

Salazar's Racial Politics

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Until 1940 Portuguese constituted less than 1 percent of Angola's population, and it was not until 1950 that their proportion approached 2 percent. This increase in the number of Europeans and the continuation of forced labor (not abolished until 1962) and other labor abuses led to an intensification of racial conflict. Before 1900 *mestiços* had been engaged in a variety of commercial and governmental roles, but as the white population came to outnumber them, the status of *mestiços* declined. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, laws and regulations requiring a certain level of education to hold some government positions effectively excluded *mestiços* from access to them. In 1921 the colonial administration divided the civil service into European and African branches and assigned *mestiços* and the very few African *assimilados* to the latter, thereby limiting their chances of rising in the bureaucratic hierarchy. In 1929 statutes limited the bureaucratic level to which *mestiços* and *assimilados* could rise to that of first clerk, established different pay scales for Europeans and non-Europeans in both public and private sectors, and restricted competition between them for jobs in the bureaucracy. Given this legal framework, the immigration of increasing numbers of Portuguese led to considerable disaffection among *mestiços*, who had hitherto tended to identify with whites rather than with Africans.

Beginning in the 1940s, the system of forced labor came under renewed criticism. One particularly outspoken critic, Captain Henrique Galvão, who had served for more than two decades in an official capacity in Angola, chronicled abuses committed against the African population. The Salazar government responded by arresting Galvão for treason and banning his report. Despite the introduction of some labor reforms from the late 1940s through the late 1950s, forced labor continued.

Legislation that was passed in Portugal between 1926 and 1933 was based on a new conception of Africans. Whereas Portugal previously had assumed that Africans would somehow naturally be assimilated into European society, the New State established definite standards Africans had to meet to qualify for rights. The new legislation defined Africans as a separate element in the population, referred to as *indígenas*. Those who learned to speak Portuguese, who took jobs in commerce or industry, and who behaved as Portuguese citizens were classified as *assimilados*. In accepting the rights of citizenship, *assimilados* took on the same tax obligations as the European citizens. Male *indígenas* were required to pay a head tax. If they could not raise the money, they were obligated to work for the government for half of each year without wages.

The colonial administration stringently applied the requirements for assimilation. In 1950, of an estimated African population of 4 million in Angola (according to an official census that probably provided more accurate figures than previous estimates), there were less than 31,000 *assimilados*. But instead of elevating the status of Africans, the policy of assimilation maintained them in a degraded status. The colonial administration required *indígenas* to carry identification cards, of major importance psychologically to the Africans and politically to the Portuguese, who were thus more easily able to control the African population.

The authoritarian Salazar regime frequently used African informants to ferret out signs of political dissidence. Censorship, border control, police action, and control of education all retarded the development of African leadership. Africans studying in Portugal--and therefore exposed to "progressive" ideas--were sometimes prevented from returning home. Political offenses brought severe penalties, and the colonial administration viewed African organizations with extreme disfavor.