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La Grande Nation: The Revolutionary Tradition in French West Africa

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La Grande Nation: The Revolutionary Tradition in French West Africa

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History Department Honors Thesis

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Abstract: Historically, France has garnered a reputation for being one of the most enlightened nations due to its progressive policies and having produced so many enlightenment thinkers. In imperial historiography, a similar assertion is often made about French West Africa. Historians and Frenchmen alike often make claims about the altruistic nature of the French empire and frequently point out efforts undertaken in French West Africa to significantly develop the federation and aid the Africans in need. In this thesis I will provide a much more nuanced look at the condition of French West Africa as it existed from 1870-1930. In this examination, I will uncover what was particular to France that allowed it to create an empire in West Africa that saw infrastructure that both respected African institutions and simultaneously imposed French ideals on the Africans themselves. Ultimately, I will argue that this empire was a result of two often contradictory ideas born of the French Revolution: A strongly held nationalism that saw France as the world's foremost nation and carried an obligation to spread the greatness of France, as well as a republican political tradition that sought to provide the tenets of liberty, equality, and fraternity to French West Africa. In doing so I will examine the many ways that Africans under the French enjoyed more rights than anywhere else on the continent, but not attempt to ignore the many illegitimate assertions of power and paternalism as well as the human rights abuses committed by Frenchmen in the federation.

Key words and phrases: *Mise en Valeur*, *l'Afrique Occidentale Française*, France, Africa, Revolution, imperialism, republicanism, nationalism, education, healthcare.

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La Grande Nation: The Revolutionary Tradition in French West Africa
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i. Introduction

During the summer of 2015 while studying at the Institut d'études politiques de Bordeaux, I met a now retired professor named Jean-Louis Triaud, an incredibly well travelled and fascinating man. Upon introducing himself to our small class of some 15 students, I discovered that he was a historian of Africa, and had studied, as well as worked in government departments in several former French colonies in Africa including Morocco, Algeria, and Senegal. As an African historian myself I was very interested in discussing his experience with him and understanding French Africa from a French perspective. At this point I had little knowledge of French West Africa, except that France was often cited as the most altruistic imperial power in Africa, and that France was the only European nation to extend citizenship for some (but not all) Africans.

The next day, at a group meet and greet lunch provided by our host school I introduced myself and told him about my interest in Africa. He seemed to be receptive to my interest in Africa and for the next ten minutes recounted his history of travelling through Africa. When I had a chance to speak I inquired about whether he believed the continuing connection between France and its former colonies persisted because of the uniquely French policies toward Africans. His response, while being perhaps more strongly worded, very much echoed the notion I had often encountered regarding the altruism of the French in Africa. He responded "Because of the way the French treated Africans in our colonies and included them in the French nation, there is no racism toward blacks in modern France, and we keep close ties with our former colonies."

Again, this statement was perhaps too strongly worded: of course in a nation of some 66 million there are bound to be traces of racism. The sentiment conveyed in his statement, however, was not surprising to me. I continue to encounter historians, and French citizens who believe that the French imperial mission was legitimately a product of altruism, and that there is some characteristic specific to France that allowed the Africans to thrive under French rule.

It is exactly this notion that continues to persist in French memory and history that this thesis will address. What was unique about France that allowed or even prompted the creation of this supposedly altruistic empire, and did France really stand above other European empires in Africa as a beacon of inclusion and opportunity? Ultimately, I will argue that two factors contributed to this perception of French exceptionalism: a strongly held and uniquely French sense of republicanism, and a nationalism grounded simultaneously in the ideals of the Revolution of 1789 and in a belief that the prestige of the “Grande Nation” compelled France to extend its influence beyond its borders. Furthermore, I will argue that despite well documented human rights abuses in the early stages of the *Afrique Occidentale Française* (the French federation of West African colonies), the French empire was indeed unique in that it not only wanted to exploit the land and people of West Africa for resources but rather genuinely sought to raise the *mise en valeur* of its African subjects in the period from 1870 until around 1930.¹ To tie both of these contentions together, I will also point out that the attempt to raise *mise en valeur* of Africans was also largely a project of acculturation, and an attempt to spread French ideals. Furthermore, in order to address common Marxist notions of African imperialism, I will attempt to uncover why, despite the economic losses it incurred, and often unstable social situations it

¹ *Mise en Valeur* is a French phrase used commonly among French imperialists and subsequently French imperial scholars. Usually translated as “development” this generally refers to the quality of life of African subjects in terms of the resources available to them. This development is usually framed not in terms of individuals but rather in terms of the modernity and amount of infrastructure.

confronted, France maintained such a strong presence in West Africa, and why it kept investing resources with little expectation that it would see a profit.

ii. Historiography and Primary Sources

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries European imperialism reached a peak with almost the entirety of Africa, parts of Asia, and the Caribbean being dominated by European powers. At the time, empire was portrayed as an altruistic mission to bring the light of civilization to people the Europeans considered “uncivilized.” While there were certainly individuals who critiqued this supposedly altruistic mission, the majority of peoples in Europe at the time accepted this discourse of the altruistic necessity of their empire and wished to portray their endeavors as such. After decolonization occurred worldwide, however, there was a fundamental shift in how imperialism was viewed and the histories written about European imperialism became chronicles of exploitation of both people and resources.

It is this post-colonial view of European exploitation that makes up a large part of modern imperial history in general, including a large proportion of French imperial history in Africa. The French case, however, is unique as is reflected in the historiography. Many scholars of French imperial history contend that because of the French policies of association and assimilation, there developed a thriving indigenous intellectual class rarely seen elsewhere in African colonies. Also unique to the French case, is that when compared to their European counterparts the colonies of France were in the main financially unsuccessful. It is in this context that I will explore why, if we are to accept the traditional Marxist notion of empire as a system of economic exploitation, did France continue to maintain such a strong presence in its colonies despite its failure to realize an economic profit? In order to discover this I will first have to

answer several smaller questions. Most important of these is why do some historians propose that French imperialism was an economic venture and is there sufficient evidence to support this claim? Another important question that we must answer is why Europeans at the time—as well as certain Africans during the period of decolonization and some contemporary historians—chose to believe in the altruistic and benevolent nature of the French empire. In fact, how apt is this label?

There are several themes that have largely dominated the existing historiography of French imperialism. There are those who, much in line with the traditional historiography of European imperialism, see French imperialism as a largescale exploitation of “native” resources and people.² There are also those who interpret the unique characteristic of the African intellectual class as either a result of French altruism, or as a response to French cultural domination.³ There are only a select few historians, however, who have sought to discover reasons for the existence and persistence of French empire in Africa beyond the traditional argument of economic domination.⁴ The third of these three historiographical camps will be of most concern to me, as my argument will focus on this very topic. The first two, however, will be critical for context and background.

Perhaps the earliest, and still most complete history of French imperialism in Africa is Jean Suret-Canale’s, *French Colonialism in Tropical Africa*. This book was originally published

² Jean Suret-Canale is perhaps the foremost historian of this camp. see Jean Canale, *French Colonialism in Tropical Africa, 1900-1945* (New York, New York: Pica Press, 1971), 3

³ Wesley Johnson and Gary Wilder are included in this camp. See Wesley Johnson, *The Emergence of Black Politics in Senegal; the Struggle for Power in the Four Communes, 1900-1920* (Stanford, Calif.: Published for the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, by Stanford University Press, 1971), 94. See also Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-state: Negritude & Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: U of Chicago, 2005)

⁴ Henry Brunschwig and most notably Alice Conklin are in this camp. See Henri Brunschwig, *French Colonialism, 1871-1914: Myths and Realities* (New York, New York: Praeger, 1966). See also Alice L Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford UP, 1997), 51.

in French in the 1964 and translated to English in 1971. This period, just after the decolonization of much of Africa, and only two years after France reluctantly gave Algeria independence, marked perhaps the beginning of historical criticism of European imperialism. The 1970's marked a shift away from the scientific racism and imperial histories that had glorified European colonialism, and tended toward a critique of empire as an exploitative process. As such, Canale's book is very critical of all aspects of the French imperial system. He posits French economic exploitation as the central characteristic of all French West African colonies. He argues first that "great monopolies based on financial capital took control of the economy and indeed of the administration of colonial territories."⁵ He also contends that the policies of association and assimilation (which characterized French colonialism prior to 1914 and after 1918, respectively) were a suppression of African culture, were characterized by political and administrative oppression, and marred by "pacification" campaigns. Canale further asserts that this economic domination would give rise to the militarism that became synonymous with imperialism, leading to brutal "pacification" campaigns. He also asserts that this economic domination eventually led to French political domination of West Africa: "Sovereignty, as we saw, was entirely suspended in favor of the French state. The sovereign rights that had previously been acknowledged to ancient African states...were unilaterally annulled in French West Africa."⁶

Canale's book is extremely useful in many ways. For one it was perhaps the first scholarly work to expose the atrocities committed in the French empire, an empire which had long been seen (especially by the French) as the most benevolent in the world. By pointing out the atrocities committed in the pacification campaigns, including the forceful occupation of the Ivory Coast which caused 3 years of back and forth guerilla warfare, or the punitive mission in

⁵ Jean Canale, *French Colonialism in Tropical Africa, 1900-1945* (New York, New York: Pica Press, 1971), 3

⁶ Canale, *French Colonialism in Tropical Africa*, 307.

which 500 French troops burned several Liberian villages to the ground, as well as the domination of African culture, this book essentially lifted a long standing veil on the French empire.⁷ This analysis does, however, fall short in many ways, and Canale was perhaps so eager to point out French atrocities that his argument faltered in the process. For one, his entire argument was predicated on the belief that France pursued empire in order to secure economic advantage, which is flawed for several reasons. One is that he references the earliest forms of trade in French West Africa which only persisted in the earliest days of French presence in Africa, before many colonies were established or governed, and certainly before the establishment of the *Afrique Occidentale Française* in 1895. He also fails to note that the French in most of their empire did not even control trade, but rather chose to portion off large tracts of land and sell them to private companies outside of France in the concessionary system.⁸ Canale's critique of capitalism as the cause of, and impetus to, imperial conquest thus depends on a system that is largely separate from the French economic system, and focuses on private institutions. In his discussion of French domination of politics he also fails to note the growing political involvement of Africans in Senegal, and the fact that some Africans were actually given French citizenship as early as 1794, a move that is almost unprecedented anywhere else in colonial Africa. Overall, this book is valuable in its critique of French imperialism in Africa, but fails to grasp—or chooses to overlook—the unique character of French imperialism.

The second major school of historiography regarding French imperialism in Africa focuses on the emergence of an indigenous intellectual class as a result of increased education. There are two books that best analyze this phenomenon. Wesley Johnson's *The Emergence of*

⁷ For more on the pacification campaigns of French West Africa see Canale.. IV "Pacification" in *French Colonialism in Tropical Africa*

⁸ For more on the concessionary system of trade and economic regulation see Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff, *French West Africa* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1957)

Black Politics in Senegal is the first of these and portrays the African intellectual class as almost an unintended consequence of education, and focuses on the French attempt to dominate politics. Johnson contends “The most important forces in Senegalese government at the turn of the century were French political elites” and furthermore “The merchants of Bordeaux dominated Senegal’s trade and determined its economic policy by influencing local government.”⁹ This analysis of French imperialism still emphasizes a French domination over Africa. In his examination of the emergence of black politics in Senegal, Johnson seems to portray the growing African intellectual class that would take over politics as a reaction to the attempted cultural indoctrination by the French. By contrast, Gary Wilder in his book *The French Imperial Nation State* contends that the growing intellectual class was a success of French empire and that criticism of the colonial system from Africans was “an affirmation, not a rejection of the French *patrie*.”¹⁰ These characterizations of the indigenous intellectual class while contradictory, largely suffer the same shortcoming as Canale’s book. They fail to examine this system as unique among African colonies and fail to ask why the French even created the infrastructure necessary to cultivate this intellectual class or why the system of local participation in politics occurred at all in the French case. While the question of why the French created an indigenous intellectual class could be asked of many European powers and their colonies, we must focus on the specific character of the French intellectual class as well. For one, the French – as a consequence of developments dating back to the French Revolution—actually gave Africans in certain territories (mainly the *Originaires* from the four communes of Senegal) the opportunity

⁹ Wesley Johnson, *The Emergence of Black Politics in Senegal; the Struggle for Power in the Four Communes, 1900-1920* (Stanford, Calif.: Published for the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, by Stanford University Press, 1971), 94.

¹⁰ Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-state: Negritude & Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: U of Chicago, 2005).

to become citizens rather than subjects. Furthermore, these French colonial intellectuals, rather than holding only a subservient position often were elected to high ranking positions in government, not only in the colonial government but even in the French government in Paris itself. For a more balanced examination of the French colonial intellectual class, we must consider the unique character of French imperialism and how it made possible the participation of local people in the French sociopolitical system.

