MORE THAN JUST A POLITICIAN:
HAROLD CRUSE AND THE ORIGINS OF BLACK POWER
by Van Gosse

In the nearly four decades since the publication of The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual, Harold Cruse's analysis of the necessity of a cultural revolution in America and by African Americans has exerted great influence, often critiqued but never superceded. As Manning Marable notes in his history of post-war black activism, it is "the most complex theoretical work produced in the Black Power period."[1]

Though his ideas continue to receive attention, Cruse himself remains elusive, despite a fifty-year career as an intellectual activist. It may be that he wanted it that way, and has effectively controlled his own representation through sheer force of textual authority. The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual is explicitly about Cruse himself, his crisis or "Crusade" (as Julian Mayfield punned at the time), but its intense personalism on the intellectual plane serves to render the rest of the author's life opaque. This reticence combined with Cruse's fiercely polemical style makes him an apparitional figure in the story, there and not-there, as if he was always standing on the side, "the iconoclastic non-participating observer" in his words, noting down for future appraisal the follies around him.[2] He etches in acid a vast range of political actors since the late 1940s--in Robert Chrisman's memorable aphorism, "Cruse may not be the gadfly of Athens, but he is certainly the horsefly of Harlem"--but his own role remains elliptical.[3] By the author's own admission, "talking very much about myself and my own political exploits... would have necessitated another kind of a book--a political autobiography, a genre I was not interested in."[4]

The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual was followed in 1968 by Rebellion or Revolution?, selected essays introduced by a brief, eloquent memoir intended to "explain some of the activities in which I was involved" and "the line of critical progression which led to the publication of my first book."[5] Taken together, the two books present Cruse's political career as a series of sour failures, the only merit of which was to force his intellectual evolution. This progress towards enlightenment is described as

> a road leading deeper into a peculiar kind of American cultural sickness, a pathological region of the American psyche defended by political and cultural antagonists of all kinds.... I came through it all badly mauled, scarred, traduced, defeated in a score of battles, but determined to win the war even if that required becoming a critical Kamikaze fighter on the cultural front.[6]

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[1] Manning Marable, Race, Reform and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1990, Revised Second Edition (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 1991), p. 255.
[2] See The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual (hereafter The Crisis…), p. 498, for this phrase which one presumes is self-descriptive.
[33] Robert Chrisman, "The Crisis of Harold Cruse," The Black Scholar, Volume 1, Number 1 (November 1969), p. 78.
[4] Harold Cruse, Rebellion or Revolution (New York: William R. Morrow, 1968), p. 8.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid., p. 13.

Certainly most readers are likely to retain an image of Cruse as a perpetual outsider, disgusted by the obtuseness he finds on all sides, and above all by the machinations of the Marxist left. This characteristic narrative voice appears to have mirrored his personality. Diverse acquaintances from his years of obscurity remember him as "a very brooding person.... speaking bitterness" and how "he often spoke as though he personally, as well as other black peoples, had been wronged by the CPUSA...."[7]

Under these circumstances, sorting through Cruse's political affiliations and activities after he left the Communist Party, and comparing his version to what others may remember, must have seemed redundant. No historian to date has looked into the circumstances whereby a budding Marxist theoretician of the post-World War II era emerged years later as the pre-eminent theorist of an anti-Marxist black nationalism. The audacity of his work justified itself, as did Cruse's insistence that he was exclusively a "social critic," his favorite self-description. Clearly this was a man who had seen much, and for a long while that was sufficient. Now perhaps, it will be useful to unpack both what he saw and did, and the contradictions and silences in how he wrote about that experience.[8]

To begin, one must make a case for the biographical approach that goes beyond interest in the private life of any distinguished author. I argue that Cruse played an important role in a little-documented period of black radical and nationalist politics, from the early 1950s through 1965, and that to understand the real import of The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual and his other writings, they must be placed within this domestic context, with its own set of global referents. Consider the sequence of events in these years: in 1948-49, India and Indonesia became independent, and the People's Republic of China was declared, while South Africa officially adopted apartheid. In 1953-54 the French Army was smashed in Indochina, as the Mau Mau rebellion played itself out in Kenya. 1955 saw not only the beginning of the Montgomery Bus Boycott but the Bandung Conference in Indonesia, which triumphantly announced to the world the aspirations of colonized peoples of color. From then on events spiraled out of hand across the Third World—Suez, Ghana, Cuba, Sharpeville, Algeria and so on, leading up to 1965, the year of the Watts rebellion and of Malcolm X's murder, as the Civil Rights Movement began its turn left and to the north, as part of the surge towards Black Power.

Adopting this periodization, and this transnational framework, changes our understanding of Black Power's origins, and allows us to see Cruse as one of many actors responding to this new world. Yet we are still hamstrung by a narrow, even personalist, set of theses about this transition in the black freedom movement. At the time and since, the Black Power movement has been described as inspired largely by Malcolm X's charisma and his articulation of a rigorously coherent nationalist position, in tandem with the rebuff to the Mississippi Freedom

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[7] Telephone interview with Grace Lee Boggs, September 2, 1996; letter, Richard Gibson to Gosse, March 4, 1996. In a telephone interview with Yuri Kochiyama, October 14, 1996, she remembered Cruse as "a loner, someone who enjoyed research and studying.... A very serious person, someone you know has really lived and suffered in many ways, not from poverty of material things but he may have felt he didn't have the opportunities he should have had."

[8] All otherwise unattributed quotations from Cruse are from two telephone interviews, May 29 and June 2, 1996. A subsequent in-person interview, conducted in Ann Arbor, appeared as "Locating the Black Intellectual: An Interview with Harold Cruse," Radical History Review 71 (Spring 1998), pp. 96-120, reprinted in condensed form in William Jelani Cobb, ed., The Essential Harold Cruse: A Reader (New York: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 281-297.

Democratic Party at the 1964 Democratic Party Convention. But unnoticed by white politicians, journalists and radicals, a nationalist and anti-imperialist constituency began developing in the 1950s outside of both the Civil Rights Movement and the Nation of Islam.[9] It grew rapidly in the early 1960s, in response to events like the Cuban Revolution and the CIA-supported killing of Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba in January 1961, which symbolized the West's backing of unrepentant white-supremacist forces in Africa's southern half--the Belgians in the Congo, the Portuguese in Mozambique and Angola, and white settlers in the Union of South Africa and "Rhodesia." Inspired by international events as well as by the growing militancy of Southern black activists, from roughly 1960 this Northern urban constituency of intellectuals, students, and older radicals disillusioned with the established Left began the painful process of institution-building. In the next five years, they spawned a host of local organizations and numerous publications, even attempting to create a national presence via the abortive Freedom Now Party of 1963-64. Their efforts were centered in New York City, Detroit, Chicago, Oakland and a few other cities, and had significant international connections in Europe, Cuba and with black American expatriates in Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana.[10]

This emerging secular nationalist community was the world in which Harold Cruse moved (though not the only one, as we shall see), and which he wrote about. It was also, until the publication of The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual, the only world in which he was a known presence--known enough to be invited to participate in many of its important formations, from the American Society for African Culture to the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, the Freedom Now Party and The Liberator magazine. In fact, Cruse made his name among political activists by writing more effectively than anyone else about "The New Negro Nationalism," with The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual as the culmination of his documentation and analysis. Paradoxically, that book was so scathing and dismissive that it both summed up this new politics and dismissed it as a set of derivative and fruitless excursions. Cruse wrote as a theorist drawing lessons from the past to argue for a particular political direction in the future. He would reject the idea that his account in The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual [hereafter simply The Crisis…] by itself is sufficient to understand the events of the 1950s and the first half of the 1960s, and so should we. Instead, the book and its author must both be situated within the evolution of a volatile social movement, which is the task of this essay.

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According to a biographical dictionary to which he submitted a brief item, and references in his various writings, Harold Wright Cruse was born on March 8, 1916 in Petersburg, Virginia, and by the time he was a teenager, had moved to New York, growing up in an integrated Queens neighborhood and Harlem; in The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual he would describe himself

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[9] In Cruse's words, "In the years right after World War II... All at once--in a manner of speaking--a new level of protest activity, a new nationalism and a new Africa consciousness converged...", The Crisis..., pp. 454-455.

[10] On the latter, see Kevin Gaines, “From Black Power to Civil Rights: Julian Mayfield and African American Expatriates in Nkrumah’s Ghana, 1957-1966,” in Christian G. Appy, ed., Cold War Constructions: The Political Culture of American Imperialism During the Early Cold War, 1945-1963 (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), pp. 257-269.

with some pride as "a native, unassimilated Harlemite, nurtured in Harlem's idiosyncrasies."[11] By the late 1930s, he was already starting to volunteer for local drama groups at the Harlem YMCA, prefiguring his later consuming interest in the theater. Then, at age 25, he was drafted into the Army in 1941, and after serving for four and a half years in the Quartermaster Corps in Africa and Italy and reaching the rank of sergeant, he came out a very changed man.

> I have felt for a long time that World War II severed the American Negro not only from his prewar American provincialism, but from whatever tenuous moorings he might have had with his own psychological past. Practically every able-bodied Negro either had made more money than he ever had in his life, or else had gone through the psychological trauma of being purged by the American military machine. Most of us Negro soldiers who survived this deal were, like myself, never quite the same again inside. Those, especially, who had served in the European, Mediterranean theaters and who had known Ireland, Scotland, England, North Africa, Italy, France, Belgium, etc., became very "internationalist" in outlook after the war....I say this in order to account for a personal sense of rootlessness that has never left me since the end of the war.[12]

More specifically, in the British Isles Cruse had been around white people who thought *all* Americans were odd beasts, and appreciated his Anglo-Saxon name, if nothing else. He had also entered into a relationship with a young Englishwoman that was terminated only with considerable reluctance at war's end. And in Italy, he had met the Partisans, Communist resistance fighters who imparted a vision of liberation and internationalism. Returning to New York, Cruse set about getting his GED degree, and took advantage of his veteran's status to secure, if only briefly, a government job. He entered the world of the left, studying at the Communist-run George Washington Carver School in Harlem, and observing luminaries like Dr. Du Bois from afar.[13] For the next seven years, until approximately 1952 when he split with the Party, Cruse participated in New York's vibrant Popular Front left culture, assuming a position of considerable respect among Harlem Communists as "an up-and-coming Marxist theoretician... not a mere rank-and-filer like the rest of us... he functioned on a policy-making level," though Cruse himself was content to describe his role more modestly, as merely a "librarian and part-

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[11] Who's Who Among African-Americans, 1996-97 (Detroit: Gale Research, 1996), p. 348; The Crisis…, p. 15. For details on Cruse's experiences during and immediately after the war, see "Locating the Black Intellectual: An Interview with Harold Cruse," where he refers to being sent back to Petersburg to attend high school. A sheet he prepared in 1954 specified that he attended P.S. 50 in Jamaica, Queens, and P.S. 50 ("Fred Douglass") in Manhattan, between 1925 and 1934, and Commerce High School (NY) and Peabody High School (Petersburg) in 1934-1938. Less clear, since discussed nowhere else, either in print or in interviews, is a claim to have studied Sociology at Virginia State University in 1938-1940, years during which he was reaching adulthood in Harlem according to all other accounts. See "Job and Educational Data for Transcript," Box 7, Correspondence File #1, in Harold Cruse Papers, Tamiment Library, New York University [hereafter HCP].

[12] The Crisis…, p. 534-535. The unpublished sections of my 1997 interview ("Locating the Black Intellectual") include long, detailed and fond recollections of his wartime experience, from training camps to mishaps with trucks in North Africa.

[13] Cruse's personal papers include a packet of letters from Elsie Mawdsley, whom Cruse apparently met while training in England for the invasion of North Africa, as well as letters from a young woman named Yolanda in Italy. See Box 10, HCP.

time reviewer in the cultural department" of the Daily Worker.[14]

A central task of this essay will be to clarify the circumstances under which Cruse left the CP, using his correspondence from the 1950s so as to move beyond the elusive references in his later published writings. He spent the rest of the decade poor, unknown and unsung, before finally publishing a few essays. He was already 44 when he went to Cuba in 1960--the pivotal event in his trajectory during the 1960s of increasingly visible polemics and organizational efforts that finally produced the startling denouement of The Crisis…, and then a sudden ascension into the elite reaches of the professional academic world at the University of Michigan, where Cruse began teaching in 1968.

