

“The Negro Experiment”: Black Modernity and Liberia, 1883-1910

Laura Elizabeth West

‘Thesis submitted to the faculty of the
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in History

Matthew M. Heaton (Chair)

Dennis R. Hidalgo

Marian B. Mollin

Brett L. Shadle

April 25, 2012

Blacksburg, VA

Keywords: Liberia, Black Modernity, imperialism, Africa, identity

“The Negro Experiment”: Black Modernity and Liberia, 1883-1910

Laura Elizabeth West

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the notion of “black modernity” in the context of the Liberia at the turn of the twentieth century. Despite Liberia’s recognition by the international community as a sovereign nation, Liberia fell subject to the imperial ploys of the European powers in the Scramble for Africa. Americo-Liberians, the governing elite of Liberia, toiled to preserve Liberia’s status as an autonomous nation and the only self-governed black republic in Africa. This thesis examines the complexities of Liberia’s sovereignty crisis, highlighting the ways in which Americo-Liberians used methods of “modernity” for their own purposes. Using Liberia as a case study, this thesis argues that the concept of “black modernity” hinges on contextual factors such as the plight of the people, pending circumstances, power structures, and understanding of self in relation to these variables. Americo-Liberians, unlike most black people at this time, were protected from race-based oppression by the state. Thus, when Liberia’s sovereignty was in jeopardy, Americo-Liberians diligently fought to ensure that the Republic of Liberia maintained its sovereignty by using methods of colonialism and diplomacy. While these methods mirrored those of the European imperialists, Americo-Liberians employed these methods to preserve Liberia and, accordingly, challenge the prevailing notions of black inferiority.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Matthew Heaton, for his continued guidance through the many phases of this project. His diligent support and direction helped me transform an idea into an extensive research project.

I would also like to thank my committee, Drs. Dennis Hidalgo, Marian Mollin, and Brett Shadle, for the countless hours they set aside to meet with me, read various versions of my thesis, and provide thorough feedback.

Lastly, I thank my parents, Terry and Audrey West, for their steadfast love, encouragement, and support. They instilled in me a thirst for knowledge and a strong work ethic, without which, this thesis would not have been possible.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter One	
‘Poor Man Cant Vex’: The Realities of Freedom in Liberia	20
The Founding of Liberia	21
Colonial Liberia	26
The Creation of the Republic of Liberia	29
Threats to Independent Liberia	31
Decline of relationship with the ACS	41
Conclusion	43
Chapter Two	
The Origins of the Liberian Colonial State	45
Establishing Colonial Rule	47
Establishing Hegemony	53
Protecting and Enforcing Hegemony	64
Conclusion	65
Chapter Three	
“Persuasion and Diplomacy”: Perception and Black Modernity in Liberia	67
International Recognition, Jealousy, and Financial Aid	69
Collaboration for the Sake of Liberia	77
Colonial Origins, Political Kinship, and Racial Affinity	84
Americo-Liberians, African Americans, and The Fight Against Racial Oppression	90
Conclusion	100
Conclusion	103
American Intervention	103
Liberia and “Black Modernity”	105
“Black Modernity” in Haiti and Ethiopia	107
“Black Modernity,” Black Nationalism, and Pan-Africanism	109
Bibliography	112

List of Figures

Figure 1: Liberian Claims as of 1830	33
Figure 2: Americo-Liberian Settlements as of 1850	34
Figure 3: Liberian Settlements as of 1864	47

Introduction

In a speech delivered to the Liberian Legislature in December of 1905, President Arthur Barclay proclaimed, "...it is a fact that we do not represent ourselves alone, in this national experiment. Consider what our success or failure will mean for the Race."¹ Toiling to finalize territorial negotiations with both British and French officials and simultaneously struggling to repay financial loans to the British bank, Barclay reminded the legislature exactly what was at stake. Liberia's existence mattered far beyond the disputed territorial boundaries of the small Republic. Given that Liberia was one of two self-governed black republics in the world, and the only one in Africa, he believed Liberia served as a symbol of black progress. The demise of Liberia would be detrimental not only to the inhabitants of Liberia, but also to black people throughout the Atlantic World. Still labeled as an experiment, a failed Liberia would only reinforce the prevailing idea among white Europeans and Americans that black people were inherently inferior and incapable of self-government.

Concerned with the fate of Liberia, Americo-Liberians, the governing elite of Liberia, went to great lengths to preserve Liberia's sovereignty and territorial integrity throughout the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Responding to European advancements that began in the 1860s, Liberian Government officials attempted to mitigate the threats by implementing tactics similar to those used by the European powers to colonize Africa. Nonetheless, Liberian efforts alone proved unable to thwart these imperial pressures. British and French agents continued to contest Liberian territorial claims and undermine the Liberian state's territorial hegemony within the Republic. With territorial encroachments threatening Liberia's physical

¹ Arthur Barclay, "Message of the President of Liberia Communicated to the First Session of the Thirteenth Legislature," December 14, 1905," *Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, DC.

autonomy and financial indebtedness jeopardizing its economic self-sufficiency, at the turn of the twentieth century Liberian Government officials initiated a more diligent effort to protect Liberian territory via physical occupation of the hinterland and solicitation of much needed external aid. Embracing the methods of European colonial powers even as they criticized the European colonial threats, Liberian Government officials worked to preserve existing Liberian territory and improve Liberia's image throughout the Atlantic World.

Paul Gilroy introduced the concept of "black modernity" in his work *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Focusing his study on Britain's black citizens, Gilroy attempts to understand black British citizens at the intersections of race, nationality, culture, and ethnicity. Situating "black modernity" within the framework of W.E.B. Du Bois' idea "Double Consciousness," Gilroy argues black intellectuals were embedded in the modern world as both defenders of modernity and also "its sharpest critics."² Moreover, Gilroy suggests that although the black British population occupied physical spaces in the modern world, they were not necessarily of that world because they subscribed to notions of ethnic nationalism in addition to or in place of political or cultural nationalism. Broadening this idea to the greater Atlantic World, Gilroy deduces that black populations resided both inside and outside of the West.³ He attempts to unearth this counter-culture of "modernity" enacted by blacks that was situated in a "partially hidden public sphere of its own."⁴ Gilroy concludes that "black modernity" can be

² Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), ix; W.E.B. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk* (New York: NAL Penguin, Inc, 1969), 45. W.E.B. Du Bois argued African Americans possessed a "Double Consciousness" as they were caught between two identities, American and "Negro."

³ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk* (New York: NAL Penguin, Inc, 1969), 45.

⁴ Gilroy, 38.

defined through a “desire to transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity.”⁵

While Gilroy’s definition of “black modernity” proves valuable, it cannot be transposed into all historical circumstances because it rests on the premise that black people longed to transcend the confines of the nation state, as understood by the white population. While this notion may have held true in many situations, this was not the case in Liberia at the turn of the twentieth century. Contrary to Gilroy’s deduction, Americo-Liberians hoped to preserve the nation state; they were not oppressed by the boundaries of Liberia but protected and empowered by the state and the Constitution. Liberia did not deny Americo-Liberians of liberties, but actually protected the Americo-Liberian lifestyle. Liberia’s very status as the first black-ruled African republic, as well as Americo-Liberian attempts to preserve Liberia’s status as self-governed and establish it as successful nation-state, challenged prevailing notions of black inferiority. However, the racialized power structures domineering the international community constricted Americo-Liberians and the Liberian state.

Responding to race-based oppression at the international level, Americo-Liberian attempts to maintain Liberia’s foothold exemplify the idea of “black modernity.” Employing colonial tactics for the purpose of fending off European imperial encroachments within Liberia, Americo-Liberians adopted these methods in an attempt to prove Liberia’s status as sovereign nation. They thus engaged in “modern” projects of colonial expansion and international diplomacy en route to preserving Liberian territory and economic interests in the face of the Europeans’ Scramble for Africa. To ensure Liberia’s survival, Liberian Government officials both accepted and rejected “modernity” by employing European colonial methods, as agreed upon at the

⁵ Ibid,19.

Berlin Conference, for their own purposes. While Gilroy argues that “black modernity” is about overcoming the confines of the nation-state, this particular case proves otherwise. For Americo-Liberians, “black modernity” was inextricably fastened to the nation-state and its longevity.

Other historians have built on Gilroy’s pioneering work and introduced new defining characteristics of “black modernity.” Most recently, Patrick Manning addressed “black modernity” in his work *The African Diaspora: A History Through Culture*. Responding to Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic* and John Thornton’s *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, Manning suggests that these authors neglect to include the experiences of black people of Africa and the African Diaspora.⁶ Manning argues that incorporating both Africans and the African Diaspora into studies on “black modernity” would usher in a more complete and lucid understanding of the concept. Manning bases his call to contextualize “black modernity” within four overlapping connections characteristic of the African Diaspora: interactions among black communities at home and abroad, relations with hegemonic powers, relations with non-African communities, and the mixing of black and other communities. Manning argues these connections are not merely characteristics of “black modernity,” but tools of “black modernity.”

Manning’s challenge to position “black modernity” within the larger framework of the African Diaspora exposes the interconnectivity of the Diaspora. In regard to the four overlapping connections Manning outlines, three are present within this case study on Liberia. Liberia’s hybrid population consisted of black people from the Americas, Europe, and Africa. African Americans, Afro-Caribbeans, and Afro-Europeans who immigrated, whether willingly or forced, to Liberia made up the class of governing elites known as Americo-Liberians. Hailing from various parts of the Atlantic World, many of these individuals remained in contact with

⁶ Patrick Manning, *The African Diaspora* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 8. John K. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

friends and relatives from the countries from which they came. The identity “Americo-Liberian” emerged because of the connection these people maintained to their pasts. African Americans reciprocated this connection, as they recognized that a significant number of African Americans and descendants of African Americans resided in the Republic of Liberia. These transnational connections persisted, whether they were active in the form of regular communication or laid dormant in the form of lingering identities.

In addition to the assimilation of these people under the title of Americo-Liberians, sixteen distinct groups of indigenous Liberians incorporate an additional layer of diversity to Liberia’s populace.⁷ While the Americo-Liberian and indigenous populations did not cohabitate within the borders of Liberia, they did interact somewhat regularly whether on peaceful or hostile terms. As the European imperial threats increased in severity, Americo-Liberians made a more conscious effort to establish and maintain friendly relationships with the indigenous populations, and worked to prevent discordant encounters between the indigenous populations. Americo-Liberian relations with African Americans and indigenous populations embody Manning’s connection of black communities at home and abroad.

In the wake of territorial encroachments, Americo-Liberians capitalized on their existing diplomatic relationships with Great Britain, France, and Germany. Liberia established and maintained relationships with these hegemonic powers shortly after gaining its independence in 1847, though the nature of these relationships varied throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While these relations remained on friendly terms on the surface, Americo-Liberians often had to sift through the ulterior motives of antagonistic Europeans in order to look out for the best interests of Liberia. As European encroachments became more aggressive

⁷ Yekutiel Gershoni, *Black Colonialism: the Americo-Liberian Scramble for the Hinterland* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985), 1.

in the late nineteenth century, Liberian Government officials pitted these imperial regimes against each other in attempt to secure much needed assistance and resources. By drawing aid from multiple European regimes, Liberian officials were able to secure external aid all the while protecting Americo-Liberian interests by preventing Liberia from becoming wholly dependent on any of the European powers.

In addition to seeking aid from the surrounding European powers, Liberian officials also worked to rekindle the quiescent relationship with the United States Government, stemming from Liberia's origins as a private colony of the American Colonization Society. Given the United States' apparent lack of interest in colonial Africa, as well as its former connectivity to Liberia, Americo-Liberians sought more encompassing assistance. With its sovereignty in jeopardy because of past assistance from the European powers, at the turn of the 20th century Americo-Liberians hoped for a US intervention on behalf of Liberia that would allow the Republic to retain its autonomy. Americo-Liberian navigation of international diplomacy dovetails with Manning's notion of relationship with hegemonic powers, though the nature of these relationships warrants further study to explore the ways in which Americo-Liberians positioned Liberia among these powers.

While Manning's connections prove useful for this study, the Americo-Liberian pursuit of these relationships as well as the Americo-Liberian intentions further illuminate the notion of "black modernity" within the context of Liberia's sovereignty crisis. Liberian Government officials meticulously presented themselves and Liberia in a distinct manner so as to appeal to the very nature of a specific relationship. I suggest the meticulous navigation of diplomatic and non-diplomatic relationships is a form of "black modernity" in itself, as Americo-Liberians used these networks as resources to solicit Liberian aid and preserve Liberia's existence.

Historian Ibrahim Sundiata recently examined “black modernity” in the context of Liberia, specifically looking at perceptions of Liberia throughout the Black Atlantic. In *Brothers and Strangers: Black Zion, Black Slavery, 1914-1940*, Sundiata explores the desire of Pan-African leaders to transcend the national boundaries and create a unified international black identity. Given Liberia’s autonomy and physical location within Africa, Pan-African leaders toiled to establish Liberia as the epicenter of the Pan-African movement. Despite the realities of slavery within the Republic in the form of Americo-Liberian enslavement of indigenous persons, Sundiata suggests race leaders used both realities and imaginings of Liberia to defend the idea of an international black community. Further, Pan-African leaders’ desire for a free-black African state overshadowed the atrocities plaguing the Republic, such as the slavery scandal of the 1920s. In 1929, the United States Department of State accused the Republic of Liberia of being deeply involved in a system of involuntary labor. An inquiring commission found that “classic slavery” did not exist but forced labor in the form of “inter- and intra-tribal slavery” and “servitude by a debtor to a creditor for an infinite time without compensation” did exist in Liberia.⁸ Sundiata’s focus on Pan-Africanism in this context reveals the significance of Liberia to the Pan-African movement as well as the motives behind presenting romanticized understandings of Liberia to the African Diaspora. Sundiata references Liberia as “the twentieth century’s most potent African dream” suggesting Pan-Africanists needed Liberia to succeed because of its symbolic value as a sign of race progress and “black modernity.”⁹ He concludes that in the case of Liberia, Pan-Africanism ultimately failed because Garvey directed his

⁸ Culbert Christy, “Liberia in 1930,” *The Geographic Journal* vol 77, No. 6 (June 1931), 537. Found in, Felicitas Ruetten, “Black America’s Perceptions of Africa in the 1920s and 1930s” (M.A. Thesis, Seton Hall University, 2009). For more information on the Liberian Labor Scandal, see: Ibrahim Sundiata, *Black Scandal, America and the Liberian Labor Crisis, 1929-1936* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1980).

⁹ Ibrahim Sundiata, *Brothers and Strangers: Black Zion, Black Slavery, 1914-1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 2.

message towards the African Diaspora in the Americas; conscious that their geographic location placed them outside of Garvey's Diasporic vision, Americo-Liberians rejected his message and refused to cooperate. While Sundiata suggests Liberia itself was a sign of "black modernity," an analysis of "black modernity" in Liberia in the period directly preceding Sundiata's study would further explain the romanticized ideas of Liberia circulating in the World War I era.

Sundiata's work is valuable, though his study begins in 1914 and does not take into consideration the events prior to the Americo-Liberian slavery scandal. While Sundiata explores the relations between the indigenous populations and Americo-Liberians, his focus on Liberia beginning in the World War I period neglects to contextualize the Americo-Liberian pursuit of the hinterland and colonization of the indigenous. In order to understand the origins of twentieth century slavery in Liberia, one must consider the ways in which Americo-Liberians worked to distance themselves from the "heathen" indigenous populations by seeking affinity with the white Europeans. Additionally, exploring the events surrounding Liberia's threatened sovereignty at the turn of the twentieth century would further explain these romanticized views of Liberia, as these very ideas filled African American newspapers in an attempt to secure, and later justify, American intervention on behalf of Liberia between 1906 and 1910. The World War I era was not the first time Liberia's struggle for independence made American headlines, and the practices the Americo-Liberians implemented in and around 1900 likely led to the slavery scandal that threatened Liberia's independence in 1929.

This particular study focuses on "black modernity" in a time of crisis, when Americo-Liberians were determined to ensure that the Republic of Liberia survived as an independent state within a continent almost wholly colonized by European regimes. Merely scraping by would not be enough, as a limping Liberia would only undergird the idea that blacks were

incapable of self-governing. Thus, Americo-Liberians needed to preserve Liberia's national sovereignty and elevate the Republic to the status of the Western nations. While Liberia constituted a crucial signpost in the broader struggle for racial uplift, Liberia's plight and the methods employed by the Americo-Liberians reveal the flexibility of the concept "black modernity." This study on Liberia illustrates that the characteristics of "black modernity" hinge on the historical time, geographic location, and immediate circumstances to which black leader are responding.

Building on the existing scholarship, I define "black modernity" as the ways in which Americo-Liberians accepted and rejected European notions of "modernity." I do not use "modernity" as a category of analysis but as a European construct designed to distinguish Europe from the rest of the world. Western intellectuals defined "modernity" by what they believed to be the negation of the "modern," the "primitive." Moreover, they defined "modern," "civilized," and "progressive" by contrasting them with "savage," "uncivilized," and "regressive." By creating taxonomies in which Western "modernity" served as the standard, Europeans subjected non-Western cultures to judgment on a Western scale.¹⁰ Although scholars within the past decade have challenged the idea of a singular, Western-based "modernity" by acknowledging the presence of "modernities" both outside the West and preceding Western influence, I use "modernity" in the singular, orthodox sense as a product and "accomplishment" of Europe.¹¹ "Black modernity" constitutes one of the many "modernities" at play during this period. However, "black modernity" in the context of Liberia's sovereignty crisis is intrinsically tied to

¹⁰ Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 113-114; Jeremy Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 89.

¹¹ Timothy Mitchell, eds., *Questions of Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Memphis Press, 2000); Charles Piot, *Remotely Global: Village Modernity in West Africa* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999); Jeremy Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

the European understanding of “modernity” because “modernity” was the entity to which Americo-Liberians responded.

Western powers dictated the standards of “modernity,” which served as the measuring-stick for Liberian sovereignty. Americo-Liberians politically, socially, and ideologically exhibited this particular “modernity” through their embodiment of Western styles of government, dress, education, and religion. Nonetheless, they fell short of the “modernity” threshold in the eyes of Europeans, largely because of the prevailing European association of savagery and regression with blackness. Caught within this dichotomy, Americo-Liberians appealed to European standards of “modernity” in order to bridge the gap between themselves and the Europeans, all the while distancing themselves from “savage” Africa.

In an attempt to preserve the Republic of Liberia, Americo-Liberians mirrored European methods of colonial occupation in Africa with the Americo-Liberian move into the hinterland. However, Americo-Liberians surpassed established ethnic and national boundaries not to forge a broader identity outside these confines but to acquire assistance for Liberia. For Americo-Liberians, the nation state was not an entity they wanted to transcend but something they strove to preserve. Further, Americo-Liberians meticulously presented themselves and Liberia so as to secure aid from particular audiences in the international community. In doing so, Americo-Liberians made use of three of the connections that Manning suggests are characteristic of the African Diaspora. Thus, I use a portion of Gilroy’s definition of “black modernity,” but situate it in the context of the greater African Diaspora.

This thesis adds to the existing historiography on “black modernity” by examining this concept in a case study on Liberia nestled within the broader framework of international politics and the Scramble for Africa. “Black modernity” varies with both time and place because of the

ways in which different black communities understood themselves in relation to the rest of the Black Atlantic. “Black modernity” in the context of Liberia at the turn of the twentieth century differed from that implemented in other parts of the Atlantic because of the very plight of Liberia and the power at the disposal of Americo-Liberians. As one of two black Republics in the world, Liberia’s sole existence challenged the prevailing race-based sentiment of the day. Moreover, in Liberia, Americo-Liberians enjoyed the liberties of citizenship, such as voting and running for political office, denied to black citizens throughout much of the world, although Americo-Liberians did not initially extend these liberties to the indigenous populations within the Republic. Despite this internal division, the relationships between the Americo-Liberian community and other black populations speak to the interconnectivity of the Black Atlantic as well as the Americo-Liberian understanding of their position within the broader Atlantic World.

Depending on the context, “black modernity” exists at various levels. Gilroy’s idea of “black modernity” as the desire to transcend the nation-state only addresses “black modernity” at the national level. In the case of Liberia, Americo-Liberians were not combating state sponsored oppression, but a racialized Western mindset. Accordingly, exploring this concept at the local, national, and international levels adds another layer of complexity. In order to prove their governing capability to European onlookers, Americo-Liberians needed to facilitate cooperation at the local level with the indigenous Liberians. Since these populations proved to be far from docile, Liberian Government officials needed to highlight the benefits of submitting to Liberian authority. Cooperation at the local level would enable Liberian Government officials to frame Liberia as a cohesive state, serving as proof of Liberian autonomy and authority to the international community.

While cooperation at the local level was necessary, relationships with those residing outside the Republic were equally important. Scholars have examined the ways in which African American perceived Africa and Africans, as well as the ways in which Africans perceived African Americans.¹² Despite the physical geography separating African Americans and Americo-Liberians, these populations were not so distant, as African Americans and Americo-Liberians understood themselves as facing similar race-based oppression. Considering the advantages of the other group, both populations viewed each other as tools of “black modernity” with the potential to mitigate their respective causes. While two sides of this relationship existed, I focus on the Americo-Liberian component. Nonetheless, further study on these relationships as tools of “black modernity” will add to the existing literature by exploring the Black Atlantic as a both a network and a resource.

Building on the ways in which African Americans and Africans viewed each other, scholars have examined how these perceptions gave rise to transnational ideas, and later movements, such as Black Nationalism¹³ and Pan-Africanism.¹⁴ While both of these ideologies transcended the boundaries of nation states as a means of uniting blacks on the premise of racial affinity, “black modernity” in the case of Liberia complicates these narratives. While Americo-Liberians had no trouble identifying themselves with African Americans along racial lines, they typically

¹² James Sidbury, *Becoming African in America: Race and Nation in the Early Black Atlantic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden, 1898-1903* (Urbana, Chicago, and London: University of Illinois Press, 1975); Charles Alvis Bodie, *The Images of Africa in the Black American Press, 1890-1930*. Thesis--Indiana University, 1978.

¹³ Dexter B. Gordon, *Black Identity: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Nineteenth-Century Black Nationalism* (Carbondale, IL and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003); Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1978); Colin Grant, *Negro with a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.)

¹⁴ Toyin Falola, *Nationalism and African intellectuals* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2001); Marika Sherwood, *Origins of Pan-Africanism: Henry Sylvester Williams, Africa, and the African Diaspora* (New York: Routledge, 2011); P. Olisanwuche Esedebe, *Pan-Africanism: The Idea and the Movement, 1776-1963* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1982); Ronald W. Walters, *Pan Africanism in the African Diaspora: An Analysis of Modern Afrocentric Political Movements* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993).

excluded indigenous Africans from this genre. In the minds of Americo-Liberians, the indigenous Africans exemplified the very stereotypes Americo-Liberians were trying to surpass. Aside from the racial hierarchy perceived by the Americo-Liberians, “black modernity” in Liberia runs parallel to many of the goals Pan-Africanists hoped to achieve, particularly independence and self-government.

In addition to the literature on “black modernity,” my thesis also directly engages with the scholarship on Liberia. Much of this literature focuses on Liberia during either the colonial period or the civil wars of the late twentieth century. Of the scholarship examining colonial Liberia, many scholars have focused on the origins of Liberia, emphasizing the colonial relationship between Liberia and the American Colonization Society.¹⁵ Others have examined the state of affairs of colonial Liberia, including the conditions Liberian settlers faced as well as the early relationship between these settlers and the indigenous populations.¹⁶ Most recently, historians have examined the immigration movements from the United States to Liberia in the second half of the nineteenth century and the formation of the class of Americo-Liberians.¹⁷ Aside from the works focusing on the origins of Liberia and the creation of the Americo-Liberian population, the bulk of the remaining scholarship on Liberia centers on the Liberian Civil Wars. While some scholars have traced the origins of the Civil Wars back to the early

¹⁵ Eric Burin, *Slavery and a Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville: The University of Florida Press, 2005), P.J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), Allan Yarema, *The American Colonization Society: An Avenue to Freedom?* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2006), (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007) or Amos J. Beyan, *The American Colonization Society and the Creation of the Liberian State: A Historical Perspective, 1822-1900* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991).

¹⁶ Katherine Harris, *African and American Values: Liberia and West Africa* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), Marie Tyler-McGraw, *An African Republic: Black & White Virginians in the Making of Liberia*, Charles Morrow Wilson, *Liberia* (New York: William Sloane Associates, Inc, 1947).

¹⁷ Claude A. Clegg III, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Jeremiah Wilson Moses *Liberian Dreams: Back to Africa Narratives from the 1850s* (University Park, PA: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); Tom W. Shick, *Behold the Promised Land: A History of Afro-American Settler Society in Nineteenth-Century Liberia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

encounters between the African American immigrants and the indigenous populations residing within Liberian territory, they dedicate little attention to the period in between.¹⁸

Scholarship addressing the Scramble for Africa does mention this period of Liberian history. Many of these historians, however, gloss over Liberia's struggle to maintain its sovereignty, rationalizing that the United States came to Liberia's aid because of Liberia's origins as an ACS colony.¹⁹ While the ACS did maintain a relationship with Liberia after cutting its colonial ties, the intimacy of this relationship diminished in the late nineteenth century. Increasingly curious of the nature of the relationship between the United States and Liberia, European agents probed US officials regarding the United States' intentions with the Republic of Liberia. Nonetheless, US officials denied any sort of US interest in Liberia. Moreover, the intervention of the United States on behalf of Liberia resulted from a six-year-long pursuit by the Liberian Government via diplomacy and envoys largely arranged by African American leaders. Glossing over Liberia's sovereignty crisis fails to explore the crucial role Americo-Liberians played in preserving their own autonomy.

The scholarship that does address Liberia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries focuses on the Americo-Liberian pursuit of the Liberian hinterland but does not place this pursuit within the larger context of Liberia's threatened sovereignty within the Scramble, or take into consideration the Liberian's motives for this pursuit.²⁰ Yekutiel Gershoni addresses this

¹⁸ Jeremy I. Levitt, *The Evolution of Deadly Conflict in Liberia: From 'Paternalism' to State Collapse* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2005), Gabriel I.H. Williams, *Liberia: The Heart of Darkness* (Victoria, Canada: Trafford Publishing, 2002); Mary H. Moran, *Liberia: the Violence of Democracy* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

¹⁹ H.L. Wessling, *Divide and Rule: The Partition of Africa, 1880-1914*, trans. Arnold L. Pomerans (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996); J. D. Fage, *A History of Africa* 4th ed (New York: Routledge, 2002); J. F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder, eds, *History of West Africa*, vol 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973); Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa 1876-1912* (New York: Random House, 1991).

