Education for Control and Liberation in Africa and Among the Black Diaspora

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Abstract

We review research on the history of education policy in colonial sub-Saharan Africa and among the African diaspora in the US and Brazil through a political economy lens. While the supply of education was severely constricted in all of these cases, demand for education remained strong. Thus, even as authoritarian states have attempted to restrict educational supply for social control, the strength of the demand—and the accompanying pedagogical, organizational, and political innovations—illustrate the power of education to empower marginalized communities.

1 Introduction

The history of education among Black people in colonial Africa and among the African diaspora exemplifies a broader tension in the political economy of education. On one hand, education brings knowledge, skills, social reform, and liberation. On the other hand, as social scientists have pointed out (e.g.: Paglayan, 2021; Weber, 1976), the spread of mass education has often been rooted in the consolidation of authoritarian states and their desire to raise armies and collect taxes.[1] The spread of education has thus often been less about empowering citizens and more about controlling subjects. Colonial governments in Africa often crafted their education policies to further their authoritarian aims, withholding education from the population and calibrating schooling towards maintaining political dominance, rather than cultivating skill formation and citizenship among Black Africans. This state of affairs lasted well into the twentieth century, with many African countries not gaining independence till the 1960s and '70s. While political independence was achieved earlier in the Americas, this did not extend to Black populations, who were subjected to slavery, indentured labor, and segregation. Given this history, we ask, what role has education played in the sociopolitical development of Black people in Africa and among the African diaspora? While education in the service of repression characterized much of education policy among Africans, the story of education as empowerment shines through as an essential part of independence and liberation movements in the communi-

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[1]Following prevalent usage in political science, "authoritarian states" refers to those regimes that lack free and competitive elections. Such regimes also often severely restrict rights to free speech and free organization among their citizens (See eg. Svolik, 2012).

ties we analyze in this paper. Despite the wishes of the colonizers and other authoritarians, as we argue below, the story of education for Black people in colonial Africa and among the diaspora is a story of self empowerment.

The philosopher of education John Dewey described the goal of education by noting that, "to prepare [the student] for the future life means to give him command of himself; it means so to train him that he will have the full and ready use of all his capacities" (Dewey, 1981, p. 457). As we will show, the idea of giving the student "full and ready use" of all of their capacities was anathema to colonialism and is a far cry from the education policies pursued in most colonial African contexts on the continent and in the American and Brazilian diaspora.[2] Yet, this vision of education as empowerment was precisely the one embraced by many leaders of independence and liberation movements in Africa and among the diaspora. While French and British colonial authorities severely restricted the supply of education, Black leaders of independence and liberation movements saw expanding both the reach and content of formal education as essential to their struggle. Notably, these leaders saw education as essential to individual empowerment and to society at large. For instance, W.E.B. Du Bois argued that:

> The function of the university is not simply to teach bread-winning, or to furnish teachers for the public schools or to be a center of polite society; it is, above all, to be the organ of that fine adjustment between real life and the growing knowledge of life, an adjustment which forms the secret of civilization. (Du Bois, 2007)

For Leopold Sedar Senghor, the first president of Senegal, education was about "the encouragement of *creation* in all fields...the encouragement of the

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[2]We argue below that the US and Brazil make for instructive points of comparison with each other and with countries on the African continent.

creation of man by man." (Senghor, 1974)

Against the view of education as liberation, work in comparative politics and historical political economy has revealed connections between the spread of mass education and the rise of autocratic states. Education, in such contexts of authoritarian state formation, was an essential part of nation-building; it served to manufacture greater unity and loyalty and direct labor towards industrialization for war (Paglayan, 2021). Eugene Weber (1976) shows how education was used as a tool to inculcate patriotism and create national unity in France. While the use of education to ensure loyalty, pacify locals, and secure cheap labor was widespread in colonial Africa, an even more common practice was the withholding of education in modern skills and ideas from Black Africans so as to preserve the political and economic power imbalances that were integral to colonialism (eg: Ball, 1983, p. 245).

The British and French colonies in sub-Saharan Africa, the US, and Brazil are fruitful case studies in the political economy of education because the tension between "education as empowerment" and "education as repression" is particularly acute in these countries. The history shows that repressive states struggled, and ultimately failed, to capture and contain the effects of education over the long run. In this paper, we examine the supply and demand for education in the French and British colonies in sub-Saharan Africa and among the African diaspora in Brazil and in the US. Our intention is two-fold: first, we synthesize and re-interpret a large body of literature on the history of education in Black communities that reveals broad imbalances in the supply and demand for education, and second we present cutting-edge work in the political economy of education in Africa. Our methodology is his-

torical and comparative, but we also point to systematic quantitative studies that move beyond anecdotal accounts. We highlight the history of education as repression in colonial Africa under French and British rule and present work in political economy on the persistent, long-term effects of historical education policy. We also point to the role of education in providing social mobility, coordinating international social movements, and serving as the site of political organization. In the final analysis, the history of Africa and the African diaspora shows the power of education as a force for empowerment and liberation.[3] At the same time, this history drives home the need to double down on correcting the inherited distortions that continue to curtail the provision of education for Black communities around the world.