The third, and most important school of interpretation for my argument comprises those historians who seek to understand the uniqueness of French imperialism in Africa, and explore reasons for French imperialism outside the traditional notion of economic exploitation. Perhaps the closest and most important argument to mine is that presented in Henri Brunschwig's book *French Colonialism Myths and Realities*. In this book it is Brunschwig's primary contention that "The driving force which caused the kings of France to establish settlements overseas was not the profit motive. It was prestige rather than thoughts of commercial profit which inspired their colonial policy."¹¹ While I agree with this book's main sentiment, it is again a largely incomplete characterization. Brunschwig's book is temporally much broader in scope, and he argues that this interest in cultivating French prestige dates back to Cardinal Richelieu in 1622, and that it was the assertion of prestige developed in absolutist France alone that prompted French expansionism. I, on the other hand, contend that this imperialist prestige was a result of the revolutionary beliefs following 1789 and only fully developed under the republicanism of the Third Republic after 1870. Furthermore, by characterizing the French appetite for empire as simply a product of prestige, Brunschwig overlooks the very strong sense of a republican obligation in French colonies which is clearly present in both imperial ideology and on the

¹¹ Henri Brunschwig, *French Colonialism, 1871-1914: Myths and Realities* (New York, New York: Praeger, 1966).

ground. While also incomplete in its analysis, Alice Conklin's book, as we will see, could serve as a frame through which to revisit Brunschwig's contentions, in that it makes an extremely strong case for the significance to France of its civilizing mission. Brunschwig on the other hand relegates Africans themselves to a background role, and fails to point out attempts the French, and select Africans, made to improve the well-being of Africans in the colonies.

The second book that focuses on French Imperialism outside the realm of economics is Alice Conklin's highly regarded, *A Mission to Civilize*. Here, Conklin argues that inherent to the ideals of the Third Republic was a republican civilizing mission that saw civilizing Africans as their duty. Speaking of one of the early French governors of Senegal, Conklin contends "Roume made clear that he saw his mission overseas as something more lofty than the mere extraction of Africa's resources for exclusive benefit of the French." She quotes Roume as saying "We have a higher ambition and a significantly broader intention, we wish truly to open Africa to civilization."¹² While certainly accurate regarding the republican notion of civilizing, Conklin occasionally fails to distinguish a republican civilizing mission from a humanitarian one. She sees the mission to raise the African *mise en valeur* as one of republican obligation and something done mostly for the benefit of Africans whereas in many instances it is clear that the French had plenty to gain from this "civilizing" mission. Certainly there was a notion of improving the economic, social, and intellectual well-being of the African population. On the ground, however, this notion was obscured by atrocities committed by the French, and seems to take backseat to French interests. Conklin fails to note that in creating this extension of the French metropole, France was able both to spread French nationalist ideals, and to create an infrastructure for future French use. By relegating imperial atrocities to the background, Conklin

¹² Alice L Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford UP, 1997), 51.

fails to question why this colonial double bind took place, in which France was concerned with African *mise en valeur* at a policy level and yet committed atrocities on the ground.

My argument then will attempt to reconcile certain aspects of these last two books while also further expanding the argument. I will argue that French imperialism, unlike the most traditional notion of economic impetus, was a result partially of French republican ideals and the desire to “civilize” (although not necessarily in an unambiguously humanitarian way) those deemed ‘uncivilized.’ Moreover, French imperialism in West Africa was a product of strongly held notions of prestige and French superiority and constituted an attempt to recapture political dominance in an age afflicted by the malaise of cultural “decadence.” Furthermore, I will argue that French imperial ideology saw a shift following World War I in which the treatment of Africans improved, the republican civilizing mission truly began in earnest, and infrastructure was built to benefit Africans.

My argument will begin with an examination of the earliest iterations of French Republican ideology with regard to the colonies. I will examine the ideals of republicanism and nationalism as expressed in the Revolution of 1789 and how these revolutionary ideals were then applied to French colonies throughout the world. I will continue by briefly examining how this tradition and how these policies were carried out by the First and Second Republics (1792-1804 and 1848-1852 respectively), as well as how the policies were interrupted by the periods of authoritarian rule under Napoleon Bonaparte and Napoleon III who largely eschewed ideas of republicanism in favor of exploitative and often violent imperialism. The core of my narrative will be centered around two periods of the Third Republic: 1870 – 1914 and 1914 – 1930. The section that discusses French West Africa before 1914 will examine French imperial policy in West Africa with specific regard to the idea of assimilation, the condition of schooling, and

infrastructure built prior to 1914 which, as we will see, took a more exploitative form, although still retaining republican ideals. After this section, I will briefly examine World War I as it touched French West Africa including the policy of conscription and how the consequences of war would affect French imperialism in the decades following. As such, the next section will examine what changes came about as a result of the African participation in World War I. It is in this post-war era that we see the principles of French republicanism truly dominate, and the management of the colonies in the *Afrique Occidentale Française* reflected this. I will point out that due to African service in the French military, there became a widespread notion among Africans themselves that they deserved better treatment than was being provided. In this section I will examine the shift from assimilation—the policy of complete cultural assimilation and indoctrinating Africans with French ideals—to association—the policy of extending French civilization to Africa while respecting traditional custom. I will also examine the creation of infrastructure, schooling, and the rise of the French African intellectual class. Finally, I will make brief mention of the process of decolonization and how former French colonies fared after the decolonization of Africa.

In making these arguments I will use several critical primary sources from French West Africa as well as the metropole. In order to examine sentiment and policy toward the colonies in the years during and following the Revolution I will examine several primary sources coming from the new revolutionary government as well as from enlightenment philosophers. The first of these will be “The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen” a fundamental document published in 1789 by the French constituent assembly. This text would be crucial in the proclamation of the republican values so integral to both the Revolution and the subsequent republics. Also among my sources will be articles from the constitutions drafted during the more

radical phase of the Revolution in which French policy toward the colonies was officially decided. Lastly, in this section I will examine sections from Jacques Godechot's book *La Grande Nation* in which he espouses the notion that because France believed it was the greatest country in the world, it therefore came to believe it had an obligation to spread overseas and expand its borders.

For my next sections, in which I examine the character of French West Africa from the period spanning 1870 until about 1930, I will look at several primary sources, both government accounts as well as observational reports by outsiders. As far as government accounts I will look at speeches given by several Governors-General of the AOF to discover how French official policy took shape and played out in this period. Among these will be speeches by Governors General Jules Ferry and Ernst Roume, both of which were given in the period before 1914 as well as speeches by Governor General Jules Carde who was in office in the period after 1914. These speeches when looked at comparatively will give excellent perspective on the role of the AOF and the *mise en valeur* mission in the periods both before and after 1914. In addition to these speeches I will examine two other government publications. The first of these will be Cuillault's publication *Des Institutions d'Assistance et de Prévoyance Mises à la Disposition des Indigènes Afrique Occidentale Français*. Published just before the onset of the First World War, this piece discusses assistance and welfare programs the AOF offered the indigenous citizens of French West Africa. This piece, along with Ferry and Roume's speeches will be important in understanding the *mise en valeur* mission pre-1914. Read alongside Carde's speeches, Albert Sarraut's *La Mise En Valeur des Colonies Françaises* will shed light on the post-1914 perspective on the republican civilizing mission alongside Carde's speeches. These publications

from the AOF will be critical in illuminating government policy and practices toward the people of French West Africa, especially in terms of the republican mission.

In addition to these government publications I will examine pieces written by anthropologists and travelers who catalogued their journeys across French West Africa. In examining these sources I will obtain a perspective on the condition of French West Africa not only as it was idealized by the government of the AOF, but also how it actually looked in practice according to observers. Among the sources that will serve as a perspective on French West Africa prior to World War I are Mary Kingsley's *Travels in West Africa Congo Français, Corisco, and Cameroons* as well as Alexander Michinson's *The expiring continent: a narrative of travel in Senegambia, with observations on native character, the present condition and future prospects of Africa and colonization*. These two pieces, both published in English, will provide a perspective on French West Africa from a more impartial source from outside of France, so as not to limit this discussion simply to French rhetoric but also to examine the character of French imperialism on the ground. The second collection of primary sources come from a traveler cataloguing his journey come after 1914—Reginald Fulke's *Africa as I have known it; Nyasaland—East Africa—Liberia—Sénégal*. This piece will be critical in understanding French policy from an outside perspective post 1914.

Ultimately, this examination of French colonialism in West Africa will show that due to the principles and ideals upon which the French republics were founded, French colonialism indeed took a unique shape when compared with other European colonies. I will show that due to the ideas of nationalism, prestige, and republicanism integral to the revolutionary tradition of France, colonialism in Africa truly had a republican basis. This was not a product of economic domination, nor imperial competition, but rather a belief that the grand nation of France had not

only opportunity, but actually an obligation to spread the greatness of their nation throughout the world.

iii. A Note on Marxist Interpretations of French West Africa

While this thesis approaches French West African imperialism from an intellectual and social perspective, I believe I would be remiss if I were not to briefly discuss the economic implications of French colonialism in West Africa, as this is far and away the most common approach to European Imperialism. As mentioned above, there are several books and articles that focus on French West Africa as an exploitative economic venture, and many more that make a comparable case for imperialism in Africa more broadly. While I acknowledge these approaches have their merits and play an important part in the examination of imperialism in Africa, I believe that in the French case, this argument is much weaker. An examination of economic well-being in France during the initial period of colonization under the early Third Republic as well as attitudes regarding the prospects of potential profits in the empire point to the conclusion that there was little confidence that Africa could be a substantial source of income until well into the 20th century. Thus, economic factors and calculations seem unlikely as a motivation for French imperialism in West Africa during its rebirth after 1870 under the Third republic.

Whereas Britain had ridden success in South African mines, as well as in the cultivation of Indian and Egyptian Cotton to become the most economically dominant country in the world¹³, and Belgium had become profitable exporting rubber, France in the early stages of its colonial empire as it existed after 1870, saw little economic success and in fact, experienced a

¹³ For more on Britain's economic dominance as a result of imperialism see Sven Beckart, *Empire of Cotton* in which he attributes the rise of England to "War Capitalism" a process whereby colonial powers exploit weaker countries for economic gain.

great recession, partially as a result of the Franco-Prussian War and partly due to reckless spending in the colonies. Indeed in 1873 in what was known as the “Panic of 1873” much of the Western world entered a lengthy recession. France was hit particularly hard as it had poured great amounts of money into the war and its subsequent loss meant paying some 200 million Francs in reparations to Prussia.¹⁴ This recession would continue well into the 1880’s during the Long Recession and came to a zenith when in 1882 the stock markets in France crashed, sending the already ailing economy reeling.

This economic downturn would only be compounded by reckless spending in the colonies that failed to produce substantial profits. In Indochina, the French spent some 750 million francs in the period from 1870-1895.¹⁵ In the same period the French spent some 732 million in French West Africa.¹⁶ For all their investments, France would see little return. In a period spanning from 1860 to 1890 France’s share of world exports would actually decline from 12.8% to 9.8%.¹⁷ Additionally, French industrial growth would all but stagnate in the early colonial era increasing only 10% between 1875 and 1905, as compared to 113% in Germany and 60% in the United Kingdom. French economic growth actually saw negative rates in 1873, 1877, 1879, and from 1883 to 1885.¹⁸ Traditionally, Marxist analyses of colonialism reason that the exploitation of African resources served two purposes: expanding and creating new markets for goods made in the metropole, and increasing revenue from raw resource exports. Clearly the decline of the French share of international exports as well as industrial stagnation would

¹⁴ Rondo E Cameron, *France and the Economic Development of Europe: 1800-1914: Conquests of Peace and Seeds of War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 70.

¹⁵ Pierre Brocheaux and Daniel Mery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization, 1858-1954* [English-language ed.] (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2009), 78.

¹⁶ Elise Huillery, “The Black Man's Burden: The Cost of Colonization of French West Africa,” *Journal of Economic History* 74 (2014): 22.

¹⁷ Brocheaux, *Indochina; An Ambiguous Colonization*, 13.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

indicate that neither of these goals were likely the aims of French colonialism in West Africa, or if they did play some consideration, then largely failed. The net production of France would continue to decline over the next ten years into the 1890's and would only begin to recover after 1914 with help from wartime mobilization. If we are to assume one of the goals of the Third Republic's mission in West Africa was to bring economic prosperity to the metropole, then certainly this was a massive failure.

Clearly an analysis of economic conditions in France during this early period of African colonization strongly suggests that from an economic standpoint, French West Africa was largely unsuccessful. From this we might surmise that economic opportunity and the sense that West Africa could be exploited for profit was an unlikely motive for French colonization of the area. There are some who argue, however, that retrospective economic analyses do not necessarily point to this conclusion. They would argue that at the time, the French could not possibly have known that their investment would not pay off, and many may have believed that pouring money into the colonies might have saved France from their economic downfall. A brief examination of primary sources during this period, however, suggests that even at the time there was a suspicion that French West Africa would not be profitable, at least not for quite some time.

Consider the English ethnographer Alexander William Michinson who in his book *The expiring continent: a narrative of travel in Senegambia, with observations on native character, the present condition and future prospects of Africa and colonization* took note of the conditions of Senegambia, a region under French control that would eventually become part of the AOF. In his analysis he criticized the French for failing to take advantage of its colonies economically, asserting "The frequent severe lessons taught to France have at last cleared her way to see things in a more proper light. – During the progressive increase of her population, the means of

providing for it by new colonies were neglected; stagnation set in, and revolution followed stagnation.”¹⁹ He continues by asserting that “She has realized the necessity of colonisation, and is now making efforts to settle Senegal, knowing that capital invested is not lost, although no immediate return can be expected.”²⁰ Michinson in this statement is conveying a notion that not only had France failed to profit economically, but there was little sentiment in the country that any return on investments would be realized within the foreseeable future. Of course one ethnographer’s opinion alone does not speak for the entirety of the French nation. In order to examine more closely sentiment among the French as to the economic viability of their imperial venture, we must also examine the position of government officials in France, not only in this pre-war period, but carrying even into the post-war era. Jules Carde, who would serve as Governor General of West Africa from 1923 to 1930 made a brief statement about this very idea in a speech to the metropole cautioning reckless spending in the colonies: “Those who are too impatient will not, as they think, restore the economic and the financial health of our country. They will be cruelly deceived at the expense of criminal waste.”²¹ While Carde certainly does not speak for the entirety of the French nation, the fact that the man in charge of the entire AOF was actually cautioning against spending and expansion, seems to speak strongly to the notion that among French government officials there was hesitancy in pouring more money into the colonies and a belief that this would likely not be economically profitable at least in the short term.