²⁰ Tim Geysbeek, "The Anderson-d'Ollone Controversy of 1903-04: Race, Imperialism, and Reconfiguration of the Liberia-Guinea Border," *History in Africa* 31 (2004): 185-213; Yekutiel Gershoni, *Black Colonialism: the Americo-Liberian Scramble for the Hinterland* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985); Timothy A. Rainey, *Buffalo Soldiers in*

period of Liberian history in his book *Black Colonialism: the Americo-Liberian Scramble for the Hinterland*. Arguing that the Americo-Liberian move into the interior was imperial in nature, Gershoni labels Liberia a “black settler state.” While this “black colonialism” did exist, I argue analysis at the macro level and in the context of “black modernity” places this imperialism in new light. The Americo-Liberian move to physically occupy the Liberian interior was a direct response to European encroachments that threatened the territorial, fiscal, and political sovereignty of the Republic of Liberia. This is not an attempt to justify Americo-Liberian imperialism, but to understand it as one side of a complex and multifaceted situation.

In order to explore this particular element of Liberian history, I draw on a variety of sources. The Svend E. Holsoe Collection at Indiana University constitutes a considerable portion of my sources. This robust collection consists of both government and personal documents from Americo-Liberians, such as executive correspondence, cabinet minutes, foreign correspondence, reports from the war department, treasury account books, the president’s diary from 1909, personal letters, and Liberian newspapers. These sources give insight into Liberian leaders’ ideas and concerns in the midst of this struggle. Specifically, the executive correspondence and meeting minutes reveal the issues government officials thought pertinent, and more importantly, how they planned to address them. Letters to the indigenous chiefs add a layer of complexity to Liberia’s goals, given the different language used when writing to indigenous populations opposed to that used when referencing the indigenous in letters to other Americo-Liberians. Similarly, official correspondence with the European powers juxtaposed with internal memoranda provides insight to the Americo-Liberian understanding of how Europeans perceived Liberia, and how Americo-Liberian leaders believed they should counter these

Africa: The Liberian Frontier Force and the United States Army, 1912-1927 (Thesis (Ph. D.)--Johns Hopkins University, 2002).

perceptions. Through this variety of sources, I am able to flesh out an array of voices, though virtually all of them are situated with the Liberian Government. Nonetheless, this vast collection includes both official perspectives and personal opinions. I also consulted non-Liberian documents such as diplomatic documents and correspondence between the United States and the Liberian, French, British, and German Governments. This blend of sources further contextualizes and enables a more thorough analysis of “black modernity” in Liberia on both the national and international levels.

I have broken my thesis down into three chapters. This first chapter serves primarily as an introductory chapter, providing a brief history of the origins of Liberia and the early republic years. Beginning with Liberia’s origins as a private colony of the American Colonization Society, the bulk of this chapter centers on the relationship between the Liberian Government and the surrounding European powers in the second half of the nineteenth century. I argue that in Liberia’s first half century as an independent republic, Liberia suffered substantial losses in the form of territorial encroachments and became indebted fiscally to European banks in its attempts to solidify Liberia’s borders. While the American Colonization Society remained concerned with Liberian affairs, Americo-Liberian reliance on the ACS dwindled throughout the 1880s as the Liberian Government began to realize the society carried little clout within the US Government, and accordingly was of relatively little assistance.

Chapters two and three focus on the Americo-Liberian response to the imperial encroachments that began in the 1860s and continued until the intervention of the United States on behalf of Liberia in 1910. I have broken this study of “black modernity” into two chapters to reflect how government officials labored to protect Liberia’s autonomy in two distinct ways—through state building reforms and diplomacy. Chapter two highlights the former by exploring

how Americo-Liberians transformed Liberia into an African colonial state in hopes of proving Liberia's affinity with the reigning European powers and protecting Liberia's existing assets. Americo-Liberians worked to save Liberia by conforming to the norms of "modernity" embodied by the surrounding European imperialists. In the context of Africa in the early twentieth century, "modernity" was synonymous with colonialism and colonial state building. In order to distance themselves from the indigenous Liberians, Americo-Liberians conformed to the norms of "modernity" embodied by the surrounding European powers. Abiding by the terms of the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, Americo-Liberians worked to establish a colonial state by solidifying national boundaries and exercising political control over the indigenous populations.

Despite the fact that the actions of the Liberian Government closely mirrored those of the European imperialists, Americo-Liberians intentions diverged from the European imperial model. Americo-Liberian expansion stemmed from their desire to preserve rather than expand the Liberian state. The Liberian Government was not primarily concerned with acquiring mass territories or establishing political control over the indigenous populations, but instead with protecting existing Liberian territory and ensuring that Liberia's economy flourished. Liberian coloniality was a survival technique within the Scramble for Africa and a direct response to the threats waged on Liberia by the surrounding European powers. These responses exemplify "black modernity" in the sense that Americo-Liberians employed similar tactics to those of the "modern" European nation states, but did so for the purpose of preserving the only black Republic in Africa.

Meddling European agents and Liberia's financial instability hindered these efforts, causing the Liberian Government to rely more heavily on diplomacy. Accordingly, chapter three focuses on the ways in which Americo-Liberians navigated the realms of diplomacy in an attempt to

secure support from various groups. Liberian Government officials maximized the available options for assistance by looking to European powers, indigenous Liberians, the United States, and African Americans. They meticulously presented themselves, Liberia, and Liberia's sovereignty in distinct ways to their respective audiences. When communicating with Europeans, government officials emphasized Americo-Liberians' Westernization and their ability to civilize and Christianize the indigenous. To indigenous Liberians, Americo-Liberians presented themselves as the best colonial authority, suggesting colonial reforms protected the interests of all Liberians. In the case of the United States, they stressed Liberia's past relationship to the country, the ancestral connection linking Americo-Liberians to African Americans, and Liberia's crumbling status as an autonomous state. Through correspondence with African Americans, Liberian Government officials highlighted their similar plights of oppression by whites and presented Liberia's struggle in the context of the larger pursuit of racial uplift. By catering themselves to numerous audiences and soliciting a particular type of aid from each, Americo-Liberians avoided becoming wholly dependent on any of the European regimes. Stressing distinct aspects of Americo-Liberian and Liberia's identity, government officials presented Liberia as a "modern" self-governing black republic, proving "modernity" and "blackness" could indeed coexist.

My thesis is limited in a few ways. First and foremost is the collection I used for much of my research, the Svend E. Holsoe Collection. While thorough, the collection is limited to the documents gathered by Svend Holsoe throughout many trips during the second half of the twentieth century. While the Holsoe Collection does not include every Liberian Government document, many of the documents in "Liberian Government Archives" portion of the collection are the only remaining copies due to the destruction that occurred during the Liberian Civil Wars

in the late twentieth century. While not complete, this extensive collection contains the only known documents regarding this period of Liberian history.

Another limitation of my project is its very scope. While I argue exploring “black modernity” in Liberia proves fruitful as it gives insight into the particularities of Americo-Liberian methods used to preserve Liberia’s sovereignty, Liberia’s plight, as well as that of Americo-Liberians, was certainly unique. Nonetheless, I suggest similar studies conducted on particular groups in fixed geographic locations and time periods would expose the diversities and complexities of “black modernity,” as “black modernity” not only varied with space and place, but also with circumstance and available resources.

Aside from these slight limitations, examining “black modernity” in the context of Liberia serves multiple purposes. First and foremost, this study examines a crucial period of Liberian history. Often overlooked, the Americo-Liberian struggle to maintain Liberia’s sovereignty not only sheds light on the role of Americo-Liberians in preserving their own sovereignty by soliciting US aid in the early 1900s, but also the events leading to the Liberian slavery scandal that jeopardized Liberia’s autonomy in the 1920s. Moreover, the establishment of a colonial-like state in Liberia engendered the deferential hierarchy within the Republic that the leaders of the coups in the late twentieth century sought to overthrow. Lastly, examining “black modernity” in this particular era of Liberian history ushers in a nuanced understanding of “black modernity,” revealing it is a malleable concept that hinges on the particular conditions to which black leaders responded.

Chapter 1

‘Poor Man Cant Vex’: The Realities of Freedom in Liberia

An African proverb put into the Sierra Leone patois, says, “Poor man cant [*sic*] vex.” Liberia represents the poor man among the nations. She must not get veced [*sic*]. Patience and perseverance must be the watchword of her policy, internal as well as external.

– Arthur Barclay, President of Liberia, 1905²¹

On July 23, 1847, Americo-Liberians declared Liberia a sovereign state, cutting their colonial ties to the American Colonization Society. Two days later, twelve elected delegates gathered for the purpose of drafting the first constitution of the Republic of Liberia, which they ratified on September 27.²² Shortly after Americo-Liberians announced Liberia’s autonomy, Great Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, and Austria recognized the Republic of Liberia as a sovereign nation. Lagging behind, the United States did not acknowledge Liberia’s sovereignty until April of 1862.²³ Although internationally recognized as a sovereign state, Americo-Liberians quickly realized that Liberia’s sovereign status alone would not elevate the Republic to the status of European nations. In the midst of the European scramble to colonize Africa, Liberian territorial claims repeatedly fell subject to British and French imperial encroachments. 1860 marked the first boundary dispute between Liberia and the British, though similar negotiations characterized Liberia’s relations with the European powers throughout the late nineteenth century. Over this period, however, British and French imperial advancements increased in both magnitude and frequency. In the first fifty years of the small Republic’s existence, Liberia suffered substantial

²¹ Arthur Barclay, Letter to Sir Harry H. Johnson, August 26, 1905. Box 3, Liberian Government Archives I, Holsoe Collection.

²² Yekutiel Gershoni, *Black Colonialism: The Americo-Liberian Scramble for the Hinterland* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985), 13.

²³ American Colonization Society, *Liberia, Issues 1-9* (1892), 19. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

losses of land to the British and French. Liberian attempts to solidify its borders resulted in the national government's fiscal indebtedness to European banks. These extensive territorial losses and financial debts compromised Liberia's territorial integrity and fiscal autonomy, and, accordingly, jeopardized its sovereignty in the early twentieth century.

Drawn by the promise of liberty and the hope of a life free of race-based oppression, an estimated 16,000 African Americans immigrated to Liberia over the course of the nineteenth century. "The love of liberty brought us here" became the motto of the Republic; this motto adorns the Liberian seal, which was often embossed on official documents and diplomatic correspondence.²⁴ Contrary to these expectations, Americo-Liberians faced the harsh realities of life in Liberia upon their arrival. Disease and warfare plagued colonial Liberia, resulting in a physical and psychological decline in the settler population. In ACS-ruled colonial Liberia, African American immigrants remained politically marginalized, with little or no say in their own governance. Upon the creation of the Republic of Liberia, Americo-Liberians gained their first taste of true freedom. They quickly realized the need to protect this freedom with the nation state. Nevertheless, as a Republic, Liberia still fell victim to race-based oppression in the international community. Despite African American immigrant hopes of finding a better life in Liberia, these dreams were shattered by the stark realities of the conditions of Liberia and the racial mindset of white European and American intellectuals in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The Founding of Liberia

The Society for the Colonization of Free People of Color of America, commonly known as the American Colonization Society (ACS), founded Liberia in 1822 as a haven for free blacks.

While free blacks in the United States were not held in physical bondage, the majority of the

²⁴ Raymond Leslie Buell, *Liberia: A Century of Survival 1847-1947* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1947), 22.

white American population did not view them as equals. Labeled as criminals and degraded people, free blacks often became the scapegoats for mischief. White slave owners blamed the free black population for slave insurrections and, hence, perceived them as a threat to the institution of slavery.²⁵ Lower-class whites detested the free black population because poor whites often found themselves in competition with free blacks for the same jobs. Due to these prejudices, many white people, including prominent politicians such as Henry Clay, Thomas Jefferson, and James Monroe, voiced their concern that African Americans would never be able to successfully assimilate into American society. They rationalized that relocating the free black population outside of the United States would be best, arguing that it would permit the black population to enjoy the liberties and natural rights denied them in the United States.²⁶

Hoping to suppress the Atlantic Slave Trade, Great Britain established Sierra Leone in 1787 as a haven for recaptured slaves. In December of 1815 Paul Cuffee, an African American Quaker and prosperous New England trader, led the first group of African Americans immigrants to West Africa. Absorbing much of the costs, Cuffee used his whaling ships to transport thirty-eight African Americans to Sierra Leone. Cuffee's hope was to construct a black Christian nation in Africa.²⁷ Cuffee's expedition revitalized ideas of colonization among white politicians. In December of the following year, prominent political officials such as Supreme Court Justice

²⁵Archibald Alexander, *A History of Colonization on the Western Coast of Africa* (Philadelphia: William S. Martien, 1969), 62-63, 80-81; Amos J. Beyan, *The American Colonization Society and the Creation of the Liberian State: A Historical Perspective, 1822-1900* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991), 4; William Jay, *An Inquiry into the Character and Tendency of the American Colonization Society and American Anti-Slavery Societies* (New York: Leavitt, Lord & Co., 1835), 95-111.

²⁶Hankins, *The Second Great Awakening and the Transcendentalists*, 89; Egerton, "'Its Origins Is Not a Little Curious,'" 468-470; Nicholas Guyatt, "'The Outskirts of Our Happiness': Race and the Lure of Colonization in the Early Republic," *The Journal of American History* March 2009: 992-997; "Colonization. New-York, July 15, 1819," *New-York Daily Advertiser* (New York, NY) July 20, 1819; "Colonizing Free Blacks." *Trenton Federalist*. (Trenton, NJ) February 24, 1817; "The Courier. New-York. January 10, 1817," *New-York Courier* (New York, NY) January 10, 1817; Burin, *Slavery and a Peculiar Solution*, 13.

²⁷Tom W. Shick, *Behold the Promised Land: A History of Afro-American Settlers in Nineteenth Century Liberia* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 4; James Wesley Smith, *Sojourners in Search of Freedom: The Settlement of Liberia by Black Americans* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), 7.

Bushrod Washington and President-elect James Monroe formed the American Colonization Society.²⁸ Shortly after its conception, the organization made plans to establish a private colony along the lines of the Sierra Leone model. After several expeditions along the coast of West Africa in 1818 and 1820, ACS agents secured territory south of Sierra Leone in 1822, albeit somewhat hostile negotiations. Despite the initial failed attempt to settle African American migrants on Shebro Island, off the coast of Sierra Leone in 1821, an ACS envoy including 88 African Americans settlers left New York City in April of 1822. After a few complications upon their arrival on the coast of Africa, these immigrants and ACS agents formally inhabited colonial Liberia as of April 28, 1822.²⁹

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the American Colonization Society transported more than 16,000 immigrants to Liberia. The bulk of the Society's finances paid to transport African American to Liberia and supply them with a year's worth of food and shelter.³⁰ Immigration in the first decade began somewhat slow, but rapidly increased. In 1832, the ACS financed seven ships carrying 796 African Americans, constituting the peak of annual immigration. The sole expedition in 1834 only transported 127 people to Liberia, while the nadir of the colonial period came in 1839 with 47 individual immigrants.

The American Colonization Society covered the costs of the transatlantic voyages spanning throughout the 19th century, though much of the organization's revenue came in the form of charitable donations. Although the US federal Government granted the ACS an initial

²⁸ Other organizers and supporters include Presbyterian Minister Robert Finley, Henry Clay, Charles Fenton Mercer, John Randolph of Roanoke, and Francis Scott Key; J. Gus Liebenow, *Liberia: The Quest for Democracy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 13.

²⁹ Liebenow, 13-16; Charles Wilson Morrow, *Liberia: Black Africa in Microcosm* (New York, Evanson, and London: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971), 12-14; Claude A. Clegg, III, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 2004), 37-38.

³⁰ "Documents Relating to the United States and Liberia," *The American Journal of International Law* 4, No. 3 (Jul., 1910), 191; "Colonization. New-York, July 15, 1819," *New-York Daily Advertiser*, (New York, NY) July 20, 1819.

appropriation of \$100,000, these funds were not earmarked for the purpose of relocating African Americans to colonial Liberia. Instead, the government appropriated federal funds to discourage the illegal importation of enslaved Africans into the United States by paying for the return of captive slaves to West Africa. Aside from the initial allocation, the ACS did not receive any other federal funding. Consequently, the ACS acquired financial support through various types of donations from a national network of supporting agencies, auxiliary societies, bequests and legacies, appropriations from various states, and church collections taken annually each 4th of July.³¹ Lacking a consistent annual inflow, ACS members remained unsure of how much money would be at their disposal each year.

The costly nature of transatlantic transportation took its toll of the ACS's finances. The decline in immigration in the mid-1830s can largely be attributed to the debts the ACS incurred through the numerous voyages between 1831 and 1833. By 1834, the national organization was more than \$40,000 in debt, and the state and local chapters were strapped for cash as well. National events, such as the Panic of 1837, the depression of the 1840s, and the Mexican-American War, placed additional constraints on donations to the ACS, further exacerbating the organization's financial struggles.³² Given its limited finances, the ACS occasionally delayed expeditions and refused passage to African Americans who wanted to move to Liberia.

In addition to financial difficulties, ACS leaders also had to deal with dissention among ACS supporters. Nationally, the ACS lacked an overarching stance on the issues of slavery and the free black population. Thus, these ideas varied with both class and geographic location. For example, ACS chapters in the Cotton Belt remained more concerned with removing free blacks, because of the belief that they undermined slavery. Those in the Upper South were not as

³¹ Early Lee Fox, "The American Colonization Society 1817-1840" (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1917), 57.

³² Clegg, 141, 161.

heavily invested in the system of slavery, thus many in this region favored ideas of gradual emancipation.³³ These dissenting political views, as well as the organization's financial shortcomings, hindered the ability of the ACS to transport immigrants to colonial Liberia.

The ambiguous relationship between the United States and Liberia hampered the wellbeing of colonial Liberia. Although US officials acknowledged the special interest the United States had in Liberia, the government had no intention of claiming the territory as a colony, which led to economic problems for colonial Liberia. European powers refused to pay customs duties, arguing that as a colony Liberia did not constitute a political entity and could not impose customs regulations along its borders. Moreover, since Liberia was a private colony of the ACS, and the United States did not exercise any sort of governance over Liberia, the United States had no legal say over Liberian affairs. These external pressures, in culmination with dwindling political and financial support for Liberia in the United States, paved the way for the dissolution of the colonial ties between the ACS and Liberia in 1847.

Even after Liberia became an independent Republic, the relationship between Liberia and the ACS persisted. First and foremost, the ACS continued to transport African Americans to Liberia throughout the nineteenth century. Between 1820 and 1860, the ACS transported 9,807 individuals to Liberia, with 45 percent of this total immigrating in the decade immediately preceding the US Civil War. The passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in the United States in 1850 contributed to this spike in African American immigration, encouraging freedmen to seek refuge in the newly established Republic of Liberia.³⁴ However, a sizeable portion of the immigration population in the decade that followed consisted of newly freed persons, manumitted for the

³³ Ibid., 144.

³⁴ Moses, *Liberian Dreams*, xxiv.

purpose of settling in Liberia.³⁵ Immigration escalated after the conclusion of the Civil War and continued throughout the late nineteenth century, but it fizzled just shy of the twentieth century.³⁶

The ACS also maintained communication with Liberian officials and, accordingly, remained aware of the state of affairs in Liberia. However, the relationship waned over the nineteenth century, as Americo-Liberians began directly communicating with European and US officials on behalf of Liberia in the 1880s. By the twentieth century the relationship between the ACS and Liberia was marginal, although the ACS remained in existence until March 22, 1963 when five directors passed the “Articles of Dissolution.”³⁷

Colonial Liberia

While financial difficulties and political pressures certainly contributed to Liberia’s independence, political discontent among the settlers ushered in Liberia’s transition from a colony to a republic. In April of 1822, eighty-eight free black men, women, and children hailing from more than five states gathered at the African Methodist Church in New York City in preparation for their voyage across the Atlantic. Motivated by the promise of true freedom, these free blacks chose to relocate to West Africa in hopes of enjoying the liberties denied them in the United States.³⁸ Although most of the first African American immigrants to Liberia were born free, an influx of newly freed people immigrated soon after. In April of 1827, the first newly emancipated slaves arrived in Liberia, most of who had gained their freedom through manumission contingent on their immigration to Liberia.³⁹

Despite the conditions in which these immigrants came to Liberia, the possibility of freedom served as the draw. The first group of immigrants left the United States in pursuit of freedom in

³⁵ Clegg, 6, 197-198.

³⁶ Ibid., 268.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Smith, 1-3.

³⁹ Ibid., 62.

the form of political and social opportunities. For example, Daniel Coker, who purchased his freedom and obtained an education, chose to immigrate to Liberia because of his plight in the United States. Upon his arrival, Coker maintained that freedom within the harsh Liberian climate was superior to the oppression in the United States. One African American who immigrated alongside Coker stated his rationale for emigrating out of the United States. “We love this country, and its liberties and we would remain here if we could have an equal right in them; but our freedom is partial, we had rather be gone, though we suffer hunger and nakedness for years.”⁴⁰ For free blacks, Liberia held the promise of true freedom and a life free of race-based oppression, something for which they were willing to suffer. For manumitted slaves, immigration to Liberia marked their transition from property under the system of chattel slavery to people capable of dictating their own lives.

The realities of Liberia shattered the romanticized visions many immigrants held for their new lives in Liberia. While immigrants may have remained hopeful during their first few months in Liberia, life in Liberia took its toll on the new settlers. Disease, conflict with indigenous groups, and the realities of the colonial government made life in Liberia less than ideal, oppressing them physically and politically. Death due to disease plagued the settler population. Prior to 1844, 21 percent of the settlers died within their first year in Liberia, though the mortality rate drastically declined for those who survived for more than two years.⁴¹ Nevertheless, of the 4,571 African Americans who had immigrated to Liberia, the census of 1843 reported only 2,388 Americo-Liberian inhabitants. While nearly 45 percent of all deaths in colonial Liberia stemmed from fever, illnesses constituted only one of the hindrances Liberian settlers faced.⁴²

Relations between the indigenous Liberians and the Americo-Liberian settlers proved far

⁴⁰ Ibid., 1, 14-17, 62-63.

⁴¹ Shick, 50.

⁴² Shick, 26-27.

from ideal. Americo-Liberians perceived themselves as distinctly different from the indigenous African populations they encountered, largely because of their exposure to Western stereotypes regarding Africans.⁴³ Although for different purposes, indigenous Liberians reciprocated these perceived dissimilarities. Accordingly, conflicts between the immigrants and the indigenous populations residing near Americo-Liberian settlements quickly emerged. The first recorded confrontation occurred on December 1, 1822, at the Battle at Fort Hill, though many more violent conflicts followed.⁴⁴ These disputes impacted the settlers' psyche, as they remained skeptical of the surrounding indigenous groups and felt the need to be prepared at all times to fend off unsuspected attacks.⁴⁵

Aside from diseases and conflict with the surrounding indigenous groups, Americo-Liberians also faced the realities of Liberia's colonial government. Liberian immigrants understood freedom as the hallmark of their new lives. White American agents, however, dominated the colonial government. This supervision was never part of the immigrants' understanding of emigration and colonization.⁴⁶ Moreover, rapid leadership changes created inconsistencies in governing style and the extent of Americo-Liberian involvement in controlling their own affairs.⁴⁷ In 1839, ACS officials established the Commonwealth Legislative Council to allow Americo-Liberians to take part in their own government, inadvertently laying the foundation for the settlers to challenge the colonial administration.⁴⁸ Despite this newfound involvement in the government, Americo-Liberian discontent with the colonial hierarchy persisted. Sparked by a disagreement between Methodist missionaries and the governing administration regarding

⁴³ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 91.

⁴⁵ Smith, 33-35.

⁴⁶ Shick, 37.

⁴⁷ Smith, 70-98.

⁴⁸ Shick, 39.

customs, the Methodists helped organize opposition against the colonial government. In 1841, Methodist minister Reverend Seys allegedly declared that citizens should “rise up and shake off this rotten system of tyranny and oppression.”⁴⁹ Following Seys’ declaration, Americo-Liberians verbally expressed their discontent with the political status quo.

Internal and external factors contributed to Liberia’s transition from colony to autonomous entity. Liberia’s inability to control trade in the coastal region occupied by Americo-Liberian settlers allowed traders to exploit the trade routes throughout Liberia, denying the colonial Liberian state of the fiscal benefits of this trade. This economic exploitation, along with the discontent among the settlers regarding the reigning colonial government, led to a crescendo of dissatisfaction with the status quo in Liberia. With Americo-Liberians seeking self-government and the ACS struggling to financially provide for the colony, Liberia’s colonial period came to an end. The colony of Liberia became the autonomous Republic of Liberia on July 26, 1847.

The Creation of the Republic of Liberia

After years under the colonial regime, Americo-Liberians finally obtained self-rule. On July 16, Americo-Liberian delegates drafted and signed a declaration of independence much like that of the United States. Diverging from the US model, the writers of the Liberian Declaration of Independence particularly mentioned the racial oppression that drove them from the United States:

“We the people of Liberia, were originally inhabitants of the United States of North America.

In some parts of the country we were debarred by law from all rights and privileges of man - in other parts, public sentiment, more powerful than law, frowned us down.

We were excluded from all participation in the government.

We were taxed without our consent.

⁴⁹ Francis Burns to Samuel Wilkeson, April 2, 1841. *American Colonization Society Papers*, reel 32, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

We were compelled to contribute to the resources of a country which gave us no protection.

We were made a separate and distinct class, and against us every avenue of improvement was effectively closed. Strangers from other lands, of a color different from ours, were preferred before us.

We uttered our complaints, but they were unattended to, or only met by alleging the peculiar institutions of the country.

All hope of a favorable change in our country was thus wholly extinguished in our bosoms, and we looked with anxiety for some asylum from the deep degradation.

The western coast of Africa was the place selected by American benevolence and philanthropy for our future home. Removed beyond those influences which oppressed us in our native land, it was hoped we would be enabled to enjoy those rights and privileges and exercise and improve those faculties which the God of nature has given us in common with the rest of mankind.”⁵⁰

Given these haunting memories, Americo-Liberians saw the Republic of Liberia as an “asylum,” designed to protect them from the oppression they faced in the United States and safeguard their rights.

