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Colonialism, Postcolonialism, and the Drive for Social Justice: A Historical Analysis of Identity Based Conflicts in the First Republic of Liberia

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Colonialism, Postcolonialism, and the Drive for Social Justice: A Historical Analysis of Identity

Based Conflicts in the First Republic of Liberia

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Abstract

Liberia was an American settler based colony of freed African Americans who were commissioned with the task of establishing a Western form of governance on the African continent. The result of this venture was the colonization of indigenous Africans and almost 200 years of identity based conflict and colonial oppression. Thus, the question driving this research was how to achieve social justice in postcolonial Liberia. In pursuit of this question, the researcher seeks to develop an array of perspectives from within the context of Liberia regarding social justice through the conceptual framework of postcolonialism. Furthermore, it is the intention of this paper to also construct a historical analysis of the First Republic of Liberia that provides a polycentric approach to constructing Liberian history in order to examine the pursuit of social justice through multiple perspectives. In so doing, a history of the First Republic can be realized that demonstrates a shared experience by all Liberians in the pursuit of social justice, albeit through very different means. In conclusion, a contemporary synthesis on social justice is developed that is informed by this history and also provides a united path forward for all Liberians collectively.

Keywords: Liberia, colonialism, postcolonialism, social justice, identity, culture, governance, historical analysis

Colonialism, Postcolonialism, and the Drive for Social Justice: A Historical Analysis of Identity Based Conflicts in the First Republic of Liberia

Introduction

After 14 years of conflict, the Liberian civil wars ended in August of 2003 with the signing of the Accra Peace Agreement by all remaining conflict parties in Liberia (Kroc Institute, 2015). Namely, the Government of Liberia (GoL), the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) as well as all political parties and civil society organizations present agreed to an immediate and permanent ceasefire in conjunction with the comprehensive peace agreement (UNSC 2003). Thus, with this renewed peace, Liberians ended an ethnically charged violent conflict that killed 250,000 Liberians and displaced another 500,000 Liberians as refugees (Ellis, 2005; Tellewoyan, 2006; Global Economic Symposium, 2009). Since then, the Second Republic of Liberia has been on a path to not only rebuild their country's infrastructure, but also their economy, their institutions, and their identity as Liberians. Indeed, the Liberian identity seems to be the cornerstone of not only Liberia's violent conflicts from its recent and historical past, but also the key to developing a strong and independent nation moving forward. Much of the structural and cultural inequalities that challenge the post-conflict state of Liberia today can be traced back to the inception of Liberia as a nation in 1822; and if there is going to be progress moving forward, the social and political cleavage between the Americo Liberians and the indigenous Liberians needs to be repaired.

In order to accomplish this transformation, however, a comprehensive understanding of Liberia's history that includes both Americo Liberian and indigenous Liberian perspectives needs to be reconciled if a united identity for all Liberians can emerge. In other words, Liberians need to share a collective history that provides a foundation for all Liberians to be united as one

people. Johnathan Sacks (2015) argues that “our inclination to act well towards others, whatever its source, tends to be confined to those whom we share a common identity” (p. 31). Through this Darwinist logic, Sacks (2015) continues by stating that “The group may be small or large, but in practice as opposed to theory, we tend to see those not like us as less than fully human” (p. 31). The challenge, then, not just for Liberians, but humanity as a whole, is in recognizing each other as a part of the same group—the same collective species—the same humanity. Only through this measure can we begin to transform violent identity based conflicts into non-violent conflicts which are managed through constructive understanding and a respect for diversity that acknowledges our differences while also accepting our shared humanity. Thus, I will argue in this paper that although Liberians share a common heritage that has the potential to unite them together, they have historically failed to acknowledge their shared history and identity due to centuries of violent upheaval caused by the trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonial oppression imposed by the West. Furthermore, it is through this sociocultural divide instrumentalized by the West through orientalism and white supremacist ideologies that the freed black slaves who returned to West Africa (now known as Americo Liberians) were alienated from their own African heritage, thus, ensuring that the violent cleavage between the Americo Liberians and indigenous Liberians would be cemented in the structural and cultural elements of Liberian society.

Accordingly, this paper intends to perform a historical analysis of the First Republic of Liberia which seeks to uncover a shared pursuit for social justice by both indigenous and Americo Liberians in the face of slavery, colonialism, and the challenges of a postcolonial state besieged by greater Western powers. In order to do so, I will be employing the principles of postcolonial theory as a conceptual framework, while also providing an array of Western,

indigenous, and Americo Liberian perspectives on social justice that will inform the historical context developed through the analysis. A brief summary of the principles found within postcolonial theory will be provided in the next section of this paper, followed by multiple historical perspectives on social justice, which will lay the groundwork for the historical analysis of the First Republic of Liberia. In conclusion, a contemporary synthesis of these differing perspectives will be provided that illuminates the current pursuit for social justice occurring in the Second Republic of Liberia today. This final synthesis will act as a demonstration for how the shared history of all Liberians has assisted in developing a collective drive for social justice that all Liberians can participate within moving into the 21st century.

Conceptual Framework

The two primary conceptual frameworks I will be working with are postcolonialism and social justice. And although these two frameworks do overlap in significant ways, they both serve a purpose in terms of approaching the literature that I will be reviewing and also in how I will be analyzing the historical and contemporary context of Liberia. In short, I will be applying the theories of postcolonialism to this paper itself, while I attempt to address the struggle for social justice throughout the First Republic of Liberia.

Postcolonialism. There are three primary authors that I will address here who established the foundations of postcolonialism: Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha. To be sure, these authors are not the only voices in this field. However, most of the writing and critical analysis performed in the discourse of postcolonialism rely on the concepts formulated by these authors. Thus, a brief review is in order.

Edward Said's seminal work titled *Orientalism* is seen by most as the primary source for the foundation of postcolonial critical theory. To begin, Said reframes the western academic

institutionalization of orientalism and colonialism from that of a European perspective to the perspective of indigenous people who were the subjects of these western institutions. In essence, Said (1979) argues that the West has denied the East (and for all intents and purposes, Africa and the Americas) the ability to define or represent their own cultures in favor of definitions that enforce the terms of the West for the sake of economic and political advantage. Where this concept is developed further is in the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Specifically, Spivak (1994) addresses the subversive and often unconscious impact of Eurocentric academic literature on the “colonial subject.” In this way, Spivak argues that by addressing systems of power and oppression from within the European context of “civilization,” we, in fact legitimize that context as “concrete experience”—as what is—as reality. Therefore, the challenge of addressing experience that falls outside of this paradigm becomes that much more distant from an actualized form that is, in and of itself, a tangible reality—particularly one that is deemed legitimate. This argument is critical to the historical analysis being performed, here, on Liberia. One of the greatest challenges facing indigenous Liberians as well as the Americo Liberians is in framing their own culture and history. Indeed, being denied this ability prevents them from constructing new identities that must be developed through an informed perspective of their own historical past. In order to subvert this denial of Liberian perspectives, this historical analysis will be developed primarily from Liberian source material that gives voices to indigenous and Americo Liberian perspectives from within Western academia.

This position can't be held entirely from within Said and Spivak's arguments alone, however. Said (1979) exposed the false dichotomy between the West and the East and its subversive impacts on cultures outside the West. And Spivak (1994) decentralized the discourse by identifying and cataloguing sub-groups within these macro perspectives, therefore,

personalizing and informing the individualized identities of people who exist on a stratum within and between these paradigms. However, where the position within this paper becomes actualized is within Homi K. Bhabha's (1994) perspective, who adds to the decentralization of the discourse by introducing the concept of hybridity.

For Bhabha (1994), the postcolonial discourse exists within a hybrid context, where notions of a binary existence are rejected through a close examination of culture as multifaceted. In this regard, the postcolonial perspective departs from the sociological and economic theories of underdevelopment and dependency theory in favor of a more complex social structure. This notion of rejecting binary structures of opposition in favor of the "transnational as the translational" is where we begin to understand Bhabha's theory of hybridity. It is from such poly-relational position that "the postcolonial prerogative seeks to affirm and extend a new collaborative dimension, both within the margins of the nation-space and across boundaries between nations and peoples" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 175). What this means for the postcolonial discourse is that the examination of the postcolonial experience extends to that of the transnational as well as the transgenerational experience. In this way, the identities of postcolonial subjects are, by their very nature, a hybrid identity that translates between fluid cultural values and systems, thus creating space for new identities to emerge and new cultures to blend with the old. Thus, as the Liberian experience is multi-faceted, multicultural, and transnational in scope, so too will this historical analysis pull from an array of perspectives and histories with the intention of creating a more dynamic and polycentric discourse on Liberia.

Perspectives on Social Justice

Western perspectives on social justice in Liberia. The first article of the 1847 constitution of Liberia states that "All men are born equally free and independent, and have

certain natural, inherent and unalienable rights; among which, are the rights of enjoying and defending life and liberty, of acquiring, possessing and protecting property and of pursuing and obtaining safety and happiness” (Constitution Review Commission, 2019). Here we see the fundamental principles of human rights, private property, and the philosophical underpinnings of natural law. Indeed, the second article is worth stating here as well: “All power is inherent in the people; all free governments are instituted by their authority and for their benefit and they have the right to alter and reform the same when their safety and happiness require it” (Ibid.). This, too, is essential to Western perspectives of social justice, as it describes the social contract between sovereign governments and their people with the added stipulation that it is in the right of the people to change their government if it no longer protects their interests or serves their benefit. The use of a constitution, itself, is inherent in this logic. The three primary modern western thinkers who developed these ideas are Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

These founding principles applied within the Liberian constitution of 1847 appear on a spectrum that helps define the concept of social justice. Clearly, we can see that all three of these philosophers agree on the need for a social contract, and that such a contract is constructed by and for the benefit of the people who enter into that contract (Friend, 2019). However, the underlying assumptions made about the “natural” state of human beings remains contested, where Hobbes and (to a degree) Locke see the state of nature as inherently unjust, with Rousseau arguing that it is civilization which has created injustice in the world and it is our prerogative to work together in order to reclaim the freedom and liberty that has been taken away from us. And although these notions of justice go a long way in constructing a usable framework, here, the underlying assumptions made about a universal “natural state” of humanity, coupled with very

strong biases towards any peoples who operate outside of these parameters for “civilization” makes for a limited perspective on social justice in Liberia. In short, only those Liberians who adhere to these social perspectives can be included within this framework, which, as we will see, led to significant injustices in Liberia.

Americo Liberian perspectives on social justice. We can see many of the Western perspectives represented above in the constitution reflected in the Americo Liberian perspective as well through the nationalistic Declaration of Independence written by Hilary Teage, which cries out against the injustice perpetrated towards Americo Liberians when they lived in the US—a declaration that arguably represents the attitudes and perspectives of the larger Americo-Liberian population at the time (Brown, 1981). Teage’s statements on being “debarred by law from all the rights and privileges of men,” on being “shut out from civil office...excluded from all participation in the government...taxed without consent” on being “forced to contribute to the resources of a country, which gave us no protection,” and on being “made a separate and distinct class...against us every avenue to improvement was effectually closed” (Constitution Review Commission, 2019 p. 1) are all examples of entrenched notions of social justice personified here by the injustice of being denied them. And although these notions of social justice still fit squarely within a Western perspective, they are expressed by one of the founding fathers of the First Republic of Liberia and from the contextual vantage point of a newly postcolonial nation, filled with the hope and ambition of creating a society which grants freedom and liberty. “Liberia is an asylum from the most grinding oppression,” states Teage—one that,

indulged the pleasing hope that we [Liberians] would be permitted to exercise and improve those faculties, which impart to man his dignity...and to evince to all who despise, ridicule and oppress our race, that we possess with them a common nature, are with them susceptible of equal refinement, and capable of equal advancement in all that adorns and dignifies man. (Ibid.)

The words of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau seem to reverberate and echo across each of these impassioned declarations but from the position of desire and want of approval rather than a statement of entitlement. It would seem that Hilary Teage, and those who shared his perspective, believed that they were finally being given the opportunity to be treated as equal and to be granted the justice that is demanded by obtaining the status of a first class citizen who holds the rights and privileges of full participation within society. The right to self-determination, and to be recognized as a part of the “civilized” world sound strongly throughout this Declaration of Independence, which speaks of a keen awareness for pursuing social justice.

And, yet, this perspective is still confined to the same Eurocentric limitations identified within the modern Western perspectives of social justice—limitations that would, ultimately, lead the Americo Liberians to identify the indigenous ethnic groups of Liberia as uncivilized—both as a way to further justify their own legitimacy to the rights and privileges they were fighting for, and also as a way to further advance their capacity to access those privileges. More discussion on this will be forthcoming later in this paper, but for now, it’s enough to understand how many Americo Liberians perceived social justice during the 19th century and—more to the point—what they believed they needed to do to achieve it, which was to live up to the standards of Western civilization and all the trappings that came with it.

Indigenous Liberian perspectives on social justice. One example of social justice is given by Syrulwa Somah—an indigenous Liberian himself from the Bassa ethnic group. Somah describes the guiding principles that make up the social fabric of the Bassa people. In regards to these principles he makes the assertion that “receiving another person as one’s brother permeates every social fabric of Africa” (Somah, 2003). For the Bassa people specifically, Somah (2003) states that it was forbidden in Bassaland to lock a door of one’s house (Ibid.). He provides a

saying of his people which is “of people, or to which you have the keys,” which he explains to mean “one brother would give the keys of his gbo (house) to another, permitting him to act as he saw fit and allow him to help himself to the food of brothers and friends” (p. 4). This expression is integral to what Somah interprets as humanism, a concept borrowed from Western thought in order to reflect the underpinnings of the Bassa culture. Herein, Somah (2003) describes the social makeup of the Bassa people as “I for you, you for me, and all for one another”—a concept that Somah argues is why “a wholesome, functioning society, according to the Bassa, begins with the whole village, which is responsible for molding the mind of the community” (p. 5). Somah (2003) argues that this method of social cohesion and solidarity is why the Bassa people needed so few social laws, and he also makes the bold argument that “many man-made laws in Western societies are set up to create criminals in order to justify why they need the format of their leadership” (p. 5)—a notion that seems to agree with Rousseau.

