

an exchange:
harold cruse on the
negro intellectual

Intellectual life in America today is undergoing its greatest upheaval since the 1930's. Contributing greatly to the upheaval is the question of race; even more important, for the first time since the anti-slavery controversy of the 1840-1865 era, Negro intellectuals are prominent in defining our cultural problems and leading an assault on America's most cherished assumptions. Harold Cruse's *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* combines the most important account of the historical origins of that assault with a desire to participate in it. In the process Cruse has written one of the most timely and important books of the 1960's. As history, Cruse contributes the first major analysis of Negro writers, theater artists and left-wing intellectuals from the 1920's to the mid-1960's. But the vitality in Cruse's book derives directly from his ability to diverge from the path of the academic historian. Cruse uses historical events to explore the genesis of what is for him the most pressing contemporary problem: the crisis of identity experienced by Negro intellectuals. He combines research, intimate knowledge of Harlem's literary world, and a desire to radicalize America's understanding of itself in order to examine the implications of that crisis.

Cruse's work will seem only sporadically researched or highly opinionated to a professional historian, and it will appeal primarily to those who find the formal analytic modes of academia pedantic. Such a "non-disciplined" approach has its weaknesses and its strengths. For example, like all intellectuals with a mission Cruse often posits consistency and continuity in the behavior of men which more thorough research or different kinds of comparisons might reveal. He also ignores general demographic changes which in turn alter the interests and in part the identity of the general population with which intellectuals may deal. A largely urban rather than a largely rural Negro population might alter the identity crisis of the intellectuals. To his credit, however, Cruse eschews the timidity of academia and raises imaginative questions about the "New Man who forged American culture." He focuses especially on the Blackness of that New Man and the tensions arising over the unwillingness of most Americans to face that Blackness. As a Negro intellectual himself, he reveals many of these tensions in his own work. They give it much of its power. Like all works of cultural criticism from de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* to Myrdal's *An American Dilemma*, the

intellectual ferment to which *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* gives rise is more important than the accuracy of its specific conclusions.

In order to understand how Cruse defines the crisis, one must first sketch his understanding of the historical setting of the Negro intellectuals. The choices that they made were determined, after all, by the way they understood their historical alternatives. For Cruse, the intellectuals lived in an America which had and still has a "cultural dynamic," or a pattern by which those with power impose their standards and their will upon others. America's unique patterns of settlement and economic development have given it a unique "dynamic." Unlike European countries the struggle here has not been between social "classes." Instead, against the background of a burgeoning industrialism, "ethnic groups" have competed for wealth and power. Borrowing from the work of sociologist Milton Gordon, Cruse asserts that each group that settled here tried to impose its standards upon those that followed.¹ For example, the country was dominated in its earliest days by Anglo-Saxons who established a political structure that held the disparate ethnic groups together. Anglo-Saxons, however, were not content with simple political hegemony. They required that other groups accept their social and cultural values as well. Groups like the Indians were destroyed; Negroes were enslaved; and even Anglo-Saxons who deviated from the cultural norms of the majority—the Mormons, for example—were exiled.

The story of ethnic conflict is complicated by the evolution of the economic structure. By the mid-nineteenth century, Anglo-Saxons had created a "capitalist" social order. The farmers and petty-bourgeois commercial people used and were used by the new industrial technology. Moreover, the influx of diverse ethnic groups challenged the cultural hegemony of the Anglo-Saxons, though only slowly at first. By 1940, however, according to Gordon and Cruse, America consisted of highly competitive ethnic groups with the Anglo-Saxons in retreat. But if individual Anglo-Saxons no longer held economic and political hegemony, their system of values had been absorbed by their ethnic competitors. Most ethnics, apparently, had divested themselves of their European heritage in order to compete in the industrial market place. Their individual struggles, however, had been abetted by the resilience of those institutions which specific ethnic groups had created. Though no longer preserving European values, those institutions facilitated the entrance of their members into the industrial society and defended their newly found economic and political power.

Against this ethnic and industrial "dynamic," what role does Cruse see the Negro to have played? The Negro's role has been ambivalent. On the one hand, Cruse argues, Negroes were kept apart from the scramble for wealth and power by enslavement. They were victimized without gaining any of the economic and political rewards of capitalism. In addition, the stagnation of Southern agriculture between 1870 and 1940 further separated Negroes from industrialism. On the other hand, he counters, because of their longevity in the land as an enslaved people, Negroes understood the process of deracination best. More than any other ethnic minority Negroes understood how one group could impose values, class identity and impoverishment upon another. Because Negroes underwent prolonged rural isolation and deracination, they created America's only indigenous folk culture. Cruse writes, "the cultural and artistic originality of the American nation is founded historically on the ingredients of a black aesthetic and artistic base."²

Cruse's assertions about the unique contributions of Negroes to American "art forms" require that he focus his social analysis on the creators and interpreters of that art—the intellectuals. His study begins with the first flourishing of Negro artists—the Harlem Renaissance. Because he feels that intellectuals crystallize the mood and define the interests of social groups, he asserts that the meeting place of intellectuals—Harlem—has been and "is still the pivot of the black world's quest for identity and salvation. The way Harlem goes (or does not go) so goes all black America."³ Although one must criticize Cruse's definition of "art forms" and culture and thus question his emphasis on Harlem, one must admit that, in the 1920's at least, Harlem did provide a focus for the Black imagination.

