



BRILL

Between Revolution and the Racial Ghetto

Harold Cruse and Harry Haywood Debate Class Struggle and the 'Negro Question', 1962–8

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Abstract

This article revisits an historic exchange between two black ex-communists, Harold Cruse and Harry Haywood, a debate that prefigured many of the central contradictions of the black-power era. Their exchange followed Cruse's influential 1962 essay for *Studies on the Left*, 'Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro-American', which declared that the American Negro was a 'subject of domestic colonialism'. Written against the prevailing liberal integrationist commitments of the civil-rights movement, his essay called for black economic and political independence, and inspired many of the younger activists who would give birth to the black-power movement. In a series of essays for the Bay Area black radical journal *Soulbook*, Haywood criticised Cruse's mishandling of class politics among blacks, and his retreat from anti-capitalism. This forgotten episode is important on its own terms, for what it says about the character and limitations of left-political thinking during the sixties, and equally for understanding and contesting those commonsensical notions of African-American public life in our times which too often remain rooted in the vanished social context and political realities of the twentieth-century racial ghetto.

Keywords

race – revolutionary nationalism – class struggle – American Communist Party – intellectuals – the colonial analogy – black power

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This article re-examines a debate between two black ex-communists, Harold Cruse and Harry Haywood. Their exchange was precipitated by the publication of Cruse's 'Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro-American', an influential 1962 essay for *Studies on the Left* that declared the American Negro was a 'subject of domestic colonialism'. Written against the prevailing liberal commitments of the civil-rights movement, his essay called for black economic and political independence, and inspired many younger activists who would give birth to the black-power movement. Haywood took Cruse to task in a series of essays, published in the Bay Area black radical journal *Soulbook*. Cruse offered a full-bodied critique of Communist Party failings in his 1967 tome, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, taking aim at many of his former comrades in the CP and fellow travellers in Manhattan's mid-century theatre and literary circles. The book established Cruse as the *éminence grise* of the black-power era, and garnered him a university professorship, ending his travails as a journeyman intellectual.

Cruse and Haywood represent a mode of black intellectual life that is virtually extinct. Although they were separated by a generation, they were both left-autodidacts, and were educated through World War, daily life in a segregated America, sectarian party activity and all the profound social conundrums that filled the spaces between those experiences. Since the end of Jim Crow, the motives, expectations and terms of black intellectual engagement have been transformed by academe's career pressures and disciplinary norms, the entrepreneurial demands of grant-driven research, the fetishisation of quantitative methods in the social sciences, and post-*Bakke* rollbacks of anti-discrimination policy in many American colleges and universities. In addition, the disappearance of many independent and progressive black intellectual journals and magazines since the seventies that once facilitated critical black public debate, and the concomitant rise of the black public intellectual phenomenon within corporate media have further altered the character of black intellectual life. The left-critical view of political economy articulated by black intellectuals and activists under Jim Crow segregation was marginalised in the transition from movement protests to systemic inclusion. Vestiges of Marxist left-critique remain here and there, on the fringes of academe and flotsam of sixties black radicalism, but multiculturalism and anti-racist politics form the central lines of critical black political thinking in our times. Unfortunately, contemporary historiography of the black-power movement has not advanced very far beyond the problems that Cruse identified in the work of those left-historians who could only see blacks at the barricades, as 'a people without classes or differing class interests'.¹

1 Cruse 2009c, pp. 84–5.

This article contributes to a growing body of work that offers class analyses of black history and politics.² Rather than approaching Cruse and Haywood's exchange from the vantage point of the 'black freedom movement' frame that too readily collapses contingent ideological and political tendencies within African-American life, I want to offer a sympathetic but critical reading of Cruse's and Haywood's respective ideas and the historical conjunctures that produced them. Revisiting this forgotten exchange between Cruse and Haywood is important on its own terms, for what it says about the character of black political thinking during the sixties. Each offered an influential revolutionary-left answer to the problematic of American racial relations, and although much of the vocabulary and conceptual framework they employed – that is, 'the Negro question' and the 'black colony' – seem antiquated now, their preoccupations and disagreements are relevant to contemporary thinking about black public life, within academe and society more generally.

The first part of this article examines Cruse's intellectual formation and engages in a close reading of his landmark 1962 essay, while the second part rehearses aspects of Haywood's life within the Communist Party, and his articulation of the Black Belt thesis, before turning to his criticisms of Cruse's use of the colonial analogy. They both embraced some version of black nationalism and shared adoration for Vladimir Lenin's ideas regarding oppressed nationalities and vanguard political strategy, but they possessed divergent interpretative sensibilities and politics.

Having sketched out Cruse's and Haywood's respective views, part three of this article turns to an analysis of their work's implications for the immediate black-power movement and the evolution of black public life since the sixties. Their thinking was shaped by the social and political world of the racial ghetto, the twentieth-century phenomenon of urban segregation, which all blacks were subject to, regardless of wealth or occupation. Although both men speak to the class contradictions within the racial ghetto, Cruse embraces the dominant paradigm of ethnic pluralism and views the ghetto bourgeoisie as a natural leadership element. By contrast, Haywood offers a more critical, sustained analysis of these intra-racial dynamics, and identifies social and political contradictions within black public life that have grown in scale and implications since the sixties, as the racial ghetto has given way to the hyperghetto, the more intensive class segregation of black surplus population. Despite this radically shifting context that produced new social relations, political realities and economic conditions, Cruse's arguments were

2 See Reed 2008; Boyd 2008; Reed 1999a; Warren 2011; Reed and Warren 2010; Smith 2012; Arena 2012; Jones 2013; Mitchell 2004; Stein 1986; Robinson 2001; Johnson 2007; Gaines 1996; Floyd 2007; Fields and Fields 2012; West 2008.

given popular expression and institutional authority through the black-power movement, and continue to shape current thinking about inequality and black public life.

Harold Cruse and the Limits of the Old Left

As direct-action campaigns against Jim Crow grew increasingly frequent and defiant in Wichita, Birmingham and Greensboro, Harold Cruse enjoyed the cosmopolitan lifestyle of a New York intellectual. By day, he worked at Macy's department store, and at various odd jobs. And at night, he scribbled and entertained his diverse circle of friends, which included the impressionist painter Norman Lewis and Abram Hill, author of the famed play *Striver's Row*. He adored café culture, spending hours conversing, playing chess, and reading in coffee shops like Pandora's Box, one of his favourite haunts. After the death of the Japanese painter and printmaker Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Cruse inherited his top-floor apartment at 14th Street and Seventh Avenue, making him one of the few blacks living in the Village at that time.³ At the start of the sixties, Cruse was a man with a growing reputation as an essayist, but the path to his newfound intellectual influence had been a long and twisting one to say the least.

Cruse's journey into the Communist Party begins before the Second World War. As an adolescent, Cruse was already immersed in the vibrant political culture of Harlem where on most days at the YMCA, he later recalled, 'there were Communists debating, black nationalists debating, anti-Communists debating, pro-Communists debating, NAACPers, the whole spectrum of critical opinion was being aired.'⁴ A public discussion of Richard Wright's recently-published *Native Son*, however, would prove to be a crucial turning point in Cruse's political and intellectual development. The discussion took place at the Schomburg Collection. Although he later confessed that he 'didn't like the guy much then', Cruse was curious. The panel discussion featured the leading poet of the Harlem Renaissance Countee Cullen, the famed Jamaican-born writer and Communist partisan Claude McKay, and Christopher Morely, a Sherlock Holmes enthusiast, and author of the 1925 novel *Thunder on the Left*. The three men set about criticising the book in Wright's absence. When he finally arrived, Wright made a grand entrance, placed his books and notes on

3 Gosse 2004, p. 38. For more insight into Cruse's life before the publication of *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, see also Cruse 2009b; Cruse 2002b.

4 Gosse 2004, p. 106.

the table and proceeded to silence his critics in a lengthy, skilful rebuttal that astonished the young Cruse. 'That night', Cruse later noted, was 'the beginning of my leanings toward the communists...'⁵ His sympathies were deepening, but it would be his experiences during the Second World War that would propel him into the party's ranks.

Less than a year after his encounter with Wright, Cruse was drafted into the 'citizen's army', serving tours in the British Isles, Northern Africa and Italy. He claimed that he 'had been indoctrinated in Italy' and was 'steadfastly pro-Russian in the war'.⁶ Because his regiment was charged with managing supply lines, it was often engaged with the local underground economy. In Italy, however, the situation was volatile as criminal syndicates regularly ambushed US army trucks. In one harrowing episode, Cruse was accosted near the resort town of Terracina. He was held at gunpoint and questioned, but ultimately let go since the truck was not yet loaded with precious cargo. Cruse later confessed that he would not have survived the war had it not been for the Italian communists who provided American troops with information and protection from the local mafia. His time spent among partisans in Italy cemented his commitment to communist politics.⁷

After the war, Cruse settled back into life in Harlem. He joined the Communist Party in 1947 and would remain a member for the next 6 years. During this time, Cruse took a course in Marxist philosophy with Howard Selsam at the George Washington Carver School, an adult-education centre in Harlem that was run by Gwendolyn Bennett, a New Negro poet, and former Howard University art professor. Historian Lawrence P. Jackson writes that 'Bennett emitted a personal charm and charisma that had a profound impact in making Communist Party life attractive to Cruse'.⁸ Cruse served as librarian for the *Daily Worker*, often penning theatre and film reviews.

