"ELITE" EDUCATION IN FRENCH WEST AFRICA: THE ERA OF LIMITS, 1903–1945

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From the beginning of the twentieth century colonial education in French West Africa (A.O.F.) had two basic goals. The first was the widespread diffusion of spoken French and the rudiments of a practical education adapted to the milieu and needs of the African peasant. In theory this mass education would increase both rural productivity and "appetites" (for new consumer goods).[1] The second goal, one more successfully met, was the creation of a carefully limited number of indigenous auxiliaries whose loyalty as well as competence would be beyond question. These "native elites" were products of a handful of postprimary and secondary schools which are the subject of this paper. These so-called elite schools, however, including the famous Ecole William Ponty near Dakar, actually provided a relatively low level of education and were by no means the equivalent of the comparable metropolitan institutions. In the interwar period they were elite only in the highly selective recruitment of their students, although after World War II many of their graduates, the most highly educated of their generation, became important professional and political figures.

Although the need for trained auxiliaries was vital, colonial educators and administrators were determined to prevent the rise of potentially troublesome or even dangerous *déracinés* (literally, the uprooted, the Africans who had no real place in either traditional or colonial society). They did this by limiting educational opportunities to the positions to be filled, and equally important, by restricting the *content* of the education. The era of limits in the title refers to both these policies.

[1] See Governor General William Ponty's speech at the opening of the Government Council session of 20 June 1910 and his circular no. 82 c, 30 August 1910, on education. *Journal Officiel de l'Afrique Occidentale Française* [hereafter JOAOF], 1910, 405, 564–566.

Despite the pervasive myth of the black Frenchman and the rhetoric of assimilation, the French never intended to create indigenous elites who might effectively compete with them, nor did they want Africans so Gallicized that they could not work effectively as mediators between French colonial civilization and their untutored compatriots.[2] Only very rarely before 1945 was there a hint that education should be unrestricted even for a genuine intellectual elite, despite Minister of the Colonies Albert Sarraut's bold assertion in 1923 that "our duty as protectors is to give them the means to rise as far as they are capable, without hindering their intellectual development with a limit, a barrier. . . ."[3] In fact, the system under Sarraut and for twenty years afterward was tightly closed, with even African lycée graduates having only very limited opportunities for higher education.[4]

This paper will explore the higher educational opportunities available to francophone West Africans in the pre-World War II period, first by briefly describing the nine schools themselves, then by analyzing the specific constraints of the era of limits. These constraints operated most obviously in restricting the size of the educated elite; class size varied from an occasional maximum of one hundred at the Ecole William Ponty down to three or four at the Veterinary School. These are far from impressive figures in a total population of approximately fifteen million. In addition, the curriculums and diplomas of the schools, with the exception of the two lycées, were pegged considerably below their counterparts in France, making the diplomas useless as a basis for admission to French schools. Finally, the French administration intended the careers of African postprimary school graduates to be as circumscribed as their educations. African admission to one of these

[2]In all fairness, contemporary anglophone observers saw perhaps more black Frenchmen than the French claimed to have created. Among the most influential early writers were W. Bryant Mumford and Major G. St. J. Orde-Brown, whose tour of French West Africa in 1935 resulted in *Africans Learn to be French* (London, 1936). The title succinctly expresses their major conclusion. See Education Inspector Andrew Davesne's criticism of the federal teacher training school, the Ecole William Ponty, in 1931, "Rapport sur l'A.O.F., l'adaptation de l'enseignement dans les colonies." *Congrès international de l'enseignement dans les colonies et les pays d'outre-mer, rapports et compte-rendus,* 25–27 September 1931 (Paris, 1932), 93–99.

[3]Albert Sarraut, *La Mise en valeur des colonies francaises* (Paris, 1923), 98.

[4]Students could continue their education in France on their own, and a few did so throughout this period. However, government scholarships to the metropole which had been common in the latter part of the nineteenth century (for Creoles and Senegalese of the Communes) were virtually nonexistent by 1920.

schools was usually contingent on a pledge to serve for a given number of years in the colonial administration, where they were given their own ranks and promotion scales completely separate (with rare exceptions) from Europeans. The jobs of the two races might well be equal, the pay and perquisites, never.

The first step beyond the six years of primary education was the higher primary school or *école primaire supérieure* (E.P.S.). Between 1915 and 1922 all the colonies of the A.O.F. federation except Niger and Mauritania had created their own *école primaire supérieure.*[5] In addition to the primary certificate, these schools required candidates to pass a *concours* (competitive entrance exam) in which openings were restricted. Students spent two or three years at the E.P.S., either in one of the terminal sections preparing to be low-level clerks, teachers or other local administrative or commercial agents, or in the academic section which prepared candidates for the next and highest level, the federal schools which recruited candidates (again by *concours*) from all over French West Africa.