¹⁹ Alexander William Michinson, *The Expiring Continent [microform] a Narrative of Travel in Senegambia, With Observations on Native Character, the Present Condition and Future Prospects of Africa and Colonization* (London: W.H. Allen & Co., 1881), 174.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Jules Carde, *Discours Conseil du Gouvernement. Séance De l’Ouverture Conseil Du Gouvernement*, France: Afrique Occidentale Française. Gouvernement Générale. Dakar: Imprimerie du Gouvernement Générale, Nov 1923.

While France might have come out ahead in the long run, forming favorable trade relations with its West African colonies, it seems that unlike the majority of European powers, the primary motivation for France colonizing Africa was not economic exploitation. Of course there were some French businessmen and private corporations who saw West Africa as a means for economic opportunity. From a governmental perspective, however, it seems unlikely that there was any strong belief in the economic profitability of their West African colonies. It is because of this that I have chosen to look into other motivations for French imperial expansion in West Africa. In examining this I will first look at the condition under which the modern French state was founded and how this ideology would be carried into the Third Republic.

I. The Revolutionary Tradition

Early Imperialism

While the French Revolution of 1789 certainly founded the ideals on which the coming republics would stand, and that would serve as the ideological basis for imperialism under the Third Republic, the Revolution did not, in fact, create the desire to expand overseas. Indeed, France had had an overseas presence since the early 17th century. While this early imperialism would set the precedent for French expansionism, it would be marked by a much more mercantilist approach as compared to the imperial expansion under the republics.

The earliest episode of French imperialism can be traced to the founding of New France in what is modern day Canada with trading posts along the St. Lawrence River. These trading posts would serve both as a location where the French hunters, trappers, and fisherman could exchange fur, fish and other wares with the Native Americans as well as footholds for the later French settlements.²² The first official settlement of New France was Port Royal, founded in 1605 in French Acadia. After this, the French would keep a tenuous hold on its American colonies while trying to fight off British imperialist encroachment in the Americas. In 1713 after losing a series of wars, France ceded Acadia to the British. Later in 1763 after another loss to the British in the French and Indian War, France ceded the remainder of its territory in New France. The dream of an empire in America had finished just as quickly as it had begun, with the important, yet still short-lived exception of course of Louisiana during the Revolutionary Wars.

The French colonies in the Caribbean were similarly mercantilist and yet much more profitable when compared to their North American counterparts. The Compagnie des Îles de l'Amérique or Company of the American Islands founded colonies at Guadeloupe and

²² Barnett Singer and John W. Langdon, *Cultured Force: Makers and Defenders of the French Colonial Empire* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004).

Martinique in 1635 which became extremely profitable due to the importation of slave labor and subsequent exports of sugar from the local plantations. In 1664 France created the colony of Saint-Domingue in modern day Haiti which would prove to be equally (if not more) profitable.²³ Although France would lose Haiti as a colony after the Haitian Revolution of 1804, Guadeloupe and Martinique would remain in French control.

Most important to my examination of West Africa is the conquest of Senegal beginning in the 17th century. The French presence in Senegal began as early as 1659 when a trading port was established at Saint-Louis, which would eventually become one of the four communes of Senegal after its incorporation into the AOF in 1895. In 1677 after a successful campaign in the Franco-Dutch War, the French were also able to capture the Island of Gorée as well as the city of Dakar.²⁴ In addition to these three regions, French merchants would have considerable influence in the Rufisque Region. These four cities—Saint-Louis, Dakar, Rufisque, and Gorée constitute what would become known as the Four Communes of Senegal, or the oldest existing spheres of French influence. Africans originally born in one of these four cities came to be known as *originaires* and were considered to be the most loyal and receptive to French culture; as such they would enjoy special status not only among African colonial subjects but even among other colonies within the AOF. While the inhabitants of these colonies would remain subjects and in the Caribbean case slaves for many years to come, these native inhabitants and their respective rights were certainly on the minds of the revolutionaries, as we will see shortly.

²³ Doris Lorraine Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

²⁴ Boubacar Barry, *The Kingdom of Waalo: Senegal before the Conquest* (New York: Diasporic Africa Press, 2012).

The French Revolution and the Colonies

The year 1789 is perhaps the most important year in French history. This is the year in which France would declare the absolute sovereignty of their monarchs illegitimate insisting instead upon the rights of the individual and the formation of a constitutional state. The republican values as well as the strong French nationalism espoused in this Revolution would become the basis for the founding of each of France's subsequent republics. These revolutionary ideals, however, were not limited to the metropole. Indeed 1789 proved to be a watershed year for colonial France as well, as the values of the Revolution would be the basis on which French colonialism under the French republics derived its legitimacy. As we will see, the republicanism and French nationalism espoused by the Revolution, would be crucial in shaping French colonial discourse.

While the French Revolution is traditionally dated from the fourteenth of July 1789 with the storming of the Bastille, historians largely agree that it had its origins well before this day. Indeed even before King Louis XVI had taken the throne in 1774 France was on the verge of a financial crisis, the populace was largely dissatisfied with their lack of representation in government (while the Estates General had not actually met since 1614 there was still a sense among the French that a restored Estates General could solve the problems caused by ineffective monarchs) and talk of revolution was already in the air.²⁵ The years of 1789-1792 saw an uprising against the crown and a brief period in which France would attempt to create a constitutional monarchy with King Louis XVI sharing power with the National Assembly. It quickly became clear that Louis would not effectively share power and that the moderate revolution could not succeed in bringing republicanism to France (as the more radical

²⁵ William Doyle, *Origins of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

revolutionaries wished). The uprising of 10 August 1792 ended the liberal phase of the Revolution and ushered in the years of the First Republic. On the seventeenth of January, 1793, Louis XVI was condemned to death and only four days later on the 21st of January, he was executed in the courtyard at Place de la Révolution. This very same year saw the creation of France's first republican constitution, known commonly as the Constitution of Year I. This constitution, and the several that would follow it, proclaimed the very republican values for which the Revolution was fought and established the basis for the French republics.

“Liberté, égalité, fraternité,” a phrase first uttered by Robespierre in 1790 would become the unofficial rallying cry of the Revolution. This phrase is just one of the many examples of Enlightenment thinking that both spurred and would become prominent in the Revolution. This Enlightenment thought on which the new French Republic was founded proclaimed that all men were born free and with certain inalienable rights, and would directly influence the way in which colonies were viewed in French discourse. Indeed, perhaps the most prominent of writings during the Revolution, “The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen” was inspired by Enlightenment writers such as Rousseau and Montesquieu. This document proclaimed “Men are born and remain free and equal in rights,” and that “The goal of any political association is the conservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, safety and resistance against oppression.”²⁶ The document also declared that “The goal of any political association is the conservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, safety and resistance against oppression.”²⁷

²⁶ Encyclopædia Britannica Online, s. v. "Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen", accessed February 24, 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Declaration-of-the-Rights-of-Man-and-of-the-Citizen>.

²⁷ Ibid.

While this document was written before the First Republic and its values were not explicitly republican, the ideals espoused in this document including that of state sovereignty, individual liberty, and freedom of expression are recognizable as the key principles upon which French Republicanism was based and they would be the very same principles upon which the later republics would be founded. Indeed, even during the early years of the French Revolution, during which the French installed a constitutional monarchy, ideas of republicanism were beginning to grow. In 1791 during a debate in the National Assembly regarding the powers of the monarch under the new constitution the idea of a monarchical veto was proposed. One (perhaps slightly more radical) member of the assembly, Jacques Pierre Brissot argued against granting the monarch any sort of veto on the grounds that it would be a “threat treasonable against the sovereignty of the people and public freedom.”²⁸ While the Revolution of 1789 would not explicitly advocate for republicanism, it did see the earliest proclamations of values that would later be considered republican in nature, and would be the basis for republican constitutions.

This set of ideals would be somewhat problematic in the colonies where men were neither free, nor equal in rights. While wealthy French plantation owners opposed the idea of representation extending to all people within the colonies, the ideals of the Revolution soon spread throughout the French colonies. Several of the most prominent members in the National Assembly belonged to the Society of the Friends of Blacks and almost immediately began advocating that blacks be granted civil and political rights, as did many members of the French metropole in the years before and during the Revolution. As early as 1790, a newspaper in France wrote: “The patriots of the colonies are not yet up to the level of the French Revolution.

²⁸ Quoted in Leigh Ann Whaley, *Radicals: Politics and Republicanism in the French Revolution* (Stroud: Sutton, 2000).

Everybody wants them to have liberty, but they refuse the rights of citizenship to colored people and they want to perpetuate slavery and the slave trade.” This newspaper continued, “The New order of things will rise up... We dare to predict with confidence that the time will come, and that day is not far off, when you will see a frizzy-haired African, with no other recommendation than his good sense and his virtues, come and participate in the legislative process at the heart of our national assemblies.”²⁹

Shortly after the creation of the first republican constitution in 1793 (following the downfall of the constitutional monarchy), the National Convention set to work on establishing the republican liberties of all members of the colonies. Indeed, in 1794 just one year after the National Convention drafted the Constitution of Year I (which was written but never promulgated) the assembly abolished slavery and declared that “all men resident in the colonies, without distinction of color, are French citizens and enjoy all the rights assured by the Constitution.”³⁰ While the residents of the colonies would not actually enjoy the full rights of French Citizenship for quite some time (indeed they were given representation in the metropole but were still disenfranchised), this decree both outlawed slavery and set the precedent for the extension of Republican principles to the French colonies. Just one year later, the new Constitution of Year III declared the colonies to be “integral parts of the Republic.”³¹ These policies would serve as the precursor for the policy of assimilation and later association under the Third Republic.

²⁹ "No Color Bar," *Les Révolutions De Paris, Dédiées à La Nation* (Paris), September 5, 1790, 63rd ed. Accessed February 24, 2016. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1051028x.item>.

³⁰ Martin Deming Lewis, *One Hundred Million Frenchmen: The "assimilationist" Theory in French Colonial Policy* (Hague: Mouton, 1962), 134.

³¹ *Ibid.*

This extension of rights and revolutionary ideals to the colonies of course had its limits. The Society of the Friends of Blacks, one of the most significant abolitionist groups in Europe, made similar assertions about the nature of the French Revolution and its implications for blacks in the colonies, stating that abolitionism “only derives its mission from the humanity that induced it to defend the blacks even under the past despotism.” Recalling the ideals of the Revolution, they continued “You have declared them, these rights; you have engraved on an immortal monument that all men are born and remain free and equal in rights; You have broken the chains of feudalism that still degraded a good number of our fellow citizens; you have announced the destruction of all the stigmatizing distinctions that religious or political prejudices introduced into the great family of humankind.”³² Despite this proclamation of revolutionary ideals in the colonies, the Society still asserted “We are not asking you to restore to French blacks those political rights which alone, nevertheless, attest to and maintain the dignity of man; we are not even asking for their liberty.”³³ Indeed while the freedom of the slaves in the colonies was among the first concern of the revolutionaries in regards to the colonies, the proposed liberties did not extend much beyond freedom. Indeed, the colonies would be granted representation in the metropole but would still not be granted the rights of full citizenship. Still, this established a precedent for the future of the rights of those in the colonies.

Writing on the Revolution a century later, Arthur Girault asserted, “The Revolution had established the equality of all Frenchmen, and the rights which it proclaimed were in its thought the same for all men without distinction of latitude. What could have been more natural?” Indeed it seems that the republican principles of the French Revolution would expand throughout

³² Society of the Friends of Blacks, "Address to the National Assembly in Favor of the Abolition of the Slave Trade" (5 February 1790) in Lynn Hunt, *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History* (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1996).

³³ Ibid.

France's global territory. The ideas of the right to be born and remain free, the right to national self-determination, and the protection against exploitation would not end the French colonial venture by any means. They would, however, provide context and reason to future colonizing efforts, and a framework within which the French would operate in their republican civilizing mission in West Africa.

In addition to establishing the republican principles on which later colonialism would be founded, the Revolution also had the effect of creating an intense and widespread sense of French nationalism. Indeed, the Revolution solidified in the minds of many people that France was in some way an exceptional country, and that its people were blessed with a cultural and political superiority. Indeed many historians argue that the Revolution gave birth to modern French nationalism and that "by the second half of the eighteenth century, there was a yawning emotional void, left by the discredited notions of God and king. And the idea of the nation, *la patrie*, was beginning to fill this void."³⁴ It is in this context that Jacques Godechot would write *La Grande Nation* in which he claimed the French were the foremost people of the universe" and "had an obligation to carry their revolutionary ideals beyond France's borders"³⁵

The ideals that both influenced and came about as a result of the French Revolution of 1789 laid the foundation for the republican principles that would be the basis for future imperialism, as we will see later in this examination. The Revolution also created the modern sense of nationalism in France that would become so important in French imperial conquest as the French sought to expand the greatness of their civilization throughout the world. It seems that

³⁴ Geoffrey Best, *The Permanent Revolution: The French Revolution and Its Legacy, 1789-1989* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1989), 19.

