

Juliano Moreira: the black Brazilian who greatly influenced the modern school of Neurology in Brazil

Juliano Moreira: o brasileiro negro que influenciou profundamente a escola de Neurologia no Brasil

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ABSTRACT

Juliano Moreira was a black Brazilian physician, well recognized for his role in the foundation of scientific psychiatry in Brazil; however, little is known about his influences on modern Neurology. Our aim is to highlight Moreira's importance in the field of Neurology and his role in the development of scientific and medical societies in Brazil. We describe his contributions from his doctoral thesis in 1891 to his 27-year tenure as the director of the National Hospice for the Insane. We also review Moreira's role in the foundation of societies including the Brazilian Academy of Sciences and the first Brazilian journal dedicated to Neuropsychiatry, concluding that Moreira was one of the most important influential figures for the development of Neurology in Brazil. In addition to his influences on various medical fields, Moreira distinguished himself as an impactful citizen who fought against racist and xenophobic medical theories of his time.

Keywords: Juliano Moreira; History of Neurology; School; Neuropsychiatry.

RESUMO

Juliano Moreira foi um médico negro brasileiro reconhecido por seu papel na fundação da psiquiatria científica no Brasil; no entanto, pouco sabemos sobre sua influência na Neurologia moderna no país. Nosso objetivo é destacar a importância de Moreira no campo da Neurologia e seu papel no desenvolvimento de sociedades científicas e médicas no Brasil. Descrevemos suas contribuições desde sua tese de doutorado, em 1891, até a sua atuação durante 27 anos como diretor do Hospital Nacional de Alienados. Revisamos também o papel de Moreira na fundação de sociedades como a Academia Brasileira de Ciências, e da primeira revista brasileira dedicada à Neuropsiquiatria, concluindo que Moreira foi um dos mais importantes influenciadores para o desenvolvimento da Neurologia no Brasil. Além de sua ampla influência no campo da medicina, destacou-se como cidadão brasileiro, lutando contra teorias médicas racistas e xenófobas de seu tempo.

Palavras-chave: Juliano Moreira; História da Neurologia; Escola; Neuropsiquiatria.

Born in January 1872 in Salvador, Bahia, Juliano Moreira (Figure 1) is probably one of the most important influential figures for the modern schools of neurology and psychiatry in Brazil. He was the son of Galdina Joaquina do Amaral,

enslaved at the residence of the Baron of Itapua^{1,2}. Moreira joined the Medical School of Bahia (FAMEB) in 1886 at the age of 14, two years prior to the abolition of slavery in Brazil.¹ In 1890, he entered the clinic for dermatology, and for the

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study of syphilis which profoundly influenced his future medical interests. He graduated the following year at the age of 19, with a thesis on syphilis, refuting climate and racial factors as determinants of disease severity^{3,4}.

The advances in Moreira's learning regarding mental illness resulted in his appointment as assistant chair of Clinical Psychiatric and Nervous Diseases. In 1896, Moreira competed for a position as substitute lecturer in the Nervous and Mental Illness Department of FAMEB. Perhaps the best way to elucidate the situation Moreira faced would be to quote the man himself: "I intend to conquer the seat of substitute for the chair which is why, recognizing myself devoid of the external gifts that attract the favors of chance, I will never be at ease during the exciting and sometimes spectacular procedures of a tender"^{1,5}. At the age of 24, not only was Moreira approved for the position, but he secured first place, receiving the maximum score from the judges. In 1903, he took charge of the National Hospice for the Insane (NHI) in Rio de Janeiro, which he directed until 1930^{2,6}.

Moreira is well recognized within the field of psychiatry in Brazil; however, his influence in modern Neurology is little discussed. Hence, our aim is to highlight Moreira's importance in the field of Neurology and his role in the development of scientific and medical societies in the country.

Moreira first demonstrated his inclination towards Neuropsychiatry in his doctoral thesis "Etiology of Early

Malignant Syphilis"³. In this work, Moreira identified a gap in the study of syphilis related to the causes that made the disease more severe in some patients, and refuted the widespread theory that syphilis was more prone to transmission and malignancy in the tropics due to climate and racial factors⁶. On his 1896 thesis for the substitute lecturer position entitled "Arsenic Dyskinesia", Moreira described the neurological manifestations of arsenic poisoning⁵.

Moreira also contributed with his writings and role at *Gazeta Médica da Bahia* (GMB), one of Brazil's first scientific medical journals. From 1893, he published several articles on neurological consequences of syphilis and other nervous diseases⁷. Moreira became editor of GMB in 1896 and editor-in-chief in 1901⁷.

From 1903 until 1930, Moreira was the director of the NHI, considered as the place where the practice of neurology began in Brazil^{2,6,8}. During this period, the NHI underwent a series of renovations with the creation of new pavilions. Of note, Antônio Austregésilo, the regarded precursor of modern Brazilian neurology, was appointed in 1904 as the person in charge of one NHI pavilion⁹.

