Assimilation in 19th Century Senegal
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When discussing the evolution of the French-speaking African States, scholars have often found it fashionable to try to explain 'everything' in the light of the policy of assimilation. The policy itself has usually been explained in very general terms, and little effort has been made to demonstrate how it operated in practice in particular colonies. With reference to Senegal, which appears to be an exception in this regard, although it is regarded as the most advanced experiment in assimilation in Africa, no satisfactory attempt has so far been made to show exactly to what extent it was assimilated to France. The aim of this article, therefore, is to shed further light on this problem by reviewing the operation of the policy of assimilation in the colony during the 19th century.

The genesis of assimilation in Senegal may be traced back to an earlier period, but it was not until the 19th century that it began to assume the importance that has for long been attributed to it. The most significant dates in this connection are the years 1794, 1830, 1833 and 1848, when the legal foundation of the policy was laid, and the period 1871-1900, which witnessed its conscious application.

The National Convention decree of 16 Pluviôse, Year II (1794), abolished slavery and conferred on all men of whatever colour, and who were domiciled in the colonies, French citizenship and all the rights guaranteed by the constitution. This concession was moti-
vated by the overpowering revolutionary slogan of Liberté, égalité, fraternité and the logical reasoning that as rational beings the inhabitants of French overseas possessions, no matter their social status, were entitled to the same privileges as French citizens in the metropole. This assimilationist tendency did not disappear with the 1789 Revolution; an order-in-council dated 5 November 1830, which rendered the French Civil Code applicable in Senegal, declared the colony an integral part of France, and conferred on any free-born individuals living there the rights accorded by the Code to French citizens. A law dated 24 April 1833 carried this concession further by conferring civil and political rights on free-born persons, as well as on any individuals who had legally acquired their liberty. Finally, by article 6 of the Provisional Government’s Instruction of 27 April 1848, which regulated the operation in Senegal of the decree of 5 March 1848, concerning elections to the National Assembly in France, Senegalese resident in the colony for more than five years were regarded as French citizens and exempted from giving evidence of their naturalization, an act which was legally required of all would-be voters.

To understand the scope of this concession it is essential not only to find out what the term ‘Senegal’ connoted during this period, but also to identify the inhabitants of the localities affected. Although the French had established several military and trading posts in the strategic parts of the territory, ‘Senegal’ for a long time meant no more than Goree and St. Louis, the only localities where they were effectively established. The citizenship regulations were, therefore, meant to apply only in the two islands. However, when, by the 1860s French rule had been firmly established also in Rufisque and Dakar, civil and political rights were extended to the new centres, although the citizenship regulations were not formally promulgated there.

1. Bulletin Administratif du Sénégal (infra: BAS), 1830, pp. 303-305. According to the Minister for the Marine and the Colonies (Minister to Governor, No. 158 of 9 July 1830, IB 17), of the five French codes, only two—the commercial and the penal codes—had already been promulgated in Senegal. For discussion of the Code in the administrative council on 5 Nov. 1830, see 3E 9, ANS.

2. BAS, 1833, p. 401. For the government’s instructions on the law, see Minister to Governor, No. 71 of 10 May 1833, IB 20, AAOF. For full text of the law, see J.-B. DUVERGER, Collection complète des lois, décrets, ordonnances, règlements et avis du Conseil d’État, Paris, 1842, XXXIII, pp. 72-74.

3. BAS, 1848, pp. 257-266. The article reads: “La condition d’être né ou naturalisé Français peut se justifier, soit par la possession résultant de votes antérieurs, soit par la représentation des actes de naturalisation délivrés par les gouvernements précédents, lettres d’avis ou autres actes officiels. Seront dispensés de toute preuve de naturalisation, les habitants indigènes du Sénégal et dépendances, et des établissements français de l’Inde, justifiant d’une résidence de plus de cinq années dans lesdites possessions.” For government’s instructions on this article, see Minister to Governor, No. 102 of 25 May 1848, IB 48, AAOF.
Thus, in all matters, Rufisque and Dakar became assimilated to Goree and St. Louis.

These localities, known as the *quatre communes*, had three categories of inhabitants: the French, the mulattoes, and the Senegalese. The citizenship concession was meant primarily for the Senegalese, especially as the legal status of the French was never in dispute, and as convention gave the mulatto children recognized by their French parent the same status as their parent. With regard to French assimilation policy, however, the mulattoes and the Senegalese constituted the assimilable groups in the *quatre communes*. It is not clear why the concession of French citizenship and of civil and political rights had to be confirmed several times. Although the Senegalese did not have to argue that they were French citizens until the beginning of the 20th century, when these rights were threatened with abolition, there is no doubt that they regarded themselves as equal in status to the French and the mulattoes.

Although the work of political assimilation had begun early in the century, partly because of the traditional hostility of the local administration to representative assemblies, and partly because of the political vicissitudes in France, it made little headway, and the liberal concessions were short-lived. With the establishment of the Third Republic, however, it received a fresh impetus. Municipal councils were set up in Goree and St. Louis in 1872; in 1879 a *conseil général* was established, and in the same year Senegal recovered the rights it had once had and lost, of electing a deputy to the Chamber of Deputies in France. Deputyship was not as insignificant as one might think—the deputy was not an empty thunder sounding like heavy artillery in the distance, but his thunderbolts could hit their targets, sometimes with a devastating effect; however, until the turn of the century it did not substantially affect the local political situation. Attention will therefore be concentrated on the other elective institutions.

To what extent, it may be asked, was Senegal assimilated to France in political matters? First, the institutions were set up not as an unsolicited gift but in deference to the request for them by the articulate elements in Senegal led by the Bordeaux commercial firms who controlled the economic life of the colony. Secondly, although the ideal sought by the French government was total assimilation, in introducing liberal measures, it was realistic enough to take the local situation into consideration. Thus, while the regulations governing municipal organization in Senegal were a faithful reproduction of

1. On these concessions, see *Idowu*, pp. 43-59.
those operating in France, the decree of 4 February 1879, setting up the conseil général, an assembly with larger powers, which was expected to play a bigger role than the municipal councils, illustrates the willingness of the French government to compromise.

This decree differed substantially from the law of 10 August 1871, which reorganized the conseils généraux in France. In the first place, it was based on the senatus-consults of 3 May 1854 and 4 July 1866 governing the conseils généraux in the French West Indies. The main difference between the West Indian councils and those in France is that the former could vote direct taxes and impose customs duties while the latter had no such power but depended for their resources on government allocations and centimes additionnels. Thus the West Indian councils had more financial powers than their counterparts in France, the aim being to render them as financially autonomous as possible.