From Somah (2003) we get two more guiding principles of the Bassa people, which are “nonpartyism” and “gradualism”. Nonpartyism is quite a clean break from Western democracy, where Somah (2003) states that there were no political parties in traditional Bassa society, in large part due to the practices of social solidarity mentioned above. Somah (2003) goes on to explain how many African leaders began to participate in nationalism and political parties in reaction to imperialism, where traditional African leaders fought to protect their dignity from the “smirks and smiles, its paternalism, and condescension” coming from Western powers (p. 7). This, Somah (2003) claims, is why political parties exist in Africa, and that it is now time to return to the cultural practices of collective social development based on the principles of humanism. Somah (2003) argues that this is possible through his third principle of gradualism, which is a social process for consensus building within communities that requires the full

participation of every community member in order to ensure solidarity. To capture the full scope of this principle, an explanation by Somah (2003) is provided below:

If a decision is for the best, it must be for the highest good. On the other hand, in case of a bad decision, no leaf is left unturned in the quest to remedy the situation. All noses must be counted, and all words must be spoken. All songs must be sung. Proverbs or parables must be exhausted to make the doubtful change and the wise wiser. There must be no imposition, partiality, or corrosion to show cleverness to a point where justice is miscarried. (pp. 8-9).

In this way, we see, as Somah (2003) puts it, a political democracy employed that affords every citizen full participation in the decision making process of their government. It is a process that is not based on political competition, but rather, social collaboration, and it has profound implications for framing concepts of social justice in Liberia. And although this perspective on social justice does not incorporate all of the different indigenous methods found in Liberia (indeed, to address them all would escape the scope of this paper), it does go a long way in providing insight into the fundamental differences and (in some cases) similarities between Western perspectives and indigenous perspectives on social justice.

Summary of social justice perspectives. So there are a lot of voices in this paper now, each with their own perspective and all with unique contributions that hold significance in framing social justice in Liberia. With these voices, a complex matrix of theoretical principles have been introduced. There is the Western philosophy of natural law with multiple perspectives offered that hold strong implications on the subjects of humanity and how “civilization” is defined. Social contract theory also stands at the forefront of many perspectives, where government authority, accountability, and egalitarianism contribute to notions of good governance. Still further are the social constructs of collectivism, pluralism, and humanism, which present a much more complex social justice framework that help to shape the interpersonal and inter-communal relationships within Liberian society. Then, of course, there

are the more political perspectives of equality, nonpartyism, and gradualism. To be sure, these are not all the Liberian voices that need to be heard. However, these voices do represent a polycentric perspective on what social justice might represent for many Liberians.

In short, the value of collective social organization, where all are represented together, seems to hold the greatest significance for indigenous Liberians. This indigenous perspective includes collective land ownership, a communal distribution of resources, and relies heavily on familial notions of leadership. Whereas, individual freedoms and liberty that grants each person basic inalienable rights and privileges regarding land, property, and social status drive the perspectives of Americo Liberians. As we will see in the historical analysis below, these conflicting views on social justice were a primary cause of many conflicts between indigenous and Americo Liberians, as both groups struggled to achieve their own form of social justice. A contemporary perspective on social justice within Liberia by Amos Sawyer will follow the historical analysis, as many of the ideas and solutions are derived from Liberia's complex and violent history.

A Historical Analysis: Colonialism, Postcolonialism and the First Republic of Liberia

To perform this analysis, I intend to provide a historical accounting of Liberia from the vantage point of prominent indigenous and Americo Liberian voices within each time-period. I will also (occasionally) be pulling from American and European perspectives that were of considerable influence within Liberia. This accounting will begin in 1815, just before the ACS was initially founded, and end in 1985 at the tragic conclusion of the First Republic of Liberia, covering major historical timeframes that mark significant developments in the Liberian discourse on social justice.

But before I offer this historical analysis, it is necessary to provide a basic understanding of the different groups that will be covered. There are, of course, the Americo Liberians, which have already been introduced, but the indigenous Liberians have yet to be developed properly. I have mentioned some ethnic groups in passing and provided an in-depth perspective from the Bassa ethnic group, but there are many other indigenous tribes of Liberia that also need to be represented. In short, the most commonly referenced number of ethnic groups (or tribes) mentioned in Liberia is sixteen, which is determined by different language groups. (Liebenow, 1987; Ellis, 2001; Sawyer, 2005; Wulah, 2005). These sixteen tribes are the Belles, Gbandes, Loma, Mende, Mano, Gio, Kpelle, Gola, Kissi, Mandingo, Vai, Bassa, Grebo, Krahn/Sapo, Dei, and Kru (Best, 1974; Liebenow, 1987; Ellis, 2001; Sawyer, 2005; Wulah, 2005).

It is also important to get a sense for the rich heritage of these ethnic groups. It is believed, for example, that the Bassa, Gola, and Kissi could have been descendants of Egyptian pharaohs (Wulah, 2005). The Grebo and Krahn are also suspected of being descendants of the Nubians. What's more, the Gbande, Loma, Kpelle, Gola, and Mende tribes are believed to have originally come from the Mali Empire, and the Mandingo, being a part of the Malinke, are descendants of the Ghana Empire. The Vai are also of the Mande-speaking group and are in close relation to the Mandingo, connecting them to the Ghana Empire as well. Thus, it is clear to see that the history of these ethnic groups in Liberia is rich with highly sophisticated civilizations across Sub-Saharan and Northern Africa. Most Western readers will have heard of the Egyptians and perhaps even the Nubians (or the Kush as they would later be called), but bear in mind that the Mali, Ghana, and Songhai empires from West Africa were just as sophisticated and wealthy as their Egyptian and Nubian counterparts. And although this historical analysis will not be

exploring these ancient societies in connection with the indigenous people of Liberia, the topic is ripe for additional contributions from other researchers.

Regarding the Americo Liberians, much of their ancestral heritage harkens back to these same West African empires and kingdoms, along with many others, such as the ManiKongo kingdom. It is estimated that 90% of the total exports coming out of West African kingdoms and empires during the trans-Atlantic slave trade was gold and slaves. By the eighteenth century, estimates also indicate that more than 50,000 slaves were being shipped out of West Africa each year. Such staggering numbers of slaves being exported from the shores of West Africa is said to be the primary cause for the collapse of so many great African empires. A letter from King Nzinga Mbemba Affonso of the great ManiKongo kingdom sent to the king of Portugal (King Joao III) during the sixteenth century stands as a testament to the mass extraction of African slaves which led to the degradation and subsequent collapse of so many African civilizations:

Each day the traders are kidnapping our people--children of this country, sons of our nobles and vassals, even people of our own family...This corruption and depravity are so widespread that our land is entirely depopulated...We need in this kingdom only priests and schoolteachers, and no merchandise, unless it is wine and flour for Mass...It is our wish that this kingdom not be a place for the trade or transport of slaves. (Hochschild, 1999)

What is also important to keep in mind regarding the Americo Liberians is the form of slavery imposed upon them by force in Europe and in America: Namely, chattel slavery, which means that African slaves were literally defined as “chattel”—property “without soul, spirit, emotions, desires, and rights” (Asante, 2007). Furthermore, this form of slavery meant permanent ownership of the “chattel property” that extended to every generation after purchase, which entrenched the indoctrination of this inhumane and grotesque form of oppression and control upon the enslaved from birth until death. These are the conditions from which the Americo

Liberians were emerging, and they were returning to a homeland that had experienced centuries of destruction and war caused by the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

The colonial era: 1815 – 1847. The turn of the nineteenth century marked the beginning of the end for the trans-Atlantic slave trade. In 1807, the British outlawed slavery across their domain, encouraging other European powers to do the same; and in 1808 the British established a navel squadron along the West-African coastline with a mandate to stop any ship that was carrying slaves, regardless of the flag they were flying (Wulah, 2005). In 1808, the United States followed suit, passing their own act that required slave traders to close their operations under penalty of law, although many in America were slow to enforce the law, due to fear and resentment of freed black slaves (Finkelman, 2007). Such fear and resentment led to significant debates regarding what to do about the rising population of free African Americans. Some of the more prominent leading architects of the ACS included the following: “Former President Thomas Jefferson, the then president James Madison, President elect James Monroe, former senator and future president Andrew Jackson, Speaker of the House and later Secretary of State Henry Clay, Chief Justice John Marshall, Secretary of the Treasury and later presidential candidate William H. Crawford...” and many others (Tellewoyan, 2006).

This list also included several prominent clergymen, such as Rev. Robert Finley, Rev. Right, Bishop White, Rev. Dr. James Lorry, Rev. Dr. S. B. Blach, Rev. Obadiah B. Brown, Rev. William Hawley, as well as many others, including prominent abolitionists of the time. However, despite such wide support in the US that included religious and abolitionist forces, it is clear from the debates of this time that the primary driver for pursuing the repatriation of freed black slaves to Africa was the “de-Africanization” of America. Indeed, many of the political elites mentioned here were slave owners and—in fact slave traders—themselves, such as Jefferson,

Madison, Clay, Marshall, Key, Washington, and Jackson. Edward Wilmot Blyden (1856)—one of the leading voices in early Liberian history—offers the following accounting of these debates:

Notwithstanding the number of years which have elapsed since the abolition of the Slave Trade by the United States, that country is still groaning under the load of evils which that traffic entailed—evils whose effects are felt throughout all the ramifications of society; affecting, in a greater or less degree, men of all ranks and conditions. The question which, at present, excites the deepest interest, and upon which every political action is based, is "How shall the ponderous evil of Slavery, whose blighting influence pervades the entire country, be disposed of?"

To further this point, Liebenow (1987) provides some statistics on the growing population of “free blacks” in the US at the time: In 1790, there were 59,466 free African Americans accounted for, while two decades later that number had reached 186,466. By the onset of the Civil War in America, the number of free African Americans had grown to 488,000. Henry Clay called the situation “a ‘powder keg’ that would blow up in a colossal race war” and many Americans were calling the rise of free African Americans the “St. Domingo Virus” a genetic reference to the rebellion in Haiti (as cited in Tellewoyan, 2006). What’s more, Charles Fenton Mercer—a workhorse of the ACS—stated that “if it has not endangered our peace it has impaired the value of all the private property in a large section of our country” (as cited in Tellewoyan, 2006).

Such were the attitudes and perspective of most the political elites in America. Many abolitionists, for their part, argued that the leaders of the ACS were all slaveholders, who were neither committed to the welfare of African Americans, nor to the prohibition of the slave trade and the abolition of slavery. Christian supporters of the ACS, such as Robert Finley (a Presbyterian), William Thornton (a leading Quaker), and John Caldwell of the American Bible association, “saw the colony of the American Blacks as a beachhead in West Africa for protestant Christianity and Western civilization, not only spreading the Gospel to the ‘dark

continent' but also implementing some of the fuzzy nineteenth-century ideas of pacifism, alcoholic prohibition, and other novel experiments in morality and social relationships" (Liebenow, 1987). Ultimately, what this all translated into was \$100,000 being granted to the ACS in 1819 by the US government for the initiation of the "back to Africa" movement and the colonization of Africa (Marcos et al., 2005). Thus, we can see the very colonial and racist beginnings of the venture that eventually became the independent state of Liberia. Other colonization societies, formed in Maryland, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, and New York quickly followed suit, establishing their own settlements along the Grain Coast in a fashion quite similar to the settlement of the New England colonies in America.

The first ship landed at Sherbro Island with eighty-eight African Americans and 3 white ACS agents who were expected to set up and govern the colony. However, Sherbro Island was mostly a swamp land and infested with mosquitos, leading to the deaths of most of these first "pilgrims," as they would come to be called, by malaria, yellow fever and other tropical diseases until, in 1822, US Naval Lieutenant Robert Stockton rescued the remaining survivors and transported them to what was called the Grain Coast (Ibid.). They landed at Cape Mesurado, near present day Monrovia, and, their, Lt. Stockton and Dr. Eli Ayres, the new agent for the ACS, "successfully" negotiated with the Dai and Bassa ethnic groups to purchase the land. With "\$300 worth of muskets, tobacco, gunpowder, beads, clothing, food, mirrors, and rum," the land that would come to be called "Monrovia" after the US President Monroe was purchased from King Peter and other minor Bassa chiefs (Marcos et al., 2005; Wulah, 2005).