Although he would later claim that repeated visits from the FBI prompted his exit from the party, Cruse's discontent with the party officialdom, particularly around the matter of black cultural autonomy, had been simmering for some time. He later wrote about the party's stifling atmosphere, 'I could not function in the Left as a creative writer and critic with my own convictions concerning the "black experience"'.⁹ Inspired by the work of Irish-native and Fabian socialist George Bernard Shaw, the Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen and the

5 Davis 2001.

6 Gosse 1998, p. 107.

7 Davis 2001; Gosse 1998, pp. 102–6.

8 Jackson 2011, p. 303.

9 Cruse 2009a, p. 8.

black vaudeville shows he adored so much as a youth, Cruse wrote four plays during his time in the Communist Party and the years after, but none were ever staged. He also worked on a novel, 'The Education of a Rebel', a *roman à clef* of his party experiences. His breakthrough did not come through fiction, however, but through political essays that conveyed the spirit of the early sixties' new nationalist militancy, a precursor to black power which drew inspiration from the anti-colonial movements sweeping across the Third World.

The 'new nationalism', or 'new Afro-American nationalism' as it was called in some period publications, offered a searing critique of the civil-rights movement.¹⁰ In contrast to the Southern movement with its Christian undertones, and focus on constitutional rights, the new nationalism was defined by its emphasis on economic self-determination, a sharp critique of the civil-rights establishment, and rhetorical posturing toward revolutionary violence. Most black nationalists were sceptical that Southern segregation could be defeated, and the weekly incidences of violence, arrests and sabotage meted out against peaceful demonstrators only steeled their cynicism regarding the prospects of an integrated society. With some exceptions, the new nationalism's adherents were mostly urban, Northern and west-coast based.

Their approach was also anti-colonial in its inspiration and, in many respects, more inter-racialist in practice than black-power militancy later in the decade would become. Cruse describes manifestations of this political and cultural tendency in Harlem in his 1962 *New Leader* essay, 'Negro Nationalism's New Wave'. '[T]he Afro Americans are here to stay', Cruse declared, 'they will undoubtedly make a lot of noise in militant demonstrations, cultivate beards and sport their Negroid hair in various degrees of *la mode au naturel*, and tend to be cultish with African- and Arab-style dress. . . . Today it is not uncommon to see Albert Camus' *The Rebel* protruding from the hip pocket of a well-worn pair of jeans among the Afro American set.'¹¹ Cruse captured the sartorial aesthetics of this nascent counterculture that would gain widespread acceptance among African-Americans by the late sixties. In his typical fashion, he distanced himself from this tendency perhaps due to his sense of generational disconnect from the younger radicals he encountered on the streets of Harlem, but Cruse was an active participant in the growing nationalist political tendency. In 1960, Cruse travelled to Cuba with a delegation of black writers organised by Richard Gibson through the Fair Play for Cuba Committee.¹²

10 Cruse 2009d; Clarke 1961b.

11 Cruse 2009d, p. 73.

12 Cruse 2002c; Cruse 1967, pp. 356–7; see also Jones 1966; Clarke 1961a; Gosse 1993; Young 2001.

Others in the delegation included the Beat poet and playwright LeRoi Jones (later Amiri Baraka); the abstract expressionist painter Ed Clark; historian John Henrik Clarke; the writer Julian Mayfield and his wife Dr Ana Cordero, a Puerto Rican-born physician; the novelist Sarah Wright and her husband, the radical Jewish composer Joseph Kaye; as well as Robert F. Williams, the famed NAACP leader of Monroe County, North Carolina, who took up arms to defend black lives. Cruse would describe his two weeks in Cuba as 'one of the most inspiring experiences I have ever had'.¹³ Upon returning to the states, Cruse joined the Organization of Young Men, a small collective of black Manhattan-based artists that included Jones, jazz-saxophonist Archie Shepp, music critic A.B. Spellman, photographer Leroy McLucas, and journalist Calvin Hicks. He also joined the short-lived Freedom Now Party, an all-black organisation, during this period. These experiences, good and bad, would shape his thinking about the limitations of the Old Left and the need for a more assertive black politics, themes that would echo loudly within the emerging nationalist circles and reverberate throughout the decade.

Cruse's writings during the early sixties constitute a neglected contribution to the development of the New Left. Although Cruse does not identify as part of the New Left, casting himself in a more advisory role at times and openly chastising the 'black New Left' at others, his critique of Old Left officialdom, his emphasis on racial-identity politics over notions of class struggle, and his preoccupation with the mass-culture industry and the possibilities of 'cultural democracy' all situate him as an important contributor to American New Leftist thinking. Like the left-sociologist C. Wright Mills, Detroit activists Grace Lee Boggs and James Boggs, Frankfurt School political theorist Herbert Marcuse and his other contemporaries, Cruse's writings represented an attempt to rethink American left-radicalism in light of the taming of mass worker insurgency through bureaucratic trade unionism, McCarthyism and the consumer society. It is not surprising that his breakout essay would appear in an organ of the emerging New Left. *Studies on the Left* provided Cruse with a platform to address multiple audiences, the communist partisans he longed to correct, the black radicals whom he hoped to inspire, the slumbering black elite who needed his alarm, as well as those who formed the budding New Left, students, artists and others who might well repeat the mistakes of their predecessors.

Cruse opens the essay 'Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro-American' by assailing the failures of 'Western Marxists' – his euphemism for the Communist Party leadership – charging that they had not to come to terms

13 Cruse 2002c, p. 11.

with the growing conservatism of white industrial workers, nor did they fully appreciate the implications of the emergence of colonised nations as a revolutionary force. He sees the emergence of the Cuban revolution, and the inability of orthodox Marxists to foresee it, as symptomatic of their intellectual myopia. They expected industrial workers in the advanced capitalist nations to lead the struggle for socialism, but Cruse contends that the colonised world has taken the lead, 'The revolutionary initiative has passed to the colonial world', he argued, 'and in the United States is passing to the Negro', whose relation to the dominant culture is comparable to that of colonial subjects.¹⁴ For Cruse, the Negro is 'the American problem of underdevelopment' and the 'failure of American Marxists to understand the bond between the Negro and the colonial peoples of the world has led to their failure to develop theories that would be of value to Negroes in the United States.'¹⁵

Cruse was not alone in his view that 'the Negro is the leading revolutionary force, independent and ahead of the Marxists', as others such as Marcuse and the Trinidadian Pan-Africanist and Trotskyist C.L.R. James asserted the revolutionary potential of the black movement, departing from the orthodox formula of class struggle which viewed the Northern mass worker as central protagonist of socialist revolution.¹⁶ As Cruse more sharply asserted in a subsequent essay, 'every social revolution that has taken place since the Russian Revolution has also developed out of industrially backward, agrarian, semi-colonial or colonial conditions while the working classes of the advanced white nations became more and more conservative, pro-capitalist and *pro-imperialist* [emphasis in original].'¹⁷ Cruse overstates the bankruptcy of organised labour and white workers here and elsewhere in his writings. After all, in the twenty years after 1947, strikes were ten times more prevalent than they would be after 1980. His comments, however exaggerated, point to a set of political problems posed by the institutionalisation of capital-labour conflicts under social democracy.¹⁸ 'If the white working class is ever to move in the direction of demanding structural changes in society', Cruse held, 'it will be the Negro who will furnish the initial force.'¹⁹ His articulation of the colonial analogy bore some truth, but the notion coincided with 'end of ideology' arguments of the age, most notably authored by Daniel Bell, which viewed

14 Cruse 2009c, p. 75.

15 Cruse 2009c, pp. 74–5.

16 For some comparative discussion of their views, see Johnson 2007, pp. 15–19.

17 Cruse 2009e, p. 143.

18 Lichtenstein 2002, p. 99.

19 Cruse 2009c, p. 96.

the conflict between capital and labour as a settled matter, and working-class, socialist politics as an anachronism.²⁰

Cruse saw the potential for solidarity among the colonised around the globe more readily than among those Americans, black and white, who lived and worked side by side to varying degrees from one region of the country to another. The root problem in this all, however, is the extent to which Cruse abandons the critique of political economy and the project of socialist revolution undertaken in places like Cuba, for a form of ethnic-identity politics that was radical in its aspirations, but conservative in practice. In describing the Negro's colonial status, Cruse minimised the matter of labour exploitation, which along with the extraction of mineral wealth and other natural resources is in fact the driving impetus of most colonial projects. Instead, he emphasised the social effects of proletarianisation, secondary forms of exploitation, and the putative psychological and cultural dimensions of black oppression in the US. 'Like the peoples of the underdeveloped countries', Cruse wrote, 'the Negro suffers in varying degrees from hunger, illiteracy, disease, ties to the land, urban and semi-urban slums, cultural starvation, and the psychological reactions to being ruled over by others not of his kind.'²¹ Further, he contends that these problems are widely felt among blacks regardless of class: 'As a wage labourer or tenant farmer, the Negro is discriminated against and exploited. Those in the educated, professional and intellectual classes suffer a similar fate.'²² Cruse balks at the possibility of broad-based solidarity among black and white workers. In part, this is understandable given the social and economic conditions of the early sixties. In the South, segregationists were fighting doggedly to keep Jim Crow alive and blacks subservient and disenfranchised. And throughout the rest of the country, even in the most prosperous cities, few blacks enjoyed the full benefits of postwar investment, and most were relegated to inner-city slums and public-housing tower blocks isolated from the middle-class jobs and consumer lifestyles of suburbia. Not all of his contemporaries, however, shared his cynical view of left-politics, and the possibility of working-class solidarity.²³

