Crummell, Alexander

(b. 1819, New York, N.Y., U.S.--d. Sept. 10/12, 1898, Point Pleasant?, N.J.), American scholar and Episcopalian minister, founder of the American Negro Academy (1897), the first major learned society for black Americans. As a religious leader and an intellectual, he cultivated scholarship and leadership among young blacks.

Crummell, born to the son of an African prince and a free mother, attended an interracial school at Canaan, N.H., and an institute in Whitesboro, N.Y., which was run by abolitionists and combined manual labour and the classical curriculum. Denied admission to the General Theological Seminary of the Episcopal church in 1839 because of his race, Crummell studied theology privately and became an Episcopalian minister in 1844. He journeyed to England about 1848 to raise funds for a church for poor blacks and soon thereafter began a course of study at Queen's College, Cambridge (A.B., 1853).

Upon graduation, Crummell went to Liberia as a missionary. He spent the next 20 years there as a parish rector, professor of intellectual and moral science at Liberia College, and public figure. He became a citizen of the new republic and a strong proponent of Liberian nationalism. Throughout his life he would continue to urge the Christianization and civilization of Africa by skilled, educated blacks from all over the world.

Crummell returned to the United States about 1873 and founded and served as pastor of St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Washington, D.C. A spokesperson for blacks looking for greater recognition in the church, he led the Conference of Church Workers Among Colored People in 1883. After his 1894 retirement from the ministry, he taught at Howard University (1895-97) and founded the American Negro Academy, which promoted the publication of scholarly work dealing with African-American culture and history. Notable members included W.E.B. Du Bois and Paul Laurence Dunbar.

In his early years, Crummell was an outspoken advocate for the abolition of slavery and the removal of legal restrictions on black Americans. He fought for the right to vote and recommended the establishment of Negro schools. Late in his career, he wrote and lectured widely against the increasingly entrenched racism of post-Reconstruction America, appealing to educated blacks to provide leadership.