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More Than Just a Politician

Notes on the Life and Times of Harold Cruse

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In the thirty years since the publication of *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, Harold Cruse's analysis of the necessity of a cultural revolution in America by African Americans has exerted great influence, often critiqued but never superseded. As Manning Marable notes in his history of postwar 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 is always standing on the side, noting for future appraisal the follies around him. 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.[2] 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."[3]

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."[4] 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 toward 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."[5]

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 [U.S. Communist Party]."[6]

Under these circumstances, sorting through Cruse's political affiliations and activities after he left the Communist Party and comparing his version with 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 preeminent 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 what he did.

What follows is a preliminary sketch, based on conversations with Cruse and several former associates, and a look through readily accessible sources. A fuller examination of Cruse's life and times will have to wait until his personal papers become available.[7]

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, the decade between 1955 and 1965. These two bookends are in themselves well known. 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. 1965 was the year of the Watts rebellion and Malcolm X's murder, as the Southern-based civil rights movement began its turn left and northward as part of the surge toward Black Power.

At that 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 Democratic Party at the 1964 Democratic Party Convention. But

unnoticed by white politicians, journalists and radicals, a nationalist and anti-imperialist constituency did begin developing in the late 1950s outside of both the civil rights movement and the Nation of Islam. 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 militance of Southern black activists, from 1960 on, a 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 various 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, and had significant international connections in Europe and Cuba, and with black American expatriates in Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana.

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 Fair Play for Cuba Committee to the Freedom Now Party to 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* 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 blind alleys. 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 by itself is sufficient to understand the events of the 1955–65 period, and so should we.

According to the various biographical dictionaries to which he has submitted brief items, 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 Harlem and an integrated Queens neighborhood. He was 25 years old when he joined the U.S. Army in 1941, and after serving for four years in a Jim Crow unit of the Quartermaster Corps in Africa and Italy, he became a sergeant at the age of 29.

For the next seven years, until 1952, when he left the Communist Party at age 36, Cruse participated in the traditional Left, 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-time reviewer in the cultural department" of the *Daily Worker*.[8] Since his rupture with the CPUSA is the one event Cruse has written about in considerable if elusive detail, it is passed over here, though his fight for a nationalist position when the party was undergoing an "anti-white chauvinism" campaign bears further study. Cruse spent most of the 1950s unknown and unsung before beginning to publish essays, and was 44 when he went to Cuba in 1960—a pivotal event in his later trajectory.

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 Depression and World War II years. 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 1940s."[9] 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, that he 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."[10]

But how did he live, and what was he writing? Throughout this period, 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 that he studied at the 42nd Street Library).[11] He later described himself as "a Harlemite who became a Villager in 1950," and besides this conscious identity as a Greenwich Village bohemian—for that is clearly how he saw himself—throughout the 1950s and 1960s, he tried to develop a career as a man of letters in the old-fashioned sense, a dramatist and also a novelist.[12] This fact is alluded to only cryptically in later writings and remains sensitive, but it is central to understanding how Cruse arrived at his cultural critique of radical politics: by leaving politics and embracing art.

Cruse's only explicit references to his nonpolitical writings came in the Introduction to his *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.'"[13]

A more succinct explanation came in his terse account of how he had known LeRoi Jones years before they went to Cuba together in 1960. After all, Jones was not yet famous at all in those years, just a young man out of the U.S. Air Force trying to find his way in the Village Beat scene. To Cruse, however, there was nothing odd in his knowing 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.)"[14]

From this passing comment one gleans a sense of a strikingly different Cruse—a would-be writer of hit Broadway shows first and a polemicist after. It is unclear how many musicals, plays and novels he did write, but the biographical squib for his second published article, "Race and Bohemianism in Greenwich Village," a short piece of cultural commentary in the NAACP's *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 New York Public Library has a play script dated 1960 and titled *Irma Tazewell: The Maid's Dilemma (A Play in Two Acts and Eleven Scenes)*. Two different versions of a musical called *Headline Hetty* are at New York's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (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). Notes from a class he gave in 1965 have Cruse mentioning that in 1961 he had written a musical "around Pearl Bailey. Took years to get lyrics; another year for money (millionaire sponsor), found composer—$2000 for score.... Later, Bailey refused."[15]