2   Supply Side: Colonial Africa in Global Context

Given that the suppression of local power was integral to colonialism, French and British colonizers in Africa shaped educational policy to put down political consciousness and quash dissent. Here, there is a salient difference between British colonial policy in sub-Saharan Africa and British policy elsewhere, arising from the fact that much of Africa was colonized much later than other parts of world. The British in Africa, having learned from their "errors" in India, resolved to limit access to secondary and higher education in their African colonies, since education, in the words of one colonial official,

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[3]While our focus is on British and French colonial Africa, educational policy in areas held by other European powers was broadly similar in its restriction of the supply of education to Blacks. For example, see Frankema (2013) on Belgian Congo and Duffy (1961) on Portuguese colonies. Same patterns emerge in the British Caribbean where plantation owners strongly resisted the education of Africans (Bacchus and Bacchus, 1994; Coates, 2012).

"may stimulate unrest and discontent" (Ball, 1983, p. 248–249). So, while the highest level of literary and academic education was offered to some Indian elite in the interest of anglicizing them and building a more capable colonial state, such efforts were not a part of British colonial policy in Africa.

While French colonial policy is often associated with the aim of assimilating locals to French institutions and culture (e.g., Diouf, 1998; Gamble, 2017, p. 5–6), attempts at assimilation were limited to the early French colonies in Senegal and were soon reversed. The French, like the British, considered secondary education for Africans to be undesirable by the early 1900s. In colonies with significant European settler populations, rather than assimilate Africans, the French proceeded to establish segregated schools offering inferior education to Blacks (Gamble, 2017, p. 28–35). Again, a comparison with another colonial context is valuable. While the French in Vietnam also severely limited local access to education, some select Vietnamese did attain the highest levels of university education as early as the late nineteenth century (Osborne, 1969, p. 160). The French built an educational system in Vietnam to displace the traditional system, establishing and spreading a latinized Vietnamese script and developing schools up to the university level by the early twentieth century (Osborne,1969; Kelly,1977). This kind of long-term institution building, though still very limited in reach and largely oppressive in its aims, is in contrast to the still more limited access to education provided in France's sub-Saharan colonies, where, in many cases, the only available education was rudimentary, religiously-oriented education offered by private missionary schools, which often depended on the initiative of African converts rather than on European investment (Frankema, 2012).

Wary of their experiences in Asia and focused on limiting instability, French and British colonial policymakers in many parts of Africa were especially suspicious of education, particularly higher education. While the lack of citizenship and political participation for locals distorted the supply of modern education throughout the colonized world, these tendencies were arguably more acute in Africa than elsewhere. The history of the supply of education in colonial Africa is thus notable as a prime example of education policy under repressive authoritarian regimes. While education was sometimes used as a form of indoctrination in African settings (Ball, 1983, p. 258), "education as repression" meant that colonial powers secured their economic and cultural dominance primarily by withholding education and distorting its content instead of expanding education. The goal was to maximize economic rents from the colonies while denying citizenship, and political and economic participation, to the native inhabitants.

3 Education and Authoritarian Control in French and British Colonial Africa

Colonial policymakers faced a central dilemma in developing education policy for Africa: on the one hand, growing government bureaucracies and trade interests required more educated Africans, yet officials feared that educated Africans would demand greater freedoms as they came up against the hard limits to social mobility in colonial society (e.g., Ball, 1983, p. 244–245; Gamble, 2017, p. 25–27). In practice, in both Anglophone and Francophone Africa, this dilemma was often resolved through the implementation

of "adapted curricula"—school curricula that were based on the idea that Africans needed a different, more menial education than Europeans (Ball, 1983). Summing up this policy of bifurcating education by race, Camile Guy, the lieutenant governor of Senegal, explained in a 1903 report to his superiors that "the more practical and rudimentary education is, the more useful schools will be; it's a matter of turning young natives into workers who speak and write French" (quoted in Gamble, 2017, p. 25). In British colonies like Ghana, Kenya, and Zimbabwe, colonial governments provided grants to private missionary schools rather than investing in public education systems (Frankema, 2012).

The idea of "adapted curricula," and the underlying aim of racial segregation in education, was a political distortion in the markets for education. These policies suppressed education at very low levels among Africans despite clear economic benefits from expanding education and, as we will show in the next section, unmet burgeoning demand for schooling among many Africans. The aim of educational policy was instead to preserve the economic and cultural dominance of Europeans in Africa. These distortions were sometimes strongest in areas that had large European settler populations like Zimbabwe, Kenya, and South Africa. In Kenya, Africans were forbidden to grow plantation crops (Ball, 1983, p. 252), in colonial Zimbabwe, a fully segregated educational system had taken shape in which African education was left entirely to Christian missionaries who focused on "industrial training" (Zvobgo, 1981, p. 13). European schools in Zimbabwe received far greater support from the government; by 1908, ten out of twelve European schools were fully supported by the government, and in 1930, education was

made free and compulsory for all European children between six and fifteen years of age, but not for Africans (Ibid.). In Kenya, settlers fought to build an education system that was designed to make sure that Africans remained only a source of cheap labor, rather than of political or economic competition, and pushed for limited and vocational education for Blacks (Ball, 1983, p. 241).

Thus, French and British colonial administrators reached a consensus to overcome the essential quandary of education in colonial Africa by limiting educational opportunities available to Black Africans and emphasizing vocational education. It is worth noting that the immense power of white settler groups continued to distort the supply of education to Black Africans even after independence. The prime example here is, of course, South Africa under apartheid. The Bantu Education Act of 1953, which established state-sponsored racially segregated education, was introduced with rationales that are familiar from colonial contexts across Africa:

> Education must train and teach people in accordance with their opportunities in life according to the sphere in which they live...Native education should be controlled in such a way that it should be in accordance with the policy of the State. (Quoted in UNESCO, 1967, p. 31)

The lack of access to secondary education for Blacks, another common theme in colonial policy in Africa, also continued in South Africa. In 1962, while Black Africans made up 96.6% of pupils in South African primary schools, they made up only 3.3% of pupils in secondary schools (UNESCO, 1967, p. 57). Even when higher education became possible for Blacks, independent South Africa and self-governing Rhodesia systematized "pyramidal" educa-

tional systems, where low-quality primary education was made more readily available to Africans, but secondary and higher education was withheld by restricting supply (Zvobgo, 1981, p. 14; UNESCO, 1967, p.53).