Aside from addressing this component of Liberia’s purpose, the writers of the Declaration of Independence outlined the relationship they hoped to have with the indigenous populations. The penultimate section in the documents reads, “The native African bowing down with us before the altar of the living God, declares that from us, feeble as we are, the light of Christianity has gone forth, while upon that curse of curses, the slave trade, a deadly blight has fallen, as far as our influence extends.”⁵¹ Not only did Americo-Liberians found the Republic of Liberia with the hope of establishing and securing the rights denied to many of them in the United States, but they also claimed the philanthropic purposes of suppressing Atlantic Slave Trade and spreading Christianity.

Adopted on June 26, 1847, the Constitution of Liberia closely mirrored that of the United

⁵⁰ “The Declaration of Independence.” *Indiana University Liberian Collections*.
http://www.onliberia.org/con_declaration.htm

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

States, establishing executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. A president and vice president, elected by the popular vote of land-owning citizens, formed the executive branch. The legislative branch consisted of a Senate and a House of Representatives; two senators served from each county, with the number of representatives from each county dependent upon population. One Chief Justice and four Associate Justices made up the Supreme Court, which acted as the judicial branch of the Liberian Government.⁵² Although the writers of the Liberian constitution drew heavily from the US Constitution, requirements for citizenship drastically diverged from the US model. Only “persons of color,” were viable candidates for Liberian citizenship. Article V, Section 13 of the 1847 constitution reads, “The great object of forming these Colonies, being to provide a home for the dispersed and oppressed children of Africa, and to regenerate and enlighten this benighted continent, None but persons of color shall be admitted to citizenship in this Republic.”⁵³ While the Liberian Constitution restricted citizenship to “persons of color,” indigenous persons did not instantly become citizens as the Constitution only outlined governance over Americo-Liberian settlements. Americo-Liberians planned to “enlighten” the indigenous populations, who could then become citizens upon their amalgamation with an Americo-Liberian community. Even with these aspirations, Americo-Liberians did not initially toil to establish control over the indigenous populations within Liberia; instead they primarily concerned themselves with their own wellbeing.

Threats to Independent Liberia

Despite of Liberia’s internationally recognized status as a sovereign nation, Liberia faced territorial encroachments by the surrounding imperial powers that, at the turn of the twentieth century, threatened the Republic’s very autonomy. Territorial disputes with European powers

⁵² “Liberian Constitution of 1847,” last modified February 26, 2004, http://onliberia.org/con_1847.htm

⁵³ http://www.onliberia.org/con_1847_orig.htm; between 1849 and 1955, the Liberian constitution underwent a series of amendments. One of which included changing the terminology in Article V, Section 13 from “persons of color” to “Negroes or persons of Negro descent.”

began a mere dozen years after Liberia gained its independence. Not only did these encroachments typically result in a loss of Liberian territory, but the Liberian Government had to cover expenditures resulting from the negotiation process, such as compensating boundary surveyors.

The first boundary dispute between Great Britain and Liberia emerged out of an issue of trade. In November 1860, Liberian officials accused a British trader of violating Liberian customs regulations, trading without a proper license, and failing to pay customs duties. Sierra Leone authorities countered Liberian accusations, arguing the trader conducted his transactions outside the realm of Liberian sovereignty, and thus igniting a disagreement regarding the Sierra Leone-Liberia border. The two signed a border agreement in 1862, though it proved to be only a temporary solution.⁵⁴ In 1870, Liberia concluded its first boundary dispute with the French. According to Yekutiel Gershoni, this specific agreement did not result in a loss of Liberian territory; instead, Liberian leaders “persuaded” the French to withdraw their claims on the Setta Kru region⁵⁵ by presenting treaties between Liberia and the Kru chiefs.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Yekutiel Gershoni, “The Drawing of Liberian Boundaries in the Nineteenth Century: Treaties with African Chiefs versus Effective Occupation,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 20, No.2 (1987), 294.

⁵⁵ The Setta Kru region is located in southern Liberia, just below the mouth of the Sinoe River. See Figure 1.

⁵⁶ Gershoni, “The Drawing of Liberian Boundaries in the Nineteenth Century,” 296.



Figure 1: Liberian claims as of 1830
 Map of Liberia, West Africa. N[ew] Y[ork]: Lith. G.F. Nesbitt & Co., [183-?];
 Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division

The French and Liberian Governments finally settled a substantial negotiation in 1892, delineating the boundary between Liberia and the Ivory Coast. This agreement, however, resulted in Liberian loss of nearly two hundred miles of coastal territory.⁵⁷

While boundary encroachments began in the 1860s, the bulk of negotiations between Liberia and the surrounding imperial powers took place in the years immediately surrounding the Berlin Conference of 1884. In 1883, the Liberian Government was on the brink of signing a treaty with the British, establishing the Mano River as the northwestern boundary between Sierra Leone and Liberia. This treaty, however, concerned only the coastal region that was of greater concern to the Liberian Government since the majority of Americo-Liberian settlements were situated along

⁵⁷ Gershoni, *Black Colonialism*, 33.

the coastal strip.⁵⁸ The hinterland remained vaguely defined, which, unfortunately for the Liberian Government, left the door open for future disputes.

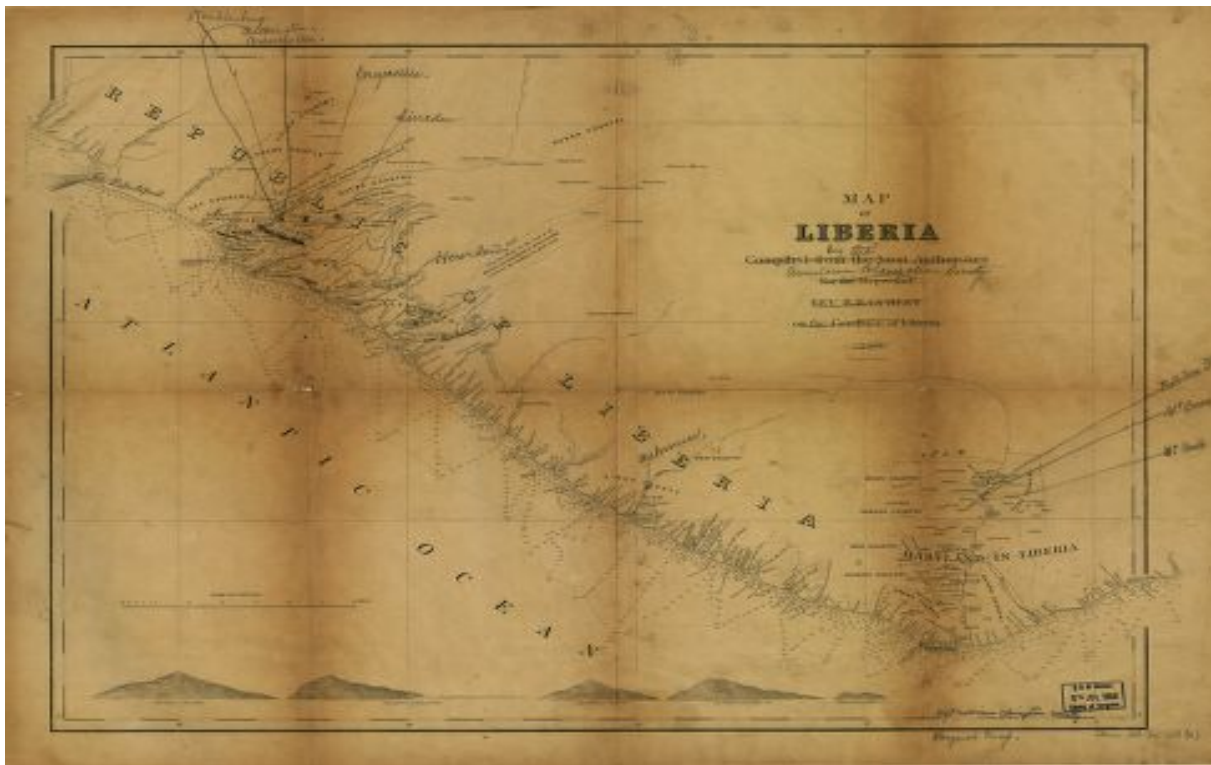


Figure 2: Americo-Liberian settlements as of 1850
Map of Liberia / compiled from the best authorities for the report of Rev. R.R. Gurley on the condition of Liberia, 1850 ; D. McClelland, sc. Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division

While Americo-Liberian officials worked to quickly resolve territorial disputes, the negotiation process often spanned multiple years. Prolonged negotiations disadvantaged Liberia, as ambiguous borders prevented the Liberian Government from establishing political authority in the region and collecting tariffs. In an 1883 letter to President-elect Hilary Johnson, an Americo-Liberian agent discussed Liberian hopes of settling the boundary of the Sierra Leone-Liberian interior “to extend interior ward from the mouth of the Manna River to the territories acquired by treaty in 1868-1869 known as the Domar Bousic and Wymar Bousic Countries,” as well as the

⁵⁸ Figure 2

Franco-Liberian border at the southeast bank of the San Pedro River.⁵⁹ Despite the promising pending settlement with the British in 1883, negotiations stagnated for nearly two years. President Johnson addressed this delay in a letter to Liberian Government agent R.B.J. Watson. Johnson wrote, “We thought the Boundary treaty would have been signed by this time. We inferred from Gov. Havelock’s dispatches that he had final instructions to sign the Manna River, but when we are ready we find that he now has to wait until he hears from England.”⁶⁰ The British and the Liberian Governments finally signed the treaty establishing the Mano River as the Sierra Leone-Liberian coastal border in November of 1885, resulting in a loss of Liberian territory.⁶¹ Noting the pending conclusion of the negotiations along the Sierra Leone-Liberian border, Secretary of State Hilary W. Travis hoped to begin negotiations with the French as soon as possible. Most of the territorial agreements disadvantaged Liberia, either in the form of territorial losses or the accumulation of debts in order to cover the expenses of boundary delimitations. The longer these territories remained in legal limbo, the longer the Liberian Government remained unable to exercise political authority over or reap the financial benefits of trade passing through contested regions. Aware that prolonged boundaries disadvantaged Liberia, Travis suggested beginning negotiations with the French as soon as the Liberian Government concluded pending negotiations with the British. He hoped to begin territorial delineations with the French in November of 1884.⁶²

The British and the French went about their piecemeal absorption of Liberian territory in a few ways. Liberia’s territorial claims were based on negotiations with indigenous chiefs; thus, Europeans tried to acquire Liberian territories by making their own treaties with the chiefs or by

⁵⁹ A.D. Williams, Letter to Mr. President, December 20, 1883. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

⁶⁰ H.R.W. Johnson, Letter to R.B.J. Watson, April 16, 1884. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

⁶¹ Gershoni, *Black Colonialism*, 33.

⁶² H.W. Travis, Letter to Baron de Stein, July 20, 1884. Box 1, Liberian Government Archives I, Holsoe Collection.

questioning the validity of Liberia's treaties. In 1886 Secretary of State E.J. Barclay wrote to an Americo-Liberian agent regarding contested territory between the French and Americo-Liberians. "[There] is said to be a treaty concluded on the 4th February 1868, between France and the Chiefs of Besiby for the recognition of French sovereignty over that portion of our Republic, concerning which I need only repeat what you have observed in your above cited dispatch, viz: 'that these territories have form a portion of the Republic of Liberia long before the date of the so-called treaty.'"⁶³ Although the French claimed rights to a segment of Liberian territory on the grounds of an 1868 treaty, Barclay maintained that Liberia's claims predated those of the French.

Aside from attempting to fend off European territorial encroachments, Liberian officials also had to deal with other matters consuming the interior, particularly war and smuggling. While the Liberian hinterland remained largely unoccupied by Americo-Liberians, the interior was home to over sixteen ethnic groups.⁶⁴ Disagreements between these socio-economic groups sometimes led to full-fledged wars. For example, the Liberian Government worked to settle a conflict between the Golahs and the Korsors around the region of Little Cape Mountain Country in 1884.

According to Liberian correspondence, the capture of a Golah man by a group of Korsors probed this conflict.⁶⁵ Although Liberian officials noted the "Golahs have traditionally had a good relationship with the Liberian Government," they remained concerned that the Golahs would retaliate against the Korsors.⁶⁶ One government correspondent expressed concern over the wars the Mima region. Similar to wars between the Golahs and the Korsors, the correspondent noted

⁶³ E. J. Barclay, Letter to M. Leopold Carrance, December 29, 1886.Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

⁶⁴ Gershoni, *Black Colonialism*, 1.

⁶⁵ J. Benj. Dennis, Jr., Letter to H.R.W. Johnson, February 24, 1884.Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

⁶⁶ J. Benj. Dennis, Jr., Letter to H.R.W. Johnson, February 24, 1884.Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection; H.R.W. Johnson, Letter to R.J.B. Watson, March 6, 1884. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

the dire need for the Liberian Government to intervene in Mima in order to put an end to these wars.⁶⁷

While some of these conflicts arose because of disagreements or mishaps between indigenous groups, the Liberians also blamed European instigators. President Johnson mentioned this issue in a letter to the American Colonization Society in 1883. He wrote that these troubles stemmed from trade, as “unprincipled” Sierra Leone traders crossed into “recognized” Liberian territory and “incite[d] the natives against the authorities of the Republic.”⁶⁸ Another Americo-Liberian echoed this belief in a letter to Johnson in 1886; he asserted, “It turns out that much of the mischief has been instigated by the civilized traders.”⁶⁹ European agents prompted wars among the indigenous populations because strife in the Liberian hinterland undermined Liberia’s claims to the region as it proved Liberia’s inability to exert political control over the region.

Despite the origins of these matters, conflict within the interior deterred the very trade that the Liberian Government hoped to solicit to revive the Liberian economy. In an 1884 letter to the Senate and the House of Representatives, J.M. Strother wrote about the war plaguing Mando, in Grand Cape Mountain County. His main concern, however, was “the great damage” the war would have on trade.⁷⁰ On the same day, President Johnson wrote to the Senate and House regarding trade, though in broader terms. In an attempt to eliminate smuggling, Johnson

⁶⁷ J.Benj. Dennis. Jr., Letter to H.R.W. Johnson, March 11, 1884. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection. Diah was the Korsor chieftain who, according to Americo-Liberian correspondence, stirred up a great deal of conflict within the hinterland. H.R.W. Johnson, Letter to Letter to R.J.B. Watson, July 11, 1884. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection

⁶⁸ Hilary R.W. Johnson, Letter to the Executive Committee of the American Colonization Society, December 10, 1883. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

⁶⁹ Benj. Anderson, Letter to H.R.W. Johnson, February 13, 1886. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

⁷⁰ J.M. Strother, Letter to the Honorable Senate & House of Representatives of the Republic of Liberia, January 11, 1884. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

suggested creating ports of entry, which would minimize entry points and permit “the better regulation & security of trade.”⁷¹

While trade had the potential to uplift the Liberian economy, unmonitored trade was to blame for the stagnating national revenue. European traders, in particular, meandered throughout the Liberian hinterland and ignored Liberian customs regulations. In a letter to an anonymous recipient in 1877, Edward Blyden⁷² discussed the “necessity of a speedy and definite settlement of the Boundary question,” as it would “prevent the confusion which arises in the minds of the traders as to the localities in which they may trade without conforming to the Liberian Customs regulations.”⁷³ Similar to the first dispute with the British in 1860, vague boundaries proved problematic for Liberia as European traders could avoid paying customs on the premise that they conducted business out of the realm of Liberian sovereignty. In early 1885, Liberian agent R.J.B. Watson wrote to President Johnson of the “impending dangers” threatening the Northern boundary. He traced the root of the problem to the British traders who had destroyed the local economy by crossing over the border and dictating the terms of trade with the indigenous. Upon Johnson’s approval, Watson sent out commissioners to the region to drive back the traders.⁷⁴

In 1877, Blyden noted that foreign traders reported losses and damaged goods for reimbursement for losses resulting from war or attacks by Liberian indigenous groups. These traders, however, frequently exaggerated the value of their losses in reports to the Liberian Government. Blyden maintained the actual losses never “amount[ed] to the sums alleged in their

⁷¹ H.R.W. Johnson, Letter to the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives, January 11, 1884. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

⁷² Born on 3 August 1832 in Saint Thomas, Blyden immigrated to Liberia in 1850. Blyden was an Americo-Liberian educator at Liberia College, writer, diplomat and politician. He served as Liberian Secretary of State (1862-1864) and Secretary of the Interior (1880-1882).

⁷³ Edward W. Blyden, Letter to My Lord, November 3, 1877. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

⁷⁴ R.J.B. Watson, Letter to H.R.W. Johnson, January 26, 1885. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection; R.J.B. Watson, Letter to H.R.W. Johnson, April 8, 1885. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

statements and depositions.”⁷⁵ President Johnson mentioned a similar incident in a letter to the ACS in 1883. He claimed British traders often entered Liberian territory “with a few bundles of goods worth about fifty pounds,” but when brought before the Liberian authorities for smuggling they would make claims against the Liberian Government to the British Government for “one or two thousand pounds.”⁷⁶ Dishonest traders exacerbated Liberia’s young economy, as the Liberian Government had to compensate traders for goods lost because of incidents in the confines of Liberia.

Wars and smuggling drained Liberia’s finances. Wars within the interior hindered the very trade Liberian officials hoped to solicit in order to boost the national economy. Moreover, government sponsored efforts to suppress these wars required sending government personnel into the region at the expense of the national treasury, which led to substantial national expenditures. For example, in the case of British traders crossing Liberia’s northern boundary and dictating terms of trade, President Johnson authorized Watson to deploy commissioners to the region for the purpose of “driving back” the traders.⁷⁷ The national government footed costs incurred by this expedition, such as the payment due to the commissioners for their services.⁷⁸ Liberia’s post-colonial inability to efficiently monitor trade led to the depletion of the Republic’s finances. Watson mentioned this in correspondence with Johnson; he claimed “the continued ingress of British traders who still continue to from [*sic*] into the Country; in fact this act. [*sic*] on their part has drained and continues to drain our revenue.”⁷⁹ Wars and smuggling exacerbated Liberia’s economy. Government attempts to mitigate these matters proved costly, and the

⁷⁵ Edward W. Blyden, Letter to My Lord, November 3, 1877. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

⁷⁶ Hilary R.W. Johnson, Letter to the Executive Committee of the American Colonization Society, December 10, 1883. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

⁷⁷ R.J.B. Watson, Letter to H.R.W. Johnson, January 26, 1885. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection; R.J.B. Watson, Letter to H.R.W. Johnson, April 8, 1885. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

⁷⁸ R.J.B. Watson, Letter to H.R.W. Johnson, April 8, 1885. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

⁷⁹ R.B.J. Watson, Letter to H.R.W. Johnson, June 19, 1885. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

presence of wars and smuggling in the hinterland hindered the inflow of revenue in the form of both trade and tariffs.

Given Liberia's accruing expenses and stagnated flow of revenue, government officials looked to the surrounding European powers for financial assistance. In 1871, the Liberian Government took out a loan for £100,000 from a British banking corporation.⁸⁰ Accumulating debts to the British quickly became a concern of Liberian officials. In an 1884 letter Chauncy Kirk, the Superintendent of Sinoe County, President Johnson asked that the Sub Treasurer "send up the portion of money [from Sinoe County] for General Government regularly" so that the government could "pay our indebtedness as fast as we can."⁸¹ The Liberian Government was in the midst of negotiating the terms of another loan with the British Government in 1897, despite the warnings of the British Consul General to Liberia. He wrote to President Gibson that the loan "with accumulated Interest exceeds One Million Dollars." Moreover, he emphasized this loan would be "a very unwise step" for Liberia. According to the terms of the loan, it "would require some 3000 Dollars per annum to be set aside for that purpose [loan payments]." In the event that the Republic could not closely follow the payments of the loan "it would be suicidal to the credit of the Republic."⁸² Although Liberia did not take out this particular loan, the Republic continued to struggle financially. Liberian Secretary of State Travis turned to the British in hopes of securing financial aid needed for the French-Liberian border demarcation in 1902. In a letter to an Errot MacDonell, Travis noted Liberia did not have the financial resources to proceed with the Franco-Liberian demarcation, but he asserted, "I am impressed that we ought not to allow the season to pass without looking after so important of a matter as a delay might be dangerous." Accordingly, Travis requested a loan from the British Government "for six or seven thousand

⁸⁰ Gershoni, *Black Colonialism*, 15; Shick, 133.

⁸¹ H.R.W. Johnson, Letter to Chauncy Kirk, January 30, 1884.Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

⁸² British Consul General to Liberia, Letter to Hon. G.W. Gibson, April 9, 1897. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

pounds sterling which will enable us to meet our French neighbor.”⁸³ Expenses endured by the Republic in the form of compensating boundary surveyors and commissions exacerbated Liberia’s financial struggles. In an attempt to cover the Republic’s rapidly accruing expenses Americo-Liberians pursued external fiscal assistance, though debts to European banks began to escalate as well.

Decline of relationship with the ACS

Although the ACS gave up its formal ties to Liberia in 1847, this small group of American activists kept up with Liberian matters and maintained semi-regular correspondence with the Liberian Government throughout the 1880s. Nonetheless, the American Colonization Society did very little to provide any sort of concrete aid to the struggling Republic. This lack of action is largely due to the fact that members of the ACS had a finite amount of resources at their disposal. Transporting and providing temporary assistance for new immigrants strained the organization’s financial resources. Moreover, the ACS had little, if any, political sway in post-bellum America. The American Government did not concern itself with international issues because of the numerous pertinent domestic matters requiring the attention of the federal government. While they could not provide monetary assistance or assure aid from the United States, ACS officials felt they could offer advice on how they thought Americo-Liberians should proceed.

Given the lingering relations between Liberia and the ACS, Liberian officials looked to the ACS for assistance in mitigating external pressures hampering the Liberian autonomy. In December 1883, Johnson wrote to the president of the ACS regarding ways in which the organization could aid Liberia. Aware of the need to move into the hinterland, Johnson asked the society to send as many immigrants as they could support for the purpose of settling in the Cape

⁸³ H.W. Travis, Letter to Errot MacDonell, August 12, 1903. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

Palmas region. Johnson also requested the society to persuade the US Government to send a vessel to Liberia, as it would “give considerable moral support and encouragement to the settlement generally.” Aside from these two specific requests, Johnson concluded that the Republic would appreciate “whatever else the Society might find it practicable and convenient to do in this direction and in strengthening the Republic generally.”⁸⁴ A month later, Johnson informed a Liberian J. T. Gibson the plans to establish a settlement at San Pedro, “to secure our territory by occupancy.” He also noted that in this matter, the ACS “expressed its readiness to cooperate with us.”⁸⁵ Because of their willingness to aid Liberia in these matters, the Liberian Senate adopted a resolution of thanks to the ACS “for the kind offices and proffered assistance.”⁸⁶ The authors of the resolution asserted the “Parent Society” had “watched unceasingly over the Republic from its founding to the present time,” and “expressed its readiness” to aid Liberia in times of crisis.⁸⁷

Although the ACS was able to secure a US vessel to send to aid Liberia in this particular instance, Americo-Liberians soon realized the ACS carried little pull within the US Government. European agents simultaneously questioned the nature of the relationship between the US Government and Liberia. In a cable in 1886 Liberian agent “LC. P.,” Frenchman P. deFrey wrote of the uncertainty of the United States’ interests in Liberia. Referencing the recent territorial dispute between Liberia, he wrote “You will understand how anxious we are under such circumstances to know exactly the situation of the Republic of Liberia towards the United States and what character we are to assign to the steps this country [the United States] has taken here

⁸⁴ Hilary R.W. Johnson, Letter to the Executive Committee of the American Colonization Society, December 10, 1883. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

⁸⁵ H.R.W. Johnson, Letter to J.T. Gibson, January 21, 1884. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

⁸⁶ B.M. Anderson, Letter to President H.R.W. Johnson, January 19, 1884. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

⁸⁷ Senate Resolution, January 19, 1884. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

[regarding the contested region] in [*sic*] behalf of the Republic of Liberia.”⁸⁸ Still unwilling to claim Liberia as a colony, the United States remained skeptical of intervening in Liberian affairs. Even though Americo-Liberians hoped their colonial ties to the ACS might result in US assistance in particular matters, numerous unfulfilled requests at the turn of the century proved otherwise.

Conclusion

Despite the hopes of African American immigrants that their transatlantic voyage would result in a life free of physical, social, and political bondage, the realities of Liberia proved otherwise. Disease plagued the settler population, significantly reducing the size of the populace and hampering the physical well being of survivors. Conflict with indigenous residents scoured the psyche of these settlers, as they felt the need to be prepared to fend off attacks from the indigenous at all times. Despite their attempts to escape political oppression, African American immigrants found themselves at the bottom of the governing hierarchy in colonial Liberia. While the transition from colony to republic undermined this hierarchy within Liberia, the racial mindset domineering the international community placed the Republic at the bottom of its hierarchical scale of power and respect. Despite the fact that France and Britain officially recognized Liberia as a sovereign nation, Liberian territories still fell subject to the imperial expansion of these two powers.

Americo-Liberian became aware that their defensive strategies alone could not fend off European territorial advancements. For this reason, they simultaneously employed an offensive strategy in an attempt to preserve their existing territory. Liberian officials began a push into the hinterland in the 1880s in an attempt to lay claim to their territorial possessions through effective occupation. Based on their experiences with past boundary disputes, Liberian Government

⁸⁸ P. deFrey to LC. P., August 30, 1886. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

officials ascertained the only way to protect Liberia's assets was by physically occupying all territorial claims and establishing political authority over these regions. In 1883, the Liberian Government began the initial stage of developing an African colonial state by initiating a gradual pursuit of the hinterland. Americo-Liberians believed establishing Liberia as a colonial entity would demonstrate Liberia's affinity with the "modern" nation-states colonizing Africa.

Chapter 2

The Origins of the Liberian Colonial State

“Let Liberia now consider whether she elects to continue to move with the agencies of civilization or to retire to the bush. If she elects the advantages of civilization, she must accept its responsibilities.... The world around us, as I have said, is moving, and we must move with it.”⁸⁹

—Edward Blyden, 1905

Faced with two choices, colonize or be colonized, Liberian Government officials realized they needed to adopt the European colonial strategies to have any hope of maintaining Liberia’s sovereign status. While Liberia differed from the indigenous populations within the continent because of the presence of the Westernized Americo-Liberians, this difference was not substantial enough to hold off European imperial quests. With the majority of the Americo-Liberian population residing along the Atlantic Coast, a weak central government, and a struggling economy, Liberia became increasingly susceptible to European imperial ploys. In order to survive, Liberia needed to conform to the standards of “modernity” by proving Americo-Liberian affinity with the Europeans colonizers and distancing themselves from the colonized indigenous population. Hence, the Liberian Government worked to establish Liberia as a colonial state by physically occupying Liberian territory, solidifying national borders, establishing political hegemony within the hinterland, and improving the Liberian economy.

