

**LIBERIA** IN PERSPECTIVE  
An Orientation Guide



Technology Integration Division  
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## Table of Contents

<b>Geography</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Geographic Regions and Topographic Features</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Climate</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Rivers and Lakes</b>	<b>8</b>
Rivers	8
Lakes	9
<b>Cities</b>	<b>9</b>
Monrovia	9
Ganta	11
Buchanan	11
Gbarnga	12
Kakata	12
<b>Environmental Concerns</b>	<b>13</b>
Deforestation	13
Water Supply and Pollution	14
Coastal Erosion	14
<b>Natural Hazards</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>History</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Early History</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>“Back to Africa”</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>American Colonization Society</b>	<b>19</b>
Early Colonization Efforts	19
Struggles in the New Colony	20
<b>The Commonwealth</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>The New Republic</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Colonial Threats</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Financial Struggles</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Firestone</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Barclay and Tubman</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>The Open Door</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Prelude to a Coup</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Chairman Doe</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Ethnic Divisions</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>The Chaos Begins</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>The First Civil War</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Taylor Assumes Power</b>	<b>33</b>

<b>The Second Civil War</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Post-Civil-War Liberia</b>	<b>34</b>
Truth and Reconciliation Report	35
<b><i>Economy</i></b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Manufacturing and Industry</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Agriculture</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Banking and Currency</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Trade</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Investment</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Energy and Mineral Resources</b>	<b>41</b>
Energy	41
Minerals	42
<b>Standard of Living</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Tourism</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Transportation</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Economic Outlook</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>International Organizations</b>	<b>47</b>
<b><i>Society</i></b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Ethnic Groups and Languages</b>	<b>49</b>
Ethnic Groups	49
English	50
<b>Ethnic Conflict and Reconciliation</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Religion</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Gender Issues</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Traditional Dress</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Traditions: Celebrations and Holidays</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Cuisine</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Arts</b>	<b>56</b>
Music and Dance	56
Traditional Crafts	57
<b>Folktales and Folklore</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Sports and Recreation</b>	<b>58</b>
<b><i>Security</i></b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Military and Police</b>	<b>60</b>

Military	60
Police	61
<b>U.S.–Liberian Relations</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Relations with Neighboring Countries</b>	<b>63</b>
Côte d’Ivoire	63
Guinea	64
Sierra Leone	65
<b>Terrorist Groups and Activity</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Issues Affecting Stability</b>	<b>66</b>
Unemployment and Poverty	66
Capacity Building and Budgetary Limitations	67
Land Disputes	68
<b>Looking Ahead</b>	<b>68</b>

# Geography

## Introduction

Liberia is a West African nation, roughly the size of Tennessee. It is one of only two African nations to have never been colonized by European powers. It is also the continent's oldest republic. Liberia is bordered by Sierra Leone to the northwest, Guinea to the north, and Côte d'Ivoire to the east. The nation is aligned along a northwest-southeast axis, and rises from sea level to moderately high mountain altitudes in the areas farthest inland. The Atlantic Ocean lies along the nation's southwestern side. In the 1820s, freed American slaves and their descendents established their first settlements in this coastal region. For many decades thereafter, the inland portions of Liberia (with large populations of indigenous Africans) and the coastal settlements of the "Americo-Liberians" existed (with notable interruptions) in a shaky relationship. This delicately balanced relationship frayed completely during a 1980 coup by a junior military officer.



© akwaaba padi / flickr.com  
Sierra Leone border

Liberia today is in the 6th year of peace following 14 years of nearly unremitting national violence. Almost all the country's infrastructure and social services were destroyed during the fighting. Now, Liberia's democratically elected government faces the daunting task of rebuilding in an environment of massive unemployment and a youthful, battle-scarred population, who have little or no memory of the "time before the fighting." Peace remains fragile and the challenges for development are staggering. But great efforts are being made to foster political and social institutions that can lead to a lasting, inclusive state. The terrible violence during the 1990s and early 2000s lingers heavily in Liberians' memories.

## Geographic Regions and Topographic Features

Liberia's terrain defines four main geographical regions. The land transitions gradually from low-lying coastal plains, through rolling hills, to highland plateaus with scattered low mountain ranges, and finally to its highest elevations in the northern highlands.<sup>1</sup>



© Teri Weefur  
Monrovia, Liberia

Liberia's 579-km (360-mi) Atlantic coast is generally flat, straight, and sandy, punctuated by only a few rocky headlands, such as Cape Mount in the northwest, Cape Mesurado at Monrovia (the capital), and Cape Palmas in the southeast.<sup>2</sup> Where inland rivers flow into the ocean,

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<sup>1</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Liberia." 28 October 2009. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/li.html>

<sup>2</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica. "Liberia: Land: Relief." 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-55255>

shifting sandbars and buried rocks have hindered the natural creation of harbors.<sup>3</sup> Lagoons, marshes, and mangrove swamps often form near the mouths of these rivers.<sup>4</sup> The coastal plain extends some 16 to 48 km (10 to 30 mi) inland. This gently undulating land was part of the vast tropical rainforests that once covered much of Liberia. Today, the forests are mostly gone, having been cleared mainly for agricultural use.<sup>5</sup>

Further inland is a narrow band of low rolling hills approximately 32 km (20 mi) wide. A steep rise leads to a plateau region that is irregularly cut by valleys and dotted with isolated low mountains, including the Putu Range to the southeast, and the Bong Range and Bomi Hills to the northwest. The latter two ranges once had large iron mining operations that helped to briefly make Liberia the world's third largest exporter of iron ore during the 1970s.<sup>6,7</sup>

Liberia's northern highlands are southern extensions of the Guinea Highlands. They include the Wologizi and Wonegizi Ranges, which run northeast to southwest from the Guinea border and are separated by the Lofa River. Mount Wuteve in the Wologizi Range is the highest peak in Liberia at 1,440 m (4,724 ft).<sup>8</sup> To the southeast, a narrow ridgeline above 1220 m (4,000 ft) marks the southwestern portion of the Nimba Range. These mountains are near the junction of the borders of Liberia, Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire. The Nimba Range is the second highest location in Liberia and featured Liberia's largest iron-ore mine until it was abandoned in 1992 during Liberia's first civil war.<sup>9</sup>

## Climate

Most of Liberia lies at latitudes between 5° and 8°N near the equator. Thus, there is little variation over the year in the amount of solar radiation or length of day, keeping

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<sup>3</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Foreign Area Studies, American University. "Chapter 2: The Society and Environment [p. 76]. 1985. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>4</sup> *Liberia*. Miller, Debra A. "1. A Tropical Place [p. 7]." 2004. Farmington Hills, MI: Lucent Books.

<sup>5</sup> Environmental Protection Agency of Liberia/United Nations Environmental Programme. "National Report on the Marine and Coastal Environment [p. 5]." May 2007.

[http://www.unep.org/AbidjanConvention/docs/Liberia National Report of Marine & Coastal Env.pdf](http://www.unep.org/AbidjanConvention/docs/Liberia%20National%20Report%20of%20Marine%20&%20Coastal%20Env.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> *The Open Door Policy of Liberia: An Economic History of Modern Liberia*, Vol. 1, 1983. Van der Kraaij, F. P. M. "Summary [p. xv]." Bremen, Germany: Publication Ubersee-Museum.

[http://www.liberiapastandpresent.org/PDF/The\\_Open\\_Door\\_deel1.pdf](http://www.liberiapastandpresent.org/PDF/The_Open_Door_deel1.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> *Liberia: Past and Present of Africa's Oldest Republic*. Van der Kraaij, F. P. M. "Iron Ore: The Start of Operations of Liberia's First Iron Mine." <http://www.liberiapastandpresent.org/ODP/IronOre/IronOreB.htm>

<sup>8</sup> *International Security and the United States: An Encyclopedia*. "Liberia [p. 439]." 30 December 2007. Westport, Conn.: Praeger Security International.

[http://books.google.com/books?id=tSLeN4U\\_C6kC&pg=PT413&lpg=PT413&dq=Mount+Wuteve+1,440&source=bl&ots=gChOBvqorW&sig=JV4wPKmcSEC128uEFat5qIp89lQ&hl=en&ei=9hJGS5tUk4g0u7vw6wI&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=6&ved=0CBEQ6AEwBTgK#v=onepage&q=Mount%20Wuteve%201%2C440&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=tSLeN4U_C6kC&pg=PT413&lpg=PT413&dq=Mount+Wuteve+1,440&source=bl&ots=gChOBvqorW&sig=JV4wPKmcSEC128uEFat5qIp89lQ&hl=en&ei=9hJGS5tUk4g0u7vw6wI&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=6&ved=0CBEQ6AEwBTgK#v=onepage&q=Mount%20Wuteve%201%2C440&f=false)

<sup>9</sup> SteelGuru.com. Bloomberg.net. "ArcelorMittal to Resume Full Operations at Liberian Iron Ore Mine in 2010." 18 September 2009.

[http://steelguru.com/news/index/2009/09/18/MTEyMzU3/ArcelorMittal\\_to\\_resume\\_full\\_operations\\_at\\_Liberian\\_iron\\_ore\\_mine\\_in\\_2010.html](http://steelguru.com/news/index/2009/09/18/MTEyMzU3/ArcelorMittal_to_resume_full_operations_at_Liberian_iron_ore_mine_in_2010.html)

temperatures uniformly hot. Any variations mostly result from altitudinal differences. Along the coast, the mean annual temperatures are 27°C (80°F), compared to 18°C (65°F) in the northern highlands.<sup>10</sup> Temperatures during a day vary by as little as 5.5°C (10°F) at the coast, and by 16.7°C (30°F) or more at the highest altitudes.<sup>11</sup>

To the extent that Liberia has seasons, they are defined by the amount of precipitation. Between April or May and October, the country experiences its rainy season, receiving over 80% of the annual rainfall.<sup>12</sup> For parts of the coastal region, the rainy season includes a few weeks in July or August when precipitation decreases noticeably, a period known locally as the “middle dries.”<sup>13</sup> In the far southeastern part of the country, this break in the rainy season may last as long as 2 or 3 months.<sup>14</sup> The remaining 6 months of the year (autumn and winter elsewhere in the Northern Hemisphere) are the dry season.



© Jason Judy  
Flooding in Monrovia, Liberia

Rainfall in Liberia is typically heaviest along the coast, with the highest annual totals along the northwestern section. Monrovia, for example, receives an average of 514 cm (202 in) a year.<sup>15, 16</sup> Inland areas in the southeast corner along the Côte d’Ivoire border are the driest regions, yet annual rainfall regularly exceeds 178 cm (70 in).<sup>17, 18</sup>

Liberia’s rainy and dry seasons are dictated by maritime and continental wind patterns. A southwesterly monsoon wind brings moisture during the rainy season. In the dry season, a hot, dry wind known as the *harmattan* blows from the northeast. This wind lowers humidity and causes haze due to fine, wind-borne dust from the Sahara and Sahel regions. During the rainy season, the *harmattan* rises over the undercutting monsoon wind, creating an interacting wind pattern that can lead to tornadoes.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica. “Liberia: Land: Climate.” 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-55258>

<sup>11</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Foreign Area Studies, American University. “Chapter 2: The Society and Environment [p. 80]. 1985. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>12</sup> *Historical Settlement of Liberia and Its Environmental Impact*. Somah, Syrula L. “Chapter 1. Liberia Historical Roots [p. 4].” 1995. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

<sup>13</sup> *Liberia*. Miller, Debra A. “1. A Tropical Place [p. 12].” 2004. Farmington Hills, MI: Lucent Books.

<sup>14</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Foreign Area Studies, American University. “Chapter 2: The Society and Environment [p. 80]. 1985. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>15</sup> BBC Weather Centre. “Average Conditions: Monrovia, Liberia.” No date. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/world/city\\_guides/results.shtml?tt=TT000310](http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/world/city_guides/results.shtml?tt=TT000310)

<sup>16</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Foreign Area Studies, American University. “Chapter 2: The Society and Environment [p. 80]. 1985. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>17</sup> Foreign Agricultural Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. “Annual Rainfall in West Africa (Palm Oil Trees Require 1500–4000 mm of Rainfall Per Year).” 2002.

[http://www.fas.usda.gov/pecad2/highlights/2002/09/cote\\_divoire/pictures/annual\\_rainfall.gif](http://www.fas.usda.gov/pecad2/highlights/2002/09/cote_divoire/pictures/annual_rainfall.gif)

<sup>18</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Foreign Area Studies, American University. “Chapter 2: The Society and Environment [p. 80]. 1985. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>19</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica. “Harmattan.” 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9039291>

## Rivers and Lakes

### *Rivers*

Nearly all of Liberia's longest rivers flow from the highlands to the coast in a northeast to southwest direction. None of these rivers is navigable more than 80 km (50 mi) from its mouth, limiting their commercial importance.<sup>20</sup> One exception is the Farmington River, a relatively short river that flows from the Bong Range to a location 48 km (30 mi) southwest of Monrovia. This river is used by the Firestone Plantations Company for shipping rubber to the coast from its plantation near the Farmington River port of Harbel. The company also operates a small hydroelectric plant near Harbel, the only such plant currently operating in Liberia.<sup>21</sup>



© Goya Bauwens  
Lofa River

Liberia has 15 main river basins, of which the 6 most important are (from northwest to southeast) the Mano, the Lofa, the Saint Paul, the Saint John, the Cestos, and the Cavalla. Most of these rivers form national boundaries along parts of their courses.

On Liberia's northwestern edge, the Mano (also known as the Gbeyar or Bewa) River and its tributary, the Morro River, form more than 145 km (90 mi) of the border with Sierra Leone.<sup>22</sup> Southwest of the Mano is the Lofa River, whose headwaters lie within Guinea. The region between these two rivers contains great mineral wealth. Gold, diamond, and iron mines have all operated here, and some are active.

The next major river to the southwest is the Saint Paul, which also originates within the highlands of Guinea. For parts of its upper reach, where it is known as the Nianda River, the Saint Paul forms the border with Guinea. Near Monrovia, the Mount Coffee Hydroelectric Plant on the Saint Paul at one time generated about half of Liberia's electrical power. It has been inoperable since 1990, a victim of the Liberian civil wars.<sup>23</sup>

The Saint John River nearly bisects Liberia and enters the Atlantic near Buchanan, Liberia's second largest port. The uppermost reach of the Saint John, known as the Mani River, forms a border with Guinea. To the southwest of the Saint John, the Nuon River—the name given to the upper reaches of the Cestos River—marks Liberia's border with Côte d'Ivoire before it shifts to the southeast and then south. This latter border region is delineated by the Cavalla River, a river given its name by 15th century Portuguese

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<sup>20</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica. "Cavalla River." 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9021899>

<sup>21</sup> United Nations Development Programme. State of the Environment Report for Liberia 2006. "4. Water Resources and Use [p. 45]." 2006. [http://www.lr.undp.org/State of the environment report final.pdf](http://www.lr.undp.org/State%20of%20the%20environment%20report%20final.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica. "Mano River." 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9050593>

<sup>23</sup> United Nations Environment Programme. "Restoring the Battered and Broken Environment of Liberia One of the Keys to a New and Sustainable Future." 13 February 2004. <http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=384&ArticleID=4411&l=en>

explorers because of the abundance of horse mackerels (*cavalla* in Portuguese) found at its mouth.<sup>24, 25</sup>

### Lakes

The largest body of water in Liberia is Lake Piso, which is actually an open coastal lagoon near the Sierra Leone border. The lake is surrounded by mangrove and freshwater swamp forests, and a rare strip of coastal tropical rainforest.<sup>26</sup> Prior to the civil war, the Lake Piso area, including coastal Robertsport at the mouth of the lagoon, was one of Liberia’s top tourist attractions.<sup>27</sup>

### Cities

City	County	Population 2008 <sup>28</sup>
Monrovia	Montserrado	1,010,970
Ganta	Nimba	41,106
Buchanan	Grand Bassa	34,270
Gbarnga	Bong	34,046
Kakata	Margibi	33,945
Voinjama	Lofa	26,594
Zwedru	Grand Gedeh	23,903
Harbel	Margibi	23,402
Pleebo	Maryland	22,963
Foya	Lofa	19,522

### Monrovia

Monrovia, Liberia’s capital, is the only significant urban area in Liberia. In fact, the *combined* population of Liberia’s nine next-largest cities amounts to only one quarter that of Monrovia. Compared with places within the United States, Monrovia is Liberia’s equivalent of Washington, D.C. and New York in political and economic importance. Monrovia is also equal to Plymouth Rock in historical significance for Liberia. The first

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<sup>24</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica. “Cavalla River.” 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9021899>

<sup>25</sup> Maryland County Association of New Jersey, U.S.A. “About Maryland County.” No date. <http://www.mcaliberianjusa.org/gpage2.html>

<sup>26</sup> Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. “The Annotated Ramsar List: Liberia.” 19 July 2003. [http://www.ramsar.org/cda/ramsar/display/main/main.jsp?zn=ramsar&cp=1-30-168%5E16546\\_4000\\_0\\_\\_](http://www.ramsar.org/cda/ramsar/display/main/main.jsp?zn=ramsar&cp=1-30-168%5E16546_4000_0__)

<sup>27</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Liberia: Economy: Services.” 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-282610>

<sup>28</sup> Government of the Republic of Liberia. “2008 National Population and Housing Census: Preliminary Results [p. 12].” June 2008. [http://www.emansion.gov.lr/doc/census\\_2008provisionalresults.pdf](http://www.emansion.gov.lr/doc/census_2008provisionalresults.pdf)

sustained American Colonization Society (ACS) settlement in Liberia was founded here in December 1821, on a small island at the mouth of the Mesurado River.<sup>29</sup> A few months later, the settlers moved to the mainland near the present-day city. Originally named Christopolis, the city was renamed “Monrovia” in honor of U.S. President James Monroe, whose administration aided the early ACS colonization efforts.<sup>30</sup>

During the middle decades of the 20th century, infrastructure development made Monrovia the nation’s major port of entry, thus cementing its importance to the Liberian economy. In 1926, the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company offered a massive loan to the financially distressed Liberian government. In exchange, the company obtained a 99-year lease for a large tract of land near the capital where it established the nation’s first rubber plantation. During World War II, the Firestone plantation became a crucial supplier of rubber for Allied forces. After the war, Liberia’s first deep-water port was built on Monrovia’s Bushrod Island by the U.S. under the Lend-Lease Act program.<sup>31</sup> The port development in turn fueled the creation of additional transportation infrastructure to deliver raw materials such as natural rubber and iron ore to the port’s loading docks.<sup>32</sup>



© Goya Bauwens  
Monrovia Approach

Also located near the Firestone rubber plantation outside Monrovia is Roberts International Airport, the main airport for the city and the country. It was constructed during World War II by Firestone, and operated by the U.S. government as an Air Force base until the war was over. After WWII, it was operated as a civil and commercial airport by the U.S. air carrier Pan American Airways until 1984.<sup>33, 34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. “Finding Liberia [p. 10].” 2004. New York: Reed Press.

<sup>30</sup> Cities of the World. “Monrovia.” 2008. <http://www.city-data.com/world-cities/Monrovia-History.html>

<sup>31</sup> *The Firestone Operations in Liberia*. Wayne Chatfield Taylor, Reprint Ed. “I. Liberia: Past and Present [p. 15].” 1975 (originally 1956). Washington, DC: National Planning Association (reprint: Arno Press). [http://books.google.com/books?id=EBWAmAxIy34C&pg=PA15&lpg=PA15&dq=Lend-Lease+Program+Liberia&source=bl&ots=J0SOayBh1W&sig=GUzOyKcoue3b-\\_sGeUffEz\\_Vbz4&hl=en&ei=AZz4SpP\\_LY20swOf5-naCQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=7&ved=0CBkQ6AEwBg#v=onepage&q=&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=EBWAmAxIy34C&pg=PA15&lpg=PA15&dq=Lend-Lease+Program+Liberia&source=bl&ots=J0SOayBh1W&sig=GUzOyKcoue3b-_sGeUffEz_Vbz4&hl=en&ei=AZz4SpP_LY20swOf5-naCQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=7&ved=0CBkQ6AEwBg#v=onepage&q=&f=false)

<sup>32</sup> *The Geography of Modern Africa*, 2nd Ed. Hance, William A. “West Africa: Introduction [pp. 192–193].” 1975. New York: Columbia University Press.

<sup>33</sup> *The Firestone Operations in Liberia*. Wayne Chatfield Taylor, Reprint Ed. “I. Liberia: Past and Present [p. 15].” 1975 (originally 1956). Washington, DC: National Planning Association (reprint: Arno Press). [http://books.google.com/books?id=EBWAmAxIy34C&pg=PA15&lpg=PA15&dq=Lend-Lease+Program+Liberia&source=bl&ots=J0SOayBh1W&sig=GUzOyKcoue3b-\\_sGeUffEz\\_Vbz4&hl=en&ei=AZz4SpP\\_LY20swOf5-naCQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=7&ved=0CBkQ6AEwBg#v=onepage&q=&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=EBWAmAxIy34C&pg=PA15&lpg=PA15&dq=Lend-Lease+Program+Liberia&source=bl&ots=J0SOayBh1W&sig=GUzOyKcoue3b-_sGeUffEz_Vbz4&hl=en&ei=AZz4SpP_LY20swOf5-naCQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=7&ved=0CBkQ6AEwBg#v=onepage&q=&f=false)

<sup>34</sup> Roberts International Airport. “Roberts International Airport Profiles.” 2009. <http://www.robertsinternationalairport.com/profile-ria.html>

## *Ganta*

The market town of Ganta lies on the Mani River, across the border from Guinea. The town and much of the surrounding areas of Nimba County were ravaged during heavy fighting in 2002–2003. The entire civilian population of Ganta was forced to flee.<sup>35</sup> After the fighting ended, land ownership issues among the returning refugees led to ethnically fueled riots in 2006.<sup>36</sup>

Before the civil wars, Ganta's location at the nexus of roads leading to Guinea and the large iron mine to the north at Mount Nimba ensured a bustling trade economy. Since then, the local economy has largely ground to a halt. Efforts continue to re-open the iron mine and rebuild heavily damaged social services and transportation infrastructure.<sup>37</sup> One of the top development goals is to extend electricity to Ganta from the grid in Côte d'Ivoire.<sup>38</sup> Currently, the only electricity in Ganta comes from a few small, privately owned generators.<sup>39</sup>



© CPL: A. Oigum, USMC  
Hospital in Ganta, Liberia

## *Buchanan*

As with most of Liberia's cities, Buchanan is a shell of its old self, even after more than 6 years of peace. The city's port was once the country's second largest, and it was served by a railway that extended inland to the iron mine at Mount Nimba. Both the iron mine and railroad are now nonoperational, although efforts are underway to restore them. Buchanan's road connections with Monrovia have also become tenuous. In October 2009, the European Union announced a EUR 60 million contribution to the Liberian Reconstruction Fund. The reconstruction of the Monrovia-Buchanan road is one of two earmarked projects.<sup>40</sup> The World Bank has separately committed USD 14 million to this project.<sup>41</sup>



© The Advocacy Project  
Coastline of Buchanan, Liberia

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<sup>35</sup> Vanity Fair. Junger, Sebastian. "Liberia's Savage Harvest." October 2003. <http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2003/10/liberia200310>

<sup>36</sup> IRIN News. UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Refugee Returns Creating Ethnic 'Time Bomb.'" 8 February 2007. <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=70055>

<sup>37</sup> Ministries of Planning and Economic Affairs and Internal Affairs, Republic of Liberia. "Nimba County Development Agenda [pp. 24–28]." 2008. <http://www.emansion.gov.lr/doc/NimbaCDA.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> Ministries of Planning and Economic Affairs and Internal Affairs, Republic of Liberia. "Nimba County Development Agenda [p. 28]." 2008. <http://www.emansion.gov.lr/doc/NimbaCDA.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> emPower Magazine. Holder, Christina. "Liberians Share Light, Bring Hope in Nation Left Dark by War." 21 October 2009. <http://www.empowernewsmag.com/listings.php?article=989>

<sup>40</sup> European Commission. "EU Grants €80 Million for Liberia's Infrastructure and Health Sector." 20 October 2009. [http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/documents/aap/2009/pr\\_aap\\_2009\\_lbr.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/documents/aap/2009/pr_aap_2009_lbr.pdf)

<sup>41</sup> allAfrica.com. "World Bank Commits U.S. \$14 Million for Buchanan Road Rehab." 17 September 2009. <http://allafrica.com/stories/200909180393.html>

## *Gbarnga*

Gbarnga, the capital city of Bong County, sits at the intersection of roads to Monrovia, Buchanan, and towns to the north and northeast. A few miles west of the town center is Cuttington University, one of the oldest private colleges in West Africa. This city has long been a trading center for the surrounding county. The city was a base for the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, led by future President Charles Taylor, during the fighting from 1989–1997.<sup>42</sup> An unfortunate result was that Gbarnga and the surrounding countryside supplied a large number of the children and young women who were forced into the irregular militias during the war.<sup>43</sup>



© United Nations Photo  
Bangladesh battalion in Gbarnga, Liberia

Virtually all large- and medium-scale economic operations in Gbarnga and Bong County were destroyed during the two Liberian civil wars. Today, most citizens of the city earn whatever they can through the informal business sector, often carrying out petty trading on a person-to-person basis. There is no pipe-borne water delivery system in the city. The little electricity that is produced comes from privately owned generators.<sup>44</sup>

## *Kakata*

Kakata is located about 56 km (35 mi) from Monrovia, along the road that connects the capital with Gbarnga, Ganta, and the iron mine at Mount Nimba. Prior to the fighting, the town was a regional educational center. Both the Booker T. Washington Institute (an agricultural and vocational school) and the Kakata Rural Teacher Training Institute (KRTTI) are there. Since fighting ended, both educational institutions have resumed operations. In 2009, the KRTTI graduated its first class of new teachers in 20 years.<sup>45</sup> Kakata is also the capital of Margibi County. This area contains several of Liberia's rubber plantations, including the largest one in the world (the Firestone operation near the city of Harbel).<sup>46</sup>



© John Connell  
Kakata, Liberia

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<sup>42</sup> CharlesTaylorTrial.org. Open Society Justice Initiative. "Who is Charles Taylor?" 2009.