³⁵ Jacques Godechot, *La Grande Nation: L'expansion Révolutionnaire de La France Dans le Monde 1789-1799 Tomes I and II* (Paris: Aubier Editions Montaigne, 1956).

these two notions, although born out of the same tradition, would often conflict in colonial practice, especially in the character of the *mise en valeur* mission.

Republicanism Interrupted & Revisited

The Revolution of 1789 and subsequent First Republic provided only temporary relief from authoritarian rulers. Indeed the next century would see the republicanism introduced by the Revolution discarded several times by powerful authoritarian rulers. Each time a power shift would occur from republican to authoritarian principles, the colonial policy of France would reflect this shift. Republican governments inspired and came to be associated with liberal policies and republican principles toward men in the colonies, whereas authoritarian rule saw a regression in policy.

Napoleon Bonaparte was the first of these authoritarian rulers to suppress the rights of those in the colonies. Napoleon, who served on the side of the revolutionary troops during the Revolution of 1789, rose to power as a consul beginning 1799. As First Consul, Napoleon claimed to uphold republican principles in the colonies declaring “The Consuls declare that the sacred principles of the liberty and equality of the black peoples will never undergo any threat or modification among you . . .if there are any who maintain relations with the enemy powers, remember brave blacks, that the French people alone recognize your freedom and the equality of your rights.”³⁶ Only three years later, however, Napoleon reversed this decision, reinstating slavery in the empire, declaring “How could I grant freedom to Africans, to utterly uncivilized men who did not even know what a colony was, what France was?”³⁷ Once Napoleon became

³⁶ Andrea Stuart, *Josephine: The Rose of Martinique* (London: Pan, 2004), 297.

³⁷ William B. Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530-1880* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 119.

emperor at the creation of the French First Empire in 1804, he continued to create race-based legislation, moving further away from the Republican ideals of the Revolution. Napoleon began this campaign by suppressing representation from the colonies in the assembly. Citizens of Guadeloupe and Martinique were no longer granted permission to enter France, miscegenation was outlawed, and any white woman found to have had sexual relations with a black man was to be immediately deported. He also issued a decree that would be upheld until 1818, stating that no men from Senegal would be allowed in France.³⁸

Napoleon was deposed and exiled, first to Elba in 1814 and then again to St. Helena in 1815 after the Hundred Days in which he briefly restored the First Empire. Thereafter, France entered a period of stagnation in terms of its republican principles with the Bourbon Restoration and the conservative reaction to Napoleon that returned France to a monarchy, albeit a constitutional monarchy. Still it seems the revolutionary spirit would live on in the colonies. Indeed, in Senegal in 1823, the minister of the navy proclaimed “The prejudice of color hardly exists, the European allies himself with the Native of color without contravening any deep seated prejudices. The Native of color occupies the same rights as the European and even occupies public office.”³⁹

The revolutionary spirit that inspired the First Republic would resurface, if only temporarily, in 1848, the year in which Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte rose to become president of the newly created Second Republic. Almost immediately upon the creation of this republic, republican ideals and policies were restored to the colonies. That very same year, the Second Republic again freed all slaves in the colonies, established universal male suffrage, and reinstated the colonies’ representation in the French government. The Second Republic would

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Quoted in Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans*, 121.

also for the first time, extend full citizenship rights to those born in the four communes of Senegal.

While the Second Republic reasserted for a short time the republican ideals the French held so closely in their colonies, the Republic itself lasted only three years before Louis-Napoleon appointed himself emperor beginning with a coup d'état in 1851, ending the Second Republic. While the ideas of republicanism and nationalism would not be revisited in the colonies for several decades, the First and Second Republics set the precedent for republican ideas and practices in the colonies. Even though the French Third Republic (1870-1940) certainly took part in the scramble for Africa that occurred in the late 19th and early 20th century, their imperial conquest took an ideological approach distinctly different from that of other European colonizers, yet similar to that of the previous two French republics. The ideas created as a result of the French Revolution and the establishment of subsequent republics carried into the Third Republic and heavily influenced colonial policy in French West Africa. Indeed, the revolutionary tradition, born of the Revolution of 1789, included a sense of nationalism and republicanism, and would remain in the French consciousness, as was reflected in the colonial discourse of the *Afrique Occidentale Française*.

II The Republican Mission in French West Africa pre-1914

As was briefly touched on earlier, and as we will see shortly, 1914 was a watershed year for France, and perhaps the most historically significant year since 1789 when the Revolution created the principles upon which the republican values animating France's colonial empire would be founded. 1914 was the year in which France became entangled in World War I; it was also the year in which Africans were first required to provide military service to France. With this in mind, my examination of the condition of French imperialism in West Africa will be divided into three sections. The first will detail the condition of the republican mission prior to 1914, the second will examine what happened during and just after World War I that caused this paradigm shift within the government of the AOF that saw a new policy that gave more respect to African institutions, and the third will detail how the changes made in the interwar years (until 1930) only served to strengthen the republican quality of the French mission.

The French Third Republic and the Origin of the Republican Civilizing Mission

As historian Martin Deming Lewis notes, the French Third Republic (founded 1870) was not born of revolutionary zeal nor strong ideological belief but rather somewhat out of necessity.⁴⁰ The year 1870, the year in which the republic was founded, saw the fall of Emperor Napoleon III and subsequently the loss of the Franco Prussian War. The Third Republic, unlike the two republics preceding it, was not formed by revolution, and didn't have the same ideological fervor. Instead, the Republic developed more slowly, and it would be some time before the republic, still ailing from war losses and the divisiveness caused by the Paris Commune and without sufficient enthusiasm, would have any sort of resources or time to give to

⁴⁰ Lewis, *One Hundred Million Frenchmen*, 136.

colonial problems. Aside from immediately reinstating the colonies' representation in the National Assembly which had been revoked under Napoleon III, little attention was given to the colonies for the first decade of the Third Republic. Despite what little attention was given to the colonies by the government of France, interest in the colonies, especially in West Africa, continued to flourish in Europe thanks to the growth of geographical societies.

Indeed it is said that the first mention of the republican civilizing mission came not from the government of France, but from those who either represented or were intrigued by geographic societies and their calls to expand exploration in Africa. These Geographic societies claimed that not only would exploration of West Africa be beneficial for academic sake but would provide new locations in which France could expand their civilizing mission. One such geographic society published an article in the Paris Newspaper the *Bulletin* calling for increased exploration of the African interior stating "one dreams of when France can finally possess a greater colonial empire than at present." Indeed they believed expansion in Africa would be necessary in order to "contribute to the knowledge of the earth and its inhabitants...and to augment her prosperity and open new fields for her civilizing mission."⁴¹ In addition to relaying the importance of geographic societies in the birth of the republican civilizing mission, this statement shows how closely tied the ideas of expansionism, republicanism, and nationalism were. Furthermore these geographic societies were crucial in relaying the notion that the civilizing mission was not a superfluous task but rather that "France was called to assume her part in this important pacific invasion of Africa...It is her duty to contribute to this work of civilization."⁴² Indeed, many people in France began to believe that as a great and modern Republican nation, France was actually obliged to spread its civilization. This belief was only

⁴¹ *Bulletin de la Société de géographie commerciale de Paris*. (Paris, Au siège de la société), I (1879). 5.

⁴² Louis Degrande, "Chronique Géographique," *Bulletin* (Lyon), III (1879), 90.

compounded by French perceptions of Africans within the colonies. Many of France's upper class citizens, already convinced of the necessity of the civilizing mission began relaying the idea that Africans were poor, destitute, and completely without civilization. The press and schools in France also continued to perpetrate the notion that Africans were people without civilization. Textbooks, for example, contained a message of France being "a republic generous to all, including benighted savages."⁴³

The geographical societies may have laid the foundation for the civilizing mission, but it would not be long before the republican government of France, still being governed by notions of the rights of man, would take up this cause. Early politicians, influenced by the notion that black Africans were without civilization saw it as their moral duty to provide their African subjects with a better quality of life via the civilizing mission. Additionally, in 1879 republican candidates gained a majority in the Chamber of Deputies for the first time, allowing for more overtly republican policies to be passed. As we will see briefly, this would be the beginning of the new republican mission in West Africa.

The Afrique Occidentale Française and Rebirth of Republicanism

Perhaps the first government official not only to accept this notion of a French obligation to expand and colonize, but to actively encourage it was Prime Minister Jules Ferry. Serving as prime minister from 1880-1881 and then again from 1883-1885, Ferry was a strong supporter of colonial expansion, especially as the scramble for Africa would commence following the Berlin Conference of 1885 during which major European powers met to discuss the future of Africa. Representing the Opportunist Republican Party, Ferry was very receptive to the idea that it was

⁴³ Quoted in Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*, 13.

Republican France's obligation to spread the greatness of their nation to those seen as without civilization. Indeed, during Ferry's first tenure as prime minister he made it clear that he supported this mission stating, "We must believe that if providence deigned to confer upon us a mission by making us masters of the earth, this mission consists of not attempting an impossible fusion of the races, but simply spreading or awakening among the other races, the superior notions of which we are the guardians."⁴⁴ Not only did Ferry advocate the civilizing mission on republican grounds, he also seems to have believed that it was France's duty to expand simply because of a notion that the French nation was somehow exceptional. Indeed, in a statement on the condition of French colonization in West Africa, Ferry states the mission "is something else to France: [France] can not be only a free country; it must also be a great country, exercising the destinies of Europe and all the influence that she has. She must spread her influence on the world, and bring wherever she may, her language, her customs, her flag, her weapons, and her genius."⁴⁵ Jules Ferry might have been the first statesman of France to advocate for this republican civilizing mission on the grounds that it was France's duty both as a republican nation and as an exceptional people.

Whereas Senegal had come under French control after years of cooperation and trade between French and Senegalese merchants, the rest of French West Africa was hard fought. After several bloody campaigns in the 1880's and early 1890's in places including Côte d'Ivoire, Mauritania, Guinea, Niger, Liberia and the Sudan, France had finally conquered a great territory spanning the majority of West Africa. In order to consolidate control over these contiguous territories, France appointed a single head, the Governor General of West Africa, headquartered

⁴⁴ Jules Ferry, *Livre Discours Et Opinions De Jules Ferry. Discours Sur La Politique Extérieure Et Coloniale France. Afrique Occidentale Française* (Gouvernement Generale.. Dakar: Impremirie Du Gouvernement Generale, 1897).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 220.

in the newly created capital of Dakar. With this action in 1895, the Afrique Occidentale Française, or AOF was created. From its inception, it became clear that the policy of the AOF would reflect strongly the ideals of a Republican obligation to civilize. In fact, the very first Governor General of French West Africa, Ernest Roume, when presenting the initial proposal for the creation of the AOF stated “If France were to have no other objective or ambition in West Africa than to maintain order among the native population in order to promote commerce, the need for a federal framework could legitimately be contested. But we have a higher ambition and a significantly broader intention: we wish to truly open Africa to Civilization.”⁴⁶ Roume and his expansionist ideals as well as his commitment to the French obligation to civilize would create a precedent for future Governors General and for the AOF as a whole, establishing that the purpose of the French in West Africa was first and foremost to fulfil the civilizing mission bestowed upon France.

Another critical piece of the reaffirmation of the republican mission in French West Africa was the advent of the policy of *assimilation*. The purpose of this policy, as one Frenchman put it was to “Move in [sic] our institutions so that [Africans] create a new mentality closer to ours.”⁴⁷ The policy of assimilation was certainly not unprecedented. In fact, it had its origins under the revolutionary government. As mentioned earlier, the revolutionary government, according to ideas of Republicanism under the Rights of Man and Citizen granted the subjects of the colonies full citizenship and claimed that they were to enjoy all of the same rights and privileges as Frenchmen. While the promise of full citizenship was not fulfilled even at this point in time, the idea that colonial subjects were, in theory, French, would set the precedent for the

⁴⁶ Ernest Roume, *Discours Prononcé Par M. E. Roume. Séance De l’Ouverture Conseil Du Gouvernement France: Afrique Occidentale Française. Gouvernement Générale. Dakar: Imprimerie Du Gouvernement Générale, 1904.*

⁴⁷ M. Couillault, *Des Institutions d’Assistance et de Prévoyance Mises à La Disposition Des Indigènes, Afrique Occidentale Française. Poitiers: Imprimerie Maurice Bousrez, 1914.*

policy of assimilation. Under this policy, all people in the colonies were considered French, if not in citizenship then as French subjects, and as such were expected to assimilate to French ideals. Included in this was the idea that the Africans should accept French institutions, be loyal to the French flag and nation, learn the French language and in all practical senses, be black Frenchmen rather than Africans. It was under this policy that much of the practices of French West Africa would occur. As I will point out, this policy was not only crucial to fulfilling the republican civilizing mission before 1914, it also served as a vehicle for the assertion of French Nationalism and prestige abroad.

The Role of Prejudice, Paternalism, and Coercion in the Civilizing Mission

Despite the oft prevailing stereotype of France as the most altruistic empire thanks to its liberal policies throughout history, this civilizing mission was often far from altruistic and was likely more self-serving than French official policy might have admitted. Indeed, while some believed the civilizing mission could be carried out without violence, others thought bloodshed might be necessary. In fact, one reporter of the French newspaper the *Revue du Monde* claimed, “If in these immense regions where only fanaticism and brigandage reign today, [France] were to bring—even at the price of spilled blood—peace, commerce, and tolerance, who could say that this was a poor use of force?”⁴⁸ This statement conveys the often precarious position of the AOF, often referred to by historians as the “colonial double bind” in which the Republic proclaimed the rights of man and a mission to help Africans, while on the ground representatives of the Republic continued to show racism and ill treatment toward their African counterparts. From the French perspective during this period, however, this treatment of Africans was seemingly not at

⁴⁸ Quoted in Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*, 13.

odds with their republican obligation. If anything, it seems to have strengthened opportunities to assert French cultural dominance. This following sections will examine the so-called colonial double bind and how it served as a vehicle for the republican mission before policy would begin to shift following World War I.