This chronological specificity is important because a single leitmotif runs throughout Cruse's writings and later oral reminiscences, other than his deep anger at the CPUSA: his sense of a distinct generational identity in the 1940s. In 1968, he would write evocatively about "the inheritance of my Harlem generation... the will of most black youth to make dreams out of their own spiritual inheritance," and add that "I don't properly belong to the current generation of young black militants, but am a carry-over from the World War II generation that came to maturity during the 1940's."[15] As late as 1996, his most distinct memory of the Cuba trip in 1960 was that he was much more "experienced" than people like the Fair Play for Cuba Committee leader Richard Gibson and LeRoi Jones and couldn't share in their enthusiasm, "I was just along for the ride.... They looked a little askance at me, wouldn't confide in me, I was from another generation."

Thus when Cruse first began his post-Communist career as a writer, he was no longer a youth, a fact he wants us to remember. This lends a particular poignancy to his fond description of the 1950s, his years in a figurative wilderness: "I found individual freedom a grand personal experience. For about five years, I read and wrote, but published nothing.... I was thinking and writing alone, unnoticed in my Chelsea, Manhattan garret."[16]

An examination of his personal papers suggests a considerably more difficult time, at odds with this image of idyllic seclusion—and makes clearer why Cruse retained for decades a deep sense of rejection combined with fierce ambition. Like many latterly-prosperous bohemians, he chose to evoke a sanguine nostalgia about his "garret" years of "individual freedom," but living them must have been considerably harsher. Throughout this entire period, he was feverishly engaged, perpetually outraged, and under considerable social and financial pressure. In the mid-1950s, he was approaching 40, with no accomplishments other than a sergeant's stripes and a few obscure movie and theater reviews in tAmerica's most notorious newspaper. He had no family (though it is not clear he ever desired one).[17] He had broken with the entire political and cultural milieu of the Communist Party, and believed himself the subject of vicious ostracization as a "spy," or, worse yet, a "Titoist nationalist." New York was the one

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[14] Julian Mayfield, "Crisis or Crusade?," Negro Digest (June 1968), p. 14; Cruse, Rebellion or Revolution?, p. 15.

[15] Cruse, Rebellion or Revolution?, pp. 11, 7.

[16] Ibid., pp. 20, 8-9.

[17] In a 1981 letter to Nathan Hare, Cruse describes himself as free-agent who avoided marriage: "I lived with a `common-law' wife for several years before splitting up," and suggests a traditional bohemian attitude towards sexual matters, seeing the current generation of students as prudish. Cruse to Nathan Hare, May 28, 1981, Box 3, Nathan Hare folder, HCP.

city where the CP-influenced left retained shreds of real influence, especially in the cultural world, so that tensions from Cruse's political apostasy carried over into his personal life. His self-perception as a pariah, and his ongoing feud with the left, apparently contributed to regular unemployment and the inability to develop a professional writing career. Amidst this flux, as a response, or to claim an identity almost never granted to black men in that era, Cruse began writing voraciously, turning out radio, television, movie and theatrical scripts by the bushel, as well as short stories, magazine articles, cartoons, and a novel, not one of which sold, despite attempts at purely commercial product (even a cowboy film scenario called "Three Faces West" and an all-black radio soap opera, "Barbershop," alongside his more highbrow fare).[18] Indeed, he was almost certainly the only would-be writer in America to simultaneously send manuscripts off to the rightwing American Mercury and the short-lived American Socialist (a late-1950s attempt at "regroupment" edited by Harry Braverman).[19]

Though all of these tensions and impulses revolving around work, art and politics coincided, often in the same encounter, it is useful to disentangle them. First, what was the immediate basis of Cruse's not just dissenting from Communist orthodoxy on race matters, but breaking with all the Party-associated institutions in New York? From early on, as a veteran emboldened by overseas experience, he had displayed his independence at the Daily Worker, even refusing to back the Dodgers over the Yankees in 1947-49, despite the former's sacrosanct status as the "People's Team" that broke the color line with Jackie Robinson.[20] Something more

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[18] Many of these manuscripts have disappeared, but references are scattered through his correspondence, and a significant number of drafts survive. The novel in particular, titled The Education of a Rebel, seems to have consumed vast amounts of time, though it was effectively a memoir of his time in the Party, with Cruse renaming himself as "Clyde Porter,' but other party figures represented as themselves. A brief excerpt will give a feel: "The next morning at the Daily Worker office a closed meeting took place in Alan Max's room to hear Clyde's criticism of George Morris' approach to the Negro in labor [e.g. his attacks on A. Philip Randolph]. Present were Benjamin J. Davis, Jr., Pettis Perry, Abner Berry, Milton Howard, John Pittman, George Morris, John Gates and Clyde Porter." Certainly, if every published, this would have been an exceptionally "historical" novel. Cruse corresponded with a sympathetic younger junior editor at Viking, Audrey Lyle, who encouraged him to avoid "long interpolated essays or polemics that are inescapably the author speaking." See Lyle to Cruse, September 20, 1957, also Lyle to Cruse, March 25, 1957, both in Box 7, Correspondence File #1, HCP. This file also contains letters seeking "fellowships in playwrighting" from the Hartford and Rockefeller Foundations, and cover letters for his plays submitted to William Morris, MCA, and Rodgers and Hammerstein (often under the name Wright Cruse), with the resulting rejections, some of them respectful. There is nothing unusual here; t the old saw that any "real" writer could paper his or her walls with rejection slips holds true, but what is striking about this volume of material over many years is Cruse's determination to succeed by the conventional rules of hard work and constant application.

[19] See Harold Lord Varney, Associate Editor, The American Mercury, to "Leland Bell" ("I am returning your excellent article, `Racial Integration—The New Orthodoxy'…"), July 11, 1957, and Harry Braverman to H.W. Cruse, ("Unfortunately it is tremendously long…," a recurring issue with editors), December 3, 1956, ibid.

[20] See Cruse to the Daily Worker, October 22, 1956, ibid. It is interesting to note that Cruse apparently took sports just as seriously as everything else, and that in this letter he expressed

specific and personal was necessary to provoke a leave-taking. Though his later references in The Crisis… cover a host of political battles, notably over his role in Paul Robeson's newspaper Freedom, Cruse's letters and memoranda from the 1950s focus sharply on his exclusion from two left formations: first, the Committee on the Negro in the Arts (CNA), the most innovative formation among black leftists in the postwar years, drawing in future stars like Harry Belafonte, Sidney Poitier, Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee; second, a more obscure Film Technicians Committee or "film club."

In his letters, the close relationship between Cruse's lack of success as a writer and being excluded from these two formations is highlighted. In a 1955 letter, he describes how he "quit the Marxist movement entirely" over rejection by the film club, "the last bit of patronage I asked for."[21] Similarly, in an undated "List of Particulars on CNA (Special Emphasis on Walter Christmas and Ruth Jett)," he indicts the latter, both black, as "snobs and incompetent flunkeys for assorted whites (mostly middle-class leftwingers)," "a clique" who asked him to "write publicity" in the Daily Worker, but never sent him a complimentary ticket, barred him from preliminary play readings, and finally turned down his script.[22]

Cruse's self-image of happy isolation in the 1950s is at odds with the evidence in other key respects. Rather than "thinking and writing alone, unnoticed," he was a visible, even obstreperous presence in black Manhattan's intellectual and political circles for many years. All of Cruse's autobiographical statements stress that The Crisis… was his long-delayed settling of accounts, and that between his departure from the CPUSA and the book's 1967 publication he functioned almost always as a gimlet-eyed, disillusioned onlooker, *not* as an activist. The facts are quite opposite: rather than a jaded spectator, Cruse was an inveterate joiner—and if he could not persuade an organization to do what he wanted, he would round up a few allies and start his own. Certainly, he began writing constantly while in the Party and continued to soldier on without respite, despite continual rejection, but at no time did he give up politics, cultural and otherwise. Within a year or two of his split from the "white-dominated" left he began trying to build his own apparatus, based on a competing vision of black autonomy. Tracing these forgotten projects underlines how most of the ideas associated with Black Power in the late 1960s had been percolating in the urban North since the immediate post-World War II years, not as a response to, but rather in tandem with, the southern civil rights movement.

Seeking to develop his own sphere of influence, Cruse tried repeatedly in the mid-1950s to float what we can label anachronistically as "cultural nationalism." First, in 1953-54, he helped found both the Acme Theatre Company (which staged a play of his) and an associated magazine, the Negro Theatre Spotlight. But his association with these short-lived enterprises did

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serious doubts about the wisdom of integrating the major leagues, if the cost was the destruction of the Negro leagues.

[21] See Cruse to "Dear Sir" ("Mr. Jacobson"), October 11, 1955 for this story, including the reference to being called a "spy" by a white Communist; also Cruse to Hortensie Sie, February 18, 1956, detailing his fight with white Party members, listed by name, in the Film Technicians Committee/Film Club, ibid.

[22] "A List of Particulars on Committee for the Negro in the Arts," ibid. See also his anonymous letter to the New York Post, November 11, 1956, commenting on Harry Belafonte's criticism of Nat King Cole for playing to segregated audiences in the South. Cruse ("A Reader") derided Belafonte as a snotty West Indian, "a pygmy taking potshots at a giant," and describes the Committee for the Negro in the Arts as a "bunch of snobs," ibid.

not last long.[23] Next, over several years he labored to form an "American Negro Cultural Society" (sometimes called the "Afro-American Cultural Society" or "the Aframerican Cultural Society"), with a detailed "Code of Racial and Cultural Ethics" that was clearly counterposed to the Committee for the Negro in the Arts: "Negroes will never be united by politics, the Negro can only be united by his common culture." Further, he insisted on "collaboration as an organization with no political party; faction or group," with "Communist influence" barred "in any way, shape or form."[24] Privately, he decried "our lack of maturity and organizational hegemony over our cultural potential," seeing the need for a magazine, and separate writers' and theatrical wings, and the possibility of "cooperatives" that would take a "two-sided approach to the white world" and establish "higher and more creative racial standards for Negroes on their own idiomatic level."[25]

To his former comrades, all of these projects would have been a dangerous "Negro chauvinism," but they were remarkably prefigurative not only of Cruse's core arguments in The Crisis…, but also of the direction carved out the Black Arts Movement leaders like Don L. Lee [later Haki Madhubuti] and organizations like Chicago's Organization for Black American Culture (OBAC).[26] A 1956 letter to Nora Holt of the Amsterdam News was even more explicit in its prefiguring of the Black Arts: "when this integration mania runs its course," Cruse declared, there would need to be "a complete overhauling of the American Negroes' attitude toward himself [so as to] …reverse this trend into a cultural blind alley," and "strive for a racially conscious art."[27] None of these efforts bore fruit, whether because of the overwhelmingly

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[23] See Cruse to Executive Board of Acme Theatre Company, c/o Stanley Greene, July 4, 1954, a letter of resignation where he decries their lack of commitment to "Negro theatre," and attacks his leading lady, Juanita Bethea as "arrogant, insulting and insolent." See also Cruse to Negro Theatre Spotlight, September 24, 1954, which he claims was "first conceived by myself," until "very sharp differences arose in Acme Theatre Co. over my personal motives, ideas, and dramatic criticisms," so he withdrew, both in ibid.

[24] See "AFRO-AMERICAN CULTURAL SOCIETY, CODE OF RACIAL AND CULTURAL ETHICS IN THE ARTS," in Box 7, ACS Work in Progress File, HCP.

[25] For these quotations, see the letter dated November 14, with no year given, to "Mr. Kaiser" (who may be the longtime Schomburg Library staffperson Ernest Kaiser, a mainstay of Freedomways in the 1960s and an uncompromising critic of Cruse). See also "Dear John," September 24, 1956, concerning "a new Negro group which I have formed… with 3 other Negro writers," focused exclusively on the "cultural question." In this letter he mentions his hope of publishing a magazine called Scene; see also "Dear Charles," August 20, 1956 and "Dear Jimmie," May 18, 1958, where he says the Aframerican Cultural Society has been "chartered" (by the state, presumably) and that he hopes to organize a "Harlem wide cultural conference," all in Box 7, Correspondence File #1, HCP.

[26] Yet another manifesto outlining a project that apparently never got off the drawing board was for Productive Artists New Developments Association (PANDA), with a "Dramatic and Fine Arts Center" aimed at "train(ing) and sponsor(ing)… qualified Negro youth," a school with three wings, annual awards and more, "centrally located in Harlem," in Box 7, ACS Work in Progress File, HCP. One notes the resemblance to LeRoi Jones' famous, if shortlived, Black Arts Reportory Theatre and School (BARTS) in 1965, where Cruse taught black history.

