

Exclusive Interview—

# A NEGRO BUSINESSMAN SPEAKS HIS MIND



Will racial demonstrations, now spreading across the nation solve the Negro's problems? Is the Negro actually a "second-class citizen"? If so, who is to blame—the white man? You get unexpected answers to these and other questions from a leading Negro businessman. He is S. B. Fuller, interviewed in Chicago by a member of the staff of "U. S. News & World Report." His conclusions: A Negro, like anybody else, can get ahead only by hard work and enterprise.

At CHICAGO

**Q** Mr. Fuller, are the doors of opportunity closed to the Negro in America today?

**A** No, I don't think so. The Negro has the same rights that other people have in America—

**Q** In what way do you mean?

**A** He has a right to vote, he has a right to start a business for himself, and he has a right to find a job, providing there's anybody that he can sell his service for. But he has to learn to use those rights.

**Q** Did you find it possible to get ahead?

**A** Yes, indeed. I left Louisiana at the age of 15 years with a sixth grade education. My people moved to Memphis, Tenn., and we lived there for eight years. Then I hitch-hiked my way to Chicago. I got a job here and found out that I could not get ahead working for somebody else.

In 1935 I had \$25, and I took the \$25 and bought some soap and started selling soap door to door. And from that \$25, it developed into this business today.

**Q** Did you find racial barriers difficult?

**A** No, because I sold my own people my own product.

**Q** What is the value of your sales annually, would you say?

**A** This year, it will run about 10 million dollars.

**Q** Do you have markets in the South, too?

**A** We have markets in the South for the colored only. We don't have any markets in the South where we sell to the whites. But we have white customers in the North.

**Q** Has that market grown much in recent years?

**A** Yes, it has a constant growth. We continue to buy out other companies if we find a white company having financial problems, we buy it out. Then we keep the white employees and add to the colored payroll.

**Q** How many employees do you have altogether?

**A** We have on our direct payroll about 600 employees.

**Q** How many of those are white?

**A** About 20 per cent of them are white. And in our door-to-door selling, we have about 3,000 people selling and about 500 of those are white.

**Q** Is there any friction? Do white persons seem to resent working for you?

**A** No, the white people here are calling integration and giving the colored people.

**Q** What do you mean by that?

**A** Here in our organization, the white people are very sensitive about being treated as inferior in our organization. They are more concerned about discrimination than the Negroes are.

One thing that I had in my organization is this: If I don't watch very closely, the Negro bosses here will discriminate and hire all Negroes and no whites. I'm constantly watching them to see that they hire people on their merit and not on the color of their skin.

**Q** Would you say, then, that racial discrimination is found among all races?

**A** It is a universal human trait, and people are so afraid they can do so, at a profit. When it becomes unprofitable, they forget it.

Here in our organization, it pays the white population to discriminate against the Negro, and they don't. But the Negroes will discriminate against the white people because they are trying to get the white people out of some of their well-paying jobs and put some Negroes in them.

**Q** In what way do they try this?

**A** If a white man applies for a job, and it usually the Negro knows if the Negro supervisor will not hire him. He'll hire another Negro.

**Q** In general, what do you think is the answer to the race problem in this country?

**A** Well, the problem is one the Negro has to work out himself. Negroes are not discriminated against because of the color of their skin. They are discriminated against because they have not anything to offer that people want to buy.

The minute that they can develop themselves so they excel in whatever they do, then they are going to find that they don't have any real problems.

An example is baseball. There was discrimination in the big leagues. But when the owners of the big leagues found out that Negroes could play just as well as whites, discrimination in the big leagues ended as far as Negro players are concerned.

