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THE POLITICS OF VICTIMIZATION MAKES STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

Jennifer L. Hochschild*

THE CIVIL RIGHTS SOCIETY: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF VICTIMS. By *Kristin Bumiller*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. 1988. Pp. x, 161. \$19.95.

PLURAL BUT EQUAL: BLACKS AND MINORITIES IN AMERICA'S PLURAL SOCIETY. By *Harold Cruse*. New York: William Morrow & Co. 1987. Pp. 420. \$22.95.

One of the main rewards of studying race in America is that racial politics constantly overturns conventional assumptions about "what goes with what." We usually think we know how left- and right-wingers differ on politically salient issues. We further assume that, at least among well educated people,¹ knowing a person's view on one issue enables us to predict his or her views on similar issues. People who seek liberation for African-Americans also seek liberation for women, opposed the Vietnam War, and are sympathetic to political and economic refugees from Third World nations — or so we assume. Conversely, people who assert that poor black women participate in their own victimization seldom promote radical reform of the legal system — or so we assume. The two books under review here have little in common, but they share the great virtue of forcing us to reconsider such assumptions. This strength is so great, in fact, that it may outweigh the flaws in style and substance that unfortunately permeate both books. Because their argument and tone differ, I will first consider them separately, then return to their common unsettling properties in the final section of the review.

Kristin Bumiller's book, *The Civil Rights Society*, focuses on "the social construction of victims" by examining how antidiscrimination law harms the people it is intended to benefit. The book's "central point"

is that antidiscrimination ideology [as articulated in contemporary civil rights law] may serve to reinforce the victimization of women and racial

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1. Ever since Philip Converse published *The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics* (in *IDEOLOGY AND DISCONTENT* (D. Apter ed. 1964)), we have been unable to assume that very many people, especially those without a college education, are ideologically constrained in the way I allude to here.

minorities. Instead of providing a tool to lessen inequality, legal mechanisms, which create the legal identity of the discrimination victim, maintain divisions between the powerful and the powerless by means that are obscured by the ideology of equal protection. [p. 2]

These means include primarily "dialectical exchanges between victims and oppressors . . . [in which] individuals acquiesce in discrimination struggles by accepting the 'invisible bonds of the victim': exclusion, sacrifice, and distortion" (p. 3). By *exclusion*, Bumiller means that victims "are often signifiers of what the dominant culture sees as evil"; by *sacrifice*, she means willing submission to victimization through some combination of guilt and mistaken martyrdom; by *distortion*, she means apparently irrational behavior by victims which is actually "a powerful mechanism for survival" (pp. 72-77). In other words, antidiscrimination law creates an expectation that victims will recognize and protest their bad treatment. When the victims refuse to fight either because they anticipate losing more than they might gain or because their character has been warped by the experience of victimization, they add the burden of guilt and frustration to the burdens of poverty and bias they already endure. The book is an extended examination of this irony (without, unfortunately, any hint of leavening from ironic humor).

The Civil Rights Society begins with several standard critiques of civil rights law. It first describes "the civil rights consciousness" — the common perception that the problem of race is best understood as Gunnar Myrdal's "American dilemma" and that its solution lies in "the power of the law ultimately to change discriminatory attitudes and behavior" (p. 4). This consciousness derives from a "model of legal protection" based on the fourteenth amendment, which has produced at least two harmful effects. First, the courts have used antidiscrimination law as much to limit as to extend governmental authority to eradicate bias. Second, Americans have learned to view the legal order as distinct from and superior to the political and social realm, thereby "creat[ing] the illusion that law is a source of power and authority disconnected from other power structures in society" (p. 10).

In a second critique of civil rights law, Bumiller points out that "progressive" "legal elites" have developed "process theory" to show the Supreme Court how to "broaden the scope of antidiscrimination doctrine" without contravening democratic authority (p. 11). The goal of process theory is to show that judicial decisionmaking is neutral — therefore good, from a liberal perspective — and should be allowed to change structures of choice and decisionmaking in ways that benefit the disadvantaged. It invokes procedures to make substantive changes (pp. 11-13). Despite its progressive intentions, however, process theory's main effects have been to drain the "moral urgency" from the "political discourse of the civil rights society" (p.

11) and to “inhibit[.]” the courts’ efforts to “move toward greater equality” for disadvantaged groups (p. 12).

Finally, Bumiller argues for “the full recognition of the rights of social groups” as well as of discrete individuals, argues against relying on litigation to end inequality and discrimination, and provides a sample of the “overwhelming evidence that the enforcement of anti-discrimination policies has been a dismal failure” (pp. 14, 19-21, 25-26).