20 Bell 1961; Johnson 2011.

21 Cruse 2009c, pp. 75–6.

22 Cruse 2009c, p. 76.

23 Some like James Boggs offered a nuanced view of the challenges that bureaucratic unionism and automation posed for shop-floor organising. Although Boggs is clear about the racial and ethnic divisions that threaten solidarity, his 1963 book *The American Revolution* is suffused with a high sense of political optimism. Perhaps the distance between Boggs and Cruse regarding the prospects of interracial working-class solidarity

Even though he appreciates the notion of working-class interests in a sociological sense, Cruse rejects the viability of a political project built on this basis. In one of his most divisive passages, Cruse boldly asserted that 'Negroes have never been equal to whites of any class in economic, social, cultural or political status, and very few whites of any class have ever regarded them as such.'²⁴ This claim could be easily contested on historical grounds, as it is more of a polemical statement than an empirical one. Here Cruse diminishes the material and ideological differences operating within the black world, in order to raise a call for more effective leadership, a nationalist bourgeoisie along the lines of a colonial territory. The core problem then for Cruse was not primarily one of racial discrimination, but rather 'a problem of political-economic, cultural, and administrative underdevelopment'.²⁵ This brings us to an important contradiction within Cruse's thinking about black life.

On one hand, he readily acknowledges the class structure of the black population, and notes the different political interests that emerge therein, and yet, on the other hand, he calls for a black-nationalist politics, led by the urban merchant and professional classes, that focuses on economic independence and self-help. Cruse chastises Marxist historians such as Herbert Aptheker for failing to appreciate the class structure of blacks. Although class analysis remains as a vestige, the capitalist political economy is no longer the central object of critical analysis for Cruse, or the target of revolutionary politics. Moreover, while he emphasises the different class interests within the black population, he views black elites as the natural arbiters of the race. The agency and interests of the working classes disappear in his analysis. His thinking on

can be explained by their different positions within the left. As an autoworker and union man, Boggs proceeds from the concrete conditions experienced by workers throughout his Chrysler plant and others in the Detroit area. His was a leftist politics that begins with the task of organising workers. Cruse's leftist politics, however, developed within the world of the New York Communist Party elites, an endeavour that begins with abstract commitment to socialism and moves towards the task of building support for a Communist Party programme. He and Boggs viewed the class war from very different vantage points, as distinct as the general's command post from the barbed-wired trenches of the battlefield. Cruse's frustrations with party officialdom no-doubt led away from any faith that working-class solidarity could be anything other than an abstraction, even though there was evidence to the contrary all around him. 'Except for a very small percentage of the Negro intelligentsia', Cruse concluded, 'the Negro functions in a subcultural world made up, usual of necessity, of his own race only.' Cruse 2009c, p. 76; Boggs 1963; Ward 2011; Johnson 2011, pp. 303–26.

24 Cruse 2009c, p. 77.

25 Cruse 2009c, p. 76.

these matters is in part influenced by E. Franklin Frazier, the Howard University sociologist best known for his 1957 book, *The Black Bourgeoisie*.²⁶ Following Frazier's analysis, Cruse argues that the black middle class lacks nationalist consciousness and responsibility because of its desire for assimilation. As a result, the black bourgeoisie, unlike that of other ethnic groups we are to assume, has become a 'social millstone around the necks of the Negro working class'.²⁷

Against the paternalism of white absentee landlords, party bosses, and Communist Party officials, Cruse called for a new political focus for black struggles: economic and political control of the racial ghetto. 'The Negro nationalist ideology', Cruse wrote, 'regards all the social ills from which the Negroes suffer as being caused by the lack of economic control over the segregated Negro community.'²⁸ Undoubtedly, Cruse's ire on these matters of the black elite's self-interest and their potential connection to blacks overall was sparked by his experiences in the Communist Party ranks where he witnessed other white ethnics who saw no contradiction between their partisan commitments and the maintenance of religious observances, ethnic entrepreneurship, neighbourhood organisations and distinct social life. In fact, he would go on to elaborate on these matters at length in *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*.²⁹

26 Cruse writes approvingly: 'Frazier shows that the failure of the Negro to establish an economic base in American society served to sever the Negro bourgeoisie, in its "slow and difficult occupational differentiation" from economic, and therefore cultural and organizational ties with the Negro working class. Since the Negro bourgeoisie does not, in the main, control the Negro "market" in the United States economy, and since it derives its income from whatever "integrated" occupational advantages it has achieved, it has neither developed a sense of association of its status with that of the Negro working class, nor a "community" of economic, political, or cultural interests conducive to cultivating "nationalistic sentiments": Cruse 2009c, p. 90. Regarding Frazier, see also Frazier 1966; Holloway 2002, pp. 123–56.

27 Cruse 2009c, p. 90.

28 Cruse 2009c, p. 91.

29 Two chapters from Cruse's most well-known work stand out on this matter of competing ethnic allegiances and class solidarity, '1920's–1930's – West Indian Influence' and 'Jews and Negroes in the Communist Party'. Aside from his attacks on artists like playwright Lorraine Hansberry, these are the most detested and controversial chapters in the book. So much so that lengthy rebuttals have been penned decades after the book's publication by those who contest the accuracy of his historical analysis and who view Cruse's arguments as ethnocentric and unfair to particular groups. See James 1998; Wald 2000–1; Resnick 2002.

When it came to the matter of territorial sovereignty, however, Cruse's black-nationalist arguments ran aground, and revealed theoretical limitations that would plague black-power radicals throughout the sixties and seventies. Cruse asked, 'Is it not just as valid for Negro nationalists to want to separate from American whites as it is for Cuban nationalists to want to separate economically and politically from the United States?' He asserts that the matter of black national sovereignty should not be viewed in terms of 'pragmatic practicalities', but rather as a political question that 'involves the inherent right accruing to individuals, groups, nations and national minorities, i.e., the right of political separation from another political entity when joint existence is incompatible, coercive, unequal, or otherwise injurious to the rights of one or both.'³⁰ Despite his allusions to political secession, he ultimately demurs, concluding the article by arguing in favour of economic control in more modest terms. This practice of gesturing towards classical national sovereignty, and then settling on a more conservative notion of self-determination – economic and political control of the racial ghetto within the parameters of Cold War America – would become a defining aspect of black-power politics. In 1968, the Republic of New Africa, an organisation formed by two Detroit-born brothers, Richard and Milton Henry, called for the formation of a black nation-state through the combination of five Southern states. And the most iconic black-power organisation, the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, demanded as part of their 10-point platform a United Nations-supervised plebiscite for the 'Black colony in which only black colonial subjects will be allowed to participate for the purpose of determining the will of the black people as to their national destiny.'³¹ Like Cruse, these pronouncements were symbolic, a way for adherents to express their lack of faith in the ability of American liberal democracy to resolve the plight of blacks, and strategic, inasmuch as they shifted public debate away from assimilationist aims towards questions of power and economic development, particularly within inner-city ghettos where investment, jobs and infrastructure were declining.

In the decade after his 1962 essay was published, Cruse's ideas regarding the purpose and means of black political life would attain widespread acceptance among black radicals who aligned themselves with Third World national-liberation struggles, and eventually, among those blacks who sought out opportunities created by civil-rights reforms, governmental anti-poverty initiatives, and cultural change in corporate America. The essay found devotees among the new nationalist crowd. It was widely read and debated

³⁰ Cruse 2009c, p. 94.

³¹ Black Panthers 1970, pp. 3–4.

among members of the Afro-American Association, a San Francisco Bay area study-group led by Donald Warden whose membership at one time or another embraced a host of influential black-power activists and intellectuals, including Ernest Allen, Leslie and Jim Lacy, Richard Thorne, Cedric Robinson, Ron Everett (later Maulana Karenga, creator of Kwanzaa), and the founders of the Black Panther Party, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale.³² Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) founder Max Stanford claimed the text as a significant influence on his thinking. By the early seventies, the colonial analogy formed the central line of radical black political thinking, and made an impact on Chicano intellectuals such as Rudolfo Acuña and Tomas Almaguer, and academic social scientists like Robert Blauner, William Tabb and Ira Katznelson as well.³³

In many ways, Cruse's 1962 essay is descended from the 'oppressed nationality' position of the interwar Communist Party. Because of their shared appreciation of Garveyism and its renunciation of 'Negro bourgeois reformism', Cruse speaks highly of Harry Haywood, viewing him in a more favourable light than James E. Jackson whom Cruse dismissed as 'the Marxist-Negro Integrationist par excellence.'³⁴ Still, Cruse offered some sharp criticisms of the 'self-determination for the black belt' thesis that Haywood helped to develop as the party's official line at the Sixth Congress of the Communist International (Comintern) in 1928. The Communists wanted 'a national question without nationalism' according to Cruse, and they posed the question too 'mechanically because they did not really understand it.'³⁵ He criticised the policy's focus on self-determination for the South's black belt, that region stretching from the alluvial soils of the Mississippi Delta eastward through the cotton-rich counties of Alabama towards the Carolinas, all densely populated by the black peasantry. This regional focus was misguided, according to Cruse, because it neglected the national scope of the Garveyite movement that was largely urban-centred. The 'Negro question' was not merely a Southern problem; rather Cruse argued that 'the national character of the Negro has little to do with what part of the country he lives in . . . His national boundaries are the color of his skin, his racial characteristics, and the social conditions within his subcultural world.'³⁶ Haywood had been the sole black advocate of

32 Bloom and Martin 2013, pp. 22–3.

33 Freeman 1964; O'Dell 1966; O'Dell 1967; Allen 1969; Boggs and Lee Boggs 1970; Carmichael and Hamilton 1967; Cleaver 1967 and 1968; Howard 1970; Acuña 1972; Almaguer 1975; Barrera 1979; Tabb 1970; Blauner 1972; Katznelson 1973.

