

NATIONAL NEGRO HEALTH WEEK

"The time has come when the health of the colored man should not be looked upon as a question for the Negro but as a problem for both races." In these words Major R. R. Moton accurately expressed the attitude of intelligent people toward the health of the Negro at a recent conference in Washington, D. C.

While much more can be done by the Negroes themselves than has been done by them, it is by no means a strictly Negro problem. Indeed, white people are more responsible than Negroes for the present high death and sickness rates of the Afro-American population. It is because of industrial discrimination that relegates black people to the lowest paid ranks of labor, and housing segregation with its consequent disease breeding, that the black population suffers from a death rate twice as high as that of the whites. Colorphobia of the white population renders it difficult for the Negro to extricate himself from this dilemma. Disease does not discriminate.

It is encouraging and laudable, of course, to find prominent Negro educators, physicians and insurance officials attempting to relieve the situation. It is quite time that the problem attracted their attention. Very little, of course, is accomplished by setting aside special weeks for everything from babies to bananas, save to focus the attention of the group and the nation on the fact that such things are of importance. That good health is important hardly needs to be stressed. However, the National Negro Health Week will do no harm and may do some good. We hope it will.

Such work, however, should be going on the entire year. There is no reason why every Negro community should not have a clinic with a paid staff to carry on educational and preventative work. Any Negro community that can afford a church should have a clinic. Every person should know as much about his body as he does about the streets in his neighborhood. An intensive educational campaign in every community under local auspices would do much to free Negroes from the great economic losses due to illness and death, and liberate the masses from their present abject slavery to useless, if not injurious, quack medicines.

This work requires and should have the support and co-operation of the white people in every community, and the most effective argument to use in gaining their support is the economic one. For instance, it can be easily shown by the most casual Negro investigator that the whites themselves lose money because of the deplorable health of the black citizens, and the conditions that give rise to this situation.

Social psychologists tell us that the intelligence of a crowd is that of its most ignorant member. The same is true with the prosperity of a community; its health is that of its least healthy group. Ten thousand Negro workers working 2,600,000 days per annum at an average salary of \$4 a day, have a total consumptive power equal to \$10,400,000. That is to say that these workers can consume food, clothing, shelter and amusements worth that much. If a thousand of these workers are incapacitated through sickness for a per capita average of twenty days a year, the consumptive power of the Negro community has been reduced by \$80,000. Every death of an able bodied worker means a loss to the community of over a thousand dollars on the basis of a 260-day year at \$4 a day.

Again, assuming that the total income of our hypothetical community is ten million dollars per annum on a basis of ten thousand workers and a total population of fifteen thousand, and that the death rate is 20 per 1,000 per annum, the total number of deaths will be 300. If each funeral, including the doctor's bill, costs \$500, the total loss in consumptive power (from the viewpoint of local merchants) will be \$150,000. Considering the fact that the Negro death rate is usually twice that of the white death rate, then the total loss in consumptive power to the community, over and above the normal loss, will be \$75,000. For a community of 150,000 Negroes the loss will be \$750,000. Thus in cities like Baltimore, New York, Washington, Memphis, New Orleans, St. Louis, Philadelphia, Louisville, Atlanta, Birmingham, Norfolk and Jacksonville, it can be plainly seen that the community loses a fortune through the bad health of the Negro population. For the country at large the total loss in dollars and cents is tremendous. And mind you, all this has nothing to do with the loss in productive power of the community. Verily, good health pays. Looked at from

another angle, a Negro ghetto where deplorable health conditions exist and the death and sickness rates are twice or thrice as great as among the white population, constitutes a great menace to the whites. Germs are democratic—they know no color line. They assail white and black alike. A germ will fly from a sick Negro to a healthy white man with admirable and un-American impartiality. The relations between the two races are close, both before and after sunset. It is quite logical to assume, therefore, that the white death rate might not be so high in some localities if it were not for the unusually high rates in the black ghettos.

These are the sort of arguments for Negroes to use in seeking to gain the support and co-operation of the white people with money and authority in various communities. Talk in dollars and cents and you will get immediate attention and assistance. Only threats against pocketbooks and lives is instantly heeded. No person wants to lose either. The white merchants who are deaf to appeals in the name of Jesus Christ will incline their ears readily enough when it is pointed out that their attitude is costing them a half million dollars or so every year that might otherwise be spent over their counters. Nor will they remain impassive when the close relation between bad housing and health and a big tax rate is indicated. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure and \$10,000 spent for health education through lectures, clinics and sanitary inspection may save a community \$100,000.

Such constructive propaganda can be freely broadcast by Negroes in every community (even the worst towns) without fear of reprisal. It will help both whites and blacks. It will create understanding and not antagonism. It will be fundamental and not palliative or futile. Problems are solved by going to their roots. If those interested in bettering the health of the Negro population will bring home to the rest of America just how much is lost in cold cash by the present conditions, we shall doubtless bring our death and sickness rates down to at least the level of the white population in the next five years.