None of this is new or particularly illuminating. What is distinctive about this book, as Bumiller points out, is that radical criticisms seldom “examin[e] the law in the context of everyday struggles” (p. 21). After a (mercifully) brief ramble through Mannheim’s definition of ideology, Marcuse’s discussion of repression, and Foucault’s theory of law as power (pp. 30-33), *The Civil Rights Society* finally arrives at its destination: intensive interviews with eighteen men and women who perceive themselves to be victims of racial, gender, or age discrimination in employment.

This research has methodological flaws, in particular the absence of a comparable group of people who face conflict and frustration in their jobs that they do not ascribe to discrimination. Without such a group, we can conclude nothing about whether the failure to take legal action against discrimination is responsible for the distinctive effects — sacrifice, exclusion, and distortion — Bumiller found among her interview subjects. That is, if young white men who do not receive the pay or promotions they think they deserve also react like Bumiller’s subjects by withdrawing from the conflict and squelching their anger, then this story is about powerlessness and hierarchy, not about discrimination and civil rights law. Conversely, if young white men react to or feel differently about experiences analogous to those of minorities, then Bumiller’s claims about the distinctive consequences of antidiscrimination law become very powerful. As it is, we simply do not know how young white men denied advancement act or why, so we do not know what to infer from the results she reports.

Another flaw in Bumiller’s analysis is her failure to provide an independent judgment, or information from which readers can conclude for themselves, about the extent of discrimination her interviewees suffered. I noted this problem after reading, at the end of a detailed and moving description of age discrimination against a would-be department store saleswoman, that the respondent was seventy-six years old at the time she was refused a job (pp. 53-55). Trying to analyze my surprise, I realized that I had been assuming the victim to be in her fifties or even sixties. My point is not that employers may legitimately refuse to hire almost-octagenarians (perhaps they may not); my point is rather that Bumiller asks us to assume that all claimants of discrimination are equally oppressed. That cannot be assumed. If Bumiller’s

goal is to examine only the psychological and behavioral consequences of *perceptions* of discrimination, this concern is irrelevant. But if she wants to analyze the consequences of discrimination *tout court*, as though there is a single identifiable thing called "discrimination," she owes us a definition and some discussion of the relationship between perceptions and the thing itself.

Nevertheless, we can set aside these questions about just what *The Civil Rights Society* aims to accomplish in order to focus more directly on what it actually says. Here my complaint is different: The book provides too little of the engrossing and very powerful interviews. A naïve quantitative measure suggests the problem. Of the 117 pages of text, only six are devoted exclusively to the respondents' stories and only an additional twenty analyze their reactions to their experiences. To make the point differently, Bumiller mainly analyzes the three distinctive features of victims — exclusion, sacrifice, and distortion — through "secondary sources . . . [containing] accounts of persons subjected to extreme . . . victimization," such as slaves and concentration camp prisoners (pp. 71-72). Would it not have been more appropriate and more interesting to make the views of her subjects the central component of this discussion?

I intend this criticism as a back-handed compliment. Those pages that do report and analyze the victims' anger, helplessness, courage, and sheer power of endurance are simply wonderful. They alone make it worth plowing through the rest of the book. But I am frustrated by thoughts of what remains unharvested from the interview transcripts.

Despite my frustration, the varied responses of these victims help illustrate the contention that the study of American race relations can jar conventional assumptions about "what goes with what." Three features of *The Civil Rights Society* can serve as examples of this contention. Consider first its subjects. On the one hand, they are *victims*, and in that role they demonstrate all kinds of weakness. They exaggerate their bosses' power and capriciousness; they occasionally erupt in unproductive violence; they possess a false consciousness, suffering from both "an illusion of choice" (p. 59) and a "limited imagination" (p. 76); they are dependent, docile, confused, and even idolatrous (p. 62); they denigrate themselves; they identify with the oppressor; and so on. On the other hand, they are people with whom Bumiller empathizes and for whom she seeks respect, and in that role they demonstrate great strengths. They understand the relationship between the self and socially ascribed personas; they love and act courageously on behalf of their families; they teach themselves self-sufficiency; they act generously toward other victims and even oppressors; they show pride, dignity, and a sense of honor. In short, they demonstrate "remarkable potential for the survival of human autonomy despite stultifying social conditions" (p. 69).