Like other historians of America's intellectuals, notably Henry May, Alfred Kazin and Christopher Lasch, Cruse begins his study with the pre-World War I salon of Mabel Dodge. These historians agree that the salon was a crucial event in American cultural history, but their interpretations are quite different. Lasch, for example, interprets the salon as the first American effort by intellectuals to create a sense of community in a world shattered by the impersonality of industrialism. By worshipping sensuality, pursuing sexual freedom and immersing themselves in exotic cultures, the intellectuals acted out their alienation from their repressive bourgeoisie upbringing and from the industrial world for which such upbringing sought to prepare them.⁴

Cruse, though, sees another meaning in the Dodge salon. By focusing on the relationship between Mabel Dodge, Carl Van Vechten, Ridgeley Torrence and Negro writers and artists, Cruse suggests that White intellectuals were bothered not so much by industrialism as a growing awareness of America's racial underpinnings. Cruse writes, "Mabel Dodge wanted an American cultural renaissance, but shrank from the implications of a black American renaissance as a socially necessary, historically determined parallel movement. Because of her racially limited view she could not, or would not, see the black cultural renaissance in its more definable role as a cultural catalyst for the reordering of the distorted and disparate ethnic ingredients in American nationality."⁵

Cruse's analysis of the Dodge salon goes well beyond an assertion that individual Whites were racially prejudiced. Such prejudice merely symbolizes the failure of virtually all twentieth-century American intellectuals to understand the sources of conflict in their own nation. Most intellectuals and scholars have assumed that the growth of industrialism and the division of society into social classes have provided the major sources of social tension in American society. Historians from Charles Beard to Samuel Hays and sociologists from Lloyd Warner to C. Wright Mills have emphasized the importance of social class in determining the attitudes and behavior of most Americans. But as Robert A. Nisbet has argued, a formal definition of social class cannot be applied effectively to American society.⁶ Cruse seems to agree and argues that it is not industrialism itself but the cultural interests of the population drawn to an America which is industrializing that has created the major source of social tension. Cruse illustrates the point by describing the flight of T. S. Eliot to Europe. Although Eliot explained his migration as a rejection of industrial society, Cruse argues that the challenge of ethnic groups to Anglo-Saxon hegemony forced Eliot's departure. Eliot returned to England to salvage what he could of Anglo-Saxon culture at its roots,

while his cohorts tried to utilize the "mass media" to perpetuate Anglo-Saxon hegemony in America.⁷

If, according to Cruse, anxieties about race and culture beset White intellectuals, they determined the thought and behavior of Blacks. Negro intellectuals especially failed to perceive the ethnic structure of American life and believed instead that America consisted of a "mainstream" into which talented individuals—"regardless of race or color"—should be absorbed. Perceiving their own folk origins as primitive, they sought assimilation into what they saw as a sophisticated cultural elite. When rejected socially by their White counterparts, they tried to combat "racism" in specific institutions rather than study their cultural roots. Instead of turning to their own group for inspiration, they sought to force entree into the fictitious "mainstream." The confusion that followed from those frustrated efforts at integration created a moral crisis for Negro intellectuals and prevented them from providing leadership for their own people.

Much of the evidence to document such a crisis comes from Cruse's own experience in Harlem over the past thirty years. Most of the intellectual circle to which he belonged did seek integration as artists. When they met personal rejection, they sought a theoretical explanation not in their ethnic origins but in the prevalent dogma among the White left-wing—Communism. From the 1920's with Claude McKay, W. A. Domingo and Phillip Randolph, to the 1930's with John P. Davis, and the 1940's and 1950's with Richard Wright and Paul Robeson, to the 1960's with Ossie Davis, Ruby Lee, Lorraine Hansbury and others, Negro intellectuals have unsuccessfully tried to convince the masses to forsake their cultural roots and become part of the "proletarian mainstream." Ignoring the nationalistic sentiments of the Negro masses, they failed to assume the lonely responsibility of intellectuals of and for Negro Americans. That crisis of identity which began in the 1920's has haunted Negro intellectuals ever since.⁸

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For professional historians Cruse's work throws new light on two major problems. First, he provides valuable information about non-liberal intellectuals, thus contributing to a general reinterpretation of the period from 1920 to the early 1960's. Second, he calls into question the traditional studies of Negro leadership that have been compiled since the 1930's. Each point requires some elaboration. Cruse's discussion of the intellectual dilemmas of Negro writers adds to a growing literature, including Daniel Aaron's *Writers on the Left* and Theodore Draper's *The Roots of American Communism*, which collectively provides the beginnings of a break with the "New Deal synthesis" that has dominated discussion of the depression and post-depression era.⁹ Along with social studies by Horace Cayton and St. Clair Drake, Harry Caudill, Oscar Lewis, Michael Harrington and others, Cruse allows one to interpret the actions of liberals in the past fifty years as a part of rather than the determining force in social change.¹⁰ By insisting on the importance of people who worked apart from liberal politicians, Cruse emphasizes both the diversity of American life and that historians must look beyond liberalism for an explanation of the American "social dynamic."

Even more importantly, Cruse suggests a new basis for selecting and

studying leadership. To date, historians have followed the example of political scientists like Ralph Bunche and Floyd Hunter who assumed that the main struggle of Negroes was for integration and that leadership should be identified by studying those heads of institutions who fostered integrationist crusades. Bunche, doing research for Gunnar Myrdal's study of "race relations" in the late 1930's, defined America as a political entity with institutions that constituted the structural "mainstream." Negro men active in politics, fraternal organizations, the church and various voluntary associations with the ability to pressure the institutions of the "mainstream" constituted the leadership elite. As Bunche wrote, "the primary concern should be a study of Negro leadership in its relationship to the general social milieu, and in its reaction to those social pressures which impinge peculiarly upon the Negro minority. Thus the analysis must devote itself to the ways in which Negroes of prominence adopt and accommodate themselves to the known social conditions or resist them."¹¹ The model suggested by Bunche has since been adopted by students of Negro leadership like Elaine Burgess and Everett Ladd, Jr., whose main addition has been a refinement in sampling Negro and White public opinion.¹²