<http://www.charlestaylortrial.org/trial-background/who-is-charles-taylor/>

<sup>43</sup> Ministries of Planning and Economic Affairs and Internal Affairs, Republic of Liberia. "Bong County Development Agenda [p. 1]." 2008. <http://www.emansion.gov.lr/doc/BongCDA.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> Ministries of Planning and Economic Affairs and Internal Affairs, Republic of Liberia. "Bong County Development Agenda [pp. 15, 27, 29]." 2008.

<sup>45</sup> allAfrica.com. "Kakata Rural Teachers Training Institute (KRTTI) Graduates First Batch of Teachers in 20 Years." 20 June 2009. <http://allafrica.com/stories/200906220328.html>

<sup>46</sup> African Press International. "Liberia: Strike Paralyzed Operations in the World's Largest Rubber Plantation." 26 April 2007. <http://africanpress.wordpress.com/2007/04/26/liberia-strike-paralyzed-operations-in-the-worlds-largest-rubber-plantation/>

## Environmental Concerns

### *Deforestation*

Liberia suffered an overwhelming human loss during 14 years of on-and-off fighting. Perhaps less well-known is the extensive damage to the nation's forests. Between 1990 and 2000 (a period encompassing the first civil war and the beginning of the second), nearly 18% of Liberia's forests were cut down. The annual rate of deforestation was nearly two-and-a-half times the average of the rest of sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>47</sup> The term "conflict timber" was coined by a United Nations panel in 2001 to describe the indiscriminate and illegal cutting of trees to fund arms purchases and other war needs. During the 1990s and early 2000s, Liberia's forests were a major source of conflict timber, used to further fighting not only in Liberia, but also in neighboring Sierra Leone.



© The Advocacy Project  
Timber from forests near Konia

In July 2003, the United Nations imposed a ban on all sales of Liberian timber, which was lifted in 2006.<sup>48, 49</sup> That same year, the Liberian government passed an ambitious National Forestry Reform Law Act. This act created a forestry management framework with two express purposes—to create a conservation plan for Liberia's existing forests, and prudent and environmentally sustainable procedures for future logging concessions.<sup>50</sup> Since then, a little over 1 million ha (3,861 sq mi) of Liberian forest lands have been awarded to logging companies in 25-year Forestry Management Contracts.<sup>51, 52</sup> Some of these contracts have been criticized for alleged irregularities in the bidding and for not following the guidelines for vetting prospective bidders.<sup>53, 54</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> World Bank. "Environment at a Glance 2004: Liberia." November 2004.

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEEI/Data/20857109/Liberia.pdf>

<sup>48</sup> Le Monde Diplomatique. Blondel, Alice. "The Logs of War." January 2004.

<http://mondediplo.com/2004/01/15timber>

<sup>49</sup> IRIN News. UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Liberia: Lifting of UN Timber Ban Gives Hope for Economic Revival." 21 June 2006.

<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=59404>

<sup>50</sup> United Nations Environmental Programme. "An Act Adopting the National Forestry Law of 2006." September 2006. [http://www.unep.org/DEC/docs/Liberian\\_forestry\\_law.pdf](http://www.unep.org/DEC/docs/Liberian_forestry_law.pdf)

<sup>51</sup> Forestry Development Authority, Republic of Liberia. "President Sirleaf Receives Three Forest Management Contracts for Her Signature." 24 October 2008.

[http://www.fda.gov.lr/press.php?news\\_id=172](http://www.fda.gov.lr/press.php?news_id=172)

<sup>52</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization. Forestry Development Agency, Republic of Liberia. *Liberian Forestry Brief*. "Status of the Awarding and Start-Up of Timber Contracts." March 2009.

<http://www.fao.org/forestry/18682-1-0.pdf>

<sup>53</sup> PublicAgendaOnline. "Don't Approve Controversial Forest Contracts, Logging Companies Tell Sirleaf." 18 September 2009.

[http://www.publicagendanews.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1333:dont-approve-controversial-forest-contracts&catid=1:latest-news&Itemid=2](http://www.publicagendanews.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1333:dont-approve-controversial-forest-contracts&catid=1:latest-news&Itemid=2)

<sup>54</sup> The Analyst, Liberia. "Don't Sign Risky Logging Contracts." 2 October 2009.

[http://www.analystliberia.com/dont\\_sign\\_risky\\_logging\\_contracts\\_oct02\\_09.html](http://www.analystliberia.com/dont_sign_risky_logging_contracts_oct02_09.html)

## *Water Supply and Pollution*

Prior to 1990, Liberia had 11 water supply systems serving urban areas, 7 of which used surface water. Nearly all of these were destroyed during the 14 years of civil wars. In coastal Monrovia, 2 boreholes and 25 shallow wells were drilled as stopgap measures. This attempt to provide alternative sources of water was not enough. By late 2007, Monrovia's water supply was only about 19% of what it was before fighting began. In addition, the city's population had more than doubled during that time.<sup>55</sup> Of further concern is that the increased extraction of groundwater at coastal Monrovia could lead to problems with salt-water intrusion.<sup>56</sup>



Most parts of Liberia receive abundant rainfall, and thus water quantity is seldom an issue except later in the dry season. But water quality is a major concern. Before the fighting began, an estimated 37% of Liberians had access to safe drinking water.<sup>57</sup> In 2009, that had dropped to 23%, and only 14% had access to adequate sanitation.<sup>58</sup> As a result, water-borne diseases such as cholera and diarrhea continue to be one of the leading causes of death for children under 5 in Liberia.<sup>59</sup>

## *Coastal Erosion*

All of Liberia's main coastal communities are somewhat threatened by natural erosion, but the problem has been escalated by human interference on the coast. A joint study by the Liberian government and the United Nations Development Programme concluded that the largest contributing factor to Liberia's loss of coastline was unregulated sand mining.<sup>60</sup> Protective measures, such as breakwater construction, have proved ineffective in some cases because residents have taken the rocks and metals used to build these barriers for their own purposes. Liberian officials have called for international assistance as coastal



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<sup>55</sup> The Perspective. Dukulé, Abdoulaye. "Bringing Adequate Safe Drinking Water to Monrovia, Very Soon." 22 October 2007. <http://www.liberiaitech.com/theperspective/2007/1022200704.html>

<sup>56</sup> United Nations Development Programme. State of the Environment Report for Liberia 2006. "4. Water Resources and Use [pp. 39–40]." 2006. [http://www.lr.undp.org/State of the environment report final.pdf](http://www.lr.undp.org/State%20of%20the%20environment%20report%20final.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> Relief Web. United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). "Liberia: UNMIL Humanitarian Situation Report No. 171." September/October 2009. <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/EGUA-7WFN54?OpenDocument>

<sup>58</sup> Relief Web. United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). "PSI Launches 'Water Guard' in Monrovia." 2 October 2009. <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/EGUA-7WFN54?OpenDocument>

<sup>59</sup> Relief Web. United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). "Liberia: UNMIL Humanitarian Situation Report No. 171." September/October 2009. <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/EGUA-7WFN54?OpenDocument>

<sup>60</sup> Refworld.org. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. IRIN. "Liberia: Coastal Erosion Displaces Hundreds." 28 May 2008. <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,,LBR,,48440538e,0.html>

cities have become increasingly vulnerable.<sup>61</sup> Buchanan has had more than 100 homes destroyed by the sea since 2006.<sup>62</sup>

## Natural Hazards

Many parts of Liberia are susceptible to flooding during the heavy rains of the wet season. Coastal urban areas—in particular, Monrovia—are most prone to flood damage, in part because some dwellings lie in swampy areas not suitable for construction.<sup>63</sup> In July 2008, the city suffered the worst flooding in its history, displacing nearly 1,000 people.<sup>64</sup> This flood occurred less than a year after serious flooding in August 2007 briefly cut off the water supply to those parts of Monrovia where water service had been restored since the end of fighting.<sup>65</sup>



© Jason Judy  
Flooded low land area

Heavy windstorms periodically cause extensive damage to structures, mostly in inland parts of Liberia.<sup>66</sup> Although such storms are common in March and April before the wet season, they can occur during other times of the year. In October 2009, for example, 35 homes were destroyed in Lofa County (the northern-most region in Liberia).<sup>67</sup> The affected region was not far from another area in Lofa County where 130 homes and public buildings were damaged in June 2008.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Global Environmental Facility Country Support Programme. Johnson-Sirleaf, H. E. Ellen. “Keynote Statement.” 20 November 2008. <http://www.gefcountrysupport.org/docs/890.doc>

<sup>62</sup> Refworld.org. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. IRIN. “Liberia: Coastal Erosion Displaces Hundreds.” 28 May 2008. <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,,LBR,,48440538e,0.html>

<sup>63</sup> VOA.com. Latham, Brent. “Liberia Floods Displace Hundreds.” 22 July 2008.

<http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2008-07/2008-07-22-voa30.cfm?moddate=2008-07-22>

<sup>64</sup> allAfrica.com. IRIN. “Liberia: Govt Warns Monrovia Floods Worst in City’s History.” 21 July 2008. <http://allafrica.com/stories/200807220618.html>

<sup>65</sup> IRIN. UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Liberia: Floods Displace Hundreds in Monrovia.” 27 August 2007. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=73973>

<sup>66</sup> Relief Web. United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). “Liberia: UNMIL Humanitarian Situation Report No. 141.” 6 April 2008. <http://www.reliefweb.int/rwarchive/rwb.nsf/db900sid/EGUA-7DGPD5?OpenDocument>

<sup>67</sup> Daily Observer. Fayia, Edwin M. III. “Windstorm Destroys 35 Houses in Lofa.” 6 October 2009. <http://liberian.server282.com/node/2054>

<sup>68</sup> Relief Web. United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). “Liberia: UNMIL Humanitarian Situation Report No. 146.” 15 June 2008. <http://www.reliefweb.int/rwarchive/rwb.nsf/db900sid/LSGZ-7FQGBG?OpenDocument>

# History

## Introduction

Liberia's history is quite different from that of any other African nation. It is the only African state that has never been colonized or controlled by a European nation. That status, however, masks the uniquely Liberian "colonial" dynamics that mark much of the country's history. For many decades, two separate groups mostly co-existed in a political union with little social or cultural integration. A small, elite class of freed American slaves and their descendants lived along the coast, and a much larger population of diverse, indigenous peoples lived within the forested inland areas. The Liberia described in civics textbooks, with a government modeled after that of the United States, extended only a few miles inland of Monrovia and other coastal settlements. Ultimately, divisive tensions between the American settlers and native population triggered a coup in 1980, leading to decades of violent conflict and the implosion of Liberia. Attempts during the mid 20th century to bridge the gap between the two groups were simply a case of "too little, too late."



© Teri Weefur  
Busy street in Monrovia, Liberia

Since the cessation of fighting in 2003, Liberia has embarked on the early stages of inclusionary nation-building. The civil wars of the last two decades have left deep scars on the landscape and in the hearts of the Liberian people. Whether the nation can rise beyond the divisions of its past to maintain a stable and more equitable society remains in question.

## Early History

Little is known about the history of the indigenous groups that inhabited modern-day Liberia when the first free, black settlers arrived from the U.S. during the early 19th century. Historians have postulated that a wave of migration from other parts of Africa into modern-day Liberia began between the 13th and 15th centuries.<sup>69</sup>

These new arrivals are thought to have moved southward and westward into Liberia, away from inland areas. The initial migrants may have come in search of better agricultural lands, while later influxes likely occurred during periods of instability in the inland kingdoms along the upper Niger River.<sup>70, 71</sup> Liberia's dense forests and fast-moving rivers often made interactions between



Courtesy of Wikipedia.org  
Monrovia, Liberia in the 1800s

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<sup>69</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Rinehart, Robert. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting [pp. 4–5]." 1984. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>70</sup> *Liberians: An Introduction to Their History and Culture*. Dunn-Marcos, Robin and Konia T. Kolllehlon, Bernard Ngovo, Emily Russ. "People: A Diverse Population [p. 3]." April 2005. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics. [http://www.cal.org/co/liberians/liberian\\_050406\\_1.pdf](http://www.cal.org/co/liberians/liberian_050406_1.pdf)

ethnically related communities difficult. The lack of interaction worked against the development of social or political units larger than local chiefdoms.

The first documented European arrival on the Liberian coast was the Portuguese navigator Pedro de Sintra, who explored this region in 1461. The lack of good natural ports along the Liberian stretch of the Atlantic did not hinder the development of trade relations with coastal populations. Ivory and *malagueta* pepper were the principal items sought by European merchants. The latter item—a spice also referred to as “grains of paradise”—is why the stretch of the Liberian coastline between Cape Mesurado and Cape Palmas became known as the Grain Coast.<sup>72</sup>

Slave trade also became a major part of the Grain Coast commerce with Europeans. Most of the enslaved were captured during raids into the Liberian interior by the Mandingo and Gola peoples, who each formed inter-ethnic confederations that helped cement their lucrative middleman status in the trade with Europeans.<sup>73, 74</sup> It is estimated that roughly 12% of all slaves shipped to the Americas during the 18th century came from depots on the Grain Coast.<sup>75</sup>

### “Back to Africa”

At the same time that the Gola and Mandingo confederations were competing in the Grain Coast slave trade, the first stirrings of a movement to establish African settlements for free persons of color were occurring in the United States.<sup>76</sup> The U.S. banned the importation of slaves on 1 January 1808—the earliest permissible date for such an action, according to Article 1 of the U.S. Constitution.<sup>77</sup> Around this time, a “back to Africa” movement for freeborn and emancipated American blacks began to take firm shape following a century of fledgling efforts to advance an African repatriation plan. Heightening the interest in this national discussion was the rapid growth of the free black population—both in the American South and abolitionist states of the North—in the wake of



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<sup>71</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Rinehart, Robert. “Chapter 1: Historical Setting [pp. 4–5].” 1984. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>72</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Grain Coast.” 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9037621>

<sup>73</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Rinehart, Robert. “Chapter 1: Historical Setting [p. 6].” 1984. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>74</sup> *Liberians: An Introduction to Their History and Culture*. Dunn-Marcos, Robin and Konia T. Kolllehlon, Bernard Ngovo, Emily Russ. “History: Pre-Liberian Times [p. 7].” April 2005. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics. [http://www.cal.org/co/liberians/liberian\\_050406\\_1.pdf](http://www.cal.org/co/liberians/liberian_050406_1.pdf)

<sup>75</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Rinehart, Robert. “Chapter 1: Historical Setting [p. 6].” 1984. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>76</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Rinehart, Robert. “Chapter 1: Historical Setting [p. 8].” 1984. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>77</sup> USConstitution.net. “U.S. Constitution – Article 1 Section 9.” 2008. [http://www.usconstitution.net/xconst\\_A1Sec9.html](http://www.usconstitution.net/xconst_A1Sec9.html)

the Revolutionary War. Understanding the economic factors driving racial stratification in the U.S. and the appeal of repatriation to many American whites and blacks will help explain, later on, the skin-color hierarchy that gets replicated in Liberia.

Motives for support of the back to Africa movement varied according to social, political, and economic interests. Religious groups were rallied by the desire to spread Christianity to African shores. Antislavery factions in the U.S. saw voluntary repatriation as a corrective action to the injustices suffered by blacks under slavery; it would allow them to return to their ancestral homeland, where they could “thrive in an atmosphere of self-government.”<sup>78</sup> From a less idealistic perspective, many white Southerners supported the movement for fear of the socio-economic threat posed by a population of free blacks living in proximity to enslaved blacks. Viewed close up, the disparity in status between the two groups would be too obvious to ignore and could fuel the potential for rebellion. Sending free blacks back to Africa would also delay any sort of popular referendum on southern (slave) and northern (wage) labor economies, which threatened to rupture the unity of the United States.<sup>79</sup>

For plantation owners in the South and industrialists in the North, the repatriation of free blacks would diminish the possibility of working class whites and blacks recognizing their shared economic interests.<sup>80</sup> Rather than see workers organize labor unions, white elites in various sectors encouraged working class whites to rally around racial rather than social class affiliations. Over time, formerly-distinct and stratified European ethnic groups (British, Irish, Italians, Greeks, etc.) were blurred and politically merged into one larger “white” constituency, albeit with its own internal ethnic hierarchy.<sup>81, 82</sup> Many free blacks, who questioned the motives for white support of repatriation and doubted whether the U.S. would ever provide equal opportunities for black people, decided to leave their country of birth. For them, the chance to go back to Africa offered a welcome prospect for a new start. Among this group was a man named Paul Cuffe, a half-black, half-Amerindian Quaker who led 38 black settlers to Sierra Leone in his own vessel in 1815.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Rinehart, Robert. “Chapter 1: Historical Setting [p. 8].” 1984. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>79</sup> *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, Rev. Ed. Roediger, David. “Chapter 7: Irish-American Workers and White Racial Formation in the Antebellum United States [pp. 144-150].” 1999. New York: Verso.

<sup>80</sup> *Learning to be White: Money, Race and God in America*. Thandeka. “Chapter 3: Class [pp. 45-46].” 1999. New York: Continuum.

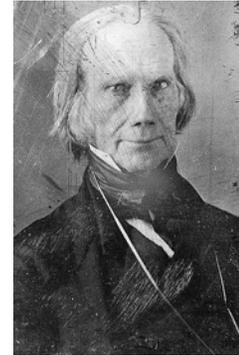
<sup>81</sup> *Learning to be White: Money, Race and God in America*. Thandeka. “Chapter 5: Victims [pp. 76-79].” New York: Continuum.

<sup>82</sup> *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, Rev. Ed. Roediger, David. “Chapter 4: Whites slaves, wage slaves, and free white labor [p. 87].” 1999. New York: Verso.

<sup>83</sup> *Liberians: An Introduction to Their History and Culture*. Dunn-Marcos, Robin and Konia T. Kollehlon, Bernard Ngovo, Emily Russ. “History: Early Americo-Liberian Settlements [p. 8].” April 2005. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics. [http://www.cal.org/co/liberians/liberian\\_050406\\_1.pdf](http://www.cal.org/co/liberians/liberian_050406_1.pdf)

## American Colonization Society

Against this backdrop, the American Colonization Society (ACS) was founded in December 1816, spearheaded by Robert Finley, a New Jersey Presbyterian minister. The group's first meeting in Washington was attended by prominent white Americans, including Henry Clay (Speaker of the House of Representatives), Congressman Daniel Webster, General (and future U.S. President) Andrew Jackson, and Francis Scott Key (author of the lyrics to "The Star Spangled Banner"). With the support of President James Monroe, the ACS received USD 100,000 in 1819 to finance an expedition to establish a barracks in West Africa to house "recaptives," those Africans rescued from slave ships seized at sea by the U.S. Navy.



Courtesy of Wikipedia.org  
Henry Clay, one of the founders of ACS

### *Early Colonization Efforts*

In 1820, a party of 86 free American blacks and three white ACS agents and government representatives sailed on the *Elizabeth* from New York toward the Grain Coast. After briefly anchoring at the British crown colony of Freetown (in modern-day Sierra Leone), the settlers continued sailing southeast, coming ashore at swampy Sherbro Island. Scarcely three weeks later, 22 of the black colonists and all the ACS and government agents died of yellow fever or malaria. A few months later, the survivors abandoned the island, returning to Freetown.<sup>84</sup>

It was not until the third ACS-sponsored voyage that negotiations for a settlement site were concluded with the people of modern-day coastal Liberia. The *Augusta*—carrying new black settlers from America plus many from Freetown who had survived the first two ACS voyages—landed at Cape Mesurado in January 1822. This voyage followed talks in December 1821 with the local Dey and Bassa chieftains.<sup>85</sup> The principal negotiator for the settlers was Lieutenant Robert Stockton, commander of the U.S.S. *Alligator* that had accompanied the *Augusta* down the coast from Freetown.<sup>86</sup> In exchange for trade goods valued at roughly USD 300, the ACS obtained rights to a long stretch of coastal land



© Adam Cohn  
Freetown Sierra Leone

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<sup>84</sup> *This Our Dark Country: The American Settlers of Liberia*. Reef, Catherine. "Chapter 3: Divine Providence [pp. 21–24]." 2002. New York: Clarion Books.  
[http://books.google.com/books?id=vf4j5O105vMC&pg=PA22&lpg=PA22&dq=Elizabeth+Sherbro+This+Our+dark&source=bl&ots=znb3dirVga&sig=cA1hZRPfMtSQOIVnIBsxFfWbXFM&hl=en&ei=PW0VS5exDonitgOPuPH2Aw&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CAgQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=vf4j5O105vMC&pg=PA22&lpg=PA22&dq=Elizabeth+Sherbro+This+Our+dark&source=bl&ots=znb3dirVga&sig=cA1hZRPfMtSQOIVnIBsxFfWbXFM&hl=en&ei=PW0VS5exDonitgOPuPH2Aw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CAgQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=&f=false)

<sup>85</sup> Dey and Bassa are the names given to the coastal ethnic groups that inhabited the Cape Mesurado area at the time of the first ACS colonization efforts.