Bumiller here is walking a tightrope. She wants to insist both that victimization has terrible consequences *and* that victims are not pitiable or terrible people. It is easy to see why a right-thinking radical would want to have it both ways, but it is hard to do so successfully. Can victims suffer extensive and irremediable damage *and* be strong and worthy of respect? Does one claim not contradict the other? *The Civil Rights Society* is not the first book to walk that tightrope, and perhaps an understanding of how it comes to such a precarious situation will show its political and intellectual import.

For decades after the Civil War, scholars largely ignored slavery and its consequences. In 1918, however, Ulrich Phillips published the profoundly influential book, *American Negro Slavery*, in which he portrayed slaves less as the victims of a malign institution than as almost willing recipients of a benign system of paternalistic protection. After all, he wrote:

[t]here were injustice, oppression, brutality and heartburning in the régime, — but where in the struggling world are these absent? There were also gentleness, kind-hearted friendship and mutual loyalty to a degree hard for him to believe who regards the system with a theorist's eye and a partisan squint. For him on the other hand who has known the considerate and cordial, courteous and charming men and women, white and black, which that picturesque life in its best phases produced, it is impossible to agree that its basis and its operation were wholly evil, the law and the prophets to the contrary notwithstanding.²

By the mid-1950s, scholars' views had changed dramatically. Stanley Elkins' *Slavery* represents the second generation of studies of black victimization. Elkins rejected Phillips' benign view; instead his work was so suffused with white liberal guilt over the horror of slavery that it portrayed the slave as a completely victimized "Sambo":

Sambo, the typical plantation slave, was docile but irresponsible, loyal but lazy, humble but chronically given to lying and stealing; his behavior was full of infantile silliness and his talk inflated with childish exaggeration. His relationship with his master was one of utter dependence and childlike attachment: it was indeed this childlike quality that was the very key to his being.³

Elkins assured his readers that not every slave was a Sambo and that Sambo-like qualities were not racially based. Indeed, his famous analogy between American slavery and Nazi concentration camps was designed as much to show that infantilism is not race-specific as that slavery was as bad as the Holocaust. But the overall impression left by *Slavery* was that African-Americans were helpless and dependent.

2. U. PHILLIPS, *AMERICAN NEGRO SLAVERY* 514 (1918). My characterization of Phillips, as of Elkins and the other authors discussed here, is too condensed to do justice to the nuances of their writing. It nevertheless, I hope, captures the essence of their arguments.

3. S. ELKINS, *SLAVERY: A PROBLEM IN AMERICAN INSTITUTIONAL AND INTELLECTUAL LIFE* 82 (1959).

Much of the history of slavery and its consequences written during the 1960s and 1970s can be read — too schematically, to be sure — as a choice between these two equally unacceptable models of victimization. Scholars could argue, with Phillips, that contemporary African-Americans are not psychologically and socially damaged because slavery was not really so awful after all. Or they could argue, with Elkins, that American slavery was so horrific that slaves (and therefore their descendants) were devastatingly and irreparably damaged. Very roughly speaking, Daniel Patrick Moynihan's *The Negro Family* can be seen as a successor to Elkins, and Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman's *Time on the Cross* serves as a successor to Phillips, without the racism and perhaps only with regard to the material circumstances of slaves.⁴

The third generation, intellectually if not temporally, of "victimization scholars" sought to escape these poles. Eugene Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll* and Herbert Gutman's *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom* best exemplify the having-it-both-ways school of thought to which Bumiller belongs.⁵ They, like she, wanted to argue both that slavery and racial discrimination were intolerably oppressive and that slaves and their descendants survived the oppression with dignity, strength, and moral rectitude. Genovese's discussion of slaves' "acceptance" of slavery shows this balancing act in process:

The slaves defended themselves effectively against the worst of their masters' aggression, but they paid a high price. They fought for their right to think and act as autonomous human beings, but it was a desperate fight in which they could easily slip backward. . . . Most found ways to develop and assert their manhood and womanhood despite the dangerous compromises forced upon them. They had manifested strength. But . . . the intersection of paternalism with racism worked a catastrophe, for it transformed elements of personal dependency into a sense of collective weakness.⁶

It is important to clarify the precise nature of Genovese's (and Bumiller's) high-wire act. It is not a search for an Aristotelian mean; Genovese did not say that slaves' deep dependence combined with their assertive separatism to produce an appropriately interdependent community. He and Bumiller make the much more interesting and complicated argument that slaves and their descendants were at once deeply dependent and proudly autonomous. The precarious balance consists in giving approximately equal emphasis to two contradictory arguments rather than combining them or trading them off against one

4. Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, in *THE MOYNIHAN REPORT AND THE POLITICS OF CONTROVERSY* (L. Rainwater & W. Yancey eds. 1967); R. FOGEL & S. ENGERMAN, *TIME ON THE CROSS: THE ECONOMICS OF AMERICAN NEGRO SLAVERY* (1974).