Finally, in what sense was education used as a tool for repression in colonial Africa? To be sure, there were some initiatives to assimilate and win over local elites through education (e.g., as described by Ball,1983, p. 248, in the case of Uganda). More significantly, however, education was used in the service of repression by severely limiting its supply. The realities of "adapted curricula" and segregated education systems already starkly illustrate this restriction of supply. A few more general facts also drive home this point. Colonial officials, concerned with their bottom lines insisted that education for Africans should be self-financing (Ball, 1983, p. 242). Reflecting this view, in 1900, the British colonial governments in Uganda and Kenya spent no money, either directly or in grants-in-aid, on the primary education of Africans; in 1910, the value in Kenya had risen to just 80 pence per enrolled student, while in 1920 the value in Nigeria was 28 pence per student and in Uganda just 3 pence per student (Frankema, 2012, p. 342). Another marker of the suppression of education—especially any education beyond the most basic—is the fact that even by 1939, no secondary education was available for Africans anywhere in Central Africa (Ball, 1983, p. 251). In the French colonies, the situation was not much different. Except for Cameroon, which had inherited a German missionary school system, and parts of Senegal, schooling was limited to the primary level, with the first secondary school in French Equatorial Africa only founded in Brazzaville in 1935 (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 2021, p. 3). Even in Senegal, where the provision of education

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was perhaps greater than anywhere else in sub-Saharan Africa, only 5% of children went to school in 1920 (Ibid, p. 9). Notably, the lack of education provision to Africans and the stark disparities in opportunities offered to Black and white children persisted into relatively modern times in some places—in Rhodesia in 1971–1972, for instance, £16.60 was spent per African child on primary and secondary education, while the value for European, Indian, and colored children was almost ten times as much at £160.70 per child (Austin, 1975, p. 45).

Colonial education policy in French and British controlled Africa is thus best understood not simply as a neglect of education but rather as an active suppression of education. It was not just that colonial governments did not care to invest in education, but that they actively resisted demands for education from Africans and distorted the institutions and content of education to keep Black Africans from attaining political and economic power. The story of the supply of education in Africa, however, is only one side of the history of education in colonial Africa. Next, we highlight the central role education played in independence and liberation movements in sub-Saharan Africa, despite colonial authorities' suppression efforts.

4 Demand Side: Social Mobility and Political Action

While the restriction of education supply under colonial governments in Africa paints a picture of education in the service of repression, the history of education as empowerment and liberation emerges in the demand side story. Here, we find that Africans often demanded an education equal

to what was available to Europeans. As we argue below, Africans recognized that education afforded them the best chances of social mobility. Strong demands, initially rooted in a desire for social mobility, in turn led to political movements centered on education. Though we present our analysis of education through the lens of supply and demand, the processes we describe here are again thoroughly political. Just as the "supply-side" distortions were politically rooted, the "demand-side" too was shaped by politics—in this case, by contestation and political organization on the part of Africans.

"If I go to school and get much knowledge," wrote one student of a missionary high school in Kenya in 1930, "I would not always work for others but I may have much money, I will look for many workmen" (quoted in Ball, 1983, p. 254). The connection between education and social mobility was thus clear to this student and many Africans, who "came to see the social, economic and material advantages of the colonizers as founded upon their access to and control of education" (Ibid, p. 258). As a result, the demand for education was very high in many parts of Africa by the early 1900s. In Ghana in 1919, for instance, a colonial official remarked that, "Never in the course of my experience of the tropics have I found a place where the people were so avid for education" (Davidson,1973, p. 21). The life stories of many African leaders vividly show how education could transform the living conditions of individuals and families. These include Blaise Diagne, the son of a servant and cook who became the first Black African to represent the Four Communes in the French National Assembly, Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana, who started life in a humble family in a typical West African village, and Ndabaningi Sithole, a Zimbabwean independence

leader who spent his childhood as a cattle herder.

In addition to these anecdotal accounts, a systematic study of the impact of education on the first school-goers and their descendants in Benin by [author] finds significant social mobility effects. Individuals who were part of the first two cohorts to receive education at colonial schools in Benin had higher living standards and better social networks than comparable individuals who were not educated. The educated individuals were also much less likely to be farmers and much more likely to be politically active (Ibid, p. 705). Moreover, these effects persisted into subsequent generations, with the descendants of these first school-goers also being more likely to be more economically and politically empowered than comparable families without education. Thus, where education was made available to Africans, it tended to significantly improve their economic and political opportunities. The strong demand for education among many Africans reflected a recognition of transformative social mobility effects.