[27] See Cruse to Holt, April 19, 1956 in Box 7, Correspondence File #1, HCP. The bulk of the

"integrationist" tenor of the 1950s, the sheer lack of resources available to build any all-black institution, the pervasive caution induced by McCarthyism, or Cruse's tendentious personality. What is important is that he tried, he experimented and he built a track record—of failure, perhaps, but a record nonetheless, which is the unspoken subtext of The Crisis…, and presumably the reason why Cruse was a respected figure among many younger African Americans outside of "left" circles, whether LeRoi Jones, Richard Gibson (who invited him to join the historic Fair Play for Cuba delegation to Havana in 1960), or even Malcolm X.

What makes all of these projects especially notable is that Cruse, like so many other black writers of the mid-century, was always one step away from penury. For him, this underscored the price he paid for asserting his independence from Communist multiracialism. One cannot ascertain the extent to which Cruse's alienation from (and unrestrained attacks upon) the left contributed to his poor employment prospects and inability to publish. Can we imagine the blacklistees themselves establishing some kind of blacklist? One supposes so, but given that much of Cruse's literary output was aimed at the mainstream Broadway and movie world, it seems unlikely this was the principal problem he faced. Whether "red" or not, he remained black, in a world where The New York Times still routinely reported the "first Negro" architect hired at a white firm, or the first black student to win admission to a prestigious high school or college.

How did he live, if no one would pay him to write? For much of the 1950s, Cruse rented an apartment at 203 West 14th Street, and worked in an "ordinary staff position" at Macy's on 34th Street, "because it was convenient" (Gibson also remembers him as a waiter in a restaurant on 14th Street, and recalls that he studied at the 42nd Street Library).[28] Earlier, while in the Party, he had worked at something called Youth House, on East 12th Street. He was unemployed in 1950, and in 1951-52 used his GI Bill money to study at the New Film Institute in Flatbush. In 1953-54, his abortive efforts to get into the film and television industry led to a job at Sterling TV Films Inc., first as a "cutter" and then in the receiving department. From May 1954 to January 1955, he was again unemployed, before starting at Macy's, where he made all of $34 a week after taxes (even then a very modest salary), reporting to the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance that he had had no bank account "in several years."[29] Other than this sparse information, one gathers it was a spartan existence, like that of so many other self-made black intellectuals and artists in those years, even those who had published extensively. Without the rare higher degrees that opened up the segregated world of black academia, holding down a menial job in a store or restaurant, picking up work at resorts or on ships, or some other form of service to wealthy whites, were all mandatory unless he or she stumbled onto a type of writing that paid well.[30]

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letter, characteristically, was a venting of his spleen against the perfidy of those "Negro stars," such as the black actors touring in Porgy and Bess, who "don't give a damn about the Negro public anyhow!"

[28] Cruse's own account from the 1996 telephone interviews, cited in Note 8.

[29] See Cruse to Department of Taxation, October 15, 1955, and "Job and Educational Data for Transcript," in Box 7, Correspondence File #1, HCP. These were not his only tax troubles---the same file contains a summons from the IRS.

[30] See The Quality of Hurt: The Autobiography of Chester Himes (Garden City, NY: 1972), for evidence of how even a well-published black writer continued to live on the margin in the 1940s and 50s, doing all manner of demeaning work and scavenging for assistance.

Poverty by itself did not seem to bother Cruse very much—one advantage of the proletarian *litterateur*! He came from a hardscrabble working-class background, so a hand-to-mouth existence, hanging out in cafeterias and living "downtown," was still a luxury. The most revelatory line in all his published writings is his toss-off self-description as "a Harlemite who became a Villager in 1950."[31] Availing himself of this consciously romantic bohemian identity, even suggesting in an unpublished 1961 article that "what Greece is to Western Civilization," the Village was to America ("the traditional seat of American intellectual and cultural excellence"), for more than a decade he tried to re-make himself as a man of letters in the old-fashioned sense, a dramatist, novelist and essayist.[32] This fact is alluded to only cryptically later, but it is central to understanding how Cruse arrived at his cultural critique of radical politics. Like James Baldwin, LeRoi Jones, Richard Wright and, earlier, W.E.B. Du Bois, he sought to articulate his vision of Black America's dilemmas and potential transformation via imaginary and fictive rather than prescriptive texts.

Cruse's only explicit reference to these literary efforts came in the Introduction to Rebellion and Revolution?:

> Life, circumstances, my creative psychology, plus the vagaries of the publishing field, have made of me a social critic almost against my will. Over the last eighteen years or so, I have written many things, both little and ambitious, in different literary forms. For a variety of reasons--subjective, objective, and external--none of my output, except some articles, was ever published. One of the external reasons was that the politically repressive and intellectually vapid decade of the fifties was not a receptive atmosphere for genuinely critical and creative 'black literature.'[33]

A more succinct explication was offered years later as Cruse described how he came to know LeRoi Jones well before they went to Cuba together in 1960. After all, Jones was not yet famous at all at that point, just a young man out of the Air Force and trying to find his way in the Village Beat scene. To Cruse, however, there was nothing odd in him moving in the same circles as the poet Jones, "because I was more than just a politician." Jones confirms that he knew "Harold Cruse, the writer...from my MacDougal Street days, often in the Cafe Figaro. (He lived then in a furnished room on West 23rd or West 14th, and was always complaining about how Broadway producers were turning down musicals he was writing.)"[34]

From this passing comment, one gleans a sense of a strikingly different Cruse--a would-be writer of hit Broadway shows who saw nothing odd about putting down his playscript, for the moment, to pen a polemic about the crisis of African American culture. In neither case, did he have any reason to expect publication, let alone fame or fortune, since the market for a post-Communist, unsentimentally nationalist black essayist in the Fifties was even smaller than the market for a black playwright. Yet Cruse persevered, turning out manuscripts of all sorts and lengths, apparently quite surprised when one or two finally made it into print.

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[31] Biographical note for Harold Cruse, "Race and Bohemianism in Greenwich Village," The Crisis (January 1960), p. 5.
[32] See the unpublished manuscript of "Bohemia Revisited," in Box 7, Bohemia Revisited file, HCP.
[33] Cruse, Rebellion or Revolution?, p. 8.
[34] Amiri Baraka, The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka (New York: Freundlich, 1984), p. 163.

A "Personal Sketch" attached to the manuscript of one of his later plays in 1960 indicates the prolific character of Cruse's writing during the 1950s:

> Irma Tazewell is the fourth full-length play attempted by this writer. First play, an historical play The Delta Rose written in 1952 was unsuitable for production. 2nd play, a war play, A Furlough to the Cradle, written in 1954 has been revised several times and is now with New Dramatists Committee pending critical review. Will be revised again. 3rd play-Headline Hetty, a musical comedy libretto with lyrics, is now with the New Dramatists Committee pending critical review. Written in 1955, revised in 1958 and 1959. A novel written in 1956, 1957, 1958 was unsuitable and is now being revised. Several articles written on art, theater, etc. Two of these have been published in Paris. I am at present negotiating with a Belgian producer to show "Furlough" (see above) on the continent. This producer is interested in a Negro family play for European audiences.[35]

In that same year, the biographical squib for his first post-Communist article published in the U.S., "Race and Bohemianism in Greenwich Village" (a short piece of cultural commentary on the tensions between putatively liberal whites and recent black arrivals in his own part of New York) in the NAACP's magazine The Crisis in January 1960, noted that "he has written three plays in search of a producer and is now at work on a novel giving a panoramic view of the Negro in the Village."

Several of the dramatic works are extant. The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture has a 1960 play, Irma Tazewell (The Maid's Dilemma), and two different versions of the musical Headline Hetty (the first from 1955, with book and lyrics by Cruse, and a 1959 revision with lyrics by Cruse and Edward Bland and music by Bland). From these two manuscripts one gleans some idea of Cruse's literary interests and style, and even a cursory examination suggests that his later readers would be startled. Headline Hetty is not in any evident sense "political," nor does it aspire to the self-conscious *gravitas* of the tradition leading from Oscar Hammerstein to Steven Sondheim. Rather, it is a light piece suggesting a mixture of Clifford Odets and Guys and Dolls Harlem-style rather than Brecht-Weill. Besides Hetty, "a newspaper girl," its main characters have Damon Runyonesque names like Boney Bigdeel, Stella Bella, Ace, Joe Elbow, Professor Lownote and Amy Tattle. The chief dramatic device is a floating chorus of Shoe Shine Boys who inhabit the archetypal Harlem corner where Hetty plies her trade until fortune hits. The song titles are perhaps the clearest indication of Cruse's romantic and popular bent in the style of the wisecracking Thirties--"I'm Gettin' Up in the World," "There's a Boom in the Love Market," "The Horse-Sense of Consequence," "I'm A-hungering for Scandalmongering," "This Side of Heartbreak," "Where Love Birds Fly," and "What Used to be a Lady," among others.

Irma Tazewell is a very different sort of play, a contemporary drama about school integration in a New York suburb called Commonweal. The "entire action takes place in the living room of the Haverly home" over a month in 1946. The Haverlys are an older white couple, typical Reform Democrats. Their black maid, Irma Tazewell, has transferred her son to

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[35] "Personal Sketch" attached to manuscript of Irma Tazewell, property of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York NY. Cruse retained his interest in musicals. In a class he gave in 1965 Cruse mentioned that in 1961 he had written "musical around Pearl Bailey. Took years to get lyrics; another year for money (millionaire sponsor), found composer-$2000 for score.... Later, Bailey refused," from notes taken by Yuri Kochiyama in Cruse's course in "Cultural Philosophy" at the Black Arts School, 1965, Yuri Kochiyama Personal Papers.

all-white West Commonweal school with the encouragement of the daughter, Christine Haverly, a teacher with a Red background. The self-consciously "social" character of the play is indicated by the following dialogue in its opening scene:

Mr. Haverly:	I never would have thought a little thing like transferring a colored child to an all-white school would cause such an uproar. It's a disturbing thing, Martha.
Mrs. Haverly:	Really now, Arthur, shouldn't we have known?
Mr. Haverly:	Well, we could've have anticipated people asking questions about it here and there, but for everybody in West Commonweal to have what looks like protest meetings over pupil transfer is something else indeed.
Mrs. Haverly:	Commonweal has had an odd growth. We've stood by for thirty years and watched this place expand into a sprawling township without anything resembling a planning committee.
Mr. Haverly:	So we've forgotten that we once tolerated Negroes because there were so few of them.
Mrs. Haverly:	Exactly. Now we have a full-grown Negro section and I don't believe anyone but the political bosses actually know how many Negroes there are across town. Particularly since we had this new war-time influx. And remember--it's a growing problem. I understand that Flynn's real estate firm is dickering to sell a whole new block of homes to Negroes who want to buy.

These semi-revelations (for those who knew Cruse in the Fifties remember him as a "writer" in the literary sense, while those who met him in 1960 and after know nothing of it) may seem of little consequence. It would be a mistake, however, to underestimate the centrality of Cruse's dramatic and novelistic efforts to his politics; his call for a sweeping "cultural revolution" in The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual almost certainly stemmed directly from his own history in trying to find a place for "genuinely critical and creative 'black literature.'" Nor should his popular, indeed Popular Front style come as any surprise. As he stated later, "to influence a broad audience, a Harlem literary and cultural movement had to use forms that were steeped in the popular idiom and images, yet as free as possible of alien political propaganda."[36]

In the most obvious terms, it appears that Cruse spent at least fifteen years actively trying to get his plays staged, with no luck. In his angry 1968 review of The Crisis…, the novelist Julian Mayfield wrote that as far back as 1949, "Mr. Cruse had written a play... the left wing off-Broadway theater groups, which were the only ones encouraging black writers then, had all turned it down." In this same review, Mayfield also suggested that "more than a decade after Lorraine Hansberry, as Cruse implies, revealed herself to be hopelessly integrationist and a puppet of the white Marxists, he was asking her to lend her name, prestige and money in support of his musical play..."[37] Hansberry first turns up in The Crisis… as a young writer for Paul Robeson's newspaper Freedom in 1952, at a time when Cruse himself was peripherally involved with the magazine.[38] One gathers, therefore, that Cruse's request that she read one of his

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[36] The Crisis…, p. 216.

[37] Mayfield, "Crisis or Crusade?," p. 15, 12.