From the manuscript of *Headline Hetty* one gleans some idea of Cruse's literary interests and style. Not having heard the music or seen the show, one can still venture that Cruse's later readers would be surprised by *Headline Hetty*. It is in no sense political, nor does it aspire to the dramatic gravitas of the tradition leading from Oscar Hammerstein to Stephen Sondheim. *Headline Hetty* is a light piece with no discernible dark tones or larger agenda, and reads like a *Guys and Dolls*, Harlem style, rather than a Brecht-Weill musical. 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,

sentimental and popular bent in the style of the wisecracking 1930s—"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.

These semirevelations (for those who knew Cruse in the 1950s remember his literary bent, 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 literary ambitions to his life.

In the most obvious terms, it appears that Cruse spent at least 15 years actively trying to get his plays staged, with no luck. In his angry 1968 review of *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, 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...."[16] Since Hansberry first turns up in *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* as a young writer for Paul Robeson's newspaper *Freedom* in 1952, one gathers that Cruse's request that she read one of his musicals came in 1963 or later, which is confirmed by his own testimony that when he left *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.

Besides these play scripts and the memories of others, friendly and otherwise, there is additional contemporary evidence that as late as 1960 Cruse defined himself in literary rather than political terms. 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 now legendary 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 such eminences as James Baldwin and Langston Hughes, as well as 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 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." The most interesting comment comes at the end, where Cruse is identified 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.")[17]

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. He indicated his deep affinity for the musical stage more directly in *Rebellion and Revolution?* in describing his Harlem boyhood and implicitly how it 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 heartfelt 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 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.[18]

Cruse may have been known as a "sharp essayist" in 1960, but in reality he had published exactly two essays; 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 anticolonial theorists, including American expatriates like Richard Wright, radical but with a anticommunist 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. Almost immediately, polemics ensued because of Cruse's controversial claims in his *Presence Africaine* article, and he participated in an abortive debate with the black critic J. Saunders Redding, who later attacked him in the *New Leader*.[19]

The polite ambience of the CIA-funded AMSAC was evidently not enough to contain Cruse's new political and 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 University School of Journalism tells 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 as a waiter on 14th Street. Cruse was very interested in the Cuban Revolution and intrigued by the Revolutionary 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.[20]

On the basis of his acquaintance with Gibson, Cruse was one of the second- or third-ranked black writers (Baldwin, Hughes, and John Oliver Killens had bowed out) to participate in the now-legendary 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. As he later noted:

> 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.[21]

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 Cruse remembers it, "The Cuban Revolution changed the activities and orientation of a lot of people in different 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"), and at least in retrospect was already feeling some disillusionment. However, this did not prevent him from attending the reception at the Theresa Hotel in September 1960 when Fidel Castro came to Harlem, or even from acting 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 entrée 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." At some early point before going to Cuba, he had also met the then-famous Southern NAACP leader Robert F. Williams, who was practicing a vigorous armed defense in Monroe, North Carolina.

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. Nor was he a 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."[22]

The subsequent fracas was headline 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 U.S. chief delegate Adlai Stevenson's maiden speech, and fought with security guards. The principal organizations named were the Liberation Committee for 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.[23]

At this point, Cruse clearly remained on the periphery of On Guard, Fair Play for Cuba, and similar efforts. His presence was noted by others, but he made

no initiatives, unlike the peripatetic Jones, who dived headfirst into political involvements, taking over the presidency of Fair Play's New York chapter later that year. Gibson remembers, "I don't think [Cruse] ever had any formal relationship with FPCC, but was listed on our mailing list," which seems to adequately sum up Cruse's role as a watcher at this point.[24]