In *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective*, Crawford Young examines the rise of the colonial state in Africa. According to Young, the African colonial state began with a brief period of conquest followed by state formation in order to solidify colonial

⁸⁹ “A Diplomatic Function at the American Legation,” 7. April 13, 1905. *Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

rule.⁹⁰ After the initial phase of establishing the colonial state, Young suggests the colonizers needed to establish and maintain hegemony in the form of political order and a steady stream of revenue.⁹¹ Despite his meticulous study of the African colonial state, Young excludes Liberia from this genre, labeling Liberia “a precarious polity subsisting by American patronage and Franco-British sufferance, loosely managed by a small Americo-Liberian minority.”⁹² Contrary to Young’s claim, Liberia followed the very model he outlined. In hopes of preventing future European encroachments, Americo-Liberians worked to establish Liberia as a colonial state, along the same lines of European colonial states in Africa.

Although Americo-Liberians followed the model of the Republic’s European contemporaries, Americo-Liberians diverged from the European colonial state in two substantial ways. Americo-Liberians embarked on colonial expansion for different purposes than European agents. Liberian colonialism was not an attempt to accumulate land and resources to enrich the metropole. Instead, Liberian Government officials used colonial strategies as a way to retain Liberian territory and thus survive the Scramble for Africa. In other respects, although Americo-Liberians followed the colonizing model outlined by Young, it took two tries. The first attempt began the year immediately preceding the Berlin Conference, though efforts quickly stagnated due to resource constraints. In 1904, the Arthur Barclay regime ushered in the second pursuit of the hinterland in an attempt to prevent further imperial advancements from the British and the French.

⁹⁰ Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 90.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 89.

Establishing Colonial Rule

Prior to 1883, Americo-Liberians made virtually no effort to physically occupy the interior. While the Liberian state lacked detailed maps of its hinterland, treaties with chiefs dating back to its establishment in 1822 outlined the physical reign of Liberian rule.⁹³ Until European imperial expansions threatened these lands, Americo-Liberians had no need to assert Liberian authority over this region or prove their claims with physical occupation. Upon the realization that their possession of treaties would not protect their territorial claims, Americo-Liberians resorted to physical expansion for the purpose of preserving their territory.

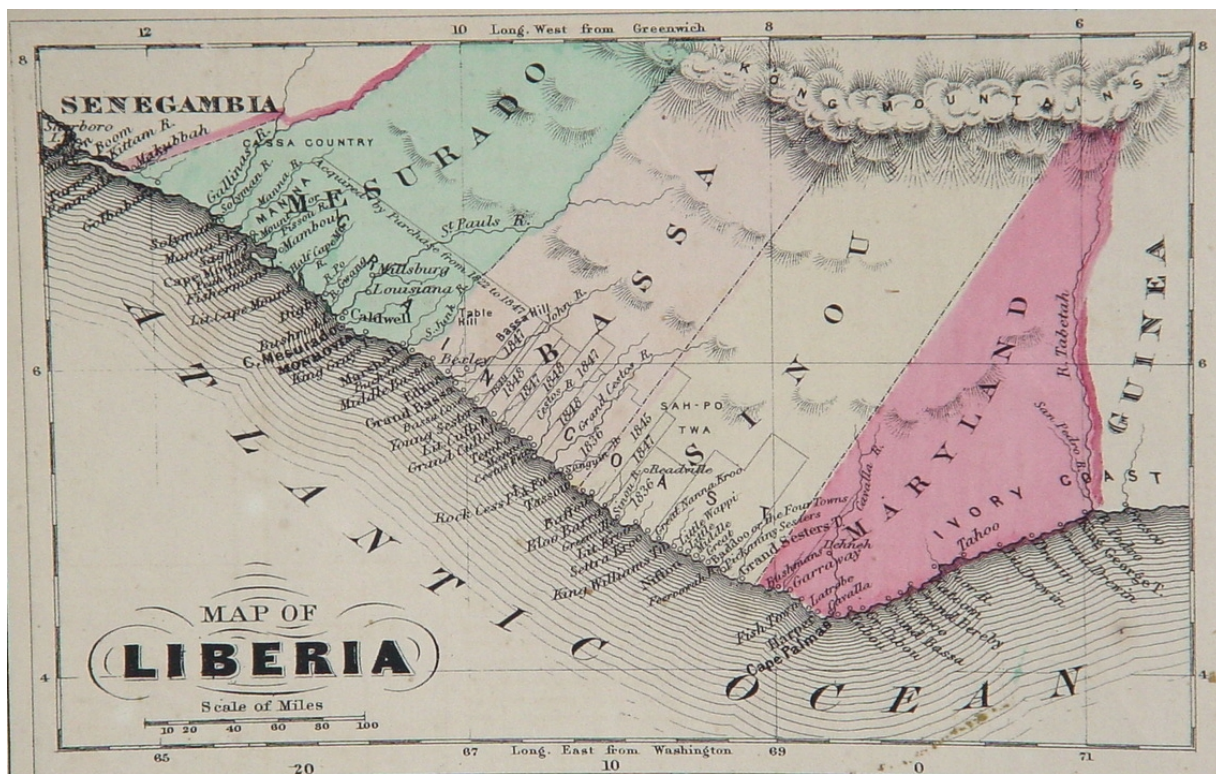


Figure 3: Liberian Settlements as of 1864
“1864 Johnson” <http://www.liberiapastandpresent.org/>

⁹³ Gershoni, “The Drawing of Liberian Boundaries in the Nineteenth Century,” 293-307; Figure 3.

In an 1882 letter, President Anthony W. Gardner⁹⁴ wrote, “It is my daily thought and prayer how to get rid of England who is preying upon the world like a lion and has her eye and right hand pointed to Liberia.”⁹⁵ Referencing a dispute with the British over the coastal territory stretching between the Cavalla and San Pedro Rivers, Gardner alerted Liberian officials to the urgent need of occupying the interior by addressing the potency of the threats facing Liberia.⁹⁶ In October of 1883, John H.B. Latrobe, the President of the American Colonization Society, warned President-elect Hilary Johnson⁹⁷ of the threats to the territory. Latrobe cautioned:

“We have just received a communication from a gentlemen in Liberia of ability and high position, calling our attention to the fact that the territory extending from Cape Palmas to San Pedro, is unoccupied by any civilized Liberians, either residents or transitory traders. and [*sic*] stating that the English possessions in the Ashante Country are almost at present adjacent to San Pedro, and should emigration not move in this locality, the probability is that the native races may be induced to combine and deny the authority of the Republic.”⁹⁸

Johnson advocated that the government immediately move into the contested region in hopes of preserving Liberian claims on the region. In one letter, Johnson wrote, “Every thing points to the necessity of immediate occupation of the San Pedro boundary.” Preservation of Liberian claims on the San Pedro required the “immediate occupation” of the region by “civilized Liberians.”⁹⁹ Johnson maintained that the Liberian Government would try to prevent British absorption by

⁹⁴ Anthony William Gardner served as the ninth President of Liberia, reigning from 1878-1883. In January of 1883, Gardner resigned due to medical reasons. Gardner was born in Virginia in 1820. He and his family moved to Liberia in 1831. In Liberia, Gardner earned his law degree, served as a delegate to the National Convention, became Liberia's first attorney general, and served in the National Legislature from 1855 to 1871.

⁹⁵ Anthony William Gardner, Letter To Unknown, July 1882. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

⁹⁶ The Cavalla and San Pedro Rivers are located in Maryland County. See Map 2.1.

⁹⁷ Hilary Richard Wright Johnson served as the 11th President of Liberia from 1884-1892. Johnson was the first Liberian president born in Africa.

⁹⁸ John H.B. Latrobe, Letter to Hilary R. W. Johnson, October 26, 1883. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection. Emphasis in original.

⁹⁹ H.R.W. Johnson, Letter to Mr. Coppinger, December 16, 1883. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

“push[ing] as vigorously as we can towards the interior.”¹⁰⁰ Knowing that establishing Liberian authority in the region would not be easy, Johnson planned to “garrison” the settlement “until firmly established.”¹⁰¹ This initial push into the hinterland ultimately failed because Americo-Liberians were insufficiently prepared, lacking the necessary finances and manpower to settle in the region. Because of this poorly executed expansion, Liberia lost this territory to the British.¹⁰² Nonetheless, this series of events in 1883 marks the beginning of Liberia’s piecemeal attempt to transform Liberia into essentially a colonial entity.

As the case of San Pedro exemplifies, Americo-Liberian colonial expansions were direct responses to a steady stream of British and French encroachments. In doing so, Americo-Liberians replicated the tactics of their European competitors, as laid out by the Berlin Conference. Gathered by German chancellor Otto von Bismarck in 1884-1885, representatives from fourteen countries met in Berlin to establish etiquette for the imperial conquest of Africa. While the majority of the issues addressed pertained to trade and access to waterways, the Berlin Conference produced a standard for the colonial division of Africa. Most significant was the policy of “effective occupation,” meaning a colonial power must exert political authority over a region before other nations would be required to acknowledge the claim.¹⁰³

Although Liberian representatives were not invited to the meeting, Liberian officials quickly saw the necessity of following Berlin Conference protocol. In fact, Americo-Liberians were familiar with the principle of “effective control” prior to the Berlin

¹⁰⁰ H.R.W. Johnson, Letter to Mr. Coppinger, December 16, 1883. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹⁰¹ H.R.W. Johnson, Letter to Mr. Coppinger, December 16, 1883. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹⁰² Gershoni, *Black Colonialism*, 25.

¹⁰³ Young, 96; R. J. Gavin and J.A. Bently, *The Scramble for Africa: Documents on the Berlin West African Conference and Related Subjects 1884/1885* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 1973).

Conference.¹⁰⁴ In Johnson's December 1883 letter to Coppinger regarding the San Pedro region, he addressed the weight of effective occupation in establishing Liberian authority. "We have concluded that in no other way can we secure our rights to the territory," Johnson wrote, "European nations will not recognize our jurisdiction unless we establish settlements under the influence of the laws of the Republic."¹⁰⁵ The simplest means of showing sovereignty was the flag. As early as 1884 the Liberian Government began issuing flags to officials throughout the Republic to visually illustrate their claims. As President, Johnson wrote in January of 1884 to the Superintendent of Sinoe County, "You will give him [Jack Savage, Native Superintendent for Niffou] the Liberian flag to be displayed on all proper occasions. Give him a large one that can be seen some distance at sea."¹⁰⁶ The visual demarcation of Liberian rule, and of the local's submission to the Liberian Government, could help turn aside European encroachments.

Aside from flying the flag, Liberia's limited resources obstructed government sponsored attempts to occupy the hinterland. Liberia lacked a substantial military that could be deployed into the disputed region or groups of Americo-Liberians willing to relocate. The Americo-Liberian pursuit of the hinterland thus targeted a few contested regions. Accordingly, other areas unoccupied by 'civilized' Liberians fell to the Europeans. By 1903, the Republic had lost hundreds of square miles of territory.¹⁰⁷ In June of 1905, American Consul General Ernest Lyon wrote to United States Secretary of State John Hay regarding the escalating territorial encroachments of the French, claiming "the encroachments of the French Government upon the Hinterland of Liberia are beginning to assume a serious aspect." Noting the establishment of

¹⁰⁴ Gershoni, "The Drawing of Liberian Boundaries in the Nineteenth Century," 298.

¹⁰⁵ H.R.W. Johnson, Letter to Mr. Coppinger, December 16, 1883. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹⁰⁶ H.R.W. Johnson, Letter to Honorable Chauncy Kirk, January 30, 1884. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹⁰⁷ Gershoni, "The Drawing of Liberian Boundaries in the Nineteenth Century," 298.

French outposts in the disputed territory, Lyon concluded that if the French succeeded in their attempts to secure the contested region, it would “deprive Liberia of more than 100 miles of its Interior Possessions.”¹⁰⁸

Arthur Barclay faced a dire situation when he assumed the presidency in 1904. Unlike his predecessors, Barclay took more pro-active steps to expand into the interior. Barclay’s goals were three-fold. First and foremost he wanted to establish peace within the Republic. Warfare among indigenous populations plagued the hinterland and hindered the government’s ability to establish authority throughout the territory. Second, he wanted to improve the state’s finances, as Liberia was heavily indebted to European banks. These fiscal shortcomings can be attributed to the fact that the government could not regulate and profit from trade. Improving industry and trade among the native populations would enable Liberia to tap into the trade markets along major waterways, and to reap the benefits of these exchanges. Barclay’s final goal went in tandem with the former two: the government desperately needed to secure Liberia’s borders.¹⁰⁹ Solidifying the borders would give the Liberian Government control over its interior, as the government would be able to control the people and goods passing through the region. Properly demarcated and secured borders would not only help generate national revenue through tariffs, but it would also put an end to the European initiated strife plaguing the interior.

Aware that Liberian settlements alone did not establish their territorial claims, Barclay planned to adhere to the standards of the Berlin Conference. In February of 1904 Barclay wrote,

“It is a principle of international law that where a nation or community claims to be the owner of a District or Territory, they must effectively occupy the same. This effective

¹⁰⁸ Ernest Lyon, Letter to John Hay, June 21, 1905. *Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹⁰⁹ Arthur Barclay, Letter to W.D. Lomax, July 25, 1904. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection. For additional examples, see: George W. Ellis, Letter to Alvey A. Adey, September 28, 1904. *Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

occupation is shewn either by garrison forts, or the presence of suitable troops displaying their falgs [*sic*], or by the appointment of officers in the said territory, which the populations obey. In the present position of affairs in the world we must strive by every means to maintain our position as an independent State and to preserve our territory. To do this, it has become imperatively necessary that there be an effective occupation or [*sic*] some sort, or else.”¹¹⁰

To meet the standards of effective occupation and preserve the remaining territory, Barclay suggested the government “enter upon a new stage in our relations with the Native Chiefs of the Country” by employing them as Liberian officials.¹¹¹ Given the authority the Liberian Government believed these individuals held at the local level, government officials viewed the chiefs as invaluable assets. Barclay delegated responsibilities to the chiefs, both furthering the relationships between the two governments and maximizing Liberia’s available resources within the hinterland. Barclay suggested the chiefs should “be commissioned as officers of the Government, and receive a flag, be made responsible for the peace of the Country and be trained to receive and obey the orders of the Government.”¹¹² Employing the chiefs as Liberian officers enabled the government to claim political authority over these regions; Liberian officers were present, the indigenous populations obeyed these officers, and Liberian flags typified Liberian authority. Employing indigenous chiefs as Liberian agents allowed the Liberian Government to “effectively occupy” territory without actually deploying Americo-Liberian personnel.

By the twentieth century the government officials recognized the need to display Liberian flags at all times, rather than simply on “proper occasions.” These flags served dual purposes. First, they aligned with the European regulations of the Berlin Conference. When facing French encroachments in 1907, an Americo-Liberian by the name of A.L. Sims sent for a Liberian flag

¹¹⁰ Arthur Barclay, To Supts. of Maryland, Sinoe, Bassa, and Terr. of Grand Cape Mt., February 26, 1904. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹¹¹ Arthur Barclay, To Supts. of Maryland, Sinoe, Bassa, and Terr. of Grand Cape Mt., February 26, 1904. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹¹² Arthur Barclay, To Supts. of Maryland, Sinoe, Bassa, and Terr. of Grand Cape Mt., February 26, 1904. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

to hoist over the Liberian settlement, visually establishing Liberian authority.¹¹³ Flags also represented the pact between the Liberian Government and the indigenous populations, as only those who entered into a covenant with the Liberian Government received Liberian flags. Chiefs who flew the Liberian flag announced their alliance with, or rather submission to, the Liberian state.

Establishing Hegemony

Americo-Liberians also worked to establish hegemony within their claimed territory, for external as well as internal purposes. Warfare plaguing the interior undermined Americo-Liberian authority in the minds of European agents. European imperialists could point to these clashes as proof of Liberia's inability to "control" the indigenous populations and, thus, the absence of effective occupation. Hence, the Liberian Government worked to establish political and economic hegemony by suppressing wars between the indigenous populations, ridding the hinterland of European agents instigating conflicts, and putting an end to "secret societies."

Americo-Liberian agents feared the consequences of ongoing war in the hinterland. In 1884, one such agent, Benjamin Dennis, Jr., wrote to President Johnson in Monrovia from Mima regarding the effects of wars on the interior. "My opinion is," Dennis wrote Johnson, "that unless the government uses a little force and convince the natives there will be incessant wars and confusion in this country."¹¹⁴ Barclay too noted the priority of settling these wars. "Let us get this Packlar war settled and we will then be in a much stronger position to talk other matters. A new war will only add to the confusion and impoverishment of the country."¹¹⁵ This "confusion"

¹¹³ A.L. Sims, Letter to President Barclay, August 18, 1907. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹¹⁴ J. Benjamin Dennis Jr., Letter to H.R.W. Johnson, March 11, 1884. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection. Barclay referenced these letters in many of his responses. For more examples, see: Arthur Barclay, Letter to Commissioner Kennedy, October 10, 1904; Arthur Barclay, Letter to C. Willis Houston, October 13, 1904; Arthur Barclay, Letter to Supt. Watson, August 15, 1905; Arthur Barclay, Letter to Doble Zulu, Chief of the Pesseh Country, May 10, 1907; Arthur Barclay, Letter to Lieut. J.A. Stewart, August 6, 1906. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹¹⁵ Arthur Barclay, Letter to Commissioner Z.R. Kennedy, July 18, 1904. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

provided rationale for European intervention via occupation. In a 1909 document, a British colonial official reflected on Liberia's inability to establish authority within the Liberian hinterland. The document maintains, "In 1903 the Liberian Government had not, and they have not yet, proved their ability to control the tribes in their interior."¹¹⁶ Since Liberia showed "no proof of ability to establish an effective administration," the British "found [it] necessary to assume administrative control" over these regions.¹¹⁷ To prevent European agents from asserting their own authority in the Liberian interior, Barclay hoped to prove Americo-Liberian authority within the state by putting an end to conflicts within the hinterland. Establishing peace in the interior meant subjecting the indigenous to Americo-Liberian governance. The Barclay administration tried to establish good relationships with the indigenous populations so as to assert the Liberian Government as the highest authority in Liberia.

Americo-Liberians began gathering "signatures" of the indigenous chiefs as a sign of their allegiance to the Republic of Liberia. For example, in June of 1896, an Americo-Liberian by the name of William P. Erskine wrote to President J.J. Cheeseman reporting that Liberian agents W.J. Hoff and S.L. Lee successfully gained the signatures of five Gorgee Golah Chiefs on June 3, 1896. These chiefs signed a document stating that they would remain loyal to the Liberian Government, obey the orders of the government "at all times," preserve the order in their region, and prevent "any person or persons under our influence" to wage war on any indigenous populations "living in the British territory across the Manoh River."¹¹⁸ While the Liberian Government had previously established relations and signed treaties with some indigenous populations, these were mainly confined to the indigenous populations residing in close proximity to Americo-Liberian settlements. As President Barclay wrote in a letter to

¹¹⁶ "His Majesty's Government," No. 44165/09, December 8, 1909. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹¹⁷ "His Majesty's Government," No. 44165/09, December 8, 1909. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹¹⁸ William P. Erskine, Letter to J.J. Cheeseman, June 24, 1896. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

Commissioner Kennedy in October of 1904, “We have the people on the waterside under our thumb. But not so in the interior districts.”¹¹⁹

In 1904, the Barclay administration particularly targeted the indigenous populations residing in a region contested by the French. In correspondence with Commissioner Lomax, Barclay encouraged Lomax to gain as many alliances as possible. He wrote, “It would not be wrong to get the deeds of succession from every Chief who has not entered into positive agreements with the French, and one does not know exactly how the boundary will actually run and any mistake made can be rectified.”¹²⁰ In these agreements, Liberia gained the right to the territory, in exchange for the Liberian Government’s promise to protect the indigenous populations from the Europeans as well as back the indigenous on all matters. This backing, however, hinged on the chiefs’ allegiance to the state, which they demonstrated by refraining from entering into wars and adhering to the laws of the Republic.

Similar to the methods of indirect rule employed by the British in colonial Africa, Liberian Government officials allowed the indigenous Liberians to continue to self-govern at the local level; although, the Liberian Government served as the final authority on all matters. For example, the chiefs possessed judicial authority over indigenous matters in their region. However, appeals of any type were brought before the Native African Commissioner or the Secretary of the Interior, and ultimately to the President of Liberia.¹²¹

Addressing the indigenous Liberian aspect of these wars only dealt with a portion of the problem, and European agents also contributed to this strife. In a 1907 letter, Barclay rejected French claims of a Liberian raid in European territories. He pointed to previous complaints by the chiefs regarding the aggressive nature of the French. Barclay noted, “For quite ten years the

¹¹⁹ Arthur Barclay, Letter to Commissioner Kennedy, October 18, 1904. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹²⁰ Arthur Barclay, Letter to W.D. Lomax, July 25, 1904. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹²¹ Arthur Barclay, Letter to Commissioner N.D. Lavall, June 18, 1907. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

Boozie tribe has constantly brought before the Government of Liberia the injuries they have sustained from French subjects & exploring parties.”¹²² Confronted with another case of European meddling a month later, Barclay claimed that the Europeans fabricated accounts of indigenous Liberian raids for their own “political purposes.”¹²³ These were not isolated events, as a Liberian agent from the Gola region wrote to R.J.B. Watson in June of 1902 regarding similar “falsehoods” in the interior.”¹²⁴ Although Americo-Liberians realized European agents were the “cause of much trouble,” Liberia could not exercise any authority in the region until the disputes were settled.¹²⁵

While Liberian officials diligently worked to delineate Liberia’s borders in hopes of preventing European meddling in the Liberian hinterland in the early twentieth century, Liberian officials noted their suspicion of European motives in previous years. President William Coleman (1896-1900) expressed concern over the presence of European agents, as he believed many Europeans tried to sway the allegiance of the indigenous populations for the purpose of establishing European control over the region. In 1898, Coleman addressed this issue in correspondence with Liberian agents in Maryland County. He wrote, “The French subjects are constantly intruding upon our hinterlands and trying to induce our subjects to join them, and for what I cannot tell, except it is to oust us because they have power.”¹²⁶ President Barclay echoed the issue of allegiance in 1905. Writing to Liberian agent Petion George regarding the loyalty of the indigenous communities, Barclay claimed “My dear George we cannot control all this mess

¹²² ABY to JPC M., June 4, 1907. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹²³ Arthur Barclay, Letter Henry Hayman, July 15, 1907. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹²⁴ Baromeh, Letter to Hon. R.J.B. Watson, June 30, 1902. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹²⁵ Baromeh, Letter to Hon. R.J.B. Watson, June 30, 1902. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹²⁶ Clmn to Ashton Md. Co., November 14, 1898. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

of heathendom at once. We are trying to keep them from straying...”¹²⁷ Given the threat of European agents swaying the local populations, Liberian Government officials hoped to minimize the number of European agents in the hinterland to prevent these agents from usurping Liberian authority within the region.

By the time Barclay assumed office in 1904, Liberia was financially indebted to two European powers. The Republic needed to generate revenue to cover its expenses and make payments on its loans. President Gibson explained the precarious situation in a speech to the Legislature in 1902: “We cannot afford, Gentlemen, at this juncture to take any backward step, or to make any change [*sic*] in the tariff that will lessen the income of the State, and prevent the Government from keeping up regular payments on the foreign loan.”¹²⁸ Two years later, the Liberian Government still found it difficult to collect tariffs from traders. After reviewing the economic state of Liberia to the legislature in 1905, Barclay stated, “I am particularly anxious to avoid a financial crisis, [which is] always a source of great economic and political danger to a State.”¹²⁹ Aware of the looming financial crises, the Liberian Government took great strides to improve Liberia’s economy by solidifying national borders, closely monitoring trade, minimizing wars and territorial disputes, collecting taxes, and improving the industry within the Republic.