Despite the colonial policy of severely restricting the supply of education, gradual expansions in supply still came about through the organized efforts of Africans. As Frankema (2012) points out, for instance, the missionary education that was essential for many Africans was driven by the initiative of African teachers and converts. Other institutions of higher education were also developed through the initiatives of Africans, who responded to the strong demands in their communities. For example, Nigerian alumni of Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone, the only university in West Africa, set up numerous secondary schools in Nigeria (Ajayi et al., 1996, p. 31). In Ghana, members of the educated elite raised funds from chiefs and busi-

nessmen to establish colleges and schools (Ibid). In rural Zimbabwe, such was the demand for education that Africans established their own independent schools under African preachers after reforms of the missionary school system were refused by the colonial authorities (Summers, 2002, p. 12). Another indication of the strong demand for education was the phenomenon of Africans leaving their home countries in pursuit of higher education. Many prominent figures in the fight for independence in Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, and Zimbabwe such as Kwame Nkrumah, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Jomo Kenyatta, Tom Mboya and Jaramogi Oginga, attained higher education outside their home countries. The skills, ideas, and international networks of peers that these African leaders gained through higher education were key to independence movements.

Given the distortions of the colonial era, demand for education could not be satisfied by market mechanisms—rather, Africans had to organize and fight for access to more education. As such, one way in which this demand manifested was through political organization in support of education reform and expansion. As we show below, Africans in many areas pushed to change the supply and content of education available to them. In time, student groups and Pan-African associations created by young educated Africans became integral to independence and nationalist movements throughout Africa. The demand for education was thus constitutive to the broader fights for political autonomy, citizenship, racial equality, and economic equity that drove independence movements across Africa. This political aspect, which was ultimately revolutionary, rather than the social mobility effects by themselves, is why we see the history of education in colonial Africa as a story of "education

for empowerment." The strong demand for a complete training in modern skills and ideas made education a prominent site of political organization.

An early example of political organization around education in Africa took place in the Four Communes of Senegal. In the early twentieth century, the French undertook several educational reforms in Senegal aimed at creating a segregated schooling system, which offered only "adapted" education for Black Africans (Bryant, 2015, p. 117). These restrictions meant that most African students were excluded from such education, which was reserved for the growing French population in urban centers like Saint-Louis. African parents and students in the Four Communes mobilized in response to these reforms, alleging racial discrimination. Ultimately, while these efforts could not prevent the implementation of segregated education, they succeeded at pushing the colonial government to offer all the different types of educational tracks at every urban school (Ibid).

More examples of resistance and organization come from Summers' (2002) study of colonial education in Southern Rhodesia in the early-mid 20th century which shows that even in local village schools, Africans' demand for education sometimes led to sophisticated political action. In Nigeria, dissatisfaction with missionary education ultimately led to the institution of the Universal Primary Education program in the 1950s. This initiative, led by Obafemi Awolowo and regional politicians in colonial Western Nigeria, was the biggest expansion of education in colonial Africa, nearly doubling the number of primary schools in the region between 1952 and 1954 (Ajayi, 2008).Thus, due to the high demand for education in the face of consistent colonial constriction of the supply, education became an important site of

political action. This kind of organizing was a part of the scaffolding for the broader liberation movements that were to emerge.

5   Independence and Liberation

One of the most consequential forms of political organizations to emerge were the international associations that brought future African leaders into contact with each other and with social movements from around the world (e.g., Zeilig, 2007, p. 24–25). An early example of such international political engagement was the Freetown Debate of 1872–1873, which centered on the issue of establishing a secular, government-financed West African University accessible to the masses (Ajayi et al., 1996, p. 16–20). These debates brought together early Pan-African leaders like Africanus Horton, who had been educated at Fourah Bay College in Freetown, gone on to study medicine in Edinburgh, and then become Assistant Surgeon for the Royal Navy at Cape Coast in Ghana (Martin, 2012, p. 48), and Edward Blyden, who was from the Virgin Islands but had immigrated to Liberia, where he became a diplomat and professor. Blyden argued that rather than the available missionary education, which was distorted by the "narrow and dwarfing influence of ecclesiastical dogmatism," Africans needed liberal education focused on the Classics, mathematics, Arabic, and African languages (Ajayi et al., 1996, p. 19–20). In the Freetown Debate, not only was education the site of political organization and agitation, it also facilitated international civic cooperation between men like Horton and Blyden. The Freetown Debate led to Fourah Bay college opening up to fee-paying students and offering a B.A. degree in

affiliation with Durham University (Ibid, 23–24).

In the early twentieth century, international association among young educated Africans, leaders in the Black diaspora, and sympathizers in Europe and the US became integral to Pan-Africanism and African nationalist movements. At this time, African student groups that brought together students from different parts of Africa and the African diaspora began to proliferate in European capitals, inspired by the Pan-Africanism of Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. Du Bois. In London, West Indian and West African students founded the Union for Students of African Descent in 1917 and the African Progress Union the following year (Esedebe, 1982, p. 79–80). Building on these early groups, African students in London formed the West African Students' Union (WASU) in 1925, which came to have branches in cities across Africa and published a quarterly journal with global circulation (Ibid, p. 97–98). Due to its deep, international political engagement, the WASU came to be regarded as the "training ground for Nigerian nationalists" (Zeilig, 2007, p. 25). Similar groups, which acquainted young Africans with political action, ideas of independence and liberation, and like-minded peers from across Africa and the diaspora, also grew among African students and exiles in Paris (Zeilig, 2007, p. 25; Esedebe, 1982, p. 109–110). Among these was *Présence Africaine*, an African cultural society and journal. When *Présence Africaine* expanded to Brussels, it engaged Patrice Lumumba, the Congolese independence leader, and others in the Congolese intelligentsia (Martin, 2012, p. 73).