<sup>86</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Rinehart, Robert. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting [p. 10]." 1984. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

extending southeastward from Cape Mesurado. It is questionable whether the Bassa chiefs fully understood the terms of this deal.<sup>87, 88, 89</sup>

The first permanent ACS settlement at Cape Mesurado was originally known as Christopolis. The settlement was renamed Monrovia in 1824 in recognition of President Monroe's assistance to the ACS during its first colonization efforts. From the founding of the colony and every year thereafter until Liberian independence in 1847, the ACS dispatched a Monrovia-bound ship carrying a new group of settlers from the U.S. Besides the ACS, several other colonization societies (under charters granted by individual states) set up separate colonies along the Grain Coast. Among these were the Maryland Colonization Society and the Mississippi Colonization Society, which founded settlements at the modern-day cities of Harper and Greenville, respectively.<sup>90</sup> Near the present-day port city of Buchanan, black Quakers from Pennsylvania established the Bassa Cove colony.<sup>91</sup>

### *Struggles in the New Colony*

The early years in the Liberian colony were difficult. Of the 4,571 ACS-sponsored free black emigrants who arrived between 1820 and 1843, only about 40% were living in the colony in 1843. Nearly half (2,243) died of malaria in those first 23 years. Another 12% of the ACS emigrants either returned to the U.S. or migrated to other locations.<sup>92</sup> Besides tropical illnesses, the ACS colony experienced frequent conflicts with indigenous groups, which resisted the expansion of settler communities into their lands and fought restrictions on the slave trade.<sup>93, 94</sup> In Lieutenant Stockton's land negotiations in 1821, he assured the Bassa chiefs that the settlers would not interfere with the local slave trade. But Jehudi Ashmun, who became the ACS resident agent of the Liberian colony in 1822,



Courtesy of Wikipedia.org  
Jehudi Ashmun

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<sup>87</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. "Chapter 1: Finding Liberia [p. 10]." 2004. New York: Reed Press.

<sup>88</sup> *International Dictionary of Historic Places*, Vol. 4. "Monrovia [p. 517]." 1996. Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers.

<sup>89</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Rinehart, Robert. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting [p. 10]." 1984. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>90</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Rinehart, Robert. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting [p. 15]." 1984. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>91</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Buchanan." 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9017864>

<sup>92</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. "Chapter 1: Finding Liberia [pp. 12, 13]." 2004. New York: Reed Press.

<sup>93</sup> *Liberians: An Introduction to Their History and Culture*. Dunn-Marcos, Robin and Konia T. Kollehlon, Bernard Ngovo, Emily Russ. "History: Early Americo-Liberian Settlements [p. 9]." April 2005. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics. [http://www.cal.org/co/liberians/liberian\\_050406\\_1.pdf](http://www.cal.org/co/liberians/liberian_050406_1.pdf)

<sup>94</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Rinehart, Robert. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting [p. 14]." 1984. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

later repudiated Stockton's promise.<sup>95</sup>

Ashmun initially experienced difficult relations with the struggling settlers, but during his six years of leadership, the small colony eventually stabilized. Farms and new settlements were established along lower stretches of the Saint Paul River. Trade in certain commodities began between settlers and indigenous groups. Some progress was made toward increasing local agricultural production.<sup>96</sup> The first schools were also opened during this period of Liberian history. By the time of Ashmun's death in 1828, the population had risen to more than 1,200 colonists.

## The Commonwealth

By 1838, the advantages of increased cooperation between the ACS and state colonies were evident. A commonwealth constitution outlined the terms of a governmental merger of the original ACS colony (referred to as Montserrado) and the Bassa Cove colony. The Mississippi colony at Greenville (now known as Sinoe County) joined the Commonwealth of Liberia four years later. Only the Maryland colony at Harper remained independent, although it joined the Republic of Liberia in 1857.<sup>97</sup>



© Global Photographer / wikipedia.org  
Harper, Liberia, 2004

The governor of the commonwealth during its early years was Thomas Buchanan (related to future U.S. President James Buchanan), after whom the Liberian port city was named. Like his predecessors, Buchanan was an appointee of the ACS. After his death in 1841, he was succeeded by Joseph Jenkins Roberts, who became the colony's first black governor. During Roberts' tenure, Liberia faced a crisis when British merchants rebelled against the commonwealth's levying of import duties. Because Liberia was viewed as a colony held by a private corporation (the ACS), British officials contested the jurisdiction of the commonwealth to collect duties on foreign traders.<sup>98</sup> When questioned by the British government, the administration of James Buchanan made it clear that Liberia was not a U.S. colony and that Washington had no intention of intervening in any dispute between the British and the Commonwealth of Liberia. Now, with no outside support to enforce the commonwealth's taxing authority, Governor Roberts was faced with the loss of Liberia's key source of governmental revenue. He had little choice but to break formal ties with the ACS and initiate the establishment of Liberia as an independent nation. An October 1846 popular vote showed the settlers narrowly favoring independence. In July

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<sup>95</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Rinehart, Robert. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting [p. 14]." 1984. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>96</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Rinehart, Robert. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting [pp. 14–15]." 1984. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>97</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Rinehart, Robert. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting [p. 16]." 1984. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>98</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. "Chapter 1: Finding Liberia [p. 16]." 2004. New York: Reed Press.

1847, at a constitutional convention in Monrovia, delegates from Liberia's three counties issued a declaration of independence and approved a new constitution, both of which were modeled after their U.S. counterparts.<sup>99</sup>

## The New Republic

Joseph Jenkins Roberts was elected president in September 1847 and served until 1856. During that time, the new country gained formal recognition from Britain, France, and several other countries. But the United States withheld recognition until 1862, during the Civil War.<sup>100</sup> Prior to that date, strong Congressional opposition by pro-slavery southern states precluded Liberia (and Haiti) being recognized by the U.S.<sup>101</sup>



Courtesy of Wikipedia.org  
Joseph Jenkins, 1851

From its beginning, Liberia was a nation divided. The constitution granted citizenship only to “Negroes or persons of Negro descent,” which excluded the more populous indigenous peoples, designated “aborigines.”<sup>102</sup> To varying degrees throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, all of Liberia's presidents tried to address the question of how best to integrate indigenous groups into the nation's political framework while maintaining the Americo-Liberian hold on power. A system introduced in 1904 allowed local chiefs to rule over their respective people while district-level commissioners dealt with judicial matters, social infrastructure, and commercial duties. This system was developed under the administration of Arthur Barclay, the only Liberian president born in Barbados. Known as the “Barclay Plan,” this program of indirect rule in Liberia's Hinterland was the basis of policy on the indigenous populace followed by most subsequent administrations.<sup>103</sup>

The denial of citizenship to the indigenous population was not the only source of social strife in the new nation. Divisions based on skin color arose within the Americo-Liberian population itself, with lighter skinned individuals coming out on top. Free blacks descended from a maternal and/or paternal white parent (“mulattos”) formed the basis of a Monrovia merchant class, which dominated the political arena during the nation's first

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<sup>99</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. “Chapter 1: Finding Liberia [pp. 17–19].” 2004. New York: Reed Press.

<sup>100</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. “Chapter 1: Finding Liberia [p. 22].” 2004. New York: Reed Press.

<sup>101</sup> *The Cambridge History of Africa: Volume 5, c. 1790– c. 1870*. “Chapter 12: Africans Overseas, 1790–1870 [p. 450].” Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.  
[http://books.google.com/books?id=gqf1nwb2QIIC&pg=PA450&lpg=PA450&dq=Haiti+Liberia+recognition+1862&source=bl&ots=NpshELZbvV&sig=vT4Op83tnngs8zHlsGKVQHVaA0Q&hl=en&ei=3IEZS5yqMIHOsQQJxPH7BA&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=9&ved=0CCMQ6AEwCA#v=onepage&q=Haiti+Liberia+recognition+1862&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=gqf1nwb2QIIC&pg=PA450&lpg=PA450&dq=Haiti+Liberia+recognition+1862&source=bl&ots=NpshELZbvV&sig=vT4Op83tnngs8zHlsGKVQHVaA0Q&hl=en&ei=3IEZS5yqMIHOsQQJxPH7BA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=9&ved=0CCMQ6AEwCA#v=onepage&q=Haiti+Liberia+recognition+1862&f=false)

<sup>102</sup> OnLiberia.org. “Liberian Constitution of 1847 (As Amended Through May, 1955): Article V.” 26 February 2004. [http://onliberia.org/con\\_1847.htm](http://onliberia.org/con_1847.htm)

<sup>103</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. “Chapter 1: Finding Liberia [pp. 31–32].” 2004. New York: Reed Press.

decades. In contrast, darker-skinned migrants from the U.S., often the descendants of field slaves, were more likely to be upriver farmers,<sup>104</sup> living closer to the indigenous African population in the Hinterland. In short, the social, political, and economic privileges attached to having lighter skin crossed the Atlantic with the very people trying to escape race-based discrimination in the U.S. These skin color divisions broke down along political party lines.

The free-trade Republican Party of Liberia came to be associated with the lighter-skinned Monrovia mulattos. Meanwhile, the protectionist True Whig Party built its support among upriver farmers and other second-class citizens, such as recent Barbadian emigrants and “Congoes.” The latter were recaptives, or Africans brought to Liberia by the U.S. Navy after the slave ships taking them to the Americas were captured. Over time, there was a shift in power from the Republican Party to the True Whig Party, which came to dominate national politics, to the extent that every Liberian president elected between 1878 and 1980 was a member of the party.<sup>105</sup>

### Colonial Threats

The 1904 “Barclay Plan” to bring Hinterland indigenous groups, or at least their leaders, into a closer relationship with the Monrovia government partly reflected continuing pressures on Liberia from its colonial neighbors. Both France and England had colonies that shared borders with Liberia (modern-day Côte d’Ivoire and Guinea for France, Sierra Leone for Britain). In 1882, under pressure from four armed British vessels that had sailed to Monrovia, the Liberian government was forced to pull their northwestern territorial claims back to the Mano River. In 1892, the French negotiated territorial concessions on Liberia’s southeastern border with Côte d’Ivoire, establishing a new border at the Cavalla River.



Courtesy of Wikipedia.org  
President Roosevelt and President Barclay, 1943

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<sup>104</sup> *Liberians: An Introduction to Their History and Culture*. Dunn-Marcos, Robin and Konia T. Kollehlon, Bernard Ngovo, Emily Russ. “History: Americo-Liberian Rule [pp. 10–11].” April 2005. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics. [http://www.cal.org/co/liberians/liberian\\_050406\\_1.pdf](http://www.cal.org/co/liberians/liberian_050406_1.pdf)

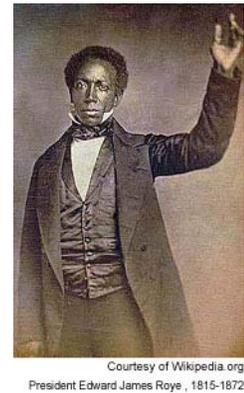
<sup>105</sup> *Liberians: An Introduction to Their History and Culture*. Dunn-Marcos, Robin and Konia T. Kollehlon, Bernard Ngovo, Emily Russ. “History: True Whig Party Dominance [p. 12].” April 2005. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics. [http://www.cal.org/co/liberians/liberian\\_050406\\_1.pdf](http://www.cal.org/co/liberians/liberian_050406_1.pdf)

Both England and France reserved their rights to disregard the new boundaries if Liberia did not “effectively occupy” the territory under its control.<sup>106</sup> Both border regions were subject to conflict. To the southeast, a confederation of Grebo peoples actually gained control of most of Maryland County in 1875–1876. Only the intervention of the U.S. Navy and a promise by the Liberian government to grant full citizenship to all eligible Grebo tribespeople were able to defuse this crisis.<sup>107</sup> (Later, during the roll-out of the Barclay Plan in 1904, full citizenship was conferred upon the remainder of Liberia’s indigenous peoples.<sup>108</sup>) On the western front near the Sierra Leone border, Liberia was forced to send several expeditions into Gola lands to quell battles between local chieftains and their rivals. These turn-of-the-century conflicts in Gola country eventually led to the resignation of Liberian President William David Coleman in 1900.<sup>109</sup>



## Financial Struggles

Liberia’s first 70 years were marked by a series of fiscal crises. Foreign loans, often obtained under unfavorable conditions, were common and sometimes used only to pay off earlier debt. One such loan from British banks, arranged during the administration of President Edward James Roye (1870–1871), led to Roye being deposed and imprisoned. As market changes and technological advancements contributed to a decreasing demand for Liberian exports (e.g., sugarcane, coffee, camwood used for red dyes, and palm oil), Liberia’s financial situation became increasingly desperate.<sup>110</sup> In an attempt to open the interior to resource development, the government granted a mining concession to a local company in 1869.<sup>111</sup> But by 1910, after several transfers of ownership, the concession had not produced any ore.



World War I further contributed to Liberia’s financial decline. Prior to the war, Germany was by far Liberia’s leading trade partner and a major investor. Nonetheless, Liberia was

<sup>106</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. “Chapter 1: Finding Liberia [pp. 28–29].” 2004. New York: Reed Press.

<sup>107</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. “Chapter 1: Finding Liberia [p. 27].” 2004. New York: Reed Press.

<sup>108</sup> *Liberians: An Introduction to Their History and Culture*. Dunn-Marcos, Robin and Konia T. Kolluhlon, Bernard Ngovo, Emily Russ. “History: True Whig Party Dominance [p. 13].” April 2005. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics. [http://www.cal.org/co/liberians/liberian\\_050406\\_1.pdf](http://www.cal.org/co/liberians/liberian_050406_1.pdf)

<sup>109</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. “Chapter 1: Finding Liberia [pp. 30–31].” 2004. New York: Reed Press.

<sup>110</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Rinehart, Robert. “Chapter 1: Historical Setting [p. 30].” 1984. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>111</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. “Chapter 1: Finding Liberia [pp. 32–33].” 2004. New York: Reed Press.

sandwiched between French and British colonies that had no desire to see a German-friendly nation in their neighborhood. With pressure from the United States after its entry into the war, Liberia reluctantly declared war on Germany in April 1918.<sup>112, 113</sup> Liberia's trade was cut off by German U-boats, leaving the nation virtually bankrupt at the end of the war. Attempts were made to secure additional sources of funding, first from the U. S. government and later from the United Negro Improvement Association (led by pan-Africanist Marcus Garvey, who referred to himself as the "provisional President of Africa").<sup>114</sup> President Charles D. B. King, elected in 1920, finally found a partner to help bail out his country in 1926: the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company of Akron, Ohio.

## Firestone

The Firestone Company secured a USD 5 million loan for the Government of Liberia to help it pay off existing foreign debt and fund public works. In exchange, the company received a 99-year lease to develop rubber plantations on one million acres of Liberian land. The company also agreed to nominal annual rents on lands it developed and to pay the Liberian government a 1% tax on the price of the rubber that it produced. At the time,



© Jason Judy  
Firestone Plantation

Firestone faced a world rubber market dominated by production in British colonies. Britain did not hesitate to use this near-monopoly to drive up rubber prices. Liberia, with a climate perfect for rubber plantations, provided an attractive investment opportunity for Firestone. Its appeal was tempered only by a limited transportation infrastructure and the fear that Liberia could easily slide into bankruptcy, threatening the company's investment.<sup>115</sup>

The Firestone legacy in Liberia was generally a positive one. The large Firestone plantation at Harbel and other, smaller operations eventually provided tens of thousands of jobs for Liberians. Liberia's transportation and communication infrastructure improved tremendously along corridors that linked various company operations. The company also built the nation's first hydroelectric plant. Hospitals and schools were built to serve the company's employees and dependents.<sup>116</sup> On the other hand, the company used a system of labor recruitment that included commissions paid to various governmental officials and local chiefs. This system created strong incentives to ensure that workers stayed on their jobs, even when they wished to leave. It must be noted, however, that such labor

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<sup>112</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Rinehart, Robert. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting [p. 39]." 1984. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>113</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. "Chapter 1: Finding Liberia [pp. 32–33]." 2004. New York: Reed Press.

<sup>114</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. "Chapter 1: Finding Liberia [pp. 32–33]." 2004. New York: Reed Press.

<sup>115</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Rinehart, Robert. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting [p. 42]." 1984. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>116</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Rinehart, Robert. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting [pp. 42–43]." 1984. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

practices were hardly unique to the Firestone plants in Liberia at the time. In fact, President King and his vice president were forced to resign in 1930 after an international commission found the Liberian government involved in abusive labor recruitment practices for the cocoa plantations on the small Spanish colony of Fernando Pó (now part of the country of Equatorial Guinea).<sup>117</sup>

## Barclay and Tubman

Secretary of State Edwin J. Barclay became Liberia's new president after King's resignation. He remained in office until January 1944. Barclay, nephew of former Liberian President Arthur Barclay, came to power in a period of worldwide economic recession that forced Liberia to cease payments on its loan from Firestone for several years. The later years of his presidency were marked by the construction of infrastructure projects. These projects were part of a Defense Areas Agreement between Liberia and the U.S. prior to Liberia's formal entrance into World War II, in 1944. Among the projects were Monrovia's deep-water port and the Robertsfield Airport. Today, the latter facility is Liberia's international airport, but during the 1940s it was first used by the U.S. Army Air Force. Its runway, designed to accommodate the B-47 Stratojet bomber, was for many years one of the longest in Africa.<sup>118</sup>



Courtesy of Wikipedia.org  
President Edwin J Barclay, 1882-1955

Liberia's longest-serving president was William Tubman, who succeeded Barclay in 1944 and remained in office until his death in 1971. As the years passed, Tubman's administration became increasingly autocratic: suppressing opposition political parties, instituting several layers of internal security services, and using an extended patronage network to consolidate power.<sup>119, 120</sup> Nonetheless, Tubman was also a reformer and arguably fostered more institutional change within the country than any other Liberian president, before or since. During the early years of his presidency, Tubman's government extended voting rights to all Liberians, as long as they owned property and paid the "hut tax."<sup>121</sup> Unlike previous Liberian leaders, who rarely ventured from the coastal settlements, Tubman toured the inland portions of the country. On his tours, he made connections with local chieftains. Legislation was passed that extended representation in Liberia's House of Representatives to Hinterland districts. These and other measures were part of Tubman's Unification Policy, which tried to break down

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<sup>117</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. "Chapter 2: A Complex Tapestry [pp. 70–71]." 2004. New York: Reed Press.

<sup>118</sup> BBC. "The Story of Africa: Between World Wars (1914–1945)." No date.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/storyofafrica/13chapter11.shtml>

<sup>119</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. "Chapter 1: Finding Liberia [pp. 44–45]." 2004. New York: Reed Press

<sup>120</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Rinehart, Robert. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting [pp. 56–57]." 1984. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>121</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Rinehart, Robert. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting [p. 49]." 1984. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

barriers that for decades had separated the minority Americo-Liberians from the majority indigenous groups. This assimilationist approach offered opportunities to those willing to operate within the established norms of an enlarged Americo-Liberian community.<sup>122</sup>

## The Open Door

During the Tubman era, Liberia underwent an economic expansion fueled by foreign investments. Under the Open Door Policy announced by Tubman in 1944, foreign firms were offered generally unrestrictive business terms in order to attract investment.<sup>123</sup> New concessions for iron ore mining, timber harvesting, and tree crop plantations (primarily rubber) provided increasing income for the government. By 1954, the foreign concessions were producing an average of 40% of Liberia's annual government revenues.<sup>124</sup> Additional foreign receipts were generated by the creation of the Liberian ship registry program in 1948.<sup>125</sup> The registry's low costs and simplified procedures made Liberia a "flag of convenience" for thousands of foreign-owned ships.<sup>126</sup> Today, only Panama has a larger registered merchant marine fleet than Liberia.<sup>127</sup>



Courtesy of Wikipedia.org  
President William Tubman, 1895-1971

The Open Door Policy also welcomed foreign merchants to participate in retail and wholesale business activities. Lebanese businesses, in particular, came to dominate mid-level economic activities in the country. This foreign fiscal clout eventually led to Liberian animosity toward the Lebanese business community.<sup>128, 129</sup> In 1963, partly in response to this dissatisfaction, Tubman launched Operation Production, which was designed to stimulate private initiative and encourage the development of a Liberian

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<sup>122</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Rinehart, Robert. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting [pp. 49–50]." 1984. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>123</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Rinehart, Robert. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting [p. 51]." 1984. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>124</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Whitaker, Donald P. "Chapter 3. The Economy [p. 144]." 1984. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>125</sup> GlobalSecurity.org. "Liberian Ship Registry." 2009.  
<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/liberia/registry.htm>

<sup>126</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. "Chapter 1: Finding Liberia [pp. 45–46]." 2004. New York: Reed Press.

<sup>127</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Country Comparison: Merchant Marine." 2009.  
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2108rank.html?countryName=Liberia&countryCode=li&regionCode=af&rank=2#li>

<sup>128</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Rinehart, Robert. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting [p. 58]." 1984. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>129</sup> *Encyclopedia of African History, Vol. 1*. Shillington, Kevin. "Liberia: Tubman, William V. S., Life and Era of [pp. 822–823]." 2005. New York: Fitzroy Dearborn. [http://books.google.com/books?id=Ftz\\_gtO-pngC&pg=PA823&lpg=PA823&dq=Liberia+Open+Door+Policy+Lebanese+merchants&source=bl&ots=IuABqkdxqX&sig=IuYQEu5HSC8PGQshYPxGFdNgB2M&hl=en&ei=gk0dS9v6OovQsQOJzLjGBg&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CBQQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=Liberia+Open+Door+Policy+Lebanese+merchants&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=Ftz_gtO-pngC&pg=PA823&lpg=PA823&dq=Liberia+Open+Door+Policy+Lebanese+merchants&source=bl&ots=IuABqkdxqX&sig=IuYQEu5HSC8PGQshYPxGFdNgB2M&hl=en&ei=gk0dS9v6OovQsQOJzLjGBg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CBQQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=Liberia+Open+Door+Policy+Lebanese+merchants&f=false)

commercial class. The program's primary aim was to increase Liberian rice production to reach levels of self-sufficiency.<sup>130</sup>

Liberia saw continued economic expansion through the 1950s and most of the 1960s. But by the late 1960s, falling rubber and iron ore prices forced the government to increase its debt load to sustain social programs initiated during better times. Although these government programs did produce some tangible results, the quality of life for the vast majority of indigenous Liberians improved little during the Liberian boom—a situation sometimes referred to as “growth without development.”<sup>131, 132</sup> Because the majority of the population had little or no disposable income, the domestic market for manufactured products was limited, and so the Liberian government found it difficult to attract foreign investment in manufacturing.<sup>133</sup>

## Prelude to a Coup

Upon Tubman's death in 1971, long-time Vice President William Tolbert became Liberia's new president. Economic stagnation continued to slow Liberia's growth. Rising fuel costs and continuing low prices for exports such as rubber and iron ore caused Liberia's debt to nearly quadruple from 1970 to 1979.<sup>134</sup> Tolbert responded by re-negotiating tax rates on foreign-owned companies operating in Liberia. He also pushed the companies to increase the participation of Liberians in their operations, but the low supply of trained workers relative to demand limited the success of this effort.<sup>135</sup>



Courtesy of Wikipedia.org  
President William Tolbert, Jr., 1913-1980

Tolbert increasingly found himself in a politically difficult position. His political and economic reforms had gained him enemies among the True Whig elites who, as a class, had held the reins of power for many decades. Among those groups clamoring for change, however, the reforms were seen as half-measures, and did not help Tolbert develop a countervailing political base of support. A protest in Monrovia in April 1979 against an announced increase in the government-subsidized price of rice led to a riot that was violently suppressed. True Whig hardliners blamed the Tolbert administration for being lax toward political protesters, and forced the regime to tighten restrictions on protests

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<sup>130</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Rinehart, Robert. “Chapter 1: Historical Setting [p. 57].” 1984. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>131</sup> UNESCO. *National Human Development Report: Liberia 2006*. “Chapter 1: A Quest for Development [p. 19].” 2006. <http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Liberia/Liberia%20HDR.pdf>

<sup>132</sup> Public Broadcasting System. Frontline: World. Johnson, Zachary. “Liberia's Historic Ties to America.” May 2005. <http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/liberia/history.html>

<sup>133</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Rinehart, Robert. “Chapter 1: Historical Setting [p. 57].” 1984. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>134</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. “Chapter 1: Finding Liberia [p. 47].” 2004. New York: Reed Press.