The economic complication of ambiguous boundaries had long been a concern. In 1877, Edward Blyden noted the need to promptly settle boundary disputes for the sake of the Liberian economy. He proclaimed the “necessity of a speedy and definite settlement” in order to “prevent

¹²⁷ Arthur Barclay, Letter to Petion George, Acty. Sec. Interior, Boparah, October 5, 1905. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹²⁸ Garretson W. Gibson, “Message of the President of Liberia Communicated to the Second Session of the Twenty Eighth Legislature,” (Monrovia: R.A. Phillips Chief Printer, 1902), 6. Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹²⁹ Message of the President of Liberia Communicated to the First Session of the Thirteenth Legislature” (Monrovia: Government Printing Office, 1905), 19. *Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

the confusion which arises in the minds of the traders as to the localities in which they may trade without conforming to the Liberian Customs regulations.”¹³⁰ Liberian agent Watson echoed Blyden in an 1885 letter to President Johnson. Watson claimed the government was “altogether powerless to act in the premises” of disputed territory. The inability to collect tariffs in these regions led to an “impoverished” Liberia as the government saw a “continual decline” in the nation’s annual revenue.¹³¹ European agents dodging tariffs proved problematic, but illicit trade also hindered the Liberian economy. Smuggling remained an issue into the early twentieth century, causing, in Barclay’s words, “a great loss of revenue.”¹³²

Liberian Government officials did their best to ensure boundary delineations moved swiftly, though the European nations often dragged their feet. In the meantime, Liberian officials worked to assert their presence in the disputed territories. Moving into disputed areas allowed the Liberian Government to maintain its “influence in the country” and thus counteract the presence of the Europeans, who “terrorized the whole hinterland of Liberia.”¹³³ In addition to using settlements as a means of asserting their authority in the region, Liberian officials erected towns and settlements to push back mischievous traders. In 1906, Barclay wrote to Watson regarding the pending township of Jenne. The eight-by-four-mile establishment would push Liberian occupation further into the hinterland and “keep foreign traders in controllable limits.”¹³⁴

Without established borders and a firm presence along these boundaries, the Liberian Government was unable to monitor trade crossing Liberia’s borders. Many European traders

¹³⁰ Edward Blyden, Letter to “My Lord”, November 3, 1877. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹³¹ R.B.J. Watson, Letter to H.R.W. Johnson, January 26, 1885. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹³² “Message of the President of Liberia Communicated to the First Session of the Thirteenth Legislature” (Monrovia: Government Printing Office, 1905), 14. *Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹³³ Arthur Barclay, Letter to Consul General Hayman, August 11, 1908. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹³⁴ Arthur Barclay, Letter to R.J.B Watson, February 10, 1906. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

refused to pay import and export duties established in 1884.¹³⁵ And because the Liberian Government proved unable to control its borders, European traders dictated the terms of trade. Edward Blyden addressed this predicament in a letter to a London citizen, in which Blyden wrote:

“The Liberian Government, until the boundary question is finally settled, is placed in the dilemma of either passively submitting to the reckless infractions of their laws by foreign traders and to a consequent subversion of all orders in their territory, or resisting by force such infractions, so as to check the tendency to widespread insubordination which they encourage, and thus exposing themselves, as in the present case, and in that of 1869, to claims preferred by their Governments in their behalf by traders, who, at their own risk, in view of the large portraits of trade, choose to settle knowingly in disputed territory (as in this moment being done by certain British traders), and to violate, by sending goods into the undisputed territory of Liberia, the Customs laws of the Republic.”¹³⁶

Liberia’s inability to control trade exacerbated the Republic’s struggling economy. Unable to exercise any sort of control over its borders, Liberian Government could do very little to protect its own interests. In regard to European traders, they could either overlook the infractions and allow them to domineer trade in the hinterland or pursue these offenders and run the risk of these agents appealing to their governments for backing on their actions. Based on Liberia’s past experiences, the latter option typically led to boundary disputes, and likely a loss of Liberian territory. Until the Liberian Government could establish firm boundaries and closely monitor them, Liberia’s economy fell to the mercy of the European traders.¹³⁷

In an attempt to monitor imports and exports, the government worked to establish posts along Liberian interior. In a 1907 letter to a British citizen, Barclay discussed the need to erect these posts. Barclay hoped these posts would put an end to the traders neglecting to

¹³⁵ Letter to His Excellency, the Governor of Cape Mount, February 9, 1884. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹³⁶ Edward W. Blyden, Letter to “My Lord,” November 3, 1977. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹³⁷ Robin Law, ed., *From Slave Trade to ‘Legitimate’ Commerce: the Commercial Transition in nineteenth-century West Africa*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

heed to the Liberian customs laws, and accordingly improve the economic state of Liberia.¹³⁸

Additionally, this would allow the government to control who entered and passed through the Republic, which they believed would lead to a decrease of wars in Liberia.

The depreciation of Liberian currency and the fact that Liberian currency failed to circulate further complicated Liberia's economic woes. Weak currency proved problematic for Liberia in trade, forcing Liberian merchants to accept European currencies and sell their goods at heavily discounted prices.¹³⁹ Lyon argued "this condition impoverishes the country, puts the Government in the clutches of the traders, and renders it helpless to satisfy the just claims against it."¹⁴⁰ While the devaluation of Liberian currency further complicated Liberia's economic struggles, this depreciation can be attributed to Liberia's national deficit. Indebted to European banks and lacking substantial revenue, Liberia had little, if any, backing for its currency.

Barclay believed that the government needed to improve the conditions of trade and travel, as wars and the thick terrain of the hinterland diverted trade from passing through the state. In July of 1904, Ernest Lyon wrote to John Hay of Barclay's progress in suppressing the conflicts among the indigenous. He noted that these "interior tribal-wars" were "disastrous in their effects upon the commerce and prosperity of Liberia."¹⁴¹ Barclay, in particular, concerned himself with the fact that these wars thwarted trade and often spurred other conflicts. In a letter to Commissioner Z.R. Kennedy regarding the state of Pessah Country, Barclay wrote of the need to put an end to the wars. Particularly referencing the war between the Pessah and the Degra, he

¹³⁸ Arthur Barclay, Private Letter to Messrs. Paterson Zochonis, Manchester, England, August 15, 1907. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹³⁹ Ernest Lyon, Letter to Elihu Root, December 18, 1905. *Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹⁴⁰ Ernest Lyon, Letter to Elihu Root, December 18, 1905. *Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹⁴¹ Ernest Lyon, Letter to Hon. John Hay, July 27, 1904. *Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

wrote, “My object is to stop the war because it interferes with trade and is likely in the end to lead to a renewal of the Golah-Pessah war which we have just settled.”¹⁴²

Difficult terrain and looming dangers obstructed trans-Liberian travel and, accordingly, trade. Aware that if Liberian Government did not improve trade routes throughout the Republic traders would seek other courses, Barclay prioritized the need to construct wide roads and keep them clear of obstructions. In a letter to R.J.B. Watson in 1907, Barclay stated the government “insisted” all towns must “clear a road 12 ft. wide” connecting each town to the next. Moreover, the Liberian Government, like other colonial regimes, expected residents to maintain the proper upkeep of these roads by allocating “two days in each quarter to clean the roads to the repair the bridges.”¹⁴³ He expected all Liberians, both Americo-Liberians and indigenous Liberians, to partake in the maintenance of roads, as good roads were crucial to the overall prosperity of Liberia.¹⁴⁴ However, Barclay’s main concern was the risk of losing the fiscal benefits of the trade passing through Liberia, which would lead to a substantial loss in revenue. He rationalized, “If we let the roads leading to Robertsport and our Settlements get out of order, why, the trade will gradually go over the British frontier.”¹⁴⁵ A loss of trade would further exacerbate Liberia’s financial difficulties, as government officials hoped Liberia would reap the benefits of import and exports.

The thick terrain within the hinterland also fostered another problem for those traveling within the Liberian hinterland, whether government agent or trader. The Liberian interior housed indigenous secret societies that, according to the executive correspondence, attacked groups and individuals passing through the region. In these letters, Liberian officials specifically referenced

¹⁴² Arthur Barclay, to Commissioner Z.R. Kennedy, Pessah Country, September 22, 1905. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection. Emphasis in original.

¹⁴³ Arthur Barclay, Letter to R.J.B. Watson, January 12, 1907. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹⁴⁴ Arthur Barclay, Letter to Supt. Houston, November 5, 1907. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹⁴⁵ Arthur Barclay, Letter to R.J.B. Watson, January 12, 1907. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

the presence of the Leopard Society and another society known as Pemba. Seeking to profit from the various trade routes crossing the continent, West African communities established Leopard Societies in the eighteenth century.¹⁴⁶ European agents throughout the West Coast of Africa, as well as Americo-Liberians, misconstrued the intentions and rituals of these societies. In the eyes of many Europeans and Liberian agents, Leopard Societies wrecked havoc on the hinterland as they “instigated mischief” and threatened the livelihood of traders passing through the region.¹⁴⁷ In one letter, Barclay claimed the members of these societies “disguise[d] as leopards to kill people by cutting their hearts out, or by poison.”¹⁴⁸

In terms of the local economies, Liberian Government officials claimed the presence of the Leopard Society instilled fear in many Liberians and, accordingly, obstructed agrarian growth. Barclay received a letter from a Liberian agent who complained that the looming presence of the Leopard Society in the region prevented indigenous people from farming because they were afraid of the society. In his response, Barclay claimed, “We must break up these societies.”¹⁴⁹ Given the fear that ensued the rumored presence of these secret societies, Barclay ordered the chiefs to find the members of these societies and send them to Monrovia for punishment.¹⁵⁰ The government hoped to eliminate these secret societies as they jeopardized trade and undermined Liberia’s image as the governing authority of the hinterland.

¹⁴⁶ The names for these societies vary with linguistic groups. Some of the names include, Ékpè, Nbgè, and Obè, all of which translate to the word leopard. These “confraternities” were referenced in the letters of European traders in the 19th century, though they frequently substituted use of “Ékpè” with “Egbo.” Ivor L. Miller, *Voice of the Leopard: African Secret Societies and Cuba* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 5-6.

¹⁴⁷ Benjamin Anderson, Letter to H.R.W. Johnson, February 13, 1886. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹⁴⁸ Arthur Barclay, Letter to Pomaporo, Chief of the Po Golahs, Tarquelleh, Chief of the Senjeh Golahs, Bar-Gorpio, Chief of the Tekke Golahs, Dahmin, Chief of the Milima Golahs, and Jarla-Kia-Bunga and Jar moore, Chiefs of the Dey Country, March 24, 1906. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹⁴⁹ Arthur Barclay, Letter to Commissioner Bracewell, March 10, 1909. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹⁵⁰ Arthur Barclay, Letter to Pomaporo, Chief of the Po Golahs, Tarquelleh, Chief of the Senjeh Golahs, Bar-Gorpio, Chief of the Tekke Golahs, Dahmin, Chief of the Milima Golahs, and Jarla-Kia-Bunga and Jar moore, Chiefs of the Dey Country, March 24, 1906. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

In addition to collecting tariffs, the Liberian Government also sought to improve the process of collecting taxes throughout the entire state. Imposing taxes on the indigenous was not new, nor were the attempts to collect these taxes efficiently. In an attempt to ensure accurate collection, an 1884 law required two tax collectors for each “tribe,” “one native and one Americo-Liberian.”¹⁵¹ Despite previous reforms, Liberia continued to suffer from the inefficient and inconsistent collection of taxes, among other collections of payment. Barclay addressed the need to take a more attentive approach to Liberia’s finances in his 1905 address to the legislature. Particularly, he stressed the need for “an officer who will arrange for and oversee the proper collection and payment into the Treasury, of taxes, of fines, and other items of internal revenue,” because he “fear[ed]” these issues had been “imperfectly looked after.”¹⁵² Ineffective tax collecting methods obstructed Liberia’s revenue and, Barclay believed, allowed ample opportunity for embezzlement.

The Liberian Government also wanted to stimulate the economy through industrialization and increased agrarian productivity in the hinterland. In Barclay’s 1904 address to the legislature, he addressed the question of growing cotton. Cotton growing in West Africa was “claiming considerable attention in Europe,” he continued, “Liberia is well known to be a cotton producing country...In view of the depression in the coffee trade it will be to the interest of our agricultural districts to extend the industry in the fertile regions in which the Republic abounds.”¹⁵³ In hopes of boosting the Liberian economy, the Barclay

¹⁵¹ H.R.W. Johnson, Letter to Honorable Chauncy Kirk, January 30, 1884. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹⁵² Message of the President of Liberia Communicated to the First Session of the Thirteenth Legislature” (Monrovia: Government Printing Office, 1905), 18. *Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹⁵³ Arthur Barclay, “Message of the President of Liberia Communicated to the Second Session of the Twenty-Ninth Legislature” (Monrovia: Government Printing Office, 1904), 8. *Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C. For more information on agricultural production, see Santosh C. Saha, *A History of Agriculture in Liberia, 1822-1970: Transference of American Values* (Lewiston, N.Y., USA: E. Mellen Press, 1990).

administration advocated the incorporation of cotton into the Liberian agricultural economy. In other attempts to improve the Liberian economy, the Liberian Government welcomed “foreigners” to establish factories along the coastal strip. This invitation was confined to the coastal region, where the majority of the Americo-Liberian population resided, but the not into the hinterland because of Liberia’s past problems with European meddling.¹⁵⁴ Writing on behalf of the Liberian Government, Lyon solicited the United States to reopen their coaling station along the Liberian coast in 1905. Lyon promoted the benefits the station would have on the United States, as well as those on Liberia. For Liberia, the station would above all else “add to her power in self-development.”¹⁵⁵ While the Liberian Government understood the benefits of gaining foreign investors, Barclay believed that it was in the best “interest of the Republic” to only permit foreign investors to develop along the coastal region.¹⁵⁶ Because of Liberia’s previous experiences with European agents attempting to sway the allegiance of indigenous groups, Liberian Government forbade non-Liberian entities from opening factories in the hinterland until Liberia could establish a “settled form of Government among the natives.”¹⁵⁷

Protecting and Enforcing Hegemony

In addition to establishing peace, the Liberian Government saw the need to fashion some sort of state authority to monitor the interior. President Johnson threatened to “send a great many soldiers if necessary to keep peace in the country” in 1884, though this did not lead to formal military presence in the hinterland.¹⁵⁸ With increased threats in the interior in the early twentieth century, the government commissioned frontier police to regularly monitor the region in 1905. In

¹⁵⁴ Arthur Barclay, Letter to Supt. Watson, September 4, 1905. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹⁵⁵ Ernest Lyon, Letter to John Hay, March 2, 1905. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection. *Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹⁵⁶ Arthur Barclay, Letter to Supt. Watson, September 4, 1905. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹⁵⁷ Arthur Barclay, Letter to Supt. Watson, September 4, 1905. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹⁵⁸ H.R.W. Johnson, Letter “To the Chiefs,” February 22, 1884. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

a letter to Commissioner McGill in 1908, Barclay mentioned creating another unit devoted to patrolling the hinterland. Established later that year, the government stationed members of the Liberian Frontier Force, or LFF, throughout the hinterland for the purpose of patrolling the border to prevent British and French encroachments, and to prevent disorders between the indigenous populations.¹⁵⁹ In an attempt to rapidly train and deploy the LFF, the Liberian Government sought outside help; a British agent initially commanded the LFF, but Liberian Government soon after decided to replace the British agent with African American officers.¹⁶⁰

While preservation of the established Liberian territory and preventing further conflict in the interior constituted the main purposes of the LFF, it also served as a means to integrate indigenous residents into the Liberian Government. The government recruited indigenous men to join the LFF, though only those residing within the boundaries of Liberia.¹⁶¹ Soliciting these men to serve as a part of the LFF further strengthened the idea of Liberian solidarity as it facilitated some sense of amalgamation between the Americo-Liberians and the indigenous populations. Giving the indigenous Liberians the opportunity to serve in the LFF granted the indigenous populations involvement in the government. Much like the roles chiefs played in governance, however, the federal government and Americo-Liberian officers limited the extent of indigenous Liberian involvement as Americo-Liberians retained the final authority on all matters.

Conclusion

The Liberian Government's attempts to fend off imperial encroachments took the form of colonizing methods. Through their attempts to establish and preserve peace in Liberia, the government also worked to establish their authority over the entire region and the populations

¹⁵⁹ Arthur Barclay, Letter to Commissioner McGill, February 18, 1908. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹⁶⁰ Timothy A. Rainey, *Buffalo Soldiers in Africa: The Liberian Frontier Force and the United States Army, 1912-1927*, (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2002).

¹⁶¹ Arthur Barclay, Letter to Commissioner Lamardine, KanreLahun, August 3, 1908. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

residing within. National autonomy would prove, in theory, the Liberian government's ability to control the indigenous populations. Before they could achieve this autonomy, Liberians needed to establish and protect Liberia's borders, settle the conflicts within the Republic, and generate substantial revenue and national economic growth. All of these strides towards improvement were Liberian efforts to distance themselves from economic dependence and catch-up with the European nations. Diverging from Gilroy's understanding of "black modernity" in which the state is an oppressive entity the black population needed to rise above, in the case of Liberia the state did not oppress the Americo-Liberian population but protected their liberties. Moreover, in order to protect the state, Americo-Liberians worked to prove Liberia as "modern" by establishing Liberia as a colonial entity.

Despite Liberian attempts to improve their plight with colonial state building techniques, Americo-Liberians failed to wholly establish and maintain political and economic hegemony. Attempts to occupy disputed territory, solidify borders, and generate revenue in the nineteenth century remained spotty and, accordingly, inefficient. While the Liberian Government worked to establish Liberian authority and improve the Liberian economy in the early twentieth century, these attempts alone could not fend off European imperialists. Upon this realization, the Liberian Government began a more aggressive solicitation of external aid in the realm of international diplomacy.

Chapter 3

“Persuasion and Diplomacy”: Perception and Black Modernity in Liberia

But as we have not sufficient power at present,
we have to rely mostly on persuasion and diplomacy.
—Arthur Barclay, 1905¹⁶²

Fending off European political, economic, and territorial encroachments, Americo-Liberians utilized an array of strategies in an attempt to preserve Liberia’s sovereignty. Americo-Liberians began to rely more heavily on diplomacy once they realized that establishing Liberia as a colonial state could not wholly ameliorate their current plight. With a stagnate economy and expenses rapidly accumulating as a result of the expansion process, Liberia needed outside assistance to help mitigate the Republic’s financial woes. The motives of Liberian Government officials, as well as their presentation of Liberia and themselves, varied depending on their intended audience. Americo-Liberians appealed to European standards of “modernity” by adhering to diplomatic norms. By simultaneously negotiating with multiple European nation-states, indigenous African chiefs, the United States of America, and African American, Americo-Liberian leaders navigated the realm of diplomacy for the explicit purposes of securing much needed aid for Liberia. The type of aid Americo-Liberians solicited varied with their targeted benefactor, thus Americo-Liberians accentuated different components of Liberia’s identity depending on both type of aid desired and identity of the audience.

While Americo-Liberians embraced diplomacy as a tool with the potential to sustain Liberia’s independence, they looked outside the traditional realm of diplomacy, which focused on formal

¹⁶² Arthur Barclay, Letter to J.B. Cole, Esqr, October 3, 1905. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

nation states, by seeking assistance from marginalized groups. Aside from the actual means, Americo-Liberian methods exemplify the idea of “black modernity.” Although Americo-Liberians presented different elements of Liberia’s and Americo-Liberian identity depending on their audience, in each instance they maintained Liberia’s identity as both black and “modern.” Using the term “modern” as a European construct resting on the premise of European progress, and in direct contrast to African backwardness and inferiority, in the Scramble for Africa a “modern” state was synonymous with a colonial entity.¹⁶³ As a self-governed black republic, Liberia’s blackness was evident. Americo-Liberians worked to distance themselves from the prevailing idea of blackness that white Westerners associated with inferiority, by showing the capability of Liberia and Americo-Liberians. The work being done in Liberia, as well as Liberia’s Westernization, proved, at least in the eyes of the Americo-Liberians, that Liberia was indeed a “modern” nation. Depending on the audience, Liberian Government officials accentuated “modernity” over blackness or vice versa, though maintained these two qualities as defining characteristics of Liberia at all times. Regardless of the ways in which Americo-Liberians presented themselves to different audiences, the driving motivation remained the same: to preserve Liberia. Thus, Americo-Liberian efforts exemplify the notion of “black modernity” as they used diplomacy to acquire particular types of aid, including monetary assistance or indigenous allegiance, all of which Americo-Liberians believed would bolster Liberia’s autonomy. The Republic of Liberia, both black and “modern,” proved these ideas could coexist and empowered Americo-Liberians by protecting their rights.

Depending on the audience, Americo-Liberians accentuated particular elements of their identity so as to emphasize Americo-Liberian commonalities with their intended audience. By

¹⁶³ Cooper, 113-114; Prestholdt, 89.

framing themselves as akin, Americo-Liberians hoped to acquire aid or assistance needed in order to maintain Liberia's sovereignty. When corresponding with European colonial powers, particularly Great Britain, France, and Germany, Americo-Liberians emphasized their own Westernization and ability to control the indigenous populations. In communication with indigenous "chiefs," Americo-Liberians portrayed themselves as similar to the indigenous because of their shared goals of preserving Liberian territory. At the same time, Americo-Liberians presented themselves to the indigenous as superior in power, but willing to protect the indigenous only as long as the indigenous remained loyal to Liberia. When corresponding with United States officials Americo-Liberians highlighted Liberia's status as a sovereign nation state as well as the cultural and historical ties linking the two states. When Liberian pleas to the US Government went unanswered, Americo-Liberians sought an alliance with African-American leaders, in hopes that these individuals could lobby for the Liberian cause among US Government officials and the African-American populace. In communication with African-American leaders, Americo-Liberians depicted Liberia's struggles as vital to the improvement of the entire black race because Liberia constituted the only self-governed black republic in Africa. Given Liberia's status as an independent black republic and the composition of the Americo-Liberian population, Americo-Liberians accentuated various aspects of their culture and ancestry in order to establish similarities with a broad spectrum of audiences. Americo-Liberians' meticulous representations of themselves and Liberia enabled them to diversify their aid, preventing Liberia from becoming wholly dependent on one potential ally, which allowed Liberia to maintain its independence.

International Recognition, Jealousy, and Financial Aid

Liberia's territorial claims fell subject to European encroachments throughout the late nineteenth century. In an attempt to mitigate these encroachments, Americo-Liberians worked to

present themselves as similar to the European imperialists so as to undermine European rationalizations for absorbing Liberian land. In an attempt to showcase their similarities with the European nations and simultaneously differentiate themselves from the indigenous Africans, Americo-Liberians demonstrated their Western qualities to European officials. When these encroachments persisted, Liberian Government officials looked to the surrounding European powers for assistance in settling boundary disputes with another European nation.

Embodying Western ideals through dress, language, culture, education, and religion, Americo-Liberians believed they differed very little from the Europeans. Furthermore, they believed that presenting this Western image was crucial to Liberia's diplomatic success. For example, Liberian delegate Edward Blyden believed that Liberia dwelled among the great powers, and in order to retain this status and gain respect from these nation-states, Liberia needed to work to match these "western civilizations." In an interesting metaphor, Blyden, speaking to an audience of diplomats, compared the "civilized" nations to a pack of wolves: "It is said that in a pack of wolves in the chase any halting or wounded one is devoured by its companions." Blyden asserted that Liberia must keep up, or be devoured by these European nations. He noted two potential paths for Liberia, that of progress alongside the Western civilizations, or regression to savagery: "Let Liberia now consider whether she elects to continue to move with the agencies of civilization or to retire to the bush."¹⁶⁴

Taking the path of civilization, Blyden believed, required Liberia to take on the burdens of civilization as well. If Liberia elects the advantages of "civilization," he argued, "she must accept its responsibilities."¹⁶⁵ In the second half of the nineteenth century many European

¹⁶⁴ "A Diplomatic Function at the American Legation," 7. April 13, 1905. *Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹⁶⁵ "A Diplomatic Function at the American Legation," 7. April 13, 1905. *Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

representatives advocated the need spread Christianity and “civilization” to “dark” Africa through European colonization. Given Liberia’s position on the West Coast of Africa and their Christian heritage, Americo-Liberians also took on this “White Man’s Burden.” In communication with European agents, Liberian Government officials presented Liberia as a spearhead vessel for Christianizing and civilizing the dark continent. Just like Europeans, Christianized Americo-Liberians could go into the hinterland and convert the ‘heathen’ Africans.¹⁶⁶

In diplomacy and in song, Americo-Liberians proclaimed their key role in the civilizing mission. For example, in an 1883 letter to the French Government, Liberian Secretary of State G.W. Gibson applauded the French for their work in mapping the West Coast of Africa. He claimed these maps would prove beneficial in the advancement and improvement of Africa, something that both Europe and Liberia desired. Like the Christian nations of Europe and America, Liberia could not “avoid being deeply concerned” with what its officials called the “advancement of Africa.”¹⁶⁷ Written and circulated in the early twentieth century, the lyrics of the anthem “Liberia the Gem of Africa” echoed this mission. In addition to proclaiming Liberia as “the land where the Negro is free,” one particular stanza emphasized Liberia’s duty: “We’ll spread our principles throughout Africa/ And strive to make the whole world know/ That God, as our one common Father/ Wants justice ev’rywhere to flow.”¹⁶⁸ At official Liberian events, such as inauguration ceremonies, participants sang “Liberia the Gem of Africa,” emphasizing the

¹⁶⁶ Eunjin Park, “White” Americans in “Black” Africa: Black and White American Methodist missionaries in Liberia, 1820-1875. (New York: Routledge, 2001.); Tunde Adeleke, *UnAfrican Americans: Nineteenth-century Black Nationalists and the Civilizing Mission*. University Press of Kentucky, 1998. eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), EBSCOhost (accessed February 1, 2012).

¹⁶⁷ G.W. Gibson, Letter to M. Leopold Carrance, September 3, 1883. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹⁶⁸ T. McCants Stewart, “Liberia the Gem of West Africa,” *Inauguration Ceremonies of Daniel Edwards Howard President and Samuel George Harmon Vice President of the Republic of Liberia*. January 1-2, 1912.

“responsibilities” of Liberia to spread Christianity and civilization to the depths of the African continent.

While Americo-Liberians maintained their status as “civilized,” their inability to control the indigenous allowed Europeans the political space to pry in Liberian affairs. The British, in particular, pointed to Liberia’s inability to control the indigenous populations residing within the Republic as a rationalization for planting British officials in the Liberian Government. Secretary of State Travis attempted to debunk what he claimed was a common misconception in a 1903 letter to Baron de Stein, Consul General of the Republic of Liberia in Belgium. He wrote “it is continually asserted that Liberia has no influence and no representatives in her hinterland.” Travis insisted that this claim “has never been altogether true.”¹⁶⁹ While Americo-Liberians had yet to effectively occupy the entire Liberian interior, Americo-Liberians had made great strides since the 1880s to “employ” indigenous chiefs as state officials for the purpose of meeting the standards of effective occupation.

Aside from emphasizing similarities between Americo-Liberians and Europeans, Liberian officials also highlighted the similarities between Liberia and European nation-states. In particular, they emphasized Liberia’s sovereignty through international diplomacy. Liberian officials regularly corresponded with and met with the reigning great powers. They maintained regular communication with Great Britain, Germany, France, and Belgium directly, by writing to government officials, and indirectly, by corresponding through appointed ambassadors. More importantly, Liberian government officials also exemplified diplomatic and cultural propriety of the time with the very aesthetics of the correspondence. Government officials wrote diplomatic letters on executive Liberian stationery imported from London, embossed with the seal of

¹⁶⁹ H.W. Travis, Letter to Baron de Stein, 1903. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

Liberia.¹⁷⁰ They also adhered to the minutiae of diplomatic etiquette. Americo-Liberians' eloquently written letters opened and closed in the same way as those written by European officials; letters opened with the recipient's title, or in the absence of the title simply "Sir," and concluded with some configuration of "I am, Sir, Your obedient servant." If proper, civilized correspondence meant anything, Liberia must be considered the equal of any European nation. Similar to the salutations of European correspondence to Liberian officials, Americo-Liberians cast themselves in these letters in a deferential, rather than egalitarian, posture. By adhering to the diplomatic propriety of the West, Americo-Liberians cast Liberia as an equal to the European nation-states.