The period from 1903 to 1920 is a complex and important one for elite colonial education, but it has been thoroughly covered in a recent study.[6] By 1920 the oldest and best known of the federal schools, the Ecole William Ponty (founded 1903), had broadened its initial scope as a teacher training institution to include an administrative and a medical preparatory section, both inherited from the defunct Ecole Faidherbe, which had existed from 1916 to 1920 as a vocational training school for non-teaching white-collar personnel. Also in 1920 the secondary school at St. Louis, which had previously included only the first cycle of secondary courses (four years), opened as a full lycée. The only other higher academic school at this date (omitting the manual vocational school Pinet-Laprade) was the medical school in Dakar, which included midwife and veterinary sections. In the 1930s two rural normal schools for boys and a normal school for girls opened, and a secondary course at Dakar became the federation's second lycée. Finally in 1940 a higher technical school was opened in Bamako, completing the

[5]Students in these colonies could attend the E.P.S. in Upper Volta and Senegal, respectively.

[6]The definitive work on French colonial education in West Africa from the nineteenth century to 1920 will undoubtedly be the encyclopedic thesis of Denise Bouche, *L'enseignement dans les territoires français de l'Afrique ocidentale de 1817 à 1920* (2 vols., Paris, 1975). On postprimary education in the early twentieth century see II, 502–564, 801–804, 839–862.

roster of elite schools up to the postwar period of educational reform and expansion. But although the number of these schools increased, there was no real evolution of French ideas about educating indigenous elites in the interwar period. If any fundamental change occurred it was in the effort to maximize rural mass education which characterized the thirties, a development which was directly responsible for the opening of two rural normal schools in that decade.

A Summary Description of "Elite" Schools in French West Africa

These schools can be divided into two main groups: the two lycées, which followed a strictly metropolitan curriculum and enrolled large numbers of Europeans, and the postprimary schools which prepared their students for specific positions in the colonial hierarchy. However before World War II even the lycées are part of an era of limited African education and access to elite status.

Lycées

Embryonic secondary schooling for Africans had existed in Senegal somewhat sporadically since the mid-nineteenth century. The St. Louis lycée of the twentieth century can be seen as the direct descendent of the four-year secondary course of the *Frères de Ploërmel,* which operated from 1884 to 1903.[7] After a hiatus of several years, the first two years of a secondary course were reestablished under government sponsorship in 1910, and the fledgling school had soon added the rest of the first cycle course (*sixième-troisième,* roughly seventh through tenth grade). Meanwhile, a private secondary course had been opened in Dakar in 1917, almost exclusively for the children of European officials; it became a government school in 1925, although it did not receive full lycée status until 1936. By 1931 the two schools together had 460 students, although probably over half of these were in the preparatory (primary level) classes.[8] In the mid-thirties the first year secondary

[7]On nineteenth century secondary education in Senegal, *Ibid.,* I, 183–214. Education for whites did not become an issue until the twentieth century, when Frenchmen began to bring their wives and children to the colonies.

[8]*Afrique Française,* supplement, *Renseignements Coloniaux,* 42 (Jan. 1932), 38. Whites were predominant throughout the interwar period, especially at Dakar and in the upper grades.

class (*sixième*) had only about thirty students, the classes diminishing in size to about eight in the final year (*teminale*).[9] Meanwhile the *brevet de capacité coloniale* (B.C.C.) had been instituted in 1925; it was considered equivalent to the metropolitan *baccalauréat.* Successful candidates were not differentiated by race, but very few African names were listed until after World War II, usually not more than one or two a year.[10] The best of this small minority were eligible for scholarships in France, although the range of possibilities was limited. By the mid 1930s five had studied veterinary medicine at Alfort, near Paris, two were preparing to become military doctors, one was preparing the *concours* for the *Ecole de Travaux Publics* and another studying at the Agricultural Institute in Algeria. The practical utility of all these fields, as well as the absence of scholarship students in the humanities and law, is striking.[11]

The lycées were the only government schools for which tuition was charged. This fact, as well as their policy of discouraging African students who already spoke French at home, meant that they drew from a very small pool of indigenous candidates. It did not mean, of course, that their students were brighter than those at the Ecole William Ponty or other federal schools, merely that they came from a relatively privileged and assimilated background. A slight extension of the age limit was the only concession made to the African milieu.

The Ecole William Ponty

For most Africans unable to enter the lycées, the William Ponty School was the apex of the French colonial education system, although it was not in any sense a secondary school. E.P.S. graduates who passed its rigorous entrance exam faced three more years of intensive schooling made up primarily of academic courses but also including specific preparation for a career in teaching,

[9]E. Braillon, "L'enseignement secondaire et le développement de la culture indigène en A.O.F.," *Congrès international de l'évolution culturelle, 1937, rapports et compte-rendus* (Paris, 1938), 29.

[10]Some of the European names, of course, could belong to sons of Creoles or assimilated Africans with French names.

[11]Braillon, "L'enseignement secondaire," 31. Only Leopold Senghor, who attended the public secondary school in Dakar from 1926–1928, pursued a purely literary education on a government scholarship. Jacques Louis Hymans, *Leopold Sedar Senghor: An Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh, 1971), 14, 75.

medicine, or the administrative services.[12] Its diploma, though prestigious in Africa, was a purely local one, not recognized as the equivalent of the *brevet supérieur* of the metropolitan normal schools after which Ponty was modeled. In fact the one abortive attempt to introduce a metropolitan degree, in the late twenties, would have given candidates merely the E.P.S. *brevet élémentaire.*

Ponty was the largest of the federal schools with entering classes rising to about one hundred for several years after World War I and again in the late thirties and forties after the school left its cramped quarters on the island of Gorée for rural Sebikotane. By 1945, it had graduated a total of 2080 students, almost half of them teachers. However, its size fluctuated drastically and in the twenties it suffered serious attrition when students who were expelled or resigned found more profitable jobs in commerce than those offered to graduates by the colonial administration. Nevertheless, its prestige as the *Grand Ecole* of A.O.F. remained intact and forty or fifty years later its graduates still proudly identify themselves as "Pontins."

