

Juliano Moreira (1873–1933): Founder of Scientific Psychiatry in Brazil



At the beginning of the 20th century, the Afro-Brazilian doctor Juliano Moreira, adopting many of Kraepelin's ideas on classification, started a theoretical renovation of Brazilian psychiatric ideas, which up to this point had a marked French accent. In 1903, he was invited by the new republican government to take charge of the National Mental Hospital. While serving there as director, he undertook an ambitious project of renovation, which changed considerably the way the asylum operated. Under his influence, for example, lumbar puncture started to be done in Brazil, as a "modern" way of diagnosing cerebral syphilis and other neuropsychiatric disorders (1).

Moreover, he devoted much time to the study of cross-cultural psychiatry (Kraepelin's "comparative psychiatry"). He especially investigated dementia caused by syphilis, concluding, against dominant views, that the racial condition would neither immunize against nor favor the emergence of such condition. According to him, regardless of climate or race, "dementia paralytica" (and mental disease in general) was equally present in every human being, due mainly to factors related to previous health conditions, concomitant diseases, and sociocultural status (2).

In Moreira's time, most Brazilian intellectuals endorsed racial biases and prejudices regarding medical and scientific ideas (3). This was not the case for Moreira, who took a clear and courageous stance, both personally and scientifically, by carefully investigating mental diseases in the different Brazilian ethnic groups and fighting the intense and widespread color prejudice of his time.

References

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