Liberians

An Introduction to their History and Culture

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Introduction

A little more than a year after the Liberian civil war broke out in late 1989, the United States initiated its resettlement program for Liberian refugees. Since then, more than 24,000 Liberian refugees have been admitted to the United States.

Most of the refugees who entered the United States in the early 1990s were family reunification cases. Many were from the urban areas of Liberia, and most arrived with at least some previous formal education and proficiency in English.

In contrast, most recent Liberian arrivals have not had relatives in the United States to help them with their initial adjustment. Many of these Liberians spent more than a decade living in refugee camps in West Africa, and in Liberia most lived in rural areas, where opportunities for schooling—limited in the best of times—virtually vanished during the war years. Many speak little or no English.

The new arrivals join a Liberian community that numbered well over 39,000 in 2004. In addition to the Liberian refugees who arrived in the early 1990s, the community is made up of thousands of Liberians who were already in the United States—mostly as students, businesspeople, and visitors—when the civil war broke out. Many were granted temporary asylum and eventually permanent residency in the United States. Many of these Liberians have gone on to contribute to their communities as doctors, nurses, educators, businesspeople, religious leaders, and social service providers.

Because of their background experiences in Liberia and in the refugee camps, recent arrivals have encountered greater challenges in the United States than have previous Liberian refugees. A particularly thorny issue facing resettlement workers is the many Liberian families headed by single women. Another issue of concern is the number of young Liberian teenagers who have become the primary caregivers for their younger siblings. Yet despite these challenges, we can expect that with help from their families, friends, and service providers, the new arrivals will survive the hardships of resettlement and go on to rebuild their lives and contribute to their communities.

This profile provides general information about Liberians—their history, culture, language, and resettlement experiences—as well as information about the new arrivals in particular. The profile is intended primarily for service providers who will be assisting the refugees in their new communities in the United States. But others may find it useful, too. Teachers may use it to educate students about a people whose history is so closely intertwined with that of the United States. Local government agencies—the courts, the police, the housing and health departments—may use it to help their staff better understand, and thus better serve, the new arrivals.

For readers who wish to learn more about Liberians, we provide a list of books, films, and Web sites at the end of this profile. But ultimately the best source of information about Liberians is the Liberian people themselves, and readers who

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find this profile interesting should consider taking the next step—getting to know those whose history, culture, and experiences are described on these pages. Readers who do will discover a warm and hospitable people eager to share their lives and stories.

People

A Diverse Population

In 2004, the Population Reference Bureau estimated the population of Liberia to be 3.5 million people. About 350,000 Liberian refugees live outside of Liberia, in neighboring West African countries, as a result of the 14-year civil war that ended in 2003. The number of Liberian immigrants and refugees living in the United States is a matter of some debate. Based on the 2000 U.S. census, which includes a count of Liberians in the United States, and on the number of refugees that the U.S. State Department has admitted since the census, a conservative estimate puts the number at well over 39,000.

Liberia's relatively small population is ethnically diverse.

Liberia's relatively small population is ethnically diverse, consisting of about 18 ethnic groups. The relative share of the population of each ethnic group has not changed much over the last three censuses (1962, 1974, and 1984). The Kpelle and Bassa continue to be the first and second largest ethnic groups, with about 20% and 15% of the total population, respectively. The Belle, Dey, and Mende are among the smallest, each with about 0.5% of the total population. The Krahn, who appear to be well represented among Liberian refugees in the United States, made up 3.8% of the total population of Liberia in 1984.

Liberia's population can be roughly divided into two major categories, indigenous Liberians and Americo-Liberians. Indigenous Liberians are descendants of African ethnic groups who were already inhabiting the area when the first African American settlers arrived. Americo-Liberians are largely made up of descendants of three groups: 19th-century African American settlers who founded Liberia, freed Afro-Caribbean slaves who came to Liberia in the mid-1800s, and Africans captured on U.S.-bound slave ships by the U.S. Navy (enforcing a U.S. law against the importation of slaves) and sent to Liberia. Americo-Liberians may also include some members of two other groups: children of marriages and informal liaisons between Americo-Liberians and indigenous Liberians, and indigenous Liberian children raised by Americo-Liberian families (a system known as *wardship*).

The overwhelming majority (about 97%) of the Liberian population is indigenous; Americo-Liberians make up the remaining 3%. The indigenous groups speak languages belonging to the Niger-Congo family of African languages, found throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, and can be further subdivided into four ethnic clusters on the basis of cultural and linguistic similarities:

- the Kwa, consisting of Bassa, Belle, Dey, Grebo, Krahn, Kru, and Sapo;
- the Mande-Fu, consisting of the Gbandi, Gio/Dan, Kpelle, Loma, Mano/Ma, and Mende;
- the Mande-Tan, consisting of the Mandingo and Vai; and
- the Mel or West Atlantic, consisting of the Gola and Kissi.

There are also a small number of Fanti, who are originally from Ghana.

It is important to note that most of the ethnic groups in Liberia extend into neighboring countries, albeit sometimes under different names. For example, the Mende and Vai are also found in Sierra Leone; the Kissi, Kpelle, and Loma are found in Guinea; and the Gio, Krahn, and Mano are found in Ivory Coast. The existence of transnational ethnic groups has had important consequences for today's Liberian refugee situation: Many Liberians who fled to neighboring countries have been able to find homes among familiar people.

There have been inhabitants in present-day Liberia for at least 700 years. The Mel entered Western Liberia between 1300 and 1700, followed shortly by Kwa-speaking groups. The Mande speakers arrived in northwestern Liberia between 1500 and 1550. Early arrivals may have migrated to Liberia in search of fertile agricultural land, after the desertification of their former habitats. The instability that followed the collapse of the third great Sudanic empire–Songhai–around the late 16th century likely prompted an influx of migrants as well. In the late 19th century, Samory Toure's conquests and eventual establishment of a short-lived empire in the area of present-day Mali, Guinea, and Sierra Leone, along with French colonial pacification campaigns in French West Africa, led to the movement of more people into the area that came to be known as Liberia.

Relations Between Americo-Liberians and Indigenous Liberians

Relations between Americo-Liberians and indigenous Liberians were marked almost from the beginning by mutual ethnocentrism, which led in turn to conflict. The Americo-Liberian settlers, representing Western culture, considered it their Christian duty to replace the "barbarous" customs, religion, and political institutions of indigenous Liberians with their own "superior" values, practices, and institutions. Indigenous Liberians in turn viewed the Americo-Liberians as liberated slaves, who should occupy a lower status in society than themselves.

Americo-Liberians demonstrated their contempt for indigenous culture in many ways: by their reluctance to marry indigenous Liberian women with whom they had informal liaisons, by their ceaseless efforts to convert indigenous Liberians to Christianity, by ordinances against public nudity (primarily aimed at indigenous Liberians, many of whom went around topless), by efforts to replace indigenous Liberian traditional land ownership (based on use and need) with private ownership, and by de facto housing segregation in towns.

Nevertheless, from the very beginning, there was a process of cultural assimilation, whereby some indigenous peoples were incorporated into "civilized" soci-

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ety. Almost always, this assimilation occurred at the expense of some aspects of the indigenous cultural identity. An indigenous Liberian might become a member of civilized society by assimilating into America-Liberian subculture and leaving behind much of his or her indigenous subculture.

A Stratified Society

Competition for land, trade routes, and indigenous Liberian labor led to numerous conflicts between the two groups, especially during the early period of America-Liberian settlement. But the superior military organization and power of the America-Liberians, with occasional assistance from the United States, provided them a clear advantage in these conflicts. This early advantage enabled the America-Liberians to develop and institutionalize an elaborate system of stratification in which they became the dominant group, controlling the country's major social, economic, cultural, and political institutions, especially in the coastal areas. The stratification system was maintained by America-Liberian organizations that in the beginning largely excluded indigenous Liberians. These organizations included social clubs (e.g., the Crowds and the Saturday Afternoon Club), fraternities (e.g., the United Brothers Friendship, the Odd Fellows, and the Free Masons), and sororities (e.g., the House of Ruth, the Sisters of the Mysterious Ten, and the Order of the Eastern Stars).

Avenues for upward social mobility by indigenous Liberians were not completely closed, however. Indigenous Liberians could move up socially in a number of ways: by being adopted into an America-Liberian family, by marrying into an America-Liberian family, by being born as the result of an informal liaison between an America-Liberian man and an indigenous woman, by receiving a formal Western education, and by being admitted into the America-Liberian clubs or fraternities and sororities.

The America-Liberians maintained their control from the founding of Liberia until 1980, when their government was violently overthrown by indigenous noncommissioned army officers in a military coup d'etat. That the overthrow occurred during the administration of President Tolbert (1971-1980)—the most liberal, progressive, and ethnically inclusive government up to this point in Liberia—was ironic but not unexpected. Violent political upheavals are more likely to occur when conditions for oppressed minority groups begin to improve. In Liberia, relative deprivation amid rising expectations provided the context within which the coup was possible.

In terms of intergroup relations, the America-Liberian-dominated governments pursued a policy of cultural assimilation: Indigenous Liberians who wished to rise socially were expected to adopt America-Liberian norms, values, practices, and life styles. But while cultural assimilation was a prerequisite for upward social mobility, it was not always a sufficient condition. Many members of the hinterland ethnic groups found it harder to assimilate than did those of the coastal ethnic groups— such as the Bassa, Dey, Grebo, and Kru— because they lacked

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the earlier contacts and sustained interactions with the Americo-Liberians experienced by the coastal groups.

The Unification Policy of President William Tubman (194411971) was somewhat of a departure from the norm of cultural assimilation pursued by his predecessors. His policy represented an incipient form of cultural pluralism—the harmonious coexistence of many different subcultures, each equally respected, within a society. Tubman's policy appeared to have been partly motivated by the independence movements in neighboring African countries and the president's partnership with such cultural nationalists as Presidents Ahmed Sekou Toure of Guinea and Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana. In addition to bringing about greater integration between Americo-Liberians and indigenous Liberians, Tubman's policy prompted greater respect for indigenous Liberian culture. This policy was continued under Tubman's successor, President William Tolbert.

Despite this relatively enlightened policy, ethnic, class, and gender inequalities continued to pervade Liberian society. These inequalities had long been part of Liberian life. Until 1980, all of the presidents of Liberia were Americo-Liberians, even though that group has never constituted more than 3% of the population. Indigenous Liberians were not granted Liberian citizenship until 1904, more than a half century after Liberia's declaration of independence in 1847. Suffrage was extended to indigenous Liberians about a century later in 1946; it had been extended to women a year earlier, in 1945. In the 1930 Fernando Po scandal, top Liberian government officials, including president Charles King himself, were charged with practicing slavery (for a discussion of this scandal, see the section "History" in this profile). On the eve of the 1980 coup that toppled the Americo-Liberian government, about 4% of Liberia's population owned more than 60% of the wealth. The longevity and pervasiveness of social inequalities in Liberia were no doubt major contributors to the 1980 coup and the devastating 14-year civil war that began in 1989.

Social inequalities were no doubt major contributors to the civil war.

History

Pre-Liberian Times

Historical accounts of Liberia usually begin by focusing on Americo-Liberians, whose ancestors founded the modern state of Liberia in the 19th century. Such a focus, however, overlooks the fact that before the arrival of the first African American immigrants in 1822, various African ethnic groups already inhabited the area.

While little is known about the earliest inhabitants of present-day Liberia, it is possible to piece together a picture of life in pre-Liberian society from anthropological and historical accounts and from narratives of journeys to the Liberian hinterland. Experts speculate that Africans inhabited this region at least as far back as the 12th century and possibly earlier.

It appears that since medieval times, the westward expansion of Mende speakers forced the southward migration of smaller ethnic groups along the West Atlantic region. Anthropologist Warren d'Azevedo notes that the Kwa-speaking Deys, Bassa, and Kru, as well as the West Atlantic Gola and Kissi, were among the earliest arrivals in the region of present-day Liberia. The migration of these early ethnic groups into pre-Liberia is said to have occurred in stages and was partly stimulated by the instability and turmoil that followed the declines of the ancient Western Sudanic empires of Mali in 1375 and Songhay in 1591. The desertification of the original homelands of these early groups and the greater availability of arable land in the region of present-day Liberia were no doubt additional reasons for their migration. These earliest immigrants to pre-Liberia brought with them the skills of cotton spinning, cloth weaving, iron smelting, rice cultivation, and models of social and political institutions from the ancient empires of Mali and Songhay.

The earliest information about the area now known as Liberia comes from European explorers and merchants who founded settlements in the late 14th and early 15th centuries on the coast, in the areas of present-day Lower Buchanan and Greenville. Perhaps the most notable of these early European merchants was the Portuguese sailor, Pedro de Cintra, who arrived in 1461. He named the area the Grain Coast because of the abundance of malagueta peppers, which were in high demand as a trade item at that time. At the end of the 16th century, the Dutch followed the Portuguese and began to trade in many of the same items—malagueta peppers, gold dust, and ivory, among other things—traded earlier by the Portuguese.

The Portuguese and Dutch taught the local Vai and Kru their languages and gave names to many rivers, lakes, capes, and mountains in this region. Over time, many of these names became partly or fully Anglicized (for example, Cape Mount, Saint Paul River, Saint John River, Cape Palmas, and Cape Mesurado). A Dutch observer of the 17th century, Olfert Dapper, noted that the local population enjoyed a high standard of political and social organization, with institutions similar to those of the ancient Western Sudanic empires.

Pre-Liberia can be roughly divided into three economic zones. The first zone, consisting of the southern interior, was rich in iron ore and wild game. The main economic activity of this zone, tuber horticulture, was supplemented with salt and fish from the coast. Since the economic activities did not produce much of a surplus, economic production was largely for family consumption.

The Kwa Coast, the second economic zone, spanned the area from Cape Mesurado to Cape Palmas. This area was rich in salt, seafood, rice, and malagueta peppers. Boat building and fishing were the main economic activities in this zone.