The School of Medicine and Midwifery and the Veterinary School

The Medical School was created in 1918, largely as a byproduct of World War I. Its students had to pass an entrance exam after completing two years in a medical preparatory section (first at the Ecole Faidherbe, after 1920 at Ponty), as did students of the veterinary section. Prospective midwives, however, entered at the much lower level of the primary certificate, until the Girls' School at Rufisque was opened in 1938.[13] In 1919 a small pharmacy section was added and in 1925 the veterinary section split off to become an autonomous school in Bamako. The emphasis in both human and veterinary medicine was on practical competency rather than on theoretical knowledge, and the most notable feature of the students' training were the half-day clinics and hospital sessions in which they participated daily with their professors from the first year onward.[14] A closely related phenomenon was the unhesitating use of students as increasingly skilled medical personnel in the actual running of the

[12]Until 1940 the medical preparatory section students spent only two years at Ponty, with an emphasis on basic science in the final years, before taking the entrance exam for the Dakar Medical School.

[13]Only a handful of girls entered the higher primary schools before the late thirties.

[14]The most detailed published description of the school is found in Mumford, *Africans Learn to be French,* 137–155.

Dakar Central Native Hospital and various outpatient clinics. Similar use was made of indigenous midwives, pharmacists, and veterinarians, although their courses of study were only three years.

Classes were of course much smaller than at Ponty. The largest number of "auxiliary doctors" (later called "African doctors") graduated in one year was thirty-one and a few classes were under ten. The largest veterinary school class was ten, and pharmacy usually took only one to three new students a year. By 1945 a total of 301 African doctors, thirty-nine pharmacists, and 109 veterinarians had been trained, for a population of over fifteen million.[15]

The Rural Normal Schools of Katibougou and Dabou

Gorée—small, rocky, dry, and urbanized—was no place to train teachers skilled in agricultural education. In the thirties, with the new emphasis on adapting primary education to a rural milieu, the need for teachers trained differently was self-evident. The result was the creation of two additional normal schools: Katibougou in the Soudan for savanna cultures and Dabou, in the southern Ivory Coast, for forest crops. Neither, however, ever approached either Ponty's enrollment or its prestige.

Students originally entered with the primary certificate although eventually Katibougou upgraded its entry requirements to one or more years of E.P.S. The regular course of study was three years with the addition at Katibougou of a fourth year teaching in an *école d'application.*[16] Class size in both schools varied from about fifteen to thirty, but some graduates of Katibougou became agents in the Departments of Agriculture and Forests and Water rather than teachers. Furthermore, since Katibougou did not graduate its first class until 1938 (and Dabou only in 1941) they obviously could not contribute substantial numbers to the teaching force before the end of the war.

Ecole Normale de Jeunes Filles (Rufisque)

Potentially one of the most important developments in postprimary education between the wars was the opening in 1938 of a federal school for girls at Rufisque on the model of the nearby Ecole

[15]Mimeographed list of all graduates, Ecole de Médecine et de Pharmacie; wall plaque of graduates at the former Bamako Veterinary School, now a school for veterinary assistants.

[16]Circular from the Governor General to Governors concerning the organization of rural normal schools, n.d., Archives, A.O.F., Dakar [hereafter AAOF], 0–286–49.

William Ponty. Like Ponty, its primary goal was to train teachers although a few girls from each class entered the Dakar Medical School for midwife training after two years. Entry into Rufisque was originally by *concours* at the primary certificate level although by 1940 one year of E.P.S. was theoretically required as well.[17] The course of study for prospective teachers was four years, similar but at a lower level to that offered at Ponty, with practical training in sewing, cooking, child care, and other domestic arts. Classes were much smaller (twenty-five to thirty-five) and, unlike Ponty, students were not segregated into dormitories by colony of origin.

The Higher Technical School at Bamako

A latecomer among elite schools, the *Ecole Technique Supérieure* opened only in 1940, recruiting students at the same level as Ponty (E.P.S. graduates). It quickly became a prestigious alternative for students gifted in mathematics and science.[18] At Bamako students were trained as technical assistants in a four-year curriculum which was at least as rigorous as that offered at Ponty. Classes were very small, by 1945 a total of only thirty students (two classes) had graduated. They became topographers, overseers, and draftsmen in the public works department.[19] After the war the school's small size was a distinct advantage to ambitious students, since the top two graduates in each class could choose to continue their education in France to prepare for a *Grande Ecole,* such as the *Ecole de Travaux Publics.*[20]

THE ERA OF LIMITS

The above catalog of the secondary and postprimary schools in French West Africa indicates that, while there had clearly been some extension of educational opportunities during the interwar period, access to even the limited elite status provided by these schools

[17]Decrees 2403/E, 21 July 1938 and 1994/E, 17 September 1940, "Evolution statutaire 1938–1969," Ecole normale de jeunes filles. Annex A. School archives. A 1945 graduate noted that even after 1940 if one could pass the *concours* the year of E.P.S. was not essential. Conversation with Mme. Marguerite Dansokho, Thiès, June 1973.

