the natural environment. This pervasive Rac cult was devoted to the creation of an artistic symbol – the Rac -- for a remade environment.

The high esteem of the Rac cult is demonstrated by the fact that near every population center, when not disturbed by the accumulation of debris, archeologists have found large and orderly collections of the Elibomotua or Rac Cult symbol. The vast number of these collections has given us the opportunity to reconstruct with considerable confidence the principal ideas of the cult.

The newest symbols seem to have nearly approached the ultimate of the Nacirema's cultural ideal. Their colors, material, and size suggest an enclosed mobile device that corresponds to no color or shape found in nature, although some authorities suggest that, at some early time in the development, the egg may have been the model. The device was provided with its own climate control system.

The Rac was designed to eliminate most sounds from the outside and to fill the interior with a hypnotic humming sound when the machine was in operation. This noise could be altered in pitch and intensity by simple mechanical controls. The Rac also produced a gaseous substance that, in a small area, could change the appearance of the air in a manner similar to the permanent factory installations. This function, however, may have been the primary reason for the cult's symbol: to provide each family with its own device for altering the environment by giving it a private system of producing the much desired air-changing and air-warming gases and substances.

We are relatively certain that a specially endowed and highly skilled group of educators was employed to keep the importance of these enclosed mobile devices constantly in the public eye through a Da or Tnemesitrevda. These were printed matter or transmitted electronic impulse images to boxlike devices in all homes.

While some of the information was aimed at describing the appearance and performance characteristics of the various kinds of machines, the greatest portion of the material was seemingly aimed at something other than these factors. A distinguished group of linguists, social psychologists, and theologians, who presented at

our most recent anthropological conference, offered the hypothesis that the Rac symbols were important in the courtship and mating rituals of the Nacirema. Apparently the males of the culture were persuaded to believe that any handicap to masculine dominance could be overcome by selecting the proper Rac cult symbol.

Further evidence of the Nacirema's devotion to the Rac or Elibomotua Cult has been discovered in surviving scraps that one of the most important quasi-religious ceremonies was performed by large groups who gathered at open-air shrines where they had Rac races. There, with intensely emotional reactions, huge crowds watched a ritual in which powerful Racs travelled in large circles within in the enormous open-air shrine. Occasionally a special ritual, designed to emphasize man's power over his universe, was enacted. On these unannounced occasions, one or more of the symbols was destroyed by crashing two of them together or by throwing one against a wall. The emotional pitch of the worshipers rose to its highest level at this moment. Then, on command of the high priest of the ceremony, all the Racs were slowed to a funeral speed and carefully held in their relative positions. After an appropriate memorial period honoring man's symbolic control of the universe, the machines were given the signal to resume their erratic speeds and permitted to make unnatural position changes.

We can only speculate on the significance of this ritual, but it seems reasonable to conclude that it served as an educational device, constantly imprinting in the individual the society's most important values about transforming the natural and human environment.

Many of the findings of archeological explorations suggest that these Rac symbols of universal power took up a large portion of the time and energy of the Nacirema society. Evidence indicates that a sizable portion of the work force and enormous amounts of space must have been devoted to the manufacture, distribution, and ceremonial care of the Racs. Some of the biggest production units of the economy were assigned this function; extensive design laboratories were given over to the manipulation of styles and appearances, and assembly lines turned out the pieces in serial fashion. They were given a variety of names, sometimes after planets, mountains or other natural object, although all of those made in the same time period looked remarkably alike.

Most families assumed the responsibility for one or more of the Rac pieces. During the time a family held a piece, they ritually cleansed it, housed it from the elements, and took it to special shrines where priests gave it a variety of injections. People who did not have their own Racs could join another person in their Rac called a Rebu, Ixat or Bac.

Many Nacirema spent much of their time inside their Racs moving about on the Steerts. Pictures show that many people engaged, especially in the morning and evening, in what must have been an important mass ritual, which we have been unable to decipher

with any surety. During these periods of the day, people of both sexes and all ages, except the very young and the very old, left their quarters to move about on the Steerts in their Racs. Films of these periods of the day show scenes like the dance one can occasionally see in a swarm of honeybees. In large population centers this "dance of the Racs" lasted for two or three hours.

It should also be mentioned that, when inside their Racs, people were free to go anywhere they chose so long as they remained on the Steerts. Apparently, when they were confined inside a Rac, the Nacirema attained a state of equality according to their status, wealth, and beliefs.

There seems to be little doubt that the Cult of the Rac was so fervently embraced by the general population that the quantities of the gases and other substances they released had the decisive effect on transforming the chemical characteristics of the air, war and soil. The Rac or Elibomotua, therefore, contributed in a major way toward the prized objective of a totally re-made and transformed natural environment.

In summary, our evaluation of both the Nacirema's enormous environmental alterations and their artifacts lead us to conclude that they were probably responsible for their own extinction.

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