Cruse, however, assumes that cultural objectives not political tactics constitute the group's ultimate interests. Leaders are men who understand those objectives and their leadership should be evaluated on their ability to articulate the inner tensions of the group itself. Cruse succinctly states the case, "Thus it is only through cultural analysis of the Negro approach to group 'politics' that the errors, weaknesses and goal-failures can cogently be analyzed and positively worked out."¹³ To interpolate from Cruse's selection of "leaders," one concludes that historians who previously have relied on the models developed by political scientists have selected "leaders" superficially. Or, such historians have studied leaders in a superficial manner.¹⁴ In the future, Cruse implies, historians would do well to shift their interest from a study of the tactics of integration to a study of why Black spokesmen, including free-lance intellectuals, chose integration at all. These men, Cruse asserts, knew that the vast majority of Blacks had strong nationalist leanings as a consequence of their experience. Yet the "leaders" chose to ignore those feelings and pursue "integration." In the future, Cruse suggests, historians should determine what tensions made such a choice attractive to Negro spokesmen.

After noting Cruse's major analytical contributions, one must examine the theories which he uses to explain the movement of events. Cruse believes that American history turns on the relationship of two sets of events: the efforts of industrialists to maximize their profits and the desire of ethnic groups to carve out an enclave for themselves within the capitalistic nexus. Although individuals make choices, they do so as members of groups and the individual agony of choosing between groups determines the tensions in American life. Admittedly, relating the development of capitalism to the history of ethnic groups is a complex undertaking. Cruse's careless use of terms and his reliance on often contradictory theories confuses his explanation. Although Cruse condemns the role of the Communist Party in the United States, he relies heavily on Marxist theory to explain the development of the American economy, the course of our foreign policy and the distribution of power in America. He explains local social history, however, as a conflict between ethnic groups. The most important consequence of such a dual

explanation is that Cruse fails to indicate exactly where he thinks power lies in America. More specifically, he misinterprets much of recent American history.

Cruse's use of the concept "ethnic group" in particular provides historical difficulties. Cruse notes how Anglo-Saxons defined the terms upon which the polity should be based. They also expressed a chauvinism which made all other groups, especially other "racial" groups, doubt their worth as human beings. Such an analysis of Anglo-Saxon behavior has some general merit. But suddenly by 1850 the group which Cruse defined as Anglo-Saxon became the "capitalists," although Cruse does not define all Anglo-Saxons as capitalists nor all capitalists as Anglo-Saxons. Cruse underestimates the possible conflict between "capitalists" and "Anglo-Saxons" which much recent literature in American Studies has examined.¹⁵ Cruse posits no such conflict and does not say whether one source of identity prevailed or whether a continuing Anglo-Saxon crisis of identity constitutes a major historical phenomena. If such a crisis does exist, then it must temper the struggle of all other ethnic groups for identity as Americans.

Cruse then skips to the early twentieth century when ethnic groups from Eastern Europe added a massive Catholic and Jewish influence to American society. The new groups carved out enclaves for themselves within the capitalist structure which the Anglo-Saxons had initially fashioned. Moving to the mid-twentieth century, Cruse assumes that these ethnic groups still provide identity and institutional life to the descendants of the immigrants. Although Cruse notes that the cultural content of ethnic beliefs has been desicated by American mass culture, he believes that the institutional structure, which among other things creates jobs for the younger generation, still exists. Although one accepts much of Cruse's general explanation, especially for New York City, one wonders if the devolution of ethnicity is not a more complex phenomena. For example, Cruse accepts Milton Gordon's explanation of the unique role of the intellectual, who finds interests beyond the confines of the ethnic world. Intellectuals, however, may not be and may not have been the only exceptions. How carefully has mobility among engineers, blue collar workers, business executives, etc., been measured? Has not massive college training created a world in which ethnicity has become obsolete? Ethnicity is an historical not a generic sociological phenomena. It has been a structural device used by inchoate groups entering the American capitalist order at or near the bottom. If Cruse intends to prescribe strategies for a contemporary inchoate group looking for structural devices, he should take the *history* of ethnicity more carefully into account.

One cannot be sure why Cruse discusses the history of ethnic groups so vaguely. His treatment of recent American history, of foreign policy and of concepts like "culture" and "intellectuals," however are explicitly traceable to Marxist social science. Cruse, for example, criticizes Negro left-wing intellectuals for misunderstanding the New Deal. They disdained the New Deal because it failed to adopt a Marxist philosophy. Cruse asserts that in fact the New Deal based its policies on Keynesian economic thought. His assertion is based, however, not on a reading of New Deal history but on the Marxist assumption that any regime needs an ideology to rationalize its actions; Cruse reasons that the New Deal—which did include a few disciples of Keynes—must therefore have been

Keynesian. The New Deal, however, far from adopting a uniform ideology was a cockpit of conflicting views.¹⁶ The idea of economic planning did not become a formal governmental objective until the passage of the Employment Act of 1946.¹⁷ Keynesians did not come to power until 1961,¹⁸ and when they did, they poured national resources into a militarized foreign policy, creating what one critic has called “reactionary Keynesianism.”¹⁹

