

Zoot-Suit Epidemic

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The Science News-Letter

He added that he appreciated fully the need for leaving enough doctors at home to care for the civilian population. He quoted Gen. Eisenhower as saying

that the outstanding service of the whole A.E.F. was that rendered by the medical department.

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reduce interest in the Zoot-Suit movement on the part of the young people who are appealed to by it, Dr. Redl pointed out.

The movement now appeals to youngsters of a special type and social and economic background whose needs are obviously not covered by any of the official adult-dominated youth organizations and agencies. And, Dr. Redl said, it is the beginning of the only spontaneous youth movement so far appealing to these young people.

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PSYCHOLOGY-SOCIOLOGY

Zoot-Suit Epidemic

Movement is widely scattered over the United States without an official organization, but occasionally flares up in certain areas.

► THE "ZOOT-SUIT" movement which caused serious difficulties with Navy, Army and other service groups in Los Angeles, exists in widely scattered localities over the United States, but flares up unexpectedly in "epidemic forms" in certain places and at certain times, according to a group of scientists who have studied the Zoot-Suiters in Detroit. Cities that have been most worried about them include besides Los Angeles, New York, Washington, D.C., and Detroit.

The Zoot-Suiters appear to be without any sort of official organization, although it had a distinct "uniform" even before it became a movement, Dr. Fritz Redl, of Wayne University's School of Public Affairs and Social Work, said in a report of the "Subcommittee on the Study of the 'Zoot-Suit' Movement" to the Detroit Association for the Study of Group Work.

At times the gangs are very loosely held together, if they exist at all, the members being merely a haphazard lot of jitterbugging youngsters. Then suddenly they may "congeal" into a unified group for intensive and sometimes threatening fighting such as is reported from Los Angeles.

The zoot-suit, originally just a dress fad intended as a part of the jitterbug dance, has become the visible signal for concerted action. It is, according to the report, "definitely a symbolic expression of potential unity of attack."

When the epidemic rages in a locality, according to the scientists, not only do more boys and girls join the jitterbugging Zoot-Suiters, but their behavior becomes more vehement and intense.

"The original basis of dance enjoyment seems to be brushed aside by an interest in tough-guy behavior, in alcoholic excesses, in rebelliously manifested freedom of inhibition in social relations with the other sex."

Although they have developed their own brand of double-talk language,

which they make a point to use only in addressing each other, the Zoot-Suiters have a tendency, the scientists state, "toward reckless extension of the freedom of behavior even toward non-members" and "get in trouble through doing so."

This would seem to have happened in Los Angeles, where servicemen have resented this "freedom."

The scientists have also observed trends "toward disturbance of the establishment they enter, and of immediate cohesion when attacked, toward violence and destruction on a large scale (tearing up plush seats, etc.) and toward the provocation of closed fights with local boys, bouncers and police.

The Zoot-Suiters include both white and colored groups and deterioration into gang vehemence and destructive orgies have occurred in both groups, the report states.

Warning against hysterical condemnation of all young Zoot-Suiters, because of present difficulties with service men in Los Angeles, was voiced by Dr. Redl in an interview.

Not all the youthful wearers of the zoot suit are criminals or delinquents, Dr. Redl emphasized. Among those who affect this peculiar dress are three entirely different groups, hard for the outsider to tell apart.

1. This group includes the enthusiastic jitterbugs who find the orgies of this wild form of dancing a release to restless emotions.

2. Another type of Zoot-Suiter wears this sort of clothing as a chronic sort of irritation in the age-old friction between youth and adult. To them the zoot suit is merely a clothing fad.

3. But there is some delinquent gang formation under cover of the zoot suit either for general destructiveness or for more or less organized crime.

To glamorize the Zoot-Suiters by hysterical over-excitement and notoriety or over-condemnation is not the way to

ENGINEERING

Carrier for Torpedo Boats Would Stow Them in Hold

► MOST AMBITIOUS among the war-like inventions recently patented is a carrier craft for motor torpedo boats, analogous to an airplane carrier. This design is submitted by Carl T. Forsberg of New York, who has received patent 2,319,855. It provides stowage space for a number of deadly, swift little vessels in the hold of a broad-beamed ship. A control elevator lifts them out when action is imminent, and an overhead track crane carries them outboard and lowers them into the water.

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CHEMISTRY

Sea Water Made Drinkable; Two Chemicals Remove Salt

► THIRSTY MEN on life rafts will be able to produce safe drinking water from the sea, thanks to a new method perfected by the Naval Medical Research Institute at Bethesda, Md., and announced officially by the Navy.

Developed for use primarily on rubber life rafts carried on aircraft, the new method utilizes two chemical compounds, the composition of which is not revealed. These two chemicals are compressed into bars of soap size. Four plastic bags, each a quart in size, are needed to perform the chemical reactions that remove the salt and make the water drinkable.

Under life-raft emergency conditions, 11 times as much drinkable water as chemicals used is obtained.

The Navy credits the discovery of the process of removing sodium salts from sea water to Lt. (j.g.) Claire R. Speakman and Lt. William V. Consolazio, volunteer specialists, U.S.N.R.

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