

slavery, and Chinese prejudices had been commonplace in Cuba. Sino-Cubans have been stereotyped as crafty, treacherous, lecherous, and inscrutable. The popular saying, "Vale mas un muerto que un Chino" (A corpse is worth more than a Chinaman), reflects that racist contempt. Castro's former confidant, Carlos Franqui, recalled Castro's dislike of the Chinese as obsessive: "I have spoken many times with Fidel about the Chinese. He feels a great antipathy for Chinese as such. To my surprise, his attitude towards them was visceral: he detests them. His attacks against Mao Tse-tung bore the imprints of that astounding personal prejudice of his."¹⁴

Prejudices against the Chinese might indeed have played no small part in Castro's open hostility toward China in the mid-1960s, when the ideological Moscow-Peking feud had degenerated into racial innuendo and mudslinging. Did Castro's reported disdain for the Chinese also cause him to resist Peking's strenuous efforts to enlist Cuba's support against Moscow in the early 1960s, even when Havana had good cause to condemn the Kremlin's behavior? In any event, between 1959 and 1969, the Sino-Soviet rift certainly offered Havana not only the leverage to deal with the mighty USSR practically as an equal but even to intimidate Moscow's cautious leadership into committing itself to guaranteeing the survival of the Castroist regime. Castro was to play Peking against Moscow to his own economic, political, and military advantage; displeased but passive, the USSR was forced to dance to his tune.¹⁵

6 CASTRO DISCOVERS BLACK AFRICA

At the end of 1959, it was evident to close observers that the domestic rapprochement between Castroism and communism was but a prelude to Havana's convergence with the Soviet bloc. Second only to Castro, the most interested participant in a Soviet-Cuban entente was certainly the Cuban Communist party. The inescapable consequences of such an event were perceived forebodingly by many independent radical Castros. "We knew," explained Carlos Franqui, "that if the Cuban Communist party got hold of the Revolution, Cuba would enter the dark ages politically and that to get her out of it would be worse than fighting a hundred Batistas together."¹⁶ But because of the enthusiastic popular support enjoyed by the Caudillo, radical non-Communist Castros were increasingly impotent. The most they could do was to use their personal ties with Castro to offer foreign and domestic policy alternatives to the drift towards the Soviet bloc and the Cuban Communist party.

An Afrocentric Foreign Policy Proposal

Perhaps only someone of the ethnic and political background of the Afro-Cuban diplomat, Walterio Carbonell, could have elaborated, at such an early date and with such a keen sense of future events, the sort of Afrocentric foreign policy alternative he presented Castro toward the end of 1959. The former Cuban ambassador to Tunisia was the first to alert the revolutionary leadership to the importance of a black African connection. He had urged Castro to adopt a resolutely pro-African stance. Carbonell perceived Africa as the key to a network of Third World alliances that could be a powerful factor in Cuba's negotiations with the USSR. If the Revolution was to resist absorption by the Soviet bloc, it was imperative that the momentum of the Cuban revolution converge with the radical mainstream of African nationalism and decolonization.

Cuba's colorful entry into the arena of world politics in 1959 had coincided with that of the African continent. Between 1956 and 1960,