34 Cruse 2009a, p. 19.

35 Cruse 2009c, p. 78.

36 Ibid.

the black-belt line at the Sixth Comintern, and for years he had dedicated most of his energies to implementing the policy. It is no wonder that Haywood felt the need to set the younger Cruse straight.

Harry Haywood Confronts the New Left

When Harry Haywood sat down to pen a response to Cruse's 1962 essay, he was in many ways a respected veteran of the Old Left. As Cruse readily acknowledged, Haywood had long been considered the most prominent black theoretician in the Communist Party, but the party's abandonment of the black-belt thesis as its official line in favour of full support for integration brought his party activism to a bitter end. Although he is best known by his *nom de guerre*, Haywood was born Heywood Hall, Jr. in 1898 to former slaves who had migrated to South Omaha, Nebraska. Haywood describes his hometown as a fairly integrated and peaceful community comprised primarily of blacks, Irish and 'Bohemian', or Czech immigrants, but his family moved abruptly to Minneapolis after his father was the victim of a racist mob attack. Ultimately they would make their way to Chicago, a city that provided the ideal setting for Haywood's political maturation. Like Cruse, his military service had a profound impact on his understanding of American race relations and world politics. Haywood served in World War I as a soldier with the Eighth Illinois National Guard, an all-Negro regiment. During the Spanish Civil War, as a member of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion of the International Brigades, he joined the Republican forces in the battle against Franco.³⁷ In 1943, Haywood joined

37 There is some debate about the character of Haywood's military service, particularly during the Spanish Civil War. Historian Robin Kelley writes, 'African American volunteers were not always heroes. Like other brigadists, they exhibited moments of cowardice, fear and incompetence. Some cracked under pressure, and there is evidence that at least one deserted. Perhaps the least respected black officer was Harry Haywood, who earned the rank of political commissar largely because he was a leading member of the Communist Party.' Kelley then cites damning testimony from other black troops: 'Oscar Hunter will never forget the day Haywood came to Jarama "with a pretty little suit on." When enemy fire became too heavy, "he got the hell out of there real quick . . . he was a real mess for us blacks up there.'" In her Introduction to an edited edition of Haywood's autobiography, Gwendolyn Mildred Hall responds to these charges and defends her late husband's record of service and integrity: 'Harry Haywood was formally removed from the Politbureau, the top leadership body of the CPUSA, in 1938 after he returned from Spain. His dismissal was based upon false, enduring racist reports about his supposed cowardice there. The slander still persist that he left the Brunete battlefield without permission and continues

the fight against fascism, enlisting in the Merchant Marines and becoming active in the National Maritime Union. In his autobiography, *Black Bolshevik*, Haywood recalls arriving in Chicago just as the 1919 race riot had erupted in the city, this being only three months after his return from the battlefields of France. He and other black combat veterans hurriedly gathered an arsenal and established a makeshift garrison in an apartment overlooking 51st and State Street, ready to fend off a rumoured invasion by Irish street gangs. They never came, but after that experience, Haywood recalled, 'It came to me then that I had been fighting the wrong war. The Germans weren't the enemy – the enemy was right here at home.'³⁸

His brother Otto Hall was a crucial force in Haywood's radicalisation. Hall was a keen intellect, a dandy who lived the 'sportin' life', and a rebel who balked at the path to black professional life that lay open before him. Haywood later wrote of his sibling, 'I feel now that one of the reasons for my self-confidence during my childhood years, and why the racist notions of innate Black inferiority left me cold, was my older brother Otto. His example belied such claims. He was the most brilliant one in our family and probably in all of South Omaha.'³⁹ In Chicago, Haywood first followed his brother into the African Blood Brotherhood, a fraternal organisation of black nationalists committed to socialist revolution founded by Cyril Valentine Briggs, a native of the Caribbean island of Nevis. From there, he eventually joined Otto in the Communist Party, as did his sister Eppa.⁴⁰ Haywood recalled that as a child she was 'a plain black girl . . . sensitive but physically tough, courageous, and a regular tomboy.' Eppa worked at the Swift Packing Company, and was one of the first black women to join the union during a stockyards organising drive led by the communists William Z. Foster and Jack Johnstone.⁴¹ Haywood would join his brother Otto in the Soviet Union in 1924 where the two were students at the University of the Toilers of the East (henceforth referred to by the Russian acronym, KUTV),

to resonate in almost every publication about the International Brigades. Some of these reports are based on interviews with survivors who demonstrate racist attitudes towards Blacks. Harry and others were resented because they were the first Black officers to lead white troops.' Hall then confides, 'Harry drank a lot in Spain and was frightened by enemy machine-gun and artillery fire and by bombings and strafing from German and Italian planes. But so was everybody else . . . Harry was no coward. He fought in three foreign wars and in class warfare in the United States.' See Kelley 1994, p. 143; Hall 2012, pp. xviii–xix.

38 Haywood 1978a, pp. 1–4, 81–8.

39 Haywood 1978a, p. 25.

40 Makalani 2011, pp. 45–69.

41 Haywood 1978a, p. 109; see also Storch 2009.

a training school for African and Asian recruits.⁴² Ultimately, Haywood's support for black self-determination, however, would pit him against his brother and other black communists.

Historians Harvey Klehr and William Tompson contend that self-determination for the black belt as an official policy was essentially imposed on the US Communist Party by Moscow 'with virtually no discussion'.⁴³ In keeping with this analysis, Klehr and Tompson claim that Haywood's influences in regard to the matter of black self-determination were 'largely Russian', but this account is only partly correct and neglects the influence of the Garveyite nationalist movement and the New Negro culture of Chicago on his thinking.⁴⁴

Haywood's articulation of the black-belt thesis emerged out of two political problems – the task of building an interracial base for the American Communist Party in the face of the popularity of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association, and the need for the Soviet Union to cultivate allies among the colonised world and combat its potential isolation within an arena dominated by Western imperialist nations. Briggs was one of the few blacks within the Communist Party orbit to advocate for black self-determination in the mould of territorial sovereignty. Briggs called for the creation of a 49th state in the Pacific northwest set aside for African-Americans. He argued in a 1917 *Amsterdam News* article that blacks were 'a nation within a nation, a nationality oppressed and jimcrowed [*sic.*], yet worthy as any other people of a square deal or failing that, a separate political existence'.⁴⁵ Briggs's position evolved as a revolutionary-left alternative to Garveyism, and no doubt influenced Haywood's thinking.

Haywood recalls an episode when he was trying to build black support for the Young Communist League in Chicago when he approached a former colleague, a postal worker who had also participated in one of the same Chicago study groups. His friend immediately rebuffed Haywood's recruitment efforts, dismissing the League as just another organisation of white do-gooders. The discussion grew increasingly heated with Haywood's friend expressing his support for socialism as an ideal, but rejecting its immediate utility, especially for blacks. His friend was a harsh critic of Garvey, but in that conversation he offered a defence of black unity and self-help as practical politics that Haywood had difficulty countering. After that exchange, Haywood would later recall,

42 Haywood 1978a, pp. 148–75; Carew 2010, pp. 27–48.

43 Klehr and Tompson 1989, p. 354. See also Record 1951; Solomon 1998, pp. 68–91; Berland 1999–2000; Berland 2000.

44 Klehr and Tompson 1989, p. 358.

45 Quoted in Klehr and Tompson 1989, p. 356; see also Haywood 1978a, pp. 124–8.

'I felt that I had failed in my first effort to recruit a good Black man to the League and that we still had some study to do with regards to Black nationalism.'⁴⁶ The young Haywood was undoubtedly captivated by the Soviet experiment and the sharp analysis of American capitalism that he heard in study groups and gatherings at Chicago's Washington Park, but he sensed a disconnect between the Communist Party's political ideals, and the daily lives and interests of the black labouring classes who populated the city's Southside ghetto. He would ultimately find resolution in an application of Lenin's national self-determination arguments.

