

PSYCHIATRY

Segregation Causes Negro Mental Illness

► SEGREGATION and the uncertainty accompanying cultural change are blamed for a greatly increased rate of mental illness among the Negroes of Virginia.

The charge that segregation is driving the Negro mentally ill is made by Dr. David C. Wilson, psychiatrist of the University of Virginia Hospital in Charlottesville, and Miss Edna M. Lantz, statistician for the Virginia State Department of Mental Hygiene and Hospitals, in a report to the *American Journal of Psychiatry* (July).

The Negro rate of first admissions to the state hospitals in proportion to Negro population is increasing and is now more than double the rate for whites and greatly increased over what it was in 1918-1925.

It has been said, the authors explain, that mental illness among the Negroes is due in the main to feeble-mindedness, alcoholism and epilepsy. But, they found, when admissions for these causes are not counted for either whites or Negroes, the picture of excessive mental illness among the Negroes and its increase in recent years remains the same. Actually, Negroes have a rate of admission because of alcoholism less than half that for whites.

The Negro in Virginia, state the authors, is far better off economically and legally than ever before, but he is more closely segregated. He has lost the security of his own culture and is moving rapidly toward a middle class white culture. This period of uncertainty and close segregation parallels the increase in the rate of Negroes admitted to the state hospitals, especially for schizophrenia.

"It seems to us most reasonable to believe," the scientists declare, "that the preponderance of mental disease in the Negro over the white man and its increase in ratio to Negro population in Virginia is due to segregation and to the period of uncertainty accompanying culture change."

Science News Letter, August 3, 1957

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