[18]This can be determined by the choice of top candidates when a common entrance exam was instituted in the 1940s; several of the highest scorers chose Bamako over Ponty.

[19]JOAOF, 1944, 536; JOAOF, 1945, 627.

[20]Interview with Placide Gbaguidi (1948 graduate of the Higher Technical School), Cotonou, March 1973.

remained extremely restricted. The limitations on elite education were four-fold: in the numbers of students educated, in their curriculums and their diplomas, and in the careers that awaited graduates. Although these constraints operated in all the schools described above, the following analysis will concentrate on the Ecole William Ponty, since it was the focus of my field research.

Compared to the population of A.O.F., and even with that of students in primary schools, the number of Africans who received postprimary training was extremely small, as Table 1 indicates.[21] This was in part due to financial constraints; not only were the colonies expected to be self-supporting, but education received a very minor share of the total A.O.F. budget, less than three percent in the late twenties and early thirties.[22] Given the small education budget students of federal schools (not including the lycées, where tuition was charged) represented a substantial investment. Not only was there no tuition, but room and board, books, clothing, school supplies, travel home once a year, and even a small allowance for incidentals were supplied. The intent, therefore, was to limit recruitment through the federation-wide *concours* to the number who would presumably be needed and to avoid the expense and perhaps ultimately danger of educating "rootless intellectuals."[23] It should be noted that the anonymous competitive *concours,* in which only a minority of candidates were successful, was and still is common in France itself as well, and in theory at least guarantees both quality control and the absence of favoritism.[24] However it can be argued that by limiting both the number and types of indigenous auxiliaries, as well as the work they were trained to do, the French also severely retarded the development of French West Africa, to the loss of the metropole as well as the colonies themselves.

[21] Educational statistics for the neighboring British colonies of Nigeria and the Gold Coast indicate that the former had about .02 percent of its total estimated 1939 population in secondary schools and the latter about .07 percent (estimated 1940 population). French West Africa was also lagging in primary education, with Nigeria educating approximately 1.2 percent of its population and the Gold Coast 2.5 percent. These percentages are calculated from data in the *Statistical Yearbook of the League of Nations 1942/44*, Economic Intelligence Service, 17 (Geneva, 1945), 12; James Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley, 1963), 134; Philip Foster, *Education and Social Change in Ghana* (Chicago, 1965), 113, 115.

[22] A.O.F. annual reports, 1927, 1929, 1930, 1931, AAOF, 2G 27/21 (4). By 1934 it had risen to just over four percent. Mumford, *Africans Learn to be French,* 167.

[23] *Intellectuals* was a somewhat ironic term, since even so-called elite schools did not see themselves as producing any kind of genuine intellectuals, employed or rootless.

[24] I am grateful to Henri Brunschwig for pointing this out to me in a recent letter, 6 June 1977.

TABLE 1

STUDENTS IN ELITE SCHOOLS ABOUT 1940, FRENCH WEST AFRICA

School	*Date*	*No. in entering class*	*No. of graduate*
William Ponty	1940	82	88
Medical School	1941	29	20
Veterinary School	1941	4	7
Lycées	1938	?	16
Katibougou	1940	48	27
Dabou	1940/41	30	12
Girls School, Rufisque	1940	27	—[a]
Higher technical school, Bamako	1941	26	—[a]
Population of French West Africa (1938)		15,200,000	
Public primary school population (1938)		68,416 (.5% of the total population)[b]	
E.P.S. population (1938)		717	
Secondary schools (lycées) (1938)		1,022[c]	01% of the total population
Normal schools: Ponty, Katibougou, Dabou (1938)		366	
		2,105	

Sources: AAOF, 0-305-49; JOAOF, 1938, 944: JOAOF, 1940, 319, 331; JOAOF, 1941, 786, 815, 921; Ecole Normale de Jeunes Filles, Rufisque, *registre matricule*; mimeographed list of all Medical School graduates; *Annuaire statistique des possessions françaises*, Ministére des Colonies, Service colonial des statistiques, Paris, provisional ed. 1944, "Enseignement," Tables 1 E, 3, 4.

[a]No student had yet graduated from these recently-opened schools.

[b]Total rather than school age population is used in these calculations because the latter was not available. The colonial governments often assumed that ten percent of the total population were of school age, convenient mathematically but almost certainly too low.

[c]Almost three quarters (741) were in the Dakar lycée, in which French students made up a substantial majority.

Actually the modest recruitment quotas of the postprimary schools were sometimes unfilled, especially in the case of the relatively unprestigious agricultural normal school of Dabou. Even Ponty had fewer students than desired for several years in the twenties. Many of the best E.P.S. prospects, especially in that decade, were lured away by commercial firms and banks. Another problem in filling quotas

was the lack of equivalence of the various *écoles primaires supérieures*; the low level of some of them made it very difficult for their students to do well on a federation-wide *concours*.