Lenin and other Bolsheviks articulated the view that American blacks were an oppressed nationality. He had argued as early as 1917 that American Negroes should be classed as an 'oppressed nation' and again in 1920, in the same spirit, he asserted that Communists must support the 'revolutionary movement among the dependent and subject nations', which included those 'in Ireland, among the Negroes of America etc.'⁴⁷ Lenin was a major intellectual influence on Haywood. He recalls the former's *State and Revolution* as 'the single most important book I had read in the entire three years of my political search and was decisive in leading me to the Communist Party.'⁴⁸ Despite his affection for Lenin, Haywood had some reservations about thinking of US blacks as a nation, but after he enrolled as a student in the Lenin School, Haywood was persuaded through debates with Charles Nasanov, a Siberian native and Young Communist International functionary, and other supporters of the line.⁴⁹ At the 1928 Sixth Congress of the Comintern, the black self-determination line had the support of Josef Stalin, then general-secretary of the party's central committee, but faced broad opposition among the American delegation. Given these sharp battle-lines between Moscow and the American Communists, the thirty-year-old Haywood emerged as the perfect spokesman for the policy.

Most black members of the US delegation viewed the black population not as a nation, but as a minority that faced racial discrimination. The solution was not territorial sovereignty along national lines, but rather 'assimilation under socialism'. One black member of the US delegation, James Ford, an Alabama native and rising figure within the Comintern ranks, argued that 'any nationalist movement on the part of Negroes does nothing but play into the hands of the bourgeoisie by arresting the revolutionary class movement of the Negro masses

46 Haywood 1978a, p. 137.

47 Lenin 1991, p. 286.

48 Haywood 1978a, p. 119.

49 Haywood 1978a, pp. 218–22.

and further widening the gulf between white and similar oppressed groups.⁵⁰ Otto Hall and Otto Huiswoud, both African Blood Brotherhood veterans, strenuously rejected the black self-determination line at the Sixth Comintern. One of the few American delegates aside from Haywood to support black self-determination was John Pepper who published an article calling for a 'Negro Soviet Republic', but this was disingenuous and obviously an opportunistic political manoeuvre. Pepper had previously rejected black self-determination, and only seemed to endorse the policy as tactical move, an attempt to curry favour with Soviet party bureaucrats amid a bitter conflict within the CPUSA that pit the majority faction of Pepper and Jay Lovestone against the minority led by Foster and James P. Cannon. In the end, the Pepper-Lovestone faction was reprimanded and self-determination for the black belt became the official policy of the CPUSA.

Even though his status declined rapidly during the popular-front years, Haywood continued to advocate self-determination for the black belt, with the most full-bodied statement of his ideas appearing in his 1948 book, *Negro Liberation*.⁵¹ Haywood argued that the Negro question was not singularly a problem of racial prejudice, but as closer economic-historical analysis revealed, it was part of the broader unresolved agrarian question in the American South. After the American Civil War, the Republican government embarked on the project of Reconstruction, the reunification of the Southern states, the process of rebuilding war-torn cities, and perhaps most significantly, the incorporation of former slaves as citizens. As Haywood argues, however, this particular bourgeois-democratic revolution went unfinished, abruptly brought to a halt after the 1877 Hayes-Tilden compromise. In an effort to garner the electoral-college votes needed to win the 1876 presidential election, Rutherford B. Hayes essentially agreed to withdraw federal troops from the South, and effectively ended the Reconstruction project. This betrayal, Haywood argued, unleashed a wave of 'counter-revolutionary terror' against blacks, the overthrow of progressive Reconstruction governments, and the restoration of the Southern merchant-planter class to power. Formal citizenship rights guaranteed under the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments existed in name only, as blacks were forced into a semi-slave status under the debt-peonage system. Haywood argued that Reconstruction 'had stopped short of a solution to the crucial land question: there was neither confiscation of the big plantations of the former

50 Quoted in Klehr and Tompson 1989, p. 359.

51 Haywood 1976.

slaveholding class, nor distribution of the land among the Negro freedmen and poor whites.⁵²

Contrary to Cruse's passing criticisms, Haywood saw this problem as originating within the Southern conflicts after the Civil War, but not bounded by the Mason-Dixon line. No matter where they migrated, Haywood held, blacks constituted an oppressed nation with common culture, language and territory. 'The shadow of the plantation falls upon the Negro in Harlem, in Chicago's Southside, in the hundreds of urban "Black Belts" through the country . . .', according to Haywood, 'The twin evils of poverty and Jim Crow dog his heels, setting the pattern for his new urban life.'⁵³ The solution, then, is not merely the attainment of full citizenship rights within the context of liberal democracy for Haywood and other supporters of the black-belt thesis, but rather the right to self-governance and land, the basis of both economic and political independence. Contrary to Klehr and Tompson's claim that the black-belt line went largely ignored, the policy had the effect of focusing party attention on organising in the Deep South, with two of the most notable campaigns being the 1931 Scottsboro Boys case, the trial of nine black young men accused of rape that the party made into an international *cause célèbre*, and the efforts to organise black sharecroppers where Haywood played a key role.⁵⁴

Haywood's black-belt thesis captured certain truths about black life in the formative decades of the twentieth century, but the dynamics he addressed so well were part of a vanishing era. The demographic, social and political changes of the post-World War II era rendered untenable what was an already-problematic thesis. A second wave of black migration to the west coast and North radically transformed many American cities. By 1960, the population of black Chicago had reached 1 million.⁵⁵ And equally, mechanisation and corporate consolidation of Southern agriculture spurred black urbanisation across the South and weakened the political power of the Southern merchant-planter class as well. The black-belt thesis was encumbered by its commitment to Soviet ideology regarding land-based nationalism, and in particular, its insistence on focusing on the agrarian economy at the very moment when blacks were becoming rapidly urbanised and more industrial, and the nation as a whole was undergoing massive economic restructuring initiated under

52 Haywood 1978a, p. 331.

53 Haywood 1976, p. 70.

54 See Haywood 1978b; Rosengarten 1974; Kelley 1990; Hudson 1972; Painter 1979; Zumoff 2014.

55 Hirsch 1998.

the New Deal and continued through extensive investments in defence, technological development and national-transportation infrastructure.

After his expulsion from the party in the late fifties, Haywood's political and intellectual activities are certainly contradictory and in one glaring aspect, deeply disappointing.⁵⁶ On one hand, his writings on black political life were lucid, keen in ascertaining the new social conditions of the immediate post-segregation years, and offered a pointed class analysis that was lacking in other corners. On the other hand, however, he would remain steadfastly Stalinist, becoming a central figure in various sectarian tendencies such as the Provisional Organizing Committee and the October League. Haywood's unwavering commitment to Stalin, decades after the Soviet dictator's transgressions had been well-documented and roundly criticised on the international left, is a disturbing aspect of his political thought. In a chapter in his autobiography titled, 'Trotsky's Day in Court', he defends his support of Stalin. 'Throughout this whole struggle', he writes,

we Black students at the school had been ardent supporters of the position of Stalin and the Central Committee. Most certainly we were Stalinists – whose policies we saw as the continuation of Lenin's. Those today who use the term 'Stalinist' as an epithet evade the real question: that is, were Stalin and the Central Committee correct? I believe history has proven that they were correct.

56 Historian Gwendolyn Mildo Hall recently published an abridged version of her late husband's autobiography, retitled *A Black Communist in the Freedom Struggle: The Life of Harry Haywood*. Hall decided to cut those chapters where Haywood engages in partisan debates and polemics (half of the original book), and to publish the remaining chapters which detail his origins as 'the child of slaves', his life in South Omaha at the start of the twentieth century, his eyewitness account of the 1919 Chicago race riot, his war stories on the frontlines in Europe and America's class struggle, his efforts to organise the sharecroppers union in Alabama and so forth. She justifies this editorial choice by arguing that this condensed version would make it 'easier to read and easier for a new generation to understand his life, what he achieved for humanity, and the example he set'. Hall also contends that the sectarian debates which animated the Communist Party would have 'little meaning for most readers today'. Although I can certainly understand her motivations here, she should have let readers decide. Hall confides in the Introduction that she lost faith in historical materialism and Marxist politics in the early seventies – a revelation she did not fully share with Haywood for fear of hurting his feelings. See Haywood 1978a, p. 184; Hall 2012, p. ix; James, Dunayevskaya and Lee 1986; See also Shachtman 2003.

When Haywood sides with Stalin in the 1920s, he is taking sides within an on-going ideological and power struggle within the Comintern over the direction of the Russian revolution and Soviet development.

In some ways, Haywood's embrace of 'socialism in one country' at that particular moment seems understandable for a few reasons. First, he was a student in the Soviet Union and experienced the heady optimism of the revolution when it was still at high tide. Like many other African-American expats, as well, he was enamoured by the relative freedom this new society afforded him when compared to American Jim Crow segregation. Second, Haywood was slowly embracing a nationalistic view of the 'Negro question' in the US, which was derived from Lenin's writings on oppressed nations and imperialism, and supported by Stalin, whom many saw as the ideological heir apparent of the fallen revolutionary. This is all well and good, but it is troubling to read Haywood's defence of Stalin – penned during the seventies, no less – especially given the powerful critical analyses of the USSR's devolution into state capitalism offered by C.L.R. James, Raya Dunayevskaya and Grace Lee of the Trotskyite Johnson-Forest Tendency, and by Cornelius Castoriadis and other intellectuals who comprised the French libertarian-socialist organisation *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. Haywood's writings on black political life during the last decade of his life do not fully counterbalance his apologetics, but they remain powerful and are worth our attention.

