

in the summer of that year. A specialist on Cuban slavery and Afro-Cuban religions, Carbonell appears to have been responsible for the Party's renewed interest in the racial question in the early 1950s. At the time of the Moncada assault, however, he was already in trouble with the Party leadership for pursuing with "excessive vigor" issues related to racial matters and for expounding views held to be ethnocentric.<sup>42</sup> He had already broken Party discipline in forming an autonomous offshoot of the Frente Contra la Discriminación Racial (Front Against Racial Discrimination) at the University of Havana and outside of Party control.<sup>43</sup>

Carbonell had met Fidel Castro at the University of Havana in the early 1940s. He was convinced that Castro was no mere putchist, but a dynamic and radical nationalist capable of assembling a good portion of Cuba's youth behind him, a man sympathetic to the aspirations of Cuban Blacks.<sup>44</sup> He was incensed at the Party's opportunistic condemnation of the Moncada action, which he saw as the most revolutionary deed undertaken in Cuba since the revolution of 1933 (ibid.). To underscore his revolt, Carbonell again broke Party discipline and sent a congratulatory telegram to Castro, who was imprisoned at the time for the assault on the Moncada and Bayamo barracks.<sup>45</sup> The Party swiftly expelled the "filthy provocateur," "petit bourgeois adventures," and "undercover agent" with the customary vilification marking such events.<sup>46</sup>

Lest the unilateral action of an "undisciplined" member be mistaken for Party policy, the Communists issued a statement reiterating that "the party rejects this kind of adventurist action [i.e., the Moncada assault] which serves only to immolate dozens of young people."<sup>47</sup> Alluding to Carbonell, it denounced "those who are attempting to involve the newspaper *Hoy* [the Party paper] with a filthy provocation . . . entangling it in the adventure of Castro and his group" (ibid.).<sup>48</sup>

The white middle-class radicals who, under Castro's leadership and initiative, conceived the first serious insurrectional assault against Batista's dictatorship had vaguely referred to Cuba's need for "new men and new procedures," "wellness and economic prosperity," and "total and definite social justice."<sup>49</sup> However, as much as a pervasive racism made the racial question one of the most crucial to any profound overhauling of Cuban society, Castro and his intimate associates were silent on that point. There was no mention of it in Castro's lengthy statement, "History Will Absolve Me,"<sup>50</sup> nor in his explanations to the court on the social reasons behind his revolt against the

Batista regime.<sup>51</sup> Such blindness to the most glaring sore spot in Cuban society was hardly appropriate for the radical nationalist and well-informed social reformer that Castro was at the time. As Thomas pointed out, Castro "had never had anything yet to say on the problem of the Negro in Cuba. . . . There was as yet lacking any mention of racial intolerance; indeed, it would have been possible to have read 'History Will Absolve Me' without ever knowing there were Negroes at all in Cuba. . . . Castro never mentioned the matter in any of his speeches or programmes before the revolution. To read 'History Will Absolve Me' would suggest that Castro was addressing a racially homogeneous nation."<sup>52</sup>

Castro was undoubtedly an ardent anti-imperialist of advanced social ideas, consumed as much by a desire to challenge the imperialist stranglehold over Cuba as by a messianic will to power. If anything, the Moncada fiasco had strengthened his conviction that history had chosen him for the accomplishment of a great design. He was certainly opposed to racial segregation and discrimination on ethical grounds, as would be expected of a white liberal nationalist reformer operating in such a heavily Africanized environment as Cuba. Equally clear is the fact that at no time had he attempted to understand the racial question in its historical, political, or psycho-cultural dimensions.

### A Paternalistic Superiority Complex

Based on two decades of close political association and personal friendship with Fidel Castro, Carlos Franqui, former propaganda chief of the Movimiento 26 de Julio, recalled Castro's racial myopia. "In all conscience, based on the knowledge I have of Fidel on a personal basis, I must say that Fidel Castro is not a discriminator in a segregationist sense. He is not the type of person who would discriminate against a black man just because his skin is black. By the same token, I do not believe Fidel to be a *machista* in the sense that he would discriminate against a woman because she is female, or against a Chinese because he is Chinese. That is not where Fidel's problem lies. Fidel's limitation—great limitation!—is in his incapacity to understand what it has meant and continues to mean to be black in Cuba. He is equally incapable of understanding what it means to be a worker, to be a peasant, or to be a woman! And this has to do with a profound problem of bourgeois and petit-bourgeois revolutionaries who entertain a deeply paternalistic outlook on revolution. It is the problem of those who, having neither emerged from nor lived among