

Dr. Solomon Carter Fuller

Horatio Alger, Jr., a prolific 19th-century American author from Natick, Massachusetts, wrote boy's adventure stories whose heroes lead exemplary lives to strive and succeed in the face of adversity, poverty, good and evil. Their goal was to achieve the American Dream. Wealth and success were often attained through hard work, courage, determination, and concern for others. Had Alger waited two decades to document such histories, he would have found an ideal character living only a few miles away in Framingham.

Solomon Carter Fuller, an immigrant from Liberia, West Africa, worked vigorously and achieved to a degree that would even have astonished Alger. However, Alger may have paid no attention, for Fuller was not a poor boy to begin with. Fuller was the grandson of John Lewis Fuller, a slave who bought his freedom in Virginia and emigrated with his wife, a former white indentured servant, to Liberia. It is there where John Fuller entered into the tobacco and brick making business working his way to prosperity. The first Solomon Fuller, John's son, became a large landowner as well as a government official in Liberia (McNarmara 26). Therefore, the second Solomon grew up under privileged circumstances, receiving his early education at the school located on his

father's plantation. Solomon Carter Fuller's unique perspective then is that he can be characterized as a young man of his time who traveled by boat at the age of seventeen from Liberia to America in pursuit of further education and perhaps the opportunity to become a great scientist. His interest in medicine stemmed from his maternal grandparents who were medical missionaries in Liberia (Kaplan & Henderson 251). Fuller accomplished both goals despite the fact that he lived during a time when the professional development of black people was not encouraged. He persevered to attain the best training available in order to make important contributions to the field of neuroscience.

Born only seven years after the end of the American Civil War, Solomon Carter Fuller came to America in 1889 when it was time for him to enter college. He enrolled into a black institution known as Livingstone College in South Carolina (Terry 1). Despite new-found liberties, blacks were essentially left to their own devices without land, money or an education. The late 1800s and early 1900s were particularly repressive years, as rights gained during Reconstruction were stripped away and violence was all too frequent. It is in this climate that Solomon Carter Fuller pursued his education and a career in psychiatry.

After graduating Livingstone College in 1893, Fuller entered the Long Island College Hospital Medical School studying for a short time before transferring to Boston University School of Medicine where he earned his medical degree (Graves 23). A two-year internship brought Fuller to Westborough State Hospital, an affiliated organization of Boston University, where he joined the staff and subsequently developed an interest in the mental and neurological conditions of psychiatric patients. In order to gain

knowledge about the underlying nature of diseases that he observed clinically, Fuller performed the unpleasant task of autopsy so he could collect and analyze tissue sections from deceased mental patients. As a result of this work, Fuller was appointed Pathologist to the hospital upon completion of his internship, and became an instructor of Pathology at Boston University (Kaplan & Henderson 252).

Opportunities for advanced research in the area of senile dementia were minimal at the turn of the century. In Fuller's quest to advance his technical skills in the origin, nature and course of brain diseases, he turned to Edward K. Dunham, professor at Bellview Hospital Medical Center in New York City. It is with Dunham that Fuller hoped to become informed of techniques in recording the histories of patients, gain further insight into the study of bacteriology and autopsy. In search of post-graduate education, Fuller soon saw the advantages of study abroad (Association American Medical College 127). According to Dunham and specifically outlined by Benjamin Franklin, the poor quality of medical education in the United States was due to the "attention of people to mere necessities in settling a colony" (Kaplan & Henderson 253). Research was viewed as a luxury of the time, lacking cultural advantages. Therefore, journey of 15,000 Americans between 1870 and 1914 to Germany and Austria for progressive medical education and training (Kaplan & Henderson 252) became a reality. Fuller was part of this group who traveled abroad in 1904 to the University of Munich where he became one of five foreign visiting students serving as an assistant for brain research to Alzheimer.

Little documentation of Fuller's experiences in Germany is available as assistants like Fuller spent their time immersed in work in hospitals and laboratories conducting

research while receiving no credit for their work. Alzheimer was the only truly recognized neuropathologist in his lab; his assistants were subordinate to him in their pursuit to demonstrate and prove any connection between physical anatomy and mental illness. Notwithstanding, Fuller took every advantage for learning. He described Alzheimer as “a delightful unassuming person who was a poor lecturer, but when you spend time with him in the lab and on the wards, you learned the stuff” (Kaplan 43). Fuller brought the wealth of information learned in Munich back with him to the United States in 1905 at which time he resumed his role as Westborough State Hospital’s neuropathologist (Hayden 24).

In 1908, Dr. Fuller met Meta Vaux Warrick, and after a brief courtship, the two were married making their home in Framingham where they raised their three sons, Solomon III, Perry James and William Thomas. Originally from Philadelphia, Meta Vaux Warrick was a recognized sculptress and a renowned individual in the Harlem Renaissance. She studied in Paris where her work was praised by Auguste Rodin. Even after their marriage, Meta kept on with her sculpting, and eventually had a studio located a short distance from the house where she worked and taught. Cofounder of the Dramatic Club and active in church affairs. She was a pioneer like her husband only her interests were related to the creation of religious dramas as well as the women’s suffrage movement. Both husband and wife respected each other’s career and interests (Karp 1). They led a formal lifestyle with meals around the dining room table. Their home became a lively gathering place for black intellectuals and professionals for, other than private homes, there were few places where black



people could gather. Often visitors came to the Fuller home to gain a sense of balance and strength (Graves 24).