Although Americo-Liberians presented Liberia as equal to the European powers, the reality of the situation proved otherwise given Liberia's underdeveloped economy and little to no political clout in the international community. Aware of the European race to accumulate land within Africa and the zero-sum game mentality governing this scramble, Americo-Liberians pit the European powers against each other. In communication with a European official, Liberian officials made sure to mention Liberian relations and pending negotiations with other European powers. For example, in a 1902 letter to the French minister of foreign affairs, Liberian Secretary of State H.W. Travis notified Monsieur Declasse of Liberia's progress in the delineation of the Anglo-Liberian boundary.¹⁷¹ Similarly, in a letter to the Liberian Consul General to Belgium, Baron de Stein, Travis discussed the continual threats generated by French agents, as well as Liberian relations with both the French and the British Governments.¹⁷² Travis

¹⁷⁰ Henry Hayman, Letter to Secretary of State, Monrovia, Liberia, May 31, 1901. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.; Invoice, Henry Good & Son, December 17, 1902; the Liberian Government ordered stationery and other supplies such as pens, envelopes, and ruled paper from Henry Good & Son in London England. The Liberian Government purchased stationery for the Executive Mansion, Department of the State, and Interior Department.

¹⁷¹ H.W. Travis, Letter to Monsieur Declasse, October 6, 1902. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹⁷² H.W. Travis, Letter to Baron de Stein, 1903. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

updated Baron de Stein in the summer of 1903, reporting the demarcation of the Anglo-Liberian frontier and pending delineation of the Franco-Liberian border scheduled for the following November.¹⁷³

Knowing that both the British and the French viewed Liberia's territory as a potential asset to their respective colonial acquisitions, Americo-Liberians used this to their benefit by playing the imperial powers against one another. In 1905 Lyon wrote, "Only the rivalry and jealousies of those two nations [France and Great Britain] has prevented the [Liberian] Hinterland from being gobbled up long ago."¹⁷⁴ European powers were willing to come to the aid of Liberia in order to prevent rival European nations from acquiring more assets in Africa. Most common in the case of Liberia, European governments offered agents to serve as surveyors for boundary disputes as well as financial loans. For example, in 1902 the British Government lent the Liberians a surveying officer to assist in the delimitation of the Franco-Liberian border. However, the British Consul General encouraged Secretary of State Travis not to reveal the officer's affiliation with the British Government "as it may prejudice the French Government."¹⁷⁵ Other imperial powers expressed concern over British involvement in Liberian affairs. According to Lyon, the German Government, "alarmed at the aggressiveness of the English will," advocated against Liberia taking out a loan with the British in 1905 because of "the undue prestige it would give England in Liberia." Lyon believed the German opposition of this loan stemmed from Germany's own ventures in Liberia, as a British loan would be "detrimental to German interests" in the Republic. Accordingly Lyon hypothesized the German Bank would offer a counter loan to

¹⁷³ H.W. Travis, Letter to Baron de Stein, July 20, 1903. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹⁷⁴ Letter to Mr. Bacon, October 30, 1905. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹⁷⁵ Consulate General, Letter to H.W. Travis, September 19, 1902. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

try to balance the European influence on Liberia.¹⁷⁶ Despite attempts to discourage another loan with the British, the Liberian Government took out a loan of £ 100,000 with the British bank in 1906.¹⁷⁷

By diversifying available diplomatic resources, Americo-Liberians ensured that no particular European nation acquired substantial control over Liberian affairs. Moreover, Americo-Liberians were able to present Liberia as free of concentrated European dependency, as they sought and received assistance from the British, French, and German Governments. Aware of the zero-sum mentality behind the European colonization of Africa, Americo-Liberians made their diplomatic dealings with other nations known in the international community. This enabled Liberia to acquire aid from other European powers and, accordingly, balance their dependency on all three. Good relations with the Europeans were of the utmost importance in preserving Liberia's autonomy, as recognized by Travis in a letter to Baron de Stein. Since Liberia had "no great influence," he acknowledged the need to gain the support of one of the "Great Powers."¹⁷⁸ However, this backing was not synonymous with dependency. Liberia turned to Great Britain more heavily for support but maintained relations and negotiations with other nations, thus minimizing Liberia's risk of absorption by one power.

Americo-Liberians remained well aware of their vulnerability because of Liberia's stagnant economy and the fact that Liberia remained a very young nation. However, the Liberian Government did not acknowledge their weaknesses to the Europeans in the diplomatic realm. This is best exemplified by the ways in which the Liberian Government worked to hold European Governments accountable to previous agreements and treaties. Secretary of State

¹⁷⁶ Ernest Lyon, Letter to Eli Root, December 18, 1905. *Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹⁷⁷ Charles Morrow Wilson, *Liberia: Black Africa in Microcosm* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 104-108

¹⁷⁸ H. W. Travis, Letter to Baron de Stein, March 1903. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

Travis wrote to the Liberian Consulate General to Great Britain in 1903 regarding the rights of Liberian citizens to navigate the Manna River. Travis explained that Liberian citizens retained the right to navigate the river based on a previous agreement with the British Government. Before writing to the Liberian Consol General, Travis wrote to British Secretary of State Lord Lansdowne regarding the same matter, but never received a reply. Boldly, Travis requested the Consul General bring the matter before the British Government.¹⁷⁹ Despite the lack of a response by the British Government, Travis expected the British to adhere to the terms of previous agreements. The fact that he was willing to directly confront the British Secretary of State exposes Travis's presentation of Liberia as an equal to Great Britain.

In communication with European powers, Americo-Liberians presented themselves and their country as equivalent to Western Europeans and European nation-states. By highlighting their similarities in language, education, government, and dress, Americo-Liberians portrayed themselves as products of Western culture transplanted in West Africa. Nevertheless, while Americo-Liberians did not flaunt the black element of their identity, they also did not deny it. Since blackness was not a characteristic Americo-Liberians shared with the Europeans, Americo-Liberians did not emphasize race but instead focused on shared attributes. Like the European imperialists, Americo-Liberians depicted their presence on the West coast of Africa as a part of the larger mission to Christianize and civilize the "heathen" Africans residing within Liberia. Not only were Americo-Liberians capable of spreading Christianity and civilization, but they also presented themselves as capable of succeeding in the broader context of the international community. They did this by presenting Americo-Liberian agents as able to navigate international diplomacy by promoting their established relationships with the great powers. By

¹⁷⁹ H. W. Travis, Letter to Liberian Consol General, May 12, 1903. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

fostering relationships with numerous European nations and selectively acquiring assistance from Great Britain, France, and Germany, Americo-Liberians carefully maneuvered through the web of European aid to maintain their sovereignty. By emphasizing their similarities and methodically playing the imperial powers off each other, Americo-Liberians secured much needed external aid to preserve the “modern,” black Republic of Liberia.

Collaboration for the Sake of Liberia

Americo-Liberians did not confine their solicitation of assistance to the surrounding European powers, as that only addressed the external factors plaguing Liberia; they also looked inward to the indigenous populations residing within the borders of Liberia. Upon his inauguration in 1904, Barclay sent letters to the chiefs informing them that “the Americans have made a new Governor for the country and his name is Barclay.”¹⁸⁰ As president, Barclay worked to improve the relations between the Liberian Government and the indigenous populations, mitigate the conflicts between the indigenous populations, and present an image of Liberian solidarity to Liberia’s onlookers, all in an attempt to protect Liberia’s territorial integrity.

Many of the boundary disputes that threatened Liberia’s territorial integrity originated with European agents securing treaties of territorial concession “signed” by chiefs. In order to prevent additional territorial losses, the Barclay administration hoped to establish substantial relationships with the African leaders. They believed these relationships would give Americo-Liberians greater insight into developments within the hinterland, particularly the presence and advancements of European agents. Moreover, this would present the image of a united Liberia and support the notion that Liberia had established political control in the hinterland. Accordingly, Barclay believed relationships with the indigenous were crucial to preserving Liberia.

¹⁸⁰ Arthur Barclay, Letter to Chiefs Doble Zoloo, Pango, Bah-Quelleh – Musah, February 22, 1904. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

Liberian Government officials diligently worked to foster and maintain substantial relationships with the chiefs. Trying to nurture trust between the two groups of Liberians, Barclay assured the chiefs that the Americo-Liberians did not instigate the wars that plagued the hinterland. Particularly referencing a war that had been going on some four years between indigenous groups loyal to the Liberian Government and the Gorgee, Barclay traced the origins of the conflict to “enemies” of the Republic. Barclay concluded, “There are many liars in this land. But in order that great trouble may not come to this country, the big men must speak to each other with naked hearts.”¹⁸¹ In a letter to Commissioner Kennedy of Pessah Country, Barclay emphasized the importance of honesty as the foundation of the relationships between the Liberian Government and the chiefs. Concerned with the government’s reputation in the hinterland, Barclay asked Kennedy to correct a rumor circulating through the region regarding Barclay’s intent to destroy the area of Loma. He stated, “I have discouraged every attempt to get me to consent to the destruction of Loma. I mean to be straight. The natives shall not catch me in a lie or in any crooked act.”¹⁸² Given European agents’ unscrupulous reputation, Barclay worked to present the Liberian Government as the very opposite, trustworthy and genuine.

By framing European agents as deceitful and Americo-Liberians as honest, Barclay hoped to discourage the indigenous from entering into contracts with the European powers. Moreover, he promised to protect the indigenous populations as long as they remained loyal to the Liberian Government. In the same letter in which Barclay introduced himself as president, he explained, “I, Barclay, Governor shall stand behind you with money, with gunds [*sic*], with powder, with

¹⁸¹ Arthur Barclay, Letter to Chiefs Doble Zoloo, Pango, Bah-Quelleh – Musah, February 22, 1904. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹⁸² Arthur Barclay, Letter to Com. Z.R. Kennedy, October 18, 1906. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection. Emphasis in original.

men if necessary because you and the Americans [Americo-Liberians] about the war are one.”¹⁸³ Barclay emphasized the shared interests of the Americo-Liberian and indigenous Liberian populations in hopes of unifying all Liberians against European agents. By suggesting they speak with “naked hearts” Barclay tried to establish a relationship with these chiefs based on trust, or at least the perception of trust. He encouraged the chiefs to come to him if anyone “hear[d] anything that you do not understand.”¹⁸⁴ Barclay hoped the chiefs would inform him when Europeans agents approached them and tried to acquire Liberian territory through “contracts.” In order to further encourage the Liberian chiefs to bring him their problems, Barclay offered to house and feed any messengers sent to him, and promised the safe return of these agents.

The Liberian Government needed the indigenous to cooperate for the sake of Liberia. Political cooperation allowed the Liberian Government to effectively occupy the interior, though the government needed the chiefs to assist in other matters concerning the Liberian interior. For example, in a letter in 1907 to the King of the Kongbah Golah Country, Barclay reminded the king of the Liberian Government’s willingness to help in all matters. However, he also asked for the king’s assistance at the local level for improving the overall state of Liberia. Barclay advocated the need for “good wide roads and bridges” in Golah Country, as they would improve the conditions for trade and for government officials traveling to, from, and through the region. The king’s cooperation on this issue was crucial to the construction of and maintenance of these roads. Barclay wrote, “You must help me get this done. it [*sic*] will be a great help to the Country.”¹⁸⁵ In an attempt to convince the king to oversee the construction and maintenance of

¹⁸³ Arthur Barclay, Letter to Chiefs Doble Zoloo, Pango, Bah-Quelleh – Musah, February 22, 1904. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection. Emphasis in original.

¹⁸⁴ Arthur Barclay, Letter to Chiefs Doble Zoloo, Pango, Bah-Quelleh – Musah, February 22, 1904. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹⁸⁵ Arthur Barclay, Letter the King of the Kongbah Golah Country, August 7, 1907. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

these roads, Barclay asserted clear roads would benefit the larger Republic of Liberia, which included the indigenous.

Backing these relationships with ideas of a peaceful and cohesive state, Barclay presented an image of a unified Liberian people to the chiefs. He argued the Liberian Government would look out for the interests of the indigenous and protect them from harm, as both the Americo-Liberians and indigenous were fighting for the same causes—to keep European influences out of Liberia. Although Barclay advocated cohesion, he did not suggest cohabitation. Much like European indirect colonial rule, the Liberian Government permitted the indigenous chiefs to govern as they wished locally; however, they required the chiefs to report to a Liberian Government official who then relayed this information to the President. Americo-Liberians presented themselves as protectors of the indigenous, though this protection hinged on the cooperation of the chiefs with the Liberian Government. Americo-Liberians understood the strife plaguing Liberia not as a local problem, but a larger national problem that required a united Liberian population as a vehicle to the solution.

In terms of style, letters to the indigenous chiefs differed from those sent to European and US Government officials in a few ways. Avoiding the flowery language, the greetings and salutations of these letters remained relatively simple. For example, Barclay opened a letter on February 22, 1904, with simply, “To the Chiefs Doblee Zoloo, Pango, Bah-Quellah-Musah, Interior.” Similarly, he closed with merely “Arthur Barclay.”¹⁸⁶ In later letters, Barclay wrote more personable salutations, though they still diverged from the model used in correspondence with the Europeans. Instead of signing with a humbling salutation such as “I am your faithful servant” or “I have the honor to be, your obedient servant,” Barclay signed letters to the chiefs as

¹⁸⁶ Arthur Barclay, Letter to “Chiefs Doblee Zoloo, Pango, Bah-Quellah-Musah, Interior,” February 22, 1904. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

“Your friend & Pres’t. Arthur Barclay.”¹⁸⁷ By identifying himself first as a friend, Barclay reminded the recipients of the friendly relationship that existed between the Liberian Government and the indigenous populations. Barclay, however, asserted himself as a figure of authority by identifying himself as president of all of Liberia. Barclay and other government officials who corresponded with the chiefs maintained friendly relations within their very salutations. Given that Americo-Liberians were seeking allegiance from the chiefs, their salutations reflected the nature of these relationships.

In addition to establishing and maintaining friendly lines of communication with the indigenous, Americo-Liberians presented themselves to indigenous chiefs as the legitimate governing authority of Liberia. As opposed to the Europeans, Americo-Liberians affirmed that Liberian Government officials knew what was in the best interest for all Liberians, indigenous included. Barclay attempted to explain matters to the chiefs by using metaphors and phrases they believed to be synonymous with the cultures of the indigenous. In an attempt to convey the extent of his reign as president, Barclay described himself in a letter to Chief Yinnitoo, as “President of Liberia and Chief of the whole country.”¹⁸⁸ Using the title “chief,” Barclay tried to explain his position as president as the ultimate authority throughout all of Liberia. When indigenous Liberians did not explicitly follow the orders of the Liberian Government, Americo-Liberian officials expressed their disappointment in the indigenous chiefs. In a letter to the chiefs of the Gorgeh region in 1904, Barclay wrote “Last year when Gibson was Governor your representatives took an oath at Monrovia that the Gorgeh people and Parklah Tuah would send no war into the Bopora Country or anywhere else...he [also] asked you by messengers to clean your roads to Bopora. You did not clean the roads. You have made the Government and all your

¹⁸⁷ Arthur Barclay, Letter to Chief Teckka, February 22, 1906. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹⁸⁸ Arthur Barclay, Letter to Chief Yinnitoo, February 24, 1911. Box 2, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

friends ashamed.” Barclay sternly concluded the letter by instructing the chiefs to stop their wars, and to send a representative to Monrovia “to explain why you sent this war.”¹⁸⁹ Barclay’s chastisement of these chiefs exemplifies his authority as president as well as his belief that he knew what was best for all Liberians. He not only told the chiefs that their actions, or lack thereof, brought shame to the government, but also demanded them to come to Monrovia to explain their behavior.

While Liberian leaders presented Americo-Liberians as superior to the indigenous, they stressed the crucial role the indigenous populations played in creating and maintaining a prosperous state. Barclay saw establishing and maintaining successful relations with the indigenous as essential to preserving Liberia’s sovereignty. In a speech in 1905, he asserted “we cannot do without the native citizen.”¹⁹⁰ However, most Americo-Liberians certainly viewed themselves as different from, and superior to, the indigenous Liberians. Because many government officials believed the indigenous played a vital role in the preservation of Liberia’s territory, they saw the notion of indigenous inferiority as problematic. In 1902 President Gibson addressed the problem of Americo-Liberians presenting themselves “in a false light before the eyes of the aboriginal citizen” to the Liberian Senate. Gibson claimed, “He [Americo-Liberian] is made to appear as an alien and stranger in Africa, the land of his fathers.”¹⁹¹ Thus, Gibson noted the need to stress the African element of the Americo-Liberian ancestry rather than strictly the American component. Similarly, in a speech delivered on April 13, 1905, Edward Blyden addressed the divide of Liberia’s citizens. He acknowledged the “aborigines” as “bona fide

¹⁸⁹ Arthur Barclay, Letter “To Torwah, Pekka, Par-kla & others. Chiefs of Gorgeh Country,” February 22, 1904. Box 1, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹⁹⁰ Ernest Lyon, Letter to Francis B. Loomis, 5. July 18, 1905. *Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹⁹¹ Garretson W. Gibson, “Message of the President of Liberia Communicated to the Second Session of the Twenty Eighth Legislature,” (Monrovia: R.A. Phillips Chief Printer, 1902), 15. Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

citizens of Liberia,” and crucial economic assets to Liberia. He pointed out to his audience, which consisted of mainly Liberian Government officials, “The aborigines are to the manor born. We are returned exiles.”¹⁹²

Not only were the two populations much more similar than the Americo-Liberians liked to believe, Barclay maintained the indigenous were valuable assets to the Liberian Government. In a 1904 letter to the Superintendents of Maryland, Sinoe, Bassa, and Grand Cape Mountain, Barclay expressed the dire need to expand Liberia’s existing relationships with the chiefs. He claimed the Liberian Government recognized the indigenous as a “fact,” but not as a “legal fact.” Barclay suggested this duality was a “source of great danger,” given the state of international law.¹⁹³ Accordingly, Barclay believed the Liberian Government needed to officially employ the chiefs as government officials, so as to adhere to standards of effective occupation established at the Berlin Conference. A nation or community displayed effective occupation by the presence of garrisons, troops, flags, or resident officers. Barclay proposed the idea of commissioning chiefs as officers of the state to maintain Liberia’s independent status.¹⁹⁴

Americo-Liberians’ desire to foster solidarity within the state of Liberia led to increased communication and a formal political covenant between the government officials and the indigenous chiefs. Despite the differences between Americo-Liberians and the indigenous populations, both perceived and real, the Liberian Government attempted to bridge the geographic and cultural gaps, transcending ideas of ethnicity to include the indigenous within the larger identity of Liberians citizens. Barclay tried to establish a sense of unity within Liberia by

¹⁹² “A Diplomatic Function at the American Legation,” 6. April 13, 1905. *Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C. Emphases in original.

¹⁹³ Arthur Barclay, Letter to “Supts. of Maryland, Sinoe, Bassa, and Terr. Of Grand Cape Mt.,” February 26, 1904. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹⁹⁴ Arthur Barclay, Letter to “Supts. of Maryland, Sinoe, Bassa, and Terr. Of Grand Cape Mt.,” February 26, 1904. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

acquiring and maintaining the trust of the indigenous via the chiefs. Liberian solidarity would not only eliminate European justifications for intervention, but it would also encourage national longevity and prosperity. Peace within Liberian borders would allow government officials to address other issues plaguing Liberia, such as financial crises and diplomatic concerns.

Americo-Liberians looked to indigenous Liberians to help safeguard Liberia's autonomy by establishing a unified state. Although the Liberian Government presented Americo-Liberians as distinctly different from the indigenous in the international community, in communication with the indigenous Americo-Liberians emphasized the commonalities of the two populations. The real unifying factor between the Americo-Liberians and the indigenous, however, was not a shared identity but a mutual interest. The Liberian officials did not want these populations to cohabitate, but simply wanted ensure that the indigenous remained loyal to the Liberian Government. Thus, in correspondence with the indigenous, Americo-Liberians contrasted themselves with the surrounding European powers to show the benefits of living under Liberian rule as opposed to French or British rule. Uniting over both their desire to protect Liberian territory and fend off a common enemy, the Liberian Government hoped to establish honest, friendly relationships with the indigenous populations. Americo-Liberians painted the image of a peaceful, harmonious state, working towards the shared goals of its inhabitants. Solving internal strife and uniting the citizens of Liberia would enable the government to present a united front to outsiders and focus on the external dilemmas plaguing Liberia. Viewing the indigenous as an asset, Americo-Liberians secured alliances for the purpose of preserving Liberian territory.

Colonial Origins, Political Kinship, and Racial Affinity

Americo-Liberians hoped to settle Liberia's problems without the intervention of an outside power, but by 1904 this had become impossible. While the Americo-Liberian push into the hinterland may ameliorate part of the Liberian Government's troubles, Liberia's financial

difficulties required outside aid. Thus, Liberian officials initiated a diligent pursuit of US aid to help mitigate Liberia's rapidly accruing debts. US support likely appeared to be a logical means of retaining sovereignty for a couple of reasons. Although Liberia originated as a private colony of the ACS, the Liberian Government viewed Liberia as an offshoot of the United States. After the US acknowledged Liberia as a sovereign entity in 1862, President Abraham Lincoln appointed Abraham Hanson as the first US Consul General to Liberia. The Consul General to Liberia served as the official liaison between the two Governments, and kept the US Government up to date on Liberian affairs. While the United States remained relatively uninterested in Liberian affairs, the United States did, on occasion, assist Liberia in particular matters. For example, in 1885 the Liberian Government wanted to extend their reign into the Liberian hinterland. Lacking the necessary resources, they requested and received subsidies from the United States to cover the expenditures of these endeavors.¹⁹⁵ Aside from this instance, relations between the United States and Liberia remained minimal throughout the late nineteenth century.

In addition to Liberia's origins as an ACS colony, Americo-Liberians saw the United States as a "Great Power," and accordingly, the only one not actively involved in the Scramble for Africa at the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁹⁶ Regardless of the reasons for soliciting US aid, in the early twentieth century the Liberian Government began to rekindle relations with the United States for the purpose of gaining an American backing against the European imperial powers. Following diplomatic norms, the relationship between these two governments largely developed through the intermediary of the US Consul General to Liberia, Ernest Lyon.

American Consul General Ernest Lyon served as a crucial liaison between the Liberian and United States Governments during Liberia's sovereignty crisis. Lyon's own identity adds a layer

¹⁹⁵ Yekutiel Gershoni, "The Drawing of Liberian Boundaries in the Nineteenth Century: Treaties with African Chiefs versus Effective Occupation," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 20, No. 2 (1987), 297.

¹⁹⁶ Baron von Stein, Letter, April 13, 1904. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

of complexity to the relationship between the Americo-Liberians and the Americans. Born in Honduras, Lyon immigrated to the United States with his family in the 1870s where he served as an African American minister, educator, and diplomat. President Theodore Roosevelt appointed Lyon to serve as the US Minister and Consul General to Liberia, upon the recommendation of Booker T. Washington. During the seven years Lyon served as consul general, he maintained regular communication between prominent officials of both the US and Liberian Governments.

Lyon first began requesting aid for Liberia in 1904. Struggling to solidify yet another boundary dispute with the French in 1904, Liberian President Barclay believed a non-French surveyor would be in the best interest of Liberia. On January 22, 1904, Liberian Secretary of State H.W. Travis wrote to Lyon requesting a US engineer to serve as the “Surveyor and Commissioner” for the pending Franco-Liberian delimitation.¹⁹⁷ On January 25, Lyon relayed this request to US Secretary of State John Hay.¹⁹⁸ Lyon informed Hay that Liberia occupied an unfortunate position between two “rich and powerful” nations, who were carefully “watching for an opportunity to put the Liberians under obligations which might lead to the overthrow of their independence.”¹⁹⁹ Hay, however, did not see the need to send an American envoy.²⁰⁰ As the matters in Liberia took on a greater sense of urgency, Lyon wrote to the US secretary of state regarding these issues more frequently, sometimes writing as many as three letters a day, updating US officials on the advancements of European agents. The situation had escalated three years later. On August 9, 1907, Arthur Barclay wrote to Ernest Lyon, asking him to request US assistance on behalf of Liberia. “I had hoped that this question of Delimitation [*sic*] would have

¹⁹⁷ H.W. Travis, Letter to Ernest Lyon, January 22, 1904. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

¹⁹⁸ John Milton Hay served as US Secretary of State from September 30, 1898 to July 1, 1905. Hay also served as a diplomat, author, journalist, and was the private secretary and assistant to Abraham Lincoln.

¹⁹⁹ Ernest Lyon, Letter to John Hay, Secretary of State, January 25, 1904. *Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

²⁰⁰ Ernest Lyons, Letter to John Hay, Secretary of State, January 25, 1904. *Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

been settled without having to trouble the United States at this time, and it is for this reason that this request has been delayed, but necessity is laid upon me, by the seriousness of the situation, as you will see from this communication, to invoke *through you* the good offices of your Government at Washington on our behalf.”²⁰¹ Lyon served as a crucial intermediary between Liberia and the United States, diligently informing US official of the state of affairs in Liberia and relaying requests for assistance to the US Government.

Although the United States was a budding international power, the ways in which Americo-Liberians portrayed themselves and their nation to the United States diverged from the image Americo-Liberians presented to the European powers. Considering that US agents were not attempting piecemeal absorptions of Liberian land, Americo-Liberians did not try to hide Liberia’s vulnerability. Instead, they situated themselves as victims of European imperialism, on the brink of losing all claims to their sovereign status. For example, In December of 1905, Lyon stressed the severity of these threats in a letter to US Secretary of State Eli Root.²⁰² Referencing the Franco-Liberian territorial delimitations, Lyon stated “it seems to me that this nation [Liberia] cannot afford to lose any more territory without suffering a material impairment of its sovereignty.”²⁰³ Not only were they weary from fighting off these European encroachments, but Americo-Liberians also framed the Republic of Liberia as in dire need of aid from the United States in order for Liberia to retain its autonomy. Liberian officials hoped the US Government would mediate the territorial disputes between Liberia and the European powers, and ensure that European agents would not cheat the Liberians in these boundary disputes. To rationalize this

²⁰¹ Arthur Barclay, letter to Ernest Lyon, “Confidential ABY to LYON M.,” August 9, 1907. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection. Emphasis mine.

²⁰² Elihu Root served as US Secretary of State from July 19, 1905 until January 27, 1909. He followed the brief time served by Francis B. Loomis, July 1, 1905 to July 18, 1905. Loomis succeeded Hay.