[38] See The Crisis…, p. 238, for the reference to Cruse's marching in Harlem with the group from Freedom to protest the death sentence of Willie McGee in 1951, as well as his reference to "The

musicals came in 1963 or later, which is confirmed by his own testimony that when he left The Liberator magazine at the end of 1964, and signed a book contract with the publisher William R. Morrow, he was at the same time writing and producing a musical play with other writers, including Frank Fields, who had written the music for Jules Dassin's 1946 film, Body and Soul, with John Garfield and Canada Lee.[39]

Stepping back from Mayfield's obvious suggestion that Cruse was a perennial sore loser, a hanger-on and second-rater, it is worth noting that even if he failed as a playwright and novelist, the odds against him were extraordinary, and that in 1954, Jose Quintero, who would become one of the most important American stage directors of the later 20th century, wrote him to praise A Furlough to the Cradle as

> splendid writing…very real and very believable….the playwright has deviated from what I would term "The Attempt to De-Humanize and De-Culturalize Negroes."….I like, too, the low charge of the play, its quiet, brooding, penetration. The dialogue is brilliant, and the absence of melodrama is refreshing….it has a universality and merit that suggests it could run on Broadway if well done.[40]

Here, as elsewhere, one is reminded of how exceptional Hansberry's success was in 1959, with Raisin in the Sun. At the least, we can say that Cruse was well ahead of his time, and that a black playwright as determined as he would have succeeded to some degree in the 1970s, rather than facing 15 or more years of rejections. His political polemics appear then as an unintended consequence of his literary failure—even he casts them that way, but his extra-literary engagements complicate this story.

Besides these playscripts and the memories of others, friendly and otherwise, there is additional contemporary evidence that as late as 1960 Cruse still defined himself in literary terms when he wrote about cultural politics. Before he went to Cuba, and through the same association with Richard Gibson, Cruse was invited to contribute to a special July 4 issue of the Cuban cultural weekly Lunes de Revolucion, focused on "Los Negroes en USA." This was no small event, because Gibson had also rounded up pieces from eminences like James Baldwin and Langston Hughes, as well as the well-established writers Mayfield and John Henrik Clarke.

It is odd and indeed interesting that although Cruse went all the way back to his Daily Worker days for the collected essays in Rebellion and Revolution?, reprinting four brief film and theater reviews, he omitted his contribution to Lunes de Revolucion, which came at a critical time in his evolution and was a serious comment on "El Arte Negro y El Arte Occidental" ("Negro Art and Western Art"). In this essay, he meditated at some length on what we now call Eurocentrism: "The idea of Greek superiority in literature, theater, the plastic arts, philosophy and science is a Western idea. Many works have been written affirming that all that is superior in Western society had its origin in the Greek tradition. From this belief comes the idea that only

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last time I visited the offices of Freedom, in 1952."

[39] One indication of the importance of Cruse and Fields' relationship is the comment in The Crisis…, p. 210, "Yet, despite this auspicious beginning, the ANT [American Negro Theater] collapsed, and ever since, the question keeps recurring among Negroes in the theater--Why? Frank Fields, one of the original members of the ANT, and a gifted musician and theatrical composer, expressed to me his opinion, `The people in the ANT didn't really believe in a Negro theater.'"

[40] Letter, Jose Quintero [signed with initials but identified from other references in the correspondence] to "Dear Harold," June 6, 1954, Box 7, Correspondence File #1, HCP.

the white race can create great art." From here he goes on to talk about Sidney Bechet, Ellington, Porgy and Bess, and Dvorak's use of black musical themes in his "Symphony for a New World." He indicts Benedetto Croce and Bernard Berenson for their aesthetics of racial exclusiveness, and suggests that "the United States is the ultimate hope for white supremacy in the politics and economy of the world, and therefore in its art," but that "art in the United States does not represent our multiracial composition."[41] The caption accompanying a photograph of the somber but very young-looking Cruse identifies him as "Novelista y dramaturgo norteamericano conocido como agudo essayista estudioso del arte negro" ("North American novelist and playwright known as a sharp essayist studying Negro art.")

A focus on the theater is evident even in Cruse's published political writings. In The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual, he anatomizes the history of the black theater, rather than painting and the other visual arts, or poetry, or the novel. Indeed the book begins with the deceptively innocent remark: "In 1940, as one of my first acts in the pursuit of becoming a more `social' being, I joined a YMCA amateur drama group in Harlem," and Cruse self-consciously reminds us of this initiation at the book's end, "I first ventured into that Harlem YMCA amateur drama group just prior to America's entry into World War II."[42] He indicated his deep affinity for the musical stage even more directly in Rebellion or Revolution?, describing how his Harlem boyhood led to "creative impulses I had for other kinds of literature which are neither forensic nor theoretical nor polemical." Harlem "introduced me to the exciting and impressionable black vaudeville world of the local theaters" and "great personalities" like Ellington, Calloway, Hines, Webb, Basie, Henderson and more--a "black theatrical art... not only unique but inimitable." Besides his eloquent and elegiac remembrance of the singer Florence Mills, "a stately female vision, faceless in time, a radiant form in a darkened spirit house full of unseen worshippers murmuring in cadence to rhythm and song," what is most striking about the memoir is Cruse's casual citations of his intellectual influences. Besides the philosophers Marx and Schopenhauer, and key black writers like Hughes, Wright, Du Bois and Locke, he includes the white playwrights O'Neill, Ibsen and Shaw, and the now-forgotten drama critic George Jean Nathan.[43]

Cruse may have been "known as a sharp essayist" in 1960, but he had published only a few things. Apparently, however, he was already beginning to make his mark. In the late 1950s, he had "transferred his cultural loyalties" to the American Society of African Culture (AMSAC), a spinoff of the Paris-based Society for African Culture (SAC), founded in 1947, which became a magnet for an emerging transnational group of anti-colonial theorists, including American expatriates like Richard Wright, radical but with a anti-Communist tinge. In 1957, Cruse had an article, "An Afro-American's Cultural Views," accepted by SAC's prestigious journal Presence Africaine, and on this basis he became active in AMSAC when it was founded soon after. The association was short-lived, however, as Cruse's controversial claims in his Presence Africaine article led to an abortive debate with the eminent black critic and AMSAC leader J. Saunders Redding, who later attacked him in the New Leader.[44]

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[41] For references to Berenson in The Crisis., see page 222.
[42] Ibid., pp. 3, 534.
[43] Rebellion or Revolution?, pp. 26, 11. The references to O'Neill, Ibsen and Shaw are also in The Crisis…, p. 534.
[44] Rebellion or Revolution?, pp. 20-21; Saunders Redding, "Negro Writing in America," New Leader, May 16, 1960, pp. 8-10. Despite the well-established CIA backing for AMSAC revealed

The polite ambience of the CIA-funded AMSAC was evidently not enough to contain Cruse's new political-cultural interests, and soon came his fateful engagement with the Cuban Revolution. As Richard Gibson, a former Agence France Press correspondent then working for CBS and holding a Fellowship at the Columbia Journalism School, remembers it:

> I cannot recall exactly where I met Harold, probably at some FPCC meeting or through Amiri Baraka (then LeRoi Jones). I think he was working was a waiter on 14th Street. Cruse was very interested in the Cuban Revolution and intrigued by the Revolutionary's Government's relationship with the Afro-Cuban population. His own political position at the time reminded me as very much similar to Richard Wright's when I knew Wright in Paris in the 50s, maintaining the concepts of Black and White more relevant than Left and Right. They shared the same hostility to the Communist Party.... But at the time, the Cubans were declaring themselves 'humanistas' not 'communistas', and he eagerly accepted my invitation to him to go to Cuba with the FPCC delegation.[45]

On the basis of his acquaintance with Gibson, Cruse was one of the second-rank black writers (Baldwin, Hughes and John O. Killens had bowed out) to participate in the Fair Play for Cuba delegation in July 1960, which he described in The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual, as did Jones in his prize-winning Evergreen Review essay, "Cuba Libre." By that time, Cruse had already become active in an emerging group of quasi-nationalist "downtown" black artists led by Jones, and this circle of contacts was the apparent basis of his invitation to Cuba. Jones had begun by forming something called

> the Organization of Young Men (OYM). It was one fledgling effort at building some political consciousness downtown. And not so strangely, it was all black. Not that I'd planned it that way, but that is who was in it. And not so strangely, almost all of those had white wives or lovers. Archie Shepp, Steve Cannon, Leroy McLucas, Walter Bowie, Harold Cruse, Calvin Hicks, A.B. Spellman, Bobb Hamilton, and a few other folks. We weren't certain just what we wanted to do. It was more like a confirmation of rising consciousness. We issued at least one statement, but the sense of it was that we knew it was time to go on the offensive in the civil rights movement. We did not feel part of that movement.

Soon, however, the Organization of Young Men merged into "a stronger, somewhat more organized group, the name of which came to be On Guard," which was led by Calvin Hicks.[46]

In reality, this was a small and very intimate milieu, the antithesis of the disciplined and bureacratized world of the CPUSA where Cruse had his first career in politics. As he remembers it, "The Cuban Revolution changed the activities and orientation of a lot of people in different

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in 1967, some of the black writers active in it in the late Fifties were veterans of the Harlem Writers Guild and the Communist Party, with whom Cruse had long disagreed. For instance, the 1959 AMSAC Conference on Negro Writers Committee included John Henrik Clarke, Julian Mayfield, Sara Wright and Lofton Mitchell (see memoranda, February 28 and March 1, 1959, AMSAC File, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture). Interestingly enough, Clarke, Wright and Mayfield all joined Cruse on the July 1960 Fair Play for Cuba Committee delegation to Cuba organized by Richard Gibson, who was also active in AMSAC.

[45] Letter, Gibson to Gosse, March 4, 1996.

[46] Baraka, Autobiography, p. 168. The full name was the "On Guard for Freedom Committee," and the most important distinction between it and the Organization of Young Men was that On Guard aspired to being an uptown, Harlem-based organization.

ways.... It was Gibson that got me involved in the Cuban situation... We used to meet at different times and talk about matters. As a consequence On Guard was tied in with Fair Play... I was associated, all of us were loosely associated, nothing firm. These were floating affairs."

Cruse remained on the periphery of these groups, wary but still involved as long as he was invited in, or someone gave him a specific task; he had noticed the growing role of Cuban Communists while in Havana ("I saw the Communist takeover," he remembered in 1996). This remembered disillusionment and cynicism, amplified in The Crisis… to an acute pitch, is at odds with his activity at the time, however. Not only did Cruse attend the legendary reception at the Theresa Hotel in September 1960, when Castro came to Harlem, he acted as a go-between in efforts to bring Malcolm X and Castro together. At the time, Malcolm was part of a welcoming committee set up in Harlem to greet African diplomats accredited to the United Nations. The hope was that Castro could be included in this open-door process, providing him with an entree to Harlem--no easy task. As Cruse remembers it, one group from that summer's delegation said "'Harold, why don't you try to see Malcolm?' It was agreed I would talk with him. I did these things mechanically. I had no illusions about the left."

Most significantly, Cruse wrote two long impassioned essays the importance of the Cuban Revolution that are in no way wary or disillusioned: in the first, "A Negro Looks At Cuba," he compared the success of the Agrarian Reform with the immiseration of rural Mississippi, and Fidel Castro to the vicious white supremacist Governor and Senator Theodore Bilbo—exactly the kind of comparison the Cubans themselves liked to make! In the later, more polemical "The American Negro and the Cuban Revolution," written after the Bay of Pigs, he critiques the "Declaration of Conscience by Afro-Americans" that ran as a Fair Play for Cuba Committee advertisement in the New York Post a few days after the invasion began, not from any disagreement over the need for solidarity with Cuba, but because of its "startling degree of political naivete" in linking the racial dynamics of two very different societies.[47]

Oddly enough, given its later importance to his career, Cruse had no role in the Liberation Committee for Africa, founded in the spring of 1960 out of the milieu of Fair Play for Cuba and On Guard (though perhaps he stayed away simply because of John Henrik Clarke's involvement, an old antagonist from the CP in Harlem). Nor was he part of On Guard's most visible and flamboyant political intervention, the then-infamous "riot" at the United Nations on February 15, 1961, perhaps because of his less flexible employment situation at Macy's. At the time, it had just become public that in January Patrice Lumumba was summarily murdered while in the custody of troops loyal to Belgian and CIA-backed Katangese secessionists led by Moise Tshombe. As a consequence, several of the "loosely associated" people around On Guard decided that something extraordinary must be done. According to Gibson, Calvin Hicks, Dan Watts (President of the Liberation Committee for Africa) and Robert F. Williams were in his apartment and they "discussed making a public protest against the obvious American hand in the elimination of Lumumba. A number of black women were subsequently recruited by them for the occasion."[48]

The subsequent fracas was front page news in the New York Times, which reported that 60 people (the men with black armbands and the women veiled in black) "burst into the Security Council chamber," interrupting US chief delegate Adlai Stevenson's maiden speech, and fought with security guards. The principal organizations named were the Liberation Committee for

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[48] Email, Gibson to Gosse, May 20, 1996.