Despite the self-proclaimed altruism of the French mission in West Africa, the very notion of the civilizing mission itself hinged upon the idea that the French knew what was best for the colonized and that their French civilization was superior to any institutions of Africa (which they believed at this point did not actually exist.) While this mission was certainly an expression of republican principles, it still carried expressions of racism and was above all paternalistic. While at a policy level, France was proclaiming their mission of altruism, we must look at the actions of the French on the ground in order to get a true sense of how the mission played out. One needs not look far in chronicles of French West Africa to see this racism in action. While certainly not appearing in government documents (which maintained the guise of an altruistic empire) travel chronicles of French West Africa indicate that expressions of racism did in fact take place.

Alexander Michinson, an English ethnographer, chronicled his journey of French West Africa in his book *The Expiring Continent* giving a critical view of what he saw to be a continent plagued by savagery. On more than one occasion he noted that the French settlers were often much less altruistic than official policy would indicate. He claimed that among the French there are notions that “Some [Africans] are lazy, ragged people, but behave civilly and do no harm; others are simply rogues, thieves, and inveterate liars.”⁴⁹ He also noted that many of the French settlers he came across believed “The freedmen of Senegambia, who have adopted Christianity,

⁴⁹ Michinson, *The Expiring Continent*, 166.

are, for the most part, if possible, more lazy, independent, and impracticable than the rest of the natives” and that “Their perverseness fully accounts for the regrets of some of the traders for the old days when niggers, more or less, did what they were required to do, and when business, in consequence, went merrily forward.”⁵⁰ In addition to casual expressions of racism there was a notion that since Africans were lazy, it was the responsibility of the French to inculcate in them a work ethic to allow them to have a better life. In one of Roume’s early speeches he conveyed a concern about the lack of infrastructure and the plausibility of making Africans develop it on their own, claiming, “The General Government is concerned about this situation and is studying ways to build reserves, forcing the natives to rebuild the colonies.”⁵¹

This expression of racism and paternalism, however, was not at odds with the civilizing mission, or the urge to spread the principles of republicanism. Rather, in several ways this paternalism was actually a crucial part of the assimilation policy as well as the desire to spread French ideals. Indeed, there was a notion that forced labor and pacification (a colonial phrase used to describe violent suppression of African rebellion) through violent means would be necessary to acculturate the Africans according to the ideas of assimilation. One Frenchman, Gabriel Louis Angoulvant, who was best-known for his pacification campaign in Côte d’Ivoire and would later become interim Governor General for the AOF affirmed this notion stating “We must completely modify the black mentality in order to be understood...let us be honest: at present the native is still detached from our institutions, for a long time yet it will be necessary for our subjects to be brought to progress against their will.”⁵² In this statement, Angoulvant was clearly conveying the notion that force and coercion would be necessary to completely assimilate

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Carde, *Discours Conseil Du Gouvernement*, 20.

⁵² Quoted in Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*, 215.

the Africans and have them accept the customs of the French. Indeed, while many Frenchmen thought coercion to be unpalatable, there was a strong notion that force, coercion, and even violence were the most plausible methods of spreading French civilization to the Africans.

Another interesting factor to the role of prejudice in Africa, and whether or not this was at odds with French colonial policy is the strong elitist overtones that seem to have been inseparable from the racism present in Africa. Indeed, as Eugen Weber notes in his book *Peasants into Frenchmen*, there was a sort of civilizing mission happening even in the motherland toward those in the countryside, who consisted of white French citizens. He notes that one Burgundian man upon examining the conditions of the French countryside claimed “You don’t need to go to America to see savages. Here are the redskins of Fennimore Cooper.”⁵³ During the 19th century, the civilizing mission seems to have applied not just to colonial holdings, but was also evident in policy toward the French within France’s borders. Prime Minister Léon Gambetta even stated “the peasants were intellectually several centuries behind the enlightened part of the country...there is an enormous distance between us, between those who speak our language and many of our compatriots.” He believed that the French civilizing mission would “become the means of their moral progress, that is, their civilization.”⁵⁴ This statement bears a strong resemblance to the policy of the AOF in the colonies, including the notion that the population in need (either the Africans or rural peasantry) was intellectually inferior, was culturally inferior due to their inability to speak French, and were altogether in need of civilization. What’s also critical to note is the use of the word “savage” and other such derogatory words and phrases one typically finds in colonial discourse for describing native

⁵³ Quoted in Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1976. Print.), 1.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

populations, although in France this terminology was applied freely to white Frenchmen as well. Many Frenchmen expressed their disdain for those in the countryside who were said to have “terrible ignorance, superstition and dirt” as well as being “lazy, greedy, avaricious, suspicious” and living in “miserable savagery.”⁵⁵ Of course the fact that the French held a similarly disdainful, paternalistic attitude toward the French peasants that they did toward Africans doesn’t excuse the racism present in French Africa. What it does show, however, is that the French assumption of African indolence was not exclusively based on race, and was in fact in some ways inseparable from notions of elitism that existed in Republican France.

Ultimately it seems that the prejudice that likely existed on the ground in French West Africa was not entirely at odds with the notions of French republicanism and nationalism on which the AOF was founded. Rather, this assertion about the inferiority of Africans was just one expression of the Republican mission, in that the French seem to truly have believed that in order to raise the well-being of Africans, they would need to do so even if it was against the will of their subjects. Indeed the French civilizing mission still strongly held notions of republicanism—that all men were sovereign in their bodies, born entitled to certain natural rights including the right to liberty and self-determination. From the French perspective prior to 1914, however, the Africans were simply not civilized enough, and lived in such abject poverty that they could not exercise their right to liberty, and it was the responsibility of Republican France to ensure this to Africans.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 4.

Mise en Valeur Pre-1914

While coercion and prejudice were certainly a critical piece of the policy of the AOF prior to 1914, they were not the centerpiece of the French mission. The centerpiece of the civilizing mission would be the *mise en valeur* of the AOF. The phrase *mise en valeur* is a difficult one to translate and most historians simply translate it as “development.” Historian Alice Conklin translates it to mean “rational economic development” and asserts that it included a notion of “progress” in the colonies. Although this is the closest approximation of the phrase in English, it fails to capture the full value of what this phrase meant. It was not simply development of the colonies, but tangible economic transition which included the imposition of French institutions and infrastructure onto Africa, that would be mutually beneficial to both the Africans and French settlers. This *mise en valeur* mission would see France building railroads, schools, hospitals and other such institutions that the French saw as staples of modern civilization. It is in this development that we see the republican civilizing mission begin in earnest in West Africa. Not only did this serve as tangible confirmation that the republican mission in Africa was in the process of being fulfilled, it also allowed the imposition of French institutions on Africa and in turn, allowed the French to assert the superiority of their nation and confer those ideals onto a receptive population. I will be examining three institutions that were among the primary concern to the AOF in their *mise en valeur* mission; railroads, schools, and hospitals.

Much like the notable similarities between perceptions of the French peasantry in the countryside and the Africans in the colonies, the *mise en valeur* mission would also see great similarities in the colonies and at home. This similarity is illustrated perfectly in the case of railroads. The idea that railroads were an instrument of civilization was certainly not

unprecedented, not only because railroads were being built throughout the African colonies, but because even prior to the civilizing mission in Africa, France had experimented with railroads as a way to liberate the “savages” of their own countryside and introduce them to civilization.

Indeed one French Colonel in 1857 expressed the hope that “railways might improve the lot of populations two or three centuries behind their fellows and eliminate the savage instincts born of isolation and misery.”⁵⁶ Clearly, from the French perspective, the savagery they saw in both the French countryside as well as their African colonies was a product of isolation and the fact that Africans could not improve their lot in life unless they were to be connected with the rest of the world, in this case through railroads. This idea in mainland France that railroads were crucial to civilizing those who were so isolated would carry into French policy in the AOF where they also saw the people as isolated and in need of civilization.

From the earliest stages of the *mise en valeur* mission it became apparent that railroads would likely be the best way to allow civilization to reach and spread throughout France’s colonies. At this point it seems necessary to discuss the traditional Marxist interpretation of what the railroad meant in an imperial African context and how the French case seems to differ. Typically, railroads built in colonies whose sole purpose was the exploitation of African resources ran from centers of production directly to the coast where goods would be unloaded and sent on cargo ships for use and trade in Europe. Because of this, railroads in many areas of Africa have long been seen as remnants and reminders of the exploitative power of colonialism.⁵⁷ France, by contrast, seemed to have little interest in facilitating trade and transport to the coast on any large scale. While the peanut industry had just begun to flourish beginning

⁵⁶ Quoted in Weber, *Peasants Into Frenchmen*, 4.

⁵⁷ For more on this argument see Charles Miller, *The Lunatic Express: An Entertainment in Imperialism* (New York: Macmillan, 1971).

around 1902, and palm oil production was on the rise, this was about the extent of trade that existed as a result of French efforts.⁵⁸ Because of the lack of largescale industry or production that would benefit the AOF it seems unlikely that the railroads would serve as a link to the coast for the exploitation of resources. Furthermore, railways built in French West Africa were unlike those in other parts of the continent in that they connected not only centers of production to the coast, but also connected the most populous settlements in the federation including railroads connecting St. Louis to Dakar Senegal, to Cote D'Ivoire, and even to French Guinea.⁵⁹

Furthermore, as we will see shortly, there was a notion among the government of the AOF that a railroad should be beneficial to the people of the colonies. Indeed, despite traditional notions of railroads that exist in imperial history, France seems once again to have been an exception in that the railroads of West Africa seem to have been a product of a legitimate *mise en valeur* mission facilitating communication and trade even within the continent. It seems to have been the idea of republican France that if the Africans were to remain isolated from the (primarily western) world, they could not exercise their rights as free men.

Ernest Roume in one of his early speeches relayed this need for railroads in order for France, and its colonial officials, to complete their republican obligation, stating “We wish to truly open up to civilization the immense regions that the foresight of our statesmen and the bravery of our explorers and soldiers have bequeathed to us; we have to not only work for the present, but to prepare for the future... The necessary condition for achieving this goal is the creation of lines of penetration, a perfected means of transport to make up for the absence of

⁵⁸ Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*, 216.

⁵⁹ Ernest Roume, *Discours Prononcé Par M. E. Roume. Séance De l'Ouverture Conseil Du Gouvernement*. France. Afrique Occidentale Française. Gouvernement Générale. Dakar: Imprimerie Du Gouvernement Générale, 1903. For a list of railways run and operated by the AOF see Jules Carde, *L'Afrique Occidentale française*, (Vie Technique, Paris, 1926) 32.

natural means of communication that has kept this country in barbarism and poverty for so long.”⁶⁰ Indeed in the early years of the AOF, thousands of miles of railroads were built connecting not only major settlements to the coast but connecting major settlements to each other as well. Roume and the AOF’s idea of using trains and railways to facilitate opening Africa to civilization seems to have worked in the sense that the railways were expanding almost daily. As for its desired effects, it is difficult to measure empirically whether the railroad objectively opened Africa to civilization or to what extent this actually affected the quality of life of the Africans.

In defining the purpose of the railways Roume explained, “It is desirable that each of the colonies of French West Africa benefits from the presence of the railways and public works.” Furthermore, he points out that railroads would facilitate access to schools, which “would form more intelligent young workers who could be sent to Dakar and perfect it.”⁶¹ From this, it seems the primary goal of the railroads was to allow for easier access to education and the spreading of western institutions to the interior of France. As I will discuss, the deliberate attempt to educate the working class in western, and especially French, institutions was one way in which the French asserted cultural superiority, and in some ways seems at odds with their republican mission. On one hand Roume expressed a desire for the railroads to benefit the colonies, while on the other it is clear that he sees this not entirely as an altruistic mission, but one from which the French could benefit. At this point chronologically it is still unclear whether the building of railroads to open West Africa to civilization could be deemed a success, and it is still unclear what a French-educated African intellectual class would look like on the ground. In order to

⁶⁰ Roume, *Discours prononcé par M.E. Roume*, 10.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 24. Note, it is unclear whether the “it” at the end of his statement refers to the railroad system or the schooling system. Ultimately the sentiment is that education will serve to increase the *Mise En Valeur* of Africa without putting more French money into the mission.

discover this, I will examine the effects and persistence of this institution and its confluence with education post-World War I.

In addition to the railroads as a means of opening up Africa to civilization, there was a belief that the *mise en valeur* mission should include an improved medical system for the people of Africa. Hospitals and medical stations in West Africa were hardly new. In fact, as M. Couillault, a colonial officer wrote in his report *Des Institutions d'assistance et de prévoyance mises à la disposition des indigènes de l'Afrique occidentale française*, "Of all the institutions created for the indigenous people, medical assistance is certainly the oldest. For each of our colonies it dates back to the time of the first occupation." He also clarifies that "when a station was created the importance of which required a physician, he was asked not only to give attention to officers and civilian officials serving at this position, but also to indigenous people around the area."⁶² Couillault's statement is important in understanding the condition of medical assistance in French West Africa in that it relays a belief that at least in some small part, there was concern for the African people in the colonies. Moreover, this effort to improve and create medical facilities in the colonies would become part of the centerpiece of the *mise en valeur* in West Africa. Indeed just two years after the creation of the AOF, Governor General Jules Ferry asked for enough funding to "construct the necessary lines of communication, build barracks and hospitals open this too dense population" and continued that "public works, that's sustainable peace, that's the true and definitive definition of occupation."⁶³ Clearly, even for the earliest officials of the AOF, building hospitals and improving medical conditions would be primary among their concerns.