<sup>135</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Rinehart, Robert. “Chapter 1: Historical Setting [p. 63].” 1984. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

and labor stoppages. By March 1980, Monrovia was awash with rumors that Tolbert would soon be pushed aside by the conservative old guard within his party. Unknown to seemingly everyone, meanwhile, was that a low-ranking, noncommissioned officer of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) was making his own plans for political change.

## Chairman Doe

With no significant political or military base of support, Master-Sergeant Samuel K. Doe was an unlikely leader for a successful military coup. Despite these drawbacks, he and 16 AFL co-conspirators (10 of whom were of no higher rank than corporal) stormed the Executive Mansion on the morning of 12 April 1980 and killed President Tolbert. Of his administration, 13 high-ranking officials were executed 10 days later on a Monrovia beach, after their hasty conviction by a special military tribunal. Only four ministers from the Tolbert administration were not killed.<sup>136</sup> One of these four, Minister of Finance Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, would be elected Liberian president little more than 25 years later.



© Frank Hall / wikipedia.org  
Master-Sergeant Samuel K. Doe, 1951-1990

After the overthrow of the Tolbert administration, Doe formed a People's Redemption Council (PRC) consisting of the coup participants, with Doe as chairman and head of state. Since none of the conspirators had as much as a high-school education, educated Liberians with no connections to the Tolbert regime were recruited to fill ministry positions requiring various levels of expertise. One such person was 32-year-old Charles Taylor (with an economics degree from Bentley College in Waltham, Massachusetts), who was appointed director of the government's procurement office. He later became a prominent figure in the civil wars that devastated Liberia during the 1990s and early 2000s.<sup>137</sup>

## Ethnic Divisions

Under Doe, the privileges previously enjoyed by Americo-Liberians were now the spoils of the indigenous Liberians who headed the government. Ethnic Krahn, in particular, held one third of the central government's positions, and in addition commanded all four infantry battalions of the AFL, despite their small percentage of the total Liberian population (3.8% according to the 1984 census).<sup>138, 139, 140</sup> Over time, various other

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<sup>136</sup> LiberiaPastandPresent.org. "President Samuel K. Doe (1980–1990): The Master-Sergeant President." No date. <http://www.liberiapastandpresent.org/AssassinatedPresidents.htm#Doe>

<sup>137</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. "Chapter 3: Towards the Precipice [pp. 79–80]." 2004. New York: Reed Press.

<sup>138</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. "Chapter 3: Towards the Precipice [p. 83]." 2004. New York: Reed Press.

<sup>139</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. "Chapter 1: Finding Liberia [p. 14]." 2004. New York: Reed Press.

<sup>140</sup> In actuality, Doe only favored select clans among the Krahn, particularly those of his parents. Many Krahn were as excluded from power during the Doe years as other Liberian groups. See *The Mask of*

Liberian indigenous peoples were vilified as much as the Americo-Liberians were by Doe and his followers. One of the coup participants, Thomas Quiwonkpa, an ethnic Gio from Nimba County, was Doe's chief rival within the PRC from the start. His position as the commander of the armed forces made him a particular threat to Doe's authority. In 1983, Quiwonkpa refused a demotion ordered by Doe and fled into exile, accompanied by his Gio compatriot and military aide-de-camp, Prince Johnson.<sup>141</sup> The latter would order the brutal execution of Doe seven years later.

With Quiwonkpa out of the country, Doe ordered a new constitution be drafted. Elections were held in October 1985. Doe's National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL) overwhelmingly dominated the legislative vote, although Doe garnered only a little over half the presidential vote. Even with such a narrow margin of victory, Doe was widely viewed as having stolen the election from his sole opponent, Jackson Doe (no relation), another Gio from Nimba County. Less than a month later, Quiwonkpa and his supporters entered Liberia from Sierra Leone and launched an attack on Monrovia. The coup was eventually beaten back by Krahn-dominated forces loyal to President Doe, and Quiwonkpa was tortured and then murdered.<sup>142</sup> Afterward, Doe ordered a purge of all Gios in the AFL in addition, hundreds of Gio and Mano civilians in Nimba County, who were suspected to be Quiwonkpa supporters, were massacred.<sup>143</sup> One ominous aspect of the failed coup and its aftermath was the development of a strong ethnic-driven cleavage between the Krahns and Mandingos on one side and the Gios and Manos of Nimba County on the other.<sup>144</sup>



© Skye Christensen  
Elections in Nimba county

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*Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*. Ellis, Stephen. "1. The First of the Warlords [p. 56]." 2001. New York: New York University Press.  
[http://books.google.com/books?id=fLAWMGqKmb4C&pg=PA58&lpg=PA58&dq=Nimba+Raid&source=bl&ots=R67s7B3Idq&sig=HHQNEAaBo5uqp0vpM1dPni7loZY&hl=en&ei=cL4eS4nXApOYsgPj6tz2CQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=7&ved=0CBsQ6AEwBg#v=onepage&q=NimbaRaid&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=fLAWMGqKmb4C&pg=PA58&lpg=PA58&dq=Nimba+Raid&source=bl&ots=R67s7B3Idq&sig=HHQNEAaBo5uqp0vpM1dPni7loZY&hl=en&ei=cL4eS4nXApOYsgPj6tz2CQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=7&ved=0CBsQ6AEwBg#v=onepage&q=NimbaRaid&f=false)

<sup>141</sup> *The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*. "1: The First of the Warlords [p. 58]." Ellis, Stephen. 2001. New York: New York University Press.  
[http://books.google.com/books?id=fLAWMGqKmb4C&pg=PA58&lpg=PA58&dq=Nimba+Raid&source=bl&ots=R67s7B3Idq&sig=HHQNEAaBo5uqp0vpM1dPni7loZY&hl=en&ei=cL4eS4nXApOYsgPj6tz2CQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=7&ved=0CBsQ6AEwBg#v=onepage&q=NimbaRaid&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=fLAWMGqKmb4C&pg=PA58&lpg=PA58&dq=Nimba+Raid&source=bl&ots=R67s7B3Idq&sig=HHQNEAaBo5uqp0vpM1dPni7loZY&hl=en&ei=cL4eS4nXApOYsgPj6tz2CQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=7&ved=0CBsQ6AEwBg#v=onepage&q=NimbaRaid&f=false)

<sup>142</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. "Chapter 3: Towards the Precipice [p. 86]." 2004. New York: Reed Press.

<sup>143</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. "Chapter 3: Towards the Precipice [p. 86]." 2004. New York: Reed Press.

<sup>144</sup> *Africa South of the Sahara*, 32nd Ed. Outram, Quentin. "Liberia: Recent History [p. 564]." 2003. London: Europa Publications.

## The Chaos Begins

In late 1989, Charles Taylor—who had fled to the United States in 1983, and spent 15 months in a Massachusetts prison awaiting extradition to Liberia before escaping—led a small force known as the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) into Nimba County.<sup>145</sup> Taylor’s forces, supported by the governments of Libya and Burkina Faso, were outnumbered early on, but quickly attracted new recruits among the Nimba ethnic groups who had been persecuted by the Doe regime.<sup>146, 147</sup> As the NPFL began to capture territory in Liberia’s Hinterland, a schism occurred in the NPFL leadership. Prince Johnson set off with his own rebel band, the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), consisting mostly of Gio soldiers. By November 1990, Doe was pinned down in a small portion of Monrovia, surrounded by the INPFL to the northwest and NPFL to the east. The Economic Community of West Africa Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), a multinational organization consisting of soldiers from the English-speaking countries of West Africa, tried to negotiate a peaceful transfer of power to an interim government. However, their efforts were compromised by an unfortunate alliance-of-convenience between ECOMOG and the INPFL. The alliance ultimately led to Doe’s arrest and execution by Johnson’s forces when Doe visited the ECOMOG headquarters unannounced.<sup>148</sup> Within days, copies of Doe’s videotaped torture-death, complete with scenes of Johnson sitting behind a desk and directing his men to remove Doe’s ears, were widely circulating throughout Liberia.<sup>149</sup>



© SSGT. Paul R. Caron  
Nigerian ECOMOG soldier

## The First Civil War

Doe’s death marked the end of the first act in what today is referred to as Liberia’s First Civil War. Johnson briefly paraded through the streets of Monrovia, declaring himself the new “President of Liberia.” Shortly thereafter, Johnson’s forces were disarmed by

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<sup>145</sup> *The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*. Ellis, Stephen. “1: The First of the Warlords [p. 75].” 2001. New York: New York University Press. [http://books.google.com/books?id=fLAWMGqKmb4C&pg=PA58&lpg=PA58&dq=Nimba+Raid&source=bl&ots=R67s7B3Idq&sig=HHQNEAaBo5uqp0vpM1dPni7loZY&hl=en&ei=cL4eS4nXApOYsgPj6tz2CQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=7&ved=0CBsQ6AEwBg#v=onepage&q=Nimba+Raid&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=fLAWMGqKmb4C&pg=PA58&lpg=PA58&dq=Nimba+Raid&source=bl&ots=R67s7B3Idq&sig=HHQNEAaBo5uqp0vpM1dPni7loZY&hl=en&ei=cL4eS4nXApOYsgPj6tz2CQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=7&ved=0CBsQ6AEwBg#v=onepage&q=Nimba+Raid&f=false)

<sup>146</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. “Chapter 4: The Dark Years [pp. 105–106].” 2004. New York: Reed Press.

<sup>147</sup> *The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*. Ellis, Stephen. “1. The First of the Warlords [pp. 69–72].” 2001. New York: New York University Press. [http://books.google.com/books?id=fLAWMGqKmb4C&pg=PA58&lpg=PA58&dq=Nimba+Raid&source=bl&ots=R67s7B3Idq&sig=HHQNEAaBo5uqp0vpM1dPni7loZY&hl=en&ei=cL4eS4nXApOYsgPj6tz2CQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=7&ved=0CBsQ6AEwBg#v=onepage&q=Nimba+Raid&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=fLAWMGqKmb4C&pg=PA58&lpg=PA58&dq=Nimba+Raid&source=bl&ots=R67s7B3Idq&sig=HHQNEAaBo5uqp0vpM1dPni7loZY&hl=en&ei=cL4eS4nXApOYsgPj6tz2CQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=7&ved=0CBsQ6AEwBg#v=onepage&q=Nimba+Raid&f=false)

<sup>148</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. “Chapter 4: The Dark Years [pp. 106–107].” 2004. New York: Reed Press.

<sup>149</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. “Chapter 4: The Dark Years [p. 107].” 2004. New York: Reed Press.

ECOMOG troops, who secured Monrovia and installed Amos Sawyer, a Liberian professor, as president of the Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU).<sup>150</sup> In truth, Sawyer’s governmental authority did not extend beyond Monrovia and depended completely on the continued military support of the mostly-Nigerian ECOMOG forces. In the vast majority of the country (a region informally referred to as “Greater Liberia”), Taylor’s NPFL held control. NPFL taxes and other levies on diamond, timber, rubber, and iron ore exports made Taylor and his associates wealthy. The diamond exports came from guns-for-diamonds trade with the Revolutionary United Front, a rebel group in Sierra Leone that was in control of that country’s eastern diamond mines. These “blood diamonds,” as they were called, eventually led the United Nations to ban countries from importing any diamonds from Liberia.<sup>151</sup>

By July 1993, Taylor’s forces had lost nearly half of the “Greater Liberia” territory to ECOMOG forces and to the United Liberian Movement for Democracy (ULIMO), a counterinsurgency mostly consisting of Krahn and Mandingo refugees from Sierra Leone.<sup>152</sup> That month, a peace agreement was signed by the various factions fighting in Liberia, and called for the creation of another transitional government consisting of representatives



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RPG shell in Konia, Liberia

from NPFL, ULIMO, and IGNU. The peace treaty was never fully implemented, and by 1994, several new military factions and splinter groups were involved in the Liberian fighting. As the level of violence increased, virtually all these groups, including the ECOMOG peacekeepers, were accused of committing terrible and sometimes bizarre atrocities. By the end of 1994, over 80% of all Liberians were displaced from their homes. UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali bluntly summarized the situation: “The results [of current fighting] are not large military victories, but deaths mostly of civilians, the decimation of entire villages, and the breakdown of any semblance of law and order.”<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> *The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*. Ellis, Stephen. “2. Lean and Hungry Years [p. 87].” 2001. New York: New York University Press. [http://books.google.com/books?id=fLAWMGqKmb4C&pg=PA58&lpg=PA58&dq=Nimba+Raid&source=bl&ots=R67s7B3ldq&sig=HHQNEAaBo5uqp0vpM1dPni7loZY&hl=en&ei=cL4eS4nXApOYsgPj6tz2CQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=7&ved=0CBsQ6AEwBg#v=onepage&q=Nimba+Raid&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=fLAWMGqKmb4C&pg=PA58&lpg=PA58&dq=Nimba+Raid&source=bl&ots=R67s7B3ldq&sig=HHQNEAaBo5uqp0vpM1dPni7loZY&hl=en&ei=cL4eS4nXApOYsgPj6tz2CQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=7&ved=0CBsQ6AEwBg#v=onepage&q=Nimba+Raid&f=false)

<sup>151</sup> *Blood Diamonds*. Campbell, Greg. “‘The Base’: Osama’s War Chest [p. 185].” 2002. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

<sup>152</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. “Chapter 4: The Dark Years [p. 112].” 2004. New York: Reed Press.

<sup>153</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. “Chapter 4: The Dark Years [p. 116].” 2004. New York: Reed Press.

## Taylor Assumes Power

Fighting continued in Liberia until 1996, despite several additional attempts to engineer a lasting peace treaty. Finally, in late 1996, an agreement was reached to hold elections the following May. The elections were delayed until July 1997, and Charles Taylor won with over 75% of the vote. Apart from the huge margin of victory, numerous nongovernmental organizations that oversaw the election generally viewed the process as “impartial and transparent.”<sup>154</sup> Taylor’s perseverance may have driven some of these votes. Some Liberians no doubt believed there was little chance for peace as long as Charles Taylor was *not* in power.<sup>155</sup> Young NFPL supporters may have best summarized the relentless brutality of Taylor’s rule in their campaign cry:

He killed my ma  
He killed my pa  
I’ll vote for him.<sup>156</sup>



Courtesy of Wikipedia.org  
U.S. Marines unit landing in Liberia, 2003

## The Second Civil War

The Taylor government faced huge problems when it came to power. The hope was that Taylor would take a path of reconciliation to aid Liberia’s rebuilding. Unfortunately, the Taylor regime soon resembled that of Samuel Doe, in terms of rewarding allies, fostering an environment of corruption, and brutally retaliating against enemies. Taylor also played a destabilizing role in West Africa by aiding and abetting rebellions in Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Côte d’Ivoire. By 1999, opponents of his government (most of whom were now refugees) organized an umbrella group, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), which operated from Guinea and was supported by the Guinean government. Before long, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea were involved in a



DOD Image  
Civilians fleeing Liberia's civil war

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<sup>154</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. “Chapter 4: The Dark Years [pp. 133–134].” 2004. New York: Reed Press.

<sup>155</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. “Chapter 6: A Slow Farewell to Arms [p. 173].” 2004. New York: Reed Press.

<sup>156</sup> *The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*. Ellis, Stephen. “2. Lean and Hungry Years [p. 109].” 2001. New York: New York University Press.  
[http://books.google.com/books?id=fLAWMGqKmb4C&pg=PA58&lpg=PA58&dq=Nimba+Raid&source=bl&ots=R67s7B3Idq&sig=HHQNEAaBo5uqp0vpM1dPni7loZY&hl=en&ei=cL4eS4nXApOYsgPj6tz2CQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=7&ved=0CBsQ6AEwBg#v=onepage&q=Nimba Raid&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=fLAWMGqKmb4C&pg=PA58&lpg=PA58&dq=Nimba+Raid&source=bl&ots=R67s7B3Idq&sig=HHQNEAaBo5uqp0vpM1dPni7loZY&hl=en&ei=cL4eS4nXApOYsgPj6tz2CQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=7&ved=0CBsQ6AEwBg#v=onepage&q=Nimba Raid&f=false)

patchwork conflict where each government's military was besieged by rebel forces that were supported by one or both of the other two countries.<sup>157</sup>

As in the First Civil War, new armed factions sprang up as the regional fighting continued. Most prominent among these was the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL). Formed by a group of Krahn émigrés in Côte d'Ivoire, the group created a new front for Taylor's forces to combat in southeastern Liberia. But Taylor's early success in having fragmented his security forces backfired on him during wartime. His divisive strategy to keep individual units from challenging him now hindered the coordination of concentrated counterattacks against the LURD and MODEL forces.<sup>158</sup> By June 2003, LURD forces were within a few miles of Monrovia. The deteriorating situation within Liberia was given attention later that month by U.S. President George W. Bush during his first trip to Africa, when he called for "President Taylor...to step down so that his country [could] be spared further bloodshed."<sup>159</sup> Fighting in and around Monrovia continued throughout July before Taylor agreed to leave Liberia for exile in Nigeria on 11 August 2003. His last words before departing were "God willing, I will be back."<sup>160</sup> Instead, at the end of 2009, Charles Taylor was at the International Criminal Court in The Hague, being prosecuted on 11 counts of war crimes by the Special Court for Sierra Leone.<sup>161</sup>

## Post-Civil-War Liberia

Taylor was now gone, but so too was much of Liberia's infrastructure, which had been destroyed during the many years of fighting. Security concerns lingered as well, given the many arms and ex-militia members within the country. An Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) peacekeeping force was initially deployed to monitor security and facilitate relief aid. This force was closely followed in October 2003 by a United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). UNMIL forces remain in Liberia to the present day, with a total of 11,649 uniformed military and police personnel as of 31 October 2009.<sup>162</sup>



© Teri Weefur  
UN Peacekeepers

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<sup>157</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. "Chapter 6: A Slow Farewell to Arms" [p. 173]. 2004. New York: Reed Press.

<sup>158</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. "Chapter 6: A Slow Farewell to Arms" [p. 184]. 2004. New York: Reed Press.

<sup>159</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. "Chapter 6: A Slow Farewell to Arms" [p. 187]. 2004. New York: Reed Press.

<sup>160</sup> *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. Pham, John-Peter. "Chapter 6: A Slow Farewell to Arms" [p. 188]. 2004. New York: Reed Press.

<sup>161</sup> CharlesTaylorTrial.org. Open Society Justice Initiative. "Trial Background." 2009. <http://www.charlestaylortrial.org/trial-background/>

<sup>162</sup> United Nations. "Liberia – UNMIL – Facts and Figures." 2009. <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unmil/facts.html>

Liberia's first post-war elections were held in 2005. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, a Harvard-trained economist who finished a distant second to Charles Taylor in the 1997 presidential election, was elected president in a run-off with Liberian soccer star George Weah. Sirleaf's inauguration in January 2006 made her the first democratically elected woman to become head of state of an African nation. Upon assuming office, Sirleaf's administration faced daunting challenges. Decades of fighting had decimated Liberia's economy, producing an unemployment rate, estimated as high as 80%, within the formal economic sector. Many of the unemployed were Liberian youths, some of whom had been active in militias during the civil wars. Major sectors of Liberia's pre-civil war economy were either in ruins (iron mines, petroleum refineries, ports, hydroelectric plants) or had been exploited in an unsustainable manner (rubber plantations, timber forests). Emotions between some ethnic groups were still raw, particularly in places such as Nimba County, where former combatants lived side by side. Conflicts broke out when displaced persons or refugees returned to homes occupied by others.

### *Truth and Reconciliation Report*

These and many other issues (e.g., corruption, the reconstruction of the nation's security forces) have been the focus of the Sirleaf administration's efforts during its first four years. Real progress has been made, and Liberia is no longer a standard inclusion on the lists of "failed states" published by various institutions. Nonetheless, the future of the Sirleaf presidency was called into question in July 2009, when the government-commissioned final report of Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) was issued. The



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Truth and reconciliation commission

Commission, charged to investigate activities that took place between 1979 and 2003 and make appropriate recommendations, placed Sirleaf on a list of 49 individuals who should be banned from public office for 30 years. Sirleaf was accused of supplying "moral and financial support" to Charles Taylor's NPFL during its campaign to overthrow the Doe regime.<sup>163, 164</sup> Sirleaf admits to having provided "some measure of support for Mr. Taylor, at some point in time,"<sup>165</sup> but also claims that she withdrew her support and connection to his regime upon learning of the atrocities being committed by his troops in Liberia.<sup>166</sup>

<sup>163</sup> SomaliPress.com. "President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Should Be Barred From Holding Office for 30 Years, Truth Team Rules in Liberia." 4 July 2009. <http://www.somalipress.com/news/2009-jul-04/president-ellen-johnson-sirleaf-should-be-barred-holding-public-office-30-years-tru>

<sup>164</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia. "Volume II: Consolidated Report [p. 361]." 30 June 2009. [https://www.trcofliberia.org/reports/final/volume-two\\_layout-1.pdf](https://www.trcofliberia.org/reports/final/volume-two_layout-1.pdf)

<sup>165</sup> theperspective.org. "Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf Challenges GOL and Calls on Opposition to Unite." 1999. <http://www.theperspective.org/johnsonsirleaf.html>

<sup>166</sup> nytimes.com. "Clinton Supports President of Liberia." 14 August 2009. [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/14/world/africa/14diplo.html?\\_r=1&hpw](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/14/world/africa/14diplo.html?_r=1&hpw)

The extent to which the TRC recommendations will be implemented is to be decided by the country's parliament after consulting with its constituents, the Liberian public.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> bloomberg.com. "Liberian Parliament Delay Action on Truth Commission Findings." 28 August 2009. <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601116&sid=aIqClsvAY9T0>

# Economy

## Introduction

Liberia's economy has begun to recover from 25 years of turmoil. Between 1979 and 1996, its gross domestic product (GDP) dropped by 91%.<sup>168</sup> By the end of the Second Civil War in 2003, Liberia's GDP per capita was one of the lowest in the world. Virtually all the country's economic infrastructure was badly damaged or completely ruined. Other than a few private generators, the country had no electricity.<sup>169</sup> Roads between cities were impassable in some cases, and the sea and air ports were either unusable or needed extensive repairs.