The third economic zone consisted of Cape Mount and the north-central portion of the territory, originally populated by Mel- and Kwa-speaking peoples. Extensive trade in salt and kola nuts attracted Mende speakers from the mid-

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15th to mid-16th centuries, pushing the Mel and Kwa speakers southward. Rice production, gold mining, iron smelting, and the production of cotton cloth came to dominate the economic activities of this region. Long-distance trading by Mandingo traders linked the region to much of western Sudan (which comprised much of present-day West Africa).

Competition for the control of markets and trade routes between the coastal region and the hinterland led to intense interethnic rivalries, especially between the Mandingo and the Gola peoples. Salt, gun powder, rum, tobacco, cloth, and beads from the coastal areas were sold and exchanged for slaves and such hinterland products as ivory, gold, kola nuts, rice, camwood, and palm kernels and oil.

In the early 19th century, this rivalry led to the emergence of two competing confederations. The Mandingo Condo Confederation, with its headquarter at Bopolu, was led by chief Sao Boso and controlled traffic to the coast through the Saint Paul River. The rival confederation was the Gola Confederation, with its headquarter at Kongba, under the leadership of Chief Zolu Duma.

With the Kongba Gola becoming custodians of the poro and sande secret societies - the indigenous schools that initiate boys and girls into traditional society—the Gola established a short-lived pan-ethnic confederation involving the Vai, Dey, Mende, Kissi, Loma, and Gbandi chiefdoms in the West Atlantic region. (For a discussion of the poro and sande secret societies, see the section "Education and Literacy" in this profile.) The Gola extended their power and influence in two primary ways: through control of the secret societies and through their unique system of women exchange, whereby Gola women, given to powerful chiefs as wives, influenced their male children to affiliate themselves with the Gola male side of their family.

It was difficult for the Golas to infiltrate the Mandingo, however, because the Moslem Mandingo were reluctant to marry Gola women. Moreover, the Mandingo did not participate in the Poro and Sande Secret Societies, because they had their own separate secret societies. The Gola moved to cut off trade links to the coast from the Mandingo confederacy at Bopolu, and by 1845 the Gola Confederacy was able to wrestle power from the Mandingo at Bopolu. The African American settlers arrived in 1822 at the height of the competition between the Golas and the Mandingo.

Early Americo-Liberian Settlements

The events that brought the first freed American slaves to Liberia in 1822 had their roots in the back-to-Africa movement in the early 1800s. The movement, made up of Southern slave plantation owners, antislavery activists, and Black nationalists, grew out of a dramatic growth in the population of free Blacks in the period following the Revolutionary War. This population increase was in part the result of antislavery laws in the North and the law of manumission, which permitted slave masters to free their slaves, in the South.

Competition for the control of markets and trade routes led to interethnic rivalries.

With an increase in the population of free Blacks, the question of their status in the United States became an important part of the national debate regarding slavery. Because of widespread belief in the inferiority of Blacks, it was generally thought that Blacks and Whites could not coexist in the United States as citizens under conditions of equality. It was also thought that the existence of free Blacks during this time posed a threat to the institution of slavery. News of the successful slave revolt in Haiti in 1791 led to increased fears of a similar revolt in the United States. These concerns, along with more humanitarian ones, prompted a search for a safe, morally acceptable solution that would remove free Blacks from the United States and relocate them elsewhere.

In 1815, Paul Cuffe, an African American Quaker and maritime entrepreneur and a pioneer in the back-to-Africa movement, successfully repatriated 38 African Americans to the then British colony of Sierra Leone in his own vessel, the *Traveller.* However, Cuffe's vision of establishing a trading network between the United States and West Africa, with African Americans leading the venture, was not fully realized because of his sudden death in 1817. But his successful repatriation of a small group of African Americans to West Africa, at his own expense, provided a model for White proponents of colonization.

In 1816, Robert Finley, a Presbyterian clergyman, and a group of very prominent White American men founded the American Colonization Society (ACS). Its prominent members included future U.S. Presidents James Monroe and Andrew Jackson, Judge Bushrod Washington (nephew of George Washington), Francis Scott Key (author of *The Star Spangled Banner*), John Randolph, Henry Clay, and Daniel Webster.

ACS members held fundamentally different views on the issue of slavery. The antislavery faction consisted of clergymen and philanthropists, who espoused the abolition of slavery and the voluntary repatriation of freed slaves to Africa. The other faction consisted of slave owners like Virginian John Randolph, who saw free Blacks (especially successful ones) as a threat to the institution of slavery and for that reason supported their repatriation to Africa. Many free Blacks in the United States, who had earlier supported Paul Cuffe's venture, were suspicious of the initially all-White and mostly Southern membership of the ACS and did not fully support it.

In 1819, members of the ACS, after successfully lobbying the U.S. president and Congress, received $100,000 for the back-to-Africa venture. The first ship, the Elizabeth, carrying 88 Black emigrants and 3 White ACS agents, sailed from New York in late 1820 and landed at Sherbro Island, off the coast of southern Sierra Leone, in 1821. Settlers suffered terribly in the mosquito-infested, swampy, coastal terrain, dying of malaria, yellow fever, and other tropical diseases.

In 1822, U.S. Naval Lieutenant Robert Stockton rescued the survivors of the *Elizabeth* and others who had arrived on a second ship, the *Nautilus,* and took them to Cape Mesurado, near present-day Monrovia. There, Lt. Stockton and Dr. Eli Ayres, the new agent for the ACS, successfully negotiated the purchase of

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Cape Mesurado and a small island at the mouth of Mesurado Bay from the chiefs of the local Deys and Bassas for $300 worth of muskets, tobacco, gunpowder, beads, clothing, food, mirrors, and rum. They initially called the island Perseverance; later it became known as Providence Island. The emerging colony at Cape Mesurado also accepted Africans captured by the U.S. Navy from slave ships bound for the New World between 1820 and 1860, after the United States ended the legal importation of slaves in 1808. Eventually, thousands of these recaptured slaves—later to be known as *recaptives,* or *Congoes*—found homes in the new state of Liberia.

Other colonization societies, formed in Maryland, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, and New York, founded their own settlements in the larger colony that later came to be called Liberia. Over time, the population of Black immigrants to the Liberia colony grew, despite the very high rate of mortality among the early African American settlers. In 1824, the main settlement at Cape Mesurado, called Christopolis, was renamed Monrovia after the fifth U.S. president, James Monroe, who before becoming president had been a prominent member of ACS.

The indigenous African ethnic groups in the area, notably the Bassa, Dey, and Gola, resisted the expansion of the settlers into their (own) lands, and numerous wars between the settlers and the indigenous groups took place. With their superior arms, better military organization, and occasional assistance from the U.S. Navy, the settlers usually prevailed. While relations between the settlers and the indigenous groups were often hostile, from time to time some of the groups (notably the Dey) felt the need to cede more territory to the new settlers, because settler expansion provided some protection from attacks by surrounding neighbors, markets for trade, and Western education for their children.

From 1821 to around 1835, the main settlement of Montserrado expanded throughout the St. Paul River region, with the creation of such towns as Arthington, Bensonville, Brewerville, Caldwell, Clay-Ashland, Crozierville, Dixville, Harrisburg, Johnsonville, Lousiana, Millsburg, New Georgia, Virginia, and White Plains, among others.

The Commonwealth Period

By early 1838, several colonies had been founded by different independent state colonization societies. These included Bassa Cove (founded by the Quaker Youngmen's Colonization Society of Pennsylvania), Maryland in Africa, and Mississippi in Africa (later called the Greenville Settlement). Later in 1838, with the help of Harvard University Law Professor Simon Greenleaf, the ACS drew up a constitution that united the four major settlements (Bassa Cove, Greenville, Maryland, and Montserrado) that adopted it into the Commonwealth of Liberia. The ACS appointed Thomas Buchanan, a relative of future U.S. President James Buchanan, as the governor of the Commonwealth, with Joseph J. Roberts, originally of Norfolk, Virginia, as the lieutenant governor. When Buchanan died in

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office in 1841, Roberts became the Commonwealth's first African American governor.

As the stature and power of the Liberian Commonwealth grew, many indigenous chiefs annexed their territories to the Commonwealth for protection and mutual aid. The Commonwealth received most of its revenues from custom duties levied on indigenous traders and on the British and French colonial powers in neighboring Guinea, Ivory Coast, and Sierra Leone.

The years between 1830 and 1850 saw the emergence of a group of African American immigrants who came to be known as the *merchant princes,* entrepreneurs engaged in commerce and international trade. These shipping entrepreneurs included Edward J. Roye, a future president of Liberia and the owner of the ship the *Eusebia Roye;* Francis Payne and Beverly Yates, owners of the *Liberia;* George Washington Young, owner of the *Mary Elizabeth;* and James B. McGill, owner of the *Eliza Francis* and the *Patsy*, among other vessels.

Eventually, the nearby British and French colonial powers refused to pay custom duties to the Commonwealth, questioning the authority of the ACS to exercise such state power. In 1845, the ACS held a constitutional convention in Monrovia, where, with the help of Harvard University Law School Professor Simon Greenleaf, a new constitution was adopted. In 1847, the ACS declared Liberia an independent, sovereign state with a republican form of government. In the first election of 1848, Governor Joseph J. Roberts of the True Liberian Party (later named the Republican Party) defeated Reverend John Sey of the Old Whig Party, making Roberts the first president of the independent Republic of Liberia. In 1854, the Maryland colony declared its independence from the Maryland State Colonization Society and became the independent country of Maryland in Africa. In 1857, it joined Liberia as a county.

Americo-Liberian Rule

The African American settlers (later known as Americo-Liberians) brought with them many of their customs, traditions, and practices to their new home. These included styles of dress, the English language, food habits, religion, place names, economic and political systems, and architectural designs.

One tradition that the Americo-Liberians brought with them that proved to be very divisive during the early years was a system of status stratification based on skin color. *Colorism,* as this system is sometimes called today, had its origin in the occupational hierarchy of the slave plantation in the southern United States and became a feature of African American life and culture that endures even to this day, although in more subtle forms than before.

In the pre-Civil War south, colorism was essentially the dichotomy between lighter skinned house slaves—illegitimate children of White slave masters and African American women—and darker skinned field slaves, who had more pronounced Negroid features. The former assimilated more into White American

The African American settlers brought with them many of their customs.

culture and enjoyed somewhat more privileges than did the latter. During slavery and the period of post-emancipation in the United States, lighter skinned African Americans directed prejudice and discrimination against those who were darker skinned. These status distinctions, and the inequality flowing from them, had been kept under control by White agents of the ACS in the Liberian colony, but they resurfaced after independence in Liberia.

Other factors, such as education and economic resources, played a role in the rift, and some scholars view the conflict between mulattos and darker skinned Americo-Liberians as essentially an economic struggle between the nonliterate poor and the economically and educationally advantaged. Nevertheless, it seems impossible to ignore the key role that color played in Liberia's political and social institutions, at least up to about 1884.

Color-based status distinctions manifested themselves most clearly in the political and occupational arenas. The Republican Party came to be associated with Monrovia-based mulattoes, who dominated the government and the civil service, while the Old Whig Party (renamed The True Black Man's Party) came to be associated with rural, darker skinned Americo-Liberian farmers. Darker skinned Americo-Liberians like Edward Blyden and Edward J. Roye (the latter being one of the few darker skinned members of the merchant princes) did not hesitate to exploit these status divisions for political advantage.

In 1923, Abayomi Karnga, a scholar and politician of recaptive parentage, noted that the status divisions among the Liberians eventually evolved into a hierarchical caste system with four distinct orders. At the top were the Americo-Liberian officials, consisting largely of light-complexioned people of mixed Black and White ancestry. They were followed by darker skinned Americo-Liberians, consisting mostly of laborers and small farmers. Then came the recaptives, the Africans who had been rescued by the U.S. Navy while aboard U.S.-bound slave ships and brought to Liberia. At the bottom of the hierarchy were the indigenous African Liberians.

These divisions affected many aspects of life, leading to de facto social segregation between the two groups. Marriage between upper status mulattoes and lower status groups was socially forbidden, and the Masonic Craft was initially founded as a mulatto-only secret society. Mulattoes lived for the most part in Monrovia, while most of the others lived in the outlying rural areas. Only mulattos were admitted to Liberia College (later known as the University of Liberia) during the tenure of its first president and founder Joseph J. Roberts; later, during his tenure as president of the college, Edward Blyden, a darker skinned Americo-Liberian, gave priority in admissions to darker skinned students and recaptives. Colorism affected national policy, too, with darker skinned Americo-Liberians favoring the early extension of citizenship and citizenship rights to indigenous African Liberians, whereas mulattoes opposed such a move.

From Liberia's declaration of independence in 1847 until 1870, politics was dominated by the Republican Party and the mulatto elite. Joseph J. Roberts,

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Liberia's first president (1848-1856), was able to obtain formal recognition of Liberia as an independent, sovereign country from a number of major European countries, with Great Britain and France leading the way in 1848. (However, because it was believed that southern U.S. states would be unwilling to accept a Black ambassador in Washington, U.S. recognition of Liberia did not come about until the U.S. Civil War in 1862, during the administration of Liberia's second president, Stephen A. Benson.) When President Roberts founded Liberia College in 1851, Liberia became the second country in West Africa, after Sierra Leone, to have an institution of higher learning.

The biggest achievement of Stephen A. Benson, Liberia's second president (1856-1864), was the incorporation of the independent country of Maryland in Africa into Liberia as Maryland County. Liberia's third president, Daniel B. Warner (1864-1868), authored the words to the Liberian national anthem. It was also during President Warner's administration that 346 immigrants from Barbados arrived in Liberia in 1865, comprising the largest group of immigrants from the Caribbean up to that point. Liberia's fourth president, James S. Payne (1868-1870), organized the first expedition of Benjamin Anderson into the Liberian hinterland. Anderson, who reached as far as Musardu in present-day Guinea, wrote detailed accounts that gave the Liberian government important knowledge about the indigenous people and their culture at that time.