To avoid creating rootless intellectuals moral character as well as intellectual ability was repeatedly stressed as a criterion for recruitment, especially at a pre-E.P.S. level. It is impossible to determine of course how many bright students but *mauvaises têtes* (the common term for students who were disciplinary problems) were thereby weeded out at the elementary level. But intermittent complaints by Ponty directors and several student strikes in the twenties indicate that the moral character of Ponty students (more precisely defined as "irreproachable conduct and work habits") at times left much to be desired.[25]

Explicit manpower projections for the utilization of postprimary school graduates were very uncommon. The most notable was in the early thirties when the Ponty administrative section was reestablished, following a period of some eight years when indigenous administrative personnel were trained in the *écoles primaires supérieures*. In 1932 a questionnaire was sent to all the federal services and the lieutenant governors of the various colonies requesting estimates of their projected needs. However three years later many of these expected positions did not materialize and some frustrated early graduates of the new section began work as clerk typists, far below their potential.[26]

Not only did the postprimary schools have few students, but both in terms of their urban, frequently coastal geographical origins and their social backgrounds a disproportionate share were drawn from a small segment of the total population, at least at Ponty and Rufisque. This was of course true to an even greater extent for the lycées and probably for the prestigious Higher Technical School at Bamako as well. Only the lower status schools, such as Katibougou and Dabou, may have drawn much of their student body from a wider segment of the population.

In the early years of the century Ponty students came mainly from the areas of long-established European presence, the Four Communes of Senegal and the coastal towns of Dahomey. With nineteen

[25]Louis Victor Pariset, acting Ponty director, report, 11 July 1921, AAOF, 0-293-49; director's annual report, 1924–25, AAOF, 0-294-49.

[26]By the late 1930s many graduates were still in minor secretarial or bookkeeping positions. Their justified discontent was acknowledged by the Minister of the Colonies in a letter to the A.O.F. Goveror General, 9 March 1939, AAOF, 0-297-49.

percent of the population of A.O.F. between them in 1911, these two colonies provided sixty-nine percent of the Ponty graduates from 1906 to 1915.[27] As time went on the relative numerical predominance of Senegal and Dahomey declined, but of the total of 1,878 graduates for whom colonies of origin are known up to 1950 (a little over seventy-five percent of the total), twenty-five percent were from Senegal and sixteen percent from Dahomey.[28] Similarly, the student body of the first six classes at Rufisque (entering from 1938 to 1943) included thirty percent from Dahomey and twenty-two percent from Senegal.[29] Furthermore, of the girls whose birthplace is known, seventy-six percent of the Senegalese were Commune *originaires* and eighty percent of the Dahomeans came from the coastal towns of Porto Novo, Cotonou, Ouidah, and Grand Popo.[30] In addition, as Table 2 indicates, the girls' school at Rufisque drew its student body from an even more Westernized social strata than its male counterpart Ponty, a finding which is consistent with other studies of the social background of African male and female secondary students.[31]

Table 2, with its data drawn from the *registres matricules,* may actually understate the extent to which new groups were rising through education. For instance school records did not distinguish between traditional chiefs and those who were given the post by the French, often as a reward for earlier service. Nor does the Table distinguish between traditional craftsmen, such as weavers, and artisans whose work brought them into contact with the Westernized sector of society (masons, tailors, carpenters). The latter, in fact, represented a majority of artisan fathers whose occupations are listed. Finally the largest number of students at Ponty (though not those at Rufisque) came from rural peasant backgrounds. In the period from 1916 to 1927 this category outnumbered the trading and white collar categories combined (thirty-six to thirty percent). Unfortunately here again the *registre matricule* fails to make the

[27]Forty-four percent were from Senegal and twenty-five percent from Dahomey. Porto Nova alone provided half the Dahomean contingent and St. Louis sixty percent of the graduates from Senegal. On the geographical backgrounds of Ponty students see Peggy Sabatier, "Educating a Colonial Elite: The William Ponty School and its Graduates" (Ph.D dissertation, University of Chicago, 1977), 214–227. The data is compiled from lists of graduates published annually in the JOAOF, from the *registres matricules,* and from directors' reports, AAOF.

[28]Sabatier, "Educating a Colonial Elite," 215.

[29]Ecole Normale de Jeunes Filles, Rufisque (now at Thiès), *registre matricule,* N=208.

[30]*Ibid.* Senegal, N=25; Dahomey, N=41.

[31]Foster, *Education and Social Change in Ghana,* 241; Remi Clignet and Philip Foster, *The Fortunate Few: A Study of Secondary Schools and Students in the Ivory Coast* (Evanston, 1966), 57–58.