If Cruse’s misreading of New Deal “dynamics” seems a minor point, it is nevertheless a symptom of a more severe analytical weakness. In dealing with foreign policy, Cruse assumes in orthodox Leninist fashion that investments vital to the health of the American economy led us to extend a colonial empire and defend it with military force. Although American investment in Latin America can be cited as an example of capitalist influence in our foreign policy, the origins of our involvement in specific countries are far more complex.²⁰ First, our foreign policy, like that of all nations, has been predicated upon the need to prevent invasion and to protect the persons and property of our citizens abroad.²¹ In a country whose citizens privately own property, one must assume that the government is obligated to protect that property when invested abroad. But since World War II many cases can be cited—Lebanon, the Dominican Republic, Vietnam—in which the protection of private property has been used as an excuse for military intervention to forestall the assumption of power by Communist regimes.²² The fear of a vague entity labelled communism has determined the course of our foreign policy in recent years, often draining rather than strengthening the economy. Public support for anti-Communist crusades apparently arose from an equation of communism with fascism, a development that grew upon historic fears and was reinforced by the Stalinist era in Russia. Furthermore, many influential figures in the Department of State, from John Foster Dulles to Dean Rusk to Walt W. Rostow, played upon public fears to implement an aggressive stance against socialist reformers all around the world. American foreign policy in recent years has been determined not by economic needs but by fears of social revolution abroad, fears exacerbated by social change at home.²⁸ In fact if Cruse had traced the sources of domestic tension into a study of our foreign policy, he could have made a distinct contribution to the way in which ethnic conflicts have affected foreign policy. As Edmund Stillman and William Pfaff wrote in 1966, “There is no case in history of a nation which possessed the power of the United States today; but it may also be true that there are few in history of so great a state so prone to unreasonable fears and so fearful of change and the unknown.”²⁴ The authors also suggest that the tensions over assimilating European immigrants made the Anglo-Saxons who dominated formation of our foreign policy fearful of domestic social changes. These men then projected their fear of social change into the effort to forestall changes abroad. When Cruse applied the Leninist mace to the study of social change, he inevitably overstated his case.

Cruse also relies on Leninist insights for his analysis of “culture” and of leadership. Like Lenin, Cruse assumes that certain intellectuals provide the vanguard for revolutionizing the consciousness of a society precedent to economic and political change. Intellectuals spark cultural change. But to change the consciousness of a culture, one must first be clear about which people constitute a cultural unit and upon which

institutions a culture rests. Because Cruse calls for a simultaneous economic, political and cultural revolution, one must understand how he uses the concept "culture," and how he defines the relationship between "cultural power" (presumably the province of the intellectuals), "economic power" (presumably the province of corporate groups), and "political power" (presumably the province of ethnic groups).

A comparison of Cruse's description of culture with the orderly definition provided by T. S. Eliot might prove useful. For Eliot "culture" can refer to one of three distinct "levels," that of the nation, that of a distinct regional group—like the Irish—and that of the individual. We usually allot the academic study of these three levels to anthropologists, sociologists and literary critics or biographers respectively. The division of labor allows one to avoid semantic confusion though it has often distorted our understanding of how the three levels fit together into a unified history. Eliot notes further that culture at all levels must have a religious base; culture, in fact, provides the material expression of a deep faith in the permanent connection between man, his ancestors and his God.²⁵

Eliot's *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*—like *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*—was not written for amusement. Eliot was deeply troubled by the interest in social planning and the secularization of society which he saw occurring around him. His main target was Karl Mannheim whose *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction* provided the most articulate and influential rationale for socialist planning in post-war Britain.²⁶ By discussing the three traditional levels of culture, Eliot tried to persuade his readers to retain the integrity of each and to conserve the humane values to which each contributed. For Eliot culture was a religious, inspirational and spontaneous phenomena and such matters as the distribution of income were of distinctly secondary importance.

While both Eliot and Cruse find unique value in folk culture, each sees in its preservation an opposite effect for the national culture. For Eliot the retention of Welsh culture, for example, preserves the vital tension between the diverse ways of life in Britain. Cruse, however, sees in the dramatization of Black ethnicity a means of revolutionizing the American consciousness. Such an assertion could be correct because in America industrialization really preceded or at least coincided historically with the emergence of ethnic groups. A re-emphasis on the impact of industrialization upon ethnicity and vice versa might change the opinions of Americans towards industrialization. But for it to do so, Americans would have to desire a return to ethnic loyalties and a new emphasis on traditional cultural roots. Such a rejuvenation of ethnicity as a radical act is not quite a contradiction in forms *against an American setting*, but it hardly attracts even the most radical American youths. While Cruse rightly reads the probable effect of new Black Art and Literature on Black youths, he misreads the psychic tensions in the history of ethnic groups and thus neglects the origins of cultural radicalism among Whites. He does not consider the inner meaning of the choice of "assimilation" for first and second generation immigrants. Often, of course, the "choice" was a matter of necessity, and the conflict between immigrant generations has been discussed aptly by Robert Ernst, Oscar Handlin, Will Herberg and others.²⁷ These uprooted "regional" cultures became submerged in a national consumer culture. By saying so little

about this turmoil over cultural norms, Cruse misrepresents the source of the discontent with consumer culture among third and fourth generation "immigrants." If these young people object to consumption as an ideal, they do not seek a return to "ethnicity" as an alternative. In many cases, liberated from the dogma of ethnicity, such people seem ready to deal as individuals with the choices now available.²⁸ But Cruse, by insisting that the folk provide the true source of "culture," isolates a Black cultural renaissance from the direction in which national and international cultural innovation is moving. By defining culture so traditionally and by failing to emphasize the importance of levels of culture, Cruse fails to suggest the historical limits of music as an art form and of literary intellectuals as artformers.