However, despite the egregious underpinnings for the development of the ACS and its dismal beginnings upon reaching the West African coast, many African Americans still supported the ACS and longed to express their newfound liberty and freedom in the homeland of

their ancestors (Ripley, 1991). Even still, the accounts of African Americans who made the voyage back to Africa are rife with conflicting stories about what awaited other African Americans who considered doing the same. For example, one account from John B. Russwurm upon arriving in Liberia from 1830 begins with words of jubilation, stating,

What my sensations were upon landing I can hardly describe. The Colonists here (at Monrovia), appear to be thriving—they subsist chiefly by trading with the natives.... You behold coloured men exercising all the duties of office of which you can scarcely believe, many fulfill the important duties with much dignity. We have here a republic in miniature. (As cited in Ripley, 1991, pp. 71-72)

Such an accounting rings with the triumph of witnessing some level of social justice being achieved for the African American settlers. And, yet, there are other accounts that reflect much less freedom and much more hardship. Russwurm's business associate, Joseph R. Daily, for example speaks to the very real colonial rule enforced by the white ACS governors during this period:

This insidious hypocrite tho. he can boast of being a white man, wd. find it very difficult to effect this himself or even find his way into the Society of my friends of his own complexion. Is it not murderous that a man should come 3 thousand miles to be free & then have his liberty abridged by another whose moral and intellectual qualifications are insignificant in the extreme...?" (As cited in Ripley, 1991, p. 76)

Still others writing from Liberia that were involved in the colonies systems of governance, such as Edward Blyden, had more political motives behind their words, wishing to champion the fight against slavery and posture the growing strength of an emerging country:

Within the last quarter of a century, however, this "curse of curses" [slavery] has received a most effectual check. The establishment of the Colony of Liberia—a name hated and despised by the lovers of African Slavery—has done more to suppress it than any other measure. If the slave trade has been like the Linnaean hydra, which, when smitten and one head severed from the body, constantly reproduced two in its place; Liberia, like another Hercules, has begun the work of its destruction. (Blyden, 1856 p. 13)

Each of these accounts speak to the convoluted entanglements of both achieving some measure of liberty, freedom, and social justice, while still being plagued by the tyranny of colonial rule

and racial oppression by the West. Indeed, such racial and colonial oppression was certainly internalized as Saidiya Hartman attests to her internal struggle after reaching West Africa in the following passage:

Being a stranger concerns not only matters of familiarity, belonging, and exclusion but as well involves a particular relation to the past. If the past is another country, then I am its citizen. I am the relic of an experience most preferred not to remember, as if the sheer will to forget could settle or decide the matter of history. I am a reminder that twelve million crossed the Atlantic Ocean and the past is not yet over. I am the progeny of the captives. I am the vestige of the dead. And history is how the secular world attends to the dead. (As cited in Kazanjian, 2011, pp. 870-871)

The depth of these words is a reminder of the harrowing, existential suffering experienced every day by freed black slaves long after their captivity ended, and, indeed, it was an experience that seemed to burden them all the more upon arrival in Liberia. As Hartman so eloquently expresses, her arrival on the shores of West Africa was met with the discomfort of being a walking reminder of the recent past for the Americo Liberians who sought to rid themselves of the unjust chains placed upon them, both physically and mentally. Indeed, it would seem that the struggle for social justice by the Americo Liberians was certainly a physical journey as well as a mental and emotional one.

Perhaps this haunting reminder of the Americo Liberian's lived experience in conjunction with their continued oppression by white leadership in the colony might help to reconcile what became, for all intents and purposes, a sociopolitical structure that mirrored the southern plantation and became a form of internal colonial oppression of its own, perpetrated most ardently against the indigenous Liberians. To achieve social justice then, through the Americo Liberian perspectives at the time, would mean that they would go to great lengths to rid themselves of their status of inferiority, even if that meant imposing such a status on others at the same time.

Between 1820 and 1847, the ACS held absolute control over settler life, as is clearly stated in the United States noninterventionist policy towards the colony of Liberia, where settlers were subject to the “unconstrained political authority of a paternalistic association of southern slave owners” and, therefore, obliged to form their social institutions around this enforced measure of control (Santana, 2012, p. 15). According to the ACS, this unfettered control over the settlers was necessary because the settlers “were incapable of self-sustainment and self-government,” thus granting the ACS the ability to enforce the 1820 constitution which afforded them total control over all political and judicial power. The impact this arrangement had on the future of Liberia is profound, as it solidified this form of governance as the correct form of governance which the Americo-Liberians were expected to follow if they were to gain the ability to govern themselves. Accordingly, we see the initial settlers of the Liberian colony quickly construct a stratified, caste based system of power, with the first surviving black settlers eventually monopolizing power shortly after independence.

This stratified caste system comprises of 4 primary groups: 1) educated free African Americans who voluntarily emigrated to Liberia; 2) emancipated black slaves who were granted their freedom by white slave owners upon condition that they would return to Africa; 3) recaptured enslaved Africans from ships engaged in illegal slave trade that were sent back to Africa; and 4) the indigenous Liberians (Ibid.). The first group, here, were the most educated and, therefore the settler class with the most technical and administrative skills, granting them a significant advantage over the other three classes, which allowed them to consolidate wealth and power quickly. The second group, albeit much less educated, were favored by the ACS as they were considered more docile, thus granting them access to more privileged positions within communities. The third group, those that became known as the “Congos,” were offered very

little advantage and often filled the ranks of the labor class and acted as a buffer between the Americo Liberians and the indigenous Liberians. Interestingly enough, however, as the voting power of the Congos began to take on greater significance during the rise of the True Whig Party in the 1870s, many political elites began to take on the title of “Congo” as a way to gain political advantage, leading to all Americo Liberians to eventually be categorized as Congos by the time of the Second Republic of Liberia. Thus, out of political necessity, most of the Americo Liberian settlers became integrated into a single class over time. As for the fourth group, the indigenous Liberians, they were not granted citizenship at all until 1904, as they were considered “backwards” and “uncivilized” even among the Americo Liberians (Santana, 2012; Sharpe, 2012). Unfortunately, this rejection of the indigenous Liberians would result in violent conflict rather than a nonviolent transformation that would lead to the integration of all Liberians.

This 4-tier system of citizenship, enforced through the white leadership of the colony, was heavily influenced by the ideological principles of white supremacy, and it negatively impacted the identity formation of the Americo Liberian Settlers in deeply problematic ways. Santana (2012) draws on the theory of double consciousness to articulate this contradictory behavior among the Americo Liberians. In short, double consciousness is a state of identity within which the subjects recognizes their own otherness from the dominant group (the white race), and in so doing begins to internalize the inferior qualities about one’s self that makes him or her “other,” a notion that resonates strongly with the theory of postcolonialism and the challenges faced by those who have been colonized. Unfortunately for the Americo Liberians, this acknowledgment of their own “otherness,” which was personified as inferior, hypersexual, and excessively violent by the dominant white society became one of the defining features of the Americo Liberian identity; thus leading them to take on seemingly contradictory behaviors, such

as active participation in pursuing their own freedom by denouncing others as inferior in an attempt to separate from themselves those qualities that made them a part of the “inferior other.” In so doing, the Americo Liberians judged their own ethnicity based on the dominant white culture and attempted to construct an identity through the use of the same oppressive cultural and structural rules that had defined their “otherness” (Ibid.). For the Americo Liberians, in order to become self-sufficient and obtain the capacity to “govern themselves,” they had to become more “white.”

Indeed we can see this social stratification in action through the words of another letter written by Russwurm to the Maryland Colonization Society in 1833:

It is human nature that the old settlers should be a little lifted up with the success which has crowned their efforts, and new emigrants ought not to expect to be placed on par with them unless they bring undoubted letters of introduction and recommendation from home. (As cited in Campbell, 1935)

Here, we see Russwurm acknowledging the growing divide between the early settlers in Liberia and the newcomers whose expectations of freedom and liberty were disheartened by their immediate placement in the lower ranks of an emerging social hierarchy. This admission, in itself, however, is not entirely without merit, as notions of freedom and liberty were strongly associated with being industrious (Kazanjian, 2011). On the other hand, where the full weight of such a statement becomes inextricably tied to notions of otherness and inferiority is when the indigenous Liberians are added to Russwurm’s statement: “They [the colonists] are unwilling to divest themselves of the idea of inferiority whenever circumstances have thrown educated native Africans in their society. 'He is native' is enough” (as cited in Campbell, 1935). Thus, it becomes apparent that notions of inferiority were strongly tied to the identity of indigenous Liberians as a way of ensuring the superiority of the settlers within Liberian society. Consequently, the

Americo Liberians were thrust into a social stratosphere that pitted their own identities against themselves in order to achieve freedom, liberty, and social justice.

From the indigenous perspective, however, achieving social justice was based on entirely different circumstances. Right from the beginning of the enterprise that was the colonization of Liberia, conflict between the Americo Liberians and indigenous Liberians was commonplace. Between 1822 and 1847, there were no less than 5 major conflicts between different ethnic groups and the Americo Liberians: 1) the Dei- Settler War of 1822; 2) the Dei-Gola-Settler War of 1832; 3) the Bassa-Settler War of 1835; 4) the Kru-Settler “Fishmen” Conflict of 1832-1838; and 5) the Vai-Settler Conflicts of 1831-1885 (Levitt, 2005; Santana, 2012). To gain a better understanding for why these conflicts occurred, a brief accounting of the initial land purchase by the ACS is necessary.

The first land purchase. Negotiations between Lieutenant Stockton and King Peter took place over a series of meetings that reveal critical aspects of indigenous sociopolitical relations and culture—particularly regarding indigenous dealings with the West. During the first meeting, Stockton told King Peter that he wanted to buy land for a farm and had been offered some by the people of Bassa country, but that he wanted land in Montserrado and to purchase the land directly from the King (Tellewoyan, 2006). The following is an excerpt from Stockton’s letters back to the ACS:

We told him we were desirous of getting a place in Africa to build a house, make farms...If we got a place, we raise tobacco, rum, sugar and sell to the natives, for rice, yams, beeswax. We told them likewise, that we would have schools and teach their children to read and write. (As cited in Tellewoyan, 2006).

King Peter responded that he did not own the land and that he couldn’t make a decision about the “transfer” of property without talking with other kings of the land first. To further entice King

Peter, Stockton and Aryes offered rum and tobacco as gifts, two of the most preferred mediums of exchange in the region.

The second and third meetings showed no progress and the negotiations stalled after King Peter departed, leaving “words of defiance about not meeting with them anymore” and challenged Stockton and Aryes to meet with him in his home territory if they wished to continue the negotiations. Eventually, Stockton and Aryes made their way to the home town of King Peter, being led by a Kru guard who harassed them constantly to keep up, saying “Come along! Come along! The devil will catch us!” (Ibid.). Mentions of the devil catching them was certainly in reference to the secret society of the Poro and Sande, which is a primary form of social structure for several of the ethnic groups in Liberia, including the Bassa.

King Peter was said to be sitting on his stool waiting for their arrival, and he became infuriated as soon as he saw Stockton and Aryes approaching, accusing them of capturing one of his men. Stockton denied the charge and countered by stating the King had reneged on his agreement to meet with them; at which point, the King demanded that Stockton state his true mission. Finally, Stockton told King Peter that he was in Africa to buy land for the colonization of free African Americans; but before he could continue further, a mulatto from Freetown who had informed the King about Stockton began to level accusations against him, causing all the men to begin their battle chant and war dance, signaling a turn for the worst. What happened next is recounted by Stockton’s personal biographer:

With that clear, ringing, and overpowering tone of voice for which [Stockton was] singularly remarkable, he commanded silence. The trumpet-sound of his voice rose ascendant over the tumult around. The multitude were hushed as if by a thunderbolt falling among them, and every eye was turned upon the speaker. Deliberately, drawing a pistol from his breast and cocking it, he gave it to Aryes saying while he pointed to the mulatto, 'Shoot that villain if he opens his mouth again!' Then, with the same deliberation, drawing another pistol and leveling it at the head of King Peter and direct[ed] him to sit silent until he heard what was to be said... [Stockton told the King]

that they had entered into a treaty already; its particulars were agreed upon, and the form of its execution only remained to be complied with... that unless he agreed to execute the treaty on the following day his fate was fixed. (As cited in Tellewoyan, 2006)

And in a most astonishing display, the clouds above King Peter's town are said to have parted, sending a ray of sunlight down across the clearing as Stockton finished speaking. With Stockton's shouting and the opening of the clouds seemingly coinciding, King Peter took it as a premonition of the plague of things to come, and quickly resolved to sell a portion of the land.

This accounting is certainly surreal, and it has undoubtedly been embellished by all parties involved, but perhaps for very different reasons. Stockton, being what would appear to be a "man of confidence," would have certainly enjoyed telling this story with bravado. But on the part of the Bassa King Peter, the embellishment of this story could have also been necessary to deal with the ramifications that would follow the sale of land to a Western power, for this event signifies a series of cultural and social norms that were broken by the sale of land.

Notwithstanding the fact that this "sale" of land was agreed to under duress by the threat of Western force, personified through the use of Stockton's pistols, several other far reaching implications also need consideration.

Sons of the soil and the original sin. The fact that King Peter agreed to the sale of land on his own is the first act that needs to be examined. As was noted in the beginning of this account, King Peter's first response to the proposed acquisition was to say that he didn't own the land and needed to speak with the other kings in the region. This response speaks to Somah's (2003) notion of "gradualism," where every member of the community must be heard when making a decision. In this case, the "community" in question is the region around the land being purchased by the ACS. In other words, if all the kings were not consulted prior to this agreement, then the purchase of land was unjust and, therefore, unlawful according to the customs practiced

by not only the Bassa, but the greater ethnic community of Liberia. Many of the subordinate chiefs as well as chiefs from other territories were outraged by the sale of the territory to the Americans (Wily, 2007). The primary complaint was that “no one, not even the King, has the right to sell the land which belongs to all of us” (as cited in Wily, 2007 p. 68). The primary cause for the Dei- Settler War of 1822 was based on these grounds alone. It was not until a more influential King from the interior, King Sao Boso of Bopolu Kingdom, was called upon to mediate the conflict that the issue was put to rest in favor of the settlers based on the agreement signed by Stockton, Aryes, King Peter and the other kings and chiefs present for the treaty.