Another of Moreira's important contributions was the creation of the journal "Arquivos Brasileiros de Psiquiatria, Neurologia e Ciências Afins" in 1905; the first Brazilian publication specializing in Neuropsychiatry. Later, the journal changed its name to "Arquivos Brasileiros de Psiquiatria, Neurologia e Medicina Legal" following the foundation of the Brazilian Society of Neurology, Psychiatry, and Forensic Medicine in 1907 of which Moreira was the director until 1933¹⁰, and to "Arquivos Brasileiros de Neurologia e Psiquiatria" in 1917¹¹ which during five decades had wide-ranging influences on Brazilian Neurology.

Moreira was one of the founders of the International League Against Epilepsy in Budapest in 1909¹², and was elected full member of the National Academy of Medicine of Brazil in 1903, acting as its vice-president from 1922-1923, and 1925-1933¹. In May 1916, Moreira participated in the foundation of the Brazilian Academy of Sciences (ABC) and in 1917 he became its vice-president until 1926 when he became president (1926-1929). Moreira received Albert Einstein in Brazil in 1925, taking lunch with him during a visit to the NHI. Einstein, who was implacable in his diary notes, was very impressed by Moreira (Figure 2)¹. For a detailed description of Moreira's contributions, see Supplementary file.

Despite all his medical contributions, Moreira struggled to be accepted as a black authority in a racist society in a time just 10 years after the abolition of black slavery in Brazil. In his doctoral thesis, Moreira rebutted the concept of race hierarchy and that native and black people were negative factors of miscegenation⁴, openly criticizing implicit racist theses on the inferiority of black people as being more vulnerable and severely affected by the disease⁴.

Some authors consider that the neuropsychiatric scientific movement was initiated in Brazil by Moreira, since



Source: Memorial Professor Juliano Moreira, Salvador, Bahia.

Figure 1. Juliano Moreira, the young neuropsychiatrist from Bahia.

bei ungeheurer Hitze. Ventilatoren nicht mehr fühlbar. Reden kürzer als gewöhnlich.

11.5. Besuch im Irrenhaus, dessen Direktor ein Mulatte und besonders vorzüglicher Mensch ist. Bei ihm brasilianisches Mittagessen mit viel Pfeffer und deutscher Frau. Dann Besuch bei Ministern, die gottlob meistens abwesend waren. Dann photographieren. Grosse Kinovorführung des Indianerlebens und deren vorbildliche Kultivierung durch General Rondon, einen Menschenfreund und Führer ersten Ranges. Endlich Abendessen im Hotel, gegeben von deutschem Gesandten. Dann noch viele Briefe und Unterschriften. Endlich frei, aber mehr tot als lebendig.

A. Einstein Archive
5-255

"Visit to the hospice whose director is a mulatto and a particularly virtuous person. With him, Brazilian lunch with lots of pepper and a German woman. Then, visit to ministers, thank God that most of them were absent..." We present the English translation of Einstein's diary entry regarding the meeting with Moreira on May 11, 1925.

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Figure 2. Excerpt from Albert Einstein's South America travel diary.

before him, miscegenation and heredity were considered to be the primary sources of most mental illness¹³. Moreira scientifically refuted xenophobic theories which stated that some mental and infectious diseases were climate-related, attempting to use those pathologies to prove a somewhat biological inferiority of non-white people¹⁴.

FINAL REMARKS

Moreira greatly influenced psychiatry and neurology in Brazil. Of note, Antônio Austregésilo worked under the direction of Moreira at NHI, participating in societies, academies and journals alongside him. Therefore, if not the founder of

scientific neuropsychiatry, he is certainly one of the most important influential figures for the establishment and development of Clinical Psychiatry and Neurology in Brazil.

We conclude by quoting this great black Brazilian's first speech as a substitute lecturer at the age of 24, when Moreira said, "In days of more light and humanity, the external fog will no longer come to the line of account." We hope these days of more light might come soon.

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Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, who coincidentally is a neurologist, were developing a storytelling activity about eminent Brazilian scientists from the past. During the activity, we "discovered" Juliano Moreira as a very important Brazilian scientist in ABC files (as we have discussed in the paper, Moreira was one of the founders and former president of this important scientific academy), and we were surprised about his contributions to the field of neuropsychiatry and neurology, and by the fact that none of us from a University in southern Brazil had ever heard about him and his role in neurology. Thereafter, our interest in Moreira's work rose with time while reading his works and works about him. We discussed our idea for writing this paper with Ingrid Lorena da Silva Gomes, a young physician recently graduated from Universidade do Estado da Bahia, who was familiar with Moreira's biography, and she joined us in the journey that culminated in the current paper.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

The following material is available online for this article:

S1. Search strategy for the historical note.

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