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The Intellectual Crisis Worrill's World

**By Dr. Conrad W. Worrill, PhD
BlackCommentator.com Columnist**

One of our great esteemed ancestors, Harold Cruse wrote a book, [*The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: A Historical Analysis of the Failure of Black Leadership*](#) which was published in 1967, at the height of the Black Power Movement. This insightful book stirred up a spirited conversation in the African Liberation Movement. That conversation revolves around the weaknesses of our movement, the direction of our movement, and inability of some of the leaders and thinkers of our movement to understand what Brother Cruse calls "The Great American Ideal." This problem continues to linger with us today.

Brother Cruse spent most of his activist and organizing days in Harlem, New York from the 1940s until he accepted a professorship at the University of Michigan and helped develop their Black Studies Program in 1967. In Harlem, Brother Cruse was an active participant in most of the major organizing activities that swept through New York for over twenty years. *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* is a summation of those experiences as it related to the literature and history of the African Liberation Movement.

This year, 2010 marks the forty-third year of the publication of *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*. Its importance to our movement has still not received the attention it deserves, primarily because Brother Cruse was so honest in his criticisms of our movement and many of its well-known leaders. Therefore, the book was blocked in many circles from receiving the kind of legitimacy its substance deserved.

However, a small group of scholar/activists have discussed and debated Brother Cruse's ideas during this forty-three year period and have organized study groups from time to time that have aided in understanding the ideas that Cruse presents in his book.

When we use the term intellectual, we are talking about people who struggle around ideas - writers, poets, scholars, researchers, teachers, students, and activists. Intellectuals are people who grapple with ideas and who function in the cultural, political, educational, and economic domains of the society. As Dr. Anderson Thompson always says, "Ideas are weapons of war."

With this definition, let us review briefly some of the ideas and concepts that Brother Cruse presented in *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*. One of the major points Cruse makes is the African American intellectuals are pathological in their approach to the choices available to them. It is Cruse's observation that they appear to adopt the values of the dominant group, which he describes as the white Anglo Saxon Protestant.

It was in the first chapter of *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* that Cruse raised this question of the problem of identity of the African in America people. The question of our identity still remains a fundamental problem with the African in America Community today. There is a tendency in the African in America Community to identify with, emulate, and support other races and ethnic groups at the expense of our own race.

Cruse illustrated this in his book when he described the following: "In 1940, as one of my first acts in the pursuit of becoming a more social being, I joined a YMCA amateur drama group in Harlem. I wanted to learn about theater so I became a stage technician - meaning a handyman for all backstage chores. But the first thing about this drama group that struck me as highly curious was the fact that all the members were overwhelmingly in favor of doing white plays with Negro casts."

Cruse continued on this point. "I wondered why and very naively expressed my sentiments about it. The replies that I got clearly indicated these amateur actors were not very favorable to the play about Negro life, although they would not plainly say so. Despite the fact that this question of identity was first presented to me within the context of the program of a small, insignificant amateur drama group,

its implications ranged far beyond.”

Another problem Cruse addresses is that the African in America intellectual’s conceptualization of our condition is not based on the ethnic reality of America. The American Ideal espouses one set of principles through the Constitution, but the basis of reality of this society is founded on ethnic and religious pluralism not individualism, according to Brother Cruse.

From the point of view of Brother Cruse, the African in America intellectual is not accepted by whites and does not identify with his or her own racial group. Cruse concludes that the crisis of the African in America intellectual is an identity crisis and misunderstanding of the false postulation of the American Ideal.

For Brother Cruse, the crisis was whether the African in America intellectual will accept the challenge of being the spokesman or spokeswoman of the African in America masses in terms of setting guidelines for our movement and of understanding the issues of our race, making proper analyses, and proceeding to help build our movement. This is still the crisis we face today.

BlackCommentator.com Columnist, Conrad W. Worrill, PhD, is the National Chairman Emeritus of the National Black United Front ([NBUF](#)). Click [here](#) to contact Dr. Worrill.



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