But, more to the point, the “ownership of land” is an even bigger issue. From the quote given above, it becomes apparent that the indigenous Liberians did not consider land to be owned absolutely by any one individual, which means the concept of private property was foreign to them. Many more of the ensuing battles to come, such as the Dei-Gola-Settler War of 1832 and the Grebo battles of 1834, would be fought on the premise that the land “purchased” by the ACS was only a temporary arrangement, based on “leasing” the land to the settlers for as long as they needed it, but not forever. Likewise, the Kru-Settler “Fishmen” Conflicts between 1832 and 1838 were originally a tribal dispute about land tenure and rebellions against unpopular chiefs who were considered friends of the Americo Liberians placed among the indigenous people without their consent (Wulah, 2005).

The idea that land was only entrusted to an individual while it was in use is connected to the “slash-and-burn” farming practices used by indigenous Liberians even today, where lands would be cleared, farmed for a period, and then burned to lay fallow for a period of 4 to as long as twelve years (Wily, 2007; Bøås, 2009). Due to the changing seasonal patterns of Sub-Saharan Africa, where an area might be green and lush one year only to be followed by an extended dry

period made this style of farming necessary. These practices of allowing land to become fallow and moving to new lands exacerbated territorial land disputes, especially in areas where rice was the main crop, which requires large swaths of land (Bøås, 2009). By way of necessity, the various ethnic groups established rather sedentary and stable land use agreements—particularly in the north—that were strongly connected to the familial structure: A family was a unit; a group of units became a clan with a chief; and several clans connected through treaties were chiefdoms with established Kings, all of which was based on the hereditary lineage of the first settlers in the region (Wily, 2007).

Many of the ethnic groups wanted the settlers to submit to the authority of their chiefs, as was the custom for most indigenous Liberians. This, too, was connected to land use and farming: Strangers could secure rights to land use by gaining sponsorship from an existing resident who becomes the strangers spokesman, protector and warrantor, but the stranger also had to agree to become a permanent resident by constructing a house in the town and could only make use of food crops, but not tree crops, which were the right of the first ethnic group only. What is being referred to, here, is the custom of autochthony, which means “the sons of the soil” or, put another way, the right of land based on who arrived first (Bøås, 2009). The relationship between the Mandingo and the Loma ethnic groups expresses this custom explicitly. The Loma were the first ethnic group to arrive in what is now considered Lofa County, and the Mandingos began migrating to the area as traders and skilled artisans. Presumably, the Mandingos came from a superior economic background than the Loma, but in order to be accepted within the territory, they had to enter into a submissive relationship of patrimony called the “stranger-father.” Essentially, the Loma did not trust the Mandingo and wanted to protect their land. However, the Loma also wanted to engage in trade with the Mandingo and exploit their artisan skills as well;

and the Mandingo wanted to farm and gain access to the land as they began to settle in larger numbers. In order to ameliorate the situation, Loma chiefs and clan leaders would “adopt” Mandingos as a way of incorporating them into the existing social structure. Once entered into, the “stranger-father” relationship could not be broken and would carry on from generation to generation, thus, effectively integrating the influx of a new ethnic tribe peacefully.

The ACS refused to acknowledge the authority of these ethnic tribes as they were seen to be inferior. To make matters worse, the ACS included in the bylaws of the 1820 constitution that “no colonist shall deal with the natives of the Colony,” thus prohibiting any individual transactions of land between settlers and natives (Wily, 2007). And although this law was set in place to prevent settlers from buying up land to create their own colony or exploit significant resources at the expense of “an entire race,” put into effect alongside the denial of citizenship to indigenous Liberians meant that only Americo Liberians had access to land rights, which came with the privileges of citizenship. Seen from this vantage point, the concept of citizenship connected to a sovereign territory that was permanent and that bound the individual to a specific polity was a new concept for the indigenous Liberians and, in many ways, went against the very fluid customs of “citizenship” they had developed over centuries, which were primarily connected to the principles of kinship (Bøås, 2009). Thus, for these reasons, as well as others, the account of Stockton’s initial purchase of land on behalf of the ACS is considered the “original sin” and has become an enduring conflict which continues even to this day.

The second part of this encounter between Lt. Stockton and King Peter is telling as well. In many ways, the final scene of this story, as it has been told, speaks to the very real presence of superior force by a Western power. It was no small matter that Lt. Stockton hid his identity as a US naval officer, especially when one considers how the signing of this agreement was finalized

through the threat of force. It is not difficult to image, for example, that King Peter was thinking about more than just Lt. Stockton's pistol pointed at his head when deciding to agree to the sale of land. Indeed, the mention of King Peter's premonition about "the plague of things to come" signals that he was aware of the larger threat involved with staring down the barrel of a blue-eyed, white American naval officer and was inclined to go along for fear of the greater ramifications involved with instigating a conflict with a Western power. Stockton, himself, seems to have been aware of this greater threat as is seen through his steady and deliberate presentation of his pistols. And if these fears, were indeed within the mind of King Peter during the signing of this agreement, they were certainly validated throughout the course of history. Indeed, the very long and protracted series of conflicts between the Americo Liberians and the Vai from 1831 to 1885 were started when Captain William Thompson, commander of the Colonies gun boat, attempted to recover a longstanding debt owed to him by Chief James Williams of Little Cape Mount through the use of violence (Wulah, 2005). With the Vai being awestruck by the devastating attack from Captain Thompson, the Americo Liberians took the opportunity to begin negotiations for "purchasing" Grand Cape Mount from the Vai (Ibid.). And as we will see in the coming section, the use of superior military force, including from the United States Navy on multiple occasions, led to the widening political and social cleavage between the Americo Liberians and their indigenous counterparts.

The postcolonial Era: 1847 – 1944. We have already discussed much of the Americo Liberian postcolonial aspirations for social justice through the words of Hilary Teage in the Declaration of Independence. And with the context of the African American settlers lived experience incorporated through the colonial period of Liberia as well, these espoused declarations for the pursuit of social justice feel all the more warranted. However, given the

added context of Americo Liberian colonialism under the ACS, it is clear that there are other aspects of Americo Liberian life that need to be considered here as well. First, not only does Teage's Declaration of Independence decry the atrocious oppression of the settlers past enslavement, but it also (as was briefly noted) speaks to the very real desire for the Americo Liberians to be acknowledged and accepted within Western culture as equals among their white counterparts. Later sections of this document, for example, address the Americo Liberians "earned" capacity to govern themselves by making claims about their "courts of justice... numerous and well attended schools...[and] churches for the worship of our Creator"

(Constitution Review Commission, 2019 p. 2). And in the second to last paragraph, the following statements are made to this end:

The native African bowing down with us before the altar in the name of the Great God, our common Creator, and our common Judge, we appeal to the nations of Christendom, and earnestly and respectfully ask of them, that they will regard us with the sympathy and friendly consideration, to which the peculiarities of our condition entitle us, and to extend to us, that comity which marks the friendly intercourse of civilized and independent communities. (Ibid.).

Clearly this speaks to the Americo Liberian's desires to be embraced by Western institutions—particularly by the greater Christian community, of which, there was the very real expectation for Americo Liberians to spread Christianity across the "dark continent" of Africa. This document and the passages shared, here, also speak to the genuine aspirations of the Americo Liberians striving for a just society that would embody their high expectations for freedom and Liberty in Liberia. And, yet, these ideals, just as in any founding document one might observe, are simply that: Ideals. What is performed in practice—or even created by the very limits of these ideals—can be quite different than one would expect, especially when hardship, fierce competition for resources, and the sustained oppression of greater (Western) powers continue to undermine the sovereignty of a nation such as Liberia.

The continued stratification of Liberians, for example, increased significantly during the postcolonial era, with unabated mercantilism, white supremacist principles, and trans-national geopolitical interests forging the nascent independent country of Liberia into a highly oligarchic system of oppression and exploitation—one that would ultimately lead to its downfall.

At the onset of Liberian independence, the latent social systems that had been the norm for African Americans during slavery in the US and the oppressive colonial structures enforced through the ACS while in Liberia became—at once—exacerbated by the actualization of social and political freedoms granted them through self-governance. For example, the concept of “colorism” practiced on southern plantations in America immediately became a central point of contestation in postcolonial Liberia (Marcos et al., 2005). Colorism, as referenced here, is a term used to identify the dichotomy between lighter skinned house slaves—illegitimate children of White slave masters and African American women—and darker skinned field slaves, who had more pronounced Negroid features” (Marcos et al., 2005, p. 10). The lighter skinned African Americans, or mulattos, enjoyed more privileges than their darker skinned counterparts due to the assumption that they more “appropriately fit” into white culture. This distinction between distinction between the mulattos and the darker skinned settlers was not lost on the Americo Liberians and many mulattos attempted to exploit their past privilege of being “more white” to gain political and economic advantage within their communities.

Because of this, the Republican Party in postcolonial Liberia came to be associated with Monrovia-based mulattos, while the Old Whig Party (later renamed the True Black Man’s Party) became associated with the darker skinned, rural farmers (Ibid.). Within this political environment, the 4-teir caste system that developed under colonial rule became entrenched in the postcolonial politics—and, indeed, the very social fabric—of the Liberian experience. At the top

were the mulatto dominated Americo Liberian officials, followed by darker skinned Americo Liberian laborers and farmers. In the third tier still came the Congos—although the Congos were slightly more integrated into the settler society by this time, blurring the lines between the second and third tiers. The indigenous Liberians who had no rights or opportunities afforded them at all would remain in the fourth tier throughout the postcolonial era. What's more, social norms and institutions became established that favored the mulattos, therefore, enforcing segregation. Upper class mulattos were socially forbidden from marrying lower class citizens, only mulattos were originally accepted into Liberia College, and the first Masonic lodges were originally a “mulatto only” institution as well (Ibid.). Again, we see the rejection of the indigenous Liberians by the Americo Liberians even after independence. Had the Americo Liberian settlers chosen to embrace the indigenous people of Liberia, perhaps a greater social transformation could have been achieved. As it was, however, the transformation of Liberia would be forged through violence, rather than peace and by force rather than collective will.

A large part of the issue, here, that allowed these growing distinctions of privilege and class hierarchy to foment within Liberian society was the fact that, for many Americo Liberians, American culture was their only reference for social construction. Although some of the Americo Liberians still maintained aspects of their original African heritage—particularly in the case of the Congo recaptives—the majority of Americo Liberians came from a prolonged, generational exposure to the American heritage, thus instilling within them the values and norms associated with American society (Santana, 2012). The implementation of American values—including those associated with white privilege—is a phenomenon experienced by many postcolonial societies, where the culture and practices of their colonial masters remain present in the subject's mind and therefore continue to be practiced despite being socially oppressive to people within

those postcolonial societies. Edward Said (1979) defines this behavior as a three step process: First, postcolonial societies “adopt” the norms of their colonial masters. Second, these norms are then “adapted” to fit the cultural preferences of those societies. And third, postcolonial societies then become “adept” at creating and practicing those cultural norms and behaviors. However, this process does not always lead to fruitful results that create a just society, which is the unfortunate case in Liberia. Rather, it would seem that the constructivist attitudes of the ACS leaders regarding the development of Liberia was geared towards Instrumentalizing the identities of Americo Liberians in order to uphold the ideologies of white supremacy, even within a black colony.

The pushback—and what might be considered the adaptation of Western colonial norms—came from prominent political and social figures like Edward Blyden and Edward J. Roye, who sought to exploit these growing differences in Liberian society for political advantage, pitting the darker skinned majority against the mulatto minority to gain access to institutions of power (Marcos, et al., 2005). The end result of these efforts led to the effective dismantling of the dominant Republican Party of Liberia and the creation of the True Whig Party, which would, ultimately, assume absolute political control from 1878 to 1979.

Meanwhile, explorations of the hinterland were taking place in order to better assess the landscape of the Liberian interior. In a letter to the ACS in 1858, which still held peripheral ties to the now independent Liberia, President Benson of Liberia expressed the following:

We are making some effort (though but small as yet) to ascertain more about the interior. I sent Mr. Seymour a few months ago... in other to get this enterprise on foot, and he left here for Bassa again on the 19th of January, and will in a few weeks (two or three) leave on a two months exploring tour, perhaps five or six times the distance any Liberian has ever attained. (As cited in Tellewoyan, 2006)

This letter was sent in reference to the new Liberian State's initial attempts to gain access to more resources, opportunities for trade, and potential expansions of the Liberian territory. Rev. George L. Seymour's initial findings from his first few expeditions confirmed that the Pessay (or Kpelle) produced iron and cotton clothing, as well as clay bowls, pots, and pipes (Ibid.). This discovery was the primary incentive to initiate a longer expedition into the interior. However, Rev. Seymour also sought to bring Christianity to indigenous communities he came in contact with. Both of these agendas are made explicit in the opening remarks of Seymour's diary:

Our readers will see that Liberia has interiorward a fine country, and an intelligent and industrious native population. They will, perhaps, learn more than ever to appreciate the advantages which our colonization of Liberia affords to efforts designed to explore and occupy the religious desolations of Africa. (Seymour, 1858).

We also see the aspirations for the greater expansion of the Liberian State made explicit through the awe inspired passages of Seymour's journal as he ascends a mountain to get a better view of an entire valley under cultivation by the Kpelle people:

Ascended a mountain in the town almost entirely under cultivation, and I could but pray for the day when Liberia's Lone Star might float over these verdant fields; no part of North America can boast such beautiful scenery, and such richness of soil. (Ibid).