⁶² Couillault, *Des Institutions D'Assistance Et De Prévoyance Mises à La Disposition des Indigènes Afrique Occidentale Française* (Poitiers: Imprimerie Maurice Bousrez, 1911), 16.

⁶³ Jules Ferry, *Livre Discours de Jules Ferry*, 564.

Despite the apparent humanitarian nature of building hospitals, the medical piece of the French *mise en Valeur* was not entirely for the sake of the Africans, and certainly carried assertions of French superiority. Indeed, as Couillault continues his report he claims that medical institutions were necessary to “alleviate suffering and curb the plagues that descended on the abandoned native due to the crude empiricism of black healers.” He continues by dismissing “this indigenous caste of Black healers, sorcerers whose ambition, greed and tyranny are second only to a complete ignorance of the first principles of the same art they claim to exercise.”⁶⁴ Indeed, until this point, all doctors were recruited from the metropole. It was required that the “Individual must be French or naturalized French and provided the French degree of doctor of medicine. They must, in addition, hold a special certificate issued by institutes of colonial medicine, such as those of Paris, Bordeaux, Marseille or have equivalent guarantees.”⁶⁵ The notion that Africans could potentially become full doctors was nearly unheard of. Any attempt to confer Africans as doctors of medicine would not occur until the post-World War I era, although medical training of Africans would begin in the years prior to World War I. As much as this was, in the eyes of the French, a humanitarian mission, it was also an assertion of French superiority and a belief that traditional medicine and African healers were not only ineffective but perhaps also detrimental to the black population. This belief that the French medical institution was the only way of helping Africans was perhaps the barest assertion of paternalism in this mission. Interestingly, however, there was a similar assertion about the state of medicine in the French countryside which was also looked upon as un-scientific and lacking empiricism.

While there was an obvious sense of paternalism and an assumption that the blacks of Africa could not care for themselves, the French in some way seemed to show legitimate concern

⁶⁴ Couillault, *Des Institutions*, 17.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

for the plight of the Africans, after all, the republican obligation to the French colonies certainly included keeping its subjects (or in some cases citizens) alive and well. In his report, Cuillault shows concern for the Africans stating “It was impossible not to be struck by all the physiological misery that fell upon the natives... Placed in a state of least resistance, they were unfortunate prey designated for the plagues that raged regularly in their homes and mostly in their children with an appalling mortality.”⁶⁶ He also noted that in 1905, Governor General Roume ordered a survey be taken about the major causes of mortality and how to best address them. He concluded that the diseases ravaging Africa were largely a result of “inadequate clothing, poor sanitation, and lack of hygiene,”⁶⁷ a problem that largely would not be addressed until after the post war era. In order to address the problem of high mortality rates, Roume created what was known as the *Corps D’aides-Médecins Indigènes*, or the Indigenous Doctor-Assistant Corps. These Africans would not be given the opportunity to become doctors for some time, indeed Couillault himself noted that “Wanting to create from scratch in French West Africa a Faculty of indigenous medicine or anything that may look like a centralized school was at least premature.”⁶⁸ Although this training would be very rudimentary and would not much resemble the medical schools that would be built in the future, this was among the first steps toward creating an indigenous intellectual class.

Also crucial in the creation of the African intellectual class was the French education system, the third focus of the *mise en valeur* policy implemented in the AOF. In the period before World War I, the education system was perhaps the most important institution and the primary one through which the French would relay both the ideas of republicanism while

⁶⁶ Ibid., 26.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 28.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 29.

simultaneously espousing the superiority of the French nation. Indeed as historian Alice Conklin notes, the belief in the inherent cultural superiority of the French was at the heart of African schooling and it was through this schooling that the French sought to transform its subjects into French speaking citizens. Furthermore, there was a desire to teach the enfranchised populations how to exercise their rights as citizens and representatives of the republic.⁶⁹ It is in the French schooling system that we see the strongest assertions of, as well as conflict between, the revolutionary ideals of republicanism and French superiority.

Language, it seems, was the focal point of education in the AOF, and it was the intention of the government that through the teaching of French, the AOF would be able to instill in the minds of Africans ideas of the greatness of France. Indeed Couillault in his report noted “to better connect us with the indigenous people and gradually bring the blacks to our moral and intellectual level...there is no factor that better determines human union than a shared language.”⁷⁰ This sentiment regarding language as a cultural unifier was clearly expressed in educational policy. Governor General William Merlaud-Ponty noted regarding education “[the African] will not be able to erase from his memory the uplifting notions which, through the intermediary of this language, we will have caused to penetrate. The words may disappear but the ideas will remain, and the ideas, which are our own and whose use endows us with our moral, social, and economic superiority, will little by little transform these barbarians of yesterday into disciples and auxiliaries.”⁷¹ This statement by Governor General Ponty in the years just before the war, is perhaps the most explicit and clear assertion of French superiority and how the education system could inculcate this belief could in minds of Africans. Indeed, as

⁶⁹ Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*, 82.

⁷⁰ Couillault, *Des Institutions*, 10.

⁷¹ William Ponty. Circulaire no. 44c “Relative aux Programmes Scolaires,” Governor General, May 1· 1914, AOF, 462. Also quoted in Conklin. *A Mission to Civilize*. 84.

we saw when examining the peasants of the French countryside, it was in large part the French language as well as their storied republican tradition that gave the French notions of cultural superiority and these very ideals would be taught to the Africans of the AOF. The schooling system throughout the AOF functioned much like this, especially after Roume's decree in 1903 that standardized school system be created. The curriculum created by this decree had its primary emphasis on learning French Culture and the French language and well as French History and Geography.⁷² Indeed it is clear that the French colonial school system, which was based around the teaching of French ideals, was the most effective means of acculturating the Africans and asserting the superiority of French culture.

Also a crucial part of the French colonial education system, was the assertion of Republicanism and an attempt to encourage Africans to exercise their rights as part of the republic (especially those in Senegal who would be a majority of those granted French citizenship.) Not only was there an explicit desire to teach the French how best to exercise their rights as citizens of the republic, there was also a belief that a common language was a crucial piece of the republican articulation of nationality.⁷³ In this way, schooling served a dual-purpose through both the expression of republican ideals and the assertion of French superiority through the teaching of French.

While colonial schooling would enjoy some success even in this early period, it would also face a significant challenge: what should be done about those already involved in Quranic schooling in predominantly Muslim areas? This challenge strongly parallels one addressed earlier in French West Africa when deciding who should be granted citizenship. While

⁷² For more on the curriculum in French colonial schools see Kelly M. Duke Bryant, *Education as Politics: Colonial Schooling and Political Debate in Senegal (1850s-1914)*. Madison: U of Wisconsin, 2015).

⁷³ For more on language and French nationality see Caroline C. Ford, "Which nation? Language, identity and republican politics in post-revolutionary France." *History of European Ideas* 17 (1):31-46. 1993.

citizenship was already ensured to the *Originaires*, those who were born in one of the original four communes of Senegal and were in large part either Christian or secular, there was heated debate about whether the *Evolués*, or those who have evolved and become receptive to French culture, would be granted the franchise. It was decided that in order to be granted citizenship, the *Evolués* would have to accept the French civil code. This code, however, conflicted with Quranic teachings, most obviously over issues of marriage and polygamy, and those *Evolués* who were Muslim refused this condition. With this conflict in mind, it is easy to see how Quranic schools could be a great threat to the French mission to create a nation of black Frenchmen. Ultimately, despite the challenge this posed to the French, it was decided that “it would be as futile as it is dangerous to suppress or even ignore [the Quranic schools]; we must, instead, strive to control this teaching, to make it less sterile.”⁷⁴ Rather than eliminate Islamic teachings, Roume thought it best to simply contain these teachings and prevent their spread.

Despite this considerable roadblock to the French education mission, even in the pre-war years of the AOF, this French schooling would produce considerable results. As early as 1895 Chief Samba Thiamka wrote a letter to the director of political affairs asking that his son be admitted to a French academy, begging “let them make him work at whatever they want, me I do not want him to come back here, because I intend for him to be a servant of the French for all his life.”⁷⁵ For more confirmation as to the success of French colonial schools in instilling French ideals upon the Africans, one need look no further than the famed Blaise Diagne. Having himself been schooled in the French colonial school system, Diagne would go on to become the first African deputy elected to French Parliament in 1914. Furthermore, as we will see briefly, Diagne was one of the most vocal and impassioned proponents of Africans fighting on the side of the

⁷⁴ Roume, *Discours 1905*, 17.

⁷⁵ Quoted in Duke Bryant, *Education as Politics*, 93.

French during World War I, and claimed repeatedly that those in French West Africa should come together as one French people during this time of need.

III. World War I in French West Africa

The year 1914 is the last watershed year in French history I will be addressing. After all, this is the year in which colonial discourse in French West Africa would be irreversibly changed, leading to a colonial policy even more liberal than that preceding it and would last until its final dissolution in 1958. Historians and non-scholars alike will likely recognize this year (1914) as the official beginning of World War I, the most costly and destructive war the world had seen at this point. It was this war that caused of the shift in colonial policy towards the citizens and subjects in the AOF. During the war, the French would deploy some 500,000 colonial troops known as the *Troupes Indigènes* to serve not only in French strongholds in Africa, but on the European continent as well.⁷⁶ The faithful service and in many cases great sacrifice that these indigenous troops provided for France led many Africans as well as French to believe that the Africans of the AOF were owed something in return; for many it was citizenship, for some it was even independence. The French, however, were still unwilling to relinquish control and convinced their civilizing mission was far from over and turned instead to a policy of respect for native people and institutions.

The War in Africa

There were several world powers that both held colonies on the African continent as well as fought in World War I (understandably so, given that holding colonies was one of the most pronounced means of asserting international power). As such, the war between these great imperial powers would spill over from Europe and extend to fighting on the African continent through use of auxiliary troops. Indeed, since 1902, the British had held a colonial army in

⁷⁶ Richard Fogarty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914-1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2008), 7.

Africa known as the King's African Rifles, the Germans had built an army in both West and East Africa with help from the Ethiopian Empire, and the French *tirailleurs* (another word for the indigenous troops) had already seen action in the pacification and occupation of Morocco and had been subject to the first draft in 1912 before the war had even started. While holding a colonial proxy army was certainly not unprecedented, the French colonial army served the distinction of being the only African colonial force to serve in a combat role on the European continent during World War I.

In many ways, the participation of African troops in World War I serves as a case study not only for why this dramatic shift occurred in the policy of the AOF, but also as a case study for assertions of French prestige that already existed during this time. It was crucial during this time, even more so than before, that the Africans truly felt they were French, in order to garner their support and sympathy for the French cause in the war. Indeed, one of the biggest forces in the push for participation of Africans in the war effort was none other than Blaise Diagne, the first African to be elected as deputy to the French Parliament. In his efforts to recruit Africans, Diagne, a French educated man and *Originnaire* hailing from the commune of Gorée Senegal, would repeatedly call on notions of French nationalism and brotherhood. In fact Diagne once stated "La France Coloniale is no longer separated from La France d'Europe" and that "France was united above any question of origin or race."⁷⁷ While we have already seen in the assimilationist policy, attempts to turn Africans into French auxiliaries at this point, it is during the recruitment and conscription of the colonial army that this notion became exceedingly prevalent. Much like in the metropole, African soldiers were taught that it was nothing short of an honor to die for their country (or at least the country they were being told they were a part of).

⁷⁷ Quoted in Fogarty, *Race and War in France*, 52.

It is during the wartime recruitment that we see existing notions of French prestige and the attempt at assimilation reach its peak.

Consequences of Conscription

While many, such as Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Mangin who was among the biggest proponents for the creation of a *force noire*, believed recruitment would be adequate to create an indigenous force, it quickly became clear that with escalating tensions just before the war, conscription would be necessary. In 1912 the first conscription began with 8,000 men in the AOF being recruited through conscription. The recruitment and in some cases conscription of African troops was of course not popular among all Africans in the AOF. In fact, many resented the “blood tax” that was being put on them by people they already might have seen as their oppressors. Furthermore, despite the rhetoric of brotherhood between the French and African soldiers, it became clear that African troops quite often experienced ill-treatment at the hands of their white officers. Some Africans protested, while others, clearly not convinced of their obligation to the *mère patrie* simply refused to fight. Backlash was so pronounced to this recruitment effort in fact, that in 1917 Governor General Vollenhoven convinced the government of Paris to suspend all recruiting activities in the AOF. This would be the end of recruiting activities in the AOF, however, by this time some 500,000 indigenous troops would already have served on behalf of France and the precedent was already set that since the citizens and subjects of French West Africa had given so much to the French, they deserved something in return.