Between the fall of 1965 and the spring of 1967, Haywood published four short essays in the Berkeley, California-based journal, *Soulbook*. Revolutionary Action Movement activists Ernie Allen, Kenny Freeman (Mamadou Lumumba) and Donald Freeman founded and led the quarterly journal. Under the masthead, 'Jazz, Economics, Poetry, Anti-Imperialism', *Soulbook* featured material that was wide-ranging in content and style, with political commentary and historical essays on subjects such as Hard Bop, South African Apartheid, Puerto Rican nationalism, and the Martinican psychiatrist Frantz Fanon's anti-colonial writings, interspersed with poetry, cartoons and photographs.⁵⁷ Haywood's *Soulbook* essays are an extension of his 1957 pamphlet, *For a Revolutionary Position on the Negro Question*, but, for the most part, the anti-revisionist polemics of this earlier work were shorn away, leaving these latter essays more squarely addressed to black radical activists and the emergent black-power culture. Of this quartet of essays, Haywood's 1966 piece, 'Is the Black Bourgeoisie the Leader of the Black Liberation Movement?', honed in on Cruse and delivered a sharp critique of his historical interpretation and political prescriptions.

57 Johnson 1991.

Haywood offered a more dialectical interpretation of black nationalism, and African-American political thought more generally. Unlike Cruse who valorised black nationalism in opposition to integration, Haywood argued that ‘there are reformist and revolutionary tendencies in both the integrationist movement and the nationalist-oriented movements.’⁵⁸ The integration versus separation debate of the sixties creates a ‘superficial and distorted picture of the true issues and problems involved’, according to Haywood, and this false dichotomy ‘reflects mainly the power struggle between two sections of black bourgeoisie.’⁵⁹ Haywood viewed the programme of liberal integration touted by civil-rights activists as ‘entirely unrealistic for the vast majority’, but, unlike Cruse, he is equally critical of certain reactionary dimensions of black-power militancy – ‘the ghetto nationalist sector, economically based on the northern urban black community, indulges in fantasies of building up a separate Black “Free Enterprise” economy as the solution.’⁶⁰

Haywood touches on a core problem with Cruse’s analysis, his tendency to treat class as a form of social stratification without much political import. The result is an interpretation where the interests and agency of the black labouring classes fall out of view, and the motives of the black bourgeoisie are seen as those of the race writ large. ‘Equating the narrow class aims of this stratum to those of the masses’, Haywood contends, Cruse ‘imputes a revolutionary potential to its petty strivings for a larger share in the ghetto market in the northern urban centers.’⁶¹ And although Cruse criticises communists, and in particular historians like Aptheker, for failing to see class diversity among blacks, his analysis ultimately falls into the same trap. As a consequence, ‘Cruse apparently considers all Black Nationalism, even its most escapist, utopian manifestations, as revolutionary, and is prepared to follow their leadership.’⁶² As Haywood makes clear, Cruse sees national liberation as primarily an elite affair, ‘in which the struggle of the bourgeoisie for control of the national market is the pivotal revolutionary factor.’⁶³ This is an out-dated mode of thinking, according to Haywood, and it is ‘unrealistic when applied to the Negro question and the attempt is made to impute to the conflict over the ghetto market the importance of a major contradiction between the

58 Haywood 1966.

59 Haywood 1966, p. 71.

60 Ibid.

61 Haywood 1966, p. 72.

62 Haywood 1966, p. 73.

63 Ibid.

nationalist bourgeoisie and U.S. imperialism.⁶⁴ Moreover, for Haywood, these flaws in Cruse's argument are rooted in his failure to take into account pivotal changes in the character of national-liberation movements since the First World War. Whereas the earlier stage of national-liberation movements, led by a native-educated stratum, sought to seize control of the domestic market, later post-Bandung anti-colonial movements, involving peasants, trade unions, urban merchants, students and intelligentsia, developed more radical, anti-imperialist politics.⁶⁵ Although his arguments at times remained burdened by the problem of thinking about blacks as an oppressed nationality, Haywood's analysis of the internal contradictions of African-American politics is more perceptive and useful. He peels away the anti-colonial patina of Cruse's rather conservative version of black politics, and points towards a left-populist vision of black public life, one which is more consonant with the socialist character of national-liberation movements in places like Cuba, North Vietnam and Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana. 'The basic masses must', Haywood wrote, 'forge their own instrument and fight for a program of liberation that will not subordinate their interests to those of either sector of the black bourgeoisie.'

The Racial Ghetto and the Contradictions of Black Power

In early 1965, on the strength of his growing reputation as an essayist, Cruse was offered a two-book contract by William Morrow and Company. The first book would be an original monograph, while the second, to be published the following year, would collect his reviews and essays from the fifties and sixties. William Morrow played a crucial role in amplifying new nationalist and black-power voices during the sixties, publishing books by Albert Cleage, LeRoi Jones, William Worthy, Larry Neal and Charles Hamilton.⁶⁶ Cruse seized the opportunity to share the fullest possible articulation of his ideas in what would become his defining work, 1967's *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, a book that was widely reviewed throughout the black-power era and has been strenuously debated in the decades since.⁶⁷

64 Ibid.

65 A fuller exposition of this argument can be found in an earlier unpublished paper titled 'Harold Cruse Exaggerates the Role of the Negro Bourgeoisie in the Liberation Struggle', no date, Box 2, Folder 'Response to Harold Cruse', Harry Haywood Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

66 Gosse 2004, p. 35.

67 Lasch 1968; Kaiser 1969; Chrisman 1969; Guy-Sheftall 1994; Spillers 1994.

In the book's opening chapter, 'Individualism and the Open Society', Cruse rejects liberal integration as a solution to American racial inequality, and offers up a notion of black ethnic politics that was present in his earlier essays, but in part concealed by his overtures to left anti-imperialism.⁶⁸ In this chapter, however, Cruse's arguments for black ethnic politics are unequivocal. Against liberalism's and the civil-rights movement's appeals to universal natural rights, Cruse contends that there are in practice no individual rights outside of actual groups that protect and defend such rights through activism and the effective exercise of power. Following the conventional wisdom of pluralist accounts of American politics at the time, he claimed that power in American society was organised around ethnic blocs, with Anglo-Saxon Protestants, white Catholics, and white Jews being the most dominant groups. For Cruse, 'the individual Negro has, proportionately, very few rights indeed because his ethnic group (whether or not he actually identifies with it) has very little political, economic or social power (beyond moral grounds) to wield.'⁶⁹ Now that blacks were reassured formal constitutional protection through civil-rights reforms, the essential problem of black ethnic political and economic power was, for Cruse, brought into even sharper relief. He concludes this keynote chapter by broaching the subject of intellectuals, citing the alienation of black intellectuals from the black masses, and insisting that they fulfil their historical role as spokespersons for the race.

His views regarding the mass-culture industry are essential for understanding the place of intellectuals within Cruse's winding and complex argument in *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*. He felt that the development of mass culture had 'drastically altered the classic character of capitalism as described by Marx'.⁷⁰ These new conditions created the possibility of cultural revolution, which he defined as 'an ideological and organizational approach to American social change by revolutionizing the administration, the organization, the functioning and the social purpose of the entire American apparatus of cultural communication and placing it under public ownership.'

68 Some contend that Cruse shifted from a left-internationalist perspective over the course of the sixties towards an embrace of American exceptionalism in his most famous work. His use of different concepts such as 'ethnic blocs' and the 'internal colony' betrays a fairly consistent, and conservative politics in Cruse's work. These interpretative problems once again beg us to take a more discerning and critical look at revolutionary nationalism to understand its rhetorical/aesthetic and substantive political dimensions. See Johnson 2007, pp. 23–8; Von Eschen 2004.

69 Cruse 1967, p. 8.

70 Cruse 1967, p. 64.

Cruse's analysis of the mass-culture industry and its social implications are underappreciated. His thinking is marked by a post-industrial sensibility that we take for granted nowadays. The primary battleground in the struggle to create a more democratic society for Cruse was no longer the factory or even the state, but rather the cultural sphere which brought into being new social protagonists and political possibilities. He wrote, 'if the growth of capitalism creates its opposite – the working class – then it is possible to say that the growth of mass communications media coincided with the appearance of an opposing class-force of radical creative intellectuals.' Because the Negro had made signal contributions to American culture in music, dance and theatre, black intellectuals were assigned a unique, vanguard role in Cruse's thinking. '[T]he alliance of white capital and labour obviates any challenge to the economic status quo where the production of basic commodities takes place', thus Cruse concluded that 'the Negro movement must challenge free enterprise at its weakest link in the production chain, where no tangible commodities are produced. This becomes the "economic" aspect of the Negro movement.'