The blossoming of international African political organization culminated in several conferences that brought together leaders from Africa and the African diaspora. The Fifth Pan-African Conference, held in Manchester in

1945 brought together many independence leaders from across Africa like Kenyatta, Nkrumah, and Obafemi Awolowo from Nigeria. That conference led to a stirring declaration, "The Challenge to the Colonial Powers," which again emphasized the demand for education:

> We are determined to be free. We want education. We want the right to earn a decent living; the right to express our thoughts and emotions, to adopt and create forms of beauty. We demand for Black Africa autonomy and independence... (quoted in Adi and Sherwood, 1995, p. 55)

Education, which drove the earliest political agitations in British and French Africa, remained central to nationalist politics in Africa on the eve of decolonization. African leaders saw the possibilities of education as empowerment and advanced visions of education in line with those espoused by Dewey, Du Bois, and Senghor. True education was not possible without true citizenship, and true citizenship was not possible without true education—the fight for education thus had to be central to the fight for independence.

Despite the severe restriction of the supply of education, demand was strong. Where Africans attained quality education, it had a transformative effect on individuals, families, and societies. The fact that demand was so high despite the severity of the suppression of education is one reason why we see the story of education in colonial Africa as illustrating the power of "education as empowerment." More importantly, by stimulating political action and organization, and facilitating the growth of global social movements, education—imagined as something integral to citizenship and political community—was central to the broader struggles for political and economic liberation. Next, we discuss how the African experience mirrored the expe-

riences of the African diaspora.

6   The Diaspora: Education and Black Citizenship in Brazil and the US

In the final few sections of this paper, we discuss the African diaspora in Brazil and the US and highlight findings in political economy that connect African educational history to present-day outcomes. The influence of the African diaspora is already evident in the above discussion of international political organization. But why focus on the cases of Brazil and the US? One distinctive aspect of the African diaspora is, of course, the history of slavery. Furthermore, the US and Brazil are particularly notable as two countries with significant Black populations that were nevertheless generally minority communities—thus the racial dynamics in these places were different from those in Africa and elsewhere where Blacks made up the majority.[4] Specifically, particularly in the US—like in South Africa—ideas of racial domination were reified through state actions that denied African Americans full citizenship and political and economic agency (e.g., Marx, 1997). While barriers for Blacks were not legally sanctioned to the same extent in Brazil, Afro-Brazilians still faced significant discrimination, leading to persistent socioeconomic inequalities (Ibid, p. 253–254).[5] In both the US and Brazil, like in colonial Africa, the supply of education to Blacks has historically been

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[4]While the Caribbean certainly makes for an interesting comparison where Blacks were the majority, due to space constraints, we leave to future work the careful consideration of this comparative case study.

[5]For example, in 1976, white Brazilians on average earned twice the income of nonwhites Brazilians (Marx, 1997, p. 253).

severely restricted. Yet strong demands for education and full citizenship were integral to the development of civil rights movements and pan-African liberation movements. In the US, African American leaders, engaged in the challenge of education for empowerment, advanced new pedagogical ideas, pragmatic and multicultural in outlook, that retain a broad relevance today. Thus, the story of education among the African diaspora in the US and Brazil again highlights the power of "education as empowerment," while also revealing the severity of historical distortions in schooling supply.

Until Brazilian independence from Portugal in 1822, Black education was limited to farms of the Society of Jesus, with Jesuits educating the children slaves that worked on these properties, and to Black brotherhoods and occupational clans (Júnior and Bittar, 1999; Silva, 2011; Cressoni, 2016). Despite formally prohibiting the schooling of slaves, the independent imperial state allowed free Blacks to attend public schools without official constraints. After the *ventre livre* ("free womb") law of 1872, which codified freedom for all children of slaves, Brazilian officials recognized the need to build schools for the expanding numbers of freed Blacks, but education was often seen as a way of controlling this population and maintaining stability rather than as a means for empowerment. For example, an 1873 report from the General Office of Statistics of the Ministry of Business to the emperor notes that:

> In addition to the great advantages of public instruction, such as instructing and civilizing the people, it exerts a remarkable influence on the crimes perpetrated in a country. The effect that the lack of such means has on the population is remarkable. (Brazil. Directoria Geral de Estatística, 1873, p. 28)

After *ventre livre*, echoing developments in Africa, there was an elite con-

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sensus to establish a segregated education system, where Blacks received a limited education focused on agricultural work so as to maintain a cheap agricultural labor supply and prevent Black migration to urban centers (Fonseca, 2002). Although this was not a formal segregation system, the incentives established by the Republic in 1889 were such that the revenues for the public education sector were tied to commodity revenues, and education supply became even more spatially divided. After abolition, and with the advent of industrialization, the Brazilian elite sought to meet growing labor needs through increasing European immigration rather than by training Afro-Brazilians and facilitating their social mobility (e.g., Jones-de Oliveira, 2003). In fact, state support for European immigration was seen as a form of compensation to slaveholders. Immigration brought not only an influx of labor but also an "injection of civilization," and it was a "means to purify the race" (Marx, 1997, p. 161–162).