5. E. GENOVESE, *ROLL, JORDAN, ROLL: THE WORLD THE SLAVES MADE* (1972); H. GUTMAN, *THE BLACK FAMILY IN SLAVERY AND FREEDOM, 1750-1925* (1976).

6. E. GENOVESE, *supra* note 5, at 148-49.

another to yield a conclusion somewhere in between.⁷

Orlando Patterson's and Glenn Loury's twin *Public Interest* articles, "The Moral Crisis of the Black American," and "The Moral Quandary of the Black Community," respectively, best represent the fourth generation of this scholarship. Both argue (Patterson with more elegance and analytic rigor) that African-Americans must, to be full moral agents, reject all claims as victims and accept responsibility for their past as well as their future. As Patterson put it:

There can be no moral equality where there is a dependency relationship among men; there will always be a dependency relationship where the victim strives for equality by vainly seeking the assistance of his victimizer. No oppressor can ever respect such a victim, whatever he may do for him, including the provision of complete economic equality. In situations like these we can expect sympathy, even magnanimity from men, but never — and it is unfair to expect otherwise — the genuine respect which one equal feels for another.⁸

Loury agrees:

The pride and self-respect valued by aspiring peoples throughout the world cannot be the gift of outsiders — they must derive from the thoughts and deeds of the peoples themselves. Neither the guilt nor the pity of one's oppressor is a sufficient basis upon which to construct a sense of self-worth.⁹

In Loury's hands, this claim takes the form of the traditional conservative plea for self-help and abjuration of dependence on government hand-outs. In Patterson's hands, the same claim takes a turn toward support for "constructive public rebellion," by which blacks and other ethnic groups with "a potentially common class interest" create "a total, almost revolutionary change in American society."¹⁰ The politics of victimization does indeed make strange bedfellows.

The point of this brief review is not to argue for one or another of these schools (although the older I get, the more compelling I find Patterson's combination of tough-minded cultural conservatism and expansive economic radicalism). Here I make only the preliminary point that the whole issue of victimization is politically and morally unsettling. Can one claim to be deeply victimized and still reject self-pity and patronization? Can one claim responsibility for the future

7. I am blurring the distinction between slavery and post-Civil War race relations for two reasons. First, my concern is the analytic question of how to think about victimization, not the historical question of how victimization and victims changed over time. Second, although many of the books I describe focused on slavery, they had an implicit (and sometimes explicit) goal of interpreting and commenting on contemporary race relations. Thus, the distinction between slavery and post-war race relations is often less important in scholarly practice than in theory. In short, my claim is not that Bumiller is contributing to the history of slavery — she obviously is not — but rather that the ways historians have thought about slavery and its aftermath give us a context for understanding her work.

8. Patterson, *The Moral Crisis of the Black American*, 32 *PUB. INTEREST* 43, 52 (1973).

9. Loury, *The Moral Quandary of the Black Community*, 79 *PUB. INTEREST* 9, 11 (1985).

10. Patterson, *supra* note 8, at 68.

without accepting blame for the past? Is the radical claim of black power really the same as the conservative demand for self-help? More precisely, if outside intervention prolongs dependency, must liberals and radicals renounce any efforts to aid victims — thus joining conservative calls for governmental inaction?

Bumiller is maddeningly vague on these and similar questions. Despite her wide-ranging reviews of various theoretical and historical literatures, she never refers to the history of victimization studies.¹¹ Thus she ignores the issue of whether the tightrope she walks can carry her either to a description of victims who are bloodied but unbowed, or to a prescription for intervention that is potent but not patronizing. As Bumiller, calling on Foucault as a model for understanding but not prescribing, puts it, her book offers “no new ‘expert’ advice about liberation strategies” (p. 113).

Given Bumiller’s express renunciation of prescription, it is perhaps unfair to press the point much further. Nevertheless, I will do so, since escape from the status of victim is so important and so intellectually complex. Here is the second way in which *The Civil Rights Society* induces us to rethink “what goes with what.” Bumiller first appears to agree with Patterson and Loury that victims must make their own future, since she concludes the sentence just quoted with “but I project a revisionist view that allows subjects to reexamine their fate” (p. 113). However, she also calls for a reformulation of the underpinnings of civil rights law:

[C]ontemporary society . . . can begin to recreate a language of rights that responds to the struggles and needs of those who experience social and economic disadvantage. . . .