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 one hundred pages down to thirty, 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."[25] It provoked an immediate storm, and put Cruse on the map as a 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 fourteen pages of debate between Cruse and his critics, others read its trenchant declarations as a clarion call: "The failure of American Marxists to work out a meaningful approach to revolutionary nationalism has special significance for the American Negro," wrote one reader. "The Negro has a relationship to the dominant culture of the United States similar to that of colonies and semidependents 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."[26]

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 him to the attention of the elite AMSAC coterie, his intervention in *Studies on the Left* was a clarion call to the emerging New Left nationwide—especially its farthest left edges, both white and black. In late 1962, the fledgling cadres of the tiny Revolutionary Action Movement, 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 the founder of the Afro-American Institute in Cleveland, who "also 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 Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) but outside of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)."[27]

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 Williams pieces, and that he carried *SoL* in the bookstore of his Harlem mosque."[28]

The year 1963 was a pivotal one for Cruse's increasing willingness to engage in ordinary politics. 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 1960s radicalism abounded—especially when it came to electoral politics. There were no records and apparently no formal national organization, and there is little precision in anyone's memories as to how it functioned, outside of Michigan, where a practical-minded cadre-led James and Grace Lee Boggs took it much further than anywhere else.

Whatever the FNP was and was not, Cruse played a major role in it. 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 elsewhere in the 1950s, and a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University when he broke U.S. laws by going into Communist China for CBS in 1957 to score a major journalistic coup. Lynn had been briefly a member of both the Communist Party and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) decades earlier and became one of the tiny handful of successful left-wing lawyers in the 1950s and '60s, aided by a young assistant named William Kunstler.

In 1962, Worthy became a minor cause célèbre when the U.S. government indicted him for passport violations after he repeatedly violated official travel bans on Cuba. Many other journalists had violated 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 the eminent A. Philip Randolph. The satiric folksinger Phil Ochs even recorded "The Ballad of William Worthy" with its famous line "William Worthy isn't worthy anymore," which is all that many people now remember of these events. On June 1, 1963, he was speaking to a Harlem crowd, 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.'"[29]

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."[30] But how exactly did this take place, and when did Cruse come into it?

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."[31] 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 one hundred 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—a characteristic touch suggesting the Boggses' involvement. 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.'[32]

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 is clearly 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.[33]

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."[34] As Worthy remembers it, Harold Cruse became involved "[a]fter we started holding meetings at Pernella Wattley's apartment. He lived on Fourteenth Street and I lived on Nineteenth 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 of the program committee.[35]

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 main actors. 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, or specifically organized 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,] 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.[36]

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."[37] Cruse dismisses 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, as he remembers it, 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 notes, "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 Cuba and Africa, ranting and raving." Cruse goes on to lay particular blame at the feet of the Michigan FNP, led by the

Boggses and their associates in the Group on Advanced Leadership (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, or even remembers any particular differences, 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...."[38]

This particular animus toward the SWP 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.

All agree that outside of Michigan (where the state branch ran a statewide ticket headed by the Reverend Albert Cleage, running 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, were the draft program written by Cruse and published in the *Liberator*, and the party's strong connection to the Grassroots Leadership Conference held on November 9–10, 1963, in Detroit. The Grassroots Leadership Conference posed an open challenge to a parallel civil rights "summit" in the same city, organized by King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). It was keynoted by Malcolm X, who gave his famous speech, "A Message to the Grassroots," anticipating his break

with the Nation of Islam and linking with broader radical forces in a call for a black revolution. 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 that the FNP might become the vehicle for that challenge, an eventuality that did not arise.[39] 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 nationalist magazine, *Liberator*.