Amid all the barriers erected by the state and the elites, the Black population, both enslaved and free, actively sought education. As studies have shown, in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Afro-Brazilians effectively organized groups at the municipal level to demand the construction of schools from local officials and provincial legislatures (Veiga, 2006; Fonseca, 2009; Colistete, 2016). The life story of Maria Firmina dos Reis provides one illustrative example of the demand for education and the impact of education among Afro-Brazilians in the nineteenth century. Maria Firmina dos Reis's mother was a slave, but through self-education, she went on to become the first Brazilian woman novelist and the first public school teacher in her city in Maranhão (Cruzo et al., 2018). Another example is the story of Luis Gama,

who was sold while still a child as a slave from Bahia to São Paulo. In his quest for education he was taught by students and professors of the São Paulo Law School. Gaining his own freedom in court, he became a lawyer and one of the main leaders of the abolitionist movement (Wissenbach, 2018). He is responsible for carrying out the biggest manumission lawsuit in Brazilian history, setting free hundreds of slaves.[6]

Until 1890, some Black families even sent their children back to Africa in search of schooling and religious education. This was the case of Martiniano do Bonfim; he returned to Africa with his father in 1875 and obtained schooling in an English missionary school in Lagos, only to return to Bahia in 1886 to become one of the most influential figures in the history of Afro-Brazilian religion. The Bahia–Africa returnee movement, which intensified after the 1835 slave rebellion in Salvador, would create large communities of Afro-Brazilian returnees in Benin, Togo, and Nigeria, known as the Aguda. In these communities, formal education was strongly valued, and the practice of going back to Brazil in search of education and then returning to Africa was also common (Turner, 1942; Yai, 2001; Guran, 2002; Castillo, 2012, 2016; Britto, 2018).

Even after Brazil had gained independence, as in colonial Africa, the connection between education and citizenship was essential to the development of education for Afro-Brazilians. Here, an important part of the story is an 1881 law that raised the minimum income requirement to vote and prohibited voting by illiterates.[7] As shown by Mariscal and Sokoloff (2000, p. 206),

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[6]See the story in Veiga (2019).

[7]Illiterates only regained the right to vote with the post-dictatorship 1988 constitution.

with constraints on schooling and voting, suffrage in Brazil was kept at one of the lowest levels in the Americas. Voters were only 2.2% of the population in 1894, 2.4% in 1914, and 5.7% in 1945, while the average in the Americas was 9.4% in the 1881 to 1920 period and 13.7% in the 1921 to 1940 period (Mariscal and Sokoloff (2000)). Restricting the supply of education to Blacks was thus a direct way to keep them from voting. In turn, politicians of the nascent democracy from 1889, when the new constitution introduced direct elections for governors, the upper and lower chambers, and the local assemblies, had election incentives to respond only to the white literate minority and no incentives to change how the public school system was financed.

In the Republic, Black associations became increasingly important as a means to organize the Afro-Brazilian population. Founded in 1931, the *Frente Negra Brasileira*, or Brazilian Black Front, gained prominence as the first political organization—and later political party—dedicated to advancing the interests of Afro-Brazilians (Jones-de Oliveira, 2003, p. 106–107). The Brazilian Black Front served Afro-Brazilians in a variety of ways, including with various levels of education, libraries, and through newspapers. By the 1930s, the Brazilian Black Front had more than sixty chapters in many states. It was recognized as the largest Black association in South America, building ties in other countries such as Uruguay, Puerto Rico, the United States, and Mozambique. The ascension of Black associations, however, was interrupted by the establishment of the 1937 dictatorship which targeted all types of associations as a means to repress dissent (Domingues, 2018).

While education has never been officially segregated in Brazil, informal and structural racial discrimination has persistently distorted the supply of

education to Afro-Brazilians. Even in the 1990s, the literacy rate for Blacks remained half that of whites, and the proportion of Afro-Brazilians who completed nine years of school was less than a third of what it was for whites (Marx, 1997, p. 254). Thus, despite the popular image of Brazil as a harmonious multi-racial society, the impediments to education and social mobility for Afro-Brazilians have been severe. Nevertheless, in an environment characterized by discriminatory social policies, Afro-Brazilians developed ideas and social movements based on Black consciousness and pride, which extended beyond Brazil to Africa and other parts of the Americas. The echoes from this past of repression, resistance, and the search for education continue in the present. With re-democratization in 1988, Black groups were able to reorganize themselves and advance on many policy fronts. In 2012, a law was passed that guarantees 50% of all slots in federal universities for public high school students. In addition, in every class, a share of slots is reserved for Blacks and Indigenous Brazilians, following these populations' shares in the state population. Recently, Lisa Earl Castillo has uncovered the story of Yassin, a descendant of Daniel da Glória and Antônia who left Bahia to Benin in 1836, after being deported for participating in the slave rebellion. Yassin, in his search for education, was able to retrace the steps of his ancestors back to Brazil and in 2021 was awarded a PhD in engineering at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.[8]

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[8]We thank Urano Andrade for pointing us to this story. See Jorge (2021).

7 Demanding Education in the US: From Slavery to Pan-Africanism and Pedagogical Innovation

In an environment of severely constricted supply, African Americans' demands for education were integral to their broader struggles for full citizenship, political rights, and economic opportunity. Unlike in Brazil, slavery in the US South was only abolished after war, and legally sanctioned segregation was upheld in many parts of the country until the 1960s. In this highly racialized society, education became intertwined with the development of Black identity and political autonomy, culminating in Pan-Africanism and related movements that, as we have shown, had global reach and significance. Additionally, African American leaders, preoccupied with questions of uplifting Black communities, formulated new modes of pragmatic and multicultural pedagogy that retain a broad relevance even today. Given the fountain of new ideas and movements that sprung from the African American community despite the severity of repression, we again see this case as illustrating the power of education as empowerment.