The underlying tone across these passages is a mix of inspiring discovery by a man emboldened with genuine aspirations for building a great country under God and a fulfilled longing to be reunited with the rich and beautiful land of his African heritage. It's a powerful scene made all the more pungent by this last passage of a hope for what can only be described as social justice:

We saw industry, cleanliness, economy, and mechanical genius, far surpassing any I had ever seen among the natives of the coast, or many of the immigrants from the United States. There is an active barter trade carried on with this whole region — which the people of Liberia have no idea of — and as soon as the interior of Africa is properly known, the old stigma of indolence and ignorance with which the people have been branded for so many ages will be entirely removed. (Seymour, 1856)

One can only imagine the overwhelming feelings of pure joy and triumphant jubilation at witnessing for the first time in Seymour's life a thriving society of African people filled with riches and commerce, social sophistication, and the blaring apparent absence of oppression by outside forces—experienced both through the social interactions amongst the people and within their hearts and minds unburdened by the memory of slavery that Seymour undoubtedly still carried within himself, making what came next in this history all the more tragic. Seymour's expedition lasted a little over 8 months, and it would have lasted a little longer had it not been for the African bandits suspected of dealing with slave traders who ambushed him and his companion Levin Ash along the last leg of his journey back to Monrovia. Seymour later died of his wounds, and Ash was sold back into slavery. Ash was later released when his identity became known and he helped carry his now wounded friend back to Monrovia to deliver the manuscript of their journey. Seymour succumbed to his wounds shortly after. Fortunately, this incredible account lives on and gives voice to an Africa that once was and a Liberia that still could be, but it also acts as an omen for greater tragedies to come.

The Scramble for Africa. Seymour's return to Monrovia would inspire future expeditions geared more towards establishing treaties among the many indigenous chiefs and Kings that occupied the hinterland territories. Benjamin J. K. Anderson would carry out two separate expeditions of his own in 1868-1869 and in 1874, travelling through the Dei, Golah, Condo, Loma, and Mandingo countries up to Musardu in the first expedition and the Kpelle, Vai, Golah, Loma, and Mandingo countries during the second expedition (Akpan, 1973). He establishing treaties with as many chiefs and Kings as possible along the way through acquisitions of land, trade deals, or protectorates for clans being harassed by slave traders and other European powers. These expeditions, as well as many others were a part of a larger project by the Americo

Liberians to lay claim on the hinterland territories before European powers could do so, and these activities were very much a part of the sociopolitical power struggle taking place in Liberia at the time as well. As mentioned earlier, Blyden (who conducted expeditions of his own) and Roye (being the only darker skinned Americo Liberian to be called one of the Merchant Princes) were leaders in the fight to overthrow the power hold that the mulatto political elites held through the Republican Party (Marcos, et al). At the center of these political debates were the matters of extending citizenship to the indigenous Liberians, enforcing anti-slave trade laws within the region, and also how to centralize government authority over claimed territories (Sawyer, 2005). Granting citizenship to the indigenous Liberians would have certainly transformed the politics of the country, and would have gone a long way towards creating a more inclusive and unified society. However, the centralized power maintained by the minority political elites in Monrovia refused to let this happen in order to maintain their holdings and continue their domination of the politico-economic apparatus of Liberia (Akpan, 1973).

Nevertheless, explorers such as H. M. Stanley and de Brazza—agents dispensed by France and England—were also hard at work in the region and the sovereignty of Liberian territorial claims to areas rich with export products such as gold, cattle, hides, camwood, and ivory was constantly being challenged. To make matters worse, the internal revenues for the Liberian State were extremely low, as the government had very little capacity to enforce taxes throughout the region (Akpan, 1975). Many taxes, such as the poll-tax, the head-tax on Kru stevedores aboard British trading ships, and proceeds from the sale of land were all readily ignored on a regular bases (Ibid.).

Due to these cash shortages, the fifth President of Liberia, Edward J. Roye secured a loan for \$500,000 from the London bank in 1870 under predatory and extortionate conditions, leading

to a breach in the sovereign integrity of Liberia and the end to Roye's presidency by coup d'état that resulted in his assassination in 1871—an act that was also perpetrated, in large part, due to Edward J. Roye being the first darker skinned Americo Liberian elected through the True Whig Party, signaling the end of the mulatto Republican Party's domination of Liberia (Ellis, 1999; Tellewoyan, 2006). To Roye's credit, he had also loaned \$14,000 of his own money and borrowed an additional \$20,000 from an associate British merchant to assist the government in 1870 as well (Tellewoyan, 2006). Under the Coleman administration in the 1890s further predatory loans and "investments" in banking, telegraph, rubber, and other business interests by French, German, and British private corporations (encouraged by their governments) employed tactics used to bait the desperate Liberian government into giving up control over major economic sectors. This allowed the British Rubber Syndicate to seize control of rubber plantations in Liberia, the French to establish their own telegraph system throughout the country, and the Germans to run the entire Liberian economy through a network of private companies, shops, and stores strategically placed throughout the country by the year 1900. These tactics were used by the European powers to circumnavigate the "protections" given to Liberia by US political elites and their ties to the US Navy so as to "colonize" Liberia through neocolonial economic leverage rather than military force (Ibid). Additional loans in 1906 provided by London and in 1912 by the United States and France eased the cash crisis, but this only further degraded the sovereign integrity of Liberia, as creditors were granted rights to customs revenue as securities and European and American personnel were appointed to posts in the customs, treasury, and army. In effect, these neocolonial practices stifled Liberia's natural development and would prove as a deciding factor in why the Americo Liberians chose violence as their method for maintaining sovereign authority over the hinterland, rather than more peaceful

methods. Had the threats against Liberia's sovereignty not been constantly waged by greater Western powers during Liberia's initial postcolonial development, it is very likely that the Liberian settlers would have been more willing to work with their indigenous counterparts in order to develop the state of Liberia and transform their collective society.

However, these attempts to colonize Liberia by France, Britain, and Germany were a part of a larger European show of force which is now infamously known as the "scramble for Africa" (Akpan, 1973; Hochschild, 1999; Sawyer, 2005; Wulah, 2005; Tellewoyan, 2006). To avoid direct confrontation between European powers, two conferences were held in order to dictate the rules of engagement for the partition of Africa (Tellewoyan, 2006). The West African Conference was held in Germany in 1884 and convened by Prince Otto Von Bismarck in order to establish the rules of engagement and negotiate which territories each European power would be allowed to colonize for their own purposes. The second conference (now called the Brussels Conference) was held in Belgium, and convened by King Leopold II in order to further map out and plan the total takeover of Africa and the African people. In 1890, the German Empire, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, United States, France, Great Britain and Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Persia, Portugal, Russia, Sweden and Norway, and the Ottoman Empire signed the General Act of the Brussels Conference (Ibid.). The stated reasons for this mass invasion of Africa was to clamp down on the sale of weapons, alcohol, and slaves throughout the continent by the,

progressive organization of the administrative, judicial, religious, and military services in the African territories placed under the sovereignty or protectorate of civilized nations... [And] the gradual establishment in the interior by the Powers to which the territories are subject of strongly occupied stations, in such a way as to make their protective or repressive action effectively felt in the territories devastated by slave hunting. (As cited in Tellewoyan, 2005)

However, these stated objectives (albeit still racist and very colonial) couldn't have been farther from the truth, as history clearly demonstrates. The real intentions of the General Act of Brussels was to subjugate and exploit an entire continent of people who had been "devastated by slave hunting" for centuries (Hochschild, 1999). Indeed, the crippling effects of enslaving tens of millions of Africans and exporting them out of Africa over more than 300 years left a continent abundantly rich in resources weakly defended by the collapse of massive empires and chaos wrought by the internal wars and conflicts brought on by the trans-Atlantic slave trade. What would follow would be some of the greatest atrocities ever committed against a people that this world has ever seen (Ibid.).

Even before the official launch of the scramble for Africa, the aggressive attitudes of the West towards African nations complicated the debates regarding the extended sphere of influence of Liberia and led to an ultimatum for how the government should move forward with its imperialist expansion over the hinterland. In order to ensure Liberian state authority over claimed territories outside of the Americo Liberian settlements and not be restricted to the 3 enclave trading communities situated along the tropical coastline, Americo Liberians either had to adopt the mechanisms of subordination and control, as the European imperial powers were doing, or strive to build more inclusive forms of governance that incorporated indigenous communities into the formal state apparatus with rights and citizenship (Sawyer, 2005).

Many Americo Liberians fighting for a more inclusive form of governance sought to implement a third option that established relationships of tutelage with the indigenous Liberians in order to slowly bring them into the Liberian polity by way of "civilizing" them (Ibid.). However, with the aggressive European colonial expansion brought on by the scramble for Africa, the Americo Liberians decided to adopt the administrative and coercive tactics of the

Europeans in order to establish control in the hinterland through a form of indirect rule, formally enacted in 1904 as policy (Ibid.). This was—at once—an agenda driven by the ambition of an emerging state seeking greater regional power and also a necessity for the survival of the State as the French, German, and British closed in around the Americo Liberians in an effort to seize colonial power across all of West Africa.

The indigenous tribes of the hinterland adopted several key strategies to assert their own authority within their respective territories, however, demanding their rights as true “sons of the soil” and fighting to maintain their own political autonomy (Wulah, 2005). The sustained conflicts between the Americo Liberians and the Vai between 1831 and 1885 took on new dimensions when the Vai enlisted the aid of the British in order to more effectively combat the Liberian government, which the Vai were united against. A series of conflicts between the Vai and Americo Liberians and subsequent “purchases” by the Americo Liberians took place throughout the 1850s and 1860s, where, through these “purchases,” the Vai had allegedly signed over their sovereignty to the Liberian state (Ibid.) However, the purportedly signed deeds of the Gallinas by Prince Mannah, and his subordinate chiefs in 1850 and 1851 did not contain any specific transfer of land to Liberia, which is significant considering the inalienable nature of African land. In 1870, Prince Mannah visited Sierra Leone and returned to Cape Mount in 1871 where he raided the town and captured a number of Tewah people and a Liberian settler. Prince Mannah died the following year and Morano Sando replaced him, rallying all the Vai chiefdoms by 1878, and declaring “my country and Liberia are not the same country—I govern my country—I am the King alone; all others are my gentlemen” (As cited in Wulah, 2005, p. 64). However, despite these declarations of being the “King,” Morano Sando and his people were, unwittingly, becoming ensnared in the British plans for colonial expansion mapped out in Sierra

Leone; and in 1885, the British negotiated on behalf of the Vai to annexed all the Vai chiefdoms along the coastlines of the Vai territory as British territory and defining Liberia's western border with Sierra Leone, much to Liberia's disadvantage (Akpan, 1973; Wulah, 2005).

At the same time, the Liberian government was building roads and laying train tracks into the hinterland, establishing military posts at strategic positions and Americo Liberian settlements up to the bank of the Niger River—all the while purchasing more land and cooperating with interior chiefs by giving them stipends and access to the Liberian legislature in exchange for schools and “protection” from larger slave raiding kingdoms and other European powers (Akpan, 1973). In this way, they were able to pass into legislation the Act Establishing the Boundaries of the Republic-of Counties, thus allowing them to extend taxation into the 600 miles of tribal lands they now incorporated into the Liberian domain (Akpan, 1973; Tellewoyan, 2006). These new boundaries also established the principle of “*eminent domain*,” which acted as something of a “*Maginot*” line that made way for new immigrants and prevented indigenous Liberians from accessing their own land, while at the same time allowing the Americo Liberians to exploit the indigenous resources and labor, all while pushing back against French encroachments to the east (Tellewoyan, 2006). In 1881, for example, the French attempted to seize Grebo land in the eastern territories and Liberia was able to repel them through the aid of indigenous tribes they had signed treaties with that fought on behalf of the Liberian government (Ibid.).

These treaties with the Grebo people deteriorated completely by the 1890s, where the Grebo tribes engaged in direct conflict with the Americo Liberians in 1893 while being supported by the French who had launched attacks in the same region in 1892 (Akpan, 1973; Wulah, 2005). The result of this conflict was the French takeover of the Ivory Coast all the way along the Cavalla River (Tellewoyan, 2006). The breakdown between the Grebo and the Liberian

government came about because of Liberia's imperialistic policies of taxation without representation as well as the forced recruitment of indigenous labor imposed primarily upon indigenous people who could not pay the tax (Tellewoyan, 2006). Indigenous families were known to pawn their children, for example, in order to pay the tax rather than face the wrath of Liberian military forces who pillaged the hinterland regularly for their own gains, leading to the desertion of many towns and farm communities that were along the roads that Liberian soldiers traveled (Akpan, 1973). Taxation and forced labor extended beyond the Grebo people, however, impacting the Kru, Kpelle, Vai, Golah, and Bassa, as well as others (Tellewoyan, 2006). Thus, in the lead up to the Grebo conflict in 1993, the Kru confederacy, consisting of Kru, Grebo, Dei, and Bassa formed "the G'Debo Reunited Kingdom for the purpose of exterminating the Liberian ruling class and restoring the ancient glory of Abron" (Wulah, 2005, p. 124). The practice of forced labor, however, was enacted by the Germans, who initially exploited the labor of the indigenous people and eventually created formal contracts with the Liberian government that provided \$2.50 for every indigenous Liberian "recruited" for labor in service of German interests (Tellewoyan, 2006). Such lucrative revenue schemes were hard to pass up for Liberia with overwhelmingly bleak economic prospects, significant financial shortages, and constant assaults by indigenous and European powers alike, making this a regular practice that would eventually bring about the Fernando Po scandal in 1927, where the Liberian government would be accused of practicing slavery.