Cruse's elitist bias, of course, has been shared by conservative intellectuals like T. S. Eliot and by revolutionaries like Lenin. Both sets of intellectuals have condemned any form of culture not produced either by the "folk" or by doctrinally pure intellectuals. Because Cruse defines the intellectual and the intellectual's role in culture change traditionally, he asserts that Blacks defined the aesthetic norms of America. Such norms were expressed in Black music. Historically, James Weldon Johnson traced the contributions of Blacks to American music forty years ago. But Johnson also noted that skyscrapers provided an artform—and a cultural expression—as well.²⁹ Moreover, when Europeans, Africans and Asians discuss American culture, they begin with reference to our technology, our emphasis on efficiency, assembly lines, etc., as well as discussing jazz and more recently the blues. When Negro historians mention the contributions of Jan Matzeliger and Norbert Rillieux to the development of American technology, they reinforce the importance of the emergence of our national culture. I do not wish to suggest that Cruse's assertions about Negro music are inaccurate or that his means of studying the cultural roots of leadership are unfruitful. On the contrary, his emphasis on culture provides an essential corrective to the narrow political definition of leadership that has prevailed for so long in American scholarship. But Cruse himself defines culture both narrowly and vaguely and thus condemns rather than understands the direction in which our society is moving. It is not coincidental that Cruse refers to television and radio as the "media" and does not discuss the movies. Such "artforms" require an interest in technology foreign both to the folk and to literary intellectuals. Cruse, in order to develop a more effective political stance, should broaden his perception of culture and consider innovative forms as well as a new use of traditional ones.

One other point should be made about Cruse's discussion of culture. T. S. Eliot emphasized the religious basis of culture; Karl Marx bemoaned the reactionary impact of religion upon the consciousness of men. Cruse himself criticizes Richard Wright among others for ignoring the impact of the *Bible* on the Black imagination when formulating a cultural stance and a political program. Yet Cruse himself neither discusses the relationship between Christianity and Negro consciousness nor the structural importance of the Negro churches. The ambivalent role of Christianity in americanizing Africans has been overwhelming. In a less complex way many Negro writers including Ralph Bunche have noted the importance of churches in determining leadership. Of course, in a study of men and women who ignored religion one can understand Cruse's omission of the subject. But Cruse often departs from historical narrative to prescribe policy for intellectuals. Such a policy—as Cruse

himself insists—must be based on a thorough understanding of the cultural roots of the people. Unless Cruse assumes that the urban population of the 1960's is dramatically different from the previous generations of rural and transient people—and such a difference may very well exist if we read between the lines of the Kerner Commission *Report*³⁰—a discussion of religion should precede policy recommendations. Finally, without some clue to Cruse's understanding of the role of religion in the development of Negro culture, one must wonder what substantive definition of Negro culture he suggests.

If Cruse's discussion of culture is confused, his prescriptions for Negro intellectuals are specific and important. The relationship of intellectuals to the Negro masses was controversial long before W. E. B. DuBois emphasized the "Talented Tenth" in essays and speeches at the turn of the century. Cruse's discussion is part of an ongoing debate which needs at least a summary here. But more important, because Cruse emphasizes the importance of a different kind of intellectual than did DuBois and his early contemporaries, the problems for Negro group organization at this point in history seem particularly difficult.

The importance of intellectuals as Negro leaders began as early as the 1830's when conventions of Negroes demanding the abolition of slavery and the acquisition of civil and political rights for free Negroes met. Intellectuals, often ministers or entrepreneurs with some legal training, drew up proposals and petitions to state legislatures in behalf of the conventions.³¹ Men like Frederick Douglass, Martin Delaney, Alexander Crummell, Henry Highland Garnett and Samuel Ringgold Ward emphasized the importance of a well-trained, articulate elite. Writing from Liberia in 1862, Crummell explained the special importance of American Negroes understanding both their African and American experience. American Negroes had a unique obligation to their American and African contemporaries which only a thorough study of their history could clarify.³² Crummell persisted in this emphasis on training a scholarly elite founding the American Negro Academy in 1897, the year before his death.

Crummell's most articulate successor, W. E. B. DuBois, provided the classic statement of the dilemmas and responsibilities of Negro intellectuals. In his capacity as Vice-President, DuBois addressed the American Negro Academy at its first meeting on the subject of "The Conservation of the Race." He noted the importance of preserving the customs and traditions of the "Negro race." DuBois believed that "the history of the world is the history not of individuals but of groups, not of nations but of races, and he who ignores or seeks to override the race idea in human history ignores and overrides the central thought of all history." The American Negro was to sponsor scholarly research so that the Negro race could understand its historical mission. The Academy was to develop "serious organizations to determine by careful conference and thoughtful interchange of opinion the broad lines of policy and action for the American Negro."³³

From the turn of the twentieth century through the 1940's DuBois worked on the role of intellectuals as the vanguard of Negro rejuvenation. In an essay in the New York *Outlook* in 1903, DuBois elaborated on the need for higher education for the "Talented Tenth" among Negroes and on their responsibility for bringing the message of thrift and self-respect to the masses.³⁴ In *The Souls of Black Folk*, also pub-

lished in 1903, DuBois developed political and cultural objectives for Negroes. While insisting that Negroes agitate for equal political rights, he also argued that they retain humanitarian and folk traditions in order to resist the evils of industrial capitalism.³⁵ In the 1930's, DuBois assessed the economic needs of Negroes more fully. Expressing even more specific anti-capitalistic biases, he recommended the formation of consumer, producer and service cooperatives. Most of DuBois' suggestions as finally synthesized in *Dusk of Dawn* were adopted almost directly by Cruse. Of all the Negro intellectuals that Cruse discusses, in fact, only DuBois' efforts at synthesizing the economic, political and cultural needs of the people receive approval.³⁶

The difference between the analysis of DuBois as developed between 1903 and 1939 and that of Cruse lies not in the argument but in the administration of policy. Specifically, the intellectuals about whom DuBois wrote occupied a different relationship to the masses than do those about whom Cruse writes. Although DuBois himself disavowed religion, he recognized the importance of clergymen and other professionals who constituted his "Talented Tenth." His intellectuals occupied institutional positions within Black America, and DuBois struggled to convince these men to use their institutions towards radical ends.³⁷ Cruse's intellectuals, however, are actors, novelists and playwrights, people with no institutional relationship to the masses. Though at their best they might express the plight of the masses more effectively than lawyers, doctors and clergymen, they require very different channels to influence mass behavior.