Even in early nineteenth century New York City, African-Americans recognized the connection between education, social mobility, citizenship, and political rights. Free Blacks in antebellum New York City embraced education, sending their children to schools at even higher rates than white residents (Dabel, 2012, p. 198). Exemplifying a prevalent view of Black leaders at the time, a contributor to the African American newspaper *The Colored American* wrote in 1841 that:

> It is the schools for our children which will abolish slavery. It is the

> schools, which will procure our enfranchisement. It is the schools
> which will put off and break down prejudice. (Quoted in Dabel, 2012,
> p. 206)

Similarly, the alacrity with which newly freed slaves embraced education in the US South immediately after the Civil War astounded observers (eg: Williams, 2005, p. 138–173). One teacher in South Carolina, for example, observed that "the enthusiasm for the children to learn is intense. Their school hours seem like one bright holiday, and their progress is remarkable" (quoted in Williams, 2005, p. 140). With Black students soon outstripping their white peers in educational attainment, a backlash emerged among many southern whites, who feared an erosion of the social system that had historically been "steeped in deference and domination" of Blacks (Ibid, p. 197). As Reconstruction ended, violence by the Ku Klux Klan targeting schools was accompanied by the steady institutionalization of a segregated school system that left Black schools systematically under-resourced (Ibid, p. 198–200). The famous debates on education for African Americans between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois took place amid this backdrop of a post-Reconstruction retrenchment of racism.

In canonical accounts of these debates, Washington is depicted as promoting a more conservative vision of a gradual expansion of education for Blacks, centered on vocational education while Du Bois favored a classical education, focused especially on the "Talented Tenth"—the ten percent of exceptionally capable African Americans who would become the leaders of the community (eg: Jeynes, 2007, p. 185–187). Yet what gets lost in this typical framing is the fact that entirely new pedagogies were emerging through these debates.

These emphasized the attainment of black "self-consciousness"—"the ability to think and act for oneself"—as the primary aim of education (Levy, 2016, p. 48). Exemplifying these ideas, Du Bois, though often associated with an elitist view of education—called for reducing the amount of Greek and Latin in Black colleges in favor of additional emphasis on natural science, English, history, and sociology. "...vocational training is a pressing need of Negroes," he wrote, but "it should be preceded by as much cultural training as possible" (Du Bois and Dill, 1911, p. 7).

Another African American pioneer of pedagogical theory was Alexander Crummell, who spent decades working as a missionary and educator in Africa starting in the early 1850s. Like Du Bois, Crummell saw true education as a synthesis of theory and practice; here, he advanced and often anticipated ideas associated with pragmatist philosophers like John Dewey and Henry James. For instance, in an 1881 graduation address at a girls' high school, Crummell described his idea of intellectual excellence in recognizably pragmatist terms:

> I mean by excellence that training by which the intellectual forces are harmoniously developed, and reason and imagination are given their rightful authority. I mean that discipline which allows one to command his own powers, and then to use them with ease and facility. I mean that style of education which puts us in the center, and affords the soul the widest circumference of nature and humanity, of knowledge and letters. (Crummell, 1891, p. 348).

Unlike Dewey and James, this pedagogical vision of Crummell and his successors was tied to ideas of developing Black consciousness (eg: Crummell, 1875, p. 20). In the words of the Black progressive and women's rights activist Fannie Barrier Williams, the goal of practical education was not simply to

provide marketable skills to Blacks, but to "bring the benighted masses into conscious relationship with their own environments" (quote in Levy, 2016, p. 51). Thus, not only was education central to political movements towards Black liberation among African Americans, these movements, in turn, compelled entirely new ideas on pedagogy that had broad significance. These ideas were founded on an understanding of education as empowerment, and empowerment in the sense of cultural consciousness, self-realization, and self-mastery.

As Pan-Africanism grew in strength and reach in the early twentieth century, its leaders remained engaged with pedagogy. In some cases, Black leaders called for education that advanced Black autonomy and consciousness by embracing African cultural heritage and history. For instance, Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), included the following demands in its 1920 "Declaration of the Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World":

> 31. We declare that the teaching in any school by alien teachers to our boys and girls, that the alien race is superior to the Negro race, is an insult to the the Negro people of the World.
> 49. We demand that instructions given Negro children in schools include the subject of "Negro history" to their benefit. (Quoted in Chapman, 2004, p. 427)

The UNIA also saw the promotion of an independent Black literature and culture as one of the aims of education for people of African descent (Chapman, 2004, p. 428). Thus, another area of pedagogical innovation involved the promotion of a pan-African culture. This engagement with pedagogy emphasizes the centrality of education to the social movements for Black liberation. Not only was education a site of political organization, these

political movements, in turn, shaped pedagogical theories in ways that had lasting significance. Ideas of practically oriented and multicultural education, of course, remain highly relevant in contemporary pedagogy.

When the US Supreme Court finally declared racial segregation in schools to be unconstitutional in 1952, it noted that:

> Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society. It is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities. Warren (1954)

Thus, here again the connection between education, citizenship, and political rights was recognized as decisive. While colonialism prevented true citizenship for Blacks in Africa, in the US and Brazil, true citizenship for Blacks remained elusive for centuries after independence as Blacks remained excluded from, in some cases, apparently thriving democratic polities. Needless to say, the legacies of these histories of disenfranchisement and discrimination persist to the present-day in the form of systematically worse socioeconomic outcomes for Black citizens of Brazil and the US as compared to whites. So, like in British and French colonial Africa, the supply and demand of education was tied to the possibilities of citizenship, political rights, and economic opportunities. Though the accounts presented here are necessarily brief and incomplete, the stories of the Black diaspora in Brazil and the US illustrate how strong demands for education were central to the formation of international social movements, new ideas of Pan-Africanism, and Black liberation, the most significant of which first took root in the US before shaping the development of independence movements in Africa. In the case of the US, the pedagogical innovations that emerged are a testament to the fact that

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questions of education were tightly braided into the broader movements for political rights. For these reasons, we see the history of education among the African diaspora in Brazil and the US as further highlighting the possibilities of education as empowerment. In concluding this paper, we turn to a discussion of questions of historical persistence and possibilities for contemporary reform.