The Gola uprising in 1900 and subsequent victory over the Liberian government was also caused by the incessant mistreatment of the Indigenous people and would assist in the fixing of the border between Liberia and Sierra Leone in 1903 (Liebenow, 1987). This, in turn, compelled the Liberian government to finally extend citizenship to the tribal people of the hinterlands in

1904, thus, further cementing Liberia's claim on the territories they still maintained by developing native administrative bureaucracies through "elected chiefs" who were often appointed by the president unilaterally, (Liebenow, 1973; Ellis, 2005; Sawyer, 2005; Wulah, 2005). However, this also came with the development of the Liberian Frontier Force in 1908 that was established to enforce Liberian rule in the hinterland and would be fully developed by 1920 (Liebenow, 1973; Ellis, 2005; Sawyer, 2005). Due to lack of financial support by the Liberian government, this force, primarily lived off the land, commandeering labor, food, and other resources according to their own discretion (Ellis, 2005).

While this Frontier Force was being developed, the Grebo conflict reignited in 1910, followed by the Gola-Bandi rebellion starting in 1912 (Wulah, 2005). The Grebo conflict resumed because of provisions made in the French and Liberian treaty signed in 1893 during the first Grebo conflict (Tellewoyan, 2006). Essentially, the treaty allowed the French to establish settlements along both sides of the Cavalla River in order to conduct trade. In addition to this, the French were allowed to enter Liberian territory in pursuit of indigenous peoples that they saw as a threat, causing significant turmoil amongst indigenous tribes, such as the Grebo, within the territory. The Gola-Bandi rebellion actually began in 1911 when the Liberian Frontier Force, in an attempt violently oppress indigenous tribes who rejected Liberian authority, hung 8 Bandi chiefs and installed a Mende chief by the name of Mambu of Yamatohun who had ruled over the region in the past and was a "friend" to the Liberian government, as the Americo Liberians had invited Chief Mambu to Monrovia in 1909 to discuss the establishment of Americo Liberian rule in his chiefdom (Wulah, 2005). Thus, the Gola and Bandi tribes rebelled against Chief Mumba, killing him in 1912 and treating the murder as a "triumph" against the oppressive rule of the Liberian government. President Barclay, for his credit, ordered his government officials Stalwart

and Cooper to not allow the Frontier Force to oppress the people, of which there were many complaints. In fact, the Gola-Bandi rebellion was not so much about the imposition of government rule as it was about the endemic corruption, oppression, and self-aggrandizement by the soldiers and government officials operating in the hinterland, where heavy “fines” were imposed against the Bandi (as well as other indigenous) people that were required to be “paid in boys and girls”—a practice that was common by this point among Americo Liberian appointed commissioners (Ibid.). With the scramble for Africa in full force by this time, the practice of selling people “captured in war” to European powers searching for soldiers and laborers to mine for diamonds and gold had become common-place (Tellewoyan, 2006). President Barclay fully rejected this practice and did what he could to stop its continuation, stating “this [the selling of war captives] I don’t approve of; it is selling a slave which is against the laws of the land” (Wulah, 2005, p. 38).

Nevertheless, the practice continued and, indeed, worsened with the introduction of the “hut tax” in 1916, which was a tax levied against every man who owned a house in Liberia or “hut” in the hinterland (Akpan, 1973; Ellis, 2005; Wulah, 2005). This was a boon for the Liberian government, which was in dire need of more funds, but a scourge against the indigenous people were violently forced to pay it, especially when the tax was enforced much more so in the hinterland than in the Americo Liberian settlements. By 1925, for example, the hut tax on the tribal population raised \$300,000 in revenue, whereas the property tax levied against Americo Liberians (who benefited almost exclusively from this revenue) only amounted to \$4,668 (Ellis, 2005). The timing of the “hut tax” policy was not coincidental, however. World War I had begun in 1914 and the Americo Liberians, who had been shielded from many of the more egregious developments in the scramble for Africa by the United States (all the while the

US denied any official relationship with Liberia), were obliged to side with the Americans in the war (Liebenow, 1987; Hyman, 2003). However, due to the fact that the Germans practically controlled the entire Liberian economy and conducted the majority of trade in the country by the start of the war, Liberia—yet again—faced a significant economic crisis when this trade with the Germans came to an abrupt end (Marcos et al. 2005). Following this economic collapse, the Germans proceeded to launch a full scale embargo against the Liberians, effectively cutting off all trade outside of Liberia throughout the war, and German submarines even shelled Monrovia in 1918 due to this break in their political and economic relationship (Ibid. 2005).

All the while, the Gola-Bandi resistance raged on, along with a new military resurgence from the Kru Confederacy in 1915 for the stated reasons that the Liberian government had not recognized their rights as individuals and citizens (Wulah, 2005). Many other tribal conflicts against the Liberian government as well as inter-tribal warfare was also occurring at this time, leading many Americo Liberians, such as Robert Lee, and other international critics to pressure the Liberian government for greater reforms towards the indigenous people in an effort to curb the excessive corruption and exploitative practices taking place across the hinterland (Hyman, 2003; Marcos et al., 2005; Wulah, 2005; Tellewoyan, 2006). One prominent example of cultural policy change from within Liberia occurred in 1917 when Chief Justice J. J. Dossen “recognized the legalistic inequities that existed as between the two sub-divisions and ruled that this was unconstitutional” (Best, 1974, p. 14). By way of an external example, in response to the Kru resistance in 1915, the Liberian government reached out to the United States for funds and arms to crush the rebellion, but the American officers in Liberia’s service insisted on reforms as a precondition to American military aid (Wulah, 2005). Eventually, these pressures for reform would lead the Liberian government to join the League of Nations in 1919 (Liebenow, 1987).

The corruption in the Liberian government and military worsened, however, and the violence reached its zenith in the 1920s under President Charles D. B. King, who had inherited a decimated economy due to the German naval blockade (Marcos et al., 2005). President King attempted to implement a major development project throughout the hinterland, building a network of roads for trade, administrative travel, and military use (Akpan, 1973). However, due to the massive shortage of funds, the roads were largely constructed by indigenous laborers who were forced to comply with as much as nine months of compulsory, unpaid labor to construct the roads, being that their communities would benefit from the development—a practice the Liberians certainly learned from their French and British counterparts who were doing the same in their respective West African colonies. What’s more, many additional bureaucratic administration was needed for these projects, leading to largely untrained district commissioners with infrequent and poor salaries to treat their respective territories as personal domains to do with what they wanted. Endemic extortion and oppression ensued, with illegal fees and exorbitant “fines” being levied in addition to the hut tax that would often be collected more often than its stated annual limit (Ibid.).

In conjunction with these illicit activities came about two major scandals, which would ultimately force President King out of office by impeachment: First, King signed a deal with the American Firestone rubber company to lease 1 million acres of land (representing 10% of Liberia’s arable land at the time) at 6 cents an acre for 99 years that would grant Firestone total access to the land for the production of rubber (Marcos et al., 2005). The second event, here, is called the Fernando Po scandal, which holds connections to the Firestone deal and has to do with the forced labor recruitment of Wedabo and Kplapo indigenous men to the then French colony of Gabon and the Spanish island of Fernando Po, off the West African Coast (Ibid.). The complaint

was made to the League of Nations in 1927 by the Wedabo and Kplapo chiefs and sub-chiefs, as well as from American missionaries and expatriates working in Liberia, that men from these chiefdoms were being forced into unpaid conscription for labor under duress of beatings and severe punishments against the chiefs and their people if the men did not comply. Each man conscripted would earn a \$45 fee, paid to the recruiting officials and members of President King's close family. These practices were considered to be a form of slavery in direct connection with the Liberian government and in breach of the Anti-Slavery Convention, which all members of the League of Nations was beholden to (League of Nations, 1930). Where this connects to the Firestone deal is in the fact that these same practices were also being implemented on the Firestone rubber plantation as well, causing the Firestone executives to confess to their participation in the use of forced labor in front of the League of Nations (Ellis, 1999; Hyman, 2003).

However, the commission was headed up by an Englishman, Dr. Cuthbert Christy, which is significant, since it was the British Rubber Syndicate (a group that held a monopoly on the production and trade of rubber globally) that had initially encroached on Liberian Sovereignty by taking over large swaths of rubber plantations in Liberia at the turn of the twentieth century (Marcos, et al. 2005; Tellewoyan, 2006). The fact that Firestone—a major American rubber company—had acquired the largest rubber plantation in Liberia for its exclusive use was not lost on the British, especially since the English had employed the British Rubber Syndicate in Liberia for the purpose of colonizing the country of Liberia against American interests. Therefore, it comes at no surprise that the accusations of slavery imposed against Liberia (although largely true) were imposed in order to—once again—bring Liberia under the colonial control of one of the European powers (Ellis, 1999). The Europeans failed, however—because of Firestone. As an

American corporation, the United States had an obligation to protect their interests and they intervened to ensure the sovereignty of Liberia in order to sustain the continued development of the Firestone Rubber plantation, since the Americans wanted to break the British monopoly on rubber (Hyman, 2003). Thus, at the end of the debacle, President King and several key government officials connected to the scandal resigned from their positions and Liberia agreed to a series of socioeconomic and cultural reforms that did breach Liberia's national sovereignty but allowed Liberia to still be considered an independent state (League of Nations, 1930; Hyman, 2003). The former President Barclay (who also sat on the League of Nations Commission) took over the Presidency throughout the 1930s and worked towards putting Liberian affairs back in order now that the dust was finally beginning to settle from the scramble for Africa.

Unfortunately, despite the assistance by the US to ward off another attempt by European powers to impose colonization on Liberia, the Firestone deal established a dangerous precedence for future administrations of Liberia to allow for major concessions to the Liberian economy in return for royalties that funneled directly into the Americo Liberian elite's pockets (Liebenow, 1987; Ellis, 1999; Hyman, 2003). Firestone, for example, promised to invest \$20 million in the Liberian rubber industry with the concessions that the Liberian government would take on a \$5 million dollar loan as security, all customs receipts were used as collateral against the debt, and an American agent was placed in charge of the customs revenue to ensure collection of levies and liquidation of the loans (Hyman, 2003). This placed Liberia in receivership, and—to this day—Firestone exports all raw materials out of Liberia, having never built a manufacturing facility and, therefore, being unable to develop the means to manufacture any of the rubber that Liberians produce in abundance (Hyman, 2003). In the decades to come, many more foreign investors would use the Firestone agreement as a model in order to extract further concessions

from the Liberian government—particularly in the form of mining rights (Ellis, 1999). Thus, although Liberia was able to maintain its independence, through the forfeiture of major socioeconomic concessions in their economy, Liberia became beholden to American corporations in a neocolonial relationship that produced growth in GDP without development of the country—much to the detriment of the indigenous Liberians and even the lower ranks of the Americo Liberians, while at the same time being very much in favor of the wealthy Americo Liberian oligarchs now running the country and their American counterparts profiting from favorable trade agreements.

The Tubman era 1944 – 1971. Liberia during the 1930s was something of a post-conflict state, where Barclay's administration worked towards providing reprisals to the different ethnic groups that had been oppressed and who were also thought to have been in connection to the League of Nations inquiry against the Liberian state (d'Azevedo, 1971). Barclay initiated the tribal reorganization program, which was quickly implemented in the Gola territories. Due to the devastation that had taken place during the Gola uprising that ended in 1918, many of the Kongba, Goje, and Pokpa areas had been deserted with these clans moving across the border into Sierra Leone. The Kru engaged in militarism, again, in 1932 in large part because of the political turmoil that became embroiled from the talks on reprisals. Punitive measures were quickly enforced by the Liberian government, who were also clamping down on the remaining Gola in the South and also the Vai in the North (d'Azevedo, 1971; Wulah, 2005; Tellewoyan, 2006). Despite these more aggressive actions by the Liberian government, Barclay also began meeting with different tribal unites directly in presidential conferences, which were used to reward loyal chiefdoms and remove from office any chiefs who showed signs of resistance (d'Azevedo, 1971).

Another significant aspect of Barclay's administration worth mentioning before moving into the Tubman era is the onset of World War II. For the first time in Liberia's history, a US president visited Liberia, albeit a short 2 hour visit at the airport (Hyman, 2003). From this meeting, a treaty of commerce, friendship, and navigation with Liberia. Over the war years, the United States helped develop military defenses, larger airports, roads, technical assistance, and constructing an open water sea port. The Freeport of Monrovia, which Barclay ensured would not be connected to—or directly benefit—the Firestone corporation became a critical establishment for the future development of Liberia, leading to the Liberian ship registry, which would amount to 25% of Liberia's future revenues in the years to come.

Despite these rapid developments from a Liberian government now supported directly by the United States and with a steady supply of revenue stemming from the Firestone rubber production, the hinterland was still sorely neglected. In an account given by President Barclay a few years before he was to hand-pick President Tubman to replace him, Barclay wrote the following about relations with the indigenous Liberians:

Not only have the native village classes been intimidated and terrorized by a display of force, cruelty and suppression, but the chiefs themselves, men whom the people not so many years ago looked up to... have been so systematically humiliated, degraded and robbed of their power that now they are mere go-betweens, paid by the government to coerce and rob the people. (As cited in Wulah, 2005, p. 134)

Barclay later points out that he contributed to this systematic degradation of the chiefs through his tribal reorganization program, which was imposed by the League of Nations reconstruction efforts that changed the provincial boundaries from 5 counties to 3: the Eastern, Central, and Western provinces (Ibid.). Nevertheless, Barclay did what he could to assimilate the tribal chiefs into the formal Liberian government through open dialogue with the chiefs, as is apparent in the following passage by a prominent Gola chief:

Edwin Barclay tried to show us that new times were coming and that we could not work in the old ways if our people were to rise in the world. He said we could not deal properly with the government if each small country [chiefdom] spoke for itself. We would be like chickens running here and there while small boys catch us one by one for chop. He showed us that the government was strong and that we would be destroyed if we did not become part of it. He was a very hard man, but he was right and he gained respect from my brother and other chiefs. (As cited in d'Azevedo, 1971, pp. 6-7)

Such were the conditions of the country when the keys to power were handed over to President W.V.S Tubman in 1944: A state in massive transition, coming off the heels of over a century of violence due to differences in identity, culture, and notions of social justice.