The decree of 4 February 1879 differed in several ways from the 1854 and 1866 senatus-consults. This was a result of a government stipulation that Senegal could not be completely assimilated even to the West Indian colonies but that the local situation should be taken into account. One of the important departures from the West Indian regulations was the stipulation empowering the governor of Senegal to enforce the collection and payment of the existing taxes if the conseil général did not vote the taxes for the revenues necessary for the regular functioning of the indispensable services. In postulating this reservation, the government claimed that it was guided by the desire to safeguard the rights of the inhabitants of a colony heterogeneous in language, religion and culture, and to prevent the proposed council from holding the local administration to ransom.

Another important departure was the right to fix customs duties and municipal taxes known as octroi de mer. The government supported the governor's explanation that it was impolitic to concede powers of decision in this matter to the council, in view of the abusive use being made of this power by the West Indian councils and the necessity not only to hold the balance equal between St. Louis and Goree, two localities with divergent customs regimes, but also to safeguard the interests of the State. Hence the decree gave the conseil général not the power to take self-executory decisions, but the right

1. The decree of 10 Aug. 1872, establishing municipal councils in St. Louis and Goree was an amalgam of the laws of 18 July 1837, 5 May 1855, 24 July 1867, and 14 Apr. 1871, governing municipal organization in France.

to express its views on the fixing of customs duties and to deliberate on the fixing of octroi de mer, after the recommendations of the municipal councils on the latter.

Among other departures may be cited the stipulation making it compulsory for would-be councillors to be able to speak, read, and write French fluently, and the reservation concerning the extent of the area over which the conseil général could exercise its various powers. The primary aim of the first reservation was to prevent the Senegalese, who constituted the largest body of voters and the majority of whom were illiterate, from swamping the council at the expense of the literate French and mulattoes, for whom the council was primarily set up. The council had the power to take definitive and self-executory decisions within the voting districts—i.e., St. Louis, Goree, Rufisque and Dakar; while outside these areas it exercised only the right to deliberate. This stipulation reflected the limited extent of French power in Senegal at the time. It must be added, however, that the council's power to vote direct taxes covered the whole colony, although only the communes were represented in the assembly.¹

Not only in political matters but also in judicial and economic affairs was Senegal not completely assimilated to France. The French system of justice operated largely in the communes, where the French were concentrated. This is not surprising, the idea being that French citizens, wherever they might be, were all equal before the law and entitled to the same judicial protection as was obtaining in France itself. Thus, persons coming under French justice were regulated by the French codes modified, where necessary, to suit the local conditions, and were justiciable by professional courts of justice which were modelled as closely as possible on those existing in France. The first act creating a regular judicial system in Senegal was the ordinance of January 1822, which established in St. Louis a Court of First Instance and an Appeal Court, and also maintained Court of First Instance already in existence in Goree. The French system of justice was reorganized several times in the course of the century.²

However, because they were not completely satisfied with this system, but preferred to be governed judicially in their own way, the communes Senegalese demanded a Muslim tribunal. As early as 1848 an attempt was made to gratify their desire, but it was not until the advent of Governor Louis Faidherbe that they received satisfac-

¹. On these departures, see IDOWU, 1966, pp. 70-76.
². Ibid., pp. 250 and 251. The French system of justice was reorganized, for example, by the ordinances of 27 Mar. 1844, and 4 Dec. 1847, and the decrees of 9 Aug. 1854 and 15 May 1889.
tion. The decree of 20 May 1857 established a Muslim tribunal in St. Louis. Officered by a cadis, an assessor, who acted for the cadi when the latter was not available, and a court-clerk, the tribunal had exclusive jurisdiction over matters concerning births, marriages, deaths, inheritances, donations, wills, and testaments. Matters not included in this list were reserved exclusively for the jurisdiction of French courts; but, in all cases, the parties had the right to choose between the one and the other system of justice. The 1857 decree was a clear recognition by the French government of the impracticability of blind assimilation.

One of the effective ways of promoting economic assimilation was the introduction of identical customs regimes in the metropole and the colonies. When in the 1860s, free trade was introduced in the colonies in the wake of its adoption in France, thus modifying substantially the illiberal regime governing their economic relations with her, it was welcomed by the merchants in Senegal who regarded it as a blessing. In the 1890s, however, when protectionism once again became the order of the day, Senegal could not be completely assimilated to France. There were two reasons for this. In the first place, having appreciated the advantages of free trade, the Bordeaux firms and the commercial elements in the colony were determined to resist protectionism, which they considered injurious to their interests. Secondly, the French government was itself persuaded that in view of the local situation, protectionism was not applicable in its West African colonies. As a result of the opposition of the merchants, only partial protectionism was introduced in Senegal in 1890, and this after a decade of wrangling with the government. A law dated

1. The native inhabitants of St. Louis started petitioning for a Muslim tribunal as early as 1832; see Bernard Schnapper, "Les tribunaux musulmans et la politique coloniale au Sénégal (1830-1914)", Revue Historique de Droit Français et Étranger, 1, 1961.

In one of their petitions, they stated: "Le Code civil a été promulgué dans la colonie mais aucune exception, aucune distinction n’a été faite pour les Mousoulmans. Est-ce à dire que nous sommes soumis aux lois civiles françaises en tous points? Qu’il faille nous appliquer ces lois pour le mariage, le divorce, les successions? Non certes et personne n’y a songé. Nous sommes soumis au koran qui est à la fois notre loi civile et religieuse et le gouvernement n’a jamais voulu nous imposer violemment des lois contraires à nos lois, pas plus que nous convertir par force à la religion chrétienne [...] Nous demandons à être admis aux droits accordés aux Mousoulmans d’Algérie: c’est-à-dire qu’il soit reconnu et proclamé que dans aucun cas les Mousoulmans ne peuvent, à Saint-Louis, être soumis à des lois civiles contraires à leurs lois religieuses, qu’à cet effet il soit créé un tribunal composé de nos chefs religieux lesquels seront saisis des contestations qui sont à la fois civiles et religieuses" (St. Louis Muslims to Governor, Dec. 1843, Senegal, viii, 14 bis, ANSOM).