Africa, On Guard and James Lawson's United African Nationalist Movement, though LeRoi Jones (who was arrested as the battle continued outside) remembers Lawson pointing out people to police officers.[49]

In 1960-61, Cruse's participation in On Guard, Fair Play for Cuba, and similar efforts was quite cautious. His presence was noted by others, but he made no initiatives, unlike the peripatetic Jones, who dove headfirst into political involvements, taking over the presidency of Fair Play's New York chapter later that year. Gibson remembers that "I don't think he ever had any formal relationship with FPCC, but was listed on our mailing list," which seems to adequately sum up Cruse's role as an observer at this point.[50] It also seems that Cruse was often at loggerheads with younger activists over their incomprehension of the key historical issues involved in black nationalism, and their unwillingness to take organization-building seriously:

> They were interested, after a fashion, in politics, economics and culture, but not at all interested in political, economic and cultural organizations per se.... Although Jones and his trend considered themselves the new wave, once they had set up their own organizations they proceeded to do the exact same thing every other civil rights trend was doing--they went out to protest demonstrations.[51]

Later in The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual, Cruse alludes to a 1961 dispute with Jones, Shepp and Hicks over their permitting whites to participate in the Harlem-based On Guard, and their disdain for his "proposal that On Guard set up a movement in Harlem to foster self-help economic cooperatives among ghetto Negroes. Shepp proposed instead that On Guard stage a black demonstration on a corner of the richest section of New York's Park Avenue (note the protest mentality)."[52]

The next major step in Cruse's career, which spawned a deepening political involvement, was a nearly book-length manuscript submitted in late 1961 to Studies on the Left, the groundbreaking journal of the white New Left out of Madison, Wisconsin. After editing that reduced 100 pages down to 30, Cruse's article, "Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro-American," appeared as a centerpiece of the spring 1962 issue, devoted to "The New Radicalism and the Afro-American."[53] It provoked an immediate storm, and put Cruse on the map as a

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[49] New York Times, February 16, 1961, p. 1; Baraka, Autobiography, p. 181.

[50] Letter, Gibson to Gosse, March 4, 1996.

[51] The Crisis…, pp. 362-363.

[52] Ibid., p. 485. Typically, this passage does not make it clear that it was Cruse's proposal, or even that he was present, but a reference on p. 538 clarifies his role: "In 1961, after my own personal ideological tussle with the Jones-Shepp-Hicks contingent in Harlem, no one could have made me believe that in 1965 LeRoi Jones would start a Black Arts Repertory Theater and School in Harlem."

[53] Martin Sklar, then a principal Studies editor, recalls it: "I did not know Cruse, and I don't believe I had previously heard of him....I read the ms. and considered it important and I recommended publication to my fellow editors. There was only one problem, its length, which I think was about 100 pages, more or less, and we had to get it down to about 30+ typescript pages to accommodate our usual article-length." Letter, Sklar to Gosse, July 21, 1996. He had sent this massive manuscript to Studies on the Left apparently in the same spirit as his other eclectic bids for publication. Certainly in 1962 no other writer would or could have simultaneously appeared in The New Leader (where Cruse's essay "Negro Nationalism's New Wave" appeared

major new theorist of American radicalism, with audiences and effects he himself could not anticipate. While one Studies reader responded by labeling the journal "Studies on the Right," and the next issue featured 14 pages of debate between Cruse and his critics, others read its trenchant declarations as a call to action:

> The failure of American Marxists to work out a meaningful approach to revolutionary nationalism has special significance for the American Negro. The Negro has a relationship to the dominant culture of the United States similar to that of colonies and semi-dependents to their particular foreign overseers: the Negro is the American problem of underdevelopment... The revolutionary initiative has passed to the colonial world, and in the United States is passing to the Negro, while Western Marxists theorize, temporize and debate.

Cruse had no way of knowing its impact, but the cold precision of his critique indicates a growing sense of mastery. While his 1957 essay in Presence Africaine brought Cruse to the attention of the elite AMSAC coterie, his intervention in Studies on the Left spoke to the emerging New Left nationwide, especially its furthest left edges, both white and black. In late 1962, the fledgling nucleus of the tiny Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), the first black organization committed to armed struggle and a catalyst for the later Black Panther Party, were instructed "to seriously study the article" by Donald Freeman, their leader and founder of the Afro-American Institute in Cleveland. Freeman "said black radicals elsewhere were studying the article and that a movement had to be created in the North similar to the Nation of Islam, using the tactics of SNCC but outside of the NAACP and CORE."[54]

A striking indication of how Cruse's theorizing contributed to the New Left is that Martin Sklar, then a key Studies on the Left editor, remembers hosting an impromptu meeting with Malcolm X at his house during the latter's late 1962 visit to Madison: "I was informed (either by my black friends or by Malcolm) that this was the first time Malcolm consented to go to a white person's place of residence for a meeting of this sort, and that he did so because he knew of SoL, especially the issue with the Cruse and [Robert F.]Williams pieces, and that he carried SoL in the bookstore of his Harlem mosque."[55]

1963 was a pivotal year for Cruse, marked by his increasing willingness to move from cultural-political theorizing to building the hoped-for permanent institutions of a new nationalist black Left. Perhaps spurred by the respect he was garnering from a new generation, Cruse simultaneously involved himself in two important and linked ventures--the Freedom Now Party and The Liberator magazine.

The history of the Freedom Now Party (FNP) is virtually unrecorded. It was one of those well-intentioned, briefly impressive but evanescent affairs in which Sixties radicalism abounded--especially when it came to electoral politics. There were no records, little national organizational structure, and few memories of how it functioned, outside of Michigan where a practical-minded cadre led by James and Grace Lee Boggs, the Reverend Albert Cleage, and the

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that same year), organ of the most vociferously anti-Communist elements in the old Socialist Party, and in Studies, which Cruse remembers as "supposedly going to replace the old CP" and fill "a gap" ideologically.

[54] Maxwell C. Stanford, "Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM): A Case Study of an Urban Revolutionary Movement in Western Capitalist Society," unpublished M.A. thesis, Atlanta University, 1986, p. 76.

[55] Letter, Sklar to Gosse, July 21, 1996.

Group on Advanced Leadership (GOAL) took it much farther than anywhere else.[56]

Whatever the FNP was and was not, Cruse played a major role in its formation and political direction. The initial inspiration came from two well-known independent black radicals, the journalist William Worthy and the attorney Conrad Lynn. The pacifist Worthy had been a special CBS News correspondent in Moscow and other hotspots in the Fifties, and a Nieman Fellow at Harvard when he broke U.S. laws by going into Red China for CBS in 1957, scoring a major journalistic coup. Lynn was briefly a member of both the Communist and Socialist Workers parties decades earlier and became one of the tiny handful of successful left-wing lawyers in the Fifties and Sixties, aided by a young assistant named William Kunstler.

In 1962, Worthy became a cause celebre when the U.S. government indicted him for passport violations after he repeatedly violated official travel bans on Cuba. Many other journalists had ignored these laws without sanction, and Worthy argued that he was singled out because of his outspoken support for the Cuban Revolution. In November 1960, ABC had aired his graphic documentary Yanki No!, about the tide of Cuban-inspired revolutionary sentiment sweeping Latin America, but by 1962 he no longer worked for the television networks and was featured only in the Baltimore Afro-American, the nation's largest-circulation black newspaper.

Worthy was convicted, but continued to appeal his case with the help of a high-profile defense committee of notables, including Bayard Rustin and the eminent A. Philip Randolph. The satiric folksinger Phil Ochs even recorded "The Ballad of William Worthy" with the famous line "William Worthy isn't worthy anymore...," which is all many people remember about these events. On June 1, 1963, he was speaking to a defense rally in Harlem, and decided to broach publicly the idea of an all-black political party. As The New Yorker reported a few weeks later,

> He suggested the formation, by Negroes, of a Freedom Now party, to propose Negro candidates for public offices. "Think about it," he said. "Talk about it. Kick the idea around. We may not win many offices, but with one out of ten Americans a Negro... we can make our voice heard in the land."

Worthy then posed a wonderful and fantastical scenario to evoke the promise of black political power.

> Do you know what would happen if Fidel Castro were President of the United States instead of John F. Kennedy?....Bull Connor would be given a fair trial and then shot. Ninety five percent of the police would have to flee to South Africa for political asylum. J. Edgar Hoover would be thrown into an integrated jail. It that didn't cure him, he would be left there for life.[57]

As Conrad Lynn later summarized the party's progress after this event, "A few more speakers addressed the assemblage, including myself, and we followed through on the formation of the Freedom Now party."[58] But how exactly did this take place, and when did Cruse come into it?

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[56] See Suzanne E. Smith, Dancing in the Street: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) for a sensitive exploration of Detroit's distinctive contributions to what would become Black P

[57] "Talk of the Town," The New Yorker, June 15, 1963. One cannot help wondering if the reference to Hoover being cured by an "integrated jail" is not an obliquely lewd reference to Hoover's rumored homosexuality.

[58] Conrad Lynn, There is a Fountain: The Autobiography of a Civil Rights Lawyer (Westport, Connecticut: Lawrence Hill, 1979), p. 183.

The March on Washington had been announced at this time by Martin Luther King, Jr., and appears to have provided the initial impetus for launching the FNP. As Lynn put it in his memoirs, "I was skeptical... but decided to attend. If we felt no viable program was enunciated, we would issue a call for our new party."[59] In fact, the party was announced to the world in the most impressive of all possible ways four days before the March on Washington, via a front-page story in The New York Times on August 24, 1963, "An All-Negro Party for '64 Is Formed."

This well-timed preemptive strike considerably exaggerated the party's strength, declaring that a National Committee of 100 people had already been formed under the acting chairmanship of Lynn, and an office opened in Harlem. It also said that the "initiators of the national committee intend to distribute handbills to participants" not only in Washington but in other cities, and at factory gates, including the Ford River Rouge plant in Detroit--an action suggesting the Boggs's involvement.[60] The bulk of the article by M.S. Handler, who covered black politics for the Times, provided priceless publicity for the infant organization by quoting its first brochure:

> What sense does it make to go on supporting the party of Eugene (Bull) Connor? Bull Connor is still Kennedy's Democratic National Committeeman from Alabama.... Why should Southern Negroes register to vote--at the risk of death--when the only 'choice' on the ballot is a James O. Eastland or a George C. Wallace?.... Our African brothers have shown us how to win freedom. Their principal technique: All-black political action. This is self-reliance, not 'racism.'

At this late date it is difficult to sort out the sequence of events in the FNP's founding. No one involved remembers them exactly, and Lynn's autobiography must be mistaken when he writes that after King's "I Have a Dream" speech "The radicals repaired to the Park Sheraton Hotel to prepare our manifesto for a Freedom Now party. After a five-hour meeting we agreed to form a committee for a Freedom Now party with myself as acting chairman," since the Times article predates any such meeting.[61]

What seems apparent is that a small group got together in New York in late 1962. It apparently included Lynn, Worthy, a woman named Pernella Wattley (who on July 22, 1963 joined Worthy in a polite sit-in at the United Nations where they forced Adlai Stevenson to discuss South Africa), probably Dan Watts and "perhaps others that had been on board with the Cuba issue."[62] As Worthy remembers it, Harold Cruse became involved "After we started holding meetings at Pernella Wattley's apartment. He lived on 14th Street and I lived on 19th Street. The small group that began meeting, we were fishing around for likely people," so Worthy called Cruse, and went to his apartment with documents. All that was involved was "mainly kicking around ideas," though Cruse did call him once to say he wanted to be Chairman

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[59] Ibid.

[60] See also an unsigned article on "The Black Revolution" in the Boggs' magazine Correspondence, September 1963: "The coming reality was heralded in the formation, on the eve of the March, of the all-black FREEDOM NOW Party which has since been gaining the support of militant local leaders like Reverend Cleage of Detroit. Such a party, as Kennedy is well aware (twice during the week of September 9 he told the press that poltiical division between whites and Negroes could be `fatal') can break up the Democratic Party."

[61] Lynn, There is a Fountain, p. 184.

[62] On the sit-in at the UN, see The Liberator, September 1963.

of the Program Committee, and late in 1963 wrote an angry letter to the Socialist Workers Party's magazine, International Socialist Review, with that title.[63]

Cruse largely corroborates this account, in that he remembers meetings at a woman's apartment and writing the FNP's draft program, as well as that Lynn, Worthy and himself were the principals. But from here on, the FNP becomes formless, perhaps reflecting its stillborn status after a grand beginning. Worthy remembers a single press conference with Lynn presiding, and Cruse an actual convention with "a couple of hundred people in Brooklyn, as I recall. The only ones who came were people ready to back the party. The factions didn't show up. A lot of interesting people without the least idea of what to do next." The major problem of the Freedom Now Party, however, in most accounts, was the role of whites (specifically, organized tendencies of white Marxists), in a party dedicated to black liberation.