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, 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.[40] Soon after, Gibson's friend and neighbor in the Upper West Side of New York'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 U.S. 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 disapointed to discover that the African diplomatic corps in New York at the UN and in Washington, D.C. were not very enthusiastic nor supportive. The FLN [Algerian National Liberation Front] office in New York, headed by M'hammed Yazid and Mohammed Sahnoun, who were personal friends of mine, were among the more appreciative, as was Vusumi 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.)[41]

From this somewhat inauspicous beginning, the LCA slowly grew, building an audience among émigré 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, Clarke, and a

white man named Lowell Beveridge, named as the magazine's editor. Increasingly, the newsletter became its main project. *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.[42] 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, *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 in a modest sense, without any evident connection to American events. Congratulatory letters were printed from figures as important as Nasser. The Liberator Book Service, advertised on the back cover, promoted popular titles like Dubois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, John Howard Griffin's *Black Like Me, An Atlas of Africa*, Hughes's *An African Treasury*, J. A. Rogers's *Africa's Gift to America* and C. Eric Lincoln's *The Black Muslims in America*. In May 1962, an honorary advisory board was announced that included Ossie Davis, the civil rights lawyer Len Holt, the eminent Harlem intellectual figures L. H. Michaux and Richard Moore, Captain Hugh Mulzac (a doyenne of the Old Left, as the first African American to command a ship of the Merchant Marine), George Murphy Jr., and others.

Criticism of this Afro-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's 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.
>
> 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 spurrious 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 toward the hypocrisy of the administration of President John F. Kennedy, 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, and a new group of young writers became editors (and members, with Cruse, of the editorial board, announced in December 1963), including 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!" However, the *Liberator* continued to also feature African National Congress statements and the like.[43] Testimonials were received from Mrs. Paul Robeson and Lorraine Hansberry—" It is becoming an excellent publication"—rather 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.[44]

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 had been attending the same meetings). 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 Cruse had decided to write some articles, and visited Watts. Presumably, they had known each other earlier in the circle of On Guard, 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, Cruse 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...."[45]

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."[46]

These articles also greatly extended Cruse's 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.[47] In November 1963, even before he officially joined the editorial board, a short piece, "Third Party: Facts and Forecasts," appeared and was 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."[48]

By this time, *Liberator* had left Africa behind and immersed itself totally in what it was calling 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's editorial in the same issue said outright that he disagreed with some of the program, apparently foreshadowing later tensions. 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-leader of the Nation of Islam leader.

As 1964 went on, the pace quickened, as did *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, 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 explicitly 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 to the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution provided ever more evidence of white liberalism's bankruptcy and the danger posed by "the gutless, spineless lackeys of the white power structure." Watts's editorial just before the November presidential election stated plainly the Crusean 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 of his articles appeared. By his account, he was locked in an increasingly acrimonious relationship with Watts (though it does not appear to have been an open split, in Finkenstaedt's recollection).[49] As Cruse recalls, "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."[50]

This caused a division that 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 U.N."[51] 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 Max Stanford with a title, "Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro-American Student," that consciously evoked Cruse.

Certainly, Cruse had other reasons for moving on. He was trying to both write and produce a new musical with several others. 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."[52]

Most important, however, was his relationship with James Finkenstaedt, which both men stress had nothing to do with their work on the *Liberator*. 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 Cleague, C. Eric Lincoln, Charles Hamilton were published by William Morrow."[53] In early 1965, Finkenstaedt gave Cruse a contract for two books: his collected articles, and a new work presenting his comprehensive critique of black politics, 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.

One more significant political 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's celebrated but short-lived Black Arts Repertory School 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 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, and "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 Fourteenth Street because, Kochiyama noted, "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. Eventually Jones was threatened personally and relocated to Newark, New Jersey, and his friend, the poet Larry Neal, was shot and wounded.[54]

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 of the Negro Intellectual.* On the first day, after defining the tension between "cultural nationalism" and "cultural assimilation," and that "Afro-Americans most militant group, had never learned to make cultural affairs political," he stressed that

> White European social theory was inapplicable to theory of social revolution for American Negro.... 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 philosophy is superior.