Fuller's balance and strength not only emerged in his personal character, but in his reputation as pioneer in the area of senile dementia. The demand for his expertise was sought by many institutions including Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts and the Veteran's Hospital at

Tuskegee, Alabama. Clark University had become the center of study of psychology in the United States. It was the director and biology professor of the institution, G. Stanley Hull, who was impressed with Fuller's material on autopsy and, therefore, looked toward Fuller to incorporate human pathology into their courses since their focus had solely involved that of animal study. The university sponsored a conference that simultaneously occurred at the time of Sigmund Freud's only visit to America (Terry 2). Pictured at the conference are the distinguished American and foreign psychologists and psychoanalysts of which Fuller is the only African American. In Alabama, Fuller helped to develop the Veteran's Hospital for the purpose of providing medical care for black veterans in the segregated south. While Fuller did not work at the hospital himself, he was instrumental in training the black psychiatry staff, thus further opening the door of opportunity for blacks in the field of psychiatry. It was Fuller's lifelong passion to, "both teach and to search out the causes of things" (Graves 81).

In 1919, Fuller transferred his research activities to Boston University Medical School. His resignation from Westborough State Hospital and move to BU laboratory

was a natural progression of events since Fuller taught pathology courses in Boston University's Department of Neurology and Psychiatry (Kaplan & Henderson 257). As the only African American on the medical school faculty, Fuller was not officially placed on the payroll nor did he possess the formal title of head of the Department of Neurology despite the fact he assumed this position in his last five years at the university. When a white assistant professor was appointed to a full professorial position and named head of the department, Fuller retired after thirty-four years of service. Fuller had never been of the character to embrace publicity. He always believed that "his work would tell in the end" (McNamara 27). He certainly was adverse to sympathy as he viewed life "as a battle in which we win or lose. As far as I am concerned, to be vanquished, if not ingloriously is not so bad after all" (Hayden 35). While the first of his race to become a psychiatrist in America, Fuller was not only dismayed that he was regarded as an excellent black psychiatrist. Even his pride did not preclude him from recognizing that, "with the sort of work I have done, I might have gone farther and reached a higher plane had it not been for my color" (Kaplan & Henderson 260). Retirement allowed Fuller an opportunity to continue a practice in psychiatry in his home in Framingham. In his practice he treated patients regardless of color or ability to pay. Patients from Boston to Western Massachusetts sought his expertise.

At the time of Fuller's death, the only acknowledgement of his work was an Honorary Doctor of Science Degree awarded in 1943 by his alma mater, Livingstone College. It was not until October, 1973 that a one-day tribute to Fuller was held as part of the Boston University Medical School centennial celebration. Donations were made during this occasion to cast a small bust

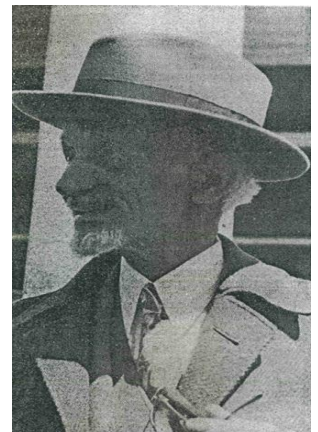


of Fuller sculpted by his wife. In 1974, the university opened the Dr. Solomon Carter Fuller Mental Health Center by an act of the Massachusetts Legislature. The Center was designed to provide facilities for psychiatric outpatient services, community education and research. Decision to honor Fuller was made because of his dedication to advances in



neuropsychiatry and his interest in promoting better health care for minorities and the poor (McNarmara 29). From the time of Fuller's initial settlement in Framingham, Massachusetts in 1908 to the late 1900s, the demographics of Framingham changed drastically. Now a richly diverse community, the opening of a new middle school spurred an investigation by the town for a proper dedication of an institution of learning. On Sunday, April 4, 1995, the Fuller Middle School was dedicated, honoring the contributions of both Dr. Solomon Carter Fuller and his wife Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller whose home had stood around the corner from the school (Mont, The Tab, January 24, 1995).

Fuller's life would not permit racism to quench the resolve and commitment to a productive life in medicine and research. Instead of wasting and consuming emotion about the inequities of his life, Fuller persevered in order to obtain the best training available to allow him to become a pioneer in neuroscience. He brought a shift in psychiatric leadership and productivity from Europe to the United States where it rests today. Fuller traveled the road bringing him from immigrant status to socially accepted doctor of color at a time of segregation.