Cruse's emphasis on "free-lance" intellectuals raises problems for his analysis of and prescription for economic policy as well. Cruse, like DuBois, settles on cooperation for essentially moral reasons. Yet he fails to note that the most successful cooperative venture among Negroes have been adjuncts of religious movements—the work of Father Divine from World War I to the present and Elijah Muhammed with the Nation of Islam. In a somewhat different way the Reverend Leon Sullivan has successfully sponsored job training and entrepreneurial ventures in North Philadelphia.³⁸ None of these men, however, are intellectuals as Cruse uses the term. Sullivan especially has been an extremely pragmatic strategist. All of these ventures, though, have liberated Negroes from welfare bureaucracy—as Cruse hopes such ventures will. But all have depended on the charisma that apparently only religious figures have. Before Black intellectuals design successful cooperatives, if history is an accurate guide to the future, they must make their peace with the clergy and the bourgeoisie.

Cruse also fails to discuss the economic feasibility of cooperatives. He is instead primarily concerned with their social and moral implications as an alternative to exploitative and deracinating capitalism. By placing so much faith in the economic and moral potential of cooperatives, though, Cruse makes some peculiar assumptions about the history of American capitalism and the "colonialism" under which Negroes live. In order to criticize Cruse, one must briefly review the changing function of Blacks in the American economy and the general contours of the history of American capitalism.

By adopting the "colonialism" model Cruse assumes that the health of the economy depends on the continued exploitation of "surplus value" from the labor of Black workers. Historically, Cruse's argument contains

a grain of truth. For example, Black slave labor through the 1850's provided the vital cash crop that determined the pace of American economic development. The exploitation of Blacks created the foreign exchange vital to the enrichment of Whites.³⁹ Moreover, before 1920 and from 1950 to 1970 many Blacks have and do constitute a "lumpen proletariat." But three phenomena temper this analysis.⁴⁰ First, a growing group of Negro white collar workers have enlarged the distance between themselves and the "lumpen proletariat." Second, labor unions even more than capitalists have prevented Blacks from improving their economic conditions. For social and economic reasons the unions have rejected Black members.⁴¹ Therefore, whatever one chooses to call our economic system, one must recognize that labor *and* capital have pursued racist policies and not exclusively for economic reasons.⁴² Third, most Negro labor has not for over 100 years been vital to the growth of our economy. The failure to invest in Black education and the retention of Blacks as sharecroppers and renters created an economic disaster for Blacks in particular and the South as a whole.⁴³ While individual entrepreneurs may have profited from exploiting Black labor, the economy as a whole has been weakened by that exploitation. Blacks have not been so much colonized as exploited and neglected. Coming to the cities as potentially productive workers, Blacks for the most part have continued to be neglected and have continued to drain the economy.⁴⁴

Assuming that the major economic problem facing most Negroes is the acquisition of productive skills, one must try to determine the most efficient way of providing them. As economists Albert O. Hirshman, John P. Lewis and Robert Baldwin have stressed in their studies of underdeveloped countries, different areas have different problems. Hirshman especially emphasizes the need to develop unique strategies for the stimulation of production.⁴⁵ An economist then must determine which strategy will allow Blacks to enter the productive sectors of this economy. Additionally, if a major deterrent to Black productivity has been the denigration of Blackness in our culture, then the ventures of a Leon Sullivan which use traditional forms of moral authority within Black communities seem to promise the greatest returns. These programs meet psychological as well as technical needs because they are administered by Blacks themselves. They meet the specific needs of people at a specific point in the economy which itself is at a specific point of development. Intellectuals, though, have been slow to deal with such ventures. Although Cruse elsewhere recognizes the need to study the thoughts and tensions of the general population, the elitist biases which he retains seem to limit his discussion of such venture.

As indicated at the outset the purpose of this review has not been to criticize Cruse's indictment of specific people, but to analyze his use of ideas for developing a critique of culture. It would be hard to imagine, for example, how a Langston Hughes, or a James Weldon Johnson or even a Marcus Garvey could have produced a more radical critique of American life than they did during an era like the 1920's. Nor could one formulate a careful analysis of contemporaries like Ossie Davis, Lorraine Hansbury or Leroi Jones without the intimate knowledge of their lives that Cruse possesses. Moreover, such a detailed counter-argument would be irrelevant unless like Cruse, its formulator wished to engage in analysis and prescription. Such a commitment, however, should not be thought of as a "trap" for academics, but rather as an opportunity to raise fundamental questions about the way in which our culture

changes. For academics who find the book often imprecise, the effort to raise important questions and to rethink our past provides essential stimulation. It should not be possible in the future to select heroes and villains out of the Negro past as facily as before; nor will criteria for judging the performances of leaders be so easy to determine. Finally, the larger question of the relationship of the Black past to the development of the nation seems ready for serious rethinking. Being drawn into that cultural analysis will raise again the kind of moral questions that academic social science has now for over a generation been trying to bury under a morass of methodological sophistication.

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footnotes

1. Milton Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life, The Role of Race, Religion and National Origin* (New York, 1964), 84-114, 163-173, for discussion of "Anglo-conformity" and the Negro as a "subsociety."

2. Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (New York, 1967), 188.

3. *Ibid.*, 12.

4. Christopher Lasch, *The New Radicalism in America, 1889-1963, The Intellectual as a Social Type* (New York, 1965), 104-140; Henry May, *The End of American Innocence, A Study of the First Years of Our Own Time, 1912-1917* (New York, 1959), 311-314.

