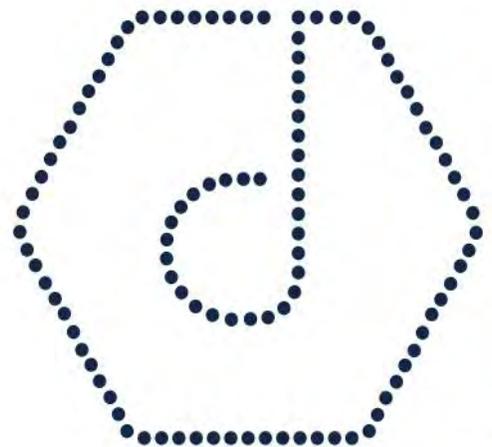




# Dignity For All

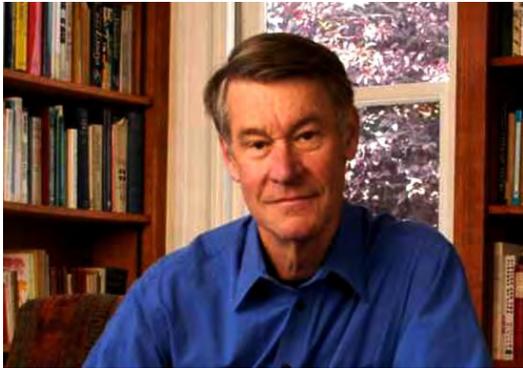
**Robert W. Fuller**



**DIGNITY**



## “DIGNITY IS NOT NEGOTIABLE”



**Robert W. Fuller** is an international authority on, and a leader of, the **Dignity Movement**. His books identify the root cause of indignity as **rankism**—discriminatory or exploitative treatment of people who have less power due to lower rank. Fuller helps organizations overcome rank-based abuses that undercut productivity and performance. He advocates for universal dignity and shows how to create a dignitarian culture in businesses, non-profits, schools, and universities.

After earning his Ph.D. in physics at Princeton University in 1961, Fuller taught at Columbia University and co-authored the text *Mathematics of Classical and Quantum Physics*. The mounting social unrest of the 1960s drew his attention to educational reform, and in 1970 he was appointed president of Oberlin College at the age of 33.

In 1970 Fuller traveled to India as a consultant to Indira Gandhi, and, on a return trip, he witnessed the famine resulting from Bangladesh's war of independence from Pakistan. With the election of Jimmy Carter, Fuller began a campaign to persuade the new president to end world hunger. His meeting with Carter in the Oval Office helped lead to the establishment of the Presidential Commission on World Hunger.

During the 1980s, Fuller traveled frequently to the USSR, working as a citizen-scientist to improve the Soviet-American relationship. This led to the creation of the nonprofit global corporation Internews, and for many years Fuller served as its chairman.

With the end of the Cold War, Fuller began reflecting on his career and came to understand that he had, at various times, been a somebody and a nobody, and the cycle was continuing. He had been sought after by the media in his 30s, had met with presidents and prime ministers in his 40s and 50s, but as a former professor and former college president, he was a nobody. Fuller's periodic sojourns in “Nobodyland” led him to identify and investigate rankism and ultimately to write two ground-breaking books on the subject.

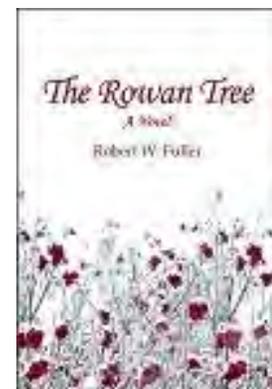
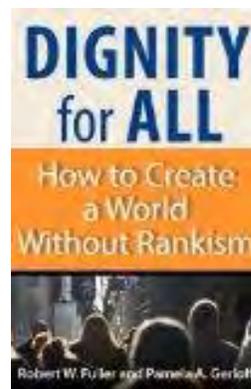
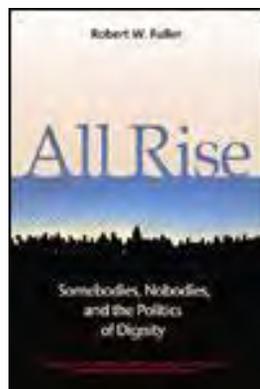
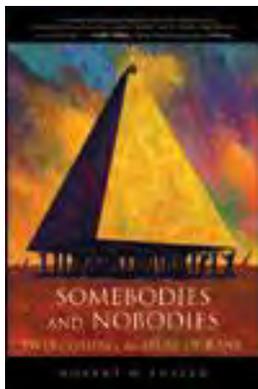
He has also written for *The Huffington Post* and *Psychology Today*, and these posts have been compiled into ebooks: *Religion and Science: A Beautiful Friendship?* and *From Genome to Wenome: The Key to Universal Dignity*. Fuller recently published *The Rowan Tree: A Novel*.

Fuller's books on dignity and rankism have been published in India, Bangladesh, India, Korea, and China. His ideas have been widely covered in the media, including *The New York Times*, NPR, C-SPAN, *The Boston Globe*, the BBC, Voice of America, and *O, The Oprah Magazine*. In 2004, Fuller was elected a Fellow of the World Academy of Art and Science. He keynoted the 2011 National Conference on Dignity for All in Bangladesh.



## ROBERT W. FULLER—ACCLAIMED AUTHOR

Fuller has written the definitive books on rankism and dignity. In *Somebodies and Nobodies: Overcoming the Abuse of Rank*, and in *All Rise: Somebodies, Nobodies, and the Politics of Dignity*, he eloquently makes the case that rankism is the chief remaining barrier to full organizational effectiveness. He has recently published a novel—**The Rowan Tree**—about the spread of the dignity meme through the world.



## FIND OUT MORE ONLINE

[WWW.ROBERTWORKSFULLER.COM](http://WWW.ROBERTWORKSFULLER.COM)

[WWW.BREAKINGRANKS.NET](http://WWW.BREAKINGRANKS.NET)

[WWW.ROWANTREENOVEL.COM](http://WWW.ROWANTREENOVEL.COM)



## WHAT ARE PEOPLE SAYING ABOUT ROBERT W. FULLER'S REVOLUTIONARY BOOKS?

*Robert Fuller's ideas about rankism changed my personal behavior. I think they will change the world in time.*

- Steward Brand, Global Business Network, founder of the Whole Earth Catalog.

*A wonderful call to action against the spillover of status.*

- Roger Fisher, author of *Getting to Yes*.

*Occasionally an author comes along who makes us see the world around us in a totally new way. This book is an eye-opener that we can all learn and benefit from in our daily lives.*

- Jeremy Rifkin, President of the Foundation on Economics.