True Whig Party Dominance

The True Whig Party (TWP) was founded in 1869 in Clay-Ashland by upriver farmers and came to include many Barbadian immigrants and recaptive Africans among its early members. Except for the period from 1872 to 1878, when the Republicans made a brief comeback in Liberian politics, all of the presidents of Liberia from 1870 to 1980 were standard bearers of the TWP.

The first standard bearer, Edward J. Roye, won the election of 1869 and became Liberia's fifth president in 1870. A dark-skinned African American barber from Newark, Ohio, Roye obtained some education from Ohio State University before immigrating to Liberia. In Liberia, Roye accumulated immense wealth and held many important positions before running for the presidency. His victory was largely assured by the support of lower status Americo-Liberians, recaptive Africans, and West Indian immigrants.

In seeking external funding for road and school construction in Liberia, President Roye hastily negotiated a loan in Britain at an exorbitantly high interest rate, without consulting the Liberian legislature. This led to resentment against him, especially among the mulatto elite. The disastrous loan, Roye's alleged attempt to unconstitutionally change the term of the presidency from 2 to 4 years, and the mulatto elite's deep resentment of the darker skinned Roye triggered Liberia's first coup d'etat. Roye died (some say he was assassinated) in Monrovia on February 12, 1872. Despite Roye's short-lived presidency, his election began the process of dismantling the Republican Party domination of Liberian politics.

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Some of the prominent presidents of Liberia during the long period of True Whig Party dominance were Hilary R. W. Johnson (1884-1892), Arthur Barclay (1904-1912), Charles D. B. King (1920-1930), William V. S. Tubman (1944-1971), and William R. Tolbert (1971-1980). Johnson, the country's 11th president, was the first Liberian-born president. Nominated by both the Republican and True Whig Parties, he ran unopposed and, after winning the election, declared himself a True Whig. During his administration, Britain annexed the Gallinas, a former slave depot in southern Sierra Leone that was deeded to Liberia by local rulers in the mid-19th century. Cuttington College, a private Episcopal Church college and the second institution of higher learning in Liberia, was founded during Johnson's administration.

The endorsement of Johnson by the Republican and True Whig Parties—the two major political parties that stood on opposite sides of the color divide—signaled a truce of some sort on the issue of color. Starting with the Johnson administration, status division based on skin color ceased to be the divisive issue in Liberian politics and society that it had been under the rule of the mulatto oligarchy. Instead, political power and economic wealth came to dominate the stratification system in Liberia.

Arthur Barclay, who became Liberia's 15th president in 1904, was a prominent member of the 1865 West Indian immigrants, a group that was widely regarded as the most intelligent, most educated, and most industrious group of immigrants to Liberia. A native of Bridgetown, Barbados, Barclay immigrated to Liberia with his father. Through hard work, scholarship, and ambition, Barclay rose from very humble beginnings as a salt seller to become president. President Barclay extended Liberian citizenship to indigenous Liberians in 1904 (probably largely as a way to demonstrate Liberia's control of the hinterland and to forestall British and French encroachment); renegotiated the terms of the exorbitant British loan that President Roye had negotiated; and established the Liberian militia, known as the Liberian Frontier Force (forerunner of the current Armed Forces of Liberia). Barclay's rule marked the beginning of indirect rule of the hinterland. The Liberian Frontier Force (LFF) consisted mainly of indigenous Liberian soldiers under Americo-Liberian officers. Charged with maintaining peace and order in the hinterland, the LFF was notorious for corruption, extortion, brutality, and abuse of hinterland residents, especially in its enforcement of the hut tax.

Corruption and repression in the interior reached their zenith during the administration of Liberia's 17th president, Charles D. B. King. Born in Freetown, Sierra Leone, of recaptive Yoruba parents, King migrated to Liberia with his parents and was educated in Liberia. After occupying a number of important government positions, including attorney general and secretary of state, King rose to the presidency of Liberia in 1920.

President King inherited a devastated economy. In 1917, during the administration of President Daniel Howard, Liberia had entered World War I on the side of the Allies against Germany. The ensuing German naval blockade essentially

A status division based on skin color ceased to be the divisive issue in Liberian politics and society.

halted all trade between Liberia and her major trading partners (France, Britain, and the United States), with disastrous results for Liberia's economy.

After Liberia was unsuccessful in obtaining a $5 million loan from the U.S. government during King's first term, the Firestone Rubber Company of Akron, Ohio, came to the rescue. In 1926, in light of Liberia's desperate financial situation, Firestone was able to negotiate a lease of 1 million acres of land (representing 10% of Liberia's arable land at that time) for 99 years at the rate of 6 cents an acre, making Firestone the largest foreign-owned company in Liberia. The initial agreement was renegotiated and revised several times, up to the late 1970s.

Another serious problem that plagued the King administration and eventually brought about its downfall was the Fernando Po Scandal (1927-1930). This scandal came to light after the chiefs and subchiefs of Wedabo and Kplapo chiefdoms in Maryland County filed a complaint against the King administration for forced labor recruitment of indigenous Liberian men to the then-French colony of Gabon and the Spanish Island of Fernando Po, off the West African coast. The complaint, supported by U.S. missionaries and expatriates working in Liberia, charged that several thousand men were being forcibly recruited, under threats of beatings and severe punishments against their chiefs and people if they refused, to work on plantations in Gabon and Fernando Po. Each man recruited brought a fee of $45, paid by the Gabon and Fernando Po plantation owners, to the recruiting officials and some relatives of President King. A League of Nations inquiry, headed by an Englishman, Dr. Cuthbert Christy, was launched. An African American sociologist from Fisk University, Dr. Charles Johnson, and former Liberian President Arthur Barclay also served on the commission. A Kru man, P. G. Wolo, a graduate of Harvard University, served as its secretary.

The commission found that slavery, as defined by the Anti-slavery Convention, did not exist in Liberia and that the Liberian government did not participate in or encourage domestic slavery. However, it found that the government did employ forced indigenous Liberian labor for public and private purposes and that the practice of sending forced laborers to Gabon and Fernando Po was associated with slavery because of the compulsory method of recruitment. Among other recommendations, the Christy Commission called for the cessation of labor recruitment and transport to Gabon and Fernando Po, a radical restructuring of the government's interior policy, and the restoration of tribal authority in the interior. The uproar that the publication of the commission's report stirred up in Monrovia led the House of Representatives to call for the resignation of President King and Vice President Allen Yancy. Following their resignations, the new government of President Edwin Barclay agreed to implement the commission's recommendations. Edwin Barclay completed the unexpired term of Charles King and was elected in his own right in 1931.

The longest serving Liberian president, and perhaps the one who had the greatest impact on Liberia, for good or bad, was its 19th president, William V. S. Tubman (1944-1971). Among his many achievements were the Open Door

The president who had the greatest impact on Liberia, for good or bad, was William V. S. Tubman.

Policy and the Unification Policy. The former opened the country to foreign investment based on joint ventures between the foreign investors and the Liberian government. The latter brought about greater social integration between the Americo-Liberian and indigenous Liberian segments of the population. An incipient model of cultural pluralism, the Unification Policy was a significant psychological boost to indigenous Liberians in that they could now publicly take pride in their cultural identities through tribal names, dress, religious practices, and other ways.

In 1946, about a century after Liberia's 1847 declaration of independence, President Tubman extended the vote to indigenous Liberians. He had extended the vote to women a year earlier. The franchise extended to indigenous Liberians, however, included a property qualification—ownership of at least a hut on which hut taxes were paid—that was reminiscent of clauses used in the postbellum southern United States to disenfranchise the newly freed African American slaves.

President Tubman also eliminated the provincial system of government and created four new counties in the former three provinces. With economic prosperity brought about by his Open Door Policy, Tubman oversaw the construction of new, modern public buildings, as well as roads and schools throughout the country.

Despite its achievements, Tubman's administration became autocratic, ruthlessly suppressing political opposition and essentially bringing an end to multiparty politics in Liberia during his long tenure. Through an elaborate patronage system and network of formal and informal security (i.e., the countless domestic spies known as Public Relations Officers, or PRO), Tubman consolidated his power and ruled Liberia until his death in 1971.

Tubman's vice president of 19 years, William R. Tolbert (1971-1980), completed Tubman's unexpired term of office and in 1975 was elected in his own right as Liberia's 20th president. Unlike Tubman, who was clearly pro-West in his foreign policy, Tolbert pursued an activist foreign policy, involving Liberia more actively in the Nonaligned Movement, establishing full diplomatic relations with the Communist world and breaking diplomatic ties with Israel, a longtime ally of Liberia. These moves obviously did not sit well with Liberia's traditional Western allies, particularly the United States. Tolbert hosted the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Conference in Monrovia in 1979, becoming chairman of the OAU.

On the domestic front, Tolbert liberalized the political system, welcoming political opposition as long as it was not destructive. His government was ethnically more inclusive than previous Liberian governments had been. Tolbert, who was more of a technocrat than a politician, significantly improved work ethics in Liberia with his emphasis on punctuality, which he personally rigidly enforced. He emphasized greater meritocracy in job appointments and promotions and significantly overhauled the civil service. Among its other achievements, the Tolbert administration encouraged domestic rice production, with the president

Tolbert involved Liberia more actively with the Nonaligned Movement.

himself being a major domestic rice producer; brought about improvements in public housing, at least in the Monrovia area; and reduced tuition at the University of Liberia by half.

Domestically, Tolbert's pronouncements and policies created rising expectations that his domestic and social programs could not meet. While the socioeconomic conditions of the masses, and particularly those of educated indigenous Liberians, were improving, sizeable gaps in living standards between the average Liberian and the upper middle class still remained. Relative deprivation amid rising expectations led to disenchantment and discontent. Forces advocating social change, such as student groups, the grassroots development agency Susukuu, the Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA), and the Progressive Alliance of Liberia (PAL), widely disseminated information about social inequality and injustice. Their political agitation galvanized the Liberian masses in an unprecedented way.

When the Tolbert administration proposed to increase the price of rice, Liberia's staple food, popular dissatisfaction ignited into the1979 Rice Riot. The riot and the brutal way in which it was put down led to a considerable loss of property and human life. Sensing Tolbert's weakness in his handling of the riot, the opposition demanded more concessions. The more Tolbert conceded to the opposition, the more the stalwarts of the True Whig Party felt that Tolbert was losing control of the political system.

Sensing vulnerability in the Tolbert government, a group of 17 indigenous Liberian soldiers under the leadership of Samuel K. Doe, a master sergeant and an ethnic Krahn, staged a military coup d'etat on April 12, 1980, violently overthrowing the Tolbert government and assassinating President Tolbert. About 10 days after the coup, 13 top officials of the Tolbert government were tried, found guilty of various crimes, and publicly executed by firing squad in Monrovia, as indigenous Liberians danced in the streets singing "Country woman born soldier, Congo woman born rogue."[1] But subsequent events in the Doe administration would make the euphoria short-lived.

The Doe Administration

Doe became the first Liberian head of state of fully indigenous Liberian parentage. Within a very short time of assuming leadership, his regime became synonymous with terror, crackdowns on press freedom and political opposition, massive corruption, and human rights abuses. In 1985, following U.S. pressure to return the country to civilian rule, an election was held. Doe allegedly changed the timetable for the election, changed his year of birth in order to meet the age requirement of the Liberian Constitution, banned two major political parties from participating in the election, and declared himself winner in an election that was considered rigged.

Like former Liberian president William Tubman, whom Doe claimed to admire, Doe was clearly pro-Western and especially pro-United States. Liberia under Doe became a listening post for U.S. intelligence and an important Cold War ally in

Liberian soldiers under the leadership of Samuel K. Doe staged a military coup d'etat on April 12, 1980.

the effort to prevent the spread of Soviet influence in the region. Partly because of Doe's pro-U.S. policies, the United States increased financial aid to the country significantly. Doe, in turn, closed down the Libyan embassy in Monrovia (just as the Reagan administration had closed the Libyan Embassy in Washington), reduced the staff at the Soviet Embassy by expelling some of its diplomats, reestablished diplomatic ties with Israel, and gave the U.S. military the right to use the Roberts International Airport and the port of Monrovia with only 24-hour advance notice.

With the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s, U.S. political interest in Liberia faded. This fact, coupled with Doe's massive corruption and his flagrant abuse of human rights, led the United States to cut back financial aid to the Doe government.

On December 24, 1989, Charles Taylor launched an invasion of Liberia from the Ivory Coast. Taylor was a former head of the General Services Agency in the Doe government who had escaped from a U.S. prison, where he was being held pending trial and possible extradition to Liberia to answer charges of embezzling nearly $1 million. In the ensuing civil war that eventually engulfed Liberia, Doe was captured, tortured, and murdered in 1990 by Prince Johnson's Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia, a splinter group from Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia. The civil war eventually came to involve about a half dozen different factions who fought for control of Liberia's natural resources and the government. With the intervention of a mediation force from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a regional organization under the leadership of Nigeria, a shaky semblance of peace and order returned to Liberia in 1996.

Largely through fear and intimidation, Taylor, son of an Americo-Liberian father and a Gola mother, won the 1997 election by a landslide. Like his predecessor, Samuel Doe, Taylor rained terror and intimidation on the Liberian people. Taylor went one step further by exporting terror to the neighboring countries, especially Sierra Leone, where he allegedly helped form the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). RUF committed atrocities on a scale previously unknown in the area, chopping off the hands and arms of innocent men, women, and children.

Liberia once again plunged into civil war during the Taylor administration when a rebel group, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), emerged to overthrow the Taylor government. As civil war spread from the countryside into the Monrovia suburbs by 2003, Taylor was indicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity by a United Nations Court in Sierra Leone. The indictment was announced while Taylor was attending a conference in Accra, Ghana, with representatives of the warring factions and other Liberian groups in an effort to find ways of ending the civil war. With the war crimes indictment, military pressures from two rebel groups, U.S. naval ships sitting visibly off the Liberian coast, and pressure from the Bush government (especially President Bush's ultimatum, "Taylor Must Leave"), Taylor was forced to resign the presidency on August 11, 2003. After handing over power to his vice presi-

Taylor rained terror and intimidation on the Liberian people.

dent, Moses Blah, Taylor left for exile in Nigeria, where he still faces the charges of the U.N. Court in Sierra Leone.