© akwaaba.padi / Flickr.com  
Welcome to Liberia!

Since 2006, the Liberian economy has begun to come to life. GDP has been growing at an annual rate exceeding 7%, and government revenues, which are crucial for spending on infrastructure and basic social services, have increased even more dramatically. Economic subsectors that had practically disappeared by the mid 2000s—most notably, mining and forestry—are poised to generate jobs and revenue once again.<sup>170</sup> Liberia continues to face economic challenges that must be addressed if it is to retain its fragile stability. But for the first time in many years, there is cause for cautious optimism. The follow-through by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's administration on necessary but difficult economic and governance reforms is being closely monitored by various transnational organizations, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Although progress is mixed in some areas, the consensus is that the country is "moving in the right direction."<sup>171</sup>

## Manufacturing and Industry

Liberia's economy has never had a strong industrial base, apart from extractive industries such as mining. Decades of fighting severely damaged Liberia's industrial infrastructure and essentially eliminated its capacity to generate electricity. The lack of electrical power decreased the limited manufacturing base (though at a lesser rate than other sectors, such as services and mining).<sup>172</sup> In 2008, two



© David Sasaki  
Beverage made in Liberia

<sup>168</sup> Center for Global Development. Radelet, Stephen. "Reviving Economic Growth in Liberia [p. 3]." November 2007. [www.cgdev.org/files/14912\\_file\\_Liberia\\_Growth.pdf](http://www.cgdev.org/files/14912_file_Liberia_Growth.pdf)

<sup>169</sup> Center for Global Development. Radelet, Stephen. "Reviving Economic Growth in Liberia [p. 3]." November 2007. [www.cgdev.org/files/14912\\_file\\_Liberia\\_Growth.pdf](http://www.cgdev.org/files/14912_file_Liberia_Growth.pdf)

<sup>170</sup> Central Bank of Liberia. Annual Report 2008. "Chapter V: The Domestic Economy [p. 32]." 27 January 2009. <http://www.cbl.org.lr/doc/annualreports/cblannualreport08.pdf>

<sup>171</sup> AllAfrica.com. Sengbeh, D. Kaihenneh. "Liberia: IMF Africa Chief Lauds Country's Progress." 29 October 2009. <http://allafrica.com/stories/200910291040.html>

<sup>172</sup> Center for Global Development. Radelet, Stephen. "Reviving Economic Growth in Liberia [p. 5]." November 2007. [www.cgdev.org/files/14912\\_file\\_Liberia\\_Growth.pdf](http://www.cgdev.org/files/14912_file_Liberia_Growth.pdf)

products—cement blocks and beverages—accounted for nearly 94% of manufacturing’s contribution to the real (inflation-adjusted) gross domestic product of Liberia.<sup>173</sup> Overall, manufacturing accounted for 12.7% of real GDP in 2008.<sup>174</sup> However, manufacturing utilizes less than 1% of Liberians employed in the formal sector; another 1.5% work in the construction industry.

## Agriculture

The agricultural sector is the most important part of the Liberian economy. It can be divided into two subsectors: cash crops—such as rubber, cocoa, coffee, sugarcane, and palm oil—which are primarily (though not exclusively) exported; and staple foods—such as cassava and rice—which are consumed domestically. Many other items are grown in small plots on family farms, including plantains, pineapples, sweet potatoes, and eddoes (similar to taro).<sup>175</sup>



© The Advocacy Project  
Coffee beans in rural Liberia

Liberia’s principal grain is rice. The nation’s paddies have long been incapable of producing enough rice to meet domestic demand, making Liberia highly vulnerable to price fluxes in the rice import market. Currently, about two thirds of the rice consumed in Liberia comes from outside the country.<sup>176</sup> Some farmers sell or barter other crops they produce to obtain sufficient amounts of rice. Among these other agricultural products are firewood and charcoal (the country’s primary household energy sources), processed palm oil, and tapped rubber.<sup>177</sup>

Agriculture and forestry combined to produce an estimated 61% of GDP in 2008.<sup>178</sup> Almost 60% of Liberia’s formal-sector employment came from these two sectors.<sup>179</sup> These percentages are likely to increase in coming years because timber production is beginning to increase after the 2006 lifting of a United Nations ban on Liberian wood products. In addition, a number of Liberian rubber plantations are starting to return to full production after closing or curtailing operations during the years of conflict. Many of the

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<sup>173</sup> Central Bank of Liberia. Annual Report 2008. “Chapter V: The Domestic Economy [p. 31].” 27 January 2009. <http://www.cbl.org.lr/doc/annualreports/cblannualreport08.pdf>

<sup>174</sup> Central Bank of Liberia. Annual Report 2008. “Chapter V: The Domestic Economy [p. 31].” 27 January 2009. <http://www.cbl.org.lr/doc/annualreports/cblannualreport08.pdf>

<sup>175</sup> ThePerspective.org. “Agricultural/Environmental Reforms in Post-Conflict Liberia.” Somah, Syrulwah. 18 April 2005. <http://www.theperspective.org/speeches/0418200501.html>

<sup>176</sup> ReliefWeb.net. Liberia Ministry of Agriculture. “Liberia Market Price Monitor [p. 2].” September 2009. [http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2009.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/EGUA-7XXUFV-full\\_report.pdf/\\$File/full\\_report.pdf](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2009.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/EGUA-7XXUFV-full_report.pdf/$File/full_report.pdf)

<sup>177</sup> Republic of Liberia, Ministry of Agriculture. ITTAS Consultancy Ltd. “Post-Harvest Crop Assessment Liberia: Rice and Cassava [p. 6].” August 2008. <http://www.moa.gov.lr/doc/CFSNS.doc>

<sup>178</sup> Central Bank of Liberia. Annual Report 2008. “Chapter V: The Domestic Economy [p. 31].” 27 January 2009. <http://www.cbl.org.lr/doc/annualreports/cblannualreport08.pdf>

<sup>179</sup> Central Bank of Liberia. Annual Report 2008. “Chapter V: The Domestic Economy [p. 31].” 27 January 2009. <http://www.cbl.org.lr/doc/annualreports/cblannualreport08.pdf>

rubber trees are aging, however, and new ones need to be planted.<sup>180</sup> The old, nonproductive trees—in the form of woodchips—have been slated to fuel Liberia’s newest power plant, which is being built in Buchanan.

There are two primary forms of land tenure in Liberia.<sup>181</sup> In coastal areas once settled by the American Colonization Society (ACS), private land ownership rights exist for either Americo-Liberians or “civilized” indigenous peoples. But on inland, indigenous areas, traditional law holds sway. Under this system, all rights to land use are communal, and access has been administered by tribal chiefs. The vast majority of subsistence farming is carried out under such arrangements.

## Banking and Currency

The Liberian dollar (currency code: LRD) is the official currency of Liberia, although the U.S. dollar (USD) is also considered legal tender and used in day-to-day transactions as well.<sup>182</sup> During 2009, the exchange rate fluctuated in the range of 64 to 74 LRD per U.S. dollar.<sup>183</sup> Over recent years, U.S. dollars have taken an increasing percentage of the total currency value within Liberia, a process known as “dollarization.” By the end of 2008, an estimated 67–90% of the total Liberian money supply was in U.S. dollars, one of the highest rates of dollarization in Africa.<sup>184, 185</sup>



© Juan Freire  
Billboard for International Bank, Liberia

The Central Bank of Liberia (CBL), established in October 1999, is the chief financial institution. In this role, it succeeded the National Bank of Liberia, which came into being in 1974. In addition to managing Liberia’s monetary policies, the CBL serves as the fiscal agent of the Government of Liberia, and carries out a supervisory and regulatory role over Liberia’s nine commercial banks. One of the newest of these CBL-regulated financial institutions is AccessBank Ltd., the nation’s first microfinance bank, which opened in January 2009. It provides banking access to Liberia’s low-income population,

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<sup>180</sup> Central Bank of Liberia. Annual Report 2008. “Chapter V: The Domestic Economy [p. 32].” 27 January 2009. <http://www.cbl.org.lr/doc/annualreports/cblannualreport08.pdf>

<sup>181</sup> World Bank. “Insecurity of Land Tenure, Land Law and Land Registration in Liberia [p. 7].” 22 October 2008. [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2008/11/23/000333037\\_20081123230839/Rendered/PDF/461340ESW0P10310Box334099B01PUBLIC1.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2008/11/23/000333037_20081123230839/Rendered/PDF/461340ESW0P10310Box334099B01PUBLIC1.pdf)

<sup>182</sup> Central Bank of Liberia. “Currency.” 2009. [http://cbl.org.lr/content\\_main.php?sub=currency](http://cbl.org.lr/content_main.php?sub=currency)

<sup>183</sup> OANDA.com. “Historical Exchange Rates.” 17 December 2009. <http://www.oanda.com/currency/historical-rates>

<sup>184</sup> Central Bank of Liberia. Annual Report 2008. “Chapter IV: Monetary and Exchange Rate Developments [p. 26].” 27 January 2009. <http://www.cbl.org.lr/doc/annualreports/cblannualreport08.pdf>

<sup>185</sup> International Monetary Fund. Erasmus, Lodewyk and Jules Leichter, Jeta Menkulasi. “De-Dollarization in Liberia—Lessons From Cross-Country Experiences [pp. 4–5].” March 2009. <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2009/wp0937.pdf>

as well as lending services to small and medium enterprises.<sup>186</sup> A recent CBL report noted that only about 10% of the micro-entrepreneurs estimated to be operating in Liberia had access to financial services.<sup>187</sup>

## Trade

Liberia's economy is in the early stages of recovery, and its trade patterns still reflect some of the wrenching changes from the long years of conflict. For example, iron ore was once one of the country's leading exports, but presently does not contribute to Liberia's trade balance because the mining infrastructure was destroyed. Redevelopment of this infrastructure is one of the Liberian government's top economic priorities. Timber exports are also well below their pre-conflict levels, although newly licensed concessions are beginning to operate.<sup>188, 189</sup>



© USAID Guinea / wikipedia.org  
Panning for diamonds, Sierra Leone

Rubber is the only remaining component of Liberia's traditional export economy that contributes positively to Liberia's current trade balance. In 2008, rubber shipments generated over 85% of Liberia's total export revenues. Most of the remaining 15% of export revenues came from gold, diamonds, and (to a lesser extent) cocoa beans.<sup>190</sup>

Liberian imports, which more than tripled the value of the country's exports in 2008, are dominated by machinery and transport equipment, food items (more than half of which is rice), along with petroleum and manufactured products. The imports of machinery and transport equipment and manufactured products reflect, in part, the increased reconstruction and infrastructure redevelopment within Liberia.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> African Economic Outlook. "Liberia: Structural Issues." 2009.

[http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/en/countries/west-africa/liberia/#/structural\\_issues](http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/en/countries/west-africa/liberia/#/structural_issues)

<sup>187</sup> Central Bank of Liberia. Annual Report 2008. "Chapter III. Microfinance [p. 20]." 27 January 2009.

<http://www.cbl.org.lr/doc/annualreports/cblannualreport08.pdf>

<sup>188</sup> Central Bank of Liberia. Annual Report 2008. "Chapter V. The Domestic Economy [p. 39]." 27 January 2009. <http://www.cbl.org.lr/doc/annualreports/cblannualreport08.pdf>

<sup>189</sup> Central Bank of Liberia. "Liberia Financial Statistics [p. 49]." March–April 2009.

<http://www.cbl.org.lr/doc/lsfreports/lfs2nd2009.pdf>

<sup>190</sup> Central Bank of Liberia. "Liberia Financial Statistics [p. 49]." March–April 2009.

<http://www.cbl.org.lr/doc/lsfreports/lfs2nd2009.pdf>

<sup>191</sup> Central Bank of Liberia. Annual Report 2008. "Chapter V. The Domestic Economy [p. 41]." 27 January 2009. <http://www.cbl.org.lr/doc/annualreports/cblannualreport08.pdf>

## Investment

One pillar of the Sirleaf administration's reconstruction plans is economic revitalization. Securing necessary outside investment to restore and then build upon Liberia's economic base is crucial to the effort. An important early step was an agreement with Arcelor Mittal, the world's largest steel company, to re-open the iron ore mine at Mount Nimba, near the town of Yekekpa in northern Nimba County. Under this USD 1.5 billion deal, Arcelor Mittal will rebuild the mining infrastructure, the port at Buchanan, and the railway connecting the iron mine to the port.<sup>192</sup> An even larger deal was signed with a Chinese corporation in 2008 to re-open the Bong iron mines and rebuild supporting infrastructure. But a year later, no work had started on this project.<sup>193</sup>



© The Advocacy Project  
Port of Buchanan, Liberia

Other potential areas of outside investment in Liberia include lumber, diamond and gold mining, and light manufacturing. Rubber continues to attract investors to Liberia. Palm oil producers have recently shown interest in setting up operations in the country. During 2009, the Liberian government announced an agreement with the Malaysian conglomerate Sime Darby for rubber and oil palm plantation licenses that could ultimately result in a USD 800 million investment.<sup>194</sup> The government was also in the final stages of negotiations in December 2009 with the Indonesian corporation Golden Veroleum for a potential USD 1.6 billion investment in an oil palm plantation and accompanying palm oil production facilities in southeastern Liberia.<sup>195</sup>

## Energy and Mineral Resources

### *Energy*

Liberia has no known oil, natural gas, or coal reserves. Several companies have signed leases since 2006 for offshore exploratory oil drilling, but even if these test wells prove promising, any Liberian oil production is many years away. In the meantime, Liberia struggles to reinstall a power system that was totally gutted by the time fighting ended in 2003. Prior to the conflicts in the 1990s, the Mount Coffee Hydroelectric Plant on the Saint Paul River, and several aging diesel and turbine generators on Bushrod Island near the



© United Nations Photo  
Solar panels in Monrovia, Liberia

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<sup>192</sup> Republic of Liberia, National Investment Commission. "The Investor's Guide to Liberia [p. 19]." No date. <http://www.nic.gov.lr/doc/INVESTOR%20GUIDE2.pdf>

<sup>193</sup> AllAfrica.com. "Liberia: Beijing's Bankroll for Bong's Ore." 16 December 2009. <http://allafrica.com/stories/200912160874.html>

<sup>194</sup> Reuters.com. Koswanage, Niluksi. "Update 2—Sime Darby Turns to Liberian Palm, Rubber Estates." 4 May 2009. <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKLR2348320090504>

<sup>195</sup> AllAfrica.com. Fofana, Boakai. "Liberia: Govt Secures Large Investment in Palm Oil Production." 1 December 2009. <http://allafrica.com/stories/200912010009.html>

Port of Monrovia, provided most of Liberia's electricity. Some of the areas outside the reach of Monrovia's transmission system were provided electricity through small generators. All these operations were run by the government-owned Liberia Electricity Corporation. The largest industrial customers (iron mines and rubber plantations) typically met their electrical needs through on-site power plants.<sup>196</sup> Of these public and private electrical facilities, only a small hydroelectric plant at the Firestone rubber plantation avoided destruction during Liberia's civil wars.<sup>197</sup>

Since the fighting ended in 2003, parts of Monrovia have had power restored by two stages of an Emergency Power Program funded by the U.S., Ghana, Norway, the World Bank, and the European Union.<sup>198, 199</sup> The Liberian National Energy Policy, released in May 2009, proposes that future increases in electrical capacity be provided by hydroelectric projects. These private/public partnerships are modeled loosely after the 1930s-era Tennessee Valley Authority project in the U.S. and Ghana's Volta River Authority, established in 1961.<sup>200</sup>

### *Minerals*

Liberia's mineral wealth primarily rests on iron ore, diamonds, and gold. With some pre-conflict iron ore operations in the process of being reopened, the government expects the mining sector to soon provide a substantially larger share of GDP. In addition to the reconstruction of iron mining operations, some new iron ore prospects have been investigated. Most notable is the Putu iron ore deposit in Grand Gedeh County, where test drilling results have shown this could be one of the richest finds in Liberia to date. Discussions concerning a 25-year licensing agreement to mine this deposit are underway.<sup>201</sup>



© The Advocacy Project  
Former iron ore mine, Tubmanburg, Liberia

Liberian diamonds and gold have typically been alluvial deposits (sediments from flowing water), requiring only small-scale prospecting operations. But, a gold deposit in

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<sup>196</sup> "Investment Opportunities: Electricity Sub-sector [pp. 2-4]." 15 February 2007.

[http://www.africacncl.org/Events/downloads/Mr.\\_Harry\\_T\\_Yuan.pdf](http://www.africacncl.org/Events/downloads/Mr._Harry_T_Yuan.pdf)

<sup>197</sup> REEEP.org. "Liberia Finds Role for Renewables." 17 April 2008. <http://www.reeep.org/57.9685/liberia-finds-role-for-renewables.htm>

<sup>198</sup> Orion Energy/Sofitel Capital Corporation. "Proposal for 28 MW Independent Power Project in Monrovia, Liberia." 15 February 2007. [http://www.africacncl.org/Events/downloads/Mr.\\_Ron\\_Flux-Davidson.pdf](http://www.africacncl.org/Events/downloads/Mr._Ron_Flux-Davidson.pdf)

<sup>199</sup> Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD). "Liberia." 2009.

<http://www.norad.no/en/Thematic+areas/Energy/Clean+Energy/Where+we+are/Liberia>

<sup>200</sup> Republic of Liberia, Ministry of Land, Mines and Energy. "National Energy Policy: An Agenda for Action and Economic and Social Development [p. 25]." May 2009.

[www.norad.no/en/\\_binary?download=true&id=61907](http://www.norad.no/en/_binary?download=true&id=61907)

<sup>201</sup> Mining Reporter. "Initial Resources Exceeds 1 Billion Tonnes of Iron Ore With Further Potential at Putu." 6 August 2009. <http://www.mining-reporter.com/index.php/press-releases/218-mano-river-resources-inc/427-initial-resource-exceeds-1-billion-tonnes-of-iron-ore-with-further-potential>

Grand Cape Mount County has shown great promise, and is undergoing final test drilling before a possible groundbreaking of Liberia's first industrial-scale gold mine.<sup>202, 203</sup> Also, diamond-bearing kimberlite pipes<sup>204</sup> have been discovered in western Liberia, but no plans have been announced to establish large-scale diamond mining operations there.<sup>205</sup>

## Standard of Living

By almost all measures, Liberia suffers one of the world's lowest standards of living. In the United Nations Development Programme's 2009 Human Development Index (HDI), Liberia ranked 169th among 182 countries. The HDI is a composite index of four components: life expectancy at birth, adult literacy rate, enrollment rates in schools, and GDP per capita. Of these four HDI factors, Liberia's GDP per capita was by far its lowest—only two of the other 181 countries were lower (Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo).<sup>206, 207</sup> Liberia's literacy rate was estimated at 52%, low by international standards but higher than many surrounding West African nations.<sup>208</sup>



© John Connell  
Home in Liberia

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<sup>202</sup> MiningWeekly.com. "Diamond Drilling Programme to Start in Liberia." 6 November 2009.

<http://www.miningweekly.com/article/diamond-drilling-programme-to-start-in-liberia-2009-11-06>

<sup>203</sup> African Aura Mining Inc. "Drilling Programme for High Grade Weauju Gold Project in Liberia." 11 November 2009. [http://www.african-aura.com/s/NewsReleases.asp?ReportID=371435&\\_Type=News&\\_Title=Drilling-Programme-for-High-Grade-Weauju-Gold-Project-In-Liberia](http://www.african-aura.com/s/NewsReleases.asp?ReportID=371435&_Type=News&_Title=Drilling-Programme-for-High-Grade-Weauju-Gold-Project-In-Liberia)

<sup>204</sup> Kimberlite pipes are vertical structures of igneous rock (produced by the cooling and hardening of magma or molten lava) thought to have originated within the earth's mantle. Most of the world's diamond production is from kimberlite pipes.

<sup>205</sup> U.S. Geological Survey. *2006 Minerals Yearbook*. "Liberia and Sierra Leone." July 2008.

<http://minerals.usgs.gov/minerals/pubs/country/2006/myb3-2006-li-sl.pdf>

<sup>206</sup> United Nations Development Programme. *2009 Human Development Report*. "Statistical Annex [p. 173]." 2009. [http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR\\_2009\\_EN\\_Indicators.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2009_EN_Indicators.pdf)

<sup>207</sup> Zimbabwe, not included in the HDI index, is also thought to have a lower GDP per capita. See International Monetary Fund. "5. Report for Selected Countries and Subjects." 2009.

<http://imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2009/02/weodata/weorept.aspx>

<sup>208</sup> United Nations Development Programme. *2009 Human Development Report*. "Statistical Annex [p. 173]." 2009. [http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR\\_2009\\_EN\\_Indicators.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2009_EN_Indicators.pdf)

Unemployment remains extremely high in Liberia. The often-quoted rate of 85% would make it nearly the highest in the world.<sup>209</sup> But the government of Liberia has protested that these figures are out of date and do not reflect the true employment situation in Liberia today.<sup>210</sup> It should be noted that the unemployment rate references the formal (wage-earning) sector. By one estimate, Liberia's informal employment sector may be nearly three and a half times larger than the formal sector.<sup>211</sup> The size of the informal sector (whose members traditionally have had no access to typical banking services, such as loans) has helped motivate the establishment of microfinancial institutions in Liberia.



© WFP-Christian Farnsworth  
Family in Liberia

## Tourism

The development of a tourism sector is a long-term goal of the government. Liberia has beaches and protected portions of its rainforest that could attract ecotourism dollars. But it lacks the infrastructure—notably, lodging and roads—that would make these sites attractive to any but the most determined and adventurous tourists.