²⁰³ Ernest Lyon, Letter to Eli Root, December 15, 1905. *Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

aid, the Liberian Government and Lyon both pointed to the many connections linking the two states, such as Liberia's origins as an ACS colony and the ancestral ties that linked much of the Americo-Liberian population to the African American population.

In communication with the US Government, Lyon rationalized why the United States should intervene on behalf of Liberia. Lyon frequently reminded the US Secretary of State John Hay of the pedigree of Americo-Liberians. In a letter in 1905 to Hay, Lyon encouraged US involvement in Liberian affairs because Liberia was “inhabited largely by American Negroes and their descendents.”²⁰⁴ A few months later Lyon reminded an audience of international diplomats of the ancestry of Liberia. In a speech delivered at the Fourth of July celebration in Monrovia, Lyon referenced the Americo-Liberians as decedents of the “loins” of the United States of America and highlighted the “race affinity” that linked the Americo-Liberian and African American populations.²⁰⁵ Aside from noting the ancestry of the Americo-Liberian population, Liberians also pointed to the origins of Liberia as a product of the United States. In his speech on July 4, 1905, Lyon mentioned the “constitutional resemblance” linking Liberia to the United States.²⁰⁶ He elaborated on this relationship in a letter five months later to Eli Root, requesting that the United States assist Liberia. Lyon concluded the correspondence with “I await with patience for Your Excellency's further instructions on this important subject in so critical a moment in the history of this struggling Republic which is a ‘Distant off-shoot of our own civilization.’”²⁰⁷ At formal occasions, such as Fourth of July celebrations and other diplomatic gatherings, President

²⁰⁴ Ernest Lyon, Letter to John Hay, February 14, 1905. *Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.; In addition to the audience of the speech, Lyon sent a copy of his speech, along with others made that day, to John Hay on February 14, 1905.

²⁰⁵ Ernest Lyon, Letter to Francis B. Loomis, July 18, 1905. *Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

²⁰⁶ Ernest Lyon, Letter to Francis B. Loomis, July 18, 1905. *Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

²⁰⁷ Ernest Lyon, Letter to Eli Root, December 18, 1905. *Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Barclay typically referenced the relationship between Liberia and the United States. In 1906, he emphasized the kinship between the two countries and the indebtedness of the Americo-Liberians to the United States because so many Americans had “given their lives and their millions in money” to found Liberia.²⁰⁸ Presenting Liberia and its inhabitants as direct descendents of the United States and African Americans, Lyon and Barclay portrayed the threats to Liberian sovereignty as pertinent to the United States because of the familial connections linking the two nations, and their citizens.

Similar to correspondence between Liberia and the European powers, Americo-Liberians and Lyon also appealed to US aid by pointing to Negro progress and efforts to improve Africa. In a 1905 letter to John Hay, Lyon concluded that US assistance would help the struggling Republic in their philanthropic pursuits. Particularly, US aid would assist Americo-Liberians in “extend[ing] the blessing of Christian civilization into the interior of her territory among her barbarous population.”²⁰⁹ Like Americo-Liberians, Lyon pointed to “civilization” and Christianity to differentiate the Americo-Liberian population from the indigenous populations, and to argue that Liberia deserved US support. US assistance would further Americo-Liberian endeavors, as it would have “a wholesome moral effect...on the Republic herself.” Further, US aid would bolster Liberia by “strengthen[ing] their national confidence” and protect them from those “who would employ ‘might instead of right’ in their political dealings with weaker nations.”²¹⁰

Lyon maintained that US aid to Liberia would benefit both countries, as it would preserve Liberia and provide both economic and diplomatic benefits for the United States. He also framed

²⁰⁸ “The Glorious Fourth Celebrated at the US Legation, Monrovia, July 4, 1906.” *Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

²⁰⁹ Ernest Lyon, Letter to John Hay, March 2, 1905. *Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

US intervention as a political investment for the United States. Since the European powers had established political hegemony over the majority of the African continent, US presence in Liberia would allow a United States naval base to protect American citizens and American interests. Thus, US presence in Liberia would enhance the United States' position in the case of an unexpected crisis or conflict with the "great world powers who are now in political control of the continent."²¹¹ Though improving, the United States had not acquired the label of "great power." Considering the world powers had acquired colonies in Africa, Lyon believed it was in the best interest of the United States to do the same. US intervention in Liberia would mitigate Liberia's dilemma, all the while providing the United States a strategic foothold in Africa.

At Barclay's behest, Lyon sent a second formal request for American support in 1907. Apparently acting on his own will, Lyon simultaneously mailed a confidential letter to Booker T. Washington. Perhaps jaded by the apparent lack of US interest, Lyon asked Washington to use his influence in Washington, DC, to rally support for Liberia. Despite the reality that Washington had little, if any, power in Washington, DC, Lyon seemed to believe otherwise. Booker T. Washington had met with Theodore Roosevelt on a few occasions and maintained correspondence with both Roosevelt and Secretary of State Howard Taft. Given the state of affairs in Liberia and the fact that Americo-Liberians had exhausted virtually all other options, Lyon wrote to Washington regarding the needs of Liberia in hopes that he could conjure up aid for Liberia.

Americo-Liberians, African Americans, and The Fight Against Racial Oppression
Lyon's decision to contact Booker T. Washington—a step which was undoubtedly outside his consular authority, and likely to upset his superiors—demonstrates his concern for the fate of Liberia. Aware of this, Lyon asked Washington to avoid disclosing Lyon as Washington's source

²¹¹ Ibid.

of information, if possible. He wrote, “*I simply ask that the sources of information be withheld for diplomatic reasons.*” Lyon gave Washington permission to name Lyon as his source of information if “absolutely necessary.”²¹² Aside from the actual decision to contact Washington, the terminology Lyon used in communication with Washington differed from that in letters to the secretaries of state, demonstrating Lyon’s vested interest in the matter. In his initial letter to Washington, Lyon referenced the Liberians as “our people,” which diverged from the correspondence with US secretaries of state in which Lyon referenced the Liberians as “these people” and “this struggling people.”²¹³ The efforts of Lyon and Booker T. Washington prove Liberia mattered to blacks outside of Liberia, as both of these individuals went to great lengths to ensure US intervention on behalf of Liberia. Washington served as a rhetorical tool for Lyon and Liberia. Since efforts to solicit US aid through traditional diplomatic correspondence did not incite any assistance, Lyon looked for alternative routes to acquiring US aid. Moreover, given African Americans had a vested interest in the success of Liberia, Lyon framed Liberia’s plight along these terms.

Lyon’s request informing Booker T. Washington of the European encroachments threatening Liberia presented Liberia’s predicament as not a national issue but a larger issue of white oppression and the black struggle for racial uplift. He conveyed the immediacy of the matter to Washington by exclaiming “We must come to the rescue of our people over here. The grasping policy of these nations must be checked if it can. They now have everything on the west coast,

²¹² Ernest Lyon, Letter to Booker T. Washington, August 10, 1907. *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, volume 9. Emphasis in original.

²¹³ Ibid.; Ernest Lyon, Letter to Eli Root, December 18, 1905. *Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Ernest Lyon, Letter to John Hay, Secretary of State, January 25, 1904. *Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

yet Ahab like, they covet Naboth's little vineyard."²¹⁴ Liberia, though technically sovereign, faced the same race-based oppression as the African American population in the United States. Though no longer physically oppressed by slavery, blacks throughout much of the Atlantic World remained socially, economically, and politically oppressed within the nation-state and by nation-states in the international realm. Aware of the similar plights of African Americans, Americo-Liberians, and Liberia, Americo-Liberians emphasized these parallels in their attempts to appeal to African American audiences. While Liberia protected Americo-Liberians from race-based oppression within the nation-state, Liberia, and accordingly, Americo-Liberians, fell subject to race-based oppression at the international level. Just as African Americans toiled to acquire political and social equality in a post-emancipation America, Americo-Liberians endeavored to obtain political equality for sovereign Liberia in the international community. Barclay noted the racial hindrances facing African Americans in the early twentieth century, stating, "They are in the fight for social and political equality with the white American." Barclay, however, cast the African American struggle in America and the fight to preserve Liberian autonomy as one in the same; both contributed to the larger pursuit of racial uplift and typified the progress of the black race. He concluded, "The Negro masses are being gradually and slowly, learning self-reliance, thrift and initiative."²¹⁵ Given that Americo-Liberians and African Americans occupied similar plights, Lyon and Barclay believed threats against Liberia would arouse support for Liberia within African American communities.

Although Liberians and African Americans faced similar obstacles, Americo-Liberians did not initially publicize the threats plaguing Liberia to the larger African American community. Instead, they only informed particular African Americans, such as Washington, of the European

²¹⁴ Ernest Lyon, Letter to Booker T. Washington, August 10, 1907. *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, volume 9.

²¹⁵ Ernest Lyon, Letter to Francis B. Loomis, February 11, 1904, 6. (*Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C)

encroachments. Upon sending an envoy to the United States in 1908, Liberian Vice President J.J. Dossen explained in an article in the *Washington Herald* that Liberia's relations with her neighbors did not motivate the trip. He maintained the trip was instead solely an attempt to strengthen the relationship between the United States and Liberia. He declared, "Our boundary relations with our French and English neighbors have been settled years ago, and there is absolutely no truth in the report that we came here to ask the United States to protect us against the encroachments on Liberia of foreign nations."²¹⁶

Rather than emphasizing Liberia's vulnerability, Americo-Liberians presented Liberia to the African American masses as a paradise for blacks. Americo-Liberians believed Liberia constituted the most viable option for African Americans seeking to escape the state-sponsored oppression of blacks. According to Liberian Senate meeting minutes from 1906, the Liberian Government received "many communications on the subject of emigration from different sections of the United States."²¹⁷ While certainly exaggerated, Lyon claimed "There are 10,000,000 of American colored people, who are directly interested in Liberia, and who are continually asking questions about the country, with a view to immigration."²¹⁸ With ideas of African American interest in immigrating to Liberia circulating, Americo-Liberians worked to depict Liberia as a desirable place to live. Thus, when appealing to African Americans, Americo-Liberians often presented romanticized views of Liberia as an ideal, black, nation-state.

In an attempt to solicit African American settlers, Liberian Government officials embellished their descriptions of the Liberian populace. In a 1908 article that ran in the *Washington Herald*, Vice President J.J. Dossen described the population of Liberia as consisting of "40,000 civilized

²¹⁶ Liberia Seeks Men," *The Washington Herald*, May 25, 1908.

²¹⁷ Edwin J. Barclay, Letter to Secretary Ellis, May 30, 1906. *Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

²¹⁸ Ernest Lyon, Letter to Elihu Root, September 29, 1905. *Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

and educated inhabitants” and “about 2,000,000 semi-civilized people.”²¹⁹ By referencing the indigenous as “semi-civilized,” rather than “uncivilized” as in internal correspondence among Liberian officials, Dossen presented the indigenous as progressing towards civilization. Framing the indigenous as improving also furthered the notion of Liberia as a black, “modern” state, as “uncivilized” inhabitants damaged the image of Liberia that Americo-Liberians wanted to promote.

In the same article, Dossen promoted Liberia as a desirable place for African Americans to live by juxtaposing the opportunities for black inhabitants in Liberia to those in the United States. Aware that African Americans were largely marginalized in Jim Crow America, Dossen pointed out the liberties a black person could acquire in Liberia. “A Negro can become a citizen in Liberia, can own property, can vote and be elected to public offices. It is a colored man’s country.” He continued by noting the racial requirements to become a citizen in Liberia. “White people may settle in Liberia and do business, but they can never become citizens. They cannot hold property; they are practically merely tolerated.” White people could not attain political power in Liberia, as one needed to own property to vote and be a citizen to run for office, and the Constitution barred white people from both. Lastly, Dossen addressed a pertinent issue to African Americans, military service. While African Americans could serve in the US military, they could not become officers. White officers led black regiments, though these regiments did not have access to the same equipment or opportunities as their white counterparts.²²⁰ Aware of this, Dossen stated, “We have a militia, the same as you have. Only negroes are permitted to join its colors and its officers are all negroes.”²²¹ Referencing rights that white Americans denied to

²¹⁹ “Liberia Seeks Men,” *The Washington Herald*, May 25, 1908.

²²⁰ Gerald Astor, *The Right To Fight: A History Of African Americans In The Military* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1998).

²²¹ “Liberia Seeks Men,” *The Washington Herald*, May 25, 1908.

African Americans, such as voting and military service, Americo-Liberians painted Liberia as the epitome of black progress and a nation free of white governance.

Americo-Liberians furthered their appeal to African Americans by promoting Liberia's need for African American immigrants. To ensure Liberia continued to progress, Americo-Liberians attempted to recruit a particular "class" of blacks. Dossen proclaimed the Liberian needed only "desirable American negroes" to immigrate to and settle in Liberia. Americo-Liberians did not want "shiftless people," because Liberia had "no use for them."²²² Liberian Government officials only wanted black immigrants who would contribute to the continued advancement of Liberia. Robert Sherman, the Liberian secretary of war and Navy, reciprocated the need for immigration of "the class of Negroes that would be a blessing to the country and Race." He claimed, Liberia needed men and women who would "come here [Liberia] with push, energy, and a self-sacrificing and industrious spirit in them...[they] will laugh at impossibilities, hardships, privation, and the African fever; then all things would become possible unto them in a few years."²²³ The postmaster general of the Republic, S.T. Prout, elaborated more about the type of men and women Liberia needed:

The kind of Immigration wanted: 1st, Men and Women who are not ignorant, worn out or needy. They will only be a burden to our Government. They should therefore, be skilled laborers, and possess a certain amount of capital to give them a start. 2nd, They should bring their books, if professional men, or their tools and implements if mechanics or farmers. Doctors should come supplied and prepared for work. 3rd, Men and Women are wanted who are patriotic lovers of freedom, self-reliant men, men who come determined to stand by the Republic of Liberia, and succeeds [*sic*] as she succeeds, or fail as the Republic fails! Moral, industrious, Christian men!²²⁴

Given Americo-Liberians attempts to cast Liberia as a "modern," black republic, Americo-Liberians only wanted those who could contribute to this image to immigrate to Liberia.

²²² "Liberia Seeks Men," *The Washington Herald*, May 25, 1908.

²²³ Ernest Lyon, Letter to Francis B. Loomis, February 11, 1904, 4. (*Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C)

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

While Barclay also reiterated these hopes for African American immigrants, he recognized the unlikelihood of African American immigration. In a previous speech in 1904 he claimed, “The Colored American or rather the class that would be a valuable acquisition to the country...are not inclined at present to come to Liberia. The leaders of the Colored people are opposed to immigration to Liberia. They are in the fight for social and political equality with the white American.”²²⁵ Barclay believed African American immigration remained unlikely not because African Americans did not want to move to Liberia, but because the African American population was immersed in its own fight for social and political equality within the United States.

Despite the fact that African American masses did not seem interested in immigrating to Liberia, Liberia’s threatened sovereignty remained a significant issue for blacks throughout the Atlantic World. Liberia’s status as one of only two black-ruled republics made the issues facing the Republic of great concern for Americo-Liberians and African Americans alike. When presenting themselves to an African American audience, Americo-Liberians presented an image of Liberia as a “modern,” self-ruled, black state, designed to give black people the liberties denied to them in white-governed states. This depiction of Liberia simultaneously challenged the notions of black inferiority as well as emerging ideas of Social Darwinism that whites used to maintain their status as superior to blacks. Believing the conditions in Liberia provided better opportunities for blacks, Americo-Liberians attempted to minimize the press coverage of the European encroachments so as to maintain this image. News of European encroachments might deter any African Americans interested in immigrating and bolster notions of black inferiority.

²²⁵ Ibid., 6.

Unable to keep the realities of Liberia out of the media, Americo-Liberians then portrayed Liberia's struggles as similar to those of African Americans, and accordingly, crucial to the larger fight for race equality. President Barclay often called attention to Liberia's struggles as having significance beyond than merely protecting Liberian sovereignty. In particular, Barclay acknowledged Liberia's value to the entire black race in an 1905 address to the Liberian legislature. He claimed, "it is a fact that we do not represent ourselves alone, in this national experiment. Consider what our success or failure will mean for the Race."²²⁶ The loss of Liberia would be detrimental to black progress, as Liberia served as proof of the capability of blacks to self-govern. Liberia's very existence presented a counter argument to the idea promoted by many whites that labeled the black race as degenerate and intrinsically inferior to whites. Because of this, all eyes, regardless of race, fell on Liberia to see how the Republic would fare. Despite the fact that Liberia was over fifty years old, Americo-Liberians understood "Liberia and the Liberians have been, and are *still* on trial."²²⁷ Given the perceived significance of Liberia to the continued advancement of the black race, Americo-Liberians presented Liberia's struggles as a pressing issue to African Americans.

In order to rally support for Liberia, Booker T. Washington began to write about Liberia's plight to other African Americans. He also mentioned Liberia's story in lectures at Tuskegee and in speeches throughout the South.²²⁸ Bishop I.B. Scott, who worked in Liberia, also spoke to the students at Tuskegee in 1908 regarding the "Christian development of the Liberian

²²⁶ Arthur Barclay, "Message of the President of Liberia Communicated to the First Session of the Thirteenth Legislature," December 14, 1905,"*Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906*, Volume 14, Roll T-14. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, Emphasis in original.

²²⁸ For an example, see "The Survival of the Fittest," , December 2, 1905. *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, volume 8, 456-460.

people.”²²⁹ In addition to correspondence and speeches, African American newspapers, such as *The Washington Bee* and *The Cleveland Gazette*, headlined articles on Liberia beginning in 1908. Washington hoped to spread the news of Liberia’s predicament throughout the African American community, as he saw Liberia’s plight as similar to those African Americans faced in Jim Crow South. Moreover, he believed that with enough support from the African American community, he could sway Roosevelt to intervene on behalf of Liberia by offering up African American votes as incentive.²³⁰

Similar to the familial connections emphasized when corresponding with US officials, Americo-Liberians emphasized their shared ancestry with the African Americans in communication with African-American leaders. This was most evident when the US envoy, consisting of three men, Roland P. Falkner, George Sale, and Emmett J. Scott, visited Liberia in May of 1909 to assess the situation at hand.²³¹ Americo-Liberians, and some indigenous Liberians, gathered in Monrovia to welcome the American Commission. They greeted the American visitors with wreathes, a brass band, and militias, and then escorted the Commission to Lyon’s home for a welcome reception. At this reception, the Americo-Liberians delivered speeches and toasts to their visitors—all of which celebrated the “kinship” linking the United States and Americans to Liberia and the Americo-Liberians.²³²

²²⁹ Booker T. Washington, Letter to Caroline Phelps Stokes, October 3, 1908. *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, volume 9.

²³⁰ Louis R. Harlan, “Booker T. Washington and the White Man’s Burden,” *The American Historical Review* 71, no. 2 (Jan., 1966), 454. Ernest Lyon, US minister to Liberia, to Washington, July 15, 1907, Washington to Roosevelt, Sept. 19, 1907, Washington to Lyon, Sept. 28, 1907, Emmett J. Scott, telegram, to Washington, Sept. 27, 1907, *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, volume 9.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 455. Falkner, the former superintendent of education in Puerto Rico, served as the chairman of the commission. Sale served as the superintendent of Baptist mission schools in Puerto Rico and Cuba. Emmett, the only African American member of the commission, was Washington’s personal secretary.

²³² Emmett J. Scott, “Is Liberia Worth Saving?,” *The Journal of Race Development* 1, No. 3 (Jan., 1911): 277-278; “May 8, 1909,” President’s Office Diary, 1909. LGA II, Holsoe Collection.

While black, the indigenous did not further the “modern” image Americo-Liberians sought to convey to the rest of the world. In his inaugural address in 1912, Liberian President Daniel Howard commented on the role of Liberians in establishing Liberia as a successful state. He claimed, “Liberia must attain the position of a prosperous African state, and her sons and daughters are to be the agents that bring about this.”²³³ Americo-Liberians clearly wanted Westernized black citizens who would further Liberia’s image as a successful, industrious state all the while improving Liberia and the Liberian economy with their skills and trades.

While Americo-Liberians understood the implications of Liberia’s fate as pertinent to the entire race, it is evident from their actions and language that they placed stipulations on this shared racial identity. Particularly, indigenous Liberians did not fall into this category. In communication with the indigenous chiefs, Liberian officials did not frame the European threats as race-based. Americo-Liberians claimed Liberia provided opportunities for “negroes,” but did not grant these same opportunities to the indigenous populations, who it appears, fell into a different racial classification. Westernized indigenous who immersed themselves in Americo-Liberian society would likely have gained opportunities to become business owners, serve in the militia, and vote. However, at this time, the majority of the indigenous were not given the opportunity to participate in presidential elections, though the government expected them to respect the elections by being obedient to the reigning president. Letters to the indigenous chiefs not only informed them of the outcome of the election, but also that an election had taken place.²³⁴ White Americans made voting increasingly difficult for African Americans through the use of poll taxes and literacy tests; likewise, the Liberian Government did not extend the

²³³ Daniel Edward Howard, “Inaugural Address,” *Inauguration Ceremonies of Daniel Edward Howard President and Samuel George Harmon Vice-President of the Republic of Liberia*. (January 1, 1912), 7.

²³⁴ Arthur Barclay, Letter to Chiefs Doble Zoloo, Pango, Bah-Quelleh – Musah, February 22, 1904. Box 3, LGA I, Holsoe Collection.

opportunity to vote to all indigenous Liberians. Because Americo-Liberians largely based their status on their “civilized” standing, they evoked the same sense of paternalism over the indigenous populations that the Europeans used to justify colonialism throughout Africa. While Americo-Liberians saw Liberia’s sovereignty crisis as pertinent to the entire Negro Race, they often excluded the indigenous from this classification because indigenous Africans did not evoke the characteristics of blackness that Americo-Liberians hoped to present; instead, in the eyes of Americo-Liberians, the indigenous Liberians embodied the very stereotypes associated with blackness from which Americo-Liberians hoped to distance themselves.

Conclusion

Despite Americo-Liberian attempts to portray Liberia as “modern” state, the European powers continued a piecemeal absorption of Liberia’s territorial, fiscal, and political independence. Although Americo-Liberians conformed to the standards of the Berlin Conference, European representatives challenged Liberia’s territorial claims and asserted their authority when the opportunity arose. In an attempt to preserve their very existence as a self-governing republic, Americo-Liberians turned to diplomacy to appeal for both internal and external aid. Pursuing all available options at hand, Americo-Liberians sought to reaffirm Liberia’s legitimacy as a sovereign nation, all the while gaining support from both prevailing nation-states and populations facing similar circumstances. However, Americo-Liberians maximized Liberia’s chances of remaining sovereign by appealing to numerous audiences and emphasizing similarities with these respective audiences. Caught between the ideas of “modernity” and “blackness,” Americo-Liberians worked to prove the two identities could indeed co-exist. While the ways in which Americo-Liberians framed themselves and Liberia varied with audience, Americo-Liberians accentuated particular elements of their identity in order to acquire aid to preserve the “modern,” black Republic of Liberia.

When communicating with Europeans, Americo-Liberians essentially presented themselves as imperialists, emphasizing their Westernization and their ability to control the indigenous. Through correspondence with the indigenous, Americo-Liberians presented the two as sharing mutual goals and enemies. In the case of the United States, Americo-Liberians stressed Liberia's past relationship to the United States and Liberia's crumbling status as an autonomous state. With African Americans, Americo-Liberians highlighted the ancestral connection linking Americo-Liberians to African Americans and their similar situations of oppression by whites. Accordingly, Americo-Liberians presented Liberia's struggle as in the context of the larger struggle for racial uplift. Americo-Liberians believed the ramifications of Liberia's success would far surpass the borders of Liberia, thus the threats against Liberia were symbolic of the larger attempts to hinder the uplift of the entire black race.

Liberia did not secure aid by solely appealing to one of these groups, but benefitted from forging and maintaining friendly relations with representatives from all of these regimes and populations. Through the Americo-Liberians' meticulous presentations of themselves and Liberia, they attempted to find the delicate balance between "modernity" and blackness. While Americo-Liberians certainly wanted to solidify Liberia's status as sovereign and mold Liberia to fit the European standards of "modernity," they did so all the while clinging to their blackness; however, this notion of blackness diverged from the prevailing white understanding of blackness characterized by innate inferiority. By seeking forms of aid from international powers and marginalized groups battling oppression in their own circumstances, Americo-Liberians acquired necessary aid by accentuating components of their collective identity. This diverse set of representation reveals the deep tensions between identifying as both black and "modern" at the turn of the twentieth century. Using these complexities to their advantage, Americo-Liberians

carefully promoted shared characteristics with different groups in order to acquire political alliances and financial assistance to preserve the Republic of Liberia. A successful Liberian state served as proof that blackness and “modernity” were not mutually exclusive.

Conclusion

American Intervention

Ernest Lyon's letter to Booker T. Washington in 1906 set United States intervention into Liberian affairs into motion. Shortly after receiving Lyon's letter, Washington wrote to US President Roosevelt, and later Secretary of State Howard Taft, regarding the plight of Liberia. Despite their skepticism of, or even disinterest in, getting involved in this matter, Washington arranged for an envoy of Liberian leaders to come to the United States in June of 1908.²³⁵ The Liberian envoy first came to Tuskegee, and then traveled to Washington, DC, to meet with Taft, who was elected president in 1908.²³⁶ In 1909, Taft authorized a US delegation to go to Liberia to assess the state of affairs in the Republic. Booker T. Washington declined the opportunity to serve on this envoy, sending his assistant Emmett Scott instead. The envoy reported their findings to the US Congress in March of 1910, recommending that the United States assist Liberia in the prompt settlement of pending boundary disputes, payment of outstanding loans, and assembling and training of a frontier force.²³⁷

After nearly six years of soliciting assistance from the United States, including a Liberian envoy to the United States as well as a US envoy to Liberia, the United States officially intervened on behalf of Liberia in December of 1910. The United States secured Liberia's territorial boundaries through a series of agreements with France and Great Britain and enabled Liberia to pay off its debts to the European powers through a loan granting Liberia \$1,700,000.²³⁸ Despite the fact that Liberia's debts merely shifted from Great Britain to the United States,

²³⁵ Booker T. Washington, Confidential Letter to James Jenkins Dossen, January 7, 1909. Louis R. Harlan and Raymond W. Smock, eds., *Booker T. Washington Papers*, vol 10 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), 4-6.

²³⁶ Booker T. Washington, Confidential Letter to Ernest Lyon, June 3, 1908. Louis R. Harlan and Raymond W. Smock, eds., *Booker T. Washington Papers*, vol 9 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), 568.