*All Rise gives us a clear mandate for transforming our society into a true democracy.*

- Rosalind Wiseman, author of *Queen Bees and Wannabees*.

*A wonderful and tremendously important book on an 'ism' far more encompassing than racism, sexism or ageism. Rankism must be our prime target from now on in. Viva Fuller!*

- Studs Terkel, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Working*

*If only all the problems in the world were just about money, or land, or religion, or racism. But in fact, they're about power. All of these things are just excuses for the ugly tendency of those in power to abuse those without it. Worse, power often seduces the powerless as much as it corrupts the powerful. Robert Fuller exposes these ugly dynamics—and in exposing them, helps to make them easier to overturn.*

- Esther Dyson, Internet guru, Editor *Release 1.0*

*Watch for a Dignity Movement against rankism that, like the civil rights and women's movements, will transform American life—in the boardroom, the schoolroom, the bedroom and, a lot sooner than we might think, at the ballot box.*

- Jerry Greenfield, co-founder Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream, trustee Ben and Jerry's Foundation

*The quest for recognition, especially by those who lack status, has long been seen as one of the driving forces of human history. *Somebodies and Nobodies* explains how recognition, or its absence, affects your life, and what we can all do to make sure that we treat each other with the dignity we each deserve.*

- Francis Fukuyama, Senior Fellow at Stanford University's Institute for International Studies, Author of *The End of History*

*Fuller gives us the essential tools to fight abuses of rank and to build high-performing institutions and organizations based on respect.*

- Wes Boyd, Co-founder of MoveOn.org



# “ROBERT FULLER WAS AN ENGAGING AND DYNAMIC SPEAKER—HE OPENED OUR EYES TO THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF DIGNITY AND RANKISM IN OUR WORLD TODAY.”

— *John Steiner Transpartisan Chair, Reuniting America*

## SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

*Robert W. Fuller is a recognized authority on the topics of dignity and rankism. He is an impressive and engaging speaker, with substantial proposals that can significantly impact your organization's performance. He has inspired people around the world with his message—an illuminating look at how rankism and dignity affect our daily lives. Organizations, universities, and companies seek out Fuller's insights into how to create and maintain a culture of dignity.*

*His presentations are filled with keen insight on how to fight abuses of rank and build high performance organizations based on respect. With verve and intelligence, Fuller helps his audience chart a path toward an evolved society where human dignity is assured. He describes how to build dignitarian organizations and a dignitarian society. Fuller gives audiences an experience that they will never forget, and leaves them with tools to enhance dignity for people regardless of where they stand in the organizational hierarchy.*

*Fuller has captivated audiences around the world, appearing in hundreds of venues in North America, Europe, Australia, China, India, and Bangladesh.*

## CREDENTIALS

- Ph.D. in physics from Princeton University
- Taught physics at Columbia University
- President of Oberlin College
- Chairman of Internews, a global nonprofit organization
- Profiled in *The New York Times*, *O Magazine*, *The Boston Globe*, and *NPR*
- Notable author of *Somebodies and Nobodies: Overcoming the Abuse of Rank* and *All Rise: Somebodies, Nobodies, and the Politics of Dignity*
- Speaker at Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Columbia, Stanford, Microsoft, Kaiser Permanente, Wells Fargo, LinkTV, C-SPAN, and many other venues
- Co-authored the classic textbook *Mathematics for Classical and Quantum Physics*



## **OFT-REQUESTED SPEAKING TOPICS**

- Dignity for All: A Unifying Value
- Democracy's Next Step: Building a Dignitarian Society
- Liberty, Justice, and Dignity for All
- Somebodies and Nobodies: Closing the Dignity Gap
- Model-Building: Key to a Dignitarian World

## **SOME ORGANIZATIONS WHERE FULLER HAS SPOKEN:**

- Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore, India
- Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Paris
- Conference on World Affairs, Boulder, CO
- Global Business Network, New York City and San Francisco
- Microsoft Corporation, Redmond, WA
- Society for Ethical Culture, New York City
- Treasury Executive Institute, Washington D.C.
- TEDxBerkeley
- Wells Fargo, San Francisco, CA
- Kaiser Permanente, California (HMO)
- Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Australia
- Harvard, Stanford, Yale, Princeton, George Mason, Northwestern, McMaster, York University, Penn State University, University of Michigan, University of California, University of Virginia
- Center for Therapeutic Justice, Williamsburg, VA
- National Association of Graduate-Professional Students (keynote speaker, 2013)
- Vancouver Public Library: Necessary Voices Series, Vancouver, B.C.
- Seattle Town Hall
- National Center for Institutional Diversity, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI
- Press Club, Dhaka, Bangladesh
- Esalen Institute, Big Sur, CA
- Center Point Energy, Houston, TX
- National Headquarters of the United Methodist Church, Washington D.C.

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**Telephone:** (510) 841-0964



THE OPRAH  
MAGAZINE

# How to Balance your *crazy* life

A whole new way  
to feel centered

**Emotional Checkup**  
How are you—  
*really?*

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know *now*  
that you  
wish you  
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What women  
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# R-E-S-P-E-C-T

Some people get it, some don't. It's not fair...but is it inevitable? Is bullying—between men and women, young and old, higher-ups and lower-downs—wired into us? **ELAINA RICHARDSON** sits down with a man who insists that “dignity is not negotiable.”

**HOW DO YOU CHANGE THE WORLD?** How do you release an idea into the air, an idea so potent that it alters the way we all behave, rewrites laws, makes us see that imbalance, whether personal or geopolitical, stems from one fundamental cause? When it comes to social revolutions, there doesn't seem to be a eureka moment, except maybe in our own personal narratives. Think of racism, and Rosa Parks saying no in a moment of monumental bravery that echoed through the entire nation. And once our conscience is awakened, there's no going back. Can you imagine, for example, walking into a bar and being told you wouldn't be served a drink unless a man accompanied you? Outlandish, right?

While it would be dangerously naive to imagine that we've overcome racism or sexism, we have dragged them into the light of discussion, they have been legislated against, and they have been given a name. Back in the 1960s, if a boss had patted my mother on the rump by way of “Good morning” (as I'm sure more than one did), she wouldn't have known what to call the behavior. She might even have been confused about whether it constituted an insult or a compliment. Flash-forward four decades, and you have my

11-year-old daughter's generation, ready to say “Hey, that's sexist!” faster than you or I can say “Whoa.” If something pernicious has a name, it's easier to draw lines around it.

Sexist, racist, elitist—just ask any politician if these epithets sting. Now, according to the author Robert W. Fuller, we all have a new one to learn: *rankist*. This is the term he's coined for what he says is the mother of all social injustice. He has just published a book, *Somebodies and Nobodies: Overcoming the Abuse of Rank* (New Society), the goal of which is to make it “okay to discuss the uses of power with those holding positions of authority, with an eye toward distinguishing between appropriate and inappropriate uses of power.”

