

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 glad 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 do it. 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 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.



Editorial Debrah Davis Photos

Mr. Fuller inspects operations at his cosmetics plant in Chicago

S. B. Fuller, at 58, has reached a level of business success attained by few men—white or Negro. In addition to the Fuller Products Company, which produces a nationally known line of cosmetics and allied products, he controls eight other corporations. Among them is a department store in Chicago, a real estate trust in New York, and the "Courier" chain of newspapers serving Negro readers in Chicago, New York, Detroit and Pittsburgh.

Born of poor parents in Louisiana, Mr. Fuller went to school only as far as the sixth grade. Moving to Chicago as a young man, he started the Fuller Products Company in 1935 on capital of \$25. Today its gross sales come to more than 10 million dollars a year. While he opposes the views and tactics being used by "militant" Negroes, Mr. Fuller describes himself as an "integrationist"—pointing out that many of his employes are white.

Q Is there any justification, then, for Negro complaints about their lot in life?

A They have some legitimate complaints, but not very many. They will find that you cannot sit a man and make him want to live just due to you. You've got to sell him the idea that you are just as good as he is, by performance. You must perform well in your job. You must train your young boys. You must keep your community as clean as the white man's community. You must keep up the home as well as he does.

Q If the Negroes have not done these things, why is that?

A I don't think that the Negroes have been taught enough concerning this. Remember this, the Negroes have been free for 100 years, but during that time, the white man has not told Negroes the truth. He has always taught the Negroes that they were at a disadvantage. He never told Negroes that they should do business for themselves, that they should clean up their own community and that they should accept community responsibility.

He has never told him this in plain English. Nor has the white man told Negroes what the white people say about the Negro when the Negro is not near. They say what they should start doing—telling Negroes at that point, and that they say about them in their absence.

Q Do you mean omitting the unfavorable comments about Negroes?

A Yes, if it's bad, then tell them.

Q Are the racial demonstrations doing any good?

A The demonstrations have made the white man know that the Negroes are displeased. But he knows that in the first place. Beyond that, I don't think they have done any good. To find they have done harm in the picture they give of Negroes.

Q Will the demonstrations continue, do you think?

A Oh, they will go on as long as they get publicity from it. When they don't get any publicity, they will die out. I don't think the demonstrations will ever be a real, lasting member of the Negro.

Q Are the white people going to object if the Negroes are to be free to go anywhere as a whole?

A Yes, they will object if the Negroes are to be free to go anywhere as a whole.

they were speaking for the Negro people as a whole, you'd find more Negroes demonstrating. As it is, those who are demonstrating and "sitting in" are a very small minority of the Negroes.

Q Are the Black Muslims really important in the Negro community?

A No, they are not. The Black Muslims have a very small organization. It is badly organized and its members are loyal to their cause, but their number is very small.

Q Why is it that we hear so much about the frustrations of the Negro?

A It's because they have been played up so much on the television, on the radio and in the newspapers.

Q Do you ever hear of militant Negroes calling you an Uncle Tom?

A No Negro calls me an "Uncle Tom." He can't call me "Uncle Tom" because I employ white people. And "Uncle Tom" never employed any white people.

Q What about the charge of some militant Negroes that Negro moderates are subservient to whites?

A I think that that is very dangerous, it is an attempt to muzzle free speech. I think that every man should have a right to his own opinion. I may disagree with him, but I believe he's right to say it.

They are more moderate than we hear of, but some are about to give their opinion. They are being misled, they are being misled in speaking out.

Q Do you find any other Negro businessmen getting ahead in the same way that you did?

A I find a few, but I don't think you should. Negroes are doing so because no one has set down and told them of the possibilities of doing something for themselves.

Q What about the argument that it is the white man or society that is to blame for the Negro's problems?

A The crime that you find in that is, the mistakes were made by the people of Harlem, and the mistakes made by the people of Harlem. I don't think you should blame the white man.

There was only one time that you should blame the white man, that is, the time that you should blame the white man, that is, the time that you should blame the white man, that is, the time that you should blame the white man.

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