In August 2003, the All-Party Peace Talks in Accra, Ghana, chose Liberian businessman Charles G. Bryant, an ethnic Grebo, to serve a 2-year term as Chairman of the National Transitional Government of Liberia and to prepare Liberia for general elections in October 2005.

Liberian Refugees in West Africa

When fighting erupted in Liberia in 1989, people fled the conflict into neighboring countries in West Africa. Large movements of Liberians continued throughout the 1990s whenever conflict flared. Liberian refugees soon found themselves in dangerous situations in their countries of asylum as the war spread throughout the region. Sadly, Liberian refugees were often forced to relocate many times to escape the fighting near the refugee camps. Consequently, many Liberian refugees have lived in at least two countries of asylum.

Joe, for example, a refugee from western Liberia, initially fled to a remote refugee camp in Ivory Coast in 1999. Three years later, when civil war broke out in that country, he traveled for many weeks by foot to seek refuge in Abidjan, the commercial capital of Ivory Coast. Wisdom, another refugee, has a similar story. He fled to safety in Guinea in 1990. In 2000, life in Guinea became unbearable for him and his family when rebels took control of the area, and they fled to Ghana where they remain today. The stories of Joe and Wisdom are not unusual.

As the war continued to destabilize the entire region in the 1990s, the number of Liberian refugees in West Africa swelled to 700,000, with the largest numbers of displaced people found in Ghana, Guinea, Ivory Coast, and Sierra Leone. Today many of these refugees live in camps under the protection of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), but many others live in villages, cities, and urban refugee settlements. In August 2003, after leading his country through 14 years of bloody civil war, President Charles Taylor agreed to leave Liberia. While a fragile peace exists in

Today, an estimated 320,000 Liberian refugees remain outside their country. As of late 2004, the UNHCR and other aid agencies were optimistic that a repatriation exercise would help many of these refugees start new lives again in Liberia.

Liberians in Flight

Liberians are living in many different conditions throughout West Africa. As in other regions of the world with large numbers of refugees, each host country has a different attitude and set of laws pertaining to its refugee population. In Guinea, the majority of Liberian refugees live in UNHCR-recognized camps,

An estimated 320,000 Liberian refugees remain outside their country.

while in Ghana most Liberians live in an urban refugee settlement near the capital, Accra. Until civil war broke out in Ivory Coast in 2002, most Liberians there enjoyed many freedoms in a special hospitality zone established for refugees. Sierra Leone, which continues to recover from its own civil war, hosts an estimated 70,000 refugees in eight refugee camps and in larger cities. Smaller urban populations of Liberian refugees also exist in Gambia and Nigeria. The following sections will focus on the larger populations living in Guinea, Ivory Coast, and Ghana.

Liberian Refugees in Guinea: Life on the Edge

French-speaking Guinea, one of the poorest countries in the world, has hosted many waves of Liberian refugees since the Liberian civil war began in 1989. When regional fighting was at its peak in the mid-1990s, as many as 400,000 Liberian refugees sought refuge in Guinea. Many were able to return in 1996, but others remained in Guinea due to continuing unrest in various border counties.

In 2002, as a result of the war in neighboring Ivory Coast, tens of thousands of Liberian refugees who had sought refuge in that country fled into Guinea. In 2003, another large group of refugees again entered Guinea seeking refuge from renewed fighting in Liberia between the government and rebel groups attempting to depose President Charles Taylor.

While many of the 150,000 Liberian refugees estimated to be living in Guinea in 2004 live in refugee camps several days drive from the capital, many also live in cities. Many of these urban refugees, however, were recently transferred to interior camps due to disturbances in the city. Another segment of the population has locally integrated into small villages and cities throughout the country. Guinea has continued to host refugees despite government concern about the infiltration of rebels from Liberia. In 2000, this concern became a reality when various rebel forces from neighboring countries, including Liberia, occupied the Parrot's Beak region of Guinea. Many refugees living in area camps and local Guineans suffered as a consequence. In an annual Independence Day speech shortly after the rebel attacks, the Guinean president blamed refugees for crime, drug and arms smuggling, and AIDS in Guinea. Refugees became the victims of unlawful detainment, harassment, and various forms of violence as these inflammatory comments spread throughout the country.

While refugees in Guinea generally have freedom of movement, they can be arbitrarily detained when traveling around the country, according to the UNHCR. While reports of arrests are not alarmingly high, refugees suspected of participating in rebel activity are stopped. To facilitate travel to and from Conakry, the Guinean capital, the UNHCR issues documents to the refugees to present to officials. In addition, refugees may have ration or registration cards to prove their identity. Travel in areas close to Liberia is especially risky. In these border areas, armed groups prey on fleeing refugees, robbing them and forcing them to pay bribes.

Refugees in Guinea became the victims of unlawful detainment.

A large portion of the refugee population in Guinea lives in the southern forest region, which is extremely isolated and difficult to access. Most of these camps, hosting an estimated 73,000 Liberians, are located near the towns of Kissidougou and N'zerekore. Liberian refugees are also located in border towns and urban centers in the region. The roads in this area are dangerous and riddled with potholes the size of small trucks. The inaccessibility of these camps, however, also has one positive consequence: It serves to protect the refugees from rebel movements in the region.

Refugee Services and Facilities in Guinea

Although Guinea's refugee law of 2000 allows refugees the right to work, very few jobs exist. Consequently, many refugees living in the camps and cities take low-paying manual jobs as farm workers, vendors, and household helpers. In many of the camps, the UNHCR has funded vocational training as well as loans for income-generating activities to promote self-sufficiency. Women have participated in activities such as tie-dye, soap making, and poultry farming, while the men have focused on masonry, mattress making, and carpentry. Employment opportunities for educated refugees are virtually nonexistent.

Refugee camps are managed by the UNHCR and its implementing partners. Refugee committees, typically made up of refugee representatives, operate in the camps to provide a communication link between UNCHR and the refugees. A person becomes a committee representative either by camp-wide election or appointment by Guinean government officials.

The UNHCR, its implementing partners, and refugee committees work together to meet the refugees' basic living requirements. Most refugees live in small shelters built with materials provided by the UNHCR or, in the case of recent arrivals, in communal hangars. In 2003, each refugee received 20 to 25 liters of water per day. It was estimated that there was one latrine for every 30 people and one shower for every 55 people. During that year, the World Food Program distributed food equaling 2,100 daily calories to camp residents. Household items such as buckets, blankets, and mosquito nets are also distributed regularly.

Refugees also receive basic health and educational services. Medical clinics, health education programs, and basic prevention services attempt to meet the refugees' medical needs. In 2003, there was one health center for 6,200 refugees. During that year, approximately 22,000 Liberian children attended school. Vocational and literacy classes were also available to small numbers of adults, primarily women.

Laine: A Guinean Camp

Located 2 hours by road from N'zerekore, in the Parrot's Beak region of southern Guinea, Laine Camp grew very quickly in 2002 as Liberian refugees from camps in nearby Ivory Coast fled violence in that country. Laine now hosts nearly

Refugees receive basic health and educational services.

25,000 refugees. This UNHCR-managed camp is divided into eight sections, primarily by ethnicity and religion. Although located deep in the forest, the camp itself sits on a clearing, leaving it very exposed to sun and heat.

Most refugees have built their own homes with materials provided by the non-governmental organization (NGO) Action Against Hunger, a UNHCR-funded program. New arrivals receive technical assistance from this NGO to turn locally made bricks into latrines and homes. In addition, the World Food Programme distributes food to supplement what the refugees grow and trade.

Many other NGOs also provide services in the camp. Right to Play offers sports and play activities to children, and the International Rescue Committee works with unaccompanied minors. Several schools, a hospital, one small movie theater, a water purification system, and a washing area are located in the camp. Basic services such as telephone lines and electricity are not available, although refugees do have access to mobile phone coverage and generator power. Although security is provided at the main entrance to the camp, the surrounding area, where women frequently gather firewood, is not secure.

At the beginning of 2005, Laine and other camps in the region established departure centers for Liberians wishing to return home with UNHCR repatriation assistance. While many refugees have made a decision to return, many others prefer to remain in the relative safety of the camp.

Liberian Refugees in Ivory Coast: From Hospitality to Hostility

In September 2002, a civil war broke out in Ivory Coast that dramatically affected the lives of refugees living in that country. Prior to the fighting, the Ivorian government had allowed refugees to live freely among the local population in western regions of the country. When fighting broke out initially in Liberia in 1989, the Ivorian president appealed to local people to assist their "brothers in distress" and take them in. Up to 400,000 refugees lived in villages and camps in this refugee zone (*zone d'acceuil des réfugiés,* or ZAR) at the height of the war in Liberia. Many Liberian refugees came from areas bordering Ivory Coast and had ethnic ties to Ivorians living in this area. Consequently, they settled in villages where they had access to land, employment, and business. Those who did not have any cultural ties settled in larger towns or in the UNHCR-administered Nicla Camp.

This hospitality ended in 2002 when a failed coup d'etat in Ivory Coast led to a rebellion throughout the country, including the ZAR. Xenophobia spread throughout the country, and all non-Ivorians, including Liberians, were targeted by fighting groups as well as by previously friendly neighbors. In addition, rebels from Liberia entered Ivory Coast, recruiting soldiers from the camps. As a result, thousands of refugees living in this zone fled to neighboring countries, to Nicla Camp, or to the commercial capital, Abidjan. Many others, however, were trapped between fighting factions. In late 2004, a peace agreement signed a

Most refugees have built their own homes with materials provided by a UNHCR-funded program.

year earlier was broken, and civil war erupted again in Ivory Coast, threatening the lives of many Ivorians and refugees. Those in the zone remain extremely - vulnerable.

As of the beginning of 2005, the UNHCR estimates that 44,680 Liberian refugees live in Ivory Coast. Approximately 8,500 refugees live in UNHCR-operated Nicla Camp, while the remaining refugee population lives in the surrounding villages of the ZAR, a 300-mile strip of land bordering Liberia that is primarily tropical forest. The northern sections of the zone are mountainous, while southern areas are more coastal.

Life as a Refugee in Ivory Coast

Most villages in the ZAR are extremely remote. Refugees living in these areas are expected to be self-sufficient, and assistance to them is minimal. For example, Yeouli, a village in the ZAR that hosts approximately 400 Liberian refugees, is inaccessible by road. To visit Yeouli, it is necessary to hike through swamp land for several hours. This village does not have electricity or potable water, but the Ivorian government hopes to move the village to a drier location with an access road. Liberians living in villages like Yeouli have typically rented homes from Ivorians or built their own houses.

Located in a dangerous rebel-held area, Nicla Camp is near the town of Danane in the northern section of the ZAR. The most recently arrived refugees, many of whom are elderly, disabled, or single women with children, are considered the most vulnerable members of the community.

Basic community and maintenance services such as medical clinics and food distribution are available in Nicla. A medical clinic is set up in the camp as well as in several of the surrounding towns. As is the case throughout West Africa, malaria is a primary health concern. The UNHCR also works with local NGOs to promote an end to sexual exploitation and violence against refugee women living in the area.

The UNHCR provides basic household supplies such as buckets and blankets to camp residents, as well as materials for building homes and shelters. Many camp residents rely on day labor or selling food for income. Other income-generating projects are difficult to implement, as the population in the area remains very transient. Many refugees supplement their income through money received from relatives living in the United States. A Western Union office operates in nearby Danane.

Educational opportunities in Nicla are limited. While an informal education system exists for children living in the camp, few Liberians are able to access secondary or vocational training, the UNHCR reports.

Most villages in the ZAR are extremely remote.

Life in the Transit Center

Approximately 200 Liberians live in an urban transit center in Abidjan. Many of these refugees were given emergency housing in transit centers by UNCHR after they were forced to leave their homes following the outbreak of violence in Abidjan. Many others were brought to Abidjan in 2002 to escape escalating violence in the rebel-held areas in the western part of the country. As with other Liberian refugees living in Ivory Coast, this urban group faces anti-immigrant hostility from the local population. During the initial outbreak of violence in 2002, for example, neighborhoods with significant non-Ivorian populations were burned and looted.

Liberian Refugees in Ghana: A "Normal" Life in the Suburbs

Unlike its neighbors, Ghana has remained very peaceful in recent years, and many Liberians have sought refuge there. During the initial influx of Liberians in 1990, Ghanaian churches helped the newly arrived refugees with food and clothing while the local communities offered accommodation. Although this early hospitality ended quickly, larger numbers of refugees arrived in 1996, 1999, and 2002. As of 2003, an estimated 42,000 Liberian refugees were living in Ghana, primarily in Buduburam refugee settlement on the outskirts of Accra, the capital.

Approaching Buduburam from the road, it is difficult to distinguish it from other neighboring communities. A large transportation hub bustling with taxis and small buses sits at the entrance to the settlement as a testament to the freedom of movement refugees enjoy in Ghana. While the settlement technically occupies 141 acres of a former prayer camp, many of the residents have spread to adjacent communities, as overcrowding is a major issue. Inside the congested camp, dusty roads lead the residents through a labyrinth of shops, houses, and even an Internet café. Although many of the shops offer the latest fashions and hair styles, only those residents lucky enough to have relatives in the United States are usually able to afford them.

While the UNHCR no longer provides financial or material aid to refugees living in the settlement, it does support community-based projects that assist the entire population. As a result, Buduburam benefits from many grassroots organizations created by refugees to resolve various problems within the community. For example, the Liberian Welfare Council, a representative group of refugees, acts as the liaison between the government of Ghana and the settlement residents. In addition, this self-governing group settles disputes within the community. A 200-member neighborhood watch team, formed in 2003 and trained by the Ghana police, enforces a nightly curfew and prevents petty crime. According to the settlement manager, crime has significantly decreased due to the efforts of this group. In addition, a very dynamic women's association, a lively Liberian dance troupe, and peer counselors trained to provide psychological support are all very active in the camp.

