

The French Model of Assimilation and Direct Rule



- Faïdherbe and Senegal -

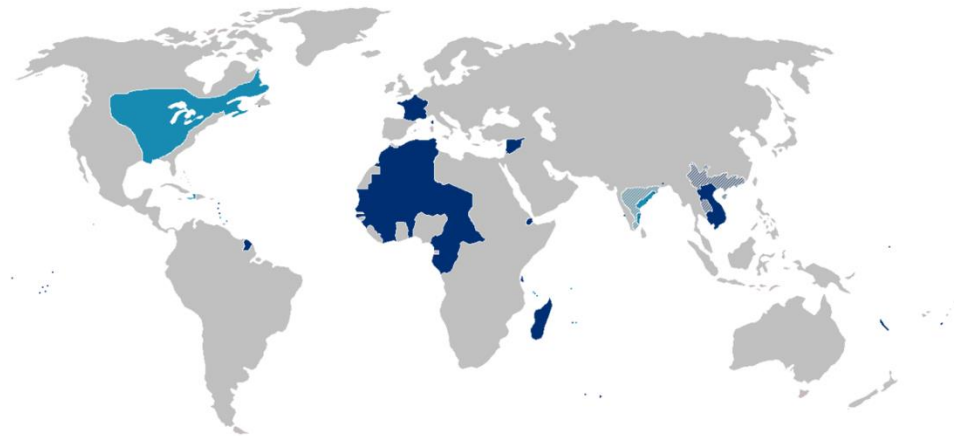
Key terms:

Assimilation

Association

Direct rule

Mission Dakar-Djibouti

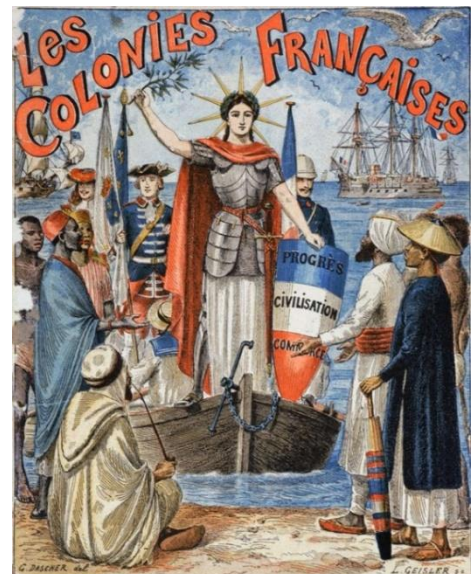


Direct Rule

Direct rule is a system whereby the colonies were governed by European officials at the top position, then Natives were at the bottom. The Germans and French preferred this system of administration in their colonies.

Reasons:

- This system enabled them to be harsh and use force to the African without any compromise, they used the direct rule in order to force African to produce raw materials and provide cheap labor
- The colonial powers did not like the use of chiefs because they saw them as backward and African people could not even know how to lead themselves in order to meet the colonial interests
- It was used to provide employment to the French and Germans, hence lowering unemployment rates in the home country



Impacts of direct rule

- It undermined pre-existing African traditional rulers replacing them with others
- It managed to suppress African resistances since these colonies had enough white military forces to safeguard their interests
- This was done through the use of harsh and brutal means to make Africans meet the colonial demands.

Assimilation (one ideological basis of French colonial policy in the 19th and 20th centuries)

In contrast with British imperial policy, the French taught their subjects that, by adopting French language and culture, they could eventually become French and eventually turned them into black Frenchmen. The famous 'Four Communes' in Senegal were seen as proof of this. Here Africans were granted all the rights of French citizens.

The French Assimilation concept was based on the idea of spreading and implanting French culture and civilization to the colonies outside France in the 19th and 20th century with the intention of suffocating the culture of the Africans. Natives of these colonies were considered French citizens as long as the culture and customs were adopted. This also meant they would have the rights and duties of French citizens. The purpose of the theory of assimilation was to turn African natives into "French" men by educating them in the language and French culture and hence become French citizens or equals.

However, people in the conservative, catholic and monarchist tradition in France were never happy with this; in fact, political rights to people in Senegal became a weather vane of politics in France: when the republicans were dominant and controlled the constitution, the Senegalese had the vote, but when monarchists were dominant, they did not. This approach was never applied anywhere else in Africa, until after 1945.