It is this very notion that would become the basis for the pronounced shift in colonial policy in the period after World War I. This notion that France owed the Africans something permeated both African intellectual and European circles. In 1918, just after the war had ended

the Minister of Colonies in Paris addressed the French parliament saying, “To fight in the first ranks of the French Army is, for our African Subjects, to stand forever on the side of civilization, threatened by our enemies. But, if she makes the *indigènes* a partner in her defense and demands of them their share of the sacrifices that she also imposes on herself, France, in return, must take care to prove to them her spirit of justice and recognition.”⁷⁸ Many French officials even went so far as to say that citizenship should be extended to all those who fought in the war on the side of the French. Indeed, a legislative proposal made to the Chamber of Deputies just after conscription began stated, “It is an obligation for France to seek to compensate the *Indigènes* who fight for her, or who, simply but loyally, have fulfilled their military duty. The highest, noblest recognition that France can perceive is to offer what she considers most precious, that is to say, French nationality.”⁷⁹ France would not ultimately extend citizenship to all members of the AOF, or even all those who fought in the war. The realization that Africans had loyally served France, however, did give rise to a whole new policy, one that saw the Africans not simply as subjects or people without civilization. This new policy gave regard to African institutions, respected African custom, and made a more earnest attempt at raising the *mise en valeur* of the AOF.

France following the war did not give its colonies independence, nor did it extend citizenship further than it had been in the pre-war era. It did, however, seek to provide for Africans in a way that was in the main less paternalistic, more humanitarian, and more respectful of the capabilities of the Africans. Of course, while this policy would be largely more progressive than that preceding it, it would not abandon the principles of republicanism and French nationalism that had been guiding colonial policy to this point. The colonial policy

⁷⁸ *Journal Officiel*, 17 January 1918, 677. Also quoted in Fogarty, *Race and War*, 236.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Fogarty, *Race and War*, 230.

following World War I was indeed a great shift for the French, but not to the extent that it did not still conform to the revolutionary ideals of France. Indeed, as we will see, this new discourse in the AOF would still see an attempt to confer French ideals upon their African subjects.

IV. The AOF After World War I

The participation of the people of West Africa in World War I on the side of the French had several critical consequences for the way France administered its West African territories. In addition to the belief that Africans deserved something in return for their service in the war, there was a belief among many officials in the AOF that inasmuch as the policy of assimilation neglected African institutions and tradition, it failed to garner positive support from the Africans who came to resist the complete domination of their lives. Colonial officials began to question and challenge the effectiveness of this policy and its disregard for African custom. Indeed Maurice Delafosse, a French ethnographer and colonial official, stated in a report dated 1917 that the African people had a history of their own which he claimed “we do not have the right to ignore nor disdain, on the grounds that it is not written and does not appear in University curriculum. It is the history of a human race and for this reason alone, cannot remain unknown to men whomever they might be, and particularly not to men who have received the mission to continue this history.”⁸⁰ This statement shows not only a belief in the importance of African custom and tradition for the future of French colonial policy, but also a hope for the longevity of the French teachings in Africa. It would be this belief, and the belief in repaying Africans for their service in the war, as well as persistent notions of the obligations of republican France that would be at the center of the new policies in the AOF including the policy of association.

Assimilation to Association

Before the war had even officially ended it had become clear to many officials in Paris and the AOF that the policy of assimilation had failed to fully indoctrinate the Africans to the

⁸⁰ From a transcript by Maurice Delafosse in the French Archives Nationales, Sept 1917. Quoted in Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*, 184.

ways of the French and had only contributed to outcry against the French colonial system. While certain Africans (such as those French-educated elites including Blaise Diagne) were receptive to French ideals, others refused to give up their traditions and customs. Others went so far as to lead full on revolts, including in the town of bélé Dougou, Western Sudan, where the indigenous chiefs refused to give a single man to the war effort, and lead armed resistance for three weeks before surrendering to the French. As such, colonial administrators had begun to believe that colonial policy must reflect African customs if the French were to continue their mission in West Africa.

Indeed Couillault, probably one of the earliest colonial administrators to denounce assimilation, wrote on this very topic: “The first idea, the one that prevailed until very recently, wanted to apply everywhere our processes of justice and administration, our codes, in a word, to regulate virtually all acts of life, from birth to death. We assimilate populations, and move in our institutions, so they create a new mentality closer to ours: that was the big mistake which we continued to implement until recently.” Couillault continued by noting “The domination of politics exacerbated our relationship with them [Africans] instead of bringing us closer”⁸¹ Couillault argued that rather than making the Africans more receptive and inclined to accept French customs, the total domination of Africans evident under the official policy of assimilation actually created more resentment and a resistance to French ideals. While Couillault clearly understood the problems inherent in the policy of assimilation, at this point he did not suggest an alternative. In fact, the phrase association would not even be mentioned prior to 1918.

Martial Merlin—who would serve as Governor General of the AOF (1907-1908 and 1919-1923) French Equatorial Africa (1908-1919) and French Indochina (1922-1925)—also proclaimed the failure of assimilation: “The failure of the policy of assimilation became flagrant

⁸¹ Couillault, *Des Institutions*, 7.

the day we noticed, among those natives trained in our schools and abruptly separated from their environment, a different frame of mind and a marked tendency to elude discipline, which an evolved society has come to expect from its members.”⁸² Indeed colonial administrators throughout the AOF and even beyond began to notice the ineffectiveness of this policy and sought to find a new way to confer their beliefs upon Africans without completely disregarding African institutions. While in some ways, this new policy would be an expression of more enlightened ideas following the African participation in World War I, in other ways, this new policy was simply a compromise that allowed for the continuation of conferring French ideals on Africans without disturbing tradition so much as to create resistance or backlash to the French system.

In noting the need for this new system, Governor General Merlin claimed, “We should attempt to bring about intellectual and material development by means adapted to their [Africans] mentality and without ever forgetting that the moral perfectibility of individuals and races does not imply immediate accession to a social level equal to that of the most evolved nations.”⁸³ This statement by Merlin shows not only a belief in the necessity of institutions that respect African customs, but also shows a sense that while policy toward Africans must progress, it must not disregard its obligation to civilize the Africans. Indeed as we will see shortly, under the policy of association the economic development (*mise en valeur*) of Africa would still be foremost among the concerns of the French regarding West Africa. Furthermore this new policy, while respecting African customs, would not abandon the French ones it had imposed on Africa.

⁸² Martial Merlin, Direction des Affaires Politiques et Administratives, “Note de l’exécution des instructions contenues dans la note du 17 Octobre, réglementation intéressant la politique indigène et la police général de l’AOF,” Nov 1921.

⁸³ Ibid.

Indeed, this new policy known as association would continue the imposition of French institutions onto Africans, although it would do so with respect to African traditions and customs as they were perceived by the French. In describing this new policy, Governor General Jules Carde noted “This collaboration is imposed on us as a duty and as a necessity. It is inspired by the liberalism that has always been the basis of black colonial policy; it meets the legitimate aspirations of the population...it will allow the penetration of ideas and interests and guide [Africans] to their [sic] highest destiny. The Native leadership should be a solid fulcrum for the lever on which we propose to raise the population.”⁸⁴ This statement conveys several important things in the context of French West Africa. For one, in describing the collaboration between Africans and the French as “a duty and a necessity” and being “inspired by the liberalism that has always been the basis of black colonial policy,” Carde was reiterating the republican sense of an obligation to the colonies, and was recalling the earliest notions of French republicanism in the colonies as discussed earlier. Secondly, he noted that the policy of association “meets the legitimate aspirations of the populations.” Lastly by claiming that “Native leadership should be a solid fulcrum for the lever on which we propose to raise the population,” Carde was insisting that the civilizing mission and the creation of a modern (French) state in Africa were not incompatible with the policy of association. This policy would continue to be the grounds on which colonial policy in the AOF would persist for many years, and would be the context in which the French would continue their attempt at the creation of a French state in West Africa.

⁸⁴ Jules Carde, *Discours Prononcé par M. J. Carde*, 11.

The Republican Mission Post-World War I

Governor General Jules Carde's statement regarding the policy of association recalls notions of republicanism in place even prior to the Third Republic as well as the continuing belief in French superiority on which the civilizing mission rested. Indeed, as we will see, these values, held since the Revolution and subsequent founding of the First Republic, would continue to play into colonial policy and the republican obligation to civilize French West Africa even in the years following the war under the policy of association. In fact, this new colonial policy even saw a renewal in said values as France continued its attempt to build a French African state.

By the post-war period, many officials in the AOF had come to believe the *mise en valeur* of West Africa had not progressed sufficiently so as to allow the Africans in the colony to attain a level of civilization comparable to that of the French. Indeed, criticizing the old colonial policy Maurice Delafosse claimed, "The first steps for those advocating assimilation should have been the creation of schools, yet there exists a small number of them... What can we offer those who attend?" He continued by eliciting the need for an infrastructure that reflected African institutions, claiming "Before we came there existed political institutions perfectly adapted to the country and the level of civilization of its inhabitants. We have ignored all of that. It would, however, have been easy and logical to integrate these institutions in our undertakings."⁸⁵ It was beliefs such as this that caused not only a turn to the policy of association, but also prompted a reexamination of the infrastructure created under the auspices of *mise en valeur*. Indeed each of the three institutions that were the centerpieces of the mission before 1914 (railroads, schools, and medical assistance) were revisited in the post-war era, and reconfigured so as to align with this new policy that respected African institution.

⁸⁵ Maurice Delafosse. Quoted in Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*, 183.

In many ways, railroads were the institution least necessary to the continuation of the *mise en valeur* of West Africa and as such were given significantly less attention by the government of the AOF. By the 1920's railroad expansion had slowed, as the major settlements in the French West Africa had largely been connected by railways built in the earlier years of the AOF. Rather than continuing to expand the railroads, the French took to utilizing this transport for the newly created industry in West Africa, one that was largely supported and run by the indigenous population. Indeed, in this post-war era of colonial policy, the railroads took a more significant turn toward transporting goods and establishing a more thriving economy in the AOF. This of course is very atypical of colonial policy up to this point in that prior to the war, colonial policy was largely unconcerned with developing indigenous industry, and largely tended to focus on human development. The post-war French government, however, had been buoyed by wartime mobilizations and income from German reparations and sought for the first time to take a chance on the economic development of the AOF. In doing so, however, the French very much retained their policy of respect toward African institutions and attempted to incorporate the booming indigenous industry into the economy of the AOF, with the help of the railroads.

Indeed, on this topic Jules Carde wrote: "indigenous industries exist throughout West Africa; almost everywhere, there are weavers and dyers, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, leather workers, potters and basket makers. The native crafts, through the efforts of the Administration have been developing very rapidly in recent years in the AOF."⁸⁶ Carde later attributed this to the rise of "important centers of production" made possible by "electricity plants...factories...and different railways."⁸⁷ In a separate report he reiterated the need for railroads for the sake of industry noting, "I remain of course, convinced that the work executed in whole or in part,

⁸⁶ Jules Carde, *L'Afrique Occidentale française*, 30.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

through this capital: the Railways of Niger, Côte d'Ivoire, and Dakar will have...business impacts sufficient enough to justify the effort.”⁸⁸ Noting the importance of this new industry for Africans he stated “Another railway, whose economic importance is not questionable because it must serve one of the most populated areas of black African empire, [is] the Haute Volta.”⁸⁹

While the direction in which policy regarding railroads went seems to be uncharacteristic in the AOF to this period due to its emphasis on indigenous tradition and industry, it was actually very closely tied to the *mise en valeur* of Africa. The railroads became crucial to the economy of West Africa, not just for the sake of the French but also for the indigenous industry. Of course it was again a paternalistic assertion that indigenous industry needed to be expanded with the help of the French but it was, nonetheless, in the eyes of the French, an effort for the *mise en valeur* of their African territory.

Medical care, which had been one of the primary institutions of African *mise en valeur* in the pre-war years, was also revisited in the post-war era, especially under the leadership of Governor General Jules Carde. During his tenure as Governor General, Carde became increasingly troubled by the many diseases that plagued Africans and thereby put the African *mise en valeur* at risk. As a consequence, improving the healthcare of the indigenous population became a priority for the federation after 1919. Carde himself sought to fix the high mortality rate among Africans “by giving to its starving inhabitants, health and strength through a policy of full stomachs.”⁹⁰ In addition to alleviating problems of hunger, the AOF sought to improve healthcare through several means. The first of these was the creation of mobile care units that could reach those outside of French posts for those Africans in lesser populated areas. There was

⁸⁸ Jules Carde, *Discours Conseil du Gouvernement*, 37.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁹⁰ Carde, *Discours Conseil du Gouvernement*, 24.

also an attempt at increasing prophylactics for diseases including malaria, yellow fever, smallpox, typhus, leprosy, tuberculosis, dysentery, sleeping sickness, and trachoma.⁹¹ What is important to note about this, however, is that this was still an assertion of the superiority of Western medicine. While the policy of association claimed to respect indigenous institutions, and certainly sought to help indigenous people, they never went so far as to proclaim respect for traditional African medicinal practices. In the eyes of the French, the way to respect African institutions in the line of medical care, was to acknowledge the capabilities of African healers and midwives but still train them in Western medicine.

In addition to attempts by the AOF to supply adequate medical care to its subjects, the AOF took a significant step in the *mise en valeur* of Africa by developing medical schools in the federation in which Africans themselves could be trained as doctors. Carde, who was suspicious of doctors because of their reluctance to participate in the mobile care units, saw an indigenous, Western trained, medical corps as the solution to problems of healthcare. A medical school was established in Dakar which trained African women in midwifery and trained African men in the practice of Western medicine.⁹² Noting the early success of this medical school, Carde noted, “The Medical School, whose teachers and students almost entirely provide the attendance in Dakar, has currently 43 doctoral students, 6 pharmacy students, and 12 veterinarians. The medical school can therefore provide ancillary health service with sufficient technical training to assist and be useful, particularly in the work of hygiene and disease which remains the basis of a protection of African races.”⁹³ Not only was a medical school established, but the newly improved primary schools in the colonies would “train native teachers as candidates for the

⁹¹ Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*, 221.