. . . . [W]e need to begin the search for a restatement of rights that abandons the objectivity and individuality of current doctrine and that recognizes the interests of social groups and individuals. People who possess salient group identities need to find in the law reinforcement for the expression of their individual selves and positive referents for the qualities they share as a collectivity. [pp. 112, 116]

Bumiller’s hint of prescription may be correct, although it is hard to tell just what it means without further development. But whatever its virtues, it places liberation not in the hands of those to be liberated, but in the hands of legal scholars and lawmakers — just the people responsible for victimization to begin with (if Genovese and Bumiller are right), and just the people who cannot, despite the best intentions, liberate victims (if Patterson and Loury are right):

My point here is neither to criticize Bumiller nor prescribe myself, but rather to show once again how this book forces us to confront our desire to join perhaps incompatible claims. Can one consistently argue

11. Bumiller also makes no reference to a roughly analogous line of research in feminist theory and gender studies.

both that liberal law and politics deeply oppress racial minorities and women *and* that the law presents opportunities to these victims to liberate themselves? I am not sure, and the contortions that Genovese, Gutman, and Bumiller all occasionally engage in suggest that they too are not sure. Similarly, can one claim *both* that victims must liberate themselves *and* that elites must radically reform political and legal structures in order to liberate victims? Again, neither I nor Bumiller, who ducks the issue, is sure.¹²

A third way, probably inadvertent, in which this book jars our conventional assumptions was suggested earlier but warrants closer attention. Glenn Loury is typically labeled a neoconservative; Orlando Patterson is economically radical but culturally conservative; Kristin Bumiller presumably thinks of herself as a radical critic from the left. Yet their arguments have striking similarities. Each argues that the American legal system perpetuates victimization, that victims must liberate themselves, and that liberation requires radical reformulation of the links among individuals, groups, and society. While I earlier suggested ways in which commonly joined assumptions warrant separation, here my point is that conventionally separated political views may be closely connected. *The Civil Rights Society*, whatever else it does or does not do, deserves praise for inducing us to rethink “what goes with what.”

The penultimate paragraph of Bumiller’s book rather surprisingly provides a transition to Harold Cruse’s *Plural But Equal*. Bumiller warns:

We are currently experiencing . . . a proliferation of antidiscrimination strategies. Such proliferation can be seen as the logical extension of the universalization of rights — by including *all* groups, it further dilutes the benefits received by the historically most disadvantaged groups. . . . [U]niversalization of rights has led to increasing tensions between racial, ethnic, and feminist groups. Spokespersons for black interests, who fear that proliferation of rights will dissolve their minimal gains, have begun to object to civil rights strategies that fail to give priority to disadvantaged blacks. [p. 117]

Here is where Cruse begins. In a long, rambling set of repetitive ruminations and sharp insights, Cruse takes on the NAACP, liberal Jews, feminists, white ethnics, Asians and Latinos, Martin Luther King, Jr., Jesse Jackson, *Brown v. Board of Education*, and other targets — all in defense of the special claims of blacks against those who would deny their uniqueness or be parasitic on their strength.

Plural But Equal covers a lot of ground. One theme was just suggested: an attack on groups other than African-Americans for trying to squeeze under the umbrella of black-led civil rights agitation and

12. Patterson and Loury *are* sure, and their answer is “no.” See Patterson, *supra* note 8, at 68-69; Loury, *supra* note 9, at 11.

legislation. Cruse has sharp words for white ethnics and feminists (of both races) who claim the same entitlement to relief for past harms but who, he claims, have suffered nowhere near the same degree of oppression as blacks (especially men). As he puts it, in the first of many such passages:

[B]lacks were the unabashed catalysts behind the ethnic consciousness aroused in the Sixties. *Who was stopping the white ethnics from seeking constitutional redress of grievances before the Brown decision?* Nothing or no one but the plain fact that white ethnics had no real constitutional argument in the first place! . . .

. . . White ethnics did not need the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, or a hundred years of litigation and court decisions, to legitimize their social status. And when one examines the pantheon of American achievers . . . and finds . . . numerous . . . decidedly un-WASPish luminaries, it means that the American Dream was not always the sleepless nightmare of nonrecognition that inspired Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream."¹³

Furthermore, Cruse points out bitterly, "European immigrants remained, for the most part, socially distant if not hostile to blacks" (p. 56). He is no more enamored of feminists, who refuse to see that "equalizing political and economic rights according to gender means *undermining the political and economic rights of nonwhite minority groups*" (p. 364-65).