The policy of assimilation can be strategically divided into three aspects: political, economic and socio-cultural.

1. Political Assimilation

- The laws for the colonial administration were deliberately made in France
- With this structure well in place, the French government was ever more pig-headed to dance to the tune of "loot-all-natural-resources" given to Africans by nature and make them wallow in the abyss of poverty and agonies.

2. Economic Assimilation

- In the economic sphere, the colony was made to produce raw materials particularly to feed French industries. Based on this, French interest was the premium. The natural resources were ***exploited*** to enable France compete favorable in the league of industrial competition taking place in Europe.

- French Colonial Pact, made it possible for France to dictate the economic and financial decisions of the colonies to favor or serve the interest of France and her citizens at the expense of the colonies. The colonial pact also forbade French colonies to engage in any foreign trade with the exception of France. What this then meant was that, France became the 'god' of trade for their colonies which even till date works like a generational 'curse'. (contemporary example – uranium in Niger, France owns 70% of all mines, while Niger is at the bottom of the Human Development Index)

3. Cultural and Social Assimilation

- Sole purpose to implant French culture on the local people thus distorting the cultural heritage of the local people
- French civilization meant that, everything African was barbaric and ungodly, and that it beholds on the local people to accept and uphold their claim of their culture being divinely-ordained.
- The social assimilation took on the harshest of all trend, thus dehumanizing the Africans into the notorious system of indigent and presentation.
- The worrying thing was that, the subjects were subjected to forced labor without any monetary payment.
- The subjects did all the difficult works especially those conscripted into the army to work as auxiliaries.
- They were popularly known as *deuxieme contingent*, who did all the dreadful work. In fact, they were regarded as "Slaves" in their own homelands.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ASSIMILATION POLICY

- African citizens within the French colonies enjoyed the privileges and the rights that were given to any French citizen in the Metropolis.
- African colonies under French rule were represented in lower House of Parliament, so there was the political integration of the Africans with France.
- There was a close economic relationship between France and her colonies in Africa. French currency was also used in the colonies.
- Africans were forced to learn the French language, follow French laws, and apply French civil and political system and to be Christian.
- French encountered difficulty in West Africa because their attitude toward Africans culture and African chiefs were negative.

Reasons for Assimilation policy:

- Since the French revolution of 1789, the French thought themselves to be the superior race and hence the French revolutionary ideas of equality, liberty, fraternity were considered to be feasible to every man in the entire world
- The French regarded their colonies as their overseas provinces thus the colonies were closely attached to France
- The French believed that their civilization was suitable for the entire world, they viewed themselves as the liberator of the other people in the world they believed that other people of different races could be absorbed into the French culture
- They wanted to spread western education and religion that they believed it was more civilized and advanced.

Impacts of Assimilation Policy

- It was too expensive - French government incurs more costs of building different facilities such as schools, hospitals, churches, and others.
- There was a great gap among the African, between the assimilated and other remained Africans who were not assimilated
- French became an official language in most of the African countries colonized by French.
- African colonies were regarded as part and parcel of France

The great expansion of the French empire in the late 19th century had brought large numbers of Africans under French control and this provoked a far-ranging debate on colonial policy. There was a growing reaction in France against assimilation:

- some argued on racist grounds that Africans were inferior and thus incapable of full assimilation;
- others felt that the tremendous educational effort involved in making assimilation a reality was too much and that beyond some arithmetic and minimal literacy, training in agriculture and simple trades was more important.
- also, in the background was Algeria with a large, influential French settler population pushing for special privileges and rights as compared to the large Moslem population there.
- however, there was also a growing recognition that Africans had a very different culture.

Key Facts:

- French colonial policy as early as the 1780s was distinguished by the ideology of assimilation. By adopting French language and culture, the indigenous populations under colonial rule could eventually become French, sharing in the equal rights of citizenship.
- This policy was put most famously into practice in the oldest French colonial towns, known as the Four Communes.
- During the French Revolution of 1848, slavery was abolished and the Four Communes were given voting rights and the right to elect a Deputy to the Assembly in Paris, which they did in 1912 with Blaise Diagne, the first black man to hold a position in the French government.
- The promise of equal rights and respect under the assimilation policy was often merely an abstraction, as the assimilated Africans (termed *Évolué*) still faced substantial discrimination in Africa and France.
- In addition, in the largest and most populous colonies, a strict separation between “sujets français” (all the natives) and “citoyens français” (all males of European extraction), along with different rights and duties, was maintained.