From here Cruse went on to another of his major theses, that identity in America is by "group," that "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 twentieth-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."[55]

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, politics,*

pragmatic, pragmatism, and *aesthetic.* He also focused at length on Harlem as a "base of cultural movement" and a "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 "[t]he route to democracy lies in the control of the cultural apparatus."[56] The clash between European and Afro-American cultural forms, especially in music, was detailed, and the current crop of black magazines like *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 periodically he did engage with issues left out of the book. These range from cooperative economics in Europe and their relevance for Harlem to the politico-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 "[a]nother 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 Marxist legacy, were offered. Repeatedly, 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,"[57] though his animus toward West Indian activists within African American politics—a major theme of *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*—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 E. U. Essien-Udom, *Nationalism* by Hans Kohn, *The Negro in American Culture* by Margaret Butcher, and Mills's essays in *Power, Politics and People.* References to "men of power" and the "power elite" are sprinkled through the notes, as is this intriguingly opaque description of Mills, who "consecrated his work in human affairs, ... has had policy-making ramifications."[58]

Years later, Cruse dryly 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. Meanwhile, he finished his massive manuscript, was again hospitalized for ulcers, and joked to acquaintances that when his book came out, "maybe I should leave the country."[59]

In any event, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* changed Cruse's life completely. From a modest notoriety among black radical intellectuals in New

York and a few other cities, he became world famous and was invited to speak in Europe and at the most prestigious American universities, bringing this narrative to an end.

This much seems obvious: the life of Harold Cruse in these years indicates the profound quandaries facing black intellectuals (a point made forcefully by Grace Lee Boggs in a later 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 experiences was successful, by his own assessment, yet without his renewed involvement in politics from 1960 to 1965, 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 irony. The Negro intellectual who would be an artist—a musical dramatist, a novelist, a boulevardier—could not make his own history as he wished, yet made something of his life itself.

Notes

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1. Manning Marable, *Race, Reform and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945–1990*, rev. 2d ed. (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1991), 255.
2. Robert Chrisman, "The Crisis of Harold Cruse," *Black Scholar*, 1, no. 1 (1969), 78.
3. Harold Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution* (New York: William R. Morrow, 1968), 8.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., 13.
6. Grace Lee Boggs telephone interview with the author, September 2, 1996; letter, Richard Gibson to the author, March 4, 1996. Yuri Kochiyama in a telephone interview with the author, October 14, 1996, 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."
7. All otherwise unattributed quotations from Cruse are from two telephone interviews with the author, May 29 and June 2, 1996.
8. Julian Mayfield, "Crisis or Crusade?" *Negro Digest*, June 1968, 14; Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution?* 15.
9. Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution?* 11, 7.
10. Ibid., 20, 8–9.
11. According to a later acquaintance, Cruse inherited this apartment from the eminent Japanese painter, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, via a complicated arrangement, since at the time there were no blacks living (or welcome) on Fourteenth Street; Kochiyama interview, October 14, 1996. Since Kuniyoshi died in 1953, Cruse must have lived in this apartment from the early 1950s through the late 1960s.
12. Biographical note for Harold Cruse, "Race and Bohemianism in Greenwich Village," *Crisis*, January 1960, 5.
13. Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution?* 8.
14. Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka* (New York: Freundlich, 1984).
15. Notes taken by Yuri Kochiyama in Cruse's course in "Cultural Philosophy" at the Black Arts School, 1965, Yuri Kochiyama personal papers.

