TWO BASIC SOURCES of societal tension in developing nations are those deriving from socio-economic disparities and those based on communal group affiliations, whether ethnic, linguistic, religious or racial. The two overlap or coincide, of course, but for analytic purposes are usually considered as distinct. In this paper we investigate whether or not these two potential sources of tension in an African state, Ghana, were reflected in the higher levels of education at the end of the Nkrumah era.¹

In addition to providing the skilled manpower necessary for economic development, the rapidly expanding educational system in a developing nation is expected to offer the individual access to modern sectors of the economy which are open, at least in theory, to talent and ability regardless of the older ascriptive criteria of rank, family, caste, or ethnic group membership. Education is also assumed to aid in the national integration process through its socialization functions. These assumptions are valid, however, only to the extent that higher education is reasonably available to all strata and groups within the society. This is what we may term the purely structural impact of education.

We will use aggregate and survey data from Ghana to examine access to

¹ Data for this study are derived from a questionnaire administered to a representative sample at the University of Ghana in June, 1966, and to five secondary schools selected to achieve maximum geographic representation of social groups within Ghana.

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the university of Ghana as well as to Ghanaian secondary schools and the educational impact on the two parallel but overlapping stratification systems.

Figure 1a indicates the analytically distinct stratification systems. If the socio-economic system were simply superimposed randomly on the ethnic system, the result could be as shown in Figure 1b. If a caste system prevailed, in which specific ethnic groups occupied only one socio-economic strata, the result would be as in Figure 1c. Our data suggest that the overlap in the Ghanaian case is closer to Figure 1d. That is, Ghanaians who belong to specific ethnic groups with past and continuing educational advantage are more likely to be found in higher socio-economic strata than others. Insofar as ethnic differences are still salient, education to some extent perpetuates them rather than having a leveling and unifying effect in society.

We will deal with each of these analytically distinct stratification systems in turn, and the effect of education upon them, and finally discuss the implications of the data.