A self-governing group settles disputes within the community.

Facilities within the camp range from good to poor. Houses are one- or two-room cement blocks crowded together. Many settlement residents rent their homes from Ghanaians or other Liberians. Because the settlement, which is well over its 10,000- resident capacity, has no remaining space, many refugees are living in neighboring villages. Water has not been available in the camp since 1999, so trucks deliver water everyday. A Western Union office is located on the fringe of the camp.

A medical clinic that has recently reopened with the support of the UNHCR provides accessible health care for settlement residents. An ambulance is also available to convey patients to nearby Accra for more comprehensive treatment.

There are 40 primary schools in the settlement, most of them private. They are not free, and many parents cannot afford to send their children to school. More than 50 churches and one mosque also exist in the settlement.

The primary complaints of refugees living in Buduburam are boredom and lack of work opportunities. While the camp is full of entrepreneurs, opportunities are limited, and most residents have difficulty supporting their families. For example, Joseph, a settlement resident since 1992, was enrolled in school when the war started in Liberia. Since living in the settlement, he has become a photographer after managing to purchase a camera. He lacks the proper developing chemicals, however, and he complains that he is often unpaid by customers who are dissatisfied with the quality of his photographs. Another refugee, Moima, a single parent of two children, volunteers full-time with the women's association and struggles to feed her family.

As of 2004, the future of this settlement, which the UNHCR described as a "small Liberia in peace," remains unclear. UNHCR is very optimistic about a voluntary repatriation program that has already begun to assist people wanting to return home. It is unclear at this time how many will participate in this program. Some Buduburam residents have become so integrated into the larger community that it is doubtful that they will want to leave. Other residents remain because they continue to fear persecution if they return to Liberia. Still others stay in Buduburam in hope that they will be accepted for resettlement in a third country.

The primary complaints in Buduburam are boredom and lack of work opportunities.

Life in Liberia

Land

Situated on the West coast of Africa, Liberia covers an area of approximately 38, 250 square miles, making it a little larger than the U.S. state of Indiana. The country is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean on the south, Guinea on the north, Ivory Coast on the east, and Sierra Leone on the west. Liberia has a humid, tropical climate with two primary seasons: the dry season, which runs from November to March, and the rainy season, which runs from April to October.

The average annual rainfall is about 158 inches, with the coastal area receiving about 197 inches and the hinterland receiving considerably less.

The average annual temperature in Liberia is about 82° Fahrenheit, with very little variation throughout the year. The humidity is generally higher in the coastal area than in the hinterland area, and between December and February the *harmattan,* a dry, dusty wind that blows across the northwest coast of Africa, increases temperatures during the day and lowers them significantly at night. Except for the northwest and the coastal area, Liberia is covered with tropical rainforest.

The Economy

The 14-year Liberian civil war devastated the Liberian economy, and today there is very little economic activity in the country.

Before the outbreak of war, the economy experienced a boom that started with World War II and ended with the 1973 OPEC oil crisis that negatively impacted many developing countries. The boom was ushered in by President Tubman's Open Door Policy, which opened the country to foreign investment through trade and capital flow. The boom was largely a result of an increase in Liberia's share of the profits of the Firestone Rubber Company, the country's oldest and largest foreign-owned company, as well as the discovery and mining of rich iron ore deposits. During the boom, almost every leading indicator of economic growth—gross domestic product, government receipts, tonnage of goods imported, and rubber and iron ore exports—more than quadrupled. The exceptional economic growth was accompanied by very little structural and institutional development, however. A 2-year economic survey of Liberia, conducted by Northwestern University, characterized the Liberian boom as an instance of economic growth without economic development. The rapid growth in production had little developmental impact on Liberia or Liberians, the study noted.

Liberia's economy is primarily an export-based economy. Its major exports are iron ore, rubber, timber, diamond, and some agricultural products. About 70% percent of the population is engaged in traditional agriculture, growing rice, coffee, cocoa, and other crops. Nevertheless, the agricultural sector, except for Firestone, is quite small and has very little impact on the overall economy. The manufacturing and construction sectors of the economy are equally small, with the former producing goods and services primarily for domestic consumption. The Liberian government has been and still is the single largest employer in the country.

Although most Liberians are poor by international economic standards, the country is rich in natural resources. In addition to iron ore, rubber (from the second largest rubber plantation in the world), diamond, and gold, Liberia has rich deposits of barite, kyarite, manganese, bauxite, and chromite. With peace, stability, good governance, and a more equitable distribution of wealth, there is great potential for significantly improving the standard of living of Liberians.

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Social Organization and Institutions

Marriage and the family represent the most basic social institutions in Liberia and constitute the basis of social organization in the country. As in other societies, the family consists of a relatively permanent group of people who are related by ancestry, marriage, or adoption and live together as an economic unit. The family is part of a much larger social network of relatives known as *kinship.*

In Liberia, as elsewhere, family patterns and practices differ among different ethnic groups. In Liberia, however, the primary contrast is between the Western-educated (locally referred to as *civilized*) Liberians and the non-Western-educated (locally referred to as *uncivilized*) Liberians. Americo-Liberians form the core of the Western-educated elite, while indigenous Liberians make up the core of the non-Western-educated group.

Marriage Customs

In Liberia, both monogamy (one man having one wife) and polygyny (one man having more than one wife at a time) are permitted and practiced. Monogamy is considered the ideal form of marriage among the Western educated, while both monogamy and polygyny are commonly practiced among non-Western-educated Liberians. According to the 1986 *Liberian Demographic and Health Survey*, polygyny is highest among the Mandingo, very low among Kru and Sapo, and virtually nonexistent among Americo-Liberians.

Although monogamy is the normative ideal among Americo-Liberians, long-standing liaisons outside of marriage, often between Americo-Liberian men and indigenous Liberian women, have long been common. In many cases, the children from these relationships are brought into the man's home, accepted by the wife, and brought up as legitimate children of the couple. In fact, the concept of illegitimate children has little or no application in Liberian society.

In terms of mate selection, there is a basic contrast between Western- and non-Western-educated Liberians. Romantic love–in which a man and a woman meet, go out on a number of dates, and come to find one another personally and physically attractive and compatible–is the predominant form of mate selection among Western-educated Liberians. Dating usually culminates in a marriage proposal from the man to the woman, and a wedding, very similar to a U.S.-style wedding, legitimizes the marriage.

Among non-Western-educated Liberians, dating and marriage are regarded as somewhat of a practical social and economic arrangement between families. Marriage often involves payment of a bride price to the bride's parents at the time a marriage is agreed upon The value of the bride price, which is often paid in installments, varies among the different ethnic groups and depends on factors such as the age and social standing of both sets of parents. Even before the marriage agreement, the suitor must make himself acceptable to his fiancée's par-

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ents by offering them numerous gifts. Among the traditional Mano, for example, the initial marriage contract consists of a man asking a blacksmith to make a special small knife. He presents this small knife and a homespun cloth to the young woman's parents. If the woman and her parents consent to the marriage, they keep the presents, inform the man's parents of their consent, and the man proceeds to pay the bride price. If they do not consent, the items are returned.

In addition to (or in place of) the bride price, the groom is often expected to provide a bride service to his future in-laws. This service generally involves help with farm work. Once he is married, the husband continues to help his in-laws. Such service points to the importance of indigenous marriage as a relationship between families, rather than just between a man and a woman.

Among traditional indigenous Liberians, the actual wedding may be very festive, as it is among the traditional Gbandi, with the shooting of guns at dawn to launch festivities that may go on for 2 days before the actual wedding feast begins. Or the wedding ceremony may be subdued and almost clandestine, as it is among the traditional Kpelle. At their wedding ceremonies, usually only immediate families of the groom and bride are present. Older people, usually men, sternly lecture the couple about marital responsibilities, sexual fidelity, the need for family members to intervene in marital disputes, and repayment of the bride price to the groom should the marriage end in divorce.

As for partner preference, there is little or no difference between Western- and non-Western-educated Liberians. Both groups are allowed to marry outside of their own ethnic group, but in practice most people marry within their own group.

Family

Where is a newlywed couple expected to live in Liberia? Western-educated Liberians generally find a residence of their own, while non-Western-educated Liberians are more likely to reside with or near the husband's family.

With respect to authority within the family—that is, who has the final say in family matters—patriarchy is the prevailing norm among all groups in Liberia, although women may have greater influence in some family matters, particularly regarding the disciplining of children, especially female children. However, patriarchy is likely to be more pronounced among non-Western-educated Liberians than among Americo-Liberians. Among the latter, there may be greater egalitarianism between husband and wife.

How do Liberians trace their ancestry and pass down property from one generation to the next? Here again the basic contrast is between Western- and non-Western-educated Liberians. While Western-educated Liberians, especially Americo-Liberians, trace ancestry and pass down property to the younger generation through both male and female sides of the family, non-Western-edu-

Patriarchy is the prevailing norm among all groups in Liberia.

cated Liberians—with the exception of the matrilineal Fanti—tend to trace descent and pass down inheritance only through the male side of the family.

Finally, the form of the Liberian family may be the nuclear family, with parents and their children living apart from other relatives, or the extended family, with two or more generations living together in the same or adjacent dwellings, usually under the authority of the oldest male. Nuclear families are more common among Western-educated Liberians and extended families more common among non-Western-educated Liberians.

Religion

Religion is a pervasive feature of Liberian society and takes a variety of forms, with animism, ancestral worship, and two monotheistic religions (Christianity and Islam) being the principal ones. Witchcraft, the notion that misfortune, disease, and death derive from the ill wishes of others, is also practiced, particularly among indigenous peoples.

Animism, the belief that spirits are capable of helping or harming people, has existed among the indigenous ethnic groups in Liberia from time immemorial. The two subtypes of animism, shamanism (the belief in a person who is able to communicate with the spirits) and totemism (the belief in a special kinship between humans and animals or plants), are practiced among many indigenous Liberians, especially those without Western education. These Liberians may also practice Christianity or Islam, since some of Liberia's ethnic groups accommodate multiple faiths and practices.

In ancestral worship, there is the belief that when death occurs, the soul departs the physical body and, after several days of earthly duties, moves into the spirit world. From the spirit world, departed ancestors can influence events, positively or negatively, in the lives of their living descendants. To appease their ancestors, family members make sacrifices to them. Those who offend their ancestors or fail to make the necessary sacrifices must consult a shaman (in local Liberian usage, a zoe) to intercede on their behalf.

In Liberia, especially among indigenous ethnic groups, a totem is a personal animal, plant, or object that is always with the individual and can help him or her, if the person keeps its laws. The totem also has the power to harm the individual who violates the totem's laws.

Among the Gio/Dan, Kpelle, Loma, and Mano, a person's totem is a secret that cannot be publicly revealed; once revealed, it loses its power. There are different versions of how one gets to know one's totem. It may be revealed in a dream, passed down from father to son or from mother to daughter, or it may manifest itself by the qualities it imparts to the individual. Animals that frequently serve as totems are the leopard, snake, manatee, and elephant, and the most frequently mentioned plants include the banana, plantain, oil palm, and the kola tree. Objects and natural phenomena such as rocks, wind, and water are also totems.

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How does a totem help an individual? If the leopard is one's totem, for example, it enables the person to run fast and avoid danger. The banana or plantain as a totem helps a woman to have many children, while the elephant, leopard, or antelope as totems can help a hunter get game. The cardinal, universal rule of totemism is that one should never eat one's totem. The proscription against eating one's totem is as strong as the Muslim prohibition against eating pork. As the Loma put it, "Your totem is yourself. If you eat it, you eat yourself."

Some of the hinterland ethnic groups also believe in a higher God or creator, known as *Ngala* by the Gbandi, *Abi* by the Gio/Dan, *Yala* by the Kpelle, *Gala* by the Loma, and *Wala* by the Mano.

Islam was brought to what is now Liberia in the second half of the 18th century by Mandingo traders and clerics from present day Guinea, while Christianity arrived with the Americo-Liberian settlers, who quickly established the Methodist Episcopal and Baptist Churches. Shortly afterward, Christian missionaries, representing many different denominations, arrived in Liberia from the United States.

According to the 1984 Liberian census, 68% of the population is Christian and 14% is Moslem. While the Americo-Liberians, Bassa, Gio/Dan, Kpelle, and Kru are predominantly Christian, the Gola, Mandingo, and Vai tend to be predominantly Moslem.

It is important to note that the practice of Islam in Liberia lacks the fundamentalism found in other parts of the world. Liberian Moslems do not practice *Sharia,* traditional Islamic laws. Women are not forced to wear a veil in public places or practice *purdah* (seclusion in the inner parts of their husbands' compounds). Moslem women in Liberia work outside of the home, can pursue higher education, and have as much freedom of movement as do non-Moslem women.

Daily Life and Values

In the pattern of Liberian daily life, the basic contrast is—once again—between Western- and non-Western-educated Liberians. In the urban areas, the more highly educated members of society perform various jobs in the public and private sectors, working as school teachers, government bureaucrats, health care workers, accountants, and security officers. The work schedules and the daily routines of these Liberians are not markedly different from those of Americans in similar positions.

Less educated urban Liberians work as auto mechanics, tailors, soldiers, police officers, and government messengers. Those with low levels of education are engaged in trade or sales work; women sell foodstuffs in markets and work in small restaurants known as *cook shops.* As in other urban areas throughout much of Sub-Saharan Africa, traders of African clothing and art work can be seen throughout much of urban Liberia, from morning to night.

The practice of Islam in Liberia lacks the fundamentalism found in other parts of the world.

In rural Liberia, daily routines do not follow a fixed time schedule as in the modern sector of society. Still, life follows a predictable pattern. The day begins at dawn, with women and girls fetching water to heat for the men's baths. As the water is being heated, women sweep and dispose of trash near their homes and start getting everything ready for work on the farms. During the farming season, which usually begins in January with the clearing of the undergrowth, workers are off to their farms by 7:00 or 8:00 a.m.

