

HANSENOLOGIA INTERNATIONALIS

The Tenth Anniversary of the "Lunar Lepers"

EDITORIAL

Today, the 20th of July 1979, the tenth anniversary of the most dramatic and most widely publicized technological feat in History is being celebrated and commented on all over the world. On July 20, 1969, at exactly 4:18 PM, American Eastern time, Neil Armstrong informed Houston, Texas, that the "Eagle" had landed on Tranquility Base. Six hours later the surface of the moon was showing its first human footprints and the American Stars and Stripes was raised in the name of Mankind and Peace.

The return trip was no less thrilling, with an additional microbiological "suspense"! Would the astronauts bring back some unknown lunar bacterium or virus to afflict an immunologically unprepared Mankind? A quarantine was arranged, tests were made, nothing was found, soon Armstrong, Aldrin and Collins were liberated to receive a most deserved triumphal welcome.

But the word "quarantine" itself was not sensationalistic enough for the press. It was necessary to keep the world's excitement at its highest, and the magic "leprosy" was immediately thought of to make the plan work.

"A prison for the conquerors of the moon. "Lunar lepers" — so will Neil Armstrong, Edwin Aldrin and Michael Collins be considered when they arrive in the Pacific this afternoon. If there

is any form of life in the moon, Armstrong and Aldrin..." "That's why it is important to isolate..." "Their contacts with the external world will be made by telephone or through double thick glass..." (Brasil)

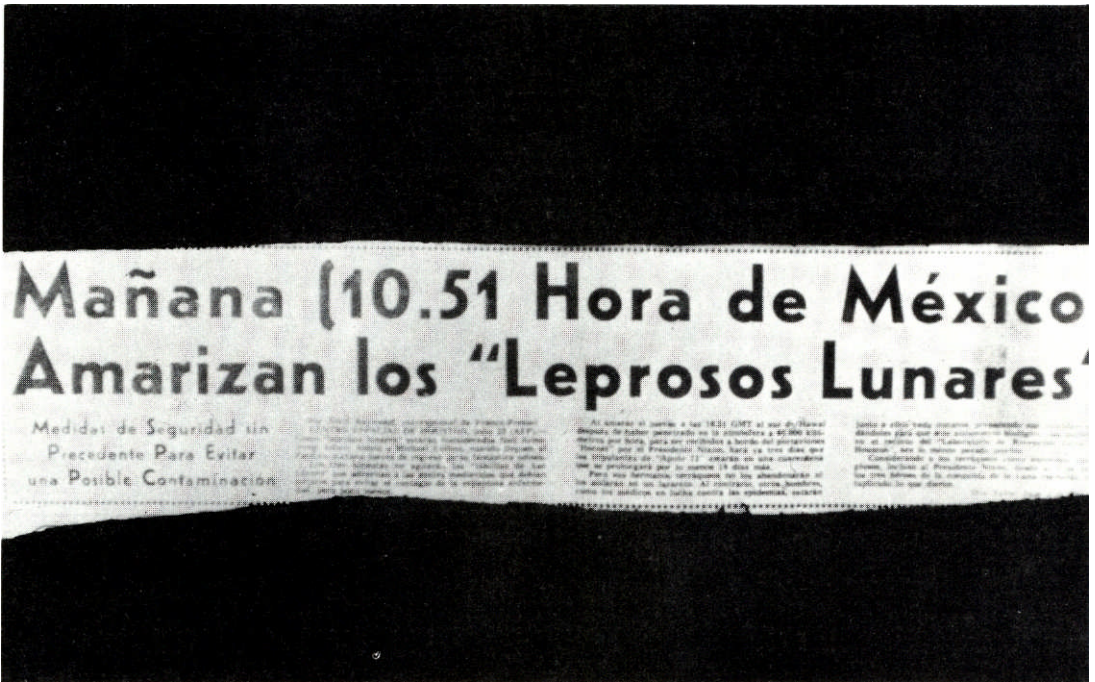
"Tomorrow, 10.51, the 'lunar lepers' land. Exceptional safety measures to prevent a possible contamination" (Mexico).

The world's most spectacular astronomical accomplishment had also become the most spectacular counter-educational blow in the history of public health.

Evidently, newspaper men do not read the conclusions and recommendations of our international and local Congresses ; or else, are not willing to relinquish the sensationalistic and profit-making powers of the words "leprosy", "leper" and "isolation", merely for the sake of that suffering, endemic and stigmatized fraction of Mankind in whose name the Apollo-11 completed its memorable mission ten years ago.

This example deserves the careful attention of those countries which still insist in giving status to the word "leprosy" and in facing the tremendous counter-educational powers of the international communication media.

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* Courtesy of Dr. Amado Saul.
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