Tubman was aware of these challenges to integration, and he understood that if there was not a reconciling of the differences between the indigenous and Americo Liberians that Liberia as a free, independent nation—as a symbol of freedom and liberty for all Africans—was doomed to fail. However, despite the incredible charisma that Tubman possessed coupled with his forward thinking about how to go about constructing a unified nation, the entrenched cultures of colonialism and colorism coupled with more than a century of identity based conflicts was an almost impossible task to accomplish—one that many perceived to be too little too late. The Americo Liberian elites, for example, had consolidated a firm grip on the sociopolitical and economic aspects of Liberian life by the 1920s through the total control of the True Whig Party—a party that Tubman was a part of and beholden to (Bøås, 1997). By the 1950s, with Tubman's "Open Door Policy" in full swing, the Americo Liberian elites had, effectively, created an aristocracy of familial power structures that not only ensured certain settler families remained in power, but also cultivated a lavish lifestyle which expressed the symbolic privileges that these elites enjoyed. Here, Bøås (1997) articulates that the Americo Liberian idea of living was "a lifestyle they were most familiar with; therefore, the repatriates towns, houses, and patterns of life were reproductions of those things considered elegant in the Old South" (pp. 368-

369). Americo Liberian choice in fashion is a particularly strong example of this colonial heritage, where in the earlier parts of the twentieth century, Americo Liberians “could not have been seen at a Sunday social function without frock coat and top hat” (Bøås, 1997, p. 369). Furthermore, the great lengths that many Americo Liberian elites went through in order to achieve the leisurely lifestyle of a “Southern land owner”—where manual labor was seen as a negative marker against one’s class status—was very expensive, adding to the many reasons for the mismanagement of funds by government officials and other elites who held positions of power.

In many ways, this explains why Tubman began his “Unification Project” through his Open Door policy, where Tubman broke with traditions of isolationism in order to maintain sovereignty and embraced the free and open trade with any and all countries or multinational corporations that wished to do business in Liberia (Marinelli, 1964). In essence, the Firestone Corporation created a stable source of revenue for Liberia, but it also had an unreasonable amount of power and control over the Liberian economy. Thus, Tubman wished to leverage this new-found source of economic activity while also diversifying the economic advantages that any one entity held over Liberia. During Tubman’s second inaugural address, he explained the Open Door policy with the following statement:

We shall encourage foreign investments and the granting of foreign concessions where Liberians have not reached the position where they are capable and competent to explore and exploit the potential resources of the country. We shall continue to guarantee protection to investors and concessionaires ... All concessions, I stress again, must be on a basis of mutuality. (As cited in Marinelli, 1964, p. 93)

Under this new policy, no less than 38 major foreign companies were operating in Liberia by the 1960s, providing \$750 million in investments that would allow Liberia to pay off all its foreign debts that had held the country’s sovereignty hostage since the British loan scandal under

President Roye in 1871 (Lanier, 1961; Marinelli, 1964). Unfortunately, with these foreign companies negotiating for trade terms that strongly favored their own interests in exchange for royalties tied directly to Americo Liberian elites (and, indeed Tubman himself), Tubman was able to orchestrate an elaborate system of patronage that granted him total political and economic control throughout the country, leading to the development of a network of spies known as “Public Relations Officers” that ruthlessly oppressed political opposition and essentially brought an end to “multi-party politics” during his long tenure (Marcos, et al., 2005). In this way, Tubman was able to create a rather sycophantic cult around his presidency that consolidated power within the executive office and inspired new forms of corruption to take hold in the country.

Many argue that these tactics used by Tubman were as much a part of the persistent practices of corruption and exploitation present since Liberia’s inception to control the social hierarchy as they were a method of amelioration for the ruling elites who contested the rather liberal transformations Tubman was trying to bring about within the country (Akpan, 1973; Liebenow, 1987; Bøås, 1997; Ellis, 2005; Marcos et al. 2005; Sawyer, 2005; Tellewoyan, 2006). Thus, despite Tubman’s very autocratic form of governance that only further established a ruling oligarchy within Liberia, Tubman was also pushing for genuine change among the general populous as well. One of his first acts as president, for example, was to extend the right to vote to women in 1945, and then to the entire indigenous population in 1946—although this right to vote for the indigenous people was also tied to the infamous hut tax and would not allow for full indigenous participation until 1986 at the onset of the Second Republic of Liberia under Samuel Doe (Marcos et al., 2005). Furthermore, one of Tubman’s largest initiatives was in expanding education to the indigenous people in an effort to eradicate illiteracy and increase the indigenous

population's capacity to participate in Liberian society (Best, 1974; Liebenow, 1987; Bøås, 1997; Ballah, 2003). Best (1974) clearly demonstrates the impact of this initiative:

In 1944 there were only 200 schools with 2,000 students; by 1968 schools numbered 1,053, and students 130,871. There were less than 600 teachers in 1944; by 1968 there were 3,880. By 1972, the student population had increased to 156,083 and the number of educational institutions to 1,155. (p. 15)

The increased attention given to voting rights and education—particularly among the indigenous populations—were part of Tubman's Unification Policy. The Unification Policy, for its part, "sought to remove the political, economic, and social barriers which separated the African masses from the Americo Liberian population, and to foster tolerance and a sense of oneness between the two groups of peoples" (Akpan, 1973, p. 235). In regards to indigenous voting rights, by 1956, one-third of the representatives in the House were elected from the provinces, although the Senate was still controlled entirely by the Americo Liberians (Ibid.).

In 1952, Tubman established the Bureau of Folkways, which was tasked with the commission to study the customs and social organization of African people, thus signaling an end to the practice of assimilating the indigenous people through "civilizing" them and placed African culture and social organization on the same level as Western culture for the first time in Liberia. And in 1963, Tubman formalized his Unification Policy by officially advocating for greater inclusion among the indigenous populations within political life overall. Tubman also eliminated the provincial system, implemented by the League of Nations, by creating 4 new counties out of the 3 former provinces, providing greater political representation within the hinterland through the integration of indigenous and Americo Liberian society (Akpan, 1973; Ballah, 2003). These changes did not come without their consequences however.

As already noted earlier, Tubman's Open Door Policy greatly increased the privilege of the Americo Liberian elites, while his Unification Policy worked as political leverage to check

the political elites through popular support from the growing influence of the indigenous tribes from the hinterland (Ballah, 2003). By doing so, Tubman subverted every institution of Liberian society into an image of Tubman as the national symbol of state sovereignty, therefore allowing himself to exploit his relationships with the elites through patrimony and mutual exchanges, while at the same time exploiting the indigenous class through clientelistic relationships that expanded his influence into the hinterland. What's more, Tubman was not at all afraid to use violent force against his political enemies. One such example of this is where Tubman enjoyed watching one of his greatest foes, David Coleman, get shot down in the street while fleeing his persecutors, only to then display Coleman's body—along with the body of Coleman's son—naked at the Barclay Training Centre, where large crowds gathered to witness the event and take stalk of the political statement that such a violent act entails (Bøås, 1997). No doubt, Tubman was a controversial figure who employed draconian tactics in Machiavellian fashion to consolidate power and increase his own prestige in Liberia. However, he also genuinely increased the welfare of the indigenous class and elevated hundreds of thousands of people into new social standings, which afforded them many opportunities that they had historically been denied. In this way, Tubman's power remained unchallenged up until his death in office in 1971, where his Vice President, William R. Tolbert, replaced him as President and attempted to carry on Tubman's legacy (Akpan, 1973; Bøås, 1997; Ballah, 2003).

The Tolbert years 1971 – 1979. The economic and social transformation of the Tubman years, had a profound effect on Liberia. In short, Liberia was rising, but political tensions were also rising. Before Tubman, Liberia was effectively two different countries with the coastal Americo Liberians imposing colonialism on the interior, just as other European powers had done elsewhere. However, with the merger of these two separated societies into a unified system, and

with the rise in education across the hinterland, a reckoning was coming from the underclass and Tolbert knew it. In 1972, Tolbert reduced the cost of education significantly, making both primary and secondary education tuition free, which led to a 30% increase in student enrollment for state funded schools (Best, 1974). Tolbert also reduced dependence on the US, attempted to ease political unrest through deformatizing many political activities, introduced an anti-corruption committee, and gave political concessions to the rising grassroots opposition, which openly called out his continued use of oppression, nepotism, coercion, and networks of patronage (Bøås, 1997).

However, the large influx of newly educated citizens attending Liberia College, grassroots activist groups such as the Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA) and the Progressive Alliance of Liberians began to rally (Ballah, 2003). What's more, these activist groups had taken a strong left turn as eastern ideologies of socialism and communism developed within many academic circles, leading for calls to nationalize major sectors of the economy, therefore reclaiming those sectors from the extractive foreign companies which had invaded the country under Tubman. Cost of living was on the rise as well—outstripping the benefits extended to the indigenous class and making demands for change even more pressing. Tolbert responded by moving further to the left himself, advocating for national programs and the decentralization of wealth and power now concentrated in the hands of the Americo Liberian elites who only amounted to 5% of the population (Liebenow, 1979; Hyman, 2003). This move to the left by Tolbert, however, only aggravated the elites in power and pushed against the vested interests of the United States (Ibid.). Thus, Tolbert found himself positioned between a rising lower class that demanded more access to the privileges of citizenship and the powerful elites who were fighting hard to maintain their holdings at the top, making Tolbert's own hold on

power that much more vulnerable. All the while, the United States began to withdraw support as the political rhetoric in Liberia continued to shift towards socialism in the midst of the cold war (Hyman, 2003).

The withdrawal of support from the United States coupled with Tolbert's own efforts to distance Liberia from US dependence came with profound ramifications for the country. The US had been subsidizing the cost of rice, for example, which made Liberia's staple food affordable but stagnated local production in the rural areas (Liebenow, 1979; Hyman, 2003). Having developed 500 miles of farm-to-market roads, Tolbert wanted to transition out of exporting rice from the US for more domestic production from within Liberia (Best, 1973). In order to do so, however, Tolbert would have to raise the cost of rice from \$22 a bag to \$30 a bag, making it unaffordable for most Liberians (Ballah, 2003). Tolbert and many of his cabinet members benefited financially from the price increase as well, and they were spending money lavishly. Tolbert spent \$100 million on constructing a new conference center in order to host the annual conference for the Organization of African Unity, for example, which enraged the general populous (Bøås, 1997).

Thus, with the economy stagnating from the astounding 15% annual growth in the 1960s to only 4% growth in the 1970s, with grassroots political activists on the rise, powerful elites fighting to maintain control, the United States withdrawing support from Liberia, and the Tolbert administration continuing to participate in corrupt practices, the rice riot of 1979 broke out with thousands of Liberians taking to the streets of Monrovia to protest (Sirleaf, 1989; Bøås, 1997; Ballah, 2003; Hyman, 2003). Tolbert responded with violent oppression. Police shot into the crowd, killing forty students and wounding four hundred more (Ballah, 2003). Thirty three demonstration organizers were arrested and charged with treason for allegedly attempting to

overthrow the government. Tolbert later provided general amnesty for the demonstration organizers after even more political unrest. However, the following year, a military group led by Quiwonkpa that called themselves the People's Revolutionary Council raided the President's mansion on April 12, 1980 and murdered Tolbert (Liebenow, 1987; Ballah, 2003; Sawyer, 2005; Ellis, 2005; Wulah, 2005; Tellewoyan, 2006).

The Rise of Samuel Doe and the fall of the First Republic 1980 – 1985. The death of William Tolbert came to be something of a political paradox as the aftermath of the bloody coup unfolded. On the one hand, Tolbert's assassination sent shockwaves through the Americo Liberian community, and with thirteen leading members of the Tolbert government being placed before a tribunal, convicted of corruption, and executed on the beach of Monrovia with cameras capturing the gruesome scene for all the world to see, the international community was in a state of shock as well (Ellis, 2005). Here was a country that was hailed for its anti-colonial rhetoric throughout Africa—the First independent African nation—one that was presumed to be a rising power in Africa, and now the world watched in horror as a violent dictatorship grabbed hold of Liberia. On the other hand, the vast majority of the Liberian population cheered in triumphant jubilation as the 2.2% Americo Liberian elite class was overthrown after 133 years of political and economic domination (Tellewoyan, 2006). Liebenow (1987) states “I was not surprised when visiting that country three weeks after the 1980 coup to have many young Liberians say to me, ‘this is our first year of independence’” (p. 3).