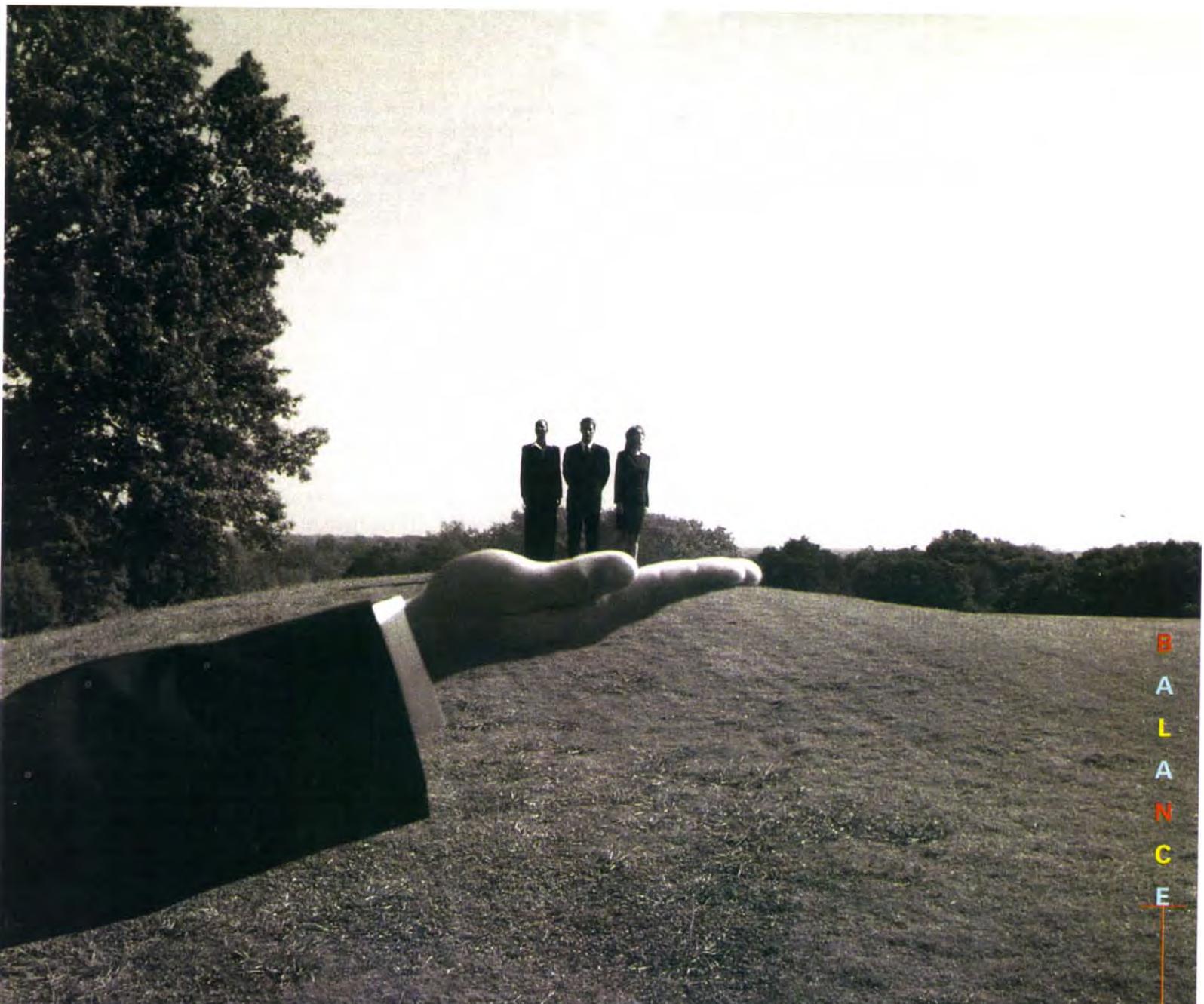
His bottom line is not that rank itself is bad. He makes it very clear from the start that he thinks humans differ greatly in talent and skill levels and that hierarchical arrangements are the best way we've found to manage our lives. What he means by *rankism* is a sort of worldwide epidemic of kicking the dog, a perpetual habit of abusing those we perceive as being lower on the ladder and of being abused by those above. A soccer mom yelling at her kid on the sideline, an executive

telling his assistant to skip lunch and go pick up his dry cleaning, a tenured professor taking credit for research done by a grad student—all of this is rankist and has to stop.

Rankist behavior can be found at every stage in an organization; it's not always the CEO who's the culprit. One of the most cringe-making examples I've heard of took place at the lowest rung: A magazine intern arrived for her first day on the job as chically put together as she could be. She had agonized about her outfit all

## How do you release an idea

weekend, trying things on and pulling them off again, before finally settling on a black suit with a cream T-shirt and a long silk scarf draped around her neck. When she reported for duty, she was assigned to an assistant editor, just a year or two older than herself, who'd only been employed for a few months. The assistant's workspace was crowded, with papers, books, and CDs everywhere. It was clear they would be busy. What wasn't clear was why the assistant took a cold look at the intern in her smart new clothes and then ordered her to go under the desk



## into the air, an idea so potent that it alters the way we all behave?

and organize the morass of papers stored there. She was not to pull the material out and sort it elsewhere, she was to *stay* under the desk until it was all done. Apparently, in the hours it took, the assistant sat at the desk talking on the phone, swinging her legs back and forth, occasionally kicking the intern as she spun. When I was first told this story, I was so shocked I laughed. But my revulsion was nothing compared

**Rankism allows us to crush those lower on the ladder.**

to what the former intern must feel every time she recalls that morning. Fuller believes we've

allowed this kind of discrimination to flourish because it seems disconnected from race or age or sexual orientation—seems, in fact, just the way things are. His goal is to have us identify such humiliations so that they can be ended. Put simply, his thesis is that none of us will live balanced lives until we fully embrace the principle that “dignity is not negotiable.”

HERE'S WHAT I'VE READ ABOUT BOB Fuller before we meet: He's tall (which he figures is the main reason he was appointed president of Oberlin College when he was

just 33 years old). He's married, the father of four grown children, and lives in Berkeley. He has had a varied work life, moving from professor of physics at Columbia University to the Oberlin presidency to advocate for justice. And he's messianic on the topic of somebodies versus nobodies, a subject that I realize I've hitherto not really thought about and that is making me strangely uneasy. It sparks memories of Marlon Brando in *On the Waterfront*, mumbling out those great loser lines: “I coulda been a contender. I coulda been somebody, instead of a bum, which is >

what I am....” It makes me recall a story my mother loved to tell about her father’s great ability to socialize up or down the chain of class. He was a milkman, doing his rounds in a horse-drawn cart, able to curse with porters and say, “Lovely day, ma’am” to ladies. This fact invariably makes me ache—his chameleon charm sounding undignified to me, as if he was always false, always a flatterer, afraid to be simply himself.

