

7 THE NEW AFRICAN POLICY AT HOME

It would take some years for the full political impact and African repercussions of his Harlem performance to be assessed, but Fidel Castro's first major victory in his courtship of black Africa was certainly his visit to Harlem. The Cuban leader returned from his U.N. expedition in triumph and immediately addressed a mass rally, threatening to seize the American-owned Nicaraguan nickel mines, exorcising American racism, the Ku Klux Klan, and the colonial domination of Africa.¹ Castro's message was clear: his regime was fighting the same enemy which oppressed black Africa and kept American Blacks at bay. "There are in the very entrails of the U.S. empire," he said, "twenty million oppressed and exploited Negroes whose aspirations cannot be met with a handful of dollars. It is a much more serious problem because such aspirations can only be satisfied with justice!" (ibid.). He then announced that two of Africa's most prestigious leaders—Gamal Abdel Nasser and Kwame Nkrumah—would be visiting Cuba within the next few months.² (However, neither was ever to show up in Cuba.)

Indeed, Castro had pulled off a great coup with long-lasting effects and implications. He had diplomatically defeated the world's lone most superpower, politically dwarfed the most radical Afro-Asian leaders, and, psychologically, begun to cast a protective shadow on a most strategic zone in the Third World. Havana's self-proclaimed duty to "save Africa" from imperialism appears to be a subtle transfer onto the black continent of the ethno-political strategy Castro had successfully applied to Cuba's domestic Africa. Yet at the historic U.N. meeting in September 1960, Kwame Nkrumah had outlined a sort of "Hands-off Doctrine" for Africa. Guinean President Sékou Touré had warned that "Africa has ceased becoming a prey to become herself."³ (As Touré spoke before the U.N., the world press was headlining uprisings by and massacres of Blacks in Rhodesia, the fierce struggle in the Congo, and the widening offensive of the FLN forces in Algeria.⁴)