2. BAS, 1857, pp. 460-462.

January 1892, issued in France, sought to link the colonies to the metropole by narrow tariff bonds and to reserve the colonial markets exclusively to France; but the nature of commercial transactions in Senegal, where merchants could not do without foreign goods which France could not supply, obliged the government to exempt Senegal and, indeed, French West Africa from its operation.¹

To illustrate the operation of assimilation in Senegal, it may be useful to examine the functioning and activities of one of the elective institutions, the *conseil général*. According to the 1879 decree, the *conseil général* was expected to meet at least once a year, in the colony’s capital, St. Louis, each session lasting a fortnight. Altogether, during the period of its existence, 43 ordinary, or budget, and 23 extraordinary, sessions were held. The council was convoked on each occasion by the governor and its agenda was prepared by the administration, after consultation with the members of the assembly.

The opening ceremony usually began with the inspection of the guard of honour by the governor, followed by a procession by the latter and his cortège composed of the heads of the administrative and military services, members of the administrative council, the St. Louis municipal organisation and Chamber of Commerce, and a large number of *fonctionnaires*. At the door of the council chamber to receive him was the council’s temporary *bureau* made up of the eldest councillor present, known as the *doyen d’âge*, who acted as chairman, and the youngest councillor present, who acted as secretary. Conducted into the hall, the governor occupied the seat normally used by the council’s president for the session, flanked on the right by the provisional *bureau* and on the left by the administration’s representative on the council, known as the *directeur de l’Intérieur*. Then followed the reading by the governor of his opening address.

Though the contents of the address varied from session to session, there was a general pattern: the governor reviewed the political, economic and budgetary situation during the immediately preceding year, made a brief analysis of the current situation, outlined the problems the council was expected to tackle in the course of the session, and sometimes discussed the programme for the future. But the most constant address item, except for the extraordinary session, was the draft budget. The aim of the address was not only to familiarize the councillors with local problems but also to create the friendly atmosphere necessary for fruitful administration—*conseil général* co-operation. For this purpose, the governor often resorted to flattering the councillors, especially to ensure the passage of unpopular measures. It is not surprising, therefore, that his speech should be

greeted with applause by the councillors. After winding up with the exclamation: "Vive la France! Vive le Sénégal! Vive la République!", the governor would withdraw with the same ceremonial, with his entourage, leaving his representative and the councillors to face the session’s tasks.

From its inception until 1896, the conseil général had a membership of 16, distributed as follows: 10 for St. Louis, 4 for Goree-Dakar, and 2 for Rufisque. In 1897, however, as a result of the agitation of the other communes against the St. Louis preponderance, the number of seats was increased to 20 which were distributed as follows: 10 for St. Louis, 5 for Goree-Dakar, and 5 for Rufisque. Altogether, between 1879 and 1920, a total of 97 persons were elected into the council: 16 Senegalese, 28 mulattoes, and 53 Frenchmen.

The session’s affairs were directed by a permanent bureau composed of a president, a vice-president, and two secretaries, and elected under the guidance of the provisional bureau. The most important of these posts was that of president. The council’s spadework was done by its committees: a finance or budget committee, and a general purposes committee, to which the agenda items coming within their respective purviews were distributed. Each committee was usually composed of five members, but the budget committee was more important than the general purposes committee.

The committees’ reports, which were usually well written and ably presented by the rapporteur, often provoked lively debates in the council, with the directeur de l’Intérieur explaining and defending the administration’s points of view and the councillors determined to have their way. In taking decisions or passing resolutions, the councillors were guided sometimes by what they considered to be the colony’s general interest—especially when these appeared to them threatened by the executive authorities—but most of the time, as was to be expected, by the divergent interests they represented.

The session would be brought to an end after the budget had been voted and after the representatives on the various administrative committees, such as the Central Education Committee, had been nominated and the members of the council’s caretaker committee, the Colonial Commission, had been elected. The president’s closing speech followed the same pattern as the governor’s opening address. It reviewed and summarized the council’s activities during the session, and provided an opportunity for flattering the council’s Ego.¹

The session was a unique business and social occasion on which were assembled under one roof the representatives of the various groups in the quatre communes: Frenchmen, mulattoes, Senegalese;

¹. For information on the council’s sessional meetings, see ibid., pp. 169-209.
merchants, traders, commercial agents, lawyers; rival families, divergent personalities; Christians, Muslims, agnostics, Freemasons. The aim was to encourage the growth of unity which the policy of assimilation was expected to create. The council’s activities were governed by rules of procedure which were modelled on those of the Chamber of Deputies in Paris.¹

An examination of the activities of the conseil général will enable us to decide to what extent the elective institutions were a useful instrument of assimilation. As was to be expected, the council was particularly concerned with the colony’s economic and social problems. To illustrate, we shall examine briefly how the council tackled the problems of economic development, education, and justice.

Commerce was the main activity in Senegal. As most of the councillors were merchants or commercial agents, it is not surprising that they should be interested in helping to provide facilities for commercial transactions. Thus, out of a loan of 5 million francs, contracted by the council in 1892, specifically for development projects, over three-fifths were set aside for the improvement of bridges, quays, jetties and ports, and allied services. Out of the second loan of 14 million francs, which the council decided to contract but which fell through for reasons beyond its control, over 3½ million francs were set aside for port works. The council was also interested in the development of communications and wanted to contribute to the financing of the Dakar-Niger railways. But if its efforts in this respect, as in that of the construction or development of ports, did not achieve any notable success, it was not because the will was lacking but because the council’s financial resources were not equal to the task. The task was taken over by the Government General of French West Africa, which contracted a loan in 1903 for 65 million francs and another for 100 million francs, in 1907, a great part of which was devoted to economic expansion through the development of ports, railways, and river navigation in French West Africa.

There were three types of justice in 19th century Senegal: French and Muslim justice operating in the quatre communes, and justice indigène, with its concomitant, the indigénat, operating in the Protectorate. The former systems posed no serious problem, but the conseil général was particularly concerned with the latter. Its criticism was succinctly put by Councillor Georges Crespin in 1913:

‘Dans la justice indigène il n’y a ni échelle de pénalité, ni distinction entre le délit et le crime ; les peines sont arbitraires et excessives ; le justiciable ne peut

¹. On the council’s rules of procedure, see Conseil général (infra CG), record of proceedings, 24 Nov. 1879, pp. 5-8.
The councillors wanted the French system of justice to operate not only in the communes but also throughout Senegal, partly because they thought that only under such a system could their interests be effectively protected, and partly because, as convinced assimilationists, many of them believed that the light of French civilization should penetrate also into the Senegalese interior.