When I do meet Fuller, I’m struck by how easy he is in his own skin, the way spiritual people often are. He’s a speed runner and has the lean frame the sport demands, making him appear younger than his 66 years. He also has enormous curiosity, asking questions that are honed to find out how you got to be whoever it is you are. He conveys trust, confidence, and the quiet assurance that comes from

these are not small-potato questions.

The attitudes behind our personal behavior—this sort of sucking up to those we perceive to have authority and brushing off of those without—have a part to play in corporate corruption, school dropout rates, even in terrorism. This might seem far-fetched, but what Fuller argues is that “the notion of rankism is the bridge that links two revolutions of the 20th century—civil rights and human rights.” At the macro level, equal dignity translates into social policy. “The non-negotiable demands of a dignitarian movement are likely to include,” Fuller writes, “a living wage, universal healthcare, and quality education for all.” At the level of daily life, what Fuller is promoting is shockingly simple: “The fact that life isn’t fair doesn’t mean we have to be unfair to each other.... We don’t want authority

teases out this idea, I become defensive about my character, a bit like J.Lo—*Used to have a little, now I have a lot.... I’m still Jenny from the block*. So that’s one element of the unease he’s stirred up—I’ve sometimes feared in my life that I might be a fake, that I might not deserve the good fortune that’s come my way.

But what’s new and startling to me is this: While I might not be prone to either bullying or toadyism, by coveting “high status for the perks and protections it offers,” I’ve played my part in holding up the edifice of rankism. Here’s Fuller’s explanation: “We covet the rewards that come to the somebodies of the world, so we’re willing to endure a lot for a shot at the life we see them leading—even if that shot is a long one. Should we, by hook or crook or sheer luck, acquire fame and fortune, then we too could insulate ourselves

## “If life isn’t fair, it doesn’t mean we have to be unfair to each other.”

many years clearing a path through one’s own prejudices and assumptions.

*Somebodies and Nobodies* (which Fuller first titled *The Nobody Manifesto*, until one publisher too many turned it down on the grounds that “nobodies don’t buy books”) was many years in the making. As Fuller explains it, “In the early ’90s I found myself studying the arc of my own identity and its periodic crystallization into something specific and marketable, and those much larger times when it was diffuse and unmarketable.” He began to see that issues of rank, of where he stood in the social order, not only governed whether or not he could get his phone calls returned, but went to the heart of the social advocacy that had come to dominate his life.

“It started off very small,” Fuller notes, “but I finally realized that rank issues are everywhere—from my own treatment of my children to the medical office.” He suggests asking yourself these questions: Why is it that we “learn the names of our doctors, but not those of their assistants who schedule our appointments”? Why do we “expect our employer to pay our benefits and contribute to our social security, yet we do not provide the same for those who do household labor for us”? Taken to their inevitable conclusions,

over others half so much as we want to avoid subservience ourselves. Equal dignity both suffices and satisfies.”

**T**HE PRISM THAT I’VE ALWAYS seen life through is radically challenged by what Fuller says. I believed the ills of the world sprang from deep sources, with poverty, class, and race leading the list of demons. But I’d always presumed that one of the indicators that these forms of discrimination were being overcome was the fact that some of us had climbed the social ladder, broken through the glass ceiling, trail-blazed. I was the first in my family to go to college, the first to have a major job in one of the glamour industries (publishing) that granted endless perks, from hobnobbing with celebrities to a clothing allowance. I had made it past the velvet rope. I thought I was chasing what Brando gave up on—I was a contender, a somebody. According to Fuller, I am simply in thrall to the “somebody mystique,” and have fallen for the notion that there’s something superhuman about those who have high rank, whether they’re celebrities, politicians, old-fashioned aristocrats, or new-fashioned technocrats. In short, I’ve mythologized my own specialness in being the “one who made it.” As Fuller

from the cruelties of life.” What’s so bad about wanting that? Well, while Fuller repeatedly makes the point that he’s not against earned rank and appropriate use of authority, the problem is that nine times out of ten we try to freeze the cycle, to stay “somebody” forever (have you noticed how the most successful people cluster together at a party, bolstering each other’s status?), and that makes us prone to flattery and isolated from the conditions that might have inspired our success and creativity in the first place. Tommie Smith, the superstar American sprinter who took the gold medal for the 200 meter race at the 1968 Olympic games and famously gave the black power salute at the awards ceremony, sees it this way: “Somebody, nobody—in my time I’ve been both. Most of us have.” And if you don’t agree that sooner or later in life each one of us will be taken for a nobody, then Fuller suggests you pay a visit to a nursing home.

Fuller’s favorite example of the somebody-nobody paradigm is Einstein—whom he groups with Darwin and (this for me was a leap) Paul McCartney—because all of them had second acts to their lives and didn’t coast on their first fame. According to Fuller, Einstein “knew that he was ordinary” CONTINUED ON PAGE 243

but he knew his rank had been earned in physics and physics alone, and instinctively avoided the accompanying enticements of fame—declining, for example, the presidency of Israel.”

The lack of such awareness, Fuller argues, leads to hero worship and abuse of rank, the “mortar,” as he would have it, of the rankist world we inhabit.

Instilling respect up and down the chain of command so that we can rebalance our relationships in the workplace, at home, even in how we as a nation treat other nations, is an idea that is not new, of course; Fuller cites several pages worth of books to read that have touched on these ideas. But the prospect of a dignitarian movement that links all of these spheres *is* new. As we’ve seen, in everything from the anger over the abuse of power that Enron represents to the challenge to the Catholic Church’s authority, this is a movement that started before it had a label. Now Fuller has given the target a name. “That’s what victims of rankism need in order to protest it, that’s what links it to the other great protest movements,” he says.