TABLE 2
SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF PONTY AND RUFISQUE STUDENTS

Occupation of fathers	*Ponty, classes of 1916–27*		*All Ponty students in school year 1940–41*		*Rufisque classes entering 1938–41*	
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
Trader	41	16	60	21	21	19
Clerical, management lower professional[a]	34	14	65	23	61	54
Uniformed services, e.g. *garde de cercle*	13	5	5	2	3	3
Artisans, skilled or unskilled workers[b]	27	11	21	7	10	9
Misc.—some connection w/Europeans, e.g. cook	8	3	1	3	6	5
Propriétaires, rentiers	4	2	0	0	2	2
Chief or *notable*, including *chef de canton*[c]	30	12	21	7	1	1
Marabout, cadi, fetish priest	3	1	5	2	0	0
Farmer, herder, fisherman	89	36	109	38	8	7
Total	249	100	287	99	112	100

Sources: Ecole William Ponty, *registre matricule*; Annual statistical report, 1940–41, AAOF, 0-305-49; Ecole Normale de Jeunes Filles, Rufisque, *registre matricule.*

Note: The categories are adapted from Gustav Jahoda's study of university students in the Gold Coast and the work of Foster and Clignet on secondary students. Jahoda, "The Social Background of a West African Student Population: I," *British Journal of Sociology*, 5 (1954), 360–361; Foster and Clignet, *Fortunate Few* (Evanston, 1966), 56–58; Foster, *Education and Social Change in Ghana* (Chicago, 1965), 240–242.

[a]Includes *employés de commerce.*

[b]Most of this group were artisans; the few skilled workers were fathers of Rufisque students.

[c]This is meant to be a category of primary occupation rather than status, thus other fathers, at least of Ponty students, may well have been chiefs at some point in their careers.

important distinction between cash crop farmers and subsistence farmers. It is perhaps significant, however, that in the pre-1916 period, before Ivory Coast students began coming in substantial numbers, the percentage of students from this category stood at only fifteen percent.[32] Although by 1940 the number of students from

[32]The greatest number of cash crop farmers in A.O.F. were cocoa and coffee growers in the southern Ivory Coast.

rural peasant backgrounds had increased slightly (to thirty-eight percent) their proportional representation was by then slightly lower than the combined trading and clerical category (forty-three percent) and of course far underrepresented in the overwhelmingly rural A.O.F. territories. This tendency is even more striking in the case of Rufisque students, where only seven percent of the fathers of girls in the first four classes were peasants.

The lycées prided themselves on an encyclopedic, strictly metropolitan secondary curriculum. Unlike the other elite schools, their value lay in the "attempt to give those who were capable of receiving it an authentic French culture."[33] Very few Africans completed these studies, but this was no cause for official concern. Only the best, those deemed capable of "possessing rather than merely imitating French culture," were awarded the *brevet de capacité coloniale.* Here, for a chosen few, educational assimilation was complete.[34]

The postprimary schools had no pretensions to secondary status. Except for the specialized studies of the medical and veterinary schools, the models for their curriculums were French higher primary and normal schools, the latter the culminating step in the primary education track in France. Ponty was undoubtedly typical of all the federal schools in the stress placed on the French language, with about ten hours a week (almost one third of the classroom hours) spent on dictations, composition, and grammar, with somewhat less concern for literature.[35] Above all else African auxiliaries were required to be completely fluent in French, although intense emphasis on and pride in the language is characteristic of schools in France as well. Other important academic subjects at Ponty were mathematics, including elementary algebra and plane geometry, physical and natural sciences, and geography and history (the latter including a French colonial view of West African history in the third year course). The level at which these subjects were taught varied

[33]Braillon, "L'enseignement secondaire," 31.

[34]*Ibid.,* 32. Many of these African dropouts left before completing the full secondary course to take jobs in the administration or in commercial firms, undoubtedly in part because of the relatively high cost of lycée education and the lack of scholarships for Africans. Another reason for the severe attrition was the discrepancy between the primary and secondary track in the lower grades. As in France, if a family could not afford to send a child to the preparatory courses of a secondary school his six years of regular primary schooling would leave him ill-prepared to enter *sixième.*

[35]"Literature" usually meant two- to three-page selections in anthologies of famous works, although students did read a few plays, especially, in their entirety.

somewhat over time. In the early and mid-twenties an attempt was made to simplify the math and science offerings on the grounds that they were too abstract for African mentalities, while from 1927 to 1931 the curriculum, especially in math, was closer to that of the metropole than at any time before the late forties. However the special commission necessary to grant the metropolitan *brevet élémentaire* was never established, despite the students' preparation for the exam, and in the early thirties the revised curriculum came under severe attack. The main criticism was that the school was failing to fulfill its primary function of preparing teachers for the largely rural primary schools of French West Africa; that it had become far too abstract and academic.[36] Although Ponty students' experience in the next few years did not become notably more practical, it did become less "French." From the mid-thirties to the mid-forties the school administration required that large amounts of time be spent on individual research papers describing some aspect of African culture (the *cahiers*), the creation and performance of plays on African themes, and the transcription and translation of indigenous tales into French.[37] But even after the school moved to rural Sebikotane in 1938 practical training in agriculture was limited to visits to the model farm, occasional supervision of the workmen there, and planting trees and flowers on the extensive but somewhat barren school grounds. Perhaps the main practical effect of the rural milieu was to change the composition of the annex primary school; Ponty teaching-section students were at last faced with the children of peasants rather than the relatively sophisticated urban children of Gorée.

At the rural normal schools of Katibougou and Dabou, on the other hand, students devoted much of their time to actual agricultural work, perhaps one reason for the schools' lesser prestige and attractiveness. In Katibougou, for example, students spent four months during the main farming season entirely engaged in practical work and two and one-half hours per day during the rest of the school

[36]Davesne, "Rapport sur l'A.O.F., l'adaptation," 93.