In the short term, the most likely areas to generate any tourism traffic are the beaches closest to Monrovia, where there are paved roads and an international airport nearby. In June 2009, U.S. businessman Robert Johnson, founder of Black Entertainment Television and owner of RLJ Industries, Inc., opened Liberia's only four-star hotel in just such a setting. Despite the hotel's modest size (78 villa-style rooms), it is hoped that the RLJ property will help stir outsider interest and attract investment in the Monrovia region.<sup>212</sup> The hotel's construction came with some controversy, however, because the site was the former home of the Liberian National Cultural Center, which had closed during the many years



© Goya Bauwens  
Hotel Africa in Monrovia, Liberia

<sup>209</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. The World Factbook. "Country Comparison: Unemployment Rate." 2009. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2129rank.html?countryName=Liberia&countryCode=li&regionCode=af&rank=199#li>

<sup>210</sup> Star Radio Liberia. Leigh, Onesimus. "Labor Ministry Challenges 85% Unemployment Rate." 26 October 2009. <http://www.starradio.org.lr/content/view/13554/59/>

<sup>211</sup> Government of Liberia/International Labor Organization. "Liberia Emergency Employment Programme (LEEP) and Liberia Employment Action Programme (LEAP) [p. 6]." 2006. [http://www.fao-ilo.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/fao\\_ilo/pdf/Liberia-Strategy-Document.pdf](http://www.fao-ilo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/fao_ilo/pdf/Liberia-Strategy-Document.pdf)

<sup>212</sup> AllAfrica.com. Sayon, Morrison O. G. "Liberia: I Take the Blame for Kendeja." 25 April 2008. <http://allafrica.com/stories/200804250862.html>

of fighting and become populated by refugees and squatters.<sup>213</sup> The government has issued assurances that a new National Culture Center will be built at a different site.<sup>214</sup>

## Transportation

The transportation infrastructure remains one of Liberia's major barriers to economic development. Two civil wars left the nation's railroads (built by mining companies to bring ore to seaports) inoperable. One exception is the railway from Monrovia to the ruins of the Bong Mine, an 80-km (50-mi) route that carries freight (mostly scrap iron and crushed stone) and passengers.<sup>215</sup>



© Javier Pais  
Train tracks in Liberia

Liberia's roads were also heavily damaged by years of conflict. Although the country officially has 9,917 km (6,152 mi) of roadway, only 734 km (456 mi) are paved, with many sections in varying states of deterioration.<sup>216</sup> During the rainy season, the unpaved roads become impassible, isolating vast regions of the country. The inadequacy of Liberia's road system was indicated in a 2008 Gallup poll, which asked residents of 35 African countries if they were satisfied with the quality of their local roads and highways. Only 8% of Liberians answered positively—by far the lowest percentage of any of the countries polled.<sup>217</sup>

Air transportation in Liberia is also “a shell of its former self.”<sup>218</sup> Roberts International Airport, which is Monrovia's air hub even though it is about 64 km (40 mi) from the city center, received major damage during the civil wars. The airport, mostly served by regional carriers that fly to the other capitals of West Africa, now operates on a limited basis.<sup>219</sup> Plans are underway to renovate the airport and upgrade its security standards. In June 2009, the U.S. carrier Delta Airlines was refused permission by the U.S.

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<sup>213</sup> The Perspective. Dukule, Abdoulaye. “The New Kendeja, Symbol of a New Liberia.” 12 June 2009. <http://www.liberiaitech.com/theperspective/2009/0612200901.html>

<sup>214</sup> Government of the Republic of Liberia, Executive Mansion. “Bob Johnson Opens Four-Star Hotel—Liberian Leader Lauds Efforts.” 11 June 2009. [http://www.emansion.gov.lr/press.php?news\\_id=1209](http://www.emansion.gov.lr/press.php?news_id=1209)

<sup>215</sup> The International Steam Pages. Nettleship, Peter. “The Bong Mine Railway, Liberia.” February 2007. <http://www.internationalsteam.co.uk/trains/liberia01.htm>

<sup>216</sup> UNESCO. International Monetary Fund. *Poverty Reduction Strategy: Republic of Liberia*. “9. Pillar IV: Rehabilitating Infrastructure and Delivering Basic Services [p. 99].” July 2008. [http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Liberia/Liberia\\_PRSP.pdf](http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Liberia/Liberia_PRSP.pdf)

<sup>217</sup> Gallup.com. “Paving the Way to Prosperity in Africa.” 8 May 2008. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/107125/paving-way-prosperity-africa.aspx>

<sup>218</sup> UNESCO. International Monetary Fund. *Poverty Reduction Strategy: Republic of Liberia*. “9. Pillar IV: Rehabilitating Infrastructure and Delivering Basic Services [p. 102].” July 2008. [http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Liberia/Liberia\\_PRSP.pdf](http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Liberia/Liberia_PRSP.pdf)

<sup>219</sup> Roberts International Airport. “Flight Schedule.” 21 December 2009. <http://www.robertsinternationalairport.com/flight-schedule.html>

Transportation Security Administration (TSA) to schedule regular flights to Roberts International because of “security irregularities” at the airport.<sup>220</sup>

Four ports—Monrovia, Buchanan, Greenville, and Harper—lie along Liberia’s coast. All were heavily damaged during the years of fighting. Monrovia, the nation’s largest seaport, is operating but requires USD 50 million of repairs. The other three ports are not currently functioning.<sup>221</sup>

## Economic Outlook

The Liberian economy has seen several years of strong real GDP growth, which is common in countries rebuilding from conflict-induced economic collapse. In 2008, when many of the world’s largest economies declined, Liberia’s GDP increased by an estimated 7.1%.<sup>222</sup> The economy is expected to show high levels of growth during 2009 and 2010 (despite decreasing world rubber prices) as timber and iron ore operations start up.



© Goya Bauwens  
Local store in Monrovia, Liberia

Nonetheless, Liberia continues to face daunting challenges in diversifying the economy beyond subsistence agriculture, tree crops, and mining. One of the government’s most important goals is to improve the transportation and energy infrastructure. Without a reliable road network and electrical system, it will be almost impossible for inland regions to expand their economies and provide more employment opportunities.

Other issues that the Sirleaf administration continues to grapple with include a burdensome debt—much of it incurred during the Doe and Taylor regimes—owed to foreign governments and international organizations.<sup>223</sup> Through debt relief programs, Liberia was able to lower its total debt by nearly 35% between 2007 and the end of 2008. The remainder, however, still represents over 500% of GDP.<sup>224</sup> Until Liberia can reduce its debt significantly, the country’s ability to secure foreign loans is limited.<sup>225</sup>

Inflation is an ongoing concern in Liberia, where the perennial need for critical imports makes the economy vulnerable to world price shifts. In 2008, the inflation rate averaged

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<sup>220</sup> CNN.com. “Delta Denied Permission to Fly to Nairobi, Monrovia.” 3 June 2009.

<http://www.cnn.com/2009/TRAVEL/06/03/africa.delta.flights/index.html>

<sup>221</sup> OT Africa Line. *Trade and Transport Report*. “Liberia Needs \$50 Million to Repair Deep-Water Port.” January 2009. [http://www.otal.com/images/OTAL\\_Services/TransportReport/Transport Report January 2009.pdf](http://www.otal.com/images/OTAL_Services/TransportReport/TransportReport%20January%202009.pdf)

<sup>222</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit. “Liberia: Country Outlook.” June 2009.

[http://www.ciaonet.org/atlas/LR/Economy/Outlook/20090602\\_28318.html](http://www.ciaonet.org/atlas/LR/Economy/Outlook/20090602_28318.html)

<sup>223</sup> New York Times. Donnelly, John. “‘Iron Lady’ Bears Burden of Reviving Liberia.” 16 May 2006.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/16/world/africa/16iht-sirleaf.html>

<sup>224</sup> African Economic Outlook. “Liberia: Macroeconomic Policy.” 8 July 2009.

[http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/en/countries/west-africa/liberia/#/macro\\_economic\\_policy](http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/en/countries/west-africa/liberia/#/macro_economic_policy)

<sup>225</sup> New York Times. Donnelly, John. “‘Iron Lady’ Bears Burden of Reviving Liberia.” 16 May 2006.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/16/world/africa/16iht-sirleaf.html>

17.5%, driven largely by increasing prices for food and oil imports.<sup>226</sup> Since then, declining world prices for these commodities have led to forecasts that the inflation rate will fall to 5–6% during 2009–2010.<sup>227</sup>

## International Organizations

Liberia belongs to the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS), a 15-member organization that includes all the coastal and island nations from Senegal to Nigeria, plus landlocked Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. Though primarily an organization facilitating regional economic coordination and growth, ECOWAS played a major peacekeeping role in the First Liberian Civil War, deploying its ECOMOG (Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group) forces.

An ongoing goal of ECOWAS is the integration of member-state currencies and the creation of a central bank to serve the entire community. Eight of the ECOWAS member states, all former French or Portuguese colonies, now use a uniform currency known as the CFA franc.<sup>228</sup> Five others, all but one of which are former British colonies, have formed the West Africa Monetary Zone (WAMZ) and plan to introduce their own common currency in 2015.<sup>229</sup><sup>230</sup> Among ECOWAS members, only Liberia and Cape Verde have not formally announced plans to switch to one of the two common currencies, although Liberian officials have expressed interest in joining the WAMZ group.<sup>231</sup>



© The Advocacy Project  
Home destroyed during  
the civil war

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<sup>226</sup> African Economic Outlook. “Liberia: Macroeconomic Policy.” 8 July 2009.

[http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/en/countries/west-africa/liberia/#/macro\\_economic\\_policy](http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/en/countries/west-africa/liberia/#/macro_economic_policy)

<sup>227</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit. “Liberia: Country Outlook.” June 2009.

[http://www.ciaonet.org/atlas/LR/Economy/Outlook/20090602\\_28318.html](http://www.ciaonet.org/atlas/LR/Economy/Outlook/20090602_28318.html)

<sup>228</sup> ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development. “The ECOWAS Commission.” 2008.

<http://www.bidc-ebid.org/en/cedea0.php>

<sup>229</sup> ECOWAS. “Convergence Council Approves Revised Plan for Realisation of Single Currency for West Africa.” 29 May 2009. <http://news.ecowas.int/presseshow.php?nb=046&lang=en&annee=2009>

<sup>230</sup> The WAMZ has delayed its switch to a common currency four times since 2000, because of the inability of member states to achieve fiscal benchmarks to ensure monetary stability. See Business and Financial Times. “Ghana Fails ECO Test Again.” 2009.

[http://www.thebftonline.com/bft\\_subcat\\_linkdetails.cfm?prodcid=6&tblNewsCatID=2&tblNewsID=2074](http://www.thebftonline.com/bft_subcat_linkdetails.cfm?prodcid=6&tblNewsCatID=2&tblNewsID=2074)

<sup>231</sup> Business and Financial Times. “Ghana Fails ECO Test Again.” 2009.

[http://www.thebftonline.com/bft\\_subcat\\_linkdetails.cfm?prodcid=6&tblNewsCatID=2&tblNewsID=2074](http://www.thebftonline.com/bft_subcat_linkdetails.cfm?prodcid=6&tblNewsCatID=2&tblNewsID=2074)

# Society

## Introduction

For the first hundred years or so of its existence, the Republic of Liberia was a nation of two vastly different societies. Monrovia and other coastal and near-coastal settlements were dominated by a mixture of three groups. There were the Americo-Liberians, the Congoes (African captives “repatriated” to Liberia after U.S. and British naval patrols intercepted the slave ships carrying them to the Americas), and the descendants of both groups. This small but elite society lived according to Western values and customs, with Christianity as the dominant religion. Government institutions and social organizations—most notably, the Masonic Lodge—were modeled after U.S. equivalents.



© Teri Weefur  
Mother and child in  
Monrovia, Liberia

In the Hinterland area, away from the coast, lived the greater indigenous society—a heterogeneous collection of tribes, clans, and kinship groups, whose native customs and social structures were only modestly affected by their interactions with the settlers on the coast. (Exceptions were the coastal indigenous peoples closest to Monrovia and other colonization society settlements.) The beliefs, customs, and social organizations of the indigenous tribes were foreign to most of the Americo-Liberian settlers.

Only since the mid 20th century has a concerted effort been made to better unify these two societies. At first, unification meant “civilizing” the indigenous populations to allow them to move within the Americo-Liberian society. In the decades immediately before Liberia’s years of conflict, a fuller form of unification began to emerge slowly and imperfectly. The languages and customs of Liberia’s indigenous population were not only acknowledged by the coastal elites, but even celebrated as part of the country’s cultural heritage. At the same time, the ideas and societal norms of the coast began to more fully permeate the Hinterland. Nevertheless, the acculturation process continued to favor the Americo-Liberians because of their ongoing control of the government and resources.

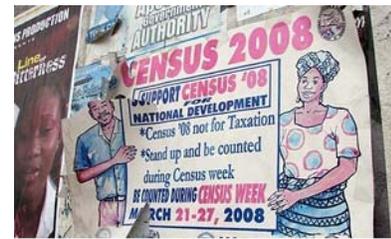
The coup of 1980 was a transformative event, one that ultimately led to greater division than unity. Since that time, throughout years of bloody conflict, a central question has continued to linger: When the fighting stops, what type of Liberian society will emerge? One of Liberia’s bigger challenges remains achieving a true national identity while respecting the diversity of its indigenous and immigrant cultures.

## Ethnic Groups and Languages

### *Ethnic Groups*

In national censuses, Liberia's indigenous population has traditionally been recognized as consisting of 16 or 17 ethnic groups. However, scholars have noted that this categorization ignores tribal and clan identities that were often stronger (at least in the past) than any ethnic affiliation.<sup>232</sup> Traditionally, the ethnic categories were based on linguistic differences, even though some groups, such as the Grebo, collectively speak 25 or more dialects that fall within 5 to 9 language subgroups.<sup>233, 234</sup> Thus, members of various Grebo clans are unable to communicate with each other, despite the fact that they are classified in the same ethnic group.

Of the 17 indigenous ethnic groups designated by the current census, all speak languages belonging to three major groups within the Niger-Congo language family. In Liberia's northern and western sections, the dominant languages are classified within the Mande group. These include Kpelle (20.3% of the total Liberian population), Gio/Dan (8.0%), Mano (7.9%), Loma/Lorma (5.1%), Vai (4.0%), Mandingo/Maniyan (3.2%), Gbandi/Bandi (3.0%), and Mende (1.3%).<sup>235</sup> In southeastern Liberia and the southern portions of central Liberia, most Liberians speak languages falling within the Kru group. These include Bassa (13.4%), Grebo (10.0%), Kru/Klao (6.0%), Krahn (4.0%), and Sapo (1.2%). Somewhat isolated from the rest of the Kru ethnic groups are the Belle/Kuwaa (0.8%) and Dey/Dewoin (0.3%), who primarily live in small enclaves in the western, Mande-dominant parts of Liberia. Two other groups, the Kissi (4.8%) and Gola (4.4%), represent the Atlantic language group, the third of the Niger-Congo language groups within Liberia. Both the Kissi and the Gola live in areas adjacent to Liberia's northwestern border with Sierra Leone. Approximately 2.1% of Liberians are classified as "Other Liberian," "Other African," or "Non-African." These classifications include the remnants of the once politically dominant Americo-Liberians, as well as members of smaller indigenous groups and Liberia's Lebanese population.<sup>236</sup>



© Denise Miller  
Census poster in Liberia

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<sup>232</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*. Kaplan, Irving et al. "Chapter 2. The Society and Its Environment [p. 88]." 1985. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

<sup>233</sup> Ethnologue.com. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 16th Ed. "Languages of Liberia." 2009. [http://www.ethnologue.com/show\\_country.asp?name=LR](http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=LR)

<sup>234</sup> SIL International. Hasselbring, Sue and Eric Johnson. "A Sociolinguistic Survey of the Grebo Language Area of Liberia [pp. 5-6]." 2002. <http://www.sil.org/silesr/abstract.asp?ref=2002-074>

<sup>235</sup> Many Liberian ethnic groups and their associated languages are known by more than one name. Where two names for the same group are relatively common, they are both listed.

<sup>236</sup> Republic of Liberia, Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services. "2008 Population and Housing Census Data: Final Results [p. A 4-87]." May 2009. <http://www.lisgis.org/Docs/NPHC 2008 Report - Final.pdf>

## English

English, the language introduced by the American Colonization Society's (ACS) settlers, is the official language of Liberia and can be divided into three broad categories. Standard Liberian English (SLE) is the version taught in formal education, and is used primarily by the government and media. SLE varies somewhat from the varieties spoken in other English-speaking West African nations, owing to the influence of American (as opposed to British) English.<sup>237, 238</sup> Vernacular Liberian English (VLE), an offshoot of 19th century U.S. Black English, is spoken at home and by Americo-Liberian descendants. VLE is informally referred to by various names, including Merico, Americo-Liberian, Brokes, Kwaisai, Waterside, and Water Street English.<sup>239</sup> Pidgin varieties of English (or, pidgin "Englishes") are frequently spoken by Liberians of indigenous descent, who constitute the vast majority of the population. Each of the pidgin Englishes spoken in Liberia is influenced by the grammatical structures of the local indigenous language.<sup>240</sup> The version heard on the streets of Monrovia is often referred to as "colloqua."<sup>241</sup>



© Skye Christensen  
Signs in Liberia

## Ethnic Conflict and Reconciliation

Ethnic divisions played a role in the violent power struggles that took place between 1979 and 2003. Samuel Doe, Liberia's first president of indigenous descent, was an ethnic Krahn who led the 1980 coup that removed the government of William R. Tolbert. One of Doe's chief rivals, Thomas Quiwonkpa, was an ethnic Gio. During Doe's reign, Gio and Mano tribespeople in Nimba County were heavily repressed and even massacred, and their members formed the base of the revolt led by Charles Taylor in 1989. Later, Mandingo fighters were drawn into the conflict, supporting Doe and his Krahn-dominated armed forces. Krahn and Mandingo forces later played an important role in the LURD (Liberians United for Reconciliation and



DOD Image  
Samuel Doe, 1982

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<sup>237</sup> *Culture and Customs of Liberia*. Olukoju, Ayodeji. "5. Social Customs and Lifestyle [p. 113]." 2006. Westport, CN: Greenwood Press.

<sup>238</sup> *Speaking and Social Identity: English in the Lives of Urban Africans*. Breitborde, Lawrence B. "3. Linguistic Diversity and Sociolinguistic Patterns [p. 55]." 1998. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

<sup>239</sup> *Culture and Customs of Liberia*. Olukoju, Ayodeji. "5. Social Customs and Lifestyle [p. 113]." 2006. Westport, CN: Greenwood Press.

<sup>240</sup> *Speaking and Social Identity: English in the Lives of Urban Africans*. Breitborde, Lawrence B. "3. Linguistic Diversity and Sociolinguistic Patterns [p. 56]." 1998. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

<sup>241</sup> International Reporting Project. Gezari, Vanessa. "Liberia Recovers from War: Liberia Starving Rappers." 4 May 2007. <http://www.internationalreportingproject.org/stories/detail/liberia-recovers-from-liberia-starving-rappers/>

Democracy) and MODEL (Movement for Democracy in Liberia) rebel groups that besieged Charles Taylor's government forces during the Second Civil War.<sup>242</sup> Today, one priority of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's administration is to establish an environment of reconciliation and inclusion so that ethnic rivalries do not spark violence again.<sup>243</sup>

## Religion

According to Liberia's most recent census (2008), 85.5% of Liberians are Christian and 12.2% are Muslim. The remainder of the population includes those who profess no religion (1.5%), follow indigenous religious beliefs (0.5%), or have identified themselves with other religions (0.1%).<sup>244</sup> These statistics differ from those commonly found in earlier reports. Previously, Christianity and indigenous religious beliefs were believed to have roughly equal percentages of adherents (40%).<sup>245</sup> In part, the difference can be explained by the 24-year time gap between censuses in Liberia. In addition, it should be noted that many Liberians who identify as Christians in surveys continue to incorporate indigenous beliefs and customs in their daily life. As one surveyor of Liberian society observed, the "tendency for people to maintain plural religious beliefs" is a striking aspect of Liberian religious practices.<sup>246</sup>



© Jason Judy  
St. Peter's Lutheran church, Liberia

Indigenous religious beliefs are sometimes collectively labeled *animism*. This broad category is applied to belief systems in which spirits and powers are assumed to reside in departed ancestors, animals, and even inanimate objects. To assure prosperity and avoid misfortune, local communities must understand these invisible forces and know how to influence them. Within Liberia, several ethnic groups traditionally have used single-gender, secret societies to initiate their boys and girls to the spirit world of the bush. The children are taught the rituals, skills, and responsibilities they will need to navigate this world as adults. Over time, these *Poro* (boys) and *Sande* (girls) societies have been influenced by the teachings of either the Christian or Muslim religion. Thus, today it is not uncommon for a *Poro* official to also consider himself a Christian.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> SearchforCommonGround.org. "SFCG, in Partnership with Peace Committees and Local Organizations, Organizes First Liberian Peace Festival." No date.

[http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/liberia/liberia\\_ganta.html](http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/liberia/liberia_ganta.html)

<sup>243</sup> Republic of Liberia, Executive Mansion. "Inaugural Address of H. E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf." 16 January 2006. [http://www.emansion.gov.lr/doc/inaugural\\_add\\_1.pdf](http://www.emansion.gov.lr/doc/inaugural_add_1.pdf)

<sup>244</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. *International Religious Freedom Report 2009*. "Liberia." 26 October 2009. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127240.htm>

<sup>245</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Liberia." 25 November 2009.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ri.html>

<sup>246</sup> *The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*. Ellis, Stephen. "6. Men and Devils [p. 224]." 1999. New York: New York University Press.

<sup>247</sup> *The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*. Ellis, Stephen. "1. The First of the Warlords [p. 39]." 1999. New York: New York University Press.

Members of the Vai and Mandingo ethnic groups make up the majority of Liberia's Muslim population. The Mandingo tribespeople, who are more geographically dispersed than other Liberian ethnic groups, have long been viewed as outsiders by some of their fellow citizens.<sup>248</sup> Several factors have contributed to this perception, including the Mandingos' historical involvement in the slave trade along the Liberian coast.<sup>249</sup> In addition, the Mandingos never participated in the *Poros/Sandes* secret societies, which often crossed ethnic lines in northwestern Liberia.<sup>250</sup> The Vai, on the other hand, have traditionally had *Poros/Sandes* institutions, though in recent decades, their traditions have weakened as orthodox Islamic ideology has more firmly taken root.<sup>251</sup>

## Gender Issues

As the only African country with a democratically elected woman leader, the Liberian government in recent years has taken the lead in addressing issues of gender bias and gender-related human-rights abuses. One of these abuses is sexual violence, a problem that became epidemic during Liberia's 14 years of conflict.<sup>252</sup> During this period, it is estimated that 40% to 70% of all Liberian women were victims in one form or another of sexual violence, either at the hands of male soldiers or civilians forced at gunpoint to rape their female relatives.<sup>253, 254, 255</sup> President Sirleaf, whose electoral victory has been attributed to the enormous support she received from Liberian women voters, has spoken forcefully on this issue. The first piece of legislation to take effect after her inauguration was a new, tougher



© World Economic Forum  
President of Liberia,  
Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

<sup>248</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Kaplan, Irving et al. "Chapter 3: The Society and Its Environment [pp. 92–94]." 1984. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>249</sup> *The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*. Ellis, Stephen. "6. Men and Devils [p. 225]." 1999. New York: New York University Press.

<sup>250</sup> *Culture and Customs of Liberia*. Olukoju, Ayodeji. "7. Social Customs and Lifestyle [p. 117]." 2006. Westport, CN: Greenwood Press.

<sup>251</sup> Conference on Music in the World of Islam. Monts, Lester. "Islam, Music, and Religious Change in Liberia: A Case Study from Vai Country." August 2007.

[http://www.islamicpopulation.com/africa/Liberia/Liberia\\_Islam,Music&religious change in Liberia.pdf](http://www.islamicpopulation.com/africa/Liberia/Liberia_Islam,Music&religious%20change%20in%20Liberia.pdf)

<sup>252</sup> United Nations News Centre. "Liberia Urges UN to Focus Attention on Gender Issues, Appoint More Women." 25 September 2009. <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=32271&Cr=liberia&Cr1=>

<sup>253</sup> Forced Migration Review. Johnson Sirleaf, Ellen. "Liberia's Gender-Based Violence National Action Plan." 21–23 June 2006. <http://www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR27/21.pdf>

<sup>254</sup> American Refugee Committee. "ARC Liberia." No date.