As Lynn wrote of the Washington meeting on August 28, 1963,

> The main disagreement at the meeting was between the separatists and the integrationists. A shaky compromise was reached: all candidates for public office would be black, but individuals of whatever color were free to join.... [In the coming months] While fending off the white liberals with one hand, it was necessary to use the other to hold back the separatists. Many blacks made it crystal clear they wanted no truck with white people. They were particularly concerned that certain white radical parties not obtain a manipulating influence in our councils.[64]

At the time, Worthy disagreed, writing in late 1963 that the party had to be all-black, so as to avoid being "the political equivalent of CORE."[65] Looking back in 1996, Cruse dismissed the question of white participation as "a side issue, a mini-issue," but clearly took major exception to the interventions of "those established forces trying to come in on it, the Communists, the SWP, the Black Nationalists, the West Indians, all trying to make hay off the idea." At that time, he remembered, there was really "a mass movement" made up of "dozens of little movements, but none were really together, all were acting up in the spirit of the times." In the end, he says, "It just collapsed... I realized finally it would never get off the ground, it was part of my education. It was a bundle of contradictions, a melange of activists stimulated by

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[63] Interview with William Worthy, July 4, 1996; Cruse to Editor, International Socialist Review, October 1963, Box 7, Correspondence File #1, HCP. See also The Crisis…, pp. 416-417: "One of the Liberator writers was called into the Freedom Now Party committee by William Worthy to assist in drafting a party platform." As readers of The Crisis… will know, this is Cruse's characteristically cryptic way of referring to himsel

[64] Lynn, There is a Fountain, p. 184.

[65] William Worthy, "An All Black Party," The Liberator, October 1963. Indicating that discussions about a possible Freedom Now Party had begun in 1962, Worthy said that "As late as the last part of the winter, realizing how strongly an all-Negro party would come under false and contrived attack, some us thought that possibly a Freedom Now Party could be interracial." Then describing the outright repression he expected from a vengeful Robert F. Kennedy's Justice Department, given the FNP's potential to deprive the Kennedys of victory in 1964, he concluded that, "with this prospect ahead, I personally would vote on just that ground alone to keep whites out of the party.... the sad truth is that of thousands of whites I know, I can think of only a handful who would stand up to the bitter end when home, job, reputation, even freedom from imprisonment are imminently threatened." An office was listed at 81 East 125th Street in Harlem, with Pernella Wattley as "corresponding secretary."

Cuba and Africa, ranting and raving." Cruse goes on to lay particular blame at the feet of the Michigan FNP, led by James and Grace Lee Boggs and their associates in GOAL: "They went back to Detroit and started their own, on their own, a separate faction. You can't build a national party if people go off on their own."

Not surprisingly, after so many years, others remember it differently. No one else, for instance, defines the relationship between the FNP in New York and in Detroit as a "split," to use Cruse's words, though Lynn's memoir does quote a hard-edged letter from James Boggs:

> I wrote that I did not believe the party should be under any kind of umbrella. If you want to know what I mean by an umbrella, I mean that it should not be under the auspices of any radical group. And if you want me to be more concrete, I am under the impression that the people you have in Detroit and Cleveland are people whom you were given by the SWP. Are they or are they not? And isn't this true of some other places?
>
> The other point I want to get home very clearly and very sharply. If white radicals are saying they must be in the party in order for it to be a party, then I am against the damn party.... There are going to have to be some choices here. Are you going to have some Muslims or are you going to have some whites and no Muslims? Because you are not going to have the two....[66]

This particular animus towards the Socialist Workers Party is corroborated by Cruse's public denunciations of the same group in his article "FNP vs. SWP: Marxism and the Negro" in the May 1964 issue of The Liberator, which prompted a strong rebuttal from Clifton DeBerry, the African American who was the Trotskyists' 1964 Presidential candidate. In an odd touch, the SWP (then building a strong working relationship with Malcolm X) was apparently so pleased by the fact of their public debate with Cruse that they reprinted the various Liberator pieces, including Cruse's denunciation, as a pamphlet.[67]

All agree that, outside of Michigan (where the state branch ran a statewide ticket headed by the Reverend Albert Cleage for Governor in November 1964) the FNP had a very brief life, mainly because of an overwhelming lack of unity and direction. It was "divided from the very beginning," in Cruse's words. Worthy drifted away before leaving the country in late 1964, "because nothing was getting done," though he remained personally close to the Boggses and others.

The most tangible evidence of the FNP's existence, other than the Michigan branch's electoral efforts in 1964-65, was the Draft Program written by Cruse and published in The Liberator, and the party's strong connection to the Northern Negro Grass Roots Leadership Conference held on November 9-10, 1963 in Detroit. This conference posed an open challenge to a parallel civil rights "leadership conference" in the same city organized by the local allies of Dr. King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which decided to "bar from its agenda all discussion of such controversial issues as `self-defense' and the Freedom Now Party, which

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[66] Lynn, There is a Fountain, p. 185.

[67] This article is described very elliptically in The Crisis…, p. 418: "since the question of Marxism *had* to be taken up one way or another, in order for the Liberator to live up to its pretensions to being a serious critical journal, the Liberator writer who grabbed at the chance of knocking Marxism did so with full knowledge that it was extremely unfair to use the Trotskyists as the whipping boys when the real historical culprits since the 1920s have been the Communists."

might lead to decisions challenging King's leadership or infiltration by `Black Nationalists.'"[68] It was keynoted by Malcolm X, who gave his famous speech, "A Message to the Grassroots," at a rally attended by 3,000 people, anticipating his imminent break with the Nation of Islam and linking with broader radical forces in a call for the Black Revolution (the rally also featured Reverend Cleage and William Worthy). In a tangible sense it represented the first open challenge to the existing leadership of the civil rights movement, and Worthy's open promotion of the Freedom Now Party briefly suggested the FNP might become the vehicle for that challenge, an eventuality that did not arise.[69] Cruse, however, had nothing to do with the Grassroots Leadership Conference, so we will focus instead on his penultimate political engagement before turning to writing The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual--his year and more as part of the Editorial board, and dominant figure, in the key proto-Black power magazine The Liberator.

The Liberator was originally the newsletter of an intended political organization, the Liberation Committee for Africa (LCA). The LCA was closely modeled on the Fair Play for Cuba Committee (FPCC), which was launched through an April 6, 1960 ad in the New York Times featuring the names of various writers and intellectuals, including the black authors John Henrik Clarke, Frank London Brown, James Baldwin and Julian Mayfield. This gambit proved very successful, prompting a thousand or more letters and requests for membership to flood the FPCC office set up by two CBS journalists, Robert Taber and the already-mentioned Richard Gibson.[70] Soon after, Gibson's friend and neighbor in the Upper West Side's Park West development, Dan Watts (then the first black architect hired by one of New York's major firms, just as Gibson was the first black newswriter hired by CBS) decided to launch a similar effort for Africa. He ran an ad denouncing US policy, naming himself as head of the embryonic Liberation Committee for Africa. But success did not strike twice, as Gibson (LCA's nominal Vice-Chair) remembers it:

> It was copycatted from the FPCC ad in the Times, which had an excellent response. But there wasn't any similar response to the LCA ad, except for many bitter comments from the American Committee on Africa, who seemed to fear that militant and angry blacks were about to poach in their liberal but mainly white preserve. The critics included the American Friends Service Committee and pacifists opposed to French nuclear testing in the Sahara. Dan Watts was disappointed to discover that the African diplomatic corps in New York at the UN and in Washington DC were not very enthusiastic nor supportive. The FLN [Algerian National Liberation Front] office in New York, headed by

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[68] "Black Revolution in the North," Correspondence, November 1963, which also reported that "the Summit Conference was a humiliating failure. An estimated 20-40 delegates, many of them white, wandered aimlessly in and out of the imposing meeting rooms in Cobo Hall... No resolutions were adopted, no plans made for future meetings or for any permanent organization." In contrast, the Grassroots Leadership Conference was attended by "157 persons, all non-white, from 11 cities in eight states." I have also drawn on an unpublished paper by Grace Boggs, "Malcolm's Message to the Grassroots," given at the "Detroit Remembers Malcolm X Conference," Wayne State University, July 24, 1993, for which I thank the author.

[69] Telephone interview with Grace Lee Boggs, September 2, 1996.

[70] For the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, and the larger history of U.S. involvement with the Cuban Revolution, see Van Gosse, Where the Boys Are: Cuba, Cold War America and the Making of a New Left (London: Verso, 1993), passim.

M'hammed Yazid and Mohammed Sahnoun, who were personal friends of mine, were among the more appreciative, as was Vusimi Make, then representative of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania, in New York. (He was later to marry Maya Angelou and move with her to Cairo.)[71]

From this somewhat inauspicous beginning, the LCA slowly grew, building an audience among emigre Africans and the still relatively small number of African Americans interested in current African politics from a radically anti-imperialist perspective. In mid-1961, an office was opened near the United Nations; at that point, the LCA's principals included only Watts, John Henrik Clarke and a white man named Lowell Beveridge, named as the magazine's Editor.[72] Increasingly, the newsletter became its main project. The Liberator's early issues featured in-depth articles on the continent's remaining colonies, plus publicity about cultural programs on African themes in New York, often endorsed by the various U.N. missions from the newly-independent African nations.[73] Considerable attention was given to the travails of the African student population, which had come to America on U.S. government-sponsored programs to combat Communism, with numerous testimonial letters from the Pan-African Students Organization in the Americas, the Organization of Arab Students and the like.

In those years, the Liberator's cover usually featured an African leader--a martyred leader of the Cameroon freedom struggle, allegedly assassinated by the French intelligence services; a commandant of the Angolan guerrillas killed in battle; Nkrumah, of course; the premier of Burundi, also assassinated. In these years it seemed to progress modestly, without any evident connection to American events. Congratulatory letters were printed from figures as important as Nasser. A Liberator Book Service, advertised on the back cover, promoted popular titles like Du Bois' The Souls of Black Folk, John Howard Griffin's Black Like Me, An Atlas of Africa, Langston Hughes' An African Treasury, J.A. Rogers' Africa's Gift to America and Eric Lincoln's The Black Muslims in America. In May 1962, an honorary Advisory Board was announced that bridged the divide between new nationalists and older leftists, including Ossie Davis, the civil rights lawyer Len Holt, the eminent Harlem intellectual figures L.H. Michaux and Richard Moore, Captain Hugh Mulzac (a mainstay of the tattered "progressive" left, as the first African American to command a ship of the United States Merchant Marine), the redoubtable Communist George Murphy, Jr., and others.

Criticism of this African-centric focus was raised in the sharpest possible fashion by a letter Watts saw fit to print in the August 1962 issue. Mae Mallory, one of Robert F. Williams' closest associates during the armed conflict in Monroe, North Carolina in 1960-61, was at this point in jail in Cleveland, Ohio, awaiting possible extradition. In her letter, she denounced Dan Watts personally:

> I saw the last copy of LIBERATOR. I must admit it is fairly good.

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[71] Electronic communication, Gibson to Gosse, May 24, 1996.

[72] The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual contains the following oblique reference on page 405 to The Liberator's "directorship" containing "both white liberalism (Christian) and the white pro-Marxist leftwing." Cruse has confirmed that by the latter he meant Beveridge.

[73] See, for instance, "A Letter from Angola" in the August 1961 issue, from an "assimilated" Angolan, denouncing the Portuguese repression in heartfelt terms, and the announcement of "Negro History Week...Commemorating the Death of Patrice Lumumba," with a performance of the Freedom Suite by Max Roach and Abby Lincoln, co-sponsored by the Ghanaian, Guinean and United Arab Republic's UN Missions (January 1962 issue).

> However, you spoke of Monroe, North Carolina only in passing....I deeply appreciate your interest in Africa, though it takes more than mere words on paper to change things... When the activists are jailed, you so-called "intellectuals" find safe grounds to cover.
>
> Mr. Watts, there are no safe grounds for black skins in this country, as there were no safe grounds for Jews in Germany and Poland.....
>
> I hope that we can co-operate for our common good. It is just as essential to defend Afro-Americans as Africans.
>
> May I expect your co-operation, will you urge the various African groups that you have contact with to wire Attorney General Robert Kennedy to order North Carolina to drop the spurious charges against us....