Association

The opposing idea was that the relationship between the conqueror and the conquered, of white and black peoples, should be one of ‘association’, not one of identity and merging; it emphasized cooperation between the rulers and the ruled.

- association was supposed to respect the cultural and political values and institutions of Africans; Africans could not and should not be turned into black French people.
- like Dual Mandate, it was asserted that economic development was for the mutual advantage of both France and Africans.
- to some extent, especially after 1918, proponents referred approvingly to the British model of indirect rule and claimed the intention to rule more indirectly, retaining traditional custom and law. Actually, conquering administrators like Faidherbe in Senegal, had done this much earlier and for many of the same reasons as the British—it was cheaper and provoked less resistance
- in practice, implementation was always a bit superficial; at best, Africans and ‘traditional’ authorities were used only at the very bottom rung of the administration. They were subordinate cogs in the bureaucracy for carrying out policies which were developed by expatriate French officials with no real consultation with Africans.
- African societies were carved up into ‘cantons’ (districts) and chiefs who were not adequately efficient or subservient were deposed and replaced, often with little regard for traditional status

Faidherbe and Senegal

Louis Faidherbe served two terms as governor of Senegal, from 1854 to 1861 and from 1863 to 1865. He instituted a “forward policy” that certain critics labeled “peace or powder.” He took decisive steps to advance eastward from Saint-Louis through the Senegal River Valley and the vast Sudan region to Lake Chad. He even dreamed of a French African empire stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea. He would create a firm basis for its future development culturally as well as politically and economically.



As governor, Faidherbe was alarmed by the growing power of the militant Islāmic leader ‘Umar Tal on the frontiers of Senegal. Faidherbe took the offensive against all those who threatened French primacy. In a series of well-executed campaigns, some undertaken against the wishes of the French government, he subjugated the Moorish tribes in the north, drove the forces of ‘Umar Tal off the lower S n gal River, and extended French control southward toward the Gambia. By 1861 he had transformed his colony from a collection of scattered trading posts into the dominant political and military power in this region of West Africa.

Colonial Policies

Faidherbe was no mere conquistador; he possessed a real sympathy for his African subjects and a genuine concern for their welfare. He also was an uncompromising enemy of slavery in all its forms. He sought to improve indigenous society without destroying it, and to this end he maintained the traditional authority of the chiefs while training their sons to become more efficient agents of French rule. He founded a school for the sons of chiefs, and lay schools for Muslims. He established scholarships for primary education in Saint-Louis and secondary education in France. He built small technical schools at Dakar, and opened a museum and newspaper at Saint-Louis. Faidherbe organized the Bank of Senegal; laid out Saint-Louis afresh as befitted a capital city; promoted the export of groundnuts; made valuable and detailed studies of the indigenous people; and founded Dakar, future metropolis of French Africa.

Faidherbe’s endeavor to end all African controls over French navigation along the Senegal River, brought greater hostilities. Conflict erupted with the traditional leaders of Futa-Toro and the Tukolor Muslim reformer and state builder, Al-Hajj Umar. In 1858-1859, Faidherbe forced peace on French terms, and divided the confederation into four client states of France (Four Communes).

Faidherbe stood at the center of modern French imperialism. He initiated firm French control of the Senegal Valley, which became the springboard for further expansion in West Africa. By opening up Senegal’s trade he provided the means for reaching the Niger Basin. His plan for railroad construction eventually materialized.

Faidherbe’s ambition was to make Senegal the cornerstone of a vast French African empire that he hoped might one day rival British India in its commercial development. During his first period of office he encouraged experimental farming, founded Dakar, and built M dina on the upper S n gal River as a base for further expansion inland. His principal objective was the extension of French power eastward to the Niger River and ultimately to Timbuktu and beyond. The French government, however, rejected his proposals for territorial expansion as too expensive. Nevertheless, his farsighted policies laid the foundations for the West African federation that was finally created at the beginning of the 20th century.