In Senegal, as in many other parts of Africa, the history of education is largely the history of missionary activities. After resuming possession of the colony in 1817, the French government, in an attempt to propagate French civilization by means of education, introduced a method of education known as enseignement mutuel, to replace the koranic form of education operating in the colony. But when this did not prosper, the government invited the religious organizations established in France to extend their educational activities to Senegal. This was the background to the activities of the Sœurs de Saint-Joseph de Cluny, the Frères de Ploërmel, and the Sœurs de l’Immaculée Conception in Senegal.

However, education could only cater for a tiny section of the population, viz. the Europeans, the mulattoes, and a handful of ‘assimilated’ Senegalese. The majority of the Senegalese Muslims remained distrustful of European education which seemed bent on converting pupils to the Catholic religion. For obvious reasons, Muslim pupils could not find themselves at home in schools where time was spent attending masses, learning the catechism, and singing religious songs. Some of the councillors were genuinely interested in giving the benefits of French education to all, including Muslims, and suggested the introduction of secular education:

"Le Sénégal est particulièrement dévoré par le fanatisme : d’un côté le maraboutisme blanc et de l’autre le maraboutisme noir. Contre ces deux fléaux, il n’y a qu’un remède : c’est l’instruction laïque."  

However, partly because of the influence of the Catholic missions and partly because of the conviction of many a councillor that the missionaries provided the best form of instruction Senegal could have, this system of education held sway until 1903 when it was abolished and a secular system was introduced by the French government.

The conseil général was also interested in secondary education, and

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2. Councillor Jean-Jacques Crespin contributing to the debate on the system of education in Senegal; see CG, record of proceedings, 17 Feb. 1882, P. 44.
efforts were concentrated on giving bursaries for post-primary education in France. The scholarships did not seem to have been put to good use. A scholarship of 1,000 francs per annum for five years was accorded a pupil of eight or nine years of age, who had just passed out of an elementary school in one of the communes, to further his education in France; but no serious effort was made to ensure that the recipient, who had won the award more because of his family connections than because of merit, was really capable of turning it to advantage. As would be expected, very few of the bursary holders ever returned to Senegal with the ‘golden fleece’. Sent to France at so young an age without having been adequately equipped for life in a foreign country, with no parents or guardians to take proper care of him, and having a standard of education very much inferior to that of his counterparts in France, the scholarship holder often found himself out of place in his new environment. Discouraged, he would plough along and ultimately quit the school a failure. Governor Clément Thomas described the situation pathetically in 1890:

“Tous les enfants de la Colonie devaient être élevés en France et des bourses étaient accordées à qui en demandait, sans aucun choix judicieux, sans aucune garantie d'instruction première. Aussi les résultats obtenus ont-ils été négatifs et les jeunes gens ainsi envoyés dans les établissements de la Métropole reviennent-ils dans la Colonie grossir le nombre des déclassés et des ratés de la civilisation.”

Largely because of the attractiveness of this system, efforts to establish a secondary school in Senegal did not succeed until in 1919, when the Lycée Faidherbe was set up in St. Louis. The conseil général was an influential representative assembly where councillors not only participated in the management of local affairs but also helped to inform and mould public opinion. Intelligent, intrepid, fearlessly articulate and politically aggressive, they criticized the administration, exposed its illiberal policies, and stressed its shortcomings. Inspector Picanon reported in 1890:

“Le respect de l'autorité a diminué et l'on a vu, aux séances de l'Assemblée locale, le représentant de l'Administration être pris à partie avec une violence sans nom.”

The councillors attached a great importance to the council and regarded it as a necessary instrument for keeping on its toes the local administration which, to them, was an embodiment of arbitrariness.

1. Governor to Under-Secretary of State, No. 129 of 16 Jan. 1890, “Sénégal et Dépendances” (infra: S & D), ix, 7, ANSOM.
2. On the council’s attitude to the problems of economic development, justice, education, etc., see Idowu, 1966, pp. 210-271.
3. Inspector Picanon to Under-Secretary of State, 16 Jan. 1890, S & D, xix, 12, ANSOM.
and despotism. Councillor Hyacinthe Devès defined the assembly's raison d'être in 1903:

"C'est un devoir pour lui [le conseil général] d'exercer son contrôle par la critique, par la discussion publique conduite avec modération, courtoisie et bienveillance, mais avec le sentiment des responsabilités que nous avons assumées vis-à-vis des électeurs."

They regarded the conseil général as a symbol of the policy of assimilation operating in the quatre communes and realized that if it were to disappear a less liberal policy would be introduced. This explains why the councillors fought very strenuously against the administration's efforts to abolish the council or deprive it of most of its powers between 1900 and 1920. It also explains why many a quatre communes citizen continued to sigh for this assembly long after it had been replaced by the conseil colonial.

Many people tend to believe that assimilation meant primarily cultural imperialism. This impression is not unjustifiable, as cultural imperialism is perhaps the most subtle aspect of assimilation. Its effects could not but be far-reaching, as it involved the conquest of the human mind and the renunciation by the colonized peoples of their own cultures for the French way of life. Before examining the question of the success or failure of cultural assimilation in Senegal, it is necessary to attempt a definition of a thoroughly assimilated person.

No standard definition is available, but the following may be regarded as the orthodox characteristics of an assimilé. He was, like a typical French citizen, governed not by native law and custom but by the French codes. He was not a polygamist. Literate in French, he was expected to have imbibed as much of the French way of life as possible, and to have contributed in his own way to the success of the mission civilisatrice in the colony. Thinking French, living French, more at home in French society than elsewhere, he was expected to be in everything except in the colour of his skin, a Frenchman. What, it may be asked, were the reactions of the mulattoes and the Senegalese to the policy of assimilation?

In view of the important role the mulattoes played in the history of Senegal, it is necessary to trace their origins. The French as a nation are said to be colour-blind good mixers. Although this generalization may be open to debate, the origins of the Senegalese mulattoes seem to confirm its validity. These could probably be traced back to the era of the chartered companies which brought the French merchants and the Senegalese in close contact with each

1. CG, record of proceedings, 22 May 1903, p. 18.
2. On the controversy over the conseil général, see IDOWU, 1966, pp. 352-369, 452-468.
other. In 1685, when de La Courbe was sent to Senegal to inspect his company’s establishments, he was shocked to find each of the company’s employees living with an African woman. As time went on, it became the general practice with French merchants or fonctionnaires on arriving in Senegal to acquire African ‘wives’, even though they might have been married before coming to Africa. Faidherbe was ‘married’ to an African woman, as Governor Blanchot had been before him. It was not until the beginning of the 19th century, however, when many Frenchmen who had escaped the fury of the French revolution came to settle in Senegal, that such marriages began to proliferate.