5. Cruse, 32.

6. Robert A. Nisbet, "The Decline and Fall of Social Class," in *Tradition and Revolt, Historical and Sociological Essays* (New York, 1970), 105-127.

7. Cruse, 465-466.

8. This criticism of the Negro intellectuals of the 1920's was first made as early as 1931 by Sterling Spero and Abram Harris, *The Black Worker, The Negro and the Labor Movement* (New York, 1931), 401: "The fact that the soil necessary to the growth of economic radicalism was lacking among Negro workers, and indeed among white workers as well, seemed never to have occurred to Owen and Randolph. Only one⁴⁰ of the economic radicals expressed an appreciation of the resistance that the Negro's cultural background set up against socialism. Owen and Randolph's failure to see it explains their failure to see the futility of Marxian propaganda in Negro life." (Footnote 40 refers to W. A. Domingo, "Socialism Imperilled, or the Negro—a Potential Menace to American Radicalism.")

9. Daniel Aaron, *Writers on the Left, Episodes in American Literary Communism* (New York, 1961); Theodore Draper, *The Roots of American Communism* (New York, 1957). See also Ralph J. Bunche, "The Programs, Ideologies, Tactics and Achievements of Negro Betterment and Interracial Organizations," a memorandum for the Carnegie-Myrdal Study, Arthur Schomburg Collection, New York Public Library, 1-729.

10. Horace Cayton and St. Claire Drake, *Black Metropolis* (Chicago, 1944); Oscar Lewis, *La Vida* (New York, 1968); Harry Caudill, *Night Comes to the Cumberland* (Boston, 1962); Michael Harrington, *The Other America, Poverty in the United States* (New York, 1964).

11. Ralph Bunche, "A Brief and Tentative Analysis of Negro Leadership," a memorandum for the Carnegie-Myrdal Study, Arthur Schomburg Collection, New York Public Library, 2.

12. Margaret E. Burgess, *Negro Leadership in a Southern City* (Chapel Hill, 1960); Everett Ladd, Jr., *Negro Political Leadership in the South* (Ithaca, New York, 1966), 2-6, argues that leadership in the Negro community should be measured by the actions of political figures who react to the series of issues growing out of race relations. Ladd states also that a study of political leadership provides the best means of understanding how objectives are determined and resources committed. Ladd, however, never discusses the cultural role that integration plays.

13. Cruse, 14. The importance of Cruse's analysis of "group politics" was initially suggested by E. Franklin Frazier, "The Failure of the Negro Intellectual," in E. Franklin Edwards, ed., *E. Franklin Frazier on Race Relations* (Chicago, 1969), 269, where Frazier discussed his participation in a Pan-African Congress in the mid-1950's. "At these congresses the African, and I might add the West Indian intellectuals, were deeply concerned with the question of human culture and personality and the impact of western civilization on the traditional culture of Negro peoples. It was to be expected that African intellectuals who were imbued with an integrationist point of view were not only unconcerned with this question but seemingly were unconscious of the implications of the important question of the relation of culture and personality and human destiny."

14. Historians who have followed Bunche's distinction between agitators and accommodators include August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915* (Ann Arbor, 1963); Allan Spear, *Black Chicago, The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago, 1967), 51-89.

15. Henry May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America* (New York, 1948). The origins of this cultural paranoia can be found in the writings of Perry Miller who treated the conflict between commercial interests and the religious jeremiad from Massachusetts Bay to the James River and from 1630 to the mid-19th century.

16. William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940* (New York, 1963), 41-94, describes the conflicting views of New Dealers on almost every domestic issue. Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform, From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York, 1955), 300-328, stressed the ambiguities in New Deal economic policies. Page 307: "F. D. R.'s spending policy never represented at any time before the outbreak of the war an unambiguous or wholehearted commitment to Keynesian economics."

17. Stephen K. Bailey, *Congress Makes a Law, The Story Behind the Employment Act of 1946* (New York, 1950).

18. Walter Heller, *New Dimensions of Political Economy* (Harvard, 1966), 29.

19. Michael Harrington, *Toward a Democratic Left, A Radical Program for a New Majority* (New York, 1968), 117-118, notes the potentially reactionary uses to which Keynesian doctrines can and have been put. John K. Galbraith, *The New Industrial State* (New York, 1967), stressed the relations between economic planning and the rise of a new technocratic class dependent especially on war technology for employment.

20. David Horowitz, *The Free World Colossus* (New York, 1965), presents the most popular revisionist view of American foreign policy from the origins of the Cold War onward, but fails to discuss popular support for foreign policy.

21. George Kennan, *Realities of American Foreign Policy* (Princeton, 1954), 11-12.

22. Les K. Adler and Thomas G. Paterson, "Red Fascism: The Merger of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia in the American Image of Totalitarianism, 1930's-1950's," *American Historical Review* (April, 1970).

23. William Toll, "Racism, Elitism and Public Policy Under the Great Society," manuscript in possession of author. This essay is scheduled for publication in the *Journal of Human Relations*, Spring, 1970.

24. Edmund Stillman and William Pfaff, *Power and Impotence* (New York, 1966), 74.

25. T. S. Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (London, 1948), 21-34, 83-94. The latter section in particular discusses the relation between culture and politics, assuming that culture as a developing phenomena cannot be "planned."

26. Karl Mannheim, *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction* (London, 1940), especially 147-239. Even without the degree of planning for which Mannheim called, the culture of Britain has become highly secularized and standardized. It has been suggested that the hero of the British working class has changed from V. I. Lenin to John Lennon. Dom Moraes, "The Passing of the British Working Class," *New York Times Magazine*, April 5, 1970, 32-33, 60-62.