Indeed, for the indigenous Liberians, the overthrow of Tolbert's regime and the downfall of the True Whig Party was heralded as a liberation from oppression and colonial rule. Quiwonkpa was acknowledged as the leader of the junta that murdered Tolbert, and he immediately declared that Liberia was now in the control of the PRC, which purported to be

acting on behalf of the indigenous Liberians, as almost all of the PRC was made up of the Krahn and Gio ethnic groups (Liebenow, 1987; Ellis, 2005). With unprecedented popularity, Quiwonkpa was promoted to commanding general, and he used his influence to get his childhood friend and fellow PRC compatriot Samuel Doe accepted as the nominal head of state and co-chairman of the PRC. However, the friendship shared between Quiwonkpa and Samuel Doe quickly turned into a bitter rivalry, which many claim to be the true beginning for the two civil wars Liberians would face from 1989-2003 (Liebenow, 1987; Ellis, 2005; Sawyer, 2005, Tellewoyan, 2006). With the Liberian government now in the hands of two men who were not even thirty years old, the economy in sharp decline, and the state facing a crisis of nation-building in an ethnically heterogeneous country, infighting among the PRC members erupted almost immediately (Liebenow, 1987). In August of 1981, Samuel Doe convicted four members of the PRC in front of a military tribunal with high treason for attempting to stage another putsch against the government and executed them shortly after (Tellewoyan, 2006). After this event, General Thomas Quiwonkpa became a menace and a thorn in Doe's side, as he began to openly discredit Doe's authority and demand that the country be returned to civilian rule, causing Doe to demote him to Secretary of State, which Quiwonkpa rejected, fleeing to Nimba county where he would later stage another coups against Doe in 1983. When Doe uncovered this coup attempt, Quiwonkpa fled the country, along with many of his political and military followers (Ellis, 2005). What followed was a series of raids against the Gio population in Nimba County by Doe's military as acts of revenge and violent oppression against any who would dare to stand up against Doe's regime.

By this time, the Liberian economy was in a free fall, causing Doe to move away from Liberia's US currency and start printing "Doe Dollars," which were quickly exploited by

government officials who paid out in Doe Dollars while keeping the books in US Dollars (Ellis, 2005). On the political front, Doe quickly began to take over the patronage machine, filling key military and government positions with agents who almost all had Krahn ethnic origins (Liebenow, 1987; Hyman, 2003; Ellis, 2005; Sawyer, 2005; Tellewoyan, 2006). In this way, Doe had effectively traded one oppressive minority elite for another. By 1984, Doe and his regime was highly unpopular, as Doe was still launching military attacks against Nimba County (Ellis, 2005).

In September of 1984, Doe issued Decree 88a, which gave his security forces the right to arrest and imprison any citizen deemed to be an opponent of the government without due process of law (Gershoni, 2007). Heavy austerity measures also became enforced at this time, including a \$10 deduction from the salaries of all civil service and public corporation employees, a \$5 health tax on the salaries and wages, and the compulsory retirement of 2,400 public employee. Doe still wanted legitimacy, however, and had consented to drafting a new constitution, which would be implemented in 1985, and elections that would be held that same year. These measures came about due to the increasing international pressure to restore power to the people and also from a growing body of civil society members from within Liberia. However, although Doe eventually lifted the ban on political parties in late 1984, as was necessary to hold “free and fair elections,” he immediately began to undermine the ten political groups who were attempting to register to run against him. A few weeks after the removal of the ban, Doe arrested the former head of the Constitution Committee, Amos Sawyer, who had announced his bid for presidency under the Liberian People’s Party, as well as several others on fabricated charges of planning a coup. Given that Amos Sawyer was a beloved Dean and professor of Liberia College and a prominent leader of the Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA), protests immediately broke out by the

Liberian student body at UL campus, only to be brutally crushed by Doe's security forces who raided the college, beat and raped the students, and looted the University property before Doe had the institution closed for the next three months. On April 1st 1985, during the midst of the election chaos, another attempt was made against Doe's life by Lieutenant-Colonel Moses M. D. Flanzamaton, the deputy leader of the Executive Mansion Guard Battalion, who opened fire with a pistol on Doe's Jeep as he was approaching the Head of State (Tellewoyan, 2006). Doe, survived, however, and Flanzamaton went into hiding.

Several more detentions of political activist groups followed the assassination attempt in August of 1985, leading to even more protests—one of which was held by three hundred members of the Liberian Women Committee who had signed a petition demanding the release of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (an outspoken critic of the Doe regime and the future President of Liberia in 2003) and two other female activists imprisoned at the time. All the while, the new constitution developed by the PRC in 1983 was approved by referendum for implementation in 1985 (Ellis, 2005). However, by the time of elections were actually held in October of 1985, only 3 of the ten political parties vying for the Presidency had been permitted to run against Samuel Doe's National Democratic Party of Liberia (Tellewoyan, 2006). These parties were the Unity Party (UP) headed by Dr. Edward Kesselly, the Liberian Action Party (LAP) led by Jackson Doe (no relation to Samuel Doe) and the Liberian Unification Party (LUP) which was headed by Gabriel Kpolleh. And despite the gross abuse of the political process by Samuel Doe in an attempt to rig the election, a general consensus by local and international observers declared that Jackson Doe from the LAP had won the election. However, Doe appointed a Special Election Commission that—after unusual delays and serious suspicion of thousands of ballots being destroyed—declared Samuel Doe as the winner of the 1985 election. Consequently, the election

was stolen by force, and the Second Republic of Liberia inaugurated Samuel Doe as its first President.

Thus, the First Republic of Liberia ended by the bloody takeover of a ruthless dictator enacting revenge against 133 years of oligarchic control by the Americo Liberians. Samuel Doe's reign as the "legitimate" President of the Second Republic of Liberia would come to an abrupt end 4 years later. Charles Taylor would enter the country through Nimba County with a band of fighters called the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) in 1989, challenging Doe's authority (Ellis, 2005; Tellewoyan, 2006). Doe would die a brutal death in 1990 by Prince Johnson that would—again—be recorded and aired for the whole world to watch in horror. What would follow would become the wholesale destruction and ravenous exploitation of all of Liberia, resulting in the deaths of more than 250,000 Liberians (a massive toll for Liberia's population of 3.5 million) and the displacement of another 500,000 refugees (Ellis, 2005; Tellewoyan, 2006; Global Economic Symposium, 2009). As of 2003, the country of Liberia stands at the precipice of a new postcolonial era, searching for reconciliation, and desperately fighting for a democracy that represents all Liberians as one unified people.

What Lies Ahead: The Second Republic of Liberia

As mentioned in the introduction to this paper, the Second Republic of Liberia now stands at the precipice of a new postcolonial era, one where all Liberians have the opportunity to stand united as one people. What the historical analysis above has hopefully shown is the collective drive for social justice shared by all Liberians, albeit from very different perspectives and through different means. Indeed, this shared history acts as a testament that all Liberians can, in fact, draw from their own collective history in order to construct a new Liberian society that unites them under one identity. In order to do so, the social development of Liberia needs to be

implemented through a willful determination of all Liberians to shape a society that allows the people of Liberia the opportunity to express their latent potential without the hindrance of further oppression by one group over the other. Johan Galtung (2010) helps to express this idea further, where he describes development as the “unfolding of the potentials in the nature, human, social, and world spaces” (p. 16). This is primarily an evolutionary argument, one that aligns with Sack’s (2015) Darwinist logic to a large degree: Trees carry seeds, and those seeds carry codes; with the proper nutrients, such as water, air, and sunshine, these latent codes manifest and develop—they unfold their codes. And just as plants unfold and develop their “codes,” so too do animals, humans, societies, and worlds (Ibid.). By viewing social development through these terms, approaches for the construction of a unified Liberia become viable through collective participation, as they allow for all Liberians to participate in the development of their own potential. There is still much work to be done in order to achieve this pursuit, however, and it begins by synthesizing the varying perspectives on social justice within Liberian into a cohesive theory that is inclusive of all Liberians. What follows below is just this: A synthesis for social justice in Liberia.

A contemporary synthesis for social justice in Liberia. “Empowerment of those who have not had opportunities or cannot imagine being in control of their own destiny is the greatest challenge—but also the surest path to success—in the quest for democracy and development in Liberia” (Sawyer, 2005, p. 200). These are some of the last words written by Amos Sawyer that stand as his final conclusion for the best hope Liberians have at moving forward. They speak to a process of inclusion and a deep understanding that all Liberian voices need to be heard and that all Liberians need to have the capacity to fully participate in building the society they are a part of. How does Sawyer (2005) expect this to be accomplished? It would take a book (as he has

demonstrated) to fully express the answer to this question, but at least we can explore some of his conclusions. There are four conclusions, specifically, that will add to our discussion on achieving social justice in Liberia: 1) Expanding opportunity through polycentric governance; 2) Citizenship and governance; 3) The role of education in nurturing citizens; and 4) Citizenship and the public realm.

Expanding opportunities through polycentric governance. The need for localized systems of governance that are contextually specific to the people within local communities and their ethnic cultures speaks volumes about the type of inclusive governance Sawyer is promoting. And the logic behind this approach is deeply rooted in the failures of governance experienced within Liberia, as Sawyer (2005) explains:

With a single center of authority, a system of unitary sovereignty can foreclose certain opportunities. Survival in such systems too frequently requires the mobilization of the creative genius of human beings for sycophancy and manipulation rather than for constructive productive outcomes. In such a state of Hobbesian sovereignty, no degree of moral suasion ultimately counts, because the stakes are high and individuals often find themselves locked in numerous noncooperative games. (p. 177)

Here, we see Sawyer rejecting Hobbes's arguments about the necessity for absolute authority, while at the same time arguing for a system of governance that incorporates a social contract, or in this case, a set of social contracts based on the wants and needs of local constituents. It's a complex, multi-layered system of governance that creates a capacity for diverse perspectives to be incorporated simultaneously, and it allows for local self-determination. In essence, polycentric governance gets at Rousseau's primary question: How can we be free and live together? It also provides space for indigenous systems—such as described by Somah—to flourish. Furthermore, it allows for pluralism among a diverse set of ethnic cultures and creates greater equality among the general population through greater economic justice.

Citizenship and governance. This section is, to a large degree, complementary to the previous section on governance in general. Thus, we see Sawyer (2005) arguing for the active and full participation of citizens at all levels of government in order to achieve true democracy and, therefore, greater social justice. In short, Sawyer (2005) argues that “the foundation of a system of democratic governance are citizens who are governors.... Democratic governance does not simply require that leaders be accountable to citizens; it requires that citizens also participate as leaders” (p. 184). Again, we see here echoes of Somah’s (2003) arguments regarding the full participation of everyone in the community in social leadership. Thus, the principles of humanism, gradualism, and nonpartyism are realized from within this framework.

The role of education in nurturing citizens. The arguments made, here, by Sawyer (2005) go a long way in not only acknowledging the role of indigenous knowledge in the Liberian education system but also in the advantages gained from harmonizing indigenous knowledge sources with western knowledge. Thus, we see Sawyer (2005) address two critical elements of education for developing good citizenship that recognizes all as equal. The first is in understanding the need to “create an educational system that integrates what is essentially a dual system of education... into a well-rounded educational experience that is relevant for addressing the challenges of life in African society more generally and in Liberian society more specifically” (p. 190). The dual education system Sawyer (2005) is referencing is the indigenous social education offered in “bush” schools by the Poro and Sande secret societies, and the more literacy and academic based Western education offered in the government based system. The second critical point made by Sawyer (2005) is that of incorporating the use of indigenous languages into the education system. This is significant in terms of social justice for Liberians not only because granting indigenous Liberians the opportunity to learn in their “mother tongue”

is essential for increased learning capacity, but also because “speaking and writing in the English language was both an emblem of being civilized and an instrument of control” that denied indigenous Liberians access to participation in Liberian society (p. 195).

Citizenship and the public realm. Like in the previous sections, this conclusion made by Sawyer speaks to many of the principles and concepts on social justice that are represented in both American and indigenous Liberian perspectives. Even still, I see Sawyer’s notions of citizenship in the public realm speaking to the concept of humanism more so than others. With this in mind, Sawyer (2005) states that “the lack of a credible public realm leaves ample public space for demagoguery, which is typically countered by government repression” (p. 196). Sawyer’s (2005) proposed solution is to cultivate a public space where newspapers and other media outlets can operate with integrity and disburse credible information that is accurate and relevant to those who receive that information. Sawyer (2005) furthers this argument by making the assertion that local language newspapers and radio stations play a vital role in the cultivation of an open space for public citizenship. Thus, “the use of local languages is not only important for conveying meaning in intellectual discourse and political governance; it is also vital for communicating other kinds of information and for creating and conveying social and cultural meanings” (p. 197). This understanding of the public realm is important for not only developing good governance, but also for cultivating meaning in social and cultural aspects of life—particularly through the expression of local languages—and is essential for creating a collective spirit of inclusion that reflects the attitude of “I for you, you for me, and all for one another.” Through songs, dance, and other cultural practices expressed in an open public realm through the use of local languages, the heritage of local citizens can be invigorated while, at the same time,

celebrating the larger heritage of others who share in the values and meanings of a common heritage for all.

Conclusion

With this historical analysis constructed through Liberian perspectives, the story of Liberia becomes one of a people searching for honor in their own heritage. It's a story of humanity, and the challenges Liberians face collectively in their pursuit for freedom, safe refuge, and social justice. And like all stories—all histories across the human race—it is filled with triumphs and tragic failures, of champions and despots, of corruption and the never ending drive to overcome oppression and tyrannical authority. But at its heart, the story of Liberia is an African story that rings with the desire to stand independent and free with the capacity to govern its own future on equal footing and in the spirit of “I for you, you for me, and all for one another.” Perhaps with the inclusive theory of development outlined by Amos Sawyer, Liberians will find a way to stand together and reclaim their collective heritage in the pursuit for social justice. In this way, Liberians stand a chance at transforming their society from that of a divided and violent social system of oppression into one that stands united in its pursuit for greater prosperity for all that harnesses its diversity as a catalyst for the development of greater human potential.

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