What happens next? Fuller hopes that we’ve embarked on a decades-long conversation that will radically alter how we treat one another. “It’s going to be as unpleasant and as uncomfortable as was the conversation about sexism, and it will reverberate in the family, the bedroom, the boardroom, internationally,” Fuller says, smiling slightly to indicate that he’s aware how grandiose he sounds. This man who has set out, quixotically perhaps but with great sincerity, to improve the world glows with the sort of visionary fervor that comes from having seen a better tomorrow. As he sees it, we’re closing in on a time when we will view rankism “in the same way that most of us have now come to view racism and sexism—as behaviors no longer to be sanctioned. It is not hard to imagine a day when everyone’s equal dignity will be as self-evident as everyone’s equal right to own property or to free speech.” In my own story, understanding what Bob Fuller has seen definitely qualifies as a eureka moment. ☺

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#### R - E - S - P - E - C - T

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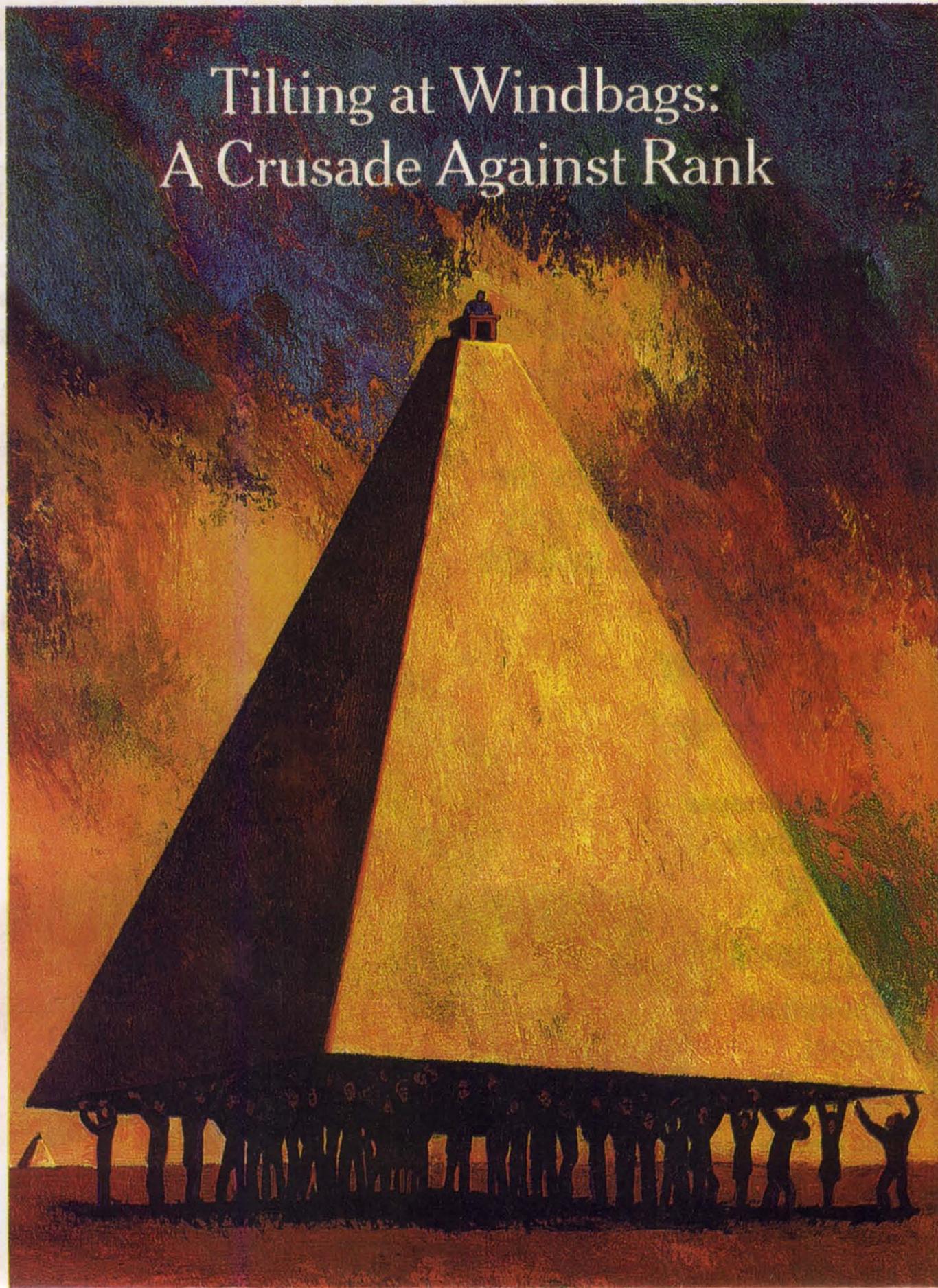
and didn’t fall for the somebody mystique about himself.” While Einstein was certainly “asking the right scientific questions,” Fuller emphasizes that Einstein was simply the first to make the right conclusions from the available data, not the only one equipped to do so. “Long after he’d ceased to hit any jackpots, Einstein kept trying to unify the laws of physics, but he was no more successful than others in the field. Similarly, after Darwin published his theory of evolution, his work did not stand out from that of the other researchers.... [Einstein] could easily have been seduced by celebrityization,

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*Elaina Richardson is a frequent contributor to O.*

The New York Times

## Tilting at Windbags: A Crusade Against Rank



Cover illustration of "Somebodies and Nobodies" by Robert W. Fuller, an expert on the nuances of status-conscious bullying. He calls it "rankism."

By JULIE SALAMON

Western society has denounced racism, sexism and anti-Semitism, mobilized against ageism and genderism, anguished over postcolonialism and nihilism, taken arms against Marxism, totalitarianism and absolutism, and trashed, at various conferences and cocktail parties, liberalism and conservatism.

Is it possible there is yet another ism to mobilize against?

Robert W. Fuller, a boyishly earnest 67-year-old who has spent most of his life in academia, thinks so, and

he calls it "rankism," the bullying behavior of people who think they are superior. The manifesto? Nobodies of the world unite! — against mean bosses, disdainful doctors, power-hungry politicians, belittling soccer coaches and arrogant professors.

"I wanted a nasty word for the crime, an unpleasant word, a stinky word," he said, referring to his choice of the word rankism. "Language is incredibly important in making political change. I always go back to that word sexism and how it became the catalyst for a movement."

Mr. Fuller wants nothing less than moral as well as behavioral account-

ability from the people in charge, whether of governments, companies, patients, employees or students. And he pitches his quixotic notion in a book, a Web site (breakingranks.net), in radio interviews and in lectures at universities and business gatherings that could be considered breeding farms for somebodies.

"The theory has the potential to explain many things we just ignore as a given," said Camilo Azcarate, Princeton University's ombudsman, who recently attended one of Mr. Fuller's lectures and bought several copies of his book to give to friends. Democracy and education should concentrate on creating virtuous citi-

## Calling all nobodies! It's time to stand up to pompous somebodies!

zens. This is exactly the kind of discussion we need to have."