[37]On the Ponty *cahiers* and African theater see Peggy Sabatier, "African Culture and French Colonial Education: The William Ponty School *Cahiers* and Theater" (paper delivered to the 18th Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, San Francisco, 1 November 1975). There are parallels in colonial Franco-Vietnamese higher primary and secondary schools, where after 1924 Vietnamese literature became part of the cirriculum, also at French instigation. Gail Kelly, "Colonial Schools in Vietnam, 1918–1938" (paper delivered to the Second Annual Meeting of the French Colonial Historical Society, Milwaukee, 9 April 1976), 8.

year. In 1945, in fact, a report finally concluded that much of this repetitive and often boring work could and should be eliminated.[38]

The most rigorous federal school, despite its practical nontheoretical emphasis, was the Dakar Medical School, which usually (though not always) took the top students from the Ponty medical preparatory class.[39] Students had about fifteen hours of courses a week in their first two years, with classes and laboratories reserved for the afternoons so students could spend the mornings in the clinics and hospitals. Beginning with emptying bedpans, taking temperatures, and putting on bandages in their first year, by the third and fourth year students were doing the initial examinations of new patients and developing tentative diagnoses and treatment plans. These more experienced students were also expected to take turns at night duty. Because of these added responsibilities their course work in the last two years was reduced to ten to thirteen hours a week. The curriculum naturally concentrated on diseases most likely to be encountered in French West Africa and some specific fields taught in medical faculties were ignored completely or treated very superficially. The most frequently mentioned of these, by graduates who had later studied in France, were embryology, biochemistry, medical physics, and medical chemistry. In addition, of course, the school lacked many of the resources available in full-fledged medical schools in the metropole, especially in terms of scientific apparatus. Graduates stressed, however, that such apparatus would not have been available *en brousse* in any case, and they uniformly praised their training for giving them the ability to diagnose and treat a broad range of medical problems unaided and with very little equipment.

In no case was an actual metropolitan diploma given to a graduate of a school in pre-World War II French West Africa. In theory, however, the *brevet de capacité coloniale* from the African lycées could be easily validated as the equivalent of the *baccalauréat (bac)* if its holder went to the metropole. For the French students, a vast majority of the total, the validation was virtually automatic, although not necessarily for Africans.[40] African lycée graduates who did not continue their education were permitted to enter certain government

[38]Report on the teaching of agriculture in the Normal Schools, 30 June 1945, AAOF, 0-297–49. Since the height of agricultural work coincided with the long vacation, their vacations were also much shorter than those of the other federal schools.

[39]Lower-ranking students generally went to the veterinary school at Bamako.

[40]The one African with this diploma to whom I talked, however, had no real difficulty, though he fould it impossible in the early 1930s to obtain a scholarship for further studies

services, such as the postal service, customs, finance, and justice, at the lowest level of the European *cadre supérieur.*[41]

In the other federal schools the A.O.F. diploma had no such equivalent. In the short-lived Aix-en-Provence experiment, twenty-three of the top Ponty graduates were given scholarships to France in the early twenties. They were all required to attend the Aix Normal School and take another complete three-year teacher training program, with no possibility of alternative or higher education. Graduates who could finally continue their education after World War II were somewhat freer, but they too had to take up their studies again at a relatively low level. Graduates of the Dakar Medical School, for example, had to earn the *bac* and then begin medical studies anew. Fortunately they were generally allowed to take some exams without repeating the course work, and thus potentially shorten the seven year program by several years.

For the vast majority of graduates from the postprimary schools, of course, the main concern in this period was occupational; further education was simply not conceivable. Here too the French were careful to segregate them (on the objective basis of their "inferior" diplomas) in separate *cadres secondaires,* although their actual work was frequently of equal responsibility and complexity as that of the corresponding European *cadre supérieur* officials, especially in the case of teachers and medical personal (auxiliary doctors, pharmacists, and veterinarians).[42]

Only a few Africans were able to enter the *cadre supérieur* in this period. Ponty graduates who were sent to the Aix Normal School and earned a certified metropolitan teaching degree could hardly be kept out. Mamadou Dia, later prime minister of Senegal, passed the

anywhere but the veterinary medical school at Alfort. He finally studied letters at Algiers, supported only by his father. Interview with Alioune Diop (of *Présence Africaine*), Paris, 17 September 1976.

[41] Although the terminology varied somewhat, by the 1920s there were four administrative *cadres* in French West Africa. The two highest, the *cadre général* and the *cadre commun supérieur,* were in general restricted to people with some post-secondary education and the *bac,* respectively. The *cadre commun secondaire* was for Africans who had graduated from one of the federal schools or in some instances had passed an examination; members of this *cadre,* like Europeans, were nominated by the governor general and could be sent anywhere in A.O.F. At the bottom was the *cadre local* for Africans with primary or higher primary education; they were limited to service in their own colony and were nominated by the local lieutenant governors.