The Four Communes

The famous “Four Communes” in Senegal are one of the foremost examples of the French assimilation project. The Four Communes were the four oldest colonial towns in French-controlled West Africa. In 1848, the French Second Republic extended the rights of full French citizenship to the inhabitants of Saint-Louis, Dakar, Gorée, and Rufisque. While those who were born in these towns could technically enjoy all the rights of native French citizens, substantial legal and social barriers prevented the full exercise of these rights, especially by those seen by authorities as “full blooded” Africans.

The residents of the Four Communes were referred as *originaires*. When they had been exposed to assimilation for a long enough period, they would become a “typical French citizen...expected to be everything except in the color of his skin, a Frenchman.” Those few Africans from the Four Communes who were able to pursue higher education could “rise” to be termed *Évolué* (‘Evolved’) and were nominally granted full French citizenship, including the vote. They were considered “African Elite.” One of those elites was Blaise Diagne, the first black deputy in the French assembly. He “defended the status of the *originaires* as French citizens.” During his service as deputy, he proposed a resolution that would allow the residents of the Four Communes all the rights of a French Citizen, which included being able to serve in the Army. This was especially important during World War I. The resolution passed on October 19, 1915. Despite this legal framework, *Évolués* still faced substantial discrimination in Africa and the Metropole alike. The Four Communes remained the only French colony where the indigenous peoples received French citizenship until 1944.

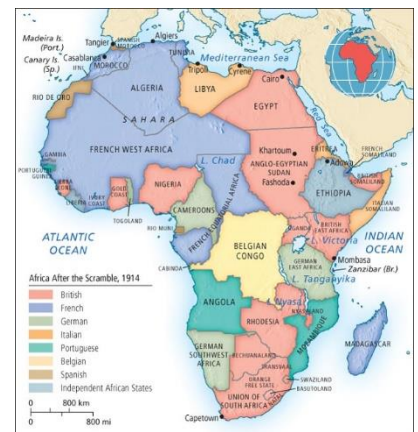


Blaise Diagne: Blaise Diagne, a Senegalese man who attained French citizenship and rose to political prominence during the height of the assimilation movement in colonial France, was the first black African elected to the French Chamber of Deputies and the first to hold a position in the French government.



French West Africa: 1895-1960

The establishment of Senegal as a French colony was merely one part of the French colonial effort in west Africa during the 1880s and 1890s. By 1895 there were no fewer than six French colonies in the region, covering a vast unbroken stretch of the continent. In that year they were grouped together as French West Africa (Dakar to Djibouti). Among them Senegal was the colony with the strongest French presence. Dakar, founded by the French in 1857, became the capital of the territory in 1902. Senegal therefore remained at the center of France's west African empire, until all the separate colonies won their independence in 1960.



Faidherbe's achievements in relation to Senegal. [4]

- Faidherbe built a series of inland forts up the Senegal River
- He signed protectorates with Bubukar Saada of Bundu and King Samba of Khasso
- He stemmed the Muslim advance by advancing French outposts on the upper Senegal
- He brought into subjection the country lying between the Senegal River and Gambia
- He founded Dakar
- Faidherbe built road systems, bridges and a telegraph
- He began a railway line along the Senegal into the interior
- He provided fresh drinking water for the Senegalese
- He placed under direct French control large scale groundnut cultivation near the forts and along the rail lines
- He created a base for further French expansion in West Africa

How similar was the impact on Africans of French imperialism in Senegal compared to British imperialism in Nigeria? Explain your answer. [10]

- minimum of three explanations (2 on one side; 1 on the other)
- in 1848, the French Second Republic extended the rights of full French citizenship to the inhabitants of Senegal. They had the right to vote and could pursue higher education
- Senegal was a parliamentary constituency. It was ruled directly from Paris
- Britain controlled Nigeria by indirect rule. This meant the British ruled using the indigenous chiefs who were encouraged to rule as they had always done, administering justice. The Foreign Office only recommended interference if a chief abused his powers and then he could be removed and replaced
- the French practiced assimilation
- the French undermined traditional rule
- Senegal was treated as an equal by the French
- the Senegalese had equal rights
- in Nigeria, the chiefs ruled the country for Britain
- Britain did not have the resources to rule directly
- one ruled directly and the other indirectly