In September 1962, the magazine announced its "new look... with substantial coverage not only of Africa but also of the struggle in the United States," and Paul Zuber's lead article focusing on "The Problem of Segregation in Northern Public Schools." Its focus shifted sharply towards the hypocrisy of the Kennedy Administration and the need for a more radical and independent black politics. During the first half of 1963, the now-color covers featured James Baldwin, Sonny Liston and a photo of Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. on a Harlem dais with Malcolm X standing behind him, smiling. Increasingly the emphasis was on New York city politics and black theater and jazz. A new group of young writers became editors and members of the Editorial board announced in December 1963, including Cruse, Carlos Russell, C.E. Wilson and Clebert Ford, a black actor gaining prominence for his role in Jean Genet's The Blacks. Especially notable were sharp attacks on Martin Luther King, Jr. as a lapdog of the white Establishment. One cartoon showed Kennedy holding a leashed, docile King on all fours and telling a Southern cop, "No... You hold your dog... King doesn't bite!", though The Liberator continued to also feature African National Congress statements and the like.[74] Testimonials were more likely to come from Mrs. Paul Robeson and Lorraine Hansberry ("It is becoming an excellent publication") than Nasser.

By this time, a woman activist who had been working with Malcolm X in Harlem, Rose L.H. Finkenstaedt, was writing pointed articles about the direction of the civil rights movement, including a December 1962 piece, "Needed: An Afro-American Political Party," that anticipated the FNP. In January 1963, her husband, James Finkenstaedt, a white vice president with the publisher William R. Morrow, signed on as a volunteer Associate Editor, though his main job was handling circulation. Their connection to The Liberator proved to be a fortuitous one for Cruse.[75]

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[74] Liberator, July 1963.

[75] "My wife was a contributor to the Liberator; through her contact with Malcolm X, she wrote about the Black Muslims, as well as social problems in Harlem. I was involved with distribution, the newstand sales throughout the country with special emphasis on the New York area. My official title was associate editor; I attended meetings and consulted with authors, but I had no fundamental editorial function. Likewise Lowell Beveridge, the only other white man on the staff, bore the title of editor, but he only served as copy-editor and text-composer. The magazine centered around Dan Watts: he was in charge; he chose the writers, enlisted celebrities, such as James Baldwin and Ossie Davis among others, and selected the subjects. He was to my mind an extremely competent publisher and certainly the most important figure in the operation in every capacity - from editorial, to promotional and financial." Letter, James C.

Cruse's first article, "Rebellion or Revolution? (Part One)", appeared in The Liberator in October 1963, along with William Worthy's article on the FNP, "An All Black Political Party" (which was presumably no coincidence since all of the parties concerned attended meetings together). In this same issue the sponsoring organization was changed from the Liberation Committee for Africa to the Afro-American Institute, also indicative of a new direction. Over the summer of 1963 Cruse had decided to write some articles, and visited Watts. Presumably, they had known each other earlier, in the On Guard circle, but the magazine's focus on Africa held little interest for Cruse. The organizing of the FNP apparently brought them into closer contact. "I just sent him my stuff and went to a few meetings where articles were presented.... It was very simple." According to James Finkenstaedt, "He was invited to a Liberator meeting by Dan Watts, and was immediately highly respected by the entire staff. He was named to the editorial board in December, 1963...."

Over the next year, Cruse's in-depth analyses of black politics in the past and present dominated The Liberator. As Finkenstaedt remembers it: "Cruse's role at the Liberator from the time of his first article in the issue of October, 1963... was one of preeminence. He was probably the leading intellectual on the staff." These articles also greatly extended his public reputation and later formed the main body of his second book, Rebellion or Revolution?, but that was not all he published in the magazine.[76] In November 1963, even before he officially joined the Editorial board, a short piece appeared, "Third Party: Facts and Forecasts," billed as the first installment of a monthly department or "forum." In it, Cruse analyzed the August March on Washington as "the end of an era," the end of false hopes and "illusions." The new phase would be an "all-black party" with a "comprehensive program... a break with moderate NAACP'ism, surface manifestations of the Jim Crow system."

By this time, The Liberator had left Africa behind, and immersed itself totally in what it called the "North's Black Revolution." In February 1964, it published Cruse's "Draft Program" for the Freedom Now Party (no author was named), with its strong emphasis on the need for "Cultural Revolution." Cruse admits that others were not sympathetic to his emphasis "on the cultural side," and Watts' editorial in the same issue said outright that he disagreed with some of the program, apparently foreshadowing later tensions.[77] Cruse's major article, "The Roots of Black Nationalism," appeared in the same issue, with critical remarks about both the FNP and the "pathological martyrdom of the jailhouse" in the southern civil rights struggle. The April 1964 issue put Malcolm X on the cover, contrasting him with King, "the obedient boy of the empire," and the next month featured an interview with the now-ex Nation of Islam leader.

As 1964 went on, the pace quickened, as did The Liberator's mounting engagement with the various elements of the black liberation movement. Cruse's next essay, "The Economics of Black Nationalism," was the lead article in the July 1964 issue, along with an interview with SNCC President John Lewis, and pieces by Rolland Snellings and Malcolm X himself,

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Finkenstaedt to Gosse, September 18, 1996.

[76] They are "Rebellion or Revolution?" in The Liberator, October, November, December, 1963 and January 1964; "The Roots of Black Nationalism," March and April, 1964; "FNP vs. SWP: Marxism and the Negro," May and June, 1964; "The Economics of Black Nationalism," July, August, 1964.

[77] See also the reference in The Crisis…, p. 418, where Cruse does not explicitly claim authorship of the FNP Draft Program: "while the draft platform was attacked in the Liberator for factional reasons, it was attacked from the Detroit wing for ideological reasons. James Boggs

recounting the lessons of his African tour ("Travel broadens one's scope... My outlook is much broader than before I left") under the headline "We Are All Blood Brothers." Don Freeman, founder of the Revolutionary Action Movement, reported on a "Black Nationalist Youth Movement" meeting in Nashville that officially endorsed Cruse's position on the relation of Marxism to the black movement.

The rest of 1964 saw more of the same, as events from the Harlem riot of that summer (first of the next four years' urban rebellions) to the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution provided ever more evidence of white liberalism's bankruptcy and the danger posed by what Watts' November 1964 editorial called "the gutless, spineless lackeys of the white power structure." Writing just before the November presidential election, he stated plainly Cruse's position that "If we choose to remain here, then we must organize black economic and political power in order to survive..." For all these months, Cruse was still listed as a member of the Editorial Board, but after August no more articles of his appeared. By his account, he was locked in an increasingly acrimonious relationship with Watts:

> Africa was the big issue for people like Watts, who was not essentially interested in the American civil rights issues.... He wanted to hobnob with the Africans in the UN.... Dan Watts didn't understand that the kind of magazine he wanted couldn't be based on African questions.... My articles put his magazine on the map, and he had to accept it. I just stepped in and boldly used it and he said 'go ahead.' I thought naively that this was the direction it would go.[78]

This caused a division, which Cruse could not overcome. "I tried to ease Watts out, to be President so someone could take over as editor. But his attitude was 'it's mine, all mine'--he was riding a popularity wave" with African affairs. Eventually, says Cruse, "I quit, I just quit. I got tired of wasting my time with Dan Watts... a spokesman for that crowd at the UN."[79] As of January 1965, Cruse was off The Liberator's masthead, with no explanation and no apparent shift in the magazine's politics. Indeed, that same issue had an article by RAM's Max Stanford which

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[78] James Finkenstaedt indicates that it was not an open split: "I do not know really why Cruse left the magazine. He may have had policy differences with Dan Watts. Both my wife and I had great respect for him; he was a very influential figure" (letter, September 18, 1996). In Yuri Kochiyama's notes from Cruse's 1965 class at the Black Arts School, another point is made: "Could have been a Harlem magazine. Should have utilized Southern writers, and pooled the talents of specialists." Interestingly, when the New York Times noted The Liberator's fifth anniversary on June 13, 1965, it quoted Watts (who asserted a circulation of 15,000) speaking in entirely Crusean terms about his mission: "We advocate white acceptance of a multiracial, pluralistic society." "All black ghettos" should be treated as an "an underdeveloped country, with massive technical assistance." Of course, Cruse writes extensively about the magazine's failings in Crisis of the Negro Intellectual, and readers must assume that he had some personal engagement, as in the following passage on p. 407, "The Liberator carried what was called an advisory board.... The exact function of this advisory board was never revealed to the staff writers, but at least five of its members were either Communist or pro-Communist.... One of the staff writers saw through the implications of this 'advisory' board; he sought, unsuccessfully, to have it removed in order to free The Liberator to deal as an independent publication [emphasis in original] with the Communist issue."

[79] Obviously, this is a one-sided view of the dispute between Cruse and Watts. However, it is the only account available. Several attempts were made to contact Watts, who did not respond.

consciously evoked Cruse in its title, "Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro-American Student."

Certainly, Cruse had other reasons for moving on. He was trying to both write and produce a new musical with several others, and had numerous other engagements.[80] His health was also precarious. His 1968 recollection states simply that

> I felt highly satisfied in my Liberator role, but it was short-lived because of certain ideological conflicts that were bound to develop within the staff over editorial policy.... In 1964, during hospitalization after an ulcer attack, I quit Liberator, finally convinced that only a lengthy book would allow me to fully elaborate my views.[81]

Most important, however, was his relationship with James Finkenstaedt, which both insist was quite separate from the magazine. In Finkenstaedt's words,

> My function as William Morrow Vice-President had nothing to do with my activities for the Liberator. It simply gave me a certain professional competence. I deliberately kept the two worlds separate. However, through my contacts with the Liberator, I was able to introduce authors to William Morrow. William Worthy, Imamu Baraka, Harold Cruse, Larry Neal, Len Holt, Reverend Cleage, Eric Lincoln, Charles Hamilton were published by William Morrow.[82]

In early 1965, Cruse signed a contract for two books with Morrow: his collected articles, and a new work presenting his comprehensive critique of black political and ideological practices, which became The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual. Morrow encouraged Cruse to write the latter book first, for the greatest possible impact. In any case, it made a dramatic difference in Cruse's life. For the first time, he had the financial independence to devote himself exclusively to research and writing; his ship had finally come in, and the years of producing long, dense essays that no one would publish now paid off, as he re-cast a series of essays written since the late 1950s into a synthetic thesis.[83]

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[80] In The Crisis…, p. 498-500, Cruse describes the activities of a split from AMSAC, the American Festival of Negro Arts, which in early 1965 held what he described as a highly successful conference at Fairleigh Dickinson University in New Jersey. One surmises a personal stake in this "rival movement," especially since the following pages describe in biting detail the failure of a contemporary "Negro writer's conference" held at the New School by "Killens and his faction."

[81] Rebellion or Revolution?, pp. 24-25.

[82] Letter, Finkenstaedt to Gosse, September 18, 1996.

[83] A detailed textual exegesis would be required, comparing The Crisis…. chapter-by-chapter with the Cruse's massive unpublished corpus, to demonstrate the extent to which the book was a collage of existing material, but the titles of just a sampling of those earlier essays are suggestive: in January 1959 he wrote the head of AMSAC, proposing to present a paper at the upcoming conference on "The American Negro Writer and His Roots" on "the Negro writer as part of the organized Marxist movement in New York City," apparently drawn from a book he was writing on "Marxism and the Negro Question," "now three fourths completed" (Cruse to James T. Harris, January 20, 1959, Box 9, Essays, Articles, Short Stories, Misc. file, HCP); in 1963 or 1964 he submitted an essay called "Contemporary Dialectics" to Monthly Review (ibid.); in June 1963, he produced another essay called "The American Negro Manifesto on Cultural Revolution—An Approach to a General Social Theory And an Analysis of Aesthetics'

One more engagement remained before the publication of The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual made Cruse famous, and moved him from New York to the University of Michigan as a leading figure in the new discipline of Black Studies. In 1965, Cruse's old acquaintance with LeRoi Jones and the respect he had gained as an analyst of black politics led to his teaching in Jones' celebrated but short-lived Black Arts Repertory Theater and School (BARTS) in Harlem.

Cruse's class in "Cultural Philosophy" began on July 1, 1965. One of the participants was Yuri Kochiyama, a Japanese-American interned in World War II who later moved to Harlem and became active in civil rights and nationalist politics, including Malcolm X's Organization of Afro-American Unity and the Revolutionary Action Movement. According to Ms. Kochiyama, the class had twelve to fifteen students, Harlem activists rather than intellectuals, "people who were not that well read. But he didn't seem to mind... we were really at rockbottom in terms of left thinking."