The products of these racial unions were the mulattoes. The French government and the local administration were not slow to appreciate the importance of the existence of the mulatto community, which they regarded as a blessing. Because of their French connections, the mulattoes represented an easily assimilable group who might be depended upon to help not only to consolidate the French position in Senegal but also to propagate French civilization in Africa. It is not surprising, therefore, that much effort was made by the government to improve their position in Senegalese society. Primary attention was paid to education, and the mulatto children constituted for a very long time virtually the only school-going population. To facilitate their education, scholarships were set aside for their post-primary studies in secondary and higher institutions in France.

The mulattoes responded with enthusiasm to the government’s measures of encouragement. Their response was facilitated by a number of factors. In the first place, as a proud people who considered themselves superior to the Africans whose blood nevertheless flowed in their veins, they preferred to be assimilated to their French parent. Hence, like the latter, they were Catholic, and invariably sent their children to the mission schools. Their preference also explains why they insisted on being assimilated to the legal status of their French parent; hence those of them who were recognized by the latter automatically acquired the status of French citizens. Lastly, because of the circumstances in which they were born, the mulatto children often started life in better conditions than Senegalese children. Thus, encouraged and pampered by the colonial government, priv-

3. The mulattoes were fond of describing themselves graphically as follows: “Ni blanc, ni noir; c’est du café au lait.”
igned by the circumstances of their birth, eager to utilize to the best of their ability the facilities available for self-advancement, the mulattoes emerged as a pushful group of people. They found ready employment in the local administration, a process facilitated not only by the latter’s policy of encouraging them to look up to the colonial government for the fulfilment of their ambitions but also by the difficulty in securing stable qualified French personnel for a colony renowned for its yellow fever and cholera epidemics. Not only in administration but also in commerce and the army did the mulattoes play a leading part. Most of them were either agents of the commercial firms based in Bordeaux or independent merchants with business connections with these firms. Several of them were officers in the army, entitled to the same privileges as their French counterparts, and the most distinguished of the mulatto soldiers, Dodds, rose to the rank of a general.

The mulattoes also contributed a great deal to the political development of Senegal. More stable as a group than the mobile French, and better equipped politically and economically than the Senegalese, although numerically negligible, they dominated local politics. Most of the local elective institutions, especially the conseil général, were under their control, and they were the closest rivals of the French in the competition for the post of deputy. They monopolized the colony’s scholarships. Indeed, as far as the political history of Senegal is concerned, the 19th century may be described as the ‘golden age’ of the mulattoes. Intelligent, always on the move, with a great passion for politics, the mulattoes were an admirable, articulate lot.

The mulattoes were the most culturally assimilated group in 19th century Senegal. The mode of life they aspired to live was French. Most of them regarded themselves as français and France as their own country. Intermediaries between the French and the Africans, they believed that their duty was to help to promote the rayonnement of French civilization in Africa, therefore they played down their African connections and extolled the value of their French origins. They regarded themselves as the equals of the French and looked down upon the Africans as inferior, uncivilized beings. The French revolutionary slogan of Liberté, égalité, fraternité was their bible, and they believed that what was good for the French in metropolitan France was also good for them as French citizens living in a French colony.

1. They also had the habit of calling themselves ‘Senegalese’, especially at election time, when they found it imperative to rally to their side the quatre communes Senegalese against their French rivals.

2. On the mulattoes, see Idowu, 1966, pp. 89-97. The most distinguished mulatto families were Carpot, Crespin, Descemet, Devès, d’Erneville, and Valantin.
The Senegalese did not at first take kindly to the policy of assimilation, especially as it led to their economic ruin and to the establishment of a French-mulatto political oligarchy which they found impossible to overthrow until the beginning of the 20th century. As time went on, however, not only did they succeed in establishing fairly good working relations with the two groups, they also contributed substantially to the expansion of French influence in Africa.

Largely for economic reasons and because an adequate and exclusively European personnel could not be recruited locally, the French were obliged to employ the Senegalese as their auxiliaries. It was with the help of the Senegalese that French commerce penetrated into Guinea, the Sudan, and other parts of West Africa. For the same reason the Senegalese played a similar role in administration. It was with their aid as administrative auxiliaries that the French established and maintained their rule in Senegal, Sudan, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Dahomey, Mauritania, etc. Indeed, the Senegalese were agents of French colonization in Africa.

Franco-Senegalese collaboration also embraced the military service. Two companies of Wolof soldiers were sent to Madagascar in 1828. In 1857, Faidherbe reorganized the existing forces into a regular battalion of native infantry called tirailleurs sénégalais. They won for him and his successor Pinet Laprade their wars of expansion in Senegal and Guinea. By the last quarter of the century, however, softened by the comparative ease provided by urban life and discouraged by the inferiority status which they thought membership of the tirailleurs corps involved, the Senegalese had become hostile to compulsory service and, no longer attracted by military career, they gradually withdrew from the corps. As a result, the tirailleurs sénégalais gradually became Senegalese only in name.

For a long time the political role of the Senegalese consisted largely in voting at elections. It is certain that, although their civil and political rights had come to them virtually unsolicited, they were nevertheless determined to keep them inviolate. For instance, during the agitation for elective institutions in 1872, the Senegalese voters in St. Louis demanded that the proposed assemblies should also include them because they too had the right to be elected. They also condemned racial discrimination when the French and the mulattoes suggested that the seats in the councils be allocated according to ethnic groupings. The views of the Senegalese prevailed, and the voters demanded from the government universal suffrage by which all the groups could stand for election without any race distinction.

2. St. Louis voters to Minister, 15 Jan. 1872, S & D, vii, 51 (a), ANSOM.
The voters' petition also shed further light on the attitude of the Senegalese toward their political rights. They had heard, they said, that Governor Valière, assimilating them to the non-commune Senegalese Muslims, had recommended that their voting right be abolished because, as Muslims, they were not assimilable. They countered that they were totally different from the non-commune Muslims because not only were they resident in the communes, they also had their property there; they were discharging the same obligations as the French and the mulattoes; they were, therefore, entitled to the same rights. They demanded, therefore, that their voting right be preserved.¹ Their demand was gratified by the government.

The Senegalese participated in politics by voting at election and by standing for election into the local assemblies. But they were not as politically conscious or articulate as the French and the mulattoes who invariably used their economic and political preponderance to monopolize control of these assemblies. The development of Senegalese political consciousness was retarded by lack of education, the cause of which has already been explained. This political impotence may well explain why many Senegalese usually sold their votes at election time. They might have come to the conclusion that, in the circumstances, this was the only direct and concrete benefit they could derive from participation in politics.