Mr. Fuller began postulating these theories on the Internet several years ago, and then brought them together last year in a book called "Somebodies and Nobodies" (New

Continued on Page A19

# Tilting at Windbags: A Crusade Against Rank

Continued From First Arts Page

Society Publishers), published recently in paperback. He can't answer how, exactly, his lofty ideas might translate into political or legal action. "I don't see the form the movement will take," he confessed in an interview at his home in Berkeley. "But I don't feel too bad about it because Betty Friedan told me she didn't have any idea there would be a women's movement when she wrote 'The Feminine Mystique.' You need five years of consciousness-raising before you find the handle."

Ms. Friedan provided a blurb for his book. Other supporting blurbers include Bill Moyers, the political scientist Frances Fukuyama and the author Studs Terkel. So far the book has sold 33,000 copies (including bulk sales); and his Web site totals 2,000 to 3,000 visitors a week, his Web master, Melanie Hart, said.

Mr. Fuller's appeal nonetheless eludes some critics. In one of the few reviews of "Somebodies and Nobodies," Clay Evans, books editor of The Daily Camera newspaper in Boulder, Colo., was dismissive. Mr. Fuller's concepts, he wrote, "were old when Jesus was making fishers of men."

But with others, he has struck a chord. Among the 2,000 people who had downloaded a working manuscript of his were Mary Lou and Ann Richardson, two sisters living in Roanoke, Va. They were so inspired by that early version that they eventually met with Mr. Fuller after the book was published. The women, Ann Richardson said, had been taking care of an aging mother with Parkinson's disease and were distressed by how people's treatment of her changed after she lost her ability to speak. They were not happy with the way their siblings responded either.

"I couldn't believe that people who loved me could harm me because of the perceived rank they had in the family," said Ann Richardson, 46, who used to work as a customer services manager for a graphic arts company in Washington, and is now studying film and photography at Hollins University in Roanoke.

The sisters began their own Dignitarian Foundation, described on its Web site (dignitarians.org) as "an organization dedicated to promoting and protecting the intrinsic right to human dignity." Ann Richardson

said her motive was simple: "If I can help some people start believing in themselves, it would make the world a much better, more peaceful place."

This was not the role Mr. Fuller seemed destined to fulfill. Designated a math and science whiz kid, he entered Oberlin College at age 15, expecting to follow the path of his father, Calvin S. Fuller, a physicist at Bell Laboratories in New Jersey who was co-inventor of the solar cell. After Oberlin, Mr. Fuller accumulated credentials with breathtaking speed. By 18 he was enrolled in graduate school at Princeton. At 33 he was named president of Oberlin.

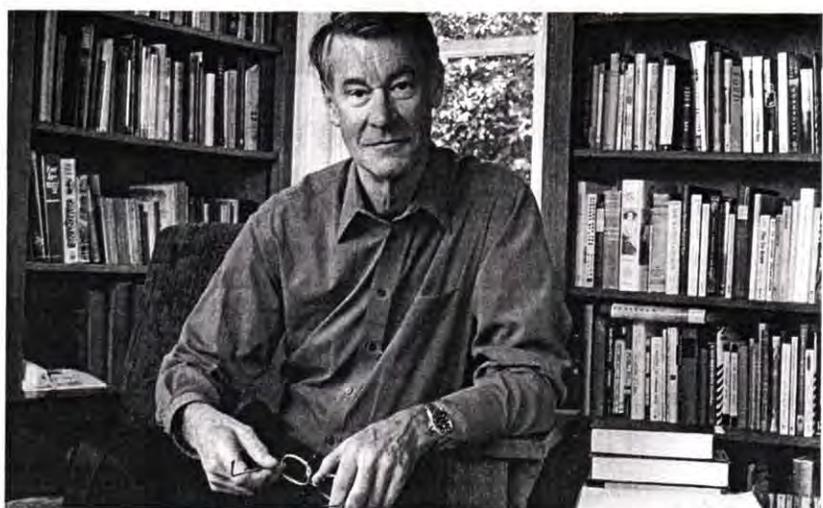
In between he learned about politics at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris and economics at the University of Chicago, helped write a significant physics text ("Mathematics of Classical and Quantum Physics" (Addison Wesley Publishing Company), taught at Columbia University, did a fellowship at Wesleyan University and was dean of faculty at Trinity College in Hartford.

His peripatetic intellectual ambi-

## Maintaining dignity in a world that's trying to put you down.

tions coincided with an era of social upheaval. Mr. Fuller left for Oberlin as an undergraduate in 1952, thinking Dwight D. Eisenhower was the perfect next president. By the time he returned to Oberlin as its president in 1970, he was ready to lead the college through the revolutions of the period — making changes in admissions policies for African-American students, abolishing course requirements, ending parietal hours.

Then, after 22 years on the academic fast track, he quit — at age 37. He left Oberlin and his first wife, with whom he had had two children, and traveled around the world for three months. Then he settled in Berkeley where, he said, "I sat still for two years, read 200 books and completely re-educated myself." Among other things, he began to realize his role model may have been



Robert W. Fuller, a lifelong academic who as a student was a wunderkind, at home in Berkeley, Calif.

his mother, Willmine Works Fuller. "She wasn't very concerned about social justice, but if someone tried to step on her toes, watch out," Mr. Fuller said, recalling a protest his mother organized against putting an airport near his hometown of Chatham, N.J. "She could not stand to be pushed around by those in authority or bullies." Nor was she particularly touchy-feely: she once kept her son confined to his room for 48 hours because he refused to eat his spinach.

He became obsessed with the nuclear arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union. "The bomb makes nobodies of all of us, that's how I put it now," he said. With a new wife, and eventually two more children in tow (a third wife would come still later) he began traveling through the Soviet Union, paying for the expeditions by giving speeches and raising money from philanthropists. Calling himself a citizen diplomat, he helped arrange televised discussions between Soviet and American scientists via satellite links.

"He believes it's possible to work through the cracks of the monolith," said Kim Spencer, formerly a producer for ABC News and now president of Link TV, a satellite network that features documentaries from around the world. Mr. Spencer worked with Mr. Fuller on the Soviet programs and remains a friend. "When I was putting together a TV network I had to go out for a walk

with Bob to see the bigger thing," he added.

In 1987, Mr. Fuller found a crucial advocate for his expensive self-discovery — Robert Cabot, a novelist and diplomat, but also heir to a family fortune. They traveled together to the Soviet Union, Afghanistan and China and together wrote a few articles. Mr. Cabot put money into some of Mr. Fuller's citizen-diplomacy projects, which always struggled for financing.

One day Mr. Cabot decided to become Mr. Fuller's patron. For 15 years he paid him to think — and to travel, expenses paid. No rankism there: Mr. Cabot included pension payments, which kicked in two years ago when Mr. Fuller turned 65.