Another theme in *Plural But Equal* is an historical account of how African-Americans have arrived at their current impasse — without a strong leader, a coherent program, or popular support. Cruse argues that the Du Bois-Washington debate over political integration versus separate economic development has been the prototype for all important conflicts among blacks in the twentieth century. The book traces the development of this conflict from the origins of the NAACP, through its legal maneuvering over school desegregation, and up to the implications of "noneconomic liberalism" for Jesse Jackson and the urban underclass. It portrays the NAACP, and black and liberal white elites more generally, as misleading and even betraying the black masses by insisting over and over on legalisms and integration rather than on autonomous political, economic, and cultural development. Cruse is especially acrimonious about the historical role of Jewish board members and financial supporters of the NAACP who provided "debilitating leadership" by creating and insisting upon "the guiding white philosophy of noneconomic liberalism" (p. 79).

A third theme of *Plural But Equal* is an internecine argument among black political activists. Cruse sees plenty of blame to go around. In addition to feminists, Jews, and ethnic revivalists, he castigates black neoconservatives for censuring ghetto dwellers, black civil

13. P. 57. Emphasis is in the original in all quotes from Cruse unless otherwise noted.

rights leaders for single-minded assimilationism, Martin Luther King, Jr. for opposing black power and wasting his moral capital on the Vietnam War, and Jesse Jackson for political cowardice. Quoting a few of Cruse's critiques may suggest the flavor of this book. On King: He "had been led, unwisely, to compromise his established civil rights legitimacy by taking a public stand against the Vietnam War. . . . The catch here was that the privileges of equal citizenship carried with them an equal obligation to fight America's wars, whether these wars were considered just or unjust" (p. 260). On Jackson's 1984 presidential campaign: "[I]n his haste for the laurels of political notoriety . . . Jesse Jackson squandered too much of his potential by opportunistically following the imaginary bait of electoral politics at the presidential summit, while neglecting the more crucial and fundamental and *obligatory* talk of political organization at the bottom, *the independent black political party*" (p. 386). And most important, on the NAACP: [T]he NAACP's program became increasingly irrelevant in the Seventies. . . .

. . . The NAACP could *not* return to *past* policies and principles to regain clarity of leadership in the present and future, since it was precisely its past policies and principles that hopelessly trapped it in its contemporary programmatic crisis. . . . [T]he NAACP could have redeemed its flagging prestige and legitimacy by . . . encouraging the National Black Political Convention movement to pursue the organizational possibilities of the independent black political thrust. . . . [Instead it] *maintained the prerogative to discourage and delegitimize black ideological departures not consistent with its leadership ideologies.* [pp. 357-59]

What unifies all these attacks, and raises the book from a cranky jeremiad to occasional eloquence and power, are the two goals that Cruse is arguing *for*. He seeks to reclaim the despised concept of "separate but equal" by recasting it as "plural but equal," and to foster "cooperative economic organization" in aid of poor blacks. His constituencies, in other words, are appropriately nationalistic African-Americans and poor African-Americans. Let us consider each argument in turn.

Cruse's most concrete discussion of "plural but equal" lies in the arena of school desegregation. He points out that school desegregation in the South following *Brown* made black teachers and principals "superfluous." Instead of endorsing "discrete implementation of the principles of local control [and] the elimination of public school segregation by law, while allowing the parental option of voluntary choice of local school enrollment," Cruse argues, the "irresponsible and romantic black leadership" allowed the nebulous issue of integration to eliminate "one of the natural foundations of political leverage in the coming struggle for *black political power*" (p. 249). In short, Cruse apparently agrees with the white Southern stance that dominated the

years from Little Rock to *Green v. County School Board*:¹⁴ namely, that no matter what the Supreme Court says, parents do and ought to have the right to send their children to whatever local public school they wish. Black opposition to mandatory school desegregation is not new, but such a strong statement of that view still startles those of us brought up to believe that support for desegregation was a rough-and-ready indicator of commitment to racial equality.

Cruse's slogan of "plural but equal" goes beyond separate schools and an independent black political party. At its broadest, it calls on "the minority group . . . to organize its *own* economic, political, and cultural potential for a showdown across the bargaining table to obtain an equal share of the resources of any society" (p. 252). This call is also not new; Cruse, after all, issues it in the midst of a discussion of the Black Power movement of the 1960s. But it is a striking claim, especially in the contemporary political context.