[42] Their base pay was about half that of Europeans, and teachers were also remunerated on a different scale for identical supplementary work, such as adult education classes. On comparative *cadres,* salaries, and perquisites for teaching, medical, and administrative personnel see Sabatier, "Educating a Colonial Elite," Chaps. VI-VIII.

brevet de capacité coloniale after studying many years on his own and then received permission to take the West African certifying exam for European teachers in the late thirties. Finally in 1942 an examination for indigenous teachers was created which gave access to the *cadre supérieur,* but it was so difficult, and possibly so arbitrarily administered, that very few had passed it by the end of the decade. For auxiliary doctors, pharmacists, and veterinarians, there was no possibility at all of being promoted out of their *cadre* until after World War II. Within all the indigenous *cadres,* of course, there was a carefully graded series of promotions, sometimes requiring a mid-career exam and/or *stage* (practical training course). It should be stressed that at the time most African functionaries found both their diplomas and their roles in the administration entirely natural, though they might well voice specific grievances. For example in a survey of 517 African teachers made by the Education Service during World War II, only 162 requested easier access into the *cadre supérieur,* compared to 517 who asked for a higher salary and more respect (especially from the local French administrator).[43]

CONCLUSION

Until the Brazzaville Conference of 1944 the French had no need to make any fundamental reevaluations of the training and utilization of indigenous modernist elites. Why should they? The system worked well. Probably the only recurring colonialist complaint about postprimary schools was that they did not turn out enough functionaries, but this was seen as an inevitable result of budgetary constraints. Nor did Africans, unlike contemporary French-ruled Vietnamese, voice discontent with the amount of postprimary or secondary schooling available to their children,[44] with the exception of occasional outbursts in the Dahomean and Senegalese press and the Colonial Council.[45]

[43]A.O.F. Education Service, "Enquête sur la fonction d'instituteur," Table II (1944), personal archives of Roger Dumargue, Vix (France).

[44]Not content with mere vocal criticism of colonial education the Vietnamese also developed their own private schools, although after 1924 there were severe restrictions on such schools and they were ultimately unable to provide valid alternatives to Franco-Vietnamese education. Gail Kelly, "Franco-Vietnam Schools, 1918 to 1938" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1975), 346, 364.

[45]In 1926, for example, a delegation from the Colonial Council went to the Governor General with a series of grievances and recommendations concerning all levels of education

African acceptance of the status quo was of course in large measure due to strict French control. Outside the Four Communes there was no toleration of either the political activity or (with very rare exceptions) the African-supported primary and even secondary schools which were characteristic of the British West African colonies.[46] A second reason for the success of French educational policy was the skillful propaganda on the glories of French history, the superiority of French civilization, and the beauty and rationality of the French language. Most francophone-educated Africans, lacking the long traditions of scholarship and national unity of the Vietnamese, were relatively easy targets for this barrage. Finally there is no denying that the material and psychic rewards of successful schoolboys and indigenous colonial auxiliaries were considerable and for most outweighed the frequent indignities and frustrations of their position. Paradoxically the combination of highly selective and restricted entry into these postprimary schools and the lack of possibilities for higher education beyond them enhanced their attractiveness in African eyes and validated their graduates' claim to elite status. It is instructive to compare the lack of prestige of the Yaba School of Medicine in Nigeria with the pride expressed in the Dakar Medical School even by those of its graduates who have continued their education in France.[47] Graduates of the Ecole William Ponty spontaneously and proudly describe their education as French, and many strongly identified with the *grande patrie* at least through their schoolboy days.[48] Thus somewhat ironically colonial education in the era of limits did create, in

from the St. Louis lycée to Senegalese primary schools. *La France Coloniale,* 4 June 1927. They were received politely, but the results of their mission were nil.

[46]On African initiatives in secondary education in the Gold Coast and Nigeria see Foster, *Education and Social Change,* 102, 114–115, and David B. Abernethy, *The Political Dilemma of Popular Education: An African Case* (Stanford, 1969), 119.

[47]Although Yaba eventually received partial recognition of its diploma from Britain (unlike the Dakar Medical School), its graduates were perceived as second-rate compared to their compatriots who had already become full-fledged medical doctors. Dr. Manuwu, International Medical Conference at Dakar, May 1951, 135–136, cited by Clement C. Chesterman, "Training and Employment of Auxiliary Personnel in Medical and Health Services in Tropical Africa," *Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene,* 61 (January-December 1953), 125; Colemen, *Nigeria,* 123.

[48]Of the almost one hundred graduates interviewed (most from the classes of 1920 through 1945) almost half said they had considered themselves French or had had deep affection for France while in school, and another twenty-five percent had thought of her with admiration and/or gratitude. Some distinction can be made between colonies, however, with students from Soudan the most likely to have had negative feelings.

an ambiguous and often impermanent fashion, a few loyal if second-class black Frenchmen.

In the very different climate of the post-World War II period both the educational and occupational systems opened up, with a good deal of African assistance. By the early fifties most of the schools discussed above, as well as several newly-created lycées, were preparing students for the *bac,* and the medical school had been replaced by the first three years of a faculty of medicine (medical students completed their studies in France until 1960). The era of deliberate limits was over, but its educated products would be the major component of the first generation of African nationalists and government leaders. At independence, in fact, the presidents of Mali, Niger, Dahomey (now Benin), and the Ivory Coast, as well as the prime minister of Senegal, were graduates of the Ecole Willian Ponty.