²³⁷ *Message of the President to the Congress, March 25, 1910*. In University of Wisconsin Digital Collections. <http://images.library.wisc.edu/FRUS/EFacs/1911/reference/frus.frus1911.i0025.pdf>

²³⁸ Buell, 24; Sundiata, 30.

Liberian officials did not view this indebtedness as an infringement upon Liberia's sovereignty. Based on the time it took Americo-Liberians to acquire US aid, they believed the United States was not interested in acquiring an African colony. While the US loan allowed Liberia to pay off its debts to Great Britain and Germany, this assistance only addressed the external fiscal pressures. Given the fact that little money, if at all, went into the Liberian economy, it remained stagnant. Accordingly, the Liberian Government remained unable to meet the internal financial needs of the Republic. Nonetheless, the US protectorate enabled Liberia to retain its status as a sovereign nation.

While US assistance ultimately preserved Liberia's autonomy, it is important not to overlook the integral role Americo-Liberians played in this process. Americo-Liberians began their attempts to fend off European imperial advancements in the 1860s by directly negotiating boundary disputes with the European powers. As the magnitude and recurrence of these threats increased, Americo-Liberians also altered the ways in which they responded. Upon the realization in the 1880s that European regimes would only recognize sovereignty according to the terms established at the Berlin Conference, Liberian Government officials conformed to these terms in attempt to minimize the occurrence of boundary disputes with the surrounding imperial powers. Americo-Liberians began a spotty pursuit of the Liberian interior in the 1880s, but came up short due to the Republic's lack of the necessary manpower and finances; thus, European encroachments persisted. Aware of the zero-sum mentality of the European imperialists, Liberian officials used the jealousy between the European powers as leverage to gain assistance in settling Liberian boundaries in the late nineteenth century. Despite this aid, Liberia's inability to produce substantial national revenue led to increased fiscal debts, which eventually began to chip away at Liberian sovereignty. At the turn of the century, these territorial

and financial losses jeopardized Liberia's autonomy. In an attempt to ensure that Liberia survived, Liberian Government officials enacted a full-fledged expansion into the hinterland in the early twentieth century in order to demonstrate "effective occupation" of all of Liberia's territorial claims. Even though Liberia worked to establish itself as a colonial regime, the Republic could not escape the grasping European powers surrounding Liberia. As a last resort, Americo-Liberians appealed to the United States for aid on the grounds of the paternal relationship that once existed between the two entities.

Liberia and "Black Modernity"

Americo-Liberian methods for preserving the Republic of Liberia exemplify the concept of "black modernity," as Americo-Liberians utilized "modern" methods championed by European regimes for the purpose of preserving the black Republic of Liberia. This particular case study reveals the malleability of "black modernity," proving the defining characteristics of "black modernity" are contingent on contextual factors such as the plight of the people, pending circumstances, power structures, and understanding of self in relation to these variables. In the context of the Scramble for Africa, Americo-Liberians needed to distinguish themselves as different from the indigenous African populations by proving they could indeed govern themselves. Publicly acknowledged rationalizations within European nation-states for colonizing Africa hinged on the idea that the "savage," "backwards" Africans needed exposure to Christianity and civilization. Given the fact that most Americo-Liberians could trace their roots to the United States, they embodied Western culture in the form of Christianity, Western education, and the English language. In addition to these ideological similarities, Americo-Liberians sought to find affinity with the European powers in their actions as well. In colonial Africa, the middle ground between colonizer and colonized was relatively non-existent; thus, Americo-Liberians assumed the role of colonizer to avoid European colonization of the Liberian

interior. Before European imperial expansion threatened Liberian territory, Americo-Liberians expressed little interest in physically occupying the hinterland much less attempting to control the numerous imperial populations residing throughout the region. Despite Liberia's recognized sovereignty, European-sponsored attempts to acquire Liberian territory proved this status alone carried very little weight, as Americo-Liberians fell subject to the same European manipulation and imperial ploys as the indigenous populations. In response, Americo-Liberians used tools of modernity, such as an African colonial state and international diplomacy for the purpose of preserving Liberia's autonomy.

Studying "black modernity" in the context of Liberia requires one to examine multiple levels of influence. Americo-Liberians worked to preserve Liberia's sovereignty at the international level so as to safeguard the footing of the larger quest of black uplift. Americo-Liberians were aware the failure of a black self-governed nation state would have repercussions for blacks outside of the boundaries of Liberia because Liberia's very existence served as the lynchpin in arguments regarding the capability of black people to govern themselves. Within Liberia, the Americo-Liberians worked to establish their reign over an African colonial state. While Americo-Liberians toiled to present Liberia as a successful state along the European standards of "modernity," the relationship between the Americo-Liberian population and the indigenous populations reveals the Americo-Liberian adoption of the prevailing thought among Europeans of the innate inferiority of Africans. The oppressed became the oppressors, as the Americo-Liberians dictated and attempted to establish authority over the indigenous populations. Perhaps a closer glance at "black modernity" within Liberia would reveal the "modernities" that challenged the state power, such as indigenous Liberians who engaged in the smuggling ring or

the Leopard Society that dictated terms of trade in the hinterland with their very presence.²³⁹ A closer look will allow one to see not only layers of imperialism, but also layers of resistance and the interactions of multiple “modernities.”

Understanding the complexities of Liberia’s struggle for sovereignty at the turn of the twentieth century places particular elements of the historiography on Liberia in a new light. Accusations of slavery within Liberia jeopardized Liberia’s sovereignty in 1929, as Liberian officials were brought before the League of Nations on these charges. Careful examination of the Americo-Liberian pursuit of the hinterland contextualizes Liberia’s twentieth century slavery scandal. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Americo-Liberians focused on the differences between themselves and the indigenous populations to the extent that they replicated a system of slavery similar to that which many African Americans immigrated to Liberia to escape. Aside from this irony, Liberia’s sovereignty crisis also sheds light on the Liberian Civil Wars. Americo-Liberians maintained a monopoly over the Liberian Government until 1980, when Samuel Doe successfully carried out a coup ousting the reigning Americo-Liberian regime. Despite his indigenous roots, Doe did not gain the support of the indigenous majority leading to another coup in 1989, which marked the beginning of fourteen years of conflict.²⁴⁰ African peoples throughout the continent began to overthrow colonial regimes as early as 1957; however, indigenous Liberians remained marginalized by the Liberian Government until the dust of the Civil Wars settled in 2003.

“Black Modernity” in Haiti and Ethiopia

Focusing on the Americo-Liberian population, this particular study on “black modernity” has explored the actions of the governing elite of Liberia, revealing how their relationship to the

²³⁹ Mitchell; Piot; Prestholdt; for a definition of the European understanding and use of modernity see Cooper, 113-114.

²⁴⁰ Levitt.

international community dictated their relationship to the indigenous Liberian populations as well as the nature of Liberia's state structure. Similar studies on Haiti and Ethiopia would serve as interesting juxtapositions, broadening this case study on "black modernity" to include all black governed states in existence in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Differing in historical background, geographic location, and governmental composition, Americo-Liberians, Haitians, and Ethiopians all had to defend the autonomy of their respective states.

An abundance of scholarship exists on these states, but engaging with the notion of "black modernity" may produce a nuanced understanding of Haitian and Ethiopian resistance to these external pressures. Scholars have thoroughly addressed the Haitian Revolution, though most of these narratives conclude with the creation of the Republic of Haiti in 1804 and do not examine the struggles post revolution the of the Republic. Laurent Dubois briefly mentions the difficulties Haiti faced in its first century as an independent republic, though only briefly in the epilogue of *Avengers of the New World*. While Haitians stood ready to defend physical attacks, jabs at Haiti's sovereignty in the nineteenth century came in subtle forms, such as the denial of the existence of Haiti in the Western world and Haiti's escalating debt to both the French and US banks. Political instability in Haiti led to a US invasion and military occupation in 1915.²⁴¹ Though ending in physical occupation by the United States, threats to Haiti's sovereignty followed a different pattern than those that challenged the autonomy of Liberia and Ethiopia, as physical invasions were not the first threats to Haiti's sovereignty. Governed by a monarchy, Ethiopia remained sovereign throughout the European colonization of Africa despite attempts by

²⁴¹ Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: the story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 303-304. Other works addressing this period of Haitian history include: Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution From Below* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1990) and Tim Matthewson, *A Proslavery Foreign Policy: Haitian-American Relations during the Early Republic* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., 2003), 143. In this work Tim Matthewson explores diplomacy between Haiti and the US during Haiti's early Republic years, but from a US perspective focusing on how American officials perceived the Haitian Revolution as "proof of the ill effects of racial equality."

the Italian Government to seize power over the Abyssinian Empire. Differing from Liberia, perhaps because of the nature of the Italian invasion, Ethiopians took up arms against the Italian invaders and successfully defeated the Italians at the Battle of Adwa in 1896.²⁴² Ethiopia remained a monarchy and retained its culture, though embraced “modern” warfare for the purpose of protecting the Ethiopian state. Moreover, Ethiopia gained support from the international black community, a form of “black modernity” in itself.

Exploring threats posed by the United States and European nations against these states would shed more light on the nature of “black modernity” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Liberia, Haiti, and Ethiopia all had to fend off encroachments on multiple occasions in order to retain their independence. The differences between these states, such as population composition, type of government, religious affiliation and rituals, and the ways in which they gained independence, would complicate this narrative of “black modernity,” but all the while reveal the ways in which black leaders used “modern” methods and resources to uphold the integrity of their respective states. These case studies would further solidify our understandings of the tensions between blackness, “modernity,” and sovereignty, as government leaders worked to bolster their governing structures as a means of protecting the populace from the race-based oppression rampant throughout the international community. Moreover, the fractures and hierarchies within these entities, based on both race and culture, add layers of irony, resistance, and “modernities” also in need of further exploration.

“Black Modernity,” Black Nationalism, and Pan-Africanism

In terms of transnational histories, Liberia’s sovereign status in the early twentieth century dovetails with the rise of the Black Nationalism and Pan-African movements. Based on the arousal of emigration sentiment among many African Americans, Wilson Moses labels the

²⁴² John Sorenson, *Imagining Ethiopia: Struggles for History and Identity in the Horn of Africa* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 25.

period between the Compromise of 1850 in the United States and Marcus Garvey's imprisonment in 1925 the "Golden Age" of Black Nationalism.²⁴³ Liberia and Haiti became the new homes to many of these emigrants, though Black Nationalism continued throughout the early twentieth century, adapting in ideology to the problems facing black populations. Pan-African thinkers of the twentieth century such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey viewed Liberia as a great potential for the black populations that remained oppressed by racialized state structures. Garvey in particular advocated the need for a black state. He championed the "Back-to-Africa" Movement by posing emigration as the solution to escaping the racial hierarchies of the Western world.²⁴⁴ Liberia, a self-governed black Republic in Africa, provided a model for the "Back-to-Africa" Movement and, despite its struggles, served as a success story for both African immigration and back self-rule. Uniting peoples of African descent, the Pan-African Movement occurred in waves. The first wave began with the Pan-African Conference of 1900 and was rejuvenated by Marcus Garvey's Garveyism Movement in the 1920s. The second wave challenged the colonial hold on the African continent through the Decolonization Movement as well as the racism in the United States through the Civil Rights Movement.²⁴⁵ Black Nationalism and Pan Africanism, like the leaders of Liberia, challenged the ideas of black inferiority, proving blackness and "modernity" were not mutually exclusive.

While Liberia remained one of two African states to maintain its independence during the European colonization of Africa, the story of Americo-Liberian struggles to fend off European agents lusting after Liberia's territory reveals the complexities of this often glossed over era of

²⁴³Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism*, 9.

²⁴⁴ Colin Grant, *Negro with a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Sundiata.

²⁴⁵ Ronald W. Walter, *Pan-Africanism in the African Diaspora: An Analysis of Modern Afrocentric Political Movements* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 91-93; Esedebe, P. Olisanwuche. *Pan-Africanism: The Idea and Movement, 1776-1991*. 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1994).

Liberian history. The United States ultimately intervened on behalf of Liberia, however Liberian Government officials heavily solicited this intercession after exhausting all other options. Attempts to transform Liberia into an African colonial state, as well as Americo-Liberians' meticulous presentation of themselves and Liberia through diplomacy, serve as two ways in which Liberian Government officials embraced aspects of "modernity" for the sake of saving Liberia. At the international level, European powers marginalized and oppressed Liberia by verbally acknowledging the Republic's sovereignty but not treating Liberia as an autonomous equal. In an attempt to gain this respect and put an end to European land grabbing that chipped away at Liberia's territorial integrity, Americo-Liberians implemented a policy of "effective occupation" and navigated the diplomatic realm for much needed assistance in boundary delineations. Given the imminent nature of these threats, Americo-Liberians employed whatever tactics they saw fit for two reasons. First, the state of Liberia protected Americo-Liberians from the oppression that characterized the lives of many black people residing throughout the Atlantic. Second, they understood Liberia's significance to the international black community.

This narrative reveals the tensions between blackness and the existing notion of "modernity," as Americo-Liberians toiled to prove the two could indeed coexist, offering up the Republic of Liberia as proof. Americo-Liberians conformed to the European understanding of "modernity" in an attempt to safeguard their own liberties. Americo-Liberians certainly understood themselves and Liberia as "modern" and "civilized," though their very blackness undermined this in the minds of the European powers because of the reigning racial hierarchies and stereotypes in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Americo-Liberians employed methods of "modernity" to protect Liberia, and accordingly, themselves.

Bibliography

Primary Sources:

Archives:

National Archives Building, Washington, D. C.

Indiana University Archives of Traditional Music Liberian Collections, Bloomington, Indiana.

White American Newspapers:

Charlotte Daily Observer. Charlotte, NC.

The Chicago Tribune. Chicago, IL.

The Duluth News Tribune. Duluth, MN.

Fort Worth Star-Telegram. Fort Worth, TX

The Idaho Daily Statesman. Boise, ID.

The London Times. London, England.

The Macon Daily Telegraph. Macon, GA.

Montgomery Advertiser. Montgomery, AL.

The New York Tribune. New York, NY.

The New York Times. New York, NY.

Springfield Republican. Springfield, MA.

African-American Newspapers:

Broad Axe. Chicago, IL.

Chicago Tribune. Chicago, IL.

Cleveland Gazette. Cleveland, OH

The Freeman. Indianapolis, IN.

New York Age. New York, NY.

Savannah Tribune. Savannah, GA.

Topeka Plaindealer. Topeka, KS.

The Washington Herald. Washington, D.C.

The Washington Bee. Washington, D.C.

Wichita Searchlight. Wichita, KS.

African-American Speeches

Extracts from Address of B.T.W. at Diocesan Convention at St. Thomas' Church, Sept. 28, 1904, New York. BTW Speeches 1901-1904, no. 3. Tuskegee Archives, Tuskegee Institute, Alabama.

Journal Articles and Books

"Convention Between the United Kingdom and Liberia Respecting the Boundary Between Sierra Leone and Liberia." *The American Journal of International Law* 5, no. 4 (Oct. 1911): 279-281.

Falkner, Roland P. "The United States and Liberia." *The American Journal of International Law* 4, No. 3 (Jul., 1910): 529-545.

Hale, Sarah J. *Liberia; or, Mr. Peyton's Failed Experiments*. 1847. Reprint, Upper Saddle River, NJ: The Gregg Press, 1968

Johnson, Harry. "Liberia." *The Geographical Journal* 26, no. 2 (Aug. 1905): 131-151.

"Liberia." *The American Journal of International Law* 3, no. 4 (Oct., 1909): 958-963.

"The Future of Liberia." *The Review of Reviews*, 41. June 1910.

Online Government Documents

"Liberian Constitution of 1847," last modified February 26, 2004,
http://onliberia.org/con_1847.htm

Personal Papers

Washington, Booker T. *The Booker T. Washington Papers*. Ed. Louis R. Harlan. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972-c1989.

Secondary Sources:

Adi, Hakim, and Marika Sherwood. *Pan-African History: Political Figures from Africa and the Diaspora since 1787*. London and New York: Routledge, 2003.

Ajayi, J. F. Ade, and Michael Crowder. *History of West Africa*. Vol 2. New York: Columbia University Press, 1976.

Albertone, Manuela, and Antonino De Francesco, eds. *Rethinking the Atlantic World: Europe and America in the Age of Democratic Revolutions*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan,

2009.

- Allen, William E. "Liberia and the Atlantic World in the Nineteenth Century: Convergence and Effects." *History in Africa* 37 (2010): 7-49.
- Anderson, Benedict R. O'G. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 2006.
- Anderson, R. Earle. *Liberia: America's African Friend*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1952.
- Astor, Gerald. *The Right To Fight: A History Of African Americans In The Military*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1998.
- Bederman, Gail. *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Bethel, Elizabeth Rauh. *The Roots of African-American Identity: Memory and History in Free Antebellum Communities*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.
- Beyan, Amos J. *The American Colonization Society and the Creation of the Liberian State: A Historical Perspective, 1822-1900*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991.
- Boahen, A. Adu. 1987. *African perspectives on colonialism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Bodie, Charles Alvis. *The Images of Africa in the Black American Press, 1890-1930*. PhD Dissertation, Indiana University, 1978.
- Brown, Robert T. *Immigrants to Liberia 1843 – 1865, an Alphabetical Listing*. Philadelphia: Institute for Liberian Studies, 1980.
- Buell, Raymond Leslie. *Liberia: A Century of Survival 1847-1947*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1947.
- Burrowes, Carl Patrick. *Modernization and the Decline of Press Freedom: Liberia, 1847 to 1970*. Columbia, SC: Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, 1996.
- Conniff, Michael L. and Thomas J. Davis. *African in the Americas: A History of the Black Diaspora*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994.
- Cooper, Frederick. *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*. Berkley: University of California Press, 2005.
- Darwin, John. *After Tamerlane: The Rise and Fall of Global Empires, 1400-2000*. New York:

- Bloomsbury Press, 2008.
- Davidson, Basil. *The Black man's burden: Africa and the curse of the nation-state*. New York: Times Books, 1992.
- Donner, Etta. *Hinterland Liberia*. 1911. Reprint, Translated by Winifred M. Deans. London and Glasgow: Blackie & Sons Limited, 1939.
- Dubois, Laurent. *Avengers of the New World: the story of the Haitian Revolution*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004.
- Dunn, D. Elwood, and S. Byron Tarr. *Liberia: A National Polity in Transition*. Metuchen, NJ and London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1988.
- Erhagbe, Edward O. "African-Americans and the Defense of African States against European Imperial Conquest: Booker T. Washington's Diplomatic Efforts to Guarantee Liberia's Independence 1907-1911" *African Studies Review* 39, no. 1 (Apr., 1996): 55-65.
- Esedebe, P. Olisanwuche. *Pan-Africanism: The Idea and Movement, 1776-1991*. 2nd ed. Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1994.
- Fage, J.D. *A History of Africa*. 4th ed. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Fairhead, James, Tim Geysbeek, Svend E. Holsoe, and Melissa Leach. *African-American Exploration in West Africa, Four Nineteenth-Century Diaries*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003.
- Falola, Toyin. *Nationalism and African intellectuals*. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2001.
- Fick, Carolyn E. *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution From Below*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1990.
- Gaines, Kevin. *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.
- Gaines, Kevin. *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.
- Gatewood, Willard B. *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden, 1898-1903*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975.
- Gavin, R.J., and J.A. Betley, trans. *The Scramble for Africa: Documents on the Berlin West Africa Conference and Related Subjects 1884/1885*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 1973.

- Gershoni, Yekutiel. *Black Colonialism: The Americo-Liberian Scramble for the Hinterland*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1985.
- Gershoni, Yekutiel. "The Drawing of Liberian Boundaries in the Nineteenth Century: Treaties with African Chiefs versus Effective Occupation." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (1987): 293-307
- Geysbeek, Tim. "The Anderson-d'Ollone Controversy of 1903-04: Race, Imperialism, and Reconfiguration of the Liberia-Guinea Border." *History in Africa* 31 (2004): 185-213.
- Gilmore, Glenda. *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Godshalk, David Fort. *Veiled Visions: The 1906 Atlanta Race Riot and the Reshaping of American Race Relations*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.
- Gordon, Dexter B. *Black Identity: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Nineteenth-Century Black Nationalism*. Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003.
- Grant, Colin. *Negro with a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Guidry, Frank Andre. *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.
- Harlan, Louis R. "Booker T. Washington and the White Man's Burden." *The American Historical Review* 71, no. 2 (Jan., 1966): 441-467.
- Harris, Katherine. *African and American Values: Liberia and West Africa*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985.
- Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Hobsbawm, E. J. *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Hoganson, Kristin. *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender-Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998.
- Immerman, Richard H. *Empire for Liberty: A History of American Imperialism*

- from Benjamin Franklin to Paul Wolfowitz*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.
- Jackson, David H., Jr. *Booker T Washington and the Struggle Against White Supremacy: The Southern Educational Tours, 1908-1912*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- Jacobson, Matthew Frye. *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2000.
- Levitt, Jeremy I. *The Evolution of Deadly Conflict in Liberia: From 'Paternalism' to State Collapse*. Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2005.
- Liebenow, J. Gus. *Liberia: the Quest for Democracy*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987.
- Litwack, Leon F. *Trouble In Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow*. New York: Random House, 1998.
- Love, Eric Tyrone Lowery. *Race Over Empire: Racism and U.S. Imperialism, 1865-1900*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.
- Lyon, Judson M. "Edward Blyden: Liberian Independence and African Nationalism, 1903-1909." *Phylon* (1960-) 41, no. 1 (1st Qtr., 1980): 36-49.
- Manning, Patrick. *Francophone sub-Saharan Africa, 1880-1995*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Maier, Charles S. *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.
- Matthewson, Tim. *A Proslavery Foreign Policy: Haitian-American Relations during the Early Republic*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., 2003.
- Marable, W. Manning. "Booker T. Washington and African Nationalism." *Phylon* (1960-) 35, No. 4 (4th Quarter, 1974), 398-406.
- McDaniel, Antonio. *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Miller, Ivor L. *Voice of the Leopard: African Secret Societies and Cuba*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009.
- Mitchell, Michele. *Righteous Propagation African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny After Reconstruction*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.
<<http://www.netlibrary.com/urlapi.asp?action=summary&v=1&bookid=137921>>.
- Mitchell, Timothy, ed., *Questions of Modernity*. Minneapolis: University of Memphis Press, 2000.

- Moses, Wilson Jeremiah, ed. *Liberian Dreams: Back to Africa Narratives from the 1850s*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998.
- Moses, Wilson Jeremiah. *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925*. Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1978.
- Mower, J.H. "The Republic of Liberia." *The Journal of Negro History* 32, no.3 (July 1947): 265-306.
- Nesbit, William, and Samuel Williams. *Two Black Views of Liberia*. New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1969.
- Packard, Jerrold M. *American Nightmare: The History of Jim Crow*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002.
- Painter, Nell Irvin. *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877-1919*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1987.
- Pakenham, Thomas. *The Scramble for Africa, 1876-1912*. New York: Random House, 1991.
- Pham, John-Peter. *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State*. New York: Reed Press, 2004.
- Piot, Charles. *Remotely Global: Village Modernity in West Africa*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Polyné, Millery. *From Douglass to Duvalier: U.S. African Americans, Haiti, and Pan-Americanism, 1870-1964*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010.
- Pratten, David. *The Man-Leopard Murders: History and Society in Colonial Nigeria*. London: Eninburgh University Press, 2007.
- Rainey, Timothy A. *Buffalo Soldiers in Africa: The Liberian Frontier Force and the United States Army, 1912-1927*. Thesis (Ph. D.)--Johns Hopkins University, 2002.
- Robinson, Ronald Edward, John Gallagher, and Alice Denny. 1981. *Africa and the Victorians: the official mind of imperialism*. London: Macmillan.
- Rosenberg, Emily. *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945*. New York, Hill and Wang, 1982.
- Rosenberg, Jonathan. *How Far the Promised Land? World Affairs and the American Civil Rights Movement from the First World War to Vietnam*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006.
- Ruetten, Felicitas. "Black America's Perceptions of Africa in the 1920s and 1930s." M.A.

- Thesis, Seton Hall University, 2009.
- Saha, Santosh C. *A History of Agriculture in Liberia, 1822-1970: Transference of American Values*. Lewiston, N.Y., USA: E. Mellen Press, 1990.
- Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994.
- Schulzinger, Robert D. *U.S. Diplomacy Since 1900*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Shafer, Boyd C. *Nationalism: Myth and Reality*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955.
- Sherwood, Marika. *Origins of Pan-Africanism: Henry Sylvester Williams, Africa, and the African Diaspora*. New York: Routledge, 2011.
- Shick, Tom W. *Behold the Promised Land: A History of Afro-American Settler Society in Nineteenth-Century Liberia*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980.
- Shick, Tom W. *Emigrants to Liberia 1820 to 1843, an Alphabetical Listing*. Newark: Liberian Studies Association in America, Inc., 1971.
- Shoup, Carl S., Douglas Dosser, Rudolph G. Penner, and William S. Vickrey. *The Tax System of Liberia, Report of the Tax Mission*. New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1970.
- Sidbury, James. *Becoming African in America: Race and Nation in the Early Black Atlantic*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Singh, Nikhil Pal. *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004.
- Smith, James Wesley. *Sojourners in Search of Freedom: The Settlement of Liberia by Black Americans*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987.
- John Sorenson, *Imagining Ethiopia: Struggles for History and Identity in the Horn of Africa*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993.
- Sundiata, I K. *Black Scandal, America and the Liberian Labor Crisis, 1929-1936*. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1980.
- Sundiata, I. K. *Brothers and Strangers: Black Zion, Black Slavery, 1914-1940*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004.
- Thornton, John K. *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Tyler-McGraw, Marie. *An African Republic: Black & White Virginians in the Making of*

- Liberia*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.
- Wagner, Bryan. *Disturbing the Peace: Black Culture and the Police Power After Slavery*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009.
- Walters, Ronald W. *Pan Africanism in the African Diaspora: An Analysis of Modern Afrocentric Political Movements*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993.
- Wesseling, H. L. *Divide and rule: the partition of Africa, 1880-1914*. Translated by Arnold L. Pomerans. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996.
- Wilson, Charles Morrow. *Liberia*. New York: William Sloane Associated, Inc., 1947.
- Wilson, Charles Morrow. *Liberia: Black Africa in Microcosm*. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.
- Young, Crawford. *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994.