27. Robert Ernst, *Immigrant Life in New York, 1825-1863* (Port Washington, New York, 1965), 1-12, 122-184; Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted* (New York, 1951), 170-285; Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* (Garden City, New York, 1955). See also the writings of John Higham, Moses Rischin and others.

28. See the work of Edgar Z. Friedenburg and Kenneth Kenniston for example.

29. James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way* (New York, 1933), 327.

30. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *Report* (New York, 1968), 7, provides a profile of a typical "rioter" in which his northern urban nativity, his attitudes and his behavior are correlated. The inference is that an urban, northern person will behave much differently than a rural person for a variety of historical and psychological reasons.

31. Note the combination of historical, legal and moral arguments contained in "Address adopted by the state convention of the colored citizens of the state of Michigan, held in the city of Detroit on the 26th and 27th days of October, 1843, for the purpose of considering their moral and political conditions as citizens of the state" (Detroit, 1843), and *Minutes of the state convention of the colored citizens of Pennsylvania convened at Harrisburg, December 13th, 14th, 1848* (Philadelphia, 1849), pamphlets at the William Clements Library, University of Michigan. Discussions of state and national conventions can be found in Austin Steward, *Twenty Years a Slave, and Forty Years a Freeman* (Rochester, New York, 1857), chapter xviii; Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (New York, 1962), reprinted from the 1892 revised edition, 226-231, 271-291.

32. Alexander Crummell, *The Future of Africa: Being Addresses, Sermons, etc., Delivered in the Republic of Liberia* (New York, 1862), 217-219.

33. W. E. B. DuBois, "The Conservation of the Races," *The American Negro Academy Occasional Paper No. 2* (Washington, D.C., 1897), Arthur Schomburg Collection, New York Public Library.

34. W. E. B. DuBois, "The Training of Negroes for Social Power," reprinted as a pamphlet by Atlanta University (1903), Arthur Schomburg Collection, New York Public Library.

35. W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, 1963), 16-18.

36. W. E. B. DuBois, *Dusk of Dawn* (New York, 1940), 209-220, should be compared with Cruse, 87-90.

37. The social and educational origins of pre-World War I intellectuals have not been carefully studied. Some of the data can be found in Constance McL. Green, *The Secret City, A History of Race Relations in the Nation's Capital* (Princeton, 1967), 119-154; John Mercer Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capital* (Hartford, Connecticut, 1894), 296-349, 521-524; T. Thomas Fortune, *Black and White, Land Labor and Politics in the South* (New York, 1884), 181-184, and in the columns of the *Washington Bee* for the 1890's. The formal institutional leadership at the nation's political capital and their close ties to the Republican Party made the context of prescriptions about a "talented tenth" very different from the suggestions about "intellectuals" by Cruse.

38. Charlayne Hunter, "The New Black Businessman," *Saturday Review*, vol. LII, no. 34 (August 23, 1969), 59-60.

39. Douglas C. North, *The Economic Growth of the United States, 1790-1860* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1961), 66-74, 122-134.

40. Daniel P. Moynihan, *The Negro Family, The Case for National Action* (Washington, D.C., 1965), 5-6, emphasizes this point.

41. Sterling Spero and Abram Harris, *The Black Worker, The Negro and the Labor Movement* (New York, 1931), documents this point for a whole spectrum of unions. Conditions of continuing discrimination during World War II are documented in Charles S. Johnson, *To Stem the Tide, A Survey of Racial Tension Areas in the United States* (Boston and Chicago, 1943), chapter I.

42. See the provocative essay on the social importance of unions in Frank Tannenbaum, *A Philosophy of Labor* (New York, 1951).

43. Eugene Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery, Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (New York, 1965), 41-69; Arthur Raper and Ira De A. Reid, *Sharecroppers All* (Chapel Hill, 1941). The importance of the investment in education of Whites for American economic growth is analyzed in Albert Fishlow, "The American Common School Revival: Fact or Fancy?," in Henry Rosovsky, ed., *Industrialization in Two Systems, Essays in Honor of Alexander Gerschenkron* (New York, 1966), and Fishlow, "Levels in Nineteenth Century American Investment in Education," manuscript in possession of author. For the diversion of funds from Negro to White schools in the southeast see Louis Harlan, *Separate but Unequal, Public School Campaigns and Racism in the Southern Seaboard States, 1901-1915* (Chapel Hill, 1958), 102-269.

44. Richard A. Cloward and Francis Fox Piven, "Migration, Politics and Welfare," *Saturday Review*, vol. LI, no. 46, 31-35.

45. John P. Lewis, *Quiet Crisis in India, Economic Development and American Policy* (Washington, D.C., 1962), 50-113, 137-201; Albert O. Hirschman, *The Strategy of Economic Development* (New Haven, 1958), 88, notes, "Our principal assumption throughout this essay is that the real scarcity in underdeveloped countries is not the resources themselves but the ability to bring them into play." The colonialism model argues both a lack of resources and a lack of skills. If people believe in the colonialism model, some outside source of resources is necessary.

a response

Given the bitterness of the controversy provoked by Harold Cruse's *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, this author was reluctant to enter into it until some of the heat had subsided. An additional cause for hesitation was the general level at which the issues were being discussed (or not discussed), i.e., ad hominem arguments and "psychological" interpretations of Cruse's motives in writing a book at all and in writing this book in particular. Much of the discussion also has dwelt on the propriety and accuracy of his criticism of various Black thinkers and on his alleged "anti-Semitism."¹

Such concerns prompted some writers to rush into print to defend themselves, or their friends, or their particular interest group against Cruse's charges. On the other hand, a number of scholars—Black and White—were so overwhelmed by the novelty of Cruse's ideas, his approach