Plural But Equal's other deep commitment is to "economic cooperative organization" (p. 340) — otherwise known as socialism in one community. Here he is especially concerned about "the magnified black millions of the Eighties existing below the poverty line, whom the nation and its uplift forces and agencies cannot rescue" (p. 383). They need not "myths surrounding . . . equal protection regarding race and economics in a free-market," but "*collective enterprises among blacks, . . . collective determination . . . in cooperative economic efforts*" (p. 384). Cruse's commitment to poor blacks generates some of his most eloquent passages excoriating middle-class blacks for their "creation of empty slogans"; their "puny . . . intellectual, scholarly and creative output"; and their development as a "mindless . . . *empty class*" that lacks "*a clearly defined social mission*" and that fails to recognize the need for nationalism and intraracial cooperation (pp. 384, 389).

I have quoted so extensively from *Plural But Equal* for two reasons. First, Cruse is so wordy that it is impossible to briefly articulate his views in his own words. Second and more important, whatever value the book has lies in its political agenda and rousing polemics, not in its substantive arguments or analytic rigor. And only the author himself can adequately convey that agenda and tone. There is no point in examining *Plural But Equal* in the same way we examined *The Civil Rights Society*, by placing it within a scholarly literature or querying its logical and methodological rigor. *Plural But Equal* is not that kind of book, and could not stand up to that kind of analysis. Instead, we should look at it as the opening salvo in a new round of debate over the value and content of black nationalism.

14. 391 U.S. 430 (1968). In Cruse's words, free choice plans "ought to have been implemented at the very outset of school desegregation no matter *what* the *Brown* decision said" P. 249.

It is in this context that Cruse's book most strongly challenges our assumptions about "what goes with what." White liberals intuitively, but vaguely, see black nationalism as a movement of the left, similar to and allied with feminism, opposition to the Vietnam War, sympathy for undocumented immigrants, and hostility to white separatists. They tend also to see Booker T. Washington as a conservative apologist for Jim Crow, and W.E.B. Du Bois as a radical exponent of black pride and black Marxism. *Plural But Equal* belies all those vague intuitions. Cruse is hostile to feminism, whether black or white, because it contributes to the denial of black men's "option to play out the role of man of the household" (p. 369). He is no more hospitable to new immigrants than to old ones, since "in the Far West, . . . black populations [are] practically lost in a melange of Asians and Latinos, all prevailing and countervailing for minority handouts from the golden pot of the American Dream" (p. 360). Cruse remembers the Vietnam War mainly as a diversion of King's attention from more important concerns about black power and black economic development. He retrospectively agrees with Southern resisters that the proper response to *Brown* should have been parental freedom of choice within a *de jure* desegregated school system. He sees Washington as the precursor of cooperative economic development, and Du Bois (at least before 1934) as elitist and assimilationist. None of this will seem new to veterans of the black nationalist debate since the 1960s.¹⁵ But I predict that, beyond that small and rather incestuous world, most whites and some blacks will be confounded by Cruse's disavowal of what are to many liberals almost canonical affiliations.

It would be less than honest to ignore the simple fact that *Plural But Equal* is not a very good book. It is repetitive, unfocused, and self-indulgent. Although they are mercifully few, such sentences as "[i]n retrospect, the Seventies would unfold as the transitional decade leading to the fateful 1980s" (p. 269) are hard to overlook. Cruse does not understand aggregate data analysis but makes the mistake of challenging its use and interpretation. The whole book needs severe editing and some effort at systematic organization. I was originally annoyed at its lack of a table of contents and substantive section and chapter titles, the absence of which tends to disorient the reader. I decided by the end that this lack was not an oversight, but rather an indication of the despair that someone (whether author or editor) must have felt in trying to decide just what each section and chapter was about.

Nevertheless, I am reluctant to criticize Cruse's book too severely, and not only out of respect for the man who twenty years ago wrote

15. For a very useful description of the internecine debates among black nationalists in the 1960s and 1970s, see Marable, *Black Nationalism in the 1970s: Through the Prism of Race and Class*, SOCIALIST REV., Mar.-June 1980, at 57.