There can be no doubt, however, that the Senegalese treasured their citizenship status and their civil and political rights. This is attested by their arrogant attitude toward the non-commune Senegalese, the confidence they had in the French courts, and the extraordinary determination with which they resisted the attempts made by the local administration and other interested agencies between 1900 and 1916 to have those rights abolished. Their determination to maintain their citizenship status is explained by their realization that if this were to be abolished, their citadel, the quatre communes, would be assimilated to the Senegalese hinterland, and the liberal regime under which they had been living for over a century would be replaced by the illiberal administration operating in that part of the colony.

The evidence is conclusive, on the other hand, that Senegalese were not greatly enraptured with French culture. In opposing in 1871 the establishment of representative assemblies in Senegal, Governor Valière explained that all efforts made so far to assimilate the Senegalese culturally to France had been a failure.² By 1875 he had despaired altogether, stating that the Senegalese could never be

². Governor to Minister, No. 282 of 14 Aug. 1871, 2B 38, AAOF.
assimilated. Governor Brière de l'Isle reported in 1879 that French cultural assimilation had made no headway in Senegal, and in 1890 Governor Clément Thomas argued that the Senegalese were and would for ever remain inassimilable.

Cultural imperialism in 19th century Senegal was a failure, in that it did not produce des toubabs à peau noire. The reasons are not far to seek. In the first place, the doctrine of assimilation rested on no solid foundations, based as it was on the belief in the power of Reason and in the ability of all men to appreciate its universal value, and on the idea of a moral obligation to 'civilize' other nations. The Age of Reason conceived of man as a rational creature, and the French assumed that what was good for themselves as rational beings would also be good for other people of whatever colour, race or cultural heritage. They set out to reorganize native societies, which were considered to be inferior, in the light of French civilization which was conceived of a superior and as having attained the highest possible perfection. They believed that the slogan of Liberté, égalité, fraternité provided the perfect remedy for all human ills, and that it was their duty to apply the formula to the 'uncivilized' peoples. The application of such a doctrine in the colonies was bound to encounter great difficulties, and Senegal was no exception.

One of the impediments to any large scale absorption by the Senegalese of French culture was Islam. Many of the governors were agreed on this. Governor Vallon even went to the extent of saying that Islam was a great threat to French influence and that the marabouts were the enemies of France. Most of the quatre communes Senegalese were Muslims; but theirs was a tolerant religion. Christianity and Islam coexisted peacefully. As Muslims the Senegalese were not strictly orthodox in their ways; but Islam constituted for them an accepted way of life which enabled them to draw a line of demarcation between the believer and the non-believer, and to preserve as far as possible their own civilization before the invading forces of an alien culture. Very strongly attached to their own civilization, the Senegalese considered it unthinkable to make tabula rasa of their culture and substitute an alien one. Even while their civil and political rights were threatened with abolition, and it seemed that only by naturalization could these be preserved, they remained obdurate. Commenting on this attitude in 1916, the Governor-General wrote:

1. Governor to Minister, No. 229 of 22 May 1875, 2B 40, AAOF.
3. Governor to Under-Secretary of State, No. 129 of 16 Jan. 1890, S & D, ix, 7. ANSOM.
4. Toubab is a Senegalese word meaning 'white man'.
5. Governor's hand-over note, 12 Nov. 1882, 13G 37, AAOF.
"L'élément musulman est hostile à la naturalisation française, non par haine de la France, mais par attachement à une civilisation sur laquelle repose tout l'édifice social indigène et dont l'abandon équivaudrait à saper cet édifice par la base."1

One other important reason why cultural assimilation made little progress in 19th century Senegal was the inadequacy of facilities for education. For a long time, many a French administrator believed Africans could be assimilated by their mere contact with Frenchmen. It was assumed that the African who frequently traded with the French merchants or was in regular contact with the French milieu in other ways would invariably be influenced by, or obliged to assimilate European culture. But, for obvious reasons, cultural assimilation could not be effectively promoted in this way.

It was also thought that assimilation could be promoted through the spread of the French language. If the African could speak, write, and read French, then he would be easily assimilated to French civilization, the French thought, for the purpose of the propagation of the French language was to facilitate French social and commercial relations with the Africans and to plant by peaceful means French civilization in Africa. Governor Clément Thomas was categorical that the day when Africans were able to speak French the French work of colonization would have been consummated and Senegal would have become a veritable extension of France.2

Indeed, the French were enraptured with their own language to which they attached a magic value. But the propagation of the use of a language could not alone lead to any extensive assimilation. The only thing that might do this was a well organized system of education. By this means the French could indoctrinate the Senegalese children at an impressionable age and seek to replace the notion of African culture with that of French civilization. Education could be a powerful weapon for winning the battle for the human mind, the conquest of which, it has been suggested, would constitute the most concrete evidence for the success of cultural assimilation. But the government merely indulged in wishful thinking. As already demonstrated, education in Senegal was for a long time the preserve of the missionaries; it was rendered inaccessible to Senegalese Muslims; it was not aimed primarily at spreading French civilization to as many Senegalese as possible.3

However, cultural assimilation could be described as a success, in that to some extent it produced an amalgam of civilizations, a compro-

1. Governor-General to Minister, 3 Sept. 1916, 23G 35, AAOF.
mise between French culture and African culture. An example was Bacre-Waly, for long the only black member of the conseil général. Although described by the local administration as assimilated, the picture of him drawn by the governor was probably true of all Senegalese assimilés of the period, but was not a faithful picture of a typical orthodox assimilés:

"M. Bacre-Waly est un traitant, beau noir pur sang, portant le costume musulman, mais appréciant mieux que la majorité de ses coreligionnaires les avantages de notre civilisation."\(^3\)

As late as 1916 General Pineau observed that any real influence of French civilization in Senegal was limited. Some Senegalese, he said, might have adopted French clothes or imbibed some French culture, but their mentality and customs had not been thereby profoundly transformed. Appearances were deceptive. Even the very few who could be considered to have been assimilated had sometimes brusquely and without any apparent reason reverted to ancestral ideas and practices.\(^4\) Senegalese who had been converted to the Catholic religion as well as those who had found employment in commerce, the administration, or the army are the ones most likely to have been assimilated in this way. Although no statistics of such ‘compromise’ assimilés is available, the number must have been small indeed.