During the day, goats, sheep, fowl, and dogs usually wander around town seeking something to eat. The tranquility and routine pattern of village life is sometimes interrupted by the sudden appearance of a government official, messenger, or soldier, demanding palm wine and food.

During the planting or early harvest season, workers return from the farms at about 4:00 or 5:00 p.m., with women carrying heavy loads of firewood, water, and edible foods. From late afternoon to early evening, women fetch water, pound rice and cassava, make palm oil and palm butter, and prepare the evening meal. Some men busy themselves with house repairs and get tools ready for the next day's work. Others gather with friends in the *palava* hut around gourds of palm wine.

At dusk, the last of the farm workers arrive, and their wives prepare the evening meals. At night, if there is a new moon, it is play time. As a drummer taps out a rhythm, a circle of dancers is formed, with each person entering the middle of the circle for a solo dance. This dancing and drinking of palm wine, and sometimes cane juice (an alcoholic beverage), might go on far into the night.

Liberians value many of the things that other people value: good health, long life, prosperity, peace, living in harmony with nature, and better lives for their children. Among some of the most highly cherished values in Liberian society are hospitality, politeness, and respect, especially for elders. Friends (and sometimes even strangers) passing each other on a road or street are expected to stop and greet one another. In greeting, people generally shake hands, using the unique Liberian handshake—snapping the fingers of the right hand once or twice after the hand clasp. Women often embrace each other in greeting, although they may shake hands as well. It is also common to offer a visitor *cold water,* which may consist of water, palm wine, and/or white kola nuts.

Traditionally, respect for elders is a very important cultural value in Liberian society, although it can be expected that the civil war, with its use of children soldiers, may have undermined this tradition. Respect governs the behavior of children and adolescents not only toward their parents but also toward other elders with whom they come into contact. Respect is shown through proper forms of address: Elders are referred to by such general kinship terms as *Uncle* or *Aunt,* or titles such as *Mister, Mrs., Old Man, Papaye, Old Pop,* and *Old Lady.* Respect to one's elders is also shown through curtsies and bows. It is generally considered impolite for young people to stand erect and look their elders in the

Respect for elders is a very important cultural value in Liberian society.

eyes when communicating with them. Another way that young people show their respect for elders is by offering their seats to them in a gathering or on a bus.

To instill the value of respect in children, Liberians use stern discipline, including corporal punishment. Many older Liberians in the United States have difficulty adjusting to what they consider to be the lack of discipline and respect among children, including Liberian children, in the United States.

A number of sexual taboos exist in Liberia, especially among less educated Liberians. These include taboos against having sex with pregnant women and with women who are still breastfeeding their children.

Food

Rice is the staple food for most Liberians, and Liberian women learn how to cook it from an early age. For the most part, properly cooked rice should have the grains separate and distinct and not be watery, soggy, or raw inside the grain. Cooked rice can be eaten with soup, cooked greens, or alone with raw palm oil, salt, and pepper. Among Liberians, cooking is seen as an essential skill for women.

Pounded new rice, beaten to a coarse meal with or without sugar, can be used to make *country bread,* chewed by the handful as a snack. Pounded rice meal mixed with mashed ripe bananas and other ingredients is used to make rice bread.

Sweet cassava, a tuberous vegetable high in starch, is probably the second most popular food in Liberia. Peeled, it can be eaten raw, roasted, boiled, or cooked and pounded (with pestle and mortar) into a dough called *dumboi.* Fermented cassava can be made into *fufu,* a dumpling that is favorite of the Bassa. Dumboi and fufu can be eaten with cooked greens, palm butter, or soup. The Gio/Dan and Mano/Ma are famous for a special kind of dumboi called *gaigba,* which is made from a coarse dough and may be somewhat difficult for the neophyte to swallow.

Some famous Liberian dishes are prepared with palm butter, a thick sauce made from cooked palm nuts. Palm butter can be cooked with meat, fish, and poultry and is a specialty of the Grebo and Kru. In Liberian cuisine, unlike U.S. cuisine, it is common to mix fish, meat, and poultry in a given dish. Among non-Western-educated Liberians, and even among some Western-educated Liberians, there is no rigidly fixed time for meals: People eat when food is ready.

The Vai are famous for their delicious cassava leaves, often cooked with dried monkey meat and red palm oil, while the Loma are known for *torporgee,* a mixture of beans, bitter balls (a small variety of eggplant), and usually lots of hot Liberian peppers. Ham hocks, collard greens, and corn bread are a specialty of

Rice is the staple food for most Liberians.

Americo-Liberians, as are split peas cooked with salt pork and salt beef eaten as a thick soup or with cooked rice. Jollof rice, very similar to jambalaya, is also a famous Liberian dish and was probably introduced into Liberia by the Wolofs from Gambia and Senegal.

Other foods grown and eaten in Liberia include corn, plantain, sweet potatoes, yams, peanuts, palm cabbage (the tender heart bud of the oil palm), varieties of beans, the leaves of the cassava, and sweet potato plants. Various tropical fruits—oranges, grapefruits, bananas, lemons and limes, papaya, mangoes, pineapples, avocados, and breadfruit—are all grown and consumed in Liberia.

From the smallest insects to the largest elephant, there is hardly anything that has not been eaten by some ethnic group in Liberia. A particularly appreciated snack is termites that have reached the swarming stage and are ready to come out of the ground. Attracted by the lights of a raffia torch, they fly toward the torch and fall into a 20-inch pit in the ground. After they have been dried and had their wings fanned off, they are roasted with salt and pepper in a hot pot. Then these *bug-a-bugs,* as they are called, are ready to be eaten. They make a particularly special treat when served with roasted cassava.

Liberians living in large metropolitan areas in the United States can find many Liberian foods—from palm wine to *palava sauce* (jute leaves)—in Spanish or Asian supermarkets.

Festivities

The three major festivities in Liberia are Christmas, New Year, and Independence Day (July 26). These holidays, introduced by the African American founders of the country, are celebrated as national holidays throughout Liberia. Liberian Moslems also celebrate the *Eid al Fitr* festival on the first day after the end of Ramadan, the Moslem month of fasting.

Each of the three major national holidays is celebrated with feasting, dancing, and merriment. It is customary to give a small gift to a person who first greets you on each of these holidays and says, "My Christmas/New Year/26th on you, oh!"

A unique feature of Christmas, especially in urban areas, involves Santa Claus. Although Santa Claus was most likely introduced into Liberia by the country's African American founders, the Liberian Santa differs from his U.S. counterpart. The Liberian Santa is a street performer, a master dancer colorfully dressed in a dance costume who moves from neighborhood to neighborhood with his troupe of young, working-class male musicians. With their improvised instruments—bottles, cans, and a saw—Santa and his troupe entertain one neighborhood after another, usually receiving gifts of money.

In Monrovia, the New Year celebration generally begins with worship services on New Year's Eve, when every church is packed to capacity. Most people want to be in church at the moment the New Year arrives. Church services usually end

The Liberian Santa is a master dancer colorfully dressed in a dance costume.

shortly after midnight. With church bells ringing, people on the streets cry out, "Happy New Year, me no die, oh!" Then many celebrants head for parties or prepare to go out and celebrate for the rest of the night.

Independence Day celebrations are also festive affairs. The Tubman Administration was especially known for its lavish Independence Day parties in Monrovia, with the grandest one taking place at the Executive Pavilion. Independence Day celebrations featured parades, marches, and speeches from morning to afternoon, culminating with dance parties at night. On the next night, the 27th, more parties would be held for those born during the Tubman administration. It was a day that everyone, even those of modest means, eagerly looked forward to and prepared for long in advance. Those who did not own the proper attire would borrow a necktie from one friend, a suit or jacket from another, and a pair of shoes from a third.

Graduation from the *poro* and *sande* secret societies can also be festive affairs among the ethnic groups that participate in them. (For a discussion of poro and sande, see the section "Education and Literacy" in this profile.) Among the Kpelle, for example, the graduation festivities involve a couple of days of eating, drinking, and dancing.

Clothing

Clothing worn by Liberians varies greatly. Between the heavy European clothing, including the black silk top hat and long black frock coat occasionally worn by urban sophisticates, and the simple loin cloth worn by village men, there are various gradations of attire. In the urban areas, most educated Liberians dress in the latest European or American styles, although on some formal occasions or when they travel abroad, they dress in African attire.

For many Liberians, typical attire for a man would consist of a pair of pants (long or short) and a home-tailored *vai* shirt—a simple, inexpensive, usually short-sleeved shirt, made from brightly colored trade cloth, with a round neck, three front buttons, and three front pockets: one on the top left, and one on each side of the lower front. Typical attire for a Liberian woman would consist of a *lappa,* a two-yard piece of cloth wrapped around the waist, and a *bubba,* a short-sleeved, loose blouse gathered at the top and with sleeves. The cloth most commonly worn today by Liberians is an imported, brightly colored trade material that has largely replaced the homespun native cloth, called *country cloth.* In the rural areas, however, some chiefs and other persons of high status still wear gowns, usually made of a homespun cloth, with a hole for the head in the center. Tie-dye materials made in Liberia are popular for a variety of clothing.

Music, Dance, and Art

Liberia has a very rich cultural heritage of music and dance. In fact, music permeates just about every aspect of life, particularly for the less educated indigenous Liberians. Whether at work or at play, Liberians are fond of singing, and

Clothing worn by Liberians varies greatly.

almost any object can be easily transformed into a musical instrument. What the anthropologist George Schwab noted about Liberia in 1947 would still be true in many parts of the country today:

> An old kerosene tin or a box serves as a drum. A goat skin and hollowed-out piece of wood becomes a guitar. A gourd, a forked stick, and some piassava fibers make a harp. Even sticks and string will serve. Machetes cutting the jungle, axes felling trees, hoes scratching rice, all swing to the rhythm of song or the beating of drums. The knife of the rice harvester moves to the cadences of the master folktale-teller. . . . Song, alone or with drum accompaniment, keeps the hammock bearer in step and makes him forget his load.

Much of the traditional Liberian culture is transmitted from one generation to the next through music, stories, dance, and singing. Typical of such stories is the Kpelle *meni-pele,* a form of musical dramatic folktale. One epic tale, *Woi-meni–pele,* tells of the life and adventures of the hero Woi.

Liberian music and dance are often a mix of indigenous and Western cultures. The quadrille, a stately march-like dance originating in France in the 1700s and most likely introduced to Liberia by Americo-Liberians, is a popular formal dance. Every major national celebration involving dancing usually culminates with the quadrille.

Perhaps even more popular is the grand march, which does not demand as much dancing skill as the quadrille and is very popular among Liberians in the United States, especially at weddings and other celebrations. Danced to the tunes of West African high life music, the grand march is led by a man who knows the dance, with long lines of couples following his lead.

The past 30 or so years have seen a revival of indigenous Liberian song and dance.. Liberians use a variety of indigenous musical instruments, including various types of drums, harps, rattles (especially the sa-sa), resonators, side-blown horns, xylophones, musical bows, and flutes, among other instruments. Since the opening of the Cultural Center in Kendejah, near Monrovia, the Liberian Cultural Dance Troupe has performed in many countries in Africa and Europe. The troupe performed at the U.S. Bicentennial celebration in Washington, D.C., and won a gold medal at the All Africa Trade Fair in Algeria in the 1970s.

Liberia is also rich in arts and crafts. The wide variety of hardwood found in Liberia's forests—ebony, camwood, walnut, and mahogany—provides materials for wood carving. The Gio/Dan, Mano/Ma, and Vai have rich artistic traditions in sculpture and weaving. Masks play important sacred and social roles in traditional societies and are seen with costumes in performance. Other works of art among Liberians include the intricate figurines and masks of the Gio/Dan, the clay models of the Grebo, the soapstone carvings of the Kissi, and the reed dolls of the Loma.

Liberian music and dance are often a mix of indigenous and Western cultures.

Education and Literacy

Although Liberia has espoused the principle of universal education since the mid-1800s, its levels of educational attainment and literacy are as low as, if not lower than, those of many other developing African countries. This situation can be attributed to the country's difficult, humble beginning as a modern nation state, to persistent patterns of social and educational inequities, and to the recent 14-year civil war that almost brought a halt to the normal operations of most of its institutions, including its school system.

There are two systems of education in Liberia: the modern, Western system that was introduced by the African American settlers and Christian missionaries during the early 19th century and the traditional system, which originated among some of the indigenous ethnic groups and continues, in some form, to this day. While Western education has served to develop and support the modern state of Liberia, the traditional education system is the primary means of transmission of the indigenous culture from one generation to the next.

Western Education

As noted in the "History" section of this profile, the modern state of Liberia was founded in the early 19th century by freed slaves from the United States, under the auspices of a private philanthropic organization, the American Colonization Society (ACS). During the more than 200 years of slavery in the United States, it was illegal to teach a slave how to read or write anything other than numbers. The ACS provided no educational training for the emigrants either before their departure from the United States or immediately upon their arrival in what was to become Liberia. The ACS was primarily concerned with the cost of transporting the emigrants to Liberia and supporting them financially for 6 months. After that, they were expected to become economically independent of the ACS.

Given this background, it is not surprising that the overwhelming majority of the emigrants—later to be known as Americo-Liberians—were not literate. (It should be noted, however, that literacy was fairly high among the earliest group of arrivals, especially those from northern U.S. states.) Although in the 1843 census of emigrants to Liberia 99% reported themselves as literate, there is reason to believe that the literacy rate could have been as low as 22%. (The reason for this discrepancy may be the tendency of people in the 19th century to report themselves as literate if they could write their names.) This background of very low educational attainment and literacy among the founders of Liberia, the addition of thousands of poor and nonliterate recaptives in the mid-1800s, and the very limited efforts of the ACS to make education and school construction a priority help to explain why public education did not expand significantly until long after World War II.

Missionary schools led the efforts in primary and secondary education in Liberia. The Methodists founded a high school, Liberia Conference Seminary (later renamed the College of West Africa), in 1839 and the Cape Palmas Seminary in

There are two systems of education in Liberia: the modern, Western system and the traditional system.