[http://www.arcrelief.org/site/PageServer?pagename=programs\\_liberia\\_genderbasedviolence](http://www.arcrelief.org/site/PageServer?pagename=programs_liberia_genderbasedviolence)

<sup>255</sup> Norwegian Institute of International Affairs. "'Nobody Gets Justice Here!': Addressing Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and the Rule of Law in Liberia." Schia, Niels Nagelhus and Benjamin de Carvalho. "2. Gender Issues in Peacekeeping and Post-Conflict Liberia [p. 8]." 2009.

<http://english.nupi.no/Publications/Working-Papers/2009/Nobody-Gets-Justice-Here!-Addressing-Sexual-and-Gender-based-Violence-and-the-Rule-of-Law-in-Liberia>

rape law.<sup>256</sup> Sirleaf has written about nearly being raped during one of her incarcerations in the mid 1980s, when the Doe administration was in power.<sup>257</sup>

In 2008, the Liberian government established a special court for rape trials.<sup>258</sup> Later in the year, President Sirleaf signed into law amendments designed to expedite such cases.<sup>259</sup> Despite these and other positive steps by the government and nongovernmental organizations, progress has been slow. Institutional and societal obstacles still limit both the reporting and prosecution of cases of sexual violence.<sup>260</sup> Incidents of rape continue to remain high as well. Regarding the ongoing frequency of rape, one Liberian police officer noted, “Rape is a scar that the war left behind. . . . Sexual violence is a direct product of the war.”<sup>261</sup>

## Traditional Dress

Liberian dress reflects the diversity of the nation’s multiethnic population, as well as foreign influences initially introduced by the Americo-Liberian settlers. The Western-influenced formal dress of the settler elites was always impractical in Liberia’s hot tropical climate and has largely been replaced by a more informal style. Liberian men, particularly government and business leaders, might still wear three-piece suits during some formal occasions, but safari suits are also popular. On the streets, cotton short-sleeve shirts and pants are common.<sup>262</sup> Men may also wear cotton gowns, often white, that are embroidered in the chest area. These are particularly popular among Liberian Muslim groups, such as the Mandingos, and for this reason they are sometimes referred to as Mandingo gowns.<sup>263</sup>



© Jason Judy  
Men and women in Liberia

Typical attire for a Liberian woman might be a cotton dress or a blouse combined with a wrap-around skirt. An important part of such clothing is a long (6 yards) fold of brightly colored, patterned cloth known as a *lappa*. The *lappa* can be used as a full-length skirt,

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<sup>256</sup> BBC News. Blunt, Elizabeth. “Liberian Leader Breaks Rape Taboo.” 20 January 2010. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4632874.stm>

<sup>257</sup> *This Child Will Be Great*. Johnson Sirleaf, Ellen. “Chapter 8. The Attempted Coup [p. 146].” 2009. New York: HarperCollins.

<sup>258</sup> United Nations. “Combating Sexual and Gender Based Violence in Liberia.” 2009. <http://www.stoprapenow.org/pdf/SGBVemail.pdf>

<sup>259</sup> Executive Mansion, Government of Liberia. “Government Takes Steps to Speed Up Rape Cases.” 31 July 2008. [http://www.emansion.gov.lr/press.php?news\\_id=808](http://www.emansion.gov.lr/press.php?news_id=808)

<sup>260</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. “2008 Human Rights Report: Liberia.” 25 February 2009. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/af/119009.htm>

<sup>261</sup> New York Times. Kristof, Nicholas D. “After War, Mass Rapes Persist.” 20 May 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/21/opinion/21kristof.html>

<sup>262</sup> *Liberia*. Miller, Debra A. “5. Life and Culture in Liberia [p. 71].” 2004. Farmington Hills, MI: Lucent Books.

<sup>263</sup> *Culture and Customs of Liberia*. Olukoju, Ayodeji. “5. Cuisine and Traditional Dress [p. 85].” 2006. Westport, CN: Greenwood Press.

with another length of fabric folded and tied around the waist as an apron, or as a sling to carry market goods or a baby. Either the same fabric or a contrasting one is popularly used as a head wrapping or shoulder piece draped over dresses and blouses.<sup>264</sup>

## Traditions: Celebrations and Holidays

Most national holidays in Liberia commemorate historical events and persons or are patriotic in nature. Among these are Armed Forces Day (February 11), Joseph Jenkins Roberts' Birthday (March 15), National Unification Day (May 14), Independence Day (July 26), National Flag Day (August 24), and William V. S. Tubman's Birthday (November 29). Liberia, like the United States, celebrates a day of thanksgiving in November. (In Liberia, Thanksgiving is the first Thursday of the month.)



© Denise Miller  
Liberian Thanksgiving

On the second Wednesday of each March, many Liberians celebrate National Decoration Day by tending the gravesites of loved ones. The day is one of remembrance and celebration. Within local cemeteries, one can observe youths dancing to the latest hip-hop rhythms only a few meters away from quiet mourners carefully painting and scrubbing the tombs of family members.<sup>265, 266</sup>

Christmas (December 25) and Easter (March or April) are the primary Christian holidays celebrated in Liberia, although only Christmas is a national holiday.<sup>267</sup> Gift giving is a traditional part of Liberian Christmas festivities in Monrovia and other urban areas of Liberia, at least for those who can afford presents.<sup>268</sup> In general, however, the celebration of Christmas in Liberia stays close to its religious roots.<sup>269</sup> No Muslim celebrations are



© DavidOaks / wikipedia.org  
Madinka, Papa Susso playing the kora

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<sup>264</sup> Liberia Orphan Education Project. "Liberian Lappas and LOEP." 26 February 2009. <http://loeporphans.blogspot.com/2009/02/liberian-lappas-and-loep.html>

<sup>265</sup> WorldFocus.org. "Liberians Scrub Tombstones and Dance to Celebrate the Dead." 15 April 2009. <http://worldfocus.org/blog/2009/04/15/liberians-scrub-tombstones-eat-dance-to-celebrate-the-dead/4916/>

<sup>266</sup> International Reporting Project. Gezari, Vanessa. "Liberia Recovers From War: A Place Where the Living Usurp the Resting Places of the Dead." 1 May 2007.

<http://www.internationalreportingproject.org/stories/detail/449/#>

<sup>267</sup> Q++Studio.com. "Public Holidays and Bank Holidays for Liberia." 15 January 2010.

<http://www.qppstudio.net/publicolidays2010/liberia.htm>

<sup>268</sup> Liberian Observer. Dukully, Abdullah and Mai Anderson. "Hard Times Take Merry Out of Christmas in Liberia." 27 December 2009. <http://liberianobserver.com/node/3626>

<sup>269</sup> Afrol.com. Hennig, Rainer Chr and Musa Saidykhan. "Christmas 'Unique' in West Africa." 22 December 2009. <http://www.afrol.com/articles/23489>

public holidays in Liberia, although there have been recent calls to make *Eid ul-Fitr* (the end of the 30-day Ramadan fast) a national holiday.<sup>270</sup>

## Cuisine

Rice is the primary Liberian staple; it is eaten at almost all meals, and often as the meal itself. *Jollof* rice, a dish that is popular throughout West Africa, includes various types of meat (when available), onions, both tomato paste and fresh tomatoes, other vegetables, and hot pepper. Also popular is check rice, a dish that combines white rice with mashed *platto* (jute) leaves, which have a taste similar to spinach with okra.<sup>271, 272</sup>



© Peter Casier  
Woman with rice



© Veronica Sparks  
Woman cooking

Cassava, a root crop, is commonly grown in Liberia and is an essential ingredient for several side dishes. Two of these are *dumboy* and *fu-fu*. In both dishes, the cassava root is boiled, drained, and then pounded into a thick paste. To eat it Liberian-style, small pieces of *fu-fu* are torn off and shaped into hollow balls used to scoop up a soup or sauce, and then swallowed without chewing. The cassava for *fu-fu* paste is fermented; for *dumboy*, it is not.<sup>273, 274</sup>

Other typical Liberian foods include palm butter (the flesh of palm nuts, pounded to a pulp), *palava* sauce (okra, dried fish or meat, and palm oil), country chop (meats, fish, and chilies, mixed with palm butter), and fried plantains. Numerous types of fruits are popular, including mangoes, oranges, pineapples, bananas, watermelons, and grapefruit.<sup>275</sup>

Ginger is commonly used in Liberian cooking to spice and flavor many dishes. It is also one of the primary ingredients of ginger beer, perhaps the most popular drink in Liberia. Other widely consumed alcoholic drinks are palm wine and cane juice. Soft drinks are popular nonalcoholic beverages and are frequently sold at



© Juan Freire  
Billboard of various drinks in Liberia

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<sup>270</sup> Q++Studio.com. The Advocate. "Liberia Muslim Public Holidays Update." 2 September 2009. [http://www.qppstudio.net/public-holidays-news/2009/liberia\\_002764.htm](http://www.qppstudio.net/public-holidays-news/2009/liberia_002764.htm)

<sup>271</sup> The African Cookbook. Sandler, Bea. "Liberia." 1993. <http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Cookbook/Liberia.html>

<sup>272</sup> African-Recipes-Secrets.com. "Check Rice Goes with Gravy and Plantain . . ." 2008–2012. <http://www.african-recipes-secrets.com/check-rice.html>

<sup>273</sup> The Reeds in Liberia. "Liberian Cuisine, Part 2." 14 May 2008. <http://reedsinliberia.blogspot.com/2008/05/liberian-cuisine-part-2.html>

<sup>274</sup> Liberia. "Liberian Diet." No date. <http://pages.prodigy.net/jkess3/Food.html>

<sup>275</sup> *Liberia in Pictures*. Streissguth, Tom. "Cultural Life [p. 54]." 2006. Minneapolis, MN Twenty First Century Books.

roadside stands.<sup>276, 277</sup> Milk is rarely drunk, and coffee is generally consumed only in urban areas.<sup>278</sup>

During large celebrations or formal occasions, goat soup is often served as the main dish. Other popular soups include beans gravy, chicken peanut, and cassava leaf. All these soups may include various meats and fish and are often spiced with hot peppers.<sup>279</sup>

Liberian desserts include a pie filled with coconut, cassava cake, and sweet potato pone, as well as spiced stewed fruit such as peaches or mangoes. Pineapple nut bread and rice bread are popular quick breads, with the latter often containing mashed bananas or plantains and nutmeg.<sup>280</sup>

## Arts

### *Music and Dance*

No important village event in Liberia is truly a celebration without music and dancing. In traditional Liberian music, the rhythms, instrumentation, and melodies vary from one indigenous group to another, but common elements are observed. Rhythm is a dominant part of the music, and a variety of drums, rattles, woodblocks, and other percussion instruments provide a complex pattern of overlapping beats underlying the melody. Traditional instruments include xylophones, lutes and other stringed instruments, bells, and horns.<sup>281</sup> Traditional Liberian singers employ vocal styles and patterns that can also be heard in more Western-influenced Liberian music. Among these are the back and forth exchanges between singer and chorus (call-and-response), ululation (a type of vocal trilling), and frequent repetition of melodic strains.<sup>282</sup>



© Kipp Jones  
Liberian Drummers and dancers

Christian music is quite popular in Liberia. Although introduced by American missionaries, Christian choral and gospel music has evolved in churches with indigenous

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<sup>276</sup> *Culture and Customs of Liberia*. Olukoju, Ayodeji. "5. Cuisine and Traditional Dress [p. 84]." 2006. Westport, CN: Greenwood Press.

<sup>277</sup> *Liberia in Pictures*. Streissguth, Tom. "Cultural Life [p. 55]." 2006. Minneapolis, MN Twenty First Century Books.

<sup>278</sup> *Cultures of the World: Liberia*. Levy, Patricia. "Food [p. 119]." 1999. Tarrytown, NY Marshall Cavendish.

<sup>279</sup> *Culture and Customs of Liberia*. Olukoju, Ayodeji. "5. Cuisine and Traditional Dress [p. 82]." 2006. Westport, CN: Greenwood Press.

<sup>280</sup> *Culture and Customs of Liberia*. Olukoju, Ayodeji. "5. Cuisine and Traditional Dress [p. 83]." 2006. Westport, CN: Greenwood Press.

<sup>281</sup> *Cultures of the World: Liberia*, 2nd Ed. Levy, Patricia and Michael Spilling. "Arts [pp. 102–103]." 2010. Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark.

<sup>282</sup> Institute for Cultural Partnerships. "Liberia and Its Music." 2002.  
<http://www.culturalpartnerships.org/ontour/liberia.asp>

congregations. It incorporates traditional West African rhythms, call-and-response patterns, and new songs composed and performed in the native languages.<sup>283</sup>

Favorite pop musical genres in Liberia include hip-hop, rhythm and blues, reggae, and the West African-Latin American-Caribbean fusion known as “highlife.” Much of this music comes from artists recording in nearby West African countries such as Senegal, Ghana, and Nigeria. Liberia’s years of conflict and subsequent reconstruction have severely dampened a once-flourishing local music scene.



© Denise Miller  
Vendor selling music

But Liberia has one group of musical artists who still live and perform there. Since the end of fighting, local Liberian hip-hop artists have gained attention for a self-described style known as “hip-co.” The words are rapped in the Liberian English vernacular, “colloqua” (hence the “co” in the genre’s name). Unlike some of their American hip-hop counterparts who celebrate an ostentatious —“bling”—lifestyle, even the better-known Liberian hip-co artists struggle to get by. Their songs often comment on subjects such as corruption, reflecting the concerns of many Liberians on the street.<sup>284</sup>

### *Traditional Crafts*

Perhaps no native art form is more associated with Liberia than the wooden masks carved for ceremonial occasions, such as the *Poro* and *Sande* society initiations. These masks are usually carved from sapwood (the younger, outermost wood of trees). They exhibit a variety of styles that reflect the diversity of Liberia’s many indigenous ethnic groups. Some masks incorporate animal features such as beaks or horns, while others portray more identifiably human facial characteristics—often in an exaggerated or grotesque form. Dyes made from local plants are used to paint the masks.<sup>285, 286, 287</sup>



© Lia / flickr.com  
Wooden mask of the Bassa people

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<sup>283</sup> Institute for Cultural Partnerships. “Liberia and Its Music.” 2002.

<http://www.culturalpartnerships.org/ontour/liberia.asp>

<sup>284</sup> International Reporting Project. Gezari, Vanessa. “Liberia Recovers from War: Liberia Starving Rappers.” 4 May 2007. <http://www.internationalreportingproject.org/stories/detail/liberia-recovers-from-liberia-starving-rappers/>

<sup>285</sup> *Liberia in Pictures*. Streissguth, Tom. “Cultural Life [pp. 48–49].” 2006. Minneapolis, MN: Twenty First Century Books.

<sup>286</sup> *Cultures of the World: Liberia*, 2nd Ed. Levy, Patricia and Michael Spilling. “Arts [p. 104].” 2010. Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark.

<sup>287</sup> *Liberia*. Miller, Debra A. “5. Life and Culture in Liberia [pp. 73–74].” 2004. Farmington Hills, MI: Lucent Books.

Carved wooden sculptures, jewelry made from wax and clay casts, baskets and mats woven from reeds and fronds, and cloth making (in particular, the beautifully patterned *lappa* fabrics) are some of the other traditional crafts of Liberia’s indigenous artisans.<sup>288, 289</sup> Prior to the civil war years, Monrovia’s National Museum housed some of the finest examples of these crafts, but the vast majority of artifacts were looted during the closing days of the Second Civil War (2003).<sup>290</sup>



© ladybugblue / flickr.com  
Sculpture at the  
Liberian National Museum

## Folktales and Folklore

Liberia is a country abounding with folktales, collections of which can be found in libraries throughout the world. Liberia’s indigenous villages have a rich history of storytelling. Even today, the oral tradition is still vibrant since many of the country’s indigenous languages have no formal writing system. Some of the more well-known stories passed down orally include “The Chief’s Wise Wife,” “The Talking Goat,” “The Leopard Woman,” and “Two Ways to Count to Ten.” Spider folktales and parables are popular in Liberia, as they are in much of Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>291</sup> As in most cultures, Liberian folktales not only entertain but also provide a moral or lesson.

## Sports and Recreation

Soccer (or football, as it is known in most of the world) is by far the most popular Liberian sport. In all corners of the country, it is common to see young men and boys—some of whom are former boy-soldier amputees from the war years—playing pick-up games on any available open patch of ground.<sup>292, 293, 294</sup> On a more organized level, the Liberian Football Association supervises over 40 local, club teams in three divisions. Perhaps with hopes of



© Erik (HASH) Hersman  
Kids playing soccer in Monrovia, Liberia

<sup>288</sup> *Liberia in Pictures*. Streissguth, Tom. “Cultural Life [p. 49].” 2006. Minneapolis, MN: Twenty First Century Books.

<sup>289</sup> *Cultures of the World: Liberia*, 2nd Ed. Levy, Patricia and Michael Spilling. “Arts [p. 105].” 2010. Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark.

<sup>290</sup> ScarlettLion.com. Global Post. Gordon, Glenna. “National Museum’s Struggle to Rebuild Is Part of Liberia’s Tumultuous History.” 15 May 2009. <http://www.scarlettlion.com/2009/05/global-post-museum-tells-story-of-liberias-past-2.html>

<sup>291</sup> TLCAfrica.com. “The Parable Page: Spider Stories.” 2000. <http://www.tlcafrica.com/parable.html>

<sup>292</sup> New York Times. Bowers, Paul. “Win-a-Trip: Serendipity and Soccer.” 16 May 2009.

<http://kristof.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/05/16/win-a-trip-serendipity-and-soccer/>

<sup>293</sup> Modern Ghana. Wall Street Journal. Phillips, Michael M. “In Liberia, Amputees Find Healing Place: Soccer Field.” 28 July 2007. <http://www.modernghana.com/news/139937/1/in-liberia-amputees-find-healing-place-soccer-fiel.html>

<sup>294</sup> LoveandGratitude.com. Sole, Helen Mumford. “Saturday, August 1, 2009: The Boys Playing Soccer.” 2009. [http://www.loveandgratitude.com/2009.08.01\\_arch.html](http://www.loveandgratitude.com/2009.08.01_arch.html)

finding another George Weah (Liberia's greatest sports star), soccer clubs throughout the world include some of Liberia's better players on their rosters.<sup>295</sup>

Weah, an ethnic Kru, grew up in one of Monrovia's poorer neighborhoods.<sup>296</sup> After excelling as a striker for two of Liberia's better club teams during the mid 1980s, he played for several teams in European leagues from the late 1980s to early 2000s. In 1995 he was named the FIFA Player of the Year, the only African player ever to win world football's top individual honor. A few years later, he was voted Africa's Footballer of the Century.<sup>297</sup> Despite Weah's international success, Liberia's national team, nicknamed the Lone Star (after the nation's flag<sup>298</sup>), has not followed suit, having never qualified for the World Cup.

Other sports that are played in Liberia, at least in urban areas, include basketball and volleyball. Although both of these sports are played by both boys and girls, kickball is the most popular girls sport in Liberia. Board games are also favorite pastimes, including checkers, *mancala* (a strategy game played with pebbles or seeds), and *woaley* (played on a *mancala* board and similar to backgammon).<sup>299, 300</sup>



© Kipp Jones  
Soccer field in Liberia

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<sup>295</sup> LiberianSoccer.com. "George Manneh Opong Weah." 2009. <http://www.liberiansoccer.com/GeorgeWeah.htm>

<sup>296</sup> BBC News. "Profile: George Weah." 11 November 2005. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4403120.stm>

<sup>297</sup> LiberianSoccer.com. "George Manneh Opong Weah." 2009. <http://www.liberiansoccer.com/GeorgeWeah.htm>

<sup>298</sup> LiberianSoccer.com. Wordsworth, Charles "Coo Coo." "Legends of the Lone Star: A Brief History." 2009. <http://www.liberiansoccer.com/HallOfFame.htm>

<sup>299</sup> *Liberia in Pictures*. Streissguth, Tom. "Cultural Life [p. 54]." 2006. Minneapolis, MN: Twenty First Century Books.

<sup>300</sup> Panix.com. O'Sullivan, Steffan. "Awale or Ayo." 14 February 2002. <http://www.panix.com/~sos/bc/awale.html>

# Security

## Introduction

A report prepared for the U.S. Congress in 2009 noted that “Liberia’s security situation has improved markedly since August 2003 and is generally stable, but is subject to periodic volatility and localized instability, and largely dependent on the presence of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).”<sup>301</sup> A few months later, UNMIL reached the same general conclusions, although the organization’s report noted the security situation in Liberia was “still fragile.” As evidence, the UNMIL report stated that “[L]aw and order incidents, including rape and armed robbery, were prevalent. Communal and mob violence also continued, often emanating from tension between ethnic groups and communities over land disputes.”<sup>302</sup>



© US Army Africa  
Liberian children in Careysburg, Liberia

For the administration of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, establishing peace and security is one of the four pillars for rebuilding Liberia. (The other three are revitalizing the economy, developing good governance and the rule of law, and providing infrastructure and basic services.) After 14 years of on-again, off-again fighting followed by 6 years of peace, most Liberians are only marginally optimistic that a return to large-scale violence will be avoided. Such as the words “volatility” and “fragility” used in the Congressional and UNMIL reports emphasize the challenges facing the Liberian government and military as they work to create security within the nation’s borders.

## Military and Police

### *Military*

The Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) were formed in 1962. Before then, security against internal and external threats was handled by the Liberian Frontier Forces, which was internationally criticized during the 1930s for brutally suppressing indigenous communities and securing forced labor for cocoa plantations in Fernando Pó.<sup>303, 304</sup> Prior to



© The U. S. Army  
National Guard mentoring the Armed Forces of Liberia

<sup>301</sup> OpenCRS.com. Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress. Cook, Nicholas. “Liberia’s Post-War Recovery: Key Issues and Developments [p. 12].” 19 February 2009.

<http://opencrs.com/document/RL33185/>

<sup>302</sup> United Nations Security Council. “Nineteenth Progress Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia [pp. 3–4].” 10 August 2009. <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N09/443/44/PDF/N0944344.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>303</sup> *Liberia: A Country Study*, 3rd Ed. Ehrenreich, Frederick. “Chapter 5: National Security [p. 261].” 1984. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>304</sup> AfricaWithin.com. “Bird’s-Eye View of Liberian History and Government.” No date. [http://www.africawithin.com/tour/liberia/hist\\_gov1.htm](http://www.africawithin.com/tour/liberia/hist_gov1.htm)

the coup led by Samuel K. Doe in 1980, the AFL was mostly led by officers from the Americo-Liberian elite. Most soldiers were members of the indigenous groups of the Hinterland. During his regime, the AFL was dominated by members of Doe's Krahn ethnic group. By 2003, at the conclusion of the second Liberian civil war, the AFL was all but disbanded, having been marginalized by Charles Taylor during this conflict.<sup>305</sup>

The peace treaty that marked the end of fighting in 2003 called for the AFL to be reconstituted from scratch. This U.S.-led effort has been carried out on the ground by two private military companies (PMCs) contracted to provide military training and construction of military facilities. An extremely thorough vetting process was put into place for new recruits. The recruitment process also emphasized attaining a representative cross-section of Liberia's ethnic communities, of which 20% would be women. To date, less than 5% of the Liberian army members are women, despite concerted recruitment efforts.<sup>306, 307</sup>

Currently, about 2,000 AFL soldiers have gone through several stages of training.<sup>308</sup> It is presently estimated that these troops will reach full operational capability by mid 2012. They are then expected to take over some of the security responsibilities currently handled by the UNMIL peacekeeping forces.<sup>309</sup> U.S.-led training for a 60-member Liberian Coast Guard is also ongoing.<sup>310</sup>

### *Police*

The Liberian National Police (LNP) is also being reconfigured. Leading this effort is the UNMIL police component. More than 3,600 Liberian police officer recruits have gone through basic training, but achieving full operational capability has been fraught with difficulties.