There is much to ponder in Cruse's sprawling thesis. In addition to his advocacy of cultural democracy, he also calls for black cooperatives and the formation of an independent black political party, solutions that many activists would pursue into the seventies and eighties. And although his critics over the years have been quick to point out his heavy-handed treatment of certain black intellectuals, his wide interpretative licence regarding blacks and Communist Party history, and other problems in the text, few can ignore the impact that this thick, passionately-argued book made on black political thinking from the sixties onwards. His defence of black ethnic politics as the only practical course, his rejection of left-orthodoxy and, to a point, class struggle, and his valorisation of the Negro folk idiom, and critical view of its appropriation by Hollywood and Broadway, are all recurring analytic tropes in post-segregation black public life.

The book solidified his place as an influential figure in the black-power movement, and ironically, spurred his movement to academe. Without so much as a bachelor's degree, Cruse was appointed to the faculty of the University of Michigan in 1968 where he would remain until his retirement. Although he would never marry, Cruse met Mara Julius, a professor of epidemiology and native of Yugoslavia, in his move to Ann Arbor, and she would be his companion for the rest of his life. He had his misgivings about leaving his Chelsea garret but the \$18,500 salary was more than he had ever seen in one year, and this newfound financial stability would allow him to keep doing what he loved – writing, teaching and debating history and current affairs. It would take Cruse twenty years to produce a follow-up monograph to *The Crisis of the Negro*

Intellectual. In 1987 he published *Plural but Equal*, and while he continued to write until his death in 2005, and remained a venerated figure within Africana Studies circles, this would be his last major work. The book reasserted his claims regarding black ethnic politics, and given the backdrop of Reagan-Bush era rollback of welfare-state liberalism, the work carried a particular urgency and resonance for various black publics.

In his own magnum opus, the 1978 autobiography *Black Bolshevik*, Haywood took one last parting shot at Cruse and his capitulation to bourgeois politics. This would be his last major statement. Haywood never lived to see the end of the Cold War. He died in 1985 after a lengthy hospitalisation, his various war-wounds finally exacting their toll. In what was a last act of protest, this unrepentant Red, and graduate of KUTV and the Lenin School, was buried in Arlington National Cemetery. Haywood had lost the battle with Cruse during the sixties, in the sense that Cruse's ideas would become those of a popular black movement, but Haywood ultimately won the war. He marshalled decades of insight gleaned from his own study, debates within the Communist International and a keen eye towards the changing historical terrain to offer a more perceptive, enduring analysis of black political life, one which clearly discerned the limitations of black power.

Haywood holds that there were essentially two wings of the movement – a revolutionary nationalist wing and more conservative black capitalist wing, and the latter was satiated through political and corporate integration during the Nixon years, e.g. Ford Foundation grants, affirmative-action hiring, electoral politics and political appointments. Haywood counted Cruse among black power's right wing alongside Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) activist Roy Innis; Floyd McKissick, a former CORE leader who attempted to build Soul City, a black planned community in North Carolina, during the seventies; and Nathan Wright, the Newark-based minister who co-organised the 1967 Black Power Conference. Haywood wrote: 'At first Black Power activists submerged class conflicts in the movement. But soon a right wing emerged, with its base in a sector of the ghetto bourgeoisie: business, ministers, professionals, poverty project leaders, Black studies professors, newly hired lower management and token upper management . . . They aspired to the role of economic and political administrators of a Black 'internal colony' still owned and controlled by white monopoly capitalists.'⁷¹ The broad outlines of Haywood's account of black power's co-optation was advanced by many of his contemporaries as well, most persuasively in Robert Allen's 1969 book, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*, and has been widely accepted and rearticulated in more recent

71 Haywood 1978a, p. 637.

histories of the black-power movement.⁷² Although there are some noteworthy limitations, Haywood's sharp analysis of black power's internal contradictions is worth revisiting here because it not only captures important problems that latter-day historians too often neglect, but, with some amendment and expansion, his mapping of the ideological and class dimensions of black life is useful for understanding post-Jim Crow black politics. There are at least three problems with this account worth noting here.

First, with regards to causality, Haywood's perspective treats the process of institutionalisation as a response to black radical politics where the state moves in to corral militancy. This is part of the story, but this undialectical narrative neglects how statist manoeuvres were implicated in black power's genesis. Most of the contemporary literature on black power embraces some version of this account, emphasising repression and co-optation, and treating black-power activists and organisations as separate from state practices, socialisation processes, and cultural dynamics that defined US society more generally. Contrary to this prevailing view, Great Society statecraft contributed in part to the expressions of empowerment and practical political aims that we associate with the black-power movement. Even before the black-power slogan entered into common parlance in movement circles, the Johnson administration sought to deliver its own notion of citizen empowerment as a remedy to inner-city poverty. The community action programmes created under the 1965 Economic Opportunity Act sought 'maximum feasible participation' of residents in poor urban communities in devising solutions to poverty.

That most scholars of the black-power movement neglect these liberal statist practices is curious given the well-known anecdotal connections between black radicals, moderates, and the War on Poverty's community action programmes, and the Model Cities programmes of the sixties. The Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School organised by Amiri Baraka was funded in part through HARYOU (Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited, Inc.), an anti-poverty programme led by Cyril DeGrasse Tyson. Bobby Seale ran an anti-poverty programme in North Oakland before founding the Black Panther Party with Huey P. Newton in 1966, and yet few historians of the Panthers see much of a connection between their self-help programmes and the technologies of citizenship promoted through the War on Poverty. Underneath the rhetoric of international revolution, much of the Panthers' actual day-to-day work – for example, free breakfast programmes, health clinics, after-school programmes, free pest control, legal aid, clothing drives – was essentially anti-poverty work,

72 Allen 1990; Hill and Rabig (eds.) 2012; Fergus 2009; Rooks 2006; Rojas 2007.

albeit more autonomous and self-directed than the state prescriptions of Johnson's administration. Then again, this was the point of the War on Poverty initiative, to employ the poor in developing solutions to their plight – without necessarily disrupting or transforming the capitalist productive relations responsible for wealth inequality and mass misery. Some urban historians and political scientists have begun to lay bare these connections between Great Society liberalism and the making of black-power politics.⁷³

Second, while Haywood's discussion of different ideological wings is helpful for analytical summary, such categorisation does not give a sense of how certain organisations and individuals behaved within real time and space, and how some acted in ways that transgressed and contradicted their professed ideological commitments. Haywood's portrait is generally correct, but we should add to these broad tendencies others such as black cultural nationalists, black feminists, an expanding core of black politicians, and those grassroots activists who fought to address matters of poverty, schooling and housing at the local level, a context where sharp divisions between separatism and integrationism sometimes had less meaning. Haywood's two wings are helpful as an abstraction, but a closer historical analysis is necessary to comprehend how certain rhetorical constructs, such as the 'black colony' commonly embraced by black revolutionists, helped to obscure meaningful political differences operating within the black population. Like much contemporary historiography of the black-power movement, Haywood's discussion treats revolutionary nationalism as pristine, and not implicated in the conservative turn in black political activity. Insofar as ethnic identity and political constituency were treated as synonymous, even radical black-power discourse legitimated the drift towards ethnic pluralism.

This tendency to conflate racial identity and political constituency is also manifest in an anti-interracialist politics that came to dominate black-power thinking. For the most part, whenever interracialism was broached, it was treated as a project that could only be effective after certain conditions of black unity had been achieved. If not, many black-power radicals warned, any attempt at multi-racial coalition-building would succumb to white paternalism and be doomed to repeat past mistakes. Many thought that coalitions among oppressed minorities were possible, but they were generally suspicious of direct collaboration with whites. Under this logic, some previously interracial organisations, such as the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and

73 Germany 2007; Goldstein 2012; Cruikshank 1999; Robinson 2001; Fergus 2009; see also Piven and Cloward 1993; Johnson 2007, pp. xxv–xxvii; Reed 1999b.

CORE, purged whites from their ranks. Others such as Panther spokesman Eldridge Cleaver offered elaborate stipulations for black-white cooperation.⁷⁴ Much of this rhetoric masked crucial personal, legal and financial support that whites provided black-power leaders and organisations. This interplay of black vanguard politics, and white political deference and patronage is an underappreciated problem in the evolution of the New Left, one that inhibited honest discussion, and, truth be told, the development of a viable, broad-based left-movement against US empire that might have lasted beyond the revocation of the compulsory military draft.