1857; the Presbyterians founded the short-lived Alexander Academy School in 1849; and the Protestant Episcopal Church established the Orphan Asylum for Girls in 1855 and the Hoffman Institute in 1862.

The primary goals of these mission schools were "civilizing and Christianizing," especially with respect to the indigenous Africans. Because the highest priority of the schools was to train teachers, preachers, and church leaders, vocational/technical education was largely neglected. Vocational education at the high school level was not introduced until the 20th century, with the opening of the Booker T. Washington Institute in Kakata in 1929. A Bureau of Education was established in 1900. Today the Ministry of Education is primarily responsible for the administration of both public and private primary and secondary schools in the country. Since the 1960s, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of both public and private schools in Liberia.

Higher education in Liberia began in 1862 with the opening of Liberia College, later renamed the University of Liberia. The private, mission-operated Cuttington College opened in Cape Palmas in 1889 and later moved to Bong County, Central Liberia. The first technical college, the William V. S. Tubman College of Science and Technology, opened in the 1970s in Cape Palmas, Maryland County. Since the founding of Liberia, many Liberians have come to the United States for higher education on government scholarships and with mission support.

The Quality of Western Education Today

Despite the increase in the number of schools in Liberia since the 1960s, the quality of education varies greatly. In general, the quality of education is better in private schools than it is in public schools, and, with the exception of rural missionary schools, it is better in urban areas than it is in rural areas.

The modern, Western educational system in Liberia is modeled somewhat after that of the United States, with three levels: primary (Grades 1 to 6), secondary (Grades 7 to 12), and postsecondary (consisting of college-level degree programs). For many public and some private nondenominational schools in Monrovia and other major urban areas, the school day runs from about 8:00 a.m. to as late as 10:00 p.m. and is divided into three sessions. The morning session, usually for primary grades, begins at about 8:00 a.m. and ends around 12:45 p.m.; the afternoon session, usually for secondary students, runs from about 1:00 p.m. to around 5 p.m.; and the night session, usually secondary classes for working adults, runs from about 6 p.m. to around 10 p.m.

The Liberian school curricula also resemble those in U.S. schools. The primary school curriculum generally consists of courses in English language arts (spelling, vocabulary, phonics, writing, and literature); arithmetic (addition, subtraction, division, and multiplication); arts and crafts; science; health science (with a focus on basic hygiene); and religion (especially in missionary schools). Generally, the

The educational system in Liberia is modeled somewhat after that of the United States.

secondary school curriculum consists of core courses such as English language, literature, geometry, algebra, physics, chemistry, history (Liberian and world), civics, geography, French, physical education, music (in some urban and private schools), and Bible studies (in nearly all missionary schools).

In teaching approach and style, Liberian schools differ markedly from U.S. schools. Teachers generally tend to focus on memorization and rarely encourage students to participate actively in their own learning. One common way to learn spelling, for example, is the "so, so" chant, in which students repeat rhyming strings of words: "s-o, so; g-o, go; n-o, no; m-e, me; h-e, he; w-e, we," and so forth. Once they have mastered this sequence, they move on to three-letter words. In the past, fourth- and fifth-grade students in some schools studied West African geography through the chant, "From Senegal to Gambia, to Portuguese Guinea, and also French Guinea, Sierra Leone to Liberia; we go to Ivory Coast, Gold Coast, Gold Coast, Togoland, Togoland, Dahomey, Nigeria to Cameroon." In missionary schools, students memorize religious materials, such as the Lord's prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Apostle's Creed, and famous Bible verses.

Discipline in Liberian schools is generally harsh. Corporal punishment is common. Other forms of discipline include sweeping an assigned area of the school, picking up debris from the campus grounds, cutting grass, suspension, and expulsion.

Poverty is the single greatest impediment to a good education in Liberia. Rural schools often lack basic resources, such as textbooks. In schools that do have textbooks, poor students cannot afford to purchase them. Homes often lack adequate light for studying, and parents are too busy trying to make enough money for basic necessities to support their children's education. Because of low teacher salaries, high teacher absenteeism, especially in public and rural schools, is common. It is also not uncommon for a teacher to be employed on a full-time basis in two or even three schools.

The 14-year civil war worsened an already poor educational situation. The government continually cut back on school supplies and paid teachers irregularly. As teachers left the country, became internally displaced, or became victims of the war, schools opened only intermittently. In their place, many ill-equipped, poorly staffed private schools sprung up, largely to make money from students desperate for an education. (For a discussion of schools in the West African refugee camps, see the section "Resettlement in the United States" in this profile.)

Levels of Literacy and Education Today

While literacy and school attendance rates remain relatively low, data from Liberia's three most recent national censuses (1962, 1974, and 1984) show significant improvement in these rates in recent years. In 1962, 20% of the school-age population was enrolled in school; by 1984 that figure had more than doubled, to 46%. Over that same time period, literacy rates for the population 10 years of age and older rose from 9% to 31%.

Discipline in Liberian schools is generally harsh.

These figures, however, conceal disparities in educational attainment that have persisted since the introduction of Western education. In general, boys, urban children, and Americo-Liberians receive a significantly better education than do girls, rural children, and indigenous Liberians.

In 1962, 29% of school-age boys were enrolled in school, while the figure for girls was only 11%. By 1984, the figures had risen to 57% for boys and 34% for girls. Over the same time period, literacy rates rose from 13% to 34% for males and from 5% to 17% for females. Thus, while recent years have seen an upward trend in educational attainment and literacy for both males and females, females continue to lag behind males.

One interesting exception to this trend is found among Americo-Liberians.[1] In this group, women tend to have more education than do men, a pattern that is also found among African Americans in the United States. In 1974, for example 42% of adult Americo-Liberian men were found to have no formal schooling; the figure for women was 21%. At the upper end of the educational spectrum, 24% of Americo-Liberian women had schooling beyond the secondary level; the figure for men was 15%.

The most significant ethnic disparity in Liberia is between Americo-Liberians, the politically and socially dominant group in Liberia before 1980, and the indigenous Liberian groups. The 1974 census shows that 37% of Americo-Liberian adults had completed no formal schooling; for indigenous adults the figure was 83%. At the upper end of the educational spectrum, 18% of Americo-Liberian men and women had completed 13 or more years of education, while only 1% of indigenous men and women had attained that level of education.

Although indigenous Liberians generally have much less formal education than Americo-Liberians, rates vary considerably among the various indigenous groups. A 1986 survey of Liberian women age 15 to 49 found that while 92% of Americo-Liberian women surveyed had completed at least a secondary education, the rates among indigenous groups varied from a high of 38% for the Grebo to a low of 9% for the Mandingo. Coastal ethnic groups such as the Bassa, Grebo, Kru, and Vai, who had an earlier contact with the Americo-Liberians, tend to have more formal education than do some of the hinterland ethnic groups, such as the Gbandi, Gio/Dan, Kissi, Kpelle, Mandingo, and Mano.

Reasons for Educational Inequalities

The lower school enrollment and educational attainment of rural youth in general and rural girls in particular is not unique to Liberia; it is typical of much of sub-Saharan Africa and the developing world. In Liberia, these inequities, which date back to the colonial period, are the result of a confluence of causes:

Indigenous Liberians generally have much less formal education than Americo-Liberians.

[1]The Liberian census/1986 Liberian Demographic & Health Survey ethnic category, No Tribal/Ethnic Affiliation, is used as a proxy or indirect measure for Americo-Liberian.

- The limited availability of schools in rural areas, where most of the indigenous people live
- The mismatch between the school curriculum and the realities of rural life
- The expense of migrating to an urban area for schooling
- The risk of teenage pregnancy among female migrants to an urban area
- The greater need for female labor in subsistence agriculture
- The belief among many rural parents that modern, Western education will alienate their children, especially their female children, from traditional values and practices
- A modern occupational structure that generally favors men over women

Liberians in the United States

According to refugee service providers, many recently arrived Liberian refugees have little or no formal education. In contrast to these recent arrivals and to most Liberians in Liberia, other members of the Liberian community in the United States tend to have relatively high levels of education. These levels, in the case of men, even exceed those of many native-born American groups. In 1990, before the first influx of Liberian refugees, the U.S. census revealed that 55% of Liberian men age 25 to 64 had completed a bachelor's degree or higher, with an average of 16 years of schooling completed. In contrast, only 27% of white, non-Hispanic U.S. men of the same age had a bachelor's degree or higher, with an average of 14 years of schooling completed. For Liberian women in the United States, the educational attainment was closer to that of White, non-Hispanic U.S. women. Whereas 23% of White, non-Hispanic women had a bachelors degree or higher, with an average of 14 years of schooling completed, 26% of Liberian women had a bachelor's degree or higher, with an average of 14 years of schooling completed.

The Traditional System of Education

Many of the indigenous ethnic groups of Liberia, especially the Mende and the Mel-speaking groups, have always maintained a traditional and formal, though nonliterate, system of education, administered by the *poro* (for men) and *sande* (for women) secret societies.

These schools, often referred to as *bush schools* because they convene in the forest, teach the initiates the fundamentals of traditional culture. Students learn everything from pottery making and basket weaving to the basics of traditional agriculture, religion, politics, and the art of warfare. The extent and quality of instruction varies from one ethnic group to another and from one region to another within the same ethnic group. In addition, education takes place informally at home and in the community as parents, relatives, and other adults teach the young the skills they need to become productive members of their community.

Bush schools teach the fundamentals of traditional culture.

In the past, the poro secret society generally lasted for 4 years, while the sande secret society lasted for 3 years. In recent years, perhaps in an effort to enable young people to attend the modern Western schools, the bush school has become a much truncated version of what existed in the past. Today's bush school may convene for only a few weeks during the summer vacation. The old bush schools that lasted for years and involved advancement through ranks is gone.

Indigenous Writing Systems

While the traditional system of education in Liberia is essentially a nonliterate system,[2] this does not mean that indigenous Liberians were preliterate. In fact, five indigenous, non-Arabic, non-Roman scripts have been developed by indigenous Liberians. Most were invented in the early 20th century, although one was devised in the early 1800s. Most of the scripts share three characteristics: According to their inventors, they originated through divine revelation (usually through a dream); they are written from left to right; and they have been used primarily for personal communication.

The earliest of these scripts, the Vai syllabary, with 212 characters, was devised by Momolu Duwalu Bukele, a member of the Vai aristocracy, around 1833. The Vai king, Fa Toro, asked Bukele and his associates to set up a school in the town of Dshondu in order to teach the script, and people came from other Vai towns to learn it. Dshondu was eventually captured by the neighboring Gola ethnic group in warfare and burned down, destroying most of the manuscripts and scattering the teachers all over the region. Later, Momolu Massaquoi, a former Liberian Consul in Hamburg, Germany, standardized the Vai script and formally introduced it into the school curriculum at St. John's Episcopal High School in Robertsport, Cape Mount County. In the late 1960s to early 1970s, the University of Liberia became interested in further standardizing the script under the leadership of Professor Fatima Fahnbulleh-Massaquoi, director of the African Studies Program and daughter of Momolu Massaquoi. The Vai script still survives among the Vai, where it is used primarily for personal correspondence.

The Mende syllabary, also called the ki-ka-ku script, consists of 195 characters and was devised in 1921 by Kisimi Kamara, a tailor. Kamara gave instructions in the script to both children and adults at Potoru town, in present-day Sierra Leone, and the script gained a limited degree of popularity among the Mende in the 1920s and 1930s, but declined rapidly from the 1940s onward.

The Loma syllabary, with about 185 characters, was devised in the 1930s by Wido Zobo, who worked on the U.S.-owned Firestone Rubber plantation in Liberia and was probably also a tailor. He is believed to have developed the script with the assistance of a weaver and perhaps also a woman. Like the other indigenous scripts, the Loma script was used primarily for personal correspondence. It

Scripts have been developed by indigenous Liberians.

[2]One scholar has speculated that indigenous scripts were not introduced into the poro and sande secret societies out of a fear that writing would be used to record the oral secrets of these societies.

was also used by Loma foremen on the Firestone Rubber Plantation to record the names of workers.

The Kpelle syllabary, with 88 characters, was devised by Paramount Chief Gbili of Sanoyea in the early 1930s. The script seems to have acquired some measure of popularity in the Kakata-Sanoyea area of Liberia and reached Kpelle-speaking Guinea by 1942. Although one of Gbili's wives, Nane-tee, mastered the script and often dazzled people in Sanoyea by reading letters from her husband during his travels and telling townspeople the exact day of her husband's return, only a small minority of Kpelle people mastered the script.

The origins of the Bassa alphabet, known as the VAH script, are unclear. It apparently was first developed in the early 1800s by a Bassa man named Dirah. His son, Jinni Darah, is said to have taught an improved version of the script to Dr. Thomas Flo Lewis, a Bassa medical doctor, who further refined it. It was introduced to the Bassa by Jinni Dirah, probably in the 1920s.

With 23 consonants, 7 vowels, and 5 tonal marks, the VAH alphabet is considered, from a purely practical point of view, to be superior to the other scripts because it is simpler in form and phonetically more sophisticated. However, as an invention, it is said to involve less imagination and ingenuity than the others.

The VAH script has a colorful history, which limited its popularity and use. The script was first learned by wives of the Bassa chiefs, who were said to have used it to communicate with their lovers. Dirah, the script's inventor, allegedly used it to communicate with his lover, Madam Toeman, who happened to be the head wife of King Blogbee. Upon learning of the affair, the king immediately sold Dirah to Cuban and Portuguese slave traders, and he eventually landed in the United States as a slave. Years later, when Dr. Lewis began an institution in Bassa County to teach the script, many chiefs refused to let their wives learn it, for fear that they would become unfaithful.

Nevertheless, Dr. Lewis taught hundreds of Bassa men the script, and used it to translate several chapters of the Bible into Bassa. By the late 1960s, the script was widely used among the Bassa, mostly for personal correspondence.

Clearly, while the use of these indigenous scripts has declined in recent years, their invention and past use, however limited, debunks the popular conception of indigenous Liberians as preliterate peoples.

The use of these indigenous scripts debunks the popular conception of indigenous Liberians as preliterate peoples.