From this study of the reaction of the Senegalese to the policy of assimilation, the following conclusions can be drawn. The vast majority of the Senegalese were unassimilated; they were prepared to absorb whatever could be absorbed in French civilization, but were determined not to lose their identity in the process; the few Senegalese who could be regarded as having been assimilated were a compromise between two different cultures and not thoroughbred assimilés.

The position of assimilation in Senegal at the end of the 19th century could be summarized as follows. The administrative, economic, and political assimilation of Senegal had succeeded to some extent, but the colony could not truly be regarded as carbon copy of a province in France. The mulattoes had been culturally assimilated, but the vast majority of the Senegalese remained strongly attached to their own way of life. They were enjoying civil and political rights but they showed no desire to be French. Citizenship had been conceded to them collectively and almost without any conditions. They were

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1. From 1879 to 1890.
2. Underlining mine.
3. Governor to Minister, No. 563 of 8 Aug. 1880, S & D, vii, 57 (b), ANSOM. Though ‘assimilated’, Bacre-Waly was and remained a Muslim.
4. General Pineau’s report, 1 June 1916, on recruitment in the quatre communes, 23G 34, AAOF.
supposed to be French citizens, but they retained their personal status; they remained polygamous Muslims; their way of life was different from that of the French to whom they were considered to have been assimilated, and the very few who had absorbed some measure of French culture were not orthodox assimilés. For a long time the position remained virtually unchanged, and very few questions were asked. But towards the end of the century, the French began to see the Senegalese citizenship as an anomaly. One was either a Frenchman or one was not, they began to argue. By the beginning of the 20th century they were determined to get rid of the ‘monstrosity’. The official campaign against assimilation had begun. How is this change of attitude to be explained?

When the policy of assimilation was introduced in Senegal, the colony consisted primarily of Goree and St. Louis. By the end of the century, however, it had grown into an empire spreading from the Senegal river valley to the Gulf of Benin. Within this area, which had been initially dependent on Senegal, had been established the separate colonies of Guinea, Sudan, Ivory Coast, and Dahomey.\textsuperscript{1} Senegal itself had grown beyond the communes and embraced most of the territories within its present borders. Apparently little had changed, but in reality the colony had been greatly transformed.

In the first place, the economic situation continued to be under the control of the Bordeaux firms, but Senegal had become a one-crop economy based on groundnuts. The économie de traite assumed frightening proportions, as the Senegalese primary producers came more and more under the clutches of the firms, thus embittering further the relations between them and the latter. Also, in the course of the century, the mulattoes had begun to lose their privileged position as agents of these firms, as the French merchants began to settle in the colony more permanently and in larger numbers, thus taking over the economic role hitherto played by the mulattoes.

The administrative system had also been transformed. The Senegalese had gradually become politically conscious, as a result of progress in education, and were now regarded as a danger by the French and the mulattoes. Meanwhile, a new idea known as ‘association’ had begun to influence French colonial policy. The local administration was faced with serious problems arising from the government’s policy to assimilate other parts of Senegal to the quatre communes. The governors were disappointed by the use made of assimilation by the articulate elements in the colony. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that they should decide that French citizenship

should not operate beyond the communes but that a protectorate system of administration should be introduced in the Senegalese hinterland. Thus, by the end of the 19th century, Senegal was under two different systems of administration: direct administration, which operated largely in the quatre communes, and protectorate administration, which applied in the interior. The agents of administration were also affected. Although the Senegalese remained indispensable, they continued to occupy only subaltern posts. As for the mulattoes, just as they were being eliminated from the commercial posts, they were now also being replaced in the administrative posts by Frenchmen. There were cries of racial discrimination, and race relations began to deteriorate.

In 1890, in an effort to render applicable to all the colonies a law recently passed in France concerning naturalization, the government asked for the governor's comments before the law was to be promulgated in Senegal. But no concrete suggestions were forthcoming. At the request of the Ministry, the conseil privé re-examined this law in 1892 and drafted a decree to render it applicable in Senegal though in a modified form. The council decided that Senegalese must first be naturalized before they could be said to be citizens. But the council also remarked that the Senegalese were so attached to their civilization that hardly any one of them would apply for naturalization.

It is not clear whether the law was to apply throughout Senegal or whether the quatre communes were to be exempt from its operation. Probably guessing that the latter were to be affected, Senegal’s Deputy


2. See L’Afrique Occidentale (No. 15 of 22 Feb. 1897; JO 7679, BN), which protested as follows: “Frenchmen were being brought from France to occupy posts to which mulattoes and Senegalese, better qualified, should have been appointed. Democratic republican France, which talked so much about Equality, was treating people according to the colour of their skin. If the top posts in the services continued to be reserved for Frenchmen and closed to mulattoes and Senegalese, then the slogan ‘Égalité’ would have been no more than an official lie.” On the evolution of French-mulatto relations, see Idowu, 1966, pp. 132-138, 397-399.

3. Under-Secretary of State to Governor, No. 10 of 29 Jan. 1890, IB 183, AAOF.

4. Under-Secretary of State to Governor, No. 9 of 27 Aug. 1892, IB 197, AAOF.

Vallon in Paris insisted that the law should not apply to the communes; their prescriptive rights and privileges, he pleaded, must remain intact.\(^1\) Hence, the decree of 7 February 1897,\(^2\) which promulgated the law in Senegal, was meant for foreigners and not for French citizens or sujets; article 17 specifically maintained the status quo with regard to the juridical condition of all the natives in French colonies. The rights of the communes Senegalese were maintained.

Had the law been rendered applicable to all the Senegalese, the following question would have been posed: were Senegalese who had acquired French citizenship because of place of birth or residence and who had been exercising civil and political rights for a long time no longer to be regarded as citizens unless formally naturalized? The majority of them would have forfeited their privileges because they were unable to fulfil the conditions for naturalization. It was because the French government wished to respect prescriptive rights and at the same time avoid creating a serious political problem in Senegal that the status quo was maintained. But the citizenship status had for the first time ever become seriously open to question and by adopting a conservative solution, the government was merely postponing the evil day.