Cruse was apparently a superb teacher, patient and egalitarian, yet "a very easy person to get along with. We all felt very comfortable with him. He treated us very well.... As a human being, he was unpretentious, didn't think of himself as a distinguished or eminent person." The class, which included a personable FBI infiltrator named Don Duncan, continued meeting for several months at Cruse's apartment downtown on 14th Street "when all the crazy stuff started, it got kind of scary and the place [the Black Arts School] was closed," because of violent tensions between LeRoi Jones and two brothers, Charles and William Patterson, part of the school's leadership (a "terrorist fringe," in Cruse's words). Eventually Jones was threatened personally and relocated to Newark, and his friend, the poet Larry Neal, was shot and wounded.[84]

Detailed notes of the class sessions reveal Cruse ("he had all these little cards he was reading from"] working out many of the key ideas he would express in The Crisis…. On the first day, after defining the tension between "Cultural Nationalism" and "Cultural Assimilation" (and that "Afro-Americans most militant group--but never learned to make cultural affairs political"), he stressed that

> White European social theory inapplicable to theory of social revolution for American Negro [emphasis in original].... Social theories created out of necessities. 19th century theories not pertinent for today's Negroes. American Negro must create his own social theory.
>
> Marxist theory has deficiencies because Western culture is not relevant to people who did not grow out of Western civilization. Every ethnic culture has its own theory. Negroes must develop their own. White people think their [emphasis in original] philosophy is superior.

From here Cruse went on to another of his major theses, that identity in America is by

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Relations to Social Change in America" (Box 11, HCP); in 1965, via the American Festival for Negro Arts, he produced a detailed "seminar" outline, titled "Towards an Afro-American Cultural Philosophy in the Creative Arts" (see Cruse to Robert S. Pritchard, August 4, 1965, explaining his withdrawal from the project because of illness, and also because it had become "multi and inter-cultural," in Box 10, Miscellaneous folder, HCP). Boxes 9 and 11 include many others pieces, like "Assimilation in American Life," "On Explaining 20th Century Negro History," "The Politics of Negro Business, "The Historical Roots of American Social Change and Social Theory," and more.

[84] Telephone interview with Yuri Kochiyama, October 14, 1996; The Crisis…, p. 541.

"group," and "the problem is group democracy, not class democracy," and the key question: "How can the Negro bourgeois class and the Negro ghetto class ever come together?" This was only a prelude, however, to his synopsis of U.S. capitalist development and the 20th century explosion of mass media, making the "cultural aspect... a revolutionary idea applicable to Afro-Americans because of the peculiar and unique way that the U.S. developed."

In this and the next class, on July 6, Cruse also gave his working-class students detailed definitions of key words like Culture, Nationalism, Integration, Assimilation, Theory, Revolution, Democracy, Prejudice, Racialism ("no such word as racism or racist in dictionary"), Plurality, Bourgeois, Proletarian, Nihilism, Socialist, Anarchism, Anarchy, Dialectics, Individualism, Economics, Economic, Politics, Pragmatic, Pragmatism, and Aesthetic. He also focused at length on Harlem "as base of cultural movement" and "base of nationalist reorganization along political, economic and cultural lines," examining in intensive and specific detail how and by whom this might happen, and the need for an "Afro-American cultural philosophy" because "The route to democracy lies in the control of the cultural apparatus." The clash between European and Afro-American cultural forms, especially in music, was detailed, and the current crop of black magazines like The Liberator and Freedomways was critiqued.

To any reader of The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual, these phrases, themes and epigrams from Cruse's lectures must seem very familiar, yet he did engage with issues left out of the book. These range from cooperative economics in Europe and their relevance for Harlem to the political-economic strategy of the Cuban Revolution in coming to power and changing the island's social order (and a suggestion that the continued domination of whites meant "Another revolution needed within Cuban Revolution on race issue"), as well as references to Nasser and "African socialism" as "pragmatic." Periodically, detailed exegeses of revolutionary history and theory in Europe, and the Marxian legacy, were offered. Again and again, however, he returned to the pivotal role of the Negro intellectual in any future revolution, even stressing the need for "Political, Economic and Cultural Bureaus" of "specialists" and "experts"--"Movement must be cultural or it is no movement at all." Throughout are his descriptions, biting even in secondhand form, of the "dominant ethnic group feeding off subordinate ethnic group," as with Porgy and Bess, "a Jewish-Anglo-Saxon collaboration," though his animus towards West Indian activists within African American politics, a major theme of The Crisis…, is noticeably absent.

Certain influences upon Cruse, and aspects of his political program, are clarified by these lectures. The importance of C. Wright Mills is evident, both in Cruse's insistence upon "group" versus "class" and his conception of the intellectual's proper role. His short list of "Books to read and study" included Black Nationalism by Essien Essien-Udom, Nationalism by Hans Kohn, The Negro in American Culture by Margaret Butcher, and Mills' essays in Power, Politics and People. References to "men of power" and the "power elite" are sprinkled through the notes, as is this intriguing description of Mills: he "consecrated his work in human affairs, has had policy-making ramifications," perhaps the highest praise.[85]

Years later, Cruse drily summed up his experience with the Black Arts School: "It was part of my learning process of what revolutionary situations can produce... not what you expect." The last class with his former Black Arts students was on January 20, 1966. His final political intervention overlapping with teaching at BARTS appears to have been an ill-fated attempt to

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[85] On Mills, see The Crisis…, p. 459 on, especially pp. 466-467: "For me, the emergence of C. Wright Mills, with his critique of the policies, dogmas and vanities of the old Marxist leftwing, was a landmark in American social theory."

assist Larry Neal, who was trying to create a New York version of the Black Panther Party. In late 1966, Cruse produced a short treatise called “What is a Program?” for this group, but he complained to a correspondent in 1985 that Neal and his cohort were concerned only with the question of armed struggle, and lacked an appreciation for the importance of ideology, so he gave up on them.[86] Throughout this entire period, however, his focus increasingly was on the tortuous compression of many different arguments and observations into The Crisis… under the direction of William Morrow editor Joyce Johnson.[87] In 1967, he finished his massive manuscript, wrote one more major article for Jean-Paul Sartre's journal Les Temps Moderne, was again hospitalized for ulcers, and joked to acquaintances that when his book came out, "maybe I should leave the country."[88]

In the event, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual changed his life completely. From a recent, modest notoriety among black radicals in New York and a few other cities, Cruse became suddenly world-famous. Institutions like the International Association for Cultural Freedom invited him to speak at the most prestigious American universities, his books sold over 80,000 copies within a few years, and he was invited by the University of Michigan’s Honors Seminar to teach in the 1968-69 school year, “using your book as a basic text” in the fall, with “*carte blanche* in the spring.” The opening of a major academic career and a new life far from the polemics and forums of New York brings this narrative of origins to an end.[89]

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The life of Harold Cruse in these years indicates the profound quandaries facing black intellectuals in the high Cold War years (a point made forcefully by Grace Lee Boggs in an

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[86] “What is a Program?, September 20, 1966, in Box 11, What Is a Program file, HCP; Cruse to Anderson Thompson, January 27, 1985, in Box 8, Correspondence, Part One (Academic) file, HCP. This letter refers to earlier relations between Cruse and Neal, when the former wrote an “organizational plan” which was ignored.

[87] In 1975, when Morrow rejected a 400-page manuscript from Cruse, they referred to “the difficult and demanding editing job that you and Joyce Johnson underwent with CRISIS,” and concluded that “the market… is simply not there.” Daniel Johnson (Managing Editor, William Morrow) to Cruse, April 28, 1975, Box 5, William Morrow file, HCP.

[88] These final details on Cruse in New York are from Yuri Kochiyama's recollections. She maintained contact with Cruse through 1967, and re-typed his Liberator essays into manuscript form for the book Rebellion or Revolution?. Cruse continued to work with LeRoi Jones, speaking at the Afro-American Festival of the Arts in Newark in 1966, along with Stokely Carmichael (Autobiography of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, p. 236).

[89] Shepard Stone (President, International Association for Cultural Freedom [Paris]) to Cruse, May 21, 1968, asking him to participate in a December 1968 seminar at Princeton “on the subject of the United States—its problems, its impact and image in the world,” Box 7, Correspondence File #2, HCP; Daniel Johnson, Managing Editor, William Morrow) to Cruse, May 10, 1976, cites sales of 11,636 hardback and 51,267 paperback copies of The Crisis…, and 3,643 hardback and 17,709 paperback copies of Rebellion or Revolution?, mainly in 1968-1971, Box 5, William Morrow Correspondence File, HCP; Honors Council to Cruse, April 26, 1968, Box 7, Correspondence File #2, HCP.

interview). Having broken with orthodox Marxism, Cruse constantly had to renegotiate his relation to Marxist analyses of colonialism, racism, capitalism and imperialism--in and around Cuba, in the Freedom Now Party, and writing for The Liberator. And all of these engagements raised the agonizing question of whether to engage at all. What indeed was the correct position for an African American social critic? None of Cruse's political engagements were successful, by his own admission, yet without this renewed involvement in politics, it is doubtful he would have developed the critique, published the articles or made the personal contacts that permitted him to publish The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual.

Rather than crisis, then, one is left with the importance of mundane experience, of worldliness--Cruse may have been a classic auto-didact but he was also a veteran in all senses. What mattered--what made Cruse into an intellectual who shaped the worldview of thousands of people and thereby "consecrated his work in human affairs"--was his fusion of the three traditionally distinct spheres of literature, political history and theory, and run-of-the-mill organizing. However much he scorned the posturing and wasted efforts involved in years of seemingly useless small-scale activism, they proved to be as important to his historical theorization of the black intellectual's correct role as were his years of failed attempts to get his plays staged and his novel read, or his endless hours poring over old magazines and books from the Twenties and Thirties. In the end, then, the politics and the cultural production blur into a common effort over several decades of toil during which he was, in his own words, as "an incomprehensible gadfly to some, and a pretentious neophyte to others."[90]

Cruse's emphasis, both overt and implied, on the importance of what he had witnessed--from Harlem to North Africa--points in turn to his alienation from the terms of subsequent black cultural politics. Though often cited as the gray eminence of cultural nationalism, he fiercely rejected the discourse of authenticity.[91] Even the use of the word "Negro" in the title of his masterwork was a deliberate anachronism, a gesture of defiance. For Cruse, the sense of self and place was geographically and nationally-specific, and he did not care to share his own blackness unasked. A striking and surely deliberate evocation of his identity as a U.S. citizen of African descent can be found in the Introduction to Rebellion or Revolution?, published in 1968 at the height of his fame. Describing his war years, a constant theme throughout all his writings, Cruse paints himself in polyglot terms:

> I carried my Harlem inheritance through the Deep South of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Florida, the British Isles--Ireland, Scotland, England--North Africa and Italy up to the Po Valley. I added new "foreign" ingredients to my inheritance from North Africa and Italy. In England, however, the "foreign" elements of the culture remained relatively remote to me because the British, noting that it was only the black regiments whose rosters were completely made up of good old Anglo-Saxon names like Smith, Jones, Williams, Wright, Johnson, etc., tentatively welcomed us into their fraternity as Black Englishmen.[92]

This attitude was apparently long-running, and entered into his disagreements with other black intellectuals, particularly those of West Indian descent. In an angry 1963 letter to Richard B. Moore, a key Harlem radical since the 'Teens (and the titular subject of an entire chapter in

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[90] Cruse, Rebellion or Revolution?, p. 13.

[91] See Ross Posnock, "How It Feels to Be a Problem: Du Bois, Fanon, and the 'Impossible Life' of the Black Intellectual," Critical Inquiry 23 (Winter 1997), pp. 323-349.

[92] Cruse, Rebellion or Revolution?, p. 12.

The Crisis…), Cruse stresses that "I am a black person of African descent, now past 40, born and reared in Virginia." He then goes on to draw a very clear distinction between himself and Moore: "There are many people both from the West Indies and from Africa who have the impression that every American Negro grows up in this society in a complete vacuum where nothing is ever learned..."[93]

It is difficult to imagine any other nationalist intellectual, in the U.S. or elsewhere, positioning himself or herself in this way vis-a-vis the African diaspora, just as Cruse stood virtually alone in situating himself as an historical actor in the internationalism and "sense of rootlessness" bred by overseas military service during World War II. The small irony of this polemical life is that decades later Cruse's obdurate cosmopolitanism is precisely what makes him a compelling figure for a new generation of political intellectuals. Like few other critiques in American letters and politics, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual survives, hard, isolate and stoic. It is good to remember that its lessons were well-earned, and that to surpass them may require an equal or greater investment in multiple spheres of cultural production and political engagement.

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[93] Letter, Harold W. Cruse to Richard B. Moore, February 28, 1963, Richard B. Moore Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. In The Crisis…, Cruse notes that he had known Moore since 1946, and indicates a measure of grudging respect (see pp. 253-254). The immediate reason for this letter was a "chance meeting" at a party, during which the two argued and Cruse felt that he had been "lectured... on what I am supposed to think or what I am allegedly unconscious of." Cruse goes on to denounce Moore's "obsession with the argument over 'The Name Negro'.... There is a conflict over these terms which I'm beginning to find extremely boring, confusing and inconclusive."

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