© Denise Miller  
Liberian police

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<sup>305</sup> International Crisis Group. "Liberia: Uneven Progress in Security Sector Reform [p. 4]." January 2009. [http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/africa/west\\_africa/148\\_liberia\\_\\_\\_uneven\\_progress\\_in\\_security\\_sector\\_reform.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/africa/west_africa/148_liberia___uneven_progress_in_security_sector_reform.pdf)

<sup>306</sup> International Crisis Group. "Liberia: Uneven Progress in Security Sector Reform [pp. 16–17]." January 2009. [http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/africa/west\\_africa/148\\_liberia\\_\\_\\_uneven\\_progress\\_in\\_security\\_sector\\_reform.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/africa/west_africa/148_liberia___uneven_progress_in_security_sector_reform.pdf)

<sup>307</sup> United Nations Security Council. "Nineteenth Progress Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia [p. 4]." 10 August 2009. <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N09/443/44/PDF/N0944344.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>308</sup> International Crisis Group. "Liberia: Uneven Progress in Security Sector Reform [p. 13]." January 2009. [http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/africa/west\\_africa/148\\_liberia\\_\\_\\_uneven\\_progress\\_in\\_security\\_sector\\_reform.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/africa/west_africa/148_liberia___uneven_progress_in_security_sector_reform.pdf)

<sup>309</sup> United Nations Security Council. "Special Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia [p. 6]." 10 June 2009. [http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unmil/S\\_2009\\_299.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unmil/S_2009_299.pdf)

<sup>310</sup> United Nations Security Council. "Special Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia [pp. 6–7]." 10 June 2009. [http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unmil/S\\_2009\\_299.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unmil/S_2009_299.pdf)

Inadequate government budgeting for the police forces has led to a high absenteeism rate and corruption. The budget problem is more pronounced due to shortfalls in donor support, which was to help provide necessary police infrastructure, including basic equipment.<sup>311</sup> In addition, the LNP has been hampered by operational weaknesses at its administrative and management levels.<sup>312</sup>

## U.S.–Liberian Relations

The United States has a long history of close relations with Liberia, predating the creation of the Liberian state. During the Cold War, the two nations were strongly linked, economically and militarily. Several defense cooperation pacts were entered into during this time, and Peace Corps volunteers were heavily involved in Liberian development efforts.<sup>313</sup> This strong, bilateral cooperation continued for several years after Samuel Doe's 1980 coup.



© US Army Africa  
U.S. soldier and Liberian soldiers talking

Between 1960 and 1985, Liberia received more aid from the U.S. on a per-capita basis than any other sub-Saharan African nation.<sup>314, 315</sup> This situation began to change in the late 1980s, when the Doe administration's grim human rights record and economic mismanagement led to a steady decline in U.S. assistance.<sup>316</sup>

U.S.–Liberian relations declined even further during the 1990s to early 2000s. In the late stages of this period, the Taylor regime's destabilizing role in West Africa led to sanctions against Liberia. Since the end of the second civil war in 2003, the U.S. has once again established strong relations with Liberia. Through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), it has contributed assistance for reconstructing Liberia's heavily damaged infrastructure, strengthening its democratic institutions, and developing and improving Liberian social welfare programs.<sup>317</sup> The U.S. has also

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<sup>311</sup> International Crisis Group. "Liberia: Uneven Progress in Security Sector Reform [p. 19]." January 2009. [http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/africa/west\\_africa/148\\_liberia\\_\\_\\_uneven\\_progress\\_in\\_security\\_sector\\_reform.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/africa/west_africa/148_liberia___uneven_progress_in_security_sector_reform.pdf)

<sup>312</sup> United Nations Security Council. "Special Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia [p. 7]." 10 June 2009. [http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unmil/S\\_2009\\_299.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unmil/S_2009_299.pdf)

<sup>313</sup> Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress. Cook, Nicholas. "1989–1997 Civil War, Post-War Developments, and U.S. Relations [p. 19]." 31 December 2003. <http://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metacrs8431/m1/>

<sup>314</sup> Public Broadcasting System. Duva, Anjali Mitter. "Liberia and the United States: A Complex Relationship." 2002. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/liberia/essays/uspolicy/index.html>

<sup>315</sup> Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress. Cook, Nicholas. "1989–1997 Civil War, Post-War Developments, and U.S. Relations [p. 20]." 31 December 2003. <http://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metacrs8431/m1/>

<sup>316</sup> Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress. Cook, Nicholas. "1989–1997 Civil War, Post-War Developments, and U.S. Relations [pp. 20–21]." 31 December 2003. <http://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metacrs8431/m1/>

<sup>317</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Libya." September 2009. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/6618.htm>

invested several hundred million dollars toward reforming and training the Liberian military.<sup>318</sup> In 2008, the U.S. wrote off USD 394 million of Liberian debt, making it the first bilateral creditor to take such a step.<sup>319, 320</sup>

Illustrating the strong ties between the U.S. and Liberia, the United States is home to one of the largest Liberian expatriate populations outside West Africa. This group of Liberians is sometimes informally labeled the “Liberian diaspora,” and includes resettled refugees, asylum seekers, and students, as well as permanent residents and Liberians who have become naturalized U.S. citizens.<sup>321</sup>

Many of Liberia’s present governmental leaders, including President Sirleaf and Vice President Joseph Boakai, have lived for periods of time in the United States either as students or in exile.



© United Nations Photo  
VP Joseph Nyumah Boakai speaking

## Relations with Neighboring Countries

Liberia is in the center of one of the world’s most politically unstable regions. The four nations of this corner of West Africa (Liberia, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, and Sierra Leone) were all affected by rebellions and conflicts during the 1990s and 2000s. At one point, the United Nations had ongoing peacekeeping missions in three of the countries.

### *Côte d’Ivoire*

During most of the 1990s, Côte d’Ivoire was spared the violence that was rampant in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and, to a lesser extent, Guinea. Yet it was involved in the events in its neighboring countries. As Charles Taylor’s forces fought for control of Liberia, Côte d’Ivoire formed a rear base for him that provided safe haven and a corridor for arms shipments, and even allegedly provided venues for Taylor’s diamond-smuggling activities.<sup>322</sup> A

1999 military coup in Côte d’Ivoire, the nation’s first ever, signaled that it might be



© United Nations Photo  
Disarmament and demobilization in Côte d’Ivoire

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<sup>318</sup> OpenCRS.com. Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress. Cook, Nicholas. “Liberia’s Post-War Recovery: Key Issues and Developments [p. 16].” 19 February 2009.

<http://opencrs.com/document/RL33185/>

<sup>319</sup> OpenCRS.com. Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress. Cook, Nicholas. “Liberia’s Post-War Recovery: Key Issues and Developments [p. 55].” 19 February 2009.

<http://opencrs.com/document/RL33185/>

<sup>320</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State. “Background Note: Libya.” September 2009.

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/6618.htm>

<sup>321</sup> Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights. “Liberian Diaspora Overview.” No date.

[http://liberiatrc.mnadvocates.org/sites/cc8c0ee4-1ad1-49b7-9c2a-0a632726e1c3/uploads/d.\\_\\_\\_\\_Liberian\\_Diaspora\\_Overview\\_2.pdf](http://liberiatrc.mnadvocates.org/sites/cc8c0ee4-1ad1-49b7-9c2a-0a632726e1c3/uploads/d.____Liberian_Diaspora_Overview_2.pdf)

<sup>322</sup> Daily Observer. “Ghadaffi, Compaore Named External Actors in Liberian Conflict.” 14 December 2009.  
<http://www.liberianobserver.com/node/3418>

moving toward its own period of instability. In September 2002, as Liberia's second civil war entered its final bloody stages, Côte d'Ivoire was suddenly swept into internal conflict after a failed coup led to a full-scale rebellion in the northern and western parts of the country. A peace treaty signed in 2005 and a subsequent power-sharing agreement reached in 2007 have still not led to the full disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of the forces that participated in the war—a precondition for holding long-awaited presidential elections.<sup>323</sup> These elections, originally scheduled for October 2005, have been delayed numerous times.<sup>324</sup>

Today, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire maintain stable relations, though one security concern is potential instability in Côte d'Ivoire's western regions. Here, a large number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) will soon return to the lands they abandoned during the years of conflict that effectively split the country in two. During the IDPs' years of absence, these lands have in many cases been taken over by others who, under Côte d'Ivoire's land laws, may now hold the upper hand in asserting ownership rights.<sup>325</sup>

The western regions of Côte d'Ivoire are home to the largest remaining group of Liberian refugees. Of this group, 14,200 refugees, or approximately 60% of the Liberian refugees in Côte d'Ivoire as of January 2009, were issued residence permits in 2008.<sup>326, 327</sup> These permits, valid for 5 years, allow the Liberian refugees to work legally in Côte d'Ivoire and to move freely within the country.<sup>328</sup>

### *Guinea*

For the first 40 years of its history, until December 2008, Guinea was run by two strongmen, Sékou Touré (1958–1984) and Lansana Conté (1984–2008). During Liberia's second civil war, Guinea served as a site for many of the refugee camps for Liberians and Sierra Leoneans. Guinea also was a staging area for Liberian rebel groups. Attacks on the rebel bases, Guinean armed forces, and the refugee camps by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), an insurgency group in Sierra Leone supported by Liberian leader Charles Taylor, threatened to fully bring Guinea into the escalating regional conflicts during the early 2000s.<sup>329, 330, 331</sup>



© Rob Rogoyki  
Guinean women and children

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<sup>323</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Côte d'Ivoire." November 2009. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2846.htm>

<sup>324</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Côte d'Ivoire." November 2009. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2846.htm>

<sup>325</sup> University of San Diego, Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies. *Peace & Justice Update*, Vol. 23, No. 9. "Côte d'Ivoire [p. 7]." 4 December 2009.

<http://www.sandiego.edu/peacestudies/documents/ipj/FINAL12.04.09.doc>

<sup>326</sup> U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants. "Côte d'Ivoire." No date.

<http://www.refugees.org/countryreports.aspx?id=2355>

<sup>327</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees. "Global Trends 2008: Annexes." 16 June 2009.

<http://www.unhcr.org/4a375c426.html>

<sup>328</sup> U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants. "Côte d'Ivoire." No date.

<http://www.refugees.org/countryreports.aspx?id=2355>

In 2009, Guinea's political instability increased. This instability could lead to military factions taking up arms. A massacre of 157 civilian protesters and mass rapes of as many as 100 women by Guinean soldiers led to international condemnation and a December assassination attempt on Guinea's military leader, Moussa Dadis Camara, by the head of his presidential guards. As of February 2010, Camara remains hospitalized in Morocco, and there are fears of civil war if he returns.<sup>332</sup>

Because of the tendency for local conflicts in West Africa to spill across borders, the Liberian government is greatly concerned about the events in Guinea. The Liberian government is also quite sensitive to any claims that it is supporting armed factions in Guinea.<sup>333</sup> In December 2009, a published report of gun-running by the Liberian government to Guinea (a charge supported only by a single unnamed member of the Guinean military) was viewed seriously enough by the government to warrant briefly arresting and interrogating the publisher and printer of the newspaper.<sup>334</sup>

### *Sierra Leone*

During the 1990s and early 2000s, Liberia and Sierra Leone both suffered brutal conflicts. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF), a group that used diamonds to purchase arms from the Liberian government of Charles Taylor and other dealers, became associated the most with the atrocities in Sierra Leone. As a result of his sponsorship of this group, Charles Taylor currently stands on trial in The Hague on 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity.



© Gene Bonventre  
Helicopter of the Sierra Leone Air Force

The fighting in Sierra Leone ended in 2002, a year before Liberia's own civil war finally ended. The two countries were then among the poorest and most physically devastated nations in the world. More than 6 years later, both are still struggling to reconstruct their infrastructure, and tackle poverty and unemployment. Relations between the two nations

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<sup>329</sup> The Norwegian Council for Africa. Inter Press Service, Samb, Sailou. "Guinea: Aid for War-Ravaged Areas Elusive." 9 May 2005. <http://www.afrika.no/Detailed/9721.html>

<sup>330</sup> American University. Inventory of Conflict and Environment. Hofstatter, Benjamin. "Liberia: Trade, Environment, and Conflict." May 2001. <http://www1.american.edu/ted/ice/liberia-diamonds.htm>

<sup>331</sup> AfrolNews.com. "Rebel Attacks Threaten Further Destabilisation in West Africa." 4 February 2001. [http://www.afrol.com/html/News2001/gui003\\_reg\\_conflict.htm](http://www.afrol.com/html/News2001/gui003_reg_conflict.htm)

<sup>332</sup> VOANews.com. Stearns, Scott. "UN Report Blames Guinea Military for Killing Civilians." 21 December 2009. <http://www1.voanews.com/english/news/afrika/west/UN-Guinea-Military-Killing-Civilians-21DEC09--79839407.html>

<sup>333</sup> Executive Mansion, Republic of Liberia. "Guinean Government Delegation Holds Talks With Liberian Leader in Monrovia." 19 August 2009. [http://www.emansion.gov.lr/press.php?news\\_id=1298](http://www.emansion.gov.lr/press.php?news_id=1298)

<sup>334</sup> Reporters Without Borders. "Publisher and Printer Held for Past Few Days by National Security Agency." 16 December 2009. <http://www.rsf.org/Publisher-and-printer-held-for.html>

have improved greatly since the fighting ended.<sup>335</sup> A symbol of this new spirit of cooperation is the Trans-Boundary Peace Park announced in 2009, which will connect the Gola Forest Reserve in Sierra Leone with the Lofa and Foya National Forests in Liberia.<sup>336</sup>

## Terrorist Groups and Activity

The factions fighting during Liberia's two civil wars in the 1990s and early 2000s carried out innumerable acts designed to terrorize local populations. Although this form of home-grown terrorism was rampant during the war years, there have never been any acts of transnational terrorism carried out within Liberia.<sup>337</sup> During the Charles Taylor era, it was alleged that diamond brokers representing Al Qaeda and Hezbollah used a safe house in Monrovia to launder terrorist monetary assets, by purchasing "conflict diamonds" from Sierra Leonean mines controlled by the RUF.<sup>338, 339</sup> But a subsequent U.S. intelligence investigation into the published allegations found no evidence to support these claims.<sup>340</sup>



© Gene Bonventre  
Rebels of the Revolutionary United Front

## Issues Affecting Stability

### *Unemployment and Poverty*

Liberia's high rate of unemployment in the formal sector of the economy, usually estimated between 80% and 85%, is an ongoing concern.<sup>341</sup> The United Nations reports that most former combatants in the Liberian civil wars remain unemployed. This may create a base of dissatisfaction that could be exploited for violent resistance in the



© United Nations Photo  
Destroyed home due to war

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<sup>335</sup> Executive Mansion, Republic of Liberia. "Liberia and Sierra Leone Extol Strong Bond as Sierra Leone Celebrates 48th Independence Anniversary [*sic*]." 29 April 2009. [http://www.emansion.gov.lr/press.php?news\\_id=1153](http://www.emansion.gov.lr/press.php?news_id=1153)

<sup>336</sup> BirdlifeInternational.org. "Trans-Boundary Rainforest Park Will Be a Symbol of Peace and Stability." 15 May 2009. [http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2009/05/peace\\_park\\_west\\_africa.html](http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2009/05/peace_park_west_africa.html)

<sup>337</sup> Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism. Country Reports on Terrorism 2008. "Chapter 2: Country Reports: Africa Overview." 30 April 2009. <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2008/122412.htm>

<sup>338</sup> Washington Post. Farah, Douglas. "Al Qaeda Cash Tied to Diamond Trade." 2 November 2001. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A27281-2001Nov1>

<sup>339</sup> The Guardian. The Observer. Hill, Amelia. "Bin Laden's \$20M 'Blood Diamonds' Deals." 20 October 2002. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/oct/20/alqaida.terrorism>

<sup>340</sup> 911WorkingGroup.org. "Allegations of Al Qaeda Trafficking in Conflict Diamonds." 18 July 2003. [http://911workinggroup.org/foia/FBI/1006600-000 --- Chapter 5, 911 Al Qaeda Aims at the American Homeland FBI Report Allegations of Al Qaeda Trafficking in Co.PDF](http://911workinggroup.org/foia/FBI/1006600-000---Chapter5,911AlQaedaAimsattheAmericanHomelandFBIReportAllegationsofAlQaedaTraffickinginCo.PDF)

<sup>341</sup> OpenCRS.com. Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress. Cook, Nicholas. "Liberia's Post-War Recovery: Key Issues and Developments [p. 8]." 19 February 2009. <http://opencrs.com/document/RL33185/>

absence of economic improvement.<sup>342, 343</sup> A recent survey in Lofa County, where heavy fighting took place during the second civil war, found that slightly over two thirds of ex-combatants could not envision circumstances in which they would take up arms again. Among the remaining one third of respondents, the most widely cited reason for potentially returning to battle is to obtain relief from poverty and joblessness.<sup>344</sup> Former fighters were promised reintegration job training and subsistence assistance as part of the demobilization process. Although most ex-combatants have received such training and assistance, several thousand have not. With job opportunities limited, there have been reports of some ex-fighters turning to armed robbery, or illegally profiting from natural resources.<sup>345</sup>

### *Capacity Building and Budgetary Limitations*

The Liberian government has demonstrated its willingness to develop strong governmental and judicial institutions, improve security, address corruption, and establish governmental authority and services throughout the nation. However, such efforts require significant investment, and Liberia's budget does not presently have sufficient funding to achieve these goals. Aid from countries, and multinational organizations such as the World Bank and the African Development Bank, has been critical in filling the gap and allowing progress. Nevertheless, building upon these positive achievements will stretch Liberia's budget capacity for the foreseeable future. In some areas, such as development of the judicial sector, Liberia faces "an almost complete dependence on donor funding."<sup>346</sup> Governmental funding for the Armed Forces of Liberia and the Liberian National Police has increased by nearly one third in the fiscal year 2009/2010 budget. But



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<sup>342</sup> OpenCRS.com. Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress. Cook, Nicholas. "Liberia's Post-War Recovery: Key Issues and Developments [p. 8]." 19 February 2009. <http://opencrs.com/document/RL33185/>

<sup>343</sup> United Nations Security Council. "Nineteenth Progress Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia [p. 4]." 10 August 2009. <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N09/443/44/PDF/N0944344.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>344</sup> United States Institute for Peace. Hill, Richard and Gwendolyn Taylor, Jonathan Temin. "Would You Fight Again?: Understanding Liberian Ex-Combatant Reintegration [pp. 3–4]." September 2008. <http://www.usip.org/files/resources/sr211.pdf>

<sup>345</sup> OpenCRS.com. Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress. Cook, Nicholas. "Liberia's Post-War Recovery: Key Issues and Developments [p. 8]." 19 February 2009. <http://opencrs.com/document/RL33185/>

<sup>346</sup> United Nations Security Council. "Nineteenth Progress Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia [p. 8]." 10 August 2009. <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N09/443/44/PDF/N0944344.pdf?OpenElement>

strong budgetary support of the crucial security sector may be difficult to sustain because of Liberia's many other development priorities.<sup>347, 348</sup>

### *Land Disputes*

In areas of Liberia that were particularly hard hit by the fighting in the civil wars, conflicts over land ownership continue to spark violence. Many plots of land in these areas were abandoned at some point during the long period of fighting, and returning villagers and farmers have found others occupying or farming their properties. In some areas, these disputes have the potential to reignite the ethnic divisions that were on display during the years of fighting. One such area is Nimba County, where Mandingos who fled the city of Ganta found their buildings either destroyed or occupied by local Gio and Mano residents upon their return.<sup>349</sup> In August 2009, the Land Commission Act was signed into law by President Sirleaf, creating a governmental body tasked to address the many issues and conflicts tied to land tenure in Liberia.<sup>350</sup>

### **Looking Ahead**

Two important decisions lie ahead for Liberia. One is the 2011 elections. President Sirleaf, who stated when she ran for office in 2005 that she would serve only one term, has increasingly indicated her openness to run for a second term in 2011. The Liberian Constitution allows a second term; but the decision is complicated by the extent to which the recommendations of the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Report are carried out. This controversial report placed Sirleaf, along with several prominent Liberian officials, on a list of individuals to be banned from holding public office for 30 years because of their activities during 1989–2003. Sirleaf was included on this list because she assisted Charles Taylor financially during the early years of his revolt. Later, she rejected Taylor's activities and ran against him in the 1997 presidential election. After the election, Taylor accused her of treason, forcing Sirleaf into exile.<sup>351</sup>



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<sup>347</sup> OpenCRS.com. Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress. Cook, Nicholas. "Liberia's Post-War Recovery: Key Issues and Developments [p. 19]." 19 February 2009. <http://opencrs.com/document/RL33185/>

<sup>348</sup> United Nations Security Council. "Nineteenth Progress Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia [p. 7]." 10 August 2009. <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N09/443/44/PDF/N0944344.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>349</sup> International Crisis Group. "Liberia: Uneven Progress in Security Sector Reform [p. 8]." January 2009. [http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/africa/west\\_africa/148\\_liberia\\_\\_\\_uneven\\_progress\\_in\\_security\\_sector\\_reform.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/africa/west_africa/148_liberia___uneven_progress_in_security_sector_reform.pdf)

<sup>350</sup> AllAfrica.com. "Liberia: Land Commission Act Signed Into Law." 4 August 2009. <http://allafrica.com/stories/200908041004.html>

<sup>351</sup> CBC News. "Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf: Liberia's 'Iron Lady.'" 28 March 2006. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/liberia/sirleaf.html>

The other decision facing the Liberian government is deciding how to proceed with the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Report. Among the report's conclusions was that an Extraordinary Criminal Court be created to prosecute 116 of the "most notorious perpetrators" of human rights violations during Liberia's years of civil war, as well as the leaders of the warring factions.<sup>352</sup> Included on the list of those to be tried are 3 of Liberia's 30 senators. Senator Prince Johnson, the notorious warlord who ordered and filmed the torture-killing of Samuel Doe in 1990, and Sundaygar Dearboy, one of Liberia's most popular hip-co musicians, are both named. While the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has maintained that Liberian law requires that their recommendations be carried out, there is a vigorous debate about whether carrying out the criminal trials and restricting future political activities are in the nation's best interests.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Republic of Liberia. *Consolidated Final Report*, Vol. 2. "12. Recommendations on Accountability: Extraordinary Criminal Court [pp. 349–350]." 30 June 2009. [https://www.trcofliberia.org/reports/final/volume-two\\_layout-1.pdf](https://www.trcofliberia.org/reports/final/volume-two_layout-1.pdf)

<sup>353</sup> AllAfrica.com. Togba, Ellis. "Liberia: TRC Heightens Tension, Suspicion." 9 December 2009. <http://allafrica.com/stories/200912090640.html>