Five C's	PRIMES
<p>Context: Racism and Segregation Contingency: If Solomon's father had not had the means to educate him, he would not have been able to become a doctor Causality: Solomon was influenced by his interactions with medical missionaries at home in Liberia Change Over Time: Went from immigrant to socially accepted doctor of color at a time of segregation Complexity: A family of color was recognized intellectually and socially at a time of segregation</p>	<p>Religious: Fuller and his family were heavily involved in the church in their community Intellectual: Fuller advanced the field not just as a black man, but as an innovative psychiatrist Social: Fuller and his family helped bring about social changes for blacks in their community</p>

Annotated Bibliography

Association American Medical College (1932): Post-graduate medical education.

Medical education in Europe. In *Final Report of the commission on Medical Education*.

New York. Office of the Director of Studies, pp. 122-140. 288-379.

At the turn of the 20th century when Solomon Carter Fuller sought to expand his education in the area of pathology, little opportunity existed in the United States for research and exploration. This report of the Association American Medical College recounts the circumstances of the times and need for study abroad.

Graves, James (1995): *Dr. Solomon Carter Fuller: Gladly would he learn and gladly teach*. Bostonia, Fall, 22-25, 81.

James Graves, in Bostonia, the alumni magazine of Boston University, quotes from Chaucer to characterize Solomon Carter Fuller. This tribute article exposes the reader to the unique character of Fuller whose passion for learning was transferred to his students. The varied interests beyond medicine are shared including Fuller's abilities in Latin, photography and gardening. From Liberia to the United States to Munich the reader follows Fuller on a journey through the life of this remarkable man.

Hayden, Robert C. (1992): *Eleven African American Doctors*. Frederick, MD, Twenty-First Century Books, pp 18-35.

Hayden's book chronicles the achievements of eleven Afro-American physicians, including the achievements of Solomon Carter Fuller, all of whom made significant contributions raise the country's health standards through medical practice, research, or teaching. In regard to Fuller, the book reports his many achievements in the United States and abroad. This book is one in a series of books about, "Achievers – African Americans in Science."

Kaplan, M.(2005). *Solomon Carter Fuller: Where my caravan has rested*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

To provide the reader with some insight into the life experiences that influenced and motivated Dr. Fuller, the book traces his family history from the days of slavery to the 1950s, crossing North American, African, and European culture. This biography is an important addition to black history and to the history of medicine, not only for its account of a man whose achievements were many, but also for its portrait of what it was like to be a black in the days of slavery, during the colonization of Liberia, and as a husband, father and physician in early 20th century white America.

Kaplan, M. & Henderson, A.R. (2000). *Solomon Carter Fuller, M.D. (1872 – 1953): American Pioneer in Alzheimer's Disease Research*. *Journal of the History of the Neurosciences*, 9, 250-261.

The appointment of Alois Alzheimer to Emil Kraepelin's clinic and laboratory at the Royal Psychiatric Hospital, University of Munich in 1903 offered new opportunities for clinical and pathological studies of the brain. In 1904, Alzheimer selected five foreign visiting students as his assistance, among whom was an American, Dr. Solomon Carter Fuller. A brief account into Fuller's background, his research in the field of senile dementia along with his experience in Germany and his standing in the field of neuropsychiatry are recounted.

Karp, Marvin. *Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller: A Brief History of Her Life and Work*. African American Heritage Committee of the Framingham Historical Society, 1985.

This brief history provides a window into the life of Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller, wife of Solomon Carter Fuller. Living in Framingham for more than fifty years, the reader learns about her rich and talented life as a wife, mother and sculptor. Her many achievements, including the bronze bust commissioned by Boston University Medical School in honor of her husband are told. We learn of her work in church affairs, drama clubs and the women's suffrage movement.

McNarmara, Owen J. (1976). *Solomon Carter Fuller*. Centerscope, Boston, Boston University School of Medicine, Winter Addition: 26-30.

McNamara focuses on the recognitions and tributes paid to Solomon Carter Fuller. The Dr. Solomon Carter Fuller Mental Health Center located adjacent to Boston University Medical School is highlighted in terms of its planning and dedication. The article credits not only Dr. Fuller for his outstanding work, but also his wife, Meta, for her dynamic work in pursuit of her own separate career.

Mont, Joseph: *Middle school gets a name: Unanimous vote to honor first black psychiatrist*. The Tab, January 24, 1995.

The former South High School in Framingham reopened as a middle school to ease overcrowding at the Walsh Middle School, September, 1994. Mont's article reviews the process the School Committee followed in finding the name for the new middle school. Recognition of both Dr. Solomon Carter Fuller and his wife, Meta Warrick Fuller is the focus of the news release which also provides backgrounds of the prominent couple who lived on Warren Street near the school throughout the early 20th century.

Terry, W. Scott (2008). *A Missed Opportunity for Psychology: The Story of Solomon Carter Fuller*. Association for Psychological Science, Volume 21, Number 6.

Among the well-known psychologists hailed for their work are innovators such as Ivan Pavlov, Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. The contributions of these men, while originally rooted in other disciplines, are of considerable interest. While psychology generally acknowledges Francis Cecil Sumner as the first African American psychologist, psychiatry has acknowledged Fuller as the first African-American psychiatrist. This article acquaints the reader with the work of Solomon Carter Fuller.