Crisis of the Negro Intellectual. If this book represents more than the idiosyncratic views of one emeritus professor — if it really does signal a resurgence of black nationalism after the assimilationist quiescence of the 1970s and 1980s — then its arguments are very important no matter how poorly presented. No one can predict when or to what degree black nationalism will revive. But given the twentieth century's unremitting tension between nationalism (represented by Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, and Imamu Baraka) and integrationism (represented by the NAACP and National Urban League), we can confidently predict that it *will* revive.¹⁶ And if common reports of strains between black and white feminists,¹⁷ between blacks and new immigrants,¹⁸ and between blacks and Jews¹⁹ represent more than authorial sensationalism, then Cruse's suspicion of the "me too's" and snakes-in-the-grass must be taken very seriously as an indicator, if not a fomenter, of mutual recriminations.

From the outside (as a white Jewish female), I am not persuaded that a small, poor, and relatively powerless minority should pursue a nationalism that pushes away all potential allies. Such a strategy seems self-defeating at best. But from the inside — if Cruse represents the inside — that form of nationalism is logically and emotionally compelling. And regardless of one's perspective, Americans of all races and persuasions should find *Plural But Equal* a valuable guide to contemporary black nationalist sentiments.

It is perhaps banal, but nevertheless important, to conclude that a book shows us how left and right have more in common than either side, or most observers, believe. Both *Plural But Equal* and *The Civil Rights Society* present themselves as far to the left of mainstream American politics. Yet both concur in major arguments with those they would probably include among the enemy. My point is not that they are mistaken or inconsistent; we can easily see how each book's own frame of reference leads it to this apparently odd position. My

16. Adolph Reed argues that African-American scholars and activists must transcend the distinction between integrationism and nationalism since it reflects "a narrow focus on racial tactics and . . . [a] penchant for ahistorical dualism." See A. Reed, *The Political Thought of W.E.B. Du Bois: Liberal Collectivism and Elite Consolidation Among Afro-Americans* (1988) (unpublished manuscript). I agree, but this is not the place to pursue that discussion, since Cruse sticks closely to the traditional dichotomy.

17. See, e.g., B. HOOKS, *TALKING BACK: THINKING FEMINIST, THINKING BLACK* 177-83 (1989). A more illuminating study of tensions within feminism, focusing in this case on Hispanic-Anglo relations, is Lugones & Spelman, *Have We Got a Theory for You! Feminist Theory, Cultural Imperialism, and the Demand for "The Woman's Voice,"* 6 *WOMEN'S STUD. INTL. F.* 573 (1983).

18. See, e.g., Schmalz, *Dreams and Despair Collide as Miami Searches for Itself*, *N.Y. Times*, Jan. 23, 1989, at A1, col. 2; Salholz, *A Conflict of the Have-Nots*, *NEWSWEEK*, Dec. 12, 1988, at 28-29.

19. See J. KAUFMAN, *BROKEN ALLIANCE: THE TURBULENT TIMES BETWEEN BLACKS AND JEWS IN AMERICA* (1988); Kramer, *Blacks and Jews: How Wide the Rift?*, *NEW YORK*, Feb. 4, 1985, at 26-32.

point is rather that the fundamental contradiction between the fact of racial subordination and the American ideology of freedom and opportunity pushes all careful thinkers into positions that seem anomalous from some perspective. That was certainly the case for Thomas Jefferson²⁰ and Hinton Rowan Helper²¹; it is equally the case for Bumiller and Cruse. In different ways, these two books lead us once again to face that contradiction and to realize how much responsibility it bears for the peculiarities of American political thought and practice.

The juxtaposition of these two books suggests a final way in which they make us rethink comfortable assumptions. Just who are the victims, or the most victimized? Cruse's answer, over and over, is "blacks," especially poor blacks. Bumiller's implicit answer is "blacks, Latinos, white women, and the elderly" — everyone who can attribute their subordination to ascriptive categories. Her interviews elide precisely the differences among types of victims or degrees of victimization that Cruse wants to insist upon. I can imagine a conversation between Bumiller and Cruse in which each accuses the other of inappropriate special pleading for some victims at the expense of other equally worthy ones.

Awarding the prize of "most victimized" to any particular group seems to me a bootless enterprise. But my imagined dialogue between Bumiller and Cruse should alert us to the political and psychological stakes attendant on the question of which victims deserve what kind of treatment. However one arrays people along the dimension of victimization (including the refusal to engage in such an exercise), one can responsibly do so only by realizing that one's allies and enemies will be disconcertingly different than one anticipated. For that important insight, we have *The Civil Rights Society* and *Plural But Equal* to thank.

20. See J. MILLER, *THE WOLF BY THE EARS: THOMAS JEFFERSON AND SLAVERY* (1977).

21. H. HELPER, *THE IMPENDING CRISIS OF THE SOUTH* (1963) (1st ed. 1857).