8 Persistence and Present-Day Outcomes

Historical study is particularly useful when it reveals connections between historical patterns and present-day outcomes, and can inform contemporary discussions. While the story of education in Africa emphasizes the power of education to empower, the historical constrictions of supply were, needless to say, very real and severe. Thus there remains an onus on governments and citizens to work towards correcting inherited distortions and further harnessing the true potential of education as empowerment.

Several papers point to historical factors from the colonial and pre-colonial eras as ways of explaining low levels of development in Africa (eg: Michalopoulos and Papaioannou, 2013; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2010), yet sometimes such papers look only at highly aggregated variables, like GDP, when considering contemporary outcomes. Because of this, the precise ways in which the past influences the present, the extent of this influence, and the ways to correct inherited distortions sometimes remain unclear. In contrast, studies focusing on the historical legacies of education reveal concrete ways in which the past continues to impact present-day outcomes. One example of such

work is [author]'s study of social mobility. This provides some evidence that education has inter-generational effects on economic and political capacities. The persistence of the impacts from education emphasizes the importance of expanding access to education to correct any inherited distortions from the past. Another "virtuous cycle" story comes from Huillery's (2009) study of educational and health investments in French West Africa. Huillery (2009) finds that colonial investments in education and health impact present-day outcomes. Localities that had higher levels of public investment in the early colonial period continued to have higher levels of investment in later periods, leading to better outcomes even into the present day. As Huillery (2009, p. 207) explains, while the selection of initial sites for colonial investment in education were often arbitrary, investments tended to concentrate over time as marginal investments flowed to areas with existing facilities and locally high demand for education (which, in turn, was also fueled by earlier investments in education). In another result on historical persistence in Africa, [author] find that levels of missionary activity in colonial Ghana explains present-day inter-regional disparities in wealth, schooling, and urbanization—colonial educational investments, this time through missionary organizations, are again central to the story here.

These historical findings, by isolating the persistent impacts from educational investments, point to policy implications for the present-day. Namely, inherited imbalances in educational investments continue to impact present-day outcomes and must thus be corrected by targeting communities that have historically been left out. Why have broader investments in education been so rarely undertaken in the post-colonial period? Here, as well, po-

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litical economy offers some insights. Specifically, part of the answer might lie in the existence of powerful elite groups who have both power and incentive to block reform. Mariscal and Sokoloff (2000), for example, argue that levels of inequality might have influenced the historical development of educational institutions in the Americas. As they note, "where the wealthy enjoyed disproportionate political power, elites could procure private schooling services for their own children and resist being taxed to underwrite or subsidize services to others" (Mariscal and Sokoloff, 2000, p. 164). A more general theory is advanced by Acemoglu and Robinson (2000), who argue that powerful elites might block economic development when it threatens their hold on power. Thus, applying this kind of reasoning to the case of sub-Saharan Africa, colonial policies might have impacted post-colonial educational investments by cementing highly unequal societies, where the masses lacked access even to basic education. In such situations, elites might block broader investments in education to cement their social and economic power. So, while the need to correct inherited distortions in educational supply is clear, demands for education must remain intertwined in broader calls for full citizenship and access to political rights and economic opportunity for all. As the history of Black communities in Africa, the US, and Brazil illustrates, education, whether for repression or empowerment, is thoroughly political.

9 Conclusion

In this paper, we have analyzed the supply and demand for education in colonial Africa and among African diaspora communities in Brazil and the

US through a political economy lens. The central tension, in this regard, is between two competing ideas of education. The first, "education as repression," highlights the fact that education has often been used as a tool for authoritarian states to enhance their control over their subjects. Meanwhile, the competing idea of "education as empowerment" emphasizes the potential of education to facilitate individual liberation and spur societal renewal. The history of education in colonial Africa and among the African diaspora in Brazil and the US starkly illustrates the tension between these two competing visions of education. While education was withheld and distorted in the service of authoritarian control in these settings, Blacks embraced and demanded more education as a means of social mobility. As we have shown, education, where attained, had a transformative impact on individuals, families, and societies. In turn, education became an important site of political organization and was central to global Pan-African movements that shaped politics in Africa and beyond. Finally, many sophisticated and influential enunciations of the idea of "education as empowerment"—such as those expressed by Du Bois, Crummell, and Senghor—and the related pedagogical theories, are a direct result of the experiences of Black communities as they fought for political rights and independence. For all of these reasons, we see the history of education in Black communities during the colonial era as illustrating the power of education as empowerment.

Needless to say, the histories presented here barely scratch the surface of the political economy of education among Black communities. Indeed, in compiling such an analytical history from interdisciplinary sources, one of the aims of this paper is to lay the groundwork for more detailed work

on this topic in economics, political science, and related fields. Many histories remain to be uncovered and analyzed and many questions deserve more work. For instance, given the political nature of education, what kind of policy interventions show most promise in correcting inherited distortions in the supply of education? What have been the primary mechanisms of persistence that have led to poor educational outcomes for Blacks in the US and Brazil even into contemporary times? What can the global Black liberation movements of the early twentieth century teach the world today? We hope that this paper encourages further study of such questions.

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