By 1900 the rather idyllic picture of the quatre communes inhabitants of the earlier part of the century had been transformed. Partly because of rivalry, and partly because of the discriminatory policy being adopted against them, the mulattoes, whose interests had hitherto coincided with those of the French and who were considered as the latters’ close collaborators, became alienated and began to emphasize their own interest as distinct from those of other groups. As for the Senegalese, on gradually becoming politically conscious, they began to realize that they were a dispossessed people in their own country, and regarded the French and the mulattoes as obstacles to their progress. And the French both considered the mulattoes and the Senegalese as dangerous elements who must be closely watched, the former because they were political rivals exercising an influence out of proportion to their number; the latter because, if allowed to have their way, they might try to drive the French out of Senegal. Thus, by the end of the 19th century, things had fallen apart in Senegal, and the quatre communes inhabitants were divided against each other. The policy of assimilation, which had tried to foster unity, could no longer hold the community together. The stage was set for the citizenship controversy which rocked the colony between 1900 and 1916, and resulted not only in victory for the quatre communes Senegalese under

\(^1\) Vallon to President of conseil général, Senegal, No. 119 of 1 Feb. 1893, S & D, vii, 16 (c), ANSOM.

\(^2\) BAS, 1897, pp. 162-169.
the leadership of Blaise Diagne, but also in the emergence of the Senegalese as the dominant political group in Senegal.1

From the preceding thesis the following conclusions may be drawn. First, although the French wished to assimilate Senegal completely to France, they were realistic enough to recognize the obstacles to such a policy. The policy of assimilation à outrance was rendered impracticable not only by this realism on the part of France but also by the conservative attitude of the local administration, the inadequacy of facilities, and the strong attachment of the Senegalese to their own culture.

Secondly, French citizenship was conferred initially on the inhabitants of St. Louis and Goree not because the French wanted to discriminate between these settlements and the rest of the territory, but primarily because the two islands were for a long time the only localities under their firm control. When Rufisque and Dakar developed into important economic centres, they received the same rights as their predecessors. By the early 1880s, the French government had given instructions for extension of the policy of assimilation beyond the quatre communes; but the local administration did not see eye to eye with it, and the Senegalese hinterland was placed under a less liberal system of administration.

It is all too easy to condemn the policy of assimilation as utopian, unrealistic, and racist. The fact is that it was about the best system of administration France could offer, and represented the civilized aspect of French colonial policy. The alternative available was 'indirect rule', with its native justice, forced labour, arbitrary taxation, the indigénat, and other indignities. If only because of its liberalism and the advantages it conferred the policy of assimilation does not deserve some of the severe judgments historians have tended to pass on it.

Assimilation was conscientiously applied in Senegal; it was not a façade. Although the quatre communes Senegalese were not very powerful during the period, they could not be governed arbitrarily; the law courts and the elective assemblies were at hand to protect their interests; and many a powerful mulatto family constantly kept a watchful eye on the doings of the local administration. Whether as voters, politicians, or fonctionnaires, soldiers, or commercial employees, the Senegalese contributed to the spreading of the rayonnement of France in Senegal and West Africa. Although they were careful to retain their cultural identity and their personal status, they appreciated and were determined to preserve the advantages of

French citizenship. It set them apart not only from their fellow countrymen in the interior but also from the other French West Africans.

The quatre communes Senegalese usually insisted on his citizenship status in whatever French colony he might find himself. In 1910, the lieutenant governor of Guinea reported to the Governor-General in Dakar the refusal of the quatre communes Senegalese resident in Conakry to pay capitation tax because, they argued, as commune inhabitants and as voters their assimilation exempted them from taxation not only within but also outside Senegal. This status consciousness explains why the Senegalese regard themselves, even today, as a people apart, and as being superior to all other French-speaking Africans.

The policy of assimilation helped to some extent to foster good relations between the various groups in the communes. Although they were divided by racial, economic, political and religious differences, they maintained peaceful coexistence and collaborated with each other in various activities. In many respects, the economic and political interests of the Bordeaux commercial firms, the French community and the mulattoes, coincided and there was not much antagonism. Economically and politically powerless, the Senegalese were tied to the apron strings of the French or the mulattoes. Towards the end of the century, however, with the adoption by the Europeans of racist policies, the gradual abandonment of the policy of assimilation, and the development of political awareness on the part of the Senegalese, the latent group antagonism began to sharpen, thus foreshadowing the serious political conflict of the early 20th century.

It is useful to compare the attitude of the mulattoes and the Senegalese to the policy of assimilation. Both groups appreciated the benefits that went with it and wished to have as much of these as possible. But because of the circumstances of their birth, the preferential policy of the administration, their consciousness of the opportunities available and of the role they could play in the local situation, the mulattoes embraced assimilation more enthusiastically than the Senegalese. As a result, the 19th century was like a golden age for the mulattoes. They enjoyed a great deal of economic and political influence, and probably benefited from the policy of assimilation more than any other group. With the rise of the Senegalese at the beginning of the 20th century, however, they were pushed to the background and have seldom emerged from that position since.

By introducing assimilation policy in Senegal, the French were in fact committing themselves in their West African Empire, though they probably did not know it at the time. Although the quatre

1. Ral/Bro/I, pièce No. 13, IFAN.
communes remained for a long time the only privileged localities, there was much pressure for greater liberalism in French West Africa. As a result, the administrative system in the Senegalese hinterland was gradually liberalized in the inter-war years. As the years passed by, the argument began to be advanced that what was good for Senegal was also good for the other parts of French Africa. Thus, partly because of the pressure for more enlightened rule, partly because of deep-rooted assimilation tendencies of the French, and partly because of the liberal measures dictated by Second World War, the Senegalese experiment was extended to the other French African colonies, and once again Senegal served as a model for the French African Empire.¹

It is not a platitude to say that present day Senegal is a product of the 19th century. As in most other territories, although assimilation has not produced des toubabs à peau noire, it has created an amalgam of civilizations. The educated African, who finds himself torn between his own civilization and that of the colonial power, is a product of that amalgam. The community of Africans, Frenchmen, and mulattoes, in modern Senegal recalls that of the 19th century. But, as far as the Senegalese themselves are concerned, their attitude towards the French way of life has remained what it was in the past: assimiler, non être assimilé.²

July 1968.

² President Senghor's famous expression. In 1937, he wrote: "L'Europe ne doit pas assimiler l'Afrique, mais si l'Afrique doit assimiler l'Europe, elle doit cependant rester elle-même [...] Les élites africaines doivent assimiler les éléments de l'enseignement français, mais à la manière dont le corps assimile son alimentation, c'est-à-dire que, si l'individu mange du chou ou de l'igname, il n'en devient pas pour cela igname ou chou, mais s'approprie les principes de ces légumes qui peuvent lui être utiles." (See his article "Les élites indigènes et la culture", L'Action Française, No. 277 of 4 Oct. 1937.)