Third, Haywood's argument that the black-power movement did not connect with class is an insightful one, but there are some notable exceptions to this claim. The League of Revolutionary Black Workers (and later the Black Workers Congress) sought to organise within and beyond the union movement, and its most articulate intellectuals, like John Watson and Ken Cockrel, Sr., were openly committed to revolutionary socialism, but it should be noted that the same moderate and radical ideological tendencies that Haywood identifies more broadly were present within the League. The bold analysis of its most militant spokesmen existed alongside the League's programmatic work, which included as a matter of practicality the fight for formal representation in the United Autoworker's union.⁷⁵ Most black-power advocates followed Cruse's lead, and their social analyses treated class in cultural terms. For black nationalists, the problem with the black middle class was cultural, and some like the writer and activist Amiri Baraka readily attacked the pretentiousness, consumer lifestyles and assimilationist aspirations of the black middle class.⁷⁶ They needed to be 'more black', according to Baraka and other cultural nationalists, by becoming more dedicated to racial self-help and community development along the lines of the ethnic paradigm. The problem with this perspective is that it proceeds from the assumption of shared political interests derived from common experience of racial oppression, and whenever substantive political differences come into view they are deemed disingenuous, either manipulated by external forces, or the result of bad socialisation. Late in life, Cruse still held the view that the problem with the black political and intellectual class was that they were a 'lumpen bourgeoisie' who had not seized upon their historic role as national liberators.⁷⁷

74 Cleaver 1967.

75 Watson 1969; Georgakas and Surkin 1998; Hamlin and Gibbs 2013; Geschwender 1977.

76 Johnson 2007, pp. 43–4.

77 Gosse 1998, p. 115.

Haywood's critical intervention is helpful as a corrective to contemporary thinking that too often projects a degree of political unity back onto Jim Crow-era black history that did not exist in fact. This mode of thinking was no doubt shaped by the context of the racial ghetto, and the possibility of ethnic-group empowerment through local electoral-machine politics. The demographic and social reality of segregation in American cities gave rise to particular ways of thinking about blacks as a political constituency with a common cause and interests. Even if black businessmen and professionals experienced different material conditions and social status, and pursued class prerogatives distinctive from that of the millions of black day-labourers, nannies, stevedores, servants, cooks, porters, hawkers and sex workers, for much of the twentieth century all were confined to the same urban residential areas, and shared the common stigma of inferiority that prevailed in Jim Crow America. Flowing from these facts of social life in US cities, the black-power movement emerged as an attempt to pursue race advancement through racial pride, community self-defence, independent organising and ultimately, control of those institutions that shaped black urban life such as schools, anti-poverty programmes, local government, and so forth.

Black nationalism's core premise that all blacks regardless of conflicting interests, and ideological differences, are in fact part of the same nation with an overarching interest and fate discouraged sustained class critique. This is not only a problem for culturalist varieties of black-nationalist thinking, but revolutionary nationalism, as we have seen in Cruse's writings, shares some culpability. The colonial analogy was embraced by academics and activists alike during the sixties, and played a pivotal role in further shifting the terms of New Left radical discourse away from discussions of inequality that might build broad solidarity. From this perspective, blacks were a 'nation within a nation', and unlike whites who enjoyed the broad benefits of wealth, power and assimilation within American life, blacks endured dispossession, inner-city ghettoisation, and cultural exclusion. The core problem with this perspective, as many have noted, is that its metanarrative of racism flattens class inequalities on both sides of the veil. Many white workers benefitted from the labour-management accord and profit-sharing arrangements that defined the postwar prosperity, but these benefits were not universal. African-Americans, by comparison, were subject to racial discrimination, but black residential ghettos were further segregated internally along class lines, and, although they faced racial insult and limits to social mobility imposed by the colour line, the black middle class exerted influence beyond their numbers within the confines of the racial ghetto. Moreover, as landlords, policy-leaders, bureaucrats, entrepreneurs, managers, and clergy, they often collaborated with

local political elites to advance agendas that were at odds with the objective interests of working-class blacks. And even though they may have played the role of junior partners to more powerful whites, black elites performed a legitimating function at various historical moments, fostering consent among working-class blacks for public policy and social-reformist agendas in ways that even the most powerful whites could not accomplish.⁷⁸

Conclusion

Cruse's 1962 essay, and Haywood's early writings on self-determination for the black belt attempted to mend the same breach, the interpretative and political bias towards industrial wage-workers within some strands of Marxism, and subsequent difficulty in accounting for the unwaged, the peasantry, the enslaved and the like as subjects of capitalism, and protagonists in social struggle. This is less a problem within Marx and Engel's historical writings than with the various extrapolations and misrepresentations advanced in their names. Hence, the 'Negro question' has always been an awkward but durable formulation within the American Left, the question of whether and how to accommodate a dispossessed and disenfranchised group to those political projects which begin with some originary protagonist, either the republican self-governing citizen, or the industrial wage-labourer. What is needed in our own times are analyses that approach the whole of inherited social theory with scepticism, and a keen appreciation for its ideological freight. In addition, such analyses, if they are to advance the radical democratic project glimpsed in the historical Marx, Cruse, Haywood and scores of left-popular movements and intellectual tendencies, must begin with the study of society as it exists, and ascertain the unique economic and social conditions of our times.

This exchange between two black, ex-communist intellectuals reflects an enduring conundrum of American left-intellectuals more generally, the task of thinking through the historical particularities of American racial inequality in a manner that does not succumb to notions of exceptionalism. Rather than viewing African-Americans as a case apart, we should view the history of slavery, Jim Crow segregation, mass migration and urban life as constitutive dimensions of American capitalist development, and equally, we should begin with the assumption that black social and public life possesses the same class contradictions that define society more generally. This was the truth articulated by the opponents of the black-belt thesis such as James Ford

78 Smith 2012.

and Haywood's brother Otto Hall, who saw blacks as the most exploited and submerged segment of workers, but as workers all the same.

The colonial analogy suffered from all of the inherent strengths and limitations of substituting a close historical, critical analysis of society with political allegory. The colonial analogy was an advance over prevailing Cold War liberal interpretations that treated the Negro condition as an anomaly within an otherwise superior system of democratic elections and free enterprise.⁷⁹ The inequality that blacks faced was understood as a sectional problem – racial prejudice as a legacy of Southern slavery, which could be remedied through legislative reform and cultural change. The actions of civil-rights reformers and the broader international embarrassment created by publicity of their brutal repression by segregationist forces slowly shifted public opinion against Jim Crow segregation. The colonial analogy operated on different interpretative and political terms than liberal integrationist thinking. Black oppression was not viewed as an exception to an otherwise-sacrosanct democratic order for Cruse, but rather, as the unique 'American brand of social underdevelopment'.⁸⁰ In a few words, Cruse reframed understandings of the black condition in a manner that also implicated US imperialist power. The political implications of his analysis were manifold. Reflecting the spirit of the new nationalist militancy of the time, his analysis suggested new lines of solidarity that connected blacks to colonised peoples fighting for national liberation. And the evocations of underdevelopment redirected movement aspirations away from integration into the consumer society, and towards the promise of meaningful political and economic self-determination.

For a time, the colonial analogy captured certain truths about American inequality, and the unique spatial, economic and social dimensions of the racial ghetto of the middle-twentieth century. But like liberal anti-poverty discourse which treated inner-city and rural poverty as exceptions to the societal norm of suburban affluence, the colonial analogy presented black inequality as a case apart – a literal 'nation within a nation' – and a problem to be resolved in ways that were disconnected from the emancipation of Americans more generally from the contradictions of late-capitalist society, and the reorganisation of social and economic life around use-values. Purveyors of the colonial analogy brilliantly illuminated capital's contradictions beyond the factory floor – the dynamics of cultural alienation, the geography of uneven development, the process of proletarianisation that segments and exploits living labour in ways that produce profit for capital as it engenders deep political division

79 See Reed 2015a and 2015b.

80 Cruse 2009c, p. 96.

within the working classes. This analysis, however, too often presented such dynamics as unique features of black life even though many blacks did not experience these processes, and many poor whites, Latinos and other groups did. Even in its most radical articulations, the notion of the black colony was in many ways a predecessor of 'the underclass', 'the precariat', 'zonards', and other limited attempts to think through class fragmentation under high-technology capitalism. And like Cruse's sharp criticisms of left-orthodoxy, these latter-day formulations speak to an enduring political problem for those who want to advance socialism on US soil – that of comprehending the particular historical and local geography of class, and devising effective political strategies that surmount status, ideological, gender, ethnic and racial, and class divisions to build an effective counterpower. Traditional notions of working-class consciousness and organisation have been further undermined within a context of neoliberal rollback of the social wage, working lives characterised by stagnant real wages, structural unemployment and precarity, a pervasive and manipulative consumer culture, and a political context where taxpayers and relatively more-secure classes are pit against those who depend on public expenditures to survive (i.e., public employment, state pensions, housing subsidies, unemployment insurance, health-care assistance, public schooling, etc.).

Although Cruse and Haywood's exchange and the rise of the black-power movement all transpired within the context of the racial ghetto, this very space of segregated black urban life with its parallel economy, class diversity and social institutions was at an end during the sixties. Within a decade of their exchange, a new urban spatial order, one characterised by intense class segregation, supplanted the world inhabited by Cruse and Haywood. This shifting demography has altered the social basis of black political life, especially those deeply-held assumptions of common experience and interests. Both Cruse's beloved Harlem, and the Southside of Chicago that Haywood knew so well have been radically transformed, no longer the black cultural and social meccas that they once were. Like Washington D.C.'s U Street corridor, once hailed as the 'Black Broadway', these and other locales have been gentrified in a manner that ironically stokes nostalgia for the black commercial and cultural life of the segregation era as a means of place branding, even as new investment and rent-intensification drive out long-standing black working-class residents. Ghettos most certainly still exist in America, but these are hyper-ghettos, more sharply class-segregated than their historical predecessors, zones where a massive reserve-army of the unemployed is contained and policed.⁸¹ After

81 Wacquant 2008 and 2010.

decades of right-wing assault on civil-rights reforms, middle-class blacks still face discrimination and even police harassment, and they often bear the brunt of contemporary assaults on the public sector given its role in expanding the ranks of black professionals since the sixties. These new realities, however, require different ways of thinking about inequality and left-politics in the United States.

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