How does Mr. Cabot feel about the way his money has been spent? "I am immensely gratified," he said. "I think we are witnessing an extreme abuse of rankism in Washington, D.C., right now. Our policy in the Middle East is rankism."

Mr. Fuller acknowledges that rankism is harder to pin down than other more apparent forms of discrimination — sex, race and disability. "We try to sniff how much power each of us has by asking: 'What do you do? Where did you go to school? Who's your husband?'" said Mr. Fuller. "It's like trying to find out if someone's gay or not, if they're a threat to us or if we can get away with abusing or exploiting them."

Mr. Fuller isn't calling for an end

to hierarchy, but neither is he simply asking for mere politeness. Yes, national leaders should refrain from cursing at one another in public places; executives should treat subordinates with respect. But more controversially, he would get rid of faculty tenure at universities, which he calls "an outdated sacrosanct privilege of a few somebodies held at the expense of many nobodies."

He urges people to remember that rank is mutable: you can be a nobody at work and a somebody at home, or vice versa. And, he points out, almost everyone eventually "gets nobodied."

The tall and lanky Mr. Fuller, whose presentation can be stiff and formal, doesn't rouse his audiences with smooth patter and startling revelations of abuse he's suffered. But his reflective, old-fashioned professorial approach to his sometimes glib, populist theories has been taken in some quarters as a refreshing whiff of sincerity in a skeptical age.

When he spoke at Mount Holyoke College last September, Andrea Ayvazian, dean of religious life, was surprised to see how mixed the audience was: students, faculty members, administrators, staff members and campus workers. "Bob's analysis freed people who considered themselves low in the hierarchy to tell their stories," said Dr. Ayvazian, who was a student of Mr. Fuller's 30 years earlier. "I saw this had struck a chord in unpredictable circles."

# Globe Careers



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## 'Dignity is not negotiable'

Ever have somebody make you feel like a nobody? That's rankism and it's time to make it stop, **ROBERT W. FULLER** writes

Organizations, like organisms, are vulnerable to maladies, especially those endemic to society as a whole.

As long as racism and sexism were undiagnosed and untreated at large, for example, many businesses proved to be hospitable hosts. But in the aftermath of the civil rights and women's movements, firms became alert to the symptoms of the afflictions. A company found harbouring either today must either fix it or lose business.

There's another malady, still generally unacknowledged, that's corrupting our society and, as a result, our organizations: rankism, the abuse of power by those higher up on the totem pole ("somebodies") against those lower down ("nobodies").

We see examples everywhere: A parent belittles a child. A teacher humiliates a student. A doctor intimidates a nurse. A customer demeans a waiter. A boss bullies an employee. There's corporate corruption, sexual abuse by clergy, school hazing, the abuse of elders.

Today, what primarily marks people for mistreatment and exploitation is not the traits that have singled them out in the past, but low rank and the powerlessness it signals. Indeed, hierarchies are all about rank and power, so it's not surprising that they've become incubators of rankism. The power vested in rank-holders at each level of a hierarchy gives them leverage over those of lower rank, shielding them from the consequences of exploiting subordinates.

The effects are no different than those of the other now-familiar "isms" based on race, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation: Abuse and discrimination are disrespectful, demeaning and degrading. They distort personal relationships, undermine trust, stoke resentment and indignation, erode the will to learn and tax productivity. And they

can cripple an organization, sometimes fatally.

But unlike the other isms, rankism plays no favourites, striking at all levels. Everyone's a potential victim. You can be a "somebody" at work and a "nobody" at home. You can be a "somebody" one day and a "nobody" the next.

In the workplace, rankist practices undermine creativity, productivity, customer service and employee commitment. The result: The victims — from day workers to the highest echelons of management — start withholding their hearts and minds and the enterprise begins to decline.

George Washington had that insight with respect to slavery, one of the most noxious forms of rankism. Today, the inefficiency of slavery is obvious. But to Washington, himself a slave-owner, it came as a surprise. While on a visit to Philadelphia, he noticed that free men there could do in "two or three days what would employ [his slaves] a month or more." His explanation that slaves had no chance "to establish a good name [and so were] too regardless of a bad one" was not that of a moralizer, but rather of a practical man concerned with the bottom line. Granted, employers aren't dealing with slaves now, though it is sometimes argued that wage-earners are wage-slaves and salaried employees are only marginally more independent. Some may suggest that rankism is simply human nature. But consider that not so long ago, it was widely believed that racism and sexism were deemed to be innate, and are now generally viewed as learned. As well, while the impulse to exploit a power advantage for personal gain is hardly uncommon in our species, history shows it is equally in our nature to detest such abuses and to act together to limit the authority of rank-holders.

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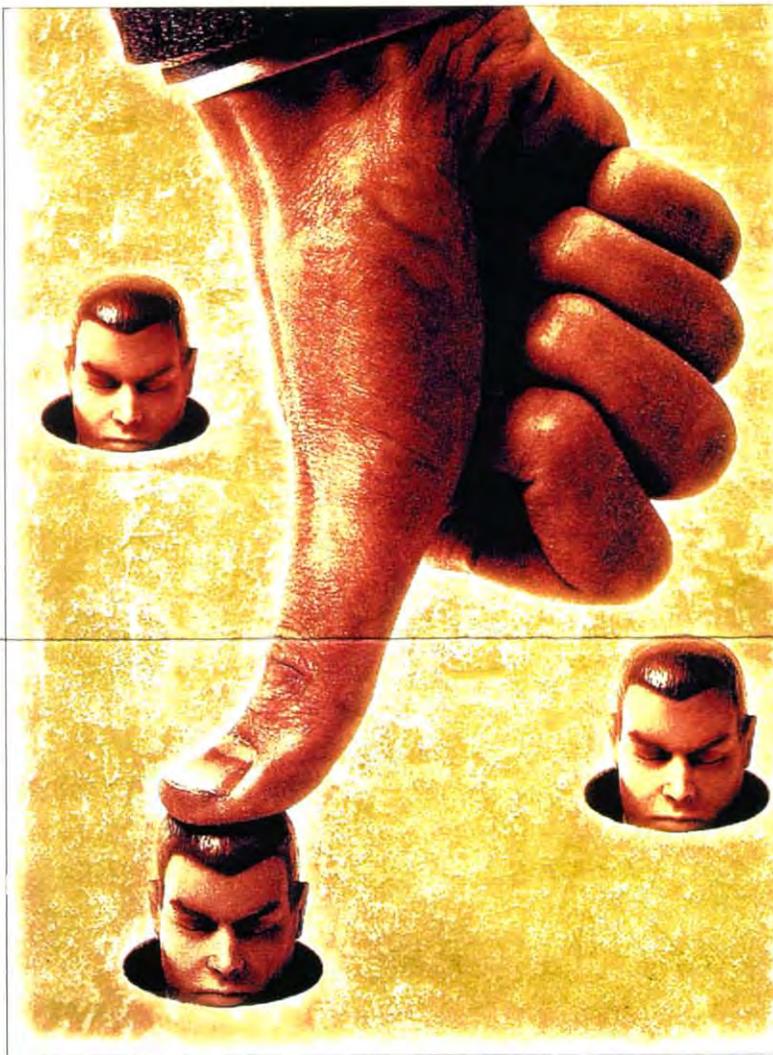


ILLUSTRATION BY ERIC FIELD/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

### The Nobody Manifesto

Who are the nobodies? Those with less power. At the moment.