16. Mayfield, "Crisis or Crusade?" 15, 12.
17.
18. Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution?* 26, 11.
19. Ibid., 20–21.
20. Gibson letter, March 4, 1996.
21. Baraka, *Autobiography*, 168.
22. Electronic communication, Richard Gibson to the author, May 20, 1996.
23. *New York Times*, February 16, 1961, 1; Baraka, *Autobiography*, 181.
24. Gibson letter, March 4, 1996.
25. Martin Sklar, then a principal *Studies* editor, recalls, "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 the author, July 21, 1996. Cruse 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* (Cruse's essay "The New Negro Nationalism" appeared in 1962), organ of the most vociferously anticommunist elements in the old Socialist Party, and in *Studies*, which Cruse remembers as "supposedly going to replace the old CP" and filling "a gap" ideologically.
26.
27. 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, 76.
28. Sklar letter to the author, July 21, 1996.
29. "Talk of the Town," *The New Yorker*, June 15, 1963.
30. Conrad Lynn, *There is a Fountain: The Autobiography of a Civil Rights Lawyer* (Westport, Conn.: Lawrence Hill, 1979), 183.
31. *Ibid.*
32. M. S. Handler, "An All-Negro party for 64 is Formed" *New York Times*, August 24, 1963, A1.
33. Lynn, Fountain, 184.
34. On the sit-in at the U.N., see *Liberator*, September 1963.
35. William Worthy interview with the author, July 4, 1996.
36. Lynn, *Fountain*, 184.
37. William Worthy, "An All Black Party," *Liberator*, October 1963. Indicating that discussions about a possible Freedom Now Party had begun in 1962, Worthy noted, "As late as the last part of the winter, realizing how strongly an all-Negro party would come under false and contrived attack, some of 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 a 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, and Pernella Wattley as "corresponding secretary."
38. James Boggs letter, quoted in Lynn, *Fountain*, 185.
39. Grace Lee Boggs, telephone interview with the author September 2, 1996.
40. 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.
41. Electronic communication, Gibson to the author, May 24, 1996.
42. 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, cosponsored by the Ghanaian, Guinean, and United Arab Republic's U.N. Missions (January 1962 issue).
43. *Liberator*, July 1963.
44. "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. Finkenstaedt to the author, September 18, 1996.

45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
47. They are "Rebellion or Revolution?" in *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; and "The Economics of Black Nationalism," July, August, 1964.
48.
49. "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." Finkenstaedt letter, September 18, 1996.
50. 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 Crusian terms about his mission: "We advocate white acceptance of a multiracial, pluralistic society," and that "[a]ll black ghettos" should be treated as an "an underdeveloped country, with massive technical assistance."
51. Obviously, this is a one-sided view of the dispute between Cruse and Watts. It is, however, the only account available. Several attempts were made to contact Watts, who did not respond.
52. Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution?* 24–25.
53. Finkenstaedt letter, September 18, 1996.
54. Kochiyama interview, October 14, 1996.
55. Harold Cruse; emphasis in the original.
56.
57.
58.
59. These final details on Cruse in New York are from Kochiyama's recollections. She maintained contact with Cruse through 1967, and retyped 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; see Baraka, *Autobiography*, 236.

2

Anatomy of Black Intellectuals and Nationalism

Harold Cruse Revisited

MARTIN KILSON

Context: Blacks as Pariahs and Marginals

Nativist Imperative in American Life

As the ethnically polygot post–Civil War American society took shape from the late 1860s onward, a system of intergroup regulation emerged among the culturally dominant white Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPS) that was premised on the ethnic denigration of non-WASP groups. Some historians like John Higham have characterized this WASP-initiated mode of ethnic denigration as "nativism," and other observers have labeled it just plain "bigotry."[1] By asserting WASP cultural superiority, nativism also asserted the inferiority of non-WASP ethnic newcomers. It was fashioned by the dominant host WASP community to regulate and checkmate the status positioning of non-WASP groups who were needed to provide a manufacturing labor force in America's rapidly industrializing system in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nativism also performed another function as well; it was used to create an unequal social pecking order that favored WASPS over non-WASP ethnic groups.

However, it was ultimately in the interaction of all white Americans with black Americans that nativism or bigotry acquired its most potent presence in American life. The term *racism* evolved as the one most common in characterizing the unique application of nativism as a method of ethnic denigration and the marginalization of African Americans in American society. As applied to African Americans, nativism evolved from a method mainly of