⁹² Albert Sarraut, *La Mise En Valeur Des Colonies Francaises* (Paris: Payot, 1922), 400.

⁹³ Carde, *Discours Conseil du Gouvernement*, 20.

School of Medicine.”⁹⁴ Indeed, health care in the post-war years under the guidance of Jules Carde saw a dramatic shift toward not only increased efforts at improving the well-being of Africans, but also an attempt to train the Africans of the federation in medicine, creating an indigenous medical force.

Education, which was perhaps the centerpiece of the pre-war mission, remained of great importance in the post-war years. Education did, however, also see a dramatic shift in the way it was administered in the AOF to better align with the policy of association. The education system in the AOF had come under criticism for producing Africans who were trained in the practices and institutions of France but were largely unable to put these skills to use in the colonies. Many French-educated Africans, especially those with French citizenship, sought to migrate to the metropole, largely rendering their education useless in the colonies. To remedy this, colonial schooling in this era saw a shift toward what was known as “practical” education, meaning the schools would no longer simply be places of indoctrination where Africans became French, but would instead be places where Africans could learn according to what was perceived as their customs and traditions. In his report on the AOF Jules Carde confirmed this new schooling, claiming “The proposed goal of formal education in West Africa French is education, not only of the elite, but of the indigenous mass in an essentially practical sense.” He continued, “This training, which seeks the amelioration of their living conditions on their own accord, seeks especially to develop their traditional activities; that is to say, it is oriented towards education of rural and artisan populations.”⁹⁵ Not only were the Africans given training in what the French thought were indigenous institutions, they were also given “higher technical education, which also prepares native teachers for Teaching and trains candidates for the Dakar School of

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Carde, *L'Afrique Occidentale française*, 48.

Medicine.”⁹⁶ This new education policy sought both to educate Africans in a manner thought to be practical in the fields they would pursue after school, and to train Africans in how to be teachers and doctors so the basic infrastructure of the AOF could be run by Africans, effectively lessening the burden of France.

While this new educational policy largely sought to train Africans with regard to their own institutions, it certainly did not abandon the notions of French nationalism on which this mission was founded. The aforementioned notion that schools should create French African auxiliaries was not entirely abandoned. In fact, even with this reorganization of education, the teaching of French in schools remained among the highest priorities even while attempting to respect indigenous culture. Indeed Albert Sarraut in his report on the *mise en valeur* of the colonies noted, “This practical and realistic teaching does not forget the need for a French general culture which must be ensured.”⁹⁷ Additionally, Jules Carde reported that “The purpose of schooling, which is the basis of education, is to give children notions of the French language and a corresponding general training appropriate to their degree of evolution.”⁹⁸ Despite this new rhetoric that saw Africans as having an intrinsic history and culture of their own, the French still saw themselves as the foremost nation and saw a need to confer this greatness on their African subjects through schooling in French language and culture.

While this post-war era *mise en valeur* saw a dramatic reorganization that sought to give more respect to African institution, it certainly did not stray from the political tradition that led France to colonize West Africa in the first place. Without doubt, this new infrastructure created in Africa gave more respect to the indigenous population, but it also continued to impose its own

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Sarraut, *La Mise en Valeur*, 401.

⁹⁸ Carde, *L'Afrique Occidentale française*, 48.

ideals upon the Africans. The creation of an indigenous medical corps trained in Western medicine largely ignored African traditional practices which were seen as antiquated and based in superstition. Additionally, the new educational policy did indeed attempt to train Africans in a manner that respected their own teachings, but still sought to teach every African student the French language and the basics of French culture.

The post-war era was in some ways a reaffirmation of the republican mission. It sought to continue and even advance further the mission to civilize West Africa and create a receptive indigenous population that believed, much like the French, in the greatness of the French nation and displayed loyalty to the mother country. In other ways, however, this era was a continuation of the inherently contradictory nature of the two values that emerged from the Revolution of 1789 and continued under the Second and Third Republics. On one hand, representatives of the French Republic saw it as their mission to civilize the Africans and allow them to exercise freedom and liberty. On the other hand, however, the nationalism spurred by the Revolution that would remain integral to the ideology of the First (and subsequent) Republic sought to impress upon the African population the greatness of France. Convinced that they were the heirs of an inherently superior political ideology – an ideology that proclaimed the values of ‘liberty, equality, and fraternity’ – the Third Republic and its colonial administrators were reluctant to liberate their African colonies from French control. The result, as we will see is twofold: the development in the AOF of a somewhat diluted copy of the French metropole; and the emergence of an intellectual class that would be receptive to French ideals, but would still ultimately vie for the freedom of their nations.

Important to note in this section regarding *mise en valeur* after World War I is that while this was certainly a shift in colonial policy, it was not an entire overhaul and did not entirely

abandon previous practices. Indeed, in regards to railroads, the AOF gave credit and sought to improve indigenous industry through transit whereas before the connection of settlements through train was the extent of French concern. The French would still not abandon their fledgling industry, however, and continued to ship colonial officials and troops by railroad. In regards to medicine, the AOF, governed by notions of association sought to respect the capabilities of the Africans by allowing them to become doctors, which was unheard of before the war.⁹⁹ French colonial policy did not, however, go so far as to acknowledge traditional medicine as legitimate. Similarly, in terms of school, the AOF gave more regard to teaching traditional African history and practices, but continued to teach French culture and language to all Africans. While the policy of association sought to give more respect to African institutions, and the *mise en valeur* mission continued after World War I, these ideas were heavily constrained by the conflict between the Republican obligation to civilize and the French nationalist desire to spread their culture.

The Success of Mise en Valeur; The AOF as an Extension of the Metropole

Throughout the colonies of the AOF, receptiveness to French domination and acculturation varied. In areas like the four communes of Senegal, the French-trained intellectual class—and especially those who enjoyed the rights granted by French citizenship—would prove to be the most receptive to French values. Other colonies within the AOF, however, would be significantly less receptive to these values either because of geographic isolation or due to the lack of rights they enjoyed under the French. Because of the often contradictory nature of the French mission, it is difficult to determine the success of *mise en valeur* for Africa. In order to

⁹⁹ Recall that prior to World War I, all doctors in the AOF had to have a medical degree from a European institution and had to be born in France.

better understand the condition of the AOF as it underwent its development under the French, I will examine an English ethnographer's analysis of French West Africa after travelling through the super colony in 1929, near the end of Jules Carde's tenure. English ethnographer Reginald Charles Fulke in his book *Africa as I Have Known it* provides a perspective on the success of the French mission beyond simple intentionality and policy and allows for a look into the AOF as it existed rather than as it was envisioned.

In many ways, the French were very successful in creating disciples and auxiliaries and building a nation in West Africa that served as an extension of the French metropole. Commenting on the condition of French West Africa, Fulke noted, "Monsieur Sarraut, the Minister for the Colonies, told me that his Department intended to make of Dakar the Marseilles of the West Coast. From what I have seen, this intention is in a fair way to be realized." He continued by praising Governor General Jules Carde for his efforts noting "For the last six years this distinguished official, with the greatest success, has shaped the destinies of French West Africa towards a measure of prosperity such as in the past few could have foreseen."¹⁰⁰ Indeed these two statements of Fulke's firsthand account seem to verify that the projects proposed by the government of the AOF had indeed been undertaken in earnest and had had at least some degree of success.

Not only did Fulke laud the success of the French civilizing mission, he also commented on the degree to which Africans in the AOF had been acculturated. He claimed, "The French Colonies, no matter where situated, are considered, both by the home authorities in Paris and by their native inhabitants, as integral portions of the mother-country." He continued, noting, "If, in any part of French West Africa, you should address to a native an inquiry as to his nationality,

¹⁰⁰ Reginal Charles Fulke, *Africa as I have known it*; [electronic resource] *Nyasaland--East Africa--Liberia--Sénégal* (London: J. Murray, 1929), 358.

instead, as in British Colonies, of replying that he is a Hausa, a Fulah, or anything else, he will at once answer, 'Moi, je suis Français.' It is a fact of which he is proud."¹⁰¹ He also noted that in his travels during World War I in French West Africa, he asked several Africans who were leaving if they were sorry to be leaving home to which he said they responded 'Oui, Mais, c'est un devoir ; c'est pour la France' (Yes, but it is a duty, it is for France). He also noted that conscription of Africans prompted them to "acquire, from that fount of all honour, *la patrie*, a distinction derived from service which time is powerless to efface or diminish."¹⁰²

Reginald Fulke also took considerable time comparing the French empire to that of his own mother country, the British Empire, noting, "The colour-bar, which gives rise, notably in South Africa, to much controversy and dissension, is far less marked in the large French centres."¹⁰³ This claim that the color bar was less sharply defined in France's African colonies certainly does not confirm the claim that the French were not racist, but it does suggest that Africans living under French rule were not regarded with as much disdain as were Africans who lived under British rule.

Clearly in Fulke's firsthand experience, he found those Africans in Senegal to be extremely receptive to French ideals to the point where they even referred to themselves as French. Furthermore, the same nationalism that many (although certainly not all) Africans espoused during the First World War seems not to have diminished after the war and if anything, served not as a means of creating disdain for the French among the Africans, but served instead to create a sense of nationalism and pride.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 361.

¹⁰² Ibid., 362.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Of course, this might only apply to Senegal, where the French efforts at development were most concentrated and where the French presence was most strongly held. Africans living in other strong French posts such as those in Côte d'Ivoire or Guinea might have had similar experiences but it seems that those who lived in the African interior probably did not experience the same exposure to French values, even though it was decreed that students in even the most remote, small villages, should learn the French language and culture. Furthermore, while there certainly existed, as we can see in this ethnography, a notion among many Africans that they were French and showed loyalty to the French nation, this did not necessarily hold true for all Africans. As is common in empire, the very people who were trained by the colonial power would begin to contemplate and advocate for more rights and eventually freedom. In fact, Leopold Sédar Senghor, who would lead the struggle for a free Senegal and become Senegal's first president was a French-trained individual who as a child had hoped to become an *évolué*, and often struggled with his identity as a Frenchman and African.¹⁰⁴ While in many ways the French attempt to confer their ideals on Africans was a success, the bond created would not be strong enough for France to hold into its colonies much longer.

¹⁰⁴ In both the metropole as well as the French empire, access to education would be the basis for an elite training. The fact that the Senghor was educated by the French and would later become what the French would consider an intellectual was no coincidence.

V. Conclusion

The Afrique Occidentale Française lasted until 1958 when it was officially dissolved by a referendum passed by the French Fifth Republic. The colonies of the former AOF were allowed to vote on whether they wanted to remain part of the French sphere as protectorates or become independent nations. Guinea was the only country to vote for independence at this time. Only two years later in 1960 after another revision to the constitution of the French Fifth republic, colonies were allowed to unilaterally change their constitutions. This would be the end of French domination in West Africa. It would not, however, be the end of relations between France and their former colonies. Indeed even today France has a large African population and much of West Africa remains Francophone. The governments of France and its former colonies keep close ties and France continues to see African migration to the metropole. While West Africa is no longer under French control it very much remains a part of the French sphere.

Through an examination of primary sources generated in French West Africa as well as in the metropole this thesis shows that there was indeed a unique character to the colonization of French West Africa. The political tradition that existed in France since the Revolution of 1789 created two not necessarily compatible beliefs: that it was duty of the French as a republican nation to bring civilization and the republican values of liberty, equality, and fraternity to Africans in the colonial territories; and that it was essential that they convey to their subjects a belief in the superiority of France. Clearly, the ideas of republicanism and nationalism, while often contradictory, influenced policy in West Africa such that steps were taken to build infrastructure and institutions that, at least in the eyes of the French, benefitted Africans, and created a French African auxiliary community that enjoyed more rights than Africans anywhere else on the continent.

What this paper does not seek to do in pointing out the unique character of the French empire in Africa, however, is excuse the French of wrongdoing, nor does it seek to praise the French in their efforts at civilizing Africans. While the political tradition in France was such that the French colonies in West Africa saw many more rights and the creation of a modern state, this mission was in many ways an illegitimate assertion of power. For one, the “pacification campaigns” that led to the capture of much of French West Africa saw brutal violence that was far from insignificant. Furthermore it would be naïve to assume that human rights abuses did not occur under the AOF even in light of the relatively liberal policies and seemingly less racial perception of Africans held by many Frenchmen. Additionally, the French assumption that France was culturally and politically superior and their attempt to raise Africans to their level was grounded first and foremost in a paternalistic belief indifferent for the most part to the wishes of the African people. The very fact that the French believed Western infrastructure was necessary for civilization was also an ethnocentric assumption that largely disregarded African tradition and institutions.

While French colonial rule in West Africa was grounded in paternalism and presupposed a deluded idea of their role in the world, it was, at least in the eyes of the French, a legitimate venture. It was not a universalist understanding of the world that dominated French colonial discourse in this time but rather a nationalist understanding. Indeed, the intense nationalism in France that emerged after the Revolution of 1789 essentially precluded any contemplation of empire from a purely universalist standpoint. Instead the French examined their role in Africa through a nationalist lens that saw it as their mission to confer their greatness onto the world. As such, policy in the colonies was aimed at improving the lives of Africans and creating a French auxiliary population. For the French, this mission was not simply rhetoric nor pretense. The

French domination of West Africa, while paternalistic and ethnocentric, legitimately sought to raise the condition of the Africans, and in doing so, created a western-modeled state.

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