Who are the somebodies? Those with more power. At the moment. Power is signified by rank. Rank in a particular setting. Somebodies hold higher rank than nobodies. In that setting. For that moment.

A somebody in one setting can be a nobody in another, and vice versa. A somebody now might be a nobody a moment later, and vice versa.

Abuse of power inherent in rank is rankism. When somebodies use the power of their position in one setting to exercise power in another, that's rankism. When somebodies use the power of their position to put a permanent hold on their power, that, too, is rankism.

Dignity is innate, non-negotiable and inviolate. No person's dignity is any less worthy of respect, any less sacred than anyone else's. Equal dignity requires equal opportunity. Rankism is an indefensible abridgement of the dignity of nobodies, and a stain on the honour of somebodies.

As once and future nobodies, we're all potential victims of rankism. As would-be somebodies, we're all potential perpetrators. Securing equal dignity means overcoming rankism.

Who are nobodies? They are Everyman, Everywoman, Everychild. Each of us dreams of becoming someone new, something more. The nobodies are us. Therein lies our power.

Nobodies of the world, unite! We have nothing to lose but our shame.

From: *Somebodies and Nobodies: Overcoming the Abuse of Rank* by Robert W. Fuller

## The revolution has started: Rankism's time is up

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To this end, we have overthrown kings and tyrants and placed political power in the hands of the people. We have reined in monopolies with antitrust legislation. We have limited the power of employers through unionization.

Blacks, women, homosexuals and people with disabilities have all built effective movements that succeeded in replacing a once-sacrosanct social consensus with another that repudiated it and that acknowledged their right to equal dignity.

So why do we tolerate rankism? First, we fear the consequences of resisting: demerit, demotion, ridicule and ostracism. Under duress, we may seek to compromise our dignity, but we are temporizing, awaiting the first opportunity to demand the respect that everyone wants and deserves.

Second — and tragically — we covet the rewards that come with status and power and dream of someday attaining them. Of course, as long as rankism rules, the chances of this happening are slim.

In truth, we are supporting the very system that is keeping us down.

It's time to stop. As Vartan Gregorian, president of the Carnegie Foundation, says: "Dignity is not negotiable."

At work, early detection and prompt treatment can restore employee morale, rejuvenate executives and improve a company's bottom line. Maintaining a strong organizational defence against rankism is practically synonymous with good management. In *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap . . . and Others Don't*, Jim Collins makes the point that protecting their firms from abuses of rank and the indignity such practices sow is the hallmark of great business leaders.

As rankism is identified and reduced, people's energy is catalyzed and engaged. Employees who feel recognized as individuals and who feel they have a fair chance at promotion give their companies their best. Organizations that figure out how to give their workers a voice in management and a stake in its profitability reap the benefits.

The competitive advantages of

relatively non-rankist hierarchies are most easily seen in companies devoted to research and development, where the very purpose is to discover and exploit new ideas. Such organizations are adept at making the distinction between rank and rankism, and have built a culture in which this distinction is paramount.

For example, Intel, like many technology firms, operates with the explicit understanding that any employee is free to call into question any other employee's professional views. A newly hired 20-year-old can challenge a director of research or the CEO. The policy of open, free exchange regardless of rank is seen as a vital part of keeping the company a creative, productive place. Rankism is perceived as a threat to research. Condescension and arrogance are out. Open, reciprocal interaction is valued over pride of position.

This doesn't mean that we do away with rank. That would make no more sense than trying to do away with race or gender. When earned and exercised appropriately, rank is a legitimate, virtually in-

dispensable tool of organization. The problem is not with authority per se, but with its abuse.

Making the distinction between rank and rankism actually revalidates rank when it has been properly earned. Sorting out the proper and improper uses of rank restores to it the respect it deserves. In the absence of rankism, presidents, CEOs and leaders of every kind regain the recognition that is their due — no more, no less. The only real "boss" is a better idea or a better question.

As with most revolutions, the young are leading the way. The generation now entering the work force is already making the move to pull the plug on rampant rankism. Today's young — mobile, resourceful, multi-skilled and ready to take chances — are less willing to put up with unfair treatment than previous generations and are groping toward a new set of principles that downplay rigid hierarchy and status, and affirm the notions of equal dignity, teamwork, and a more equitable distribution of rewards.

These attitudes will herald a major transformation of the work-

place, just as in the civic realm, where subjects evolved into citizens, at work we can anticipate employees evolving into partners.

In a post-rankist workplace, rank will be awarded and held in relation to a particular task. Recognition will be given when the task is completed, and rank then reassigned as needed for another project.

The correlation between decision-making and salary will be re-examined. Asking a good question — one that spares the firm the consequences of a bad decision — is as important to the bottom line as is making a good decision.

To retain the loyalty of workers, executives will neither show favoritism to those of high rank nor abridge the privileges of those lower down. Companies will take pride in being places where everyone experiences equal dignity, has equal opportunity and receives equal justice. The mailroom-to-boardroom story will become less exceptional; employee co-owners, with a share of the equity, will become more common; and the income and equity gaps between the highest and lowest paid will narrow.

Firms of the future will incorporate into their business plans scenarios for their employees' advancement. Personnel will be seen less as workers holding down a job and more as learners progressing to different levels. To create room at the top so others have a chance for upward mobility, resources will be devoted to "graduating" executives. Personnel officers will assume responsibility for seeing that everyone in the firm has somewhere to go, whether inside or outside the company, and assist them in the transitions. Job tenure is an inherently rankist benefit that has outlived its usefulness. Although rankism can't be eradicated overnight, it's time to put it on notice.

Authority can be democratized while increasing organizational efficiency, from our civic institutions to our workplaces, through a broad-based "digitarian" movement dedicated to overcoming rankism. That's democracy's next step.

Robert W. Fuller is the author of *Somebodies and Nobodies: Overcoming the Abuse of Rank* (New Society Publishers, 2003).