

The Life and Times of Harold Wright Cruse, 1916-2005
From Nigger to African American Intellectual
By Henry Vance Davis

"Had a little dog: his name was "Dash." Rather be a nigger than po' white trash!"

Authors Unknown

Former Howard University Professor A. P. Davis recounts the above retort of his childhood chums when they encountered young white boys who taunted them as they passed on a bridge on the campus of Hampton Institute where he grew up and attended the prestigious Whittier Primary School.

Indeed, the struggle to define black's identity in the New World has captured the imagination of all ages and races since the first Africans disembarked in chains on the shores of what Columbus thought was India. Nearly four hundred years since those Africans were impressed into service for other's riches, just over 150 since the 13th amendment ended slavery in the United States of America, and today, roughly one hundred years since the abovementioned encounter on the campus of what is now Hampton University, few would argue that a watershed moment in the evolution of the identity construction of African Americans occurred in 1967 with the publication of the *Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* by Harold Wright Cruse.

Upon the publication of the *Crisis*, scholar-activist Nathan Hare wrote, "The paradox is that only Harold Cruse who is not college educated, could write such a book." Intrigued by this question, biographer Henry Vance Davis presents from his unfinished manuscript, *The Life and Times of Harold Wright Cruse*, a comprehensive analysis of Cruse's life to provide context for, and its insight into, the mind that could write "such a book," profoundly impact Black Studies, navigate an elite predominately white university without benefit of a college degree, and challenge black thinkers into the twenty-first century as they traverse the centuries old but still critical evolution of what Cruse termed an ethnic conception of reality--read identity--for African Americans.