Language

Although 28 indigenous languages and dialects are spoken in Liberia, English is the official language of government and formal education, as well as the language of wider communication among different indigenous groups. Western-educated Liberians speak English as a first, second, or third language. Rural Liberians who have not been formally educated may speak little or no English. Service providers report that while most of the Liberian refugees who came to the United States in the early 1990s arrived with varying degrees of English proficiency, many of the current arrivals have little or no knowledge of English.

After a brief discussion of indigenous languages, this section focuses on English in Liberia—its history, role, and varieties. This focus was chosen because of the importance of English in Liberian society.

Indigenous Languages

Prior to 1980, the government of Liberia recognized 16 indigenous languages as the African languages officially spoken in the country. Anthropologists, however, have determined that Liberia actually has 28 living indigenous languages and dialects, with Kpelle having the largest number of native speakers and Bassa the second largest.

Since the 19th century, five indigenous non-Arabic, non-Roman scripts have been developed by indigenous Liberians. For one reason or another, however, none of these scripts became widely used vehicles of communication. The scripts either fell into complete disuse or have been used primarily for the purpose of personal communication. (For a brief discussion of the different scripts, see the section "Education and Literacy" in this profile.) Western missionaries have developed Roman-alphabet-based scripts for the sole purpose of producing religious materials. This has been done with Bandi, Kissi, and Loma by the Episcopal and Lutheran Churches in Lofa County; with Bassa by the United Methodist Church in Grand Bassa County; and with Glebo by the Episcopal Church in Cape Palmas.

Almost all of the indigenous languages in Liberia belong to the Niger-Congo family. The distribution of these languages is geographic; that is, each of them is spoken primarily in a single county. For example, Bandi, Kissi, and Loma are spoken primarily in Lofa County, while Kpelle is mostly spoken in Bong County. Bassa is spoken mainly in Grand Bass, Gio and Manu are spoken in Nimba, Grebo is spoken in Maryland, Krahn is spoken in Grand Gedeh, and Vai is spoken in Cape Mount. Languages that are spoken in the same county or in adjacent counties are, for the most part, mutually intelligible because they are linguistically similar.

English is the official language of government and formal education in Liberia.

The three groups of words below illustrate the close relationships among indigenous Liberian languages. In the first group, the only difference between the Kpelle word for come and the Bandi, Loma, and Mende version of that word is that in Kpelle the word begins with the sound [p][3], whereas in all the other languages it begins with a [v]. In the second group, there is practically no difference in pronunciation among the words used for the English word war in Grebo, Krahn, and Kru. In the third group, one has to be a Grebo, Krahn, or Kru speaker to hear the slight differences in pronunciation among the words these three languages use for god.

Language	**Word**	**English Meaning**
Bandi	[*va*]	come
Kpelle	[*pa*]	come
Loma	[*va*]	come
Mende	[*va*]	come
Grebo	[*tor*]	war
Krahn	[*tor*]	war
Kru	[*tor*]	war
Grebo	[*nyensuwa*]	god
Krahn	[*nyensuwa*]	god
Kru	[*nyensuwa*]	god

Similar to many other African languages, Liberian tribal languages are tonal languages. This means that words with the same pronunciation that are spoken with different pitches are considered different words. For instance, in Bandi the word [*korwoi*] spoken with a high pitch means "my leg" but spoken with a low pitch means "his, her, or its leg." Similarly, the word [*kor*] spoken with a high pitch means "share your (e.g., food) with me" but spoken with a low pitch means "share your (e.g., food) with him, her, or it."

The Establishment of English in Liberia

In Liberia, English is the official language of government, Western education, international commerce, and mass communication. It is also the lingua franca for speakers of different indigenous languages.

English was brought to Liberia by the freed African slaves from the United States. No sooner had the first group of Americo-Liberian settlers found a home in Liberia than they declared English as their official language, dismissing Liberian tribal languages as unintelligible and uncivilized. The settlers touted English as a symbol of Western civilization and political power, and they thanked the Almighty for exposing them to English and its concomitant privileges and bless-

English was brought to Liberia by the freed African slaves from the United States.

[3]Brackets indicate phonetic notation, used by linguists to show how a letter or word is pronounced.

ings in the United States. In his Independence Day oration in 1860, a prominent Americo-Liberian bragged that the settlers were blessed by God to have been given the opportunity to speak the language of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Bacon, Burke, and Webster.

Although the settlers established English as the official language of Liberia, they did not force indigenous Liberians to speak it. However, indigenous Liberians, realizing the socioeconomic benefits they stood to derive from English, took it upon themselves to learn it. Many even sent their children to live with settler families for the sole purpose of leaning English. Children who became wards of settler families took the last names of those families as their own, because the practice of family names is not native to Liberian tribes. Many tribal chiefs also asked settlers to build schools in their localities in exchange for land so that the children in their tribes could learn English. Although the indigenous chiefs granted the land, the settlers never built the schools.

Although initially Americo-Liberians were the only segment of the Liberian population that spoke English natively, the number of native speakers of English in Liberia has steadily increased over the years. Today, many people are monolingual in English. This includes children of educated people who do not expose their children to their indigenous language for three key reasons. First, in marriages between members of different indigenous groups, spouses often do not know each other's language. Consequently, they and their children communicate with one another only in English. Second, because English is the language of education, children often communicate with their schoolmates and school personnel in English only. Finally, educated Liberian parents generally want their children to become proficient in English. These parents believe that exposing their children to their tribal language will impede the children's ability to learn English.

Further, many Liberians, though proud of their cultural heritage, have gradually come to believe that English is more prestigious than their indigenous languages. Even nonliterate Liberians expect their school-going children to speak English to one another, because they equate speaking English with "civilization" and being highly educated.

Most Liberian children start formal schooling after they have already become fluent in their native language. For these children, learning English is a challenge, because there are as yet no bilingual education programs in the country, even for children who enroll in school with no knowledge of English at all. As soon as they begin their educational career, children are expected to be able to understand and speak English. Unable to keep up, many eventually drop out.

Varieties of Spoken Liberian English

Over the years, Liberians have adapted English to local purposes, transforming it into their own rich variety of speech. There is almost no difference between written American English and written Liberian English as used by educated people in

The number of native speakers of English in Liberia has steadily increased over the years.

both countries. However, Liberian English, showing the influence of the sound systems of the Liberian tribal languages, differs markedly from American English in the spoken form.

Spoken Liberian English has three major varieties. One is spoken by well-educated people and is used in political and social speeches, conversations, and education. Speakers follow the conventions of prescriptive English grammar and usage. Another variety of spoken Liberian English is what may be referred to as nonstandard English. Liberians who speak this variety are, by and large, less educated and do not strictly observe conventional rules of grammar and usage. Many dropped out of elementary or secondary school. A third variety of Liberian English is spoken primarily by Liberians with little or formal education, including market vendors, soldiers, unskilled laborers, and those who reside in rural areas. Many of the Liberian refugees now arriving in the United States fall into this category.

It should be pointed out that the existence of these varieties generally does not impede communication among Liberians. Many educated Liberians, especially indigenous Liberians, are able to switch easily back and forth between the varieties.

Nonverbal Communication

Like people everywhere, Liberians use body language and gestures to communicate nonverbally with one another. Some of these forms of communication may cause misunderstanding in the United States, however. For instance, when a Liberian elder is talking angrily to a child and looking him or her in the eye, it is unacceptable for the child to also look the elder in the eye. To do so would be considered a form of defiance. In the United States, however, a person who doesn't look someone in the eye may be considered shifty and untrustworthy.

Liberians also consider it rude to wag the index finger back and forth as a gesture for someone to come closer; they use this gesture with dogs, not humans. To gesture to other humans, Liberians use all four fingers on one hand.

An example of a Liberian form of nonverbal communication that would be considered offensive in the United States is the practice of snapping one's fingers to get another person's attention. In Liberia, this gesture is commonly used in restaurants to get the attention of the server. New arrivals will need to understand that in the United States this gesture would be considered rude and inappropriate.

Words, Phrases, and Sayings in Liberian English

Below are examples of words, phrases, expressions, and sayings in Liberian English. The meanings are given along with samples sentences. The examples are written to reflect spoken Liberian English rather than standard spelling conventions.

Liberian English differs from American English in the spoken form.

English Words and Phrases with Liberian English Meanings

In this category are English words that have acquired specific meanings in Liberian English. Some Liberians may use these words when speaking with non-Liberian English speakers.

Words	Meaning	Examples
Big heart	Greed, pride	You really get big heart; you want my part the meat, you small boy?
Big man	Big shot, important person	Many of the big men in Monrovia work for the government.
Born	To bear, give birth	She don' want to born any more children.
Dress	To move over, make room for another person	Please dress over there so I can sit down here.
Frisky	Rude, insolent, disrespectful, often said of children	You boy, don' be frisky with me.
Haul	To pull something or someone	Haul the rope.
I beg you	Don't bother me, leave me alone, I won't do that	Can you go with me today? I beg you, my friend; I am too tired.
I'm coming/ I coming	Just a minute, in a few minutes, wait for me	David, when will you do the dishes? I coming.
Know book	Literate, educated	This man don' know book, but that other man know book.
Law	Taboo, usually a vegetable or the meat of certain animals or fish that should not be eaten for tribal religious reasons	Catfish is my law. I don' eat it.
Mean	Selfish, not sharing with others, used as an adjective and a verb	He is very mean with his food. Don' mean your little sister.

My people	Everybody, used to politely address a group people	My people, who took my bucket from here?
Pay debt	Revenge, take vengeance, often used by children	If you hit me, I will pay my debt.
People	Used when the speaker refers to himself or herself in the third person	Stop the noise; people want to rest.
Ol' ma	Mother, used as a title of respect	My ol' ma gave me this shirt for Christmas.
Pregnant	Used as a verb	He is the one who pregnant her.
Put me down	Do not talk about me, do not gossip about me	Please put me down; I don't like you always talking about me.
Show oneself	To show that one is important, powerful, stronger	If you do not know me, I will show myself to you. I will make sure you do not live in this house anymore.
Soup	Stew, cooked vegetables, gravy, eaten with rice; not necessarily a liquid food	I want some more collard green soup on my rice.
Stranger	Guest	This man is my stranger; he just came yesterday.
Them (pronounced *then*)	Used for the pronoun *their;* may also be used to mean *and others*	I am going to Sam then house. Joseph then are here.
Trying	Fine, in good health, used in response to the question *How are you?*	I am trying or I trying.
Vex	Angry	My mother was vex with me.
Yah	A polite expression meaning *okay?*	Please bring me some water, yah.
Waste	To spill something	Do not waste the rice on the floor.
Your part (pronounced *you pa*)	As for you	You pa, you don't like me.

Liberian English Coined Words, Phrases, and Expressions

The following words and phrases are not used in American or other Englishes. They are words and phrases that were coined by Liberian English speakers and given Liberian meanings.

Phrase	Meaning	Examples
Bah	My friend	Bah go with me to the market.
Belly/big belly	Pregnant/pregnant woman	That woman got belly. Let big belly sit here.
Bobo	Deaf mute	He can't talk. I think he is bobo.
Broken veins	Stretch marks	She has broken veins all over her arms.
Catch head (pronounced *catch hey*)	To get drunk:	I want to catch my hey tonight.
Col bowl	Left over food	I want to warm col bowl in that pot.
Coal pot	A small, round portable appliance for cooking, heated by charcoal	I don' know who took my coal pot.
Cook shop	Unsophisticated restaurant	What kind of food they sell in that cook shop?
Door mouth	Doorway	He was standing in the door mouth.
Eat money	To spend or use money	He ate my money I gave him to keep for me.
Get best (pronounced *ge best*)	To not want to argue	The man say ge best. What you want to say again?
Gronna	Often used to refer to children who are sexually promiscuous or disobedient	That girl is very gronna.

Hold your heart	Be patient	Just hold your heart. He will one day come back to beg you.
In the bottle	Intoxicated	He is in the bottle.
Liberian white man/woman	Albino	Sam is a Liberian white man.
Man business	Knowledge about sex with men	That girl already know man business.
My heart cut	Frightened, scared	When my mother enter in the house, my heart cut.
My one	By myself	I do not want to stay here my one.
Put one's mouth on someone	Gossip about someone	You should not put your mouth on my ma.
Some timely	Moody; exhibiting varying moods	She is very some timely; someday she wan' to joke. Someday she do not wan' to joke.
Stranger father/mother	Host/hostess	Who is your stranger father in town?
Woman business	Knowledge about sex with women	You, boy, you know woman business now?
You/ [persons's name] and all	Even you/,he/,she/they, used pejoratively	Steve and all want to be president of Liberia.
You yourself ya	You should know better	You yourself ya. You should not talked to her again.

Some Liberian English Expressions and Sayings

Monkey jam eat pepper.	When one is desperate, one can do something that one does not normally do.
Softly, softly catches monkey.	Easy does it.
Bug-a-bug ate his brain.	He is stupid.

He cut off the phone in my ear.	He hung up on me.
Da how I looking	That is his how I behave: "If people respect me, I will respect them. Da how I looking."
You got name.	You are a person of economic status, and you should act accordingly.
My mouth is full.	So surprised as to be speechless.

Resettlement in the United States

 Shortly after the start of the Liberian civil war in 1989, the United States initiated a resettlement program for Liberian refugees. Between 1992 and 1994, the United States admitted 2,211 of the roughly 700,000 Liberians that the World Refugee Survey estimated were living in West African countries of first asylum. Of the refugees that entered the United States through the resettlement program, 75% were family reunification cases, and many were from the urban areas of Liberia. Over the next 9 years, the United States continued to resettle Liberian refugees, with the numbers fluctuating from a low of 44 in 1995 to a high of 3,444 in 2003.

By 2003, an estimated 250,000 Liberians still lived in exile in Ghana, Guinea, Ivory Coast, and Sierra Leone. Many of these Liberians were classified as dual-flight refugees, meaning that they had to flee their location of first asylum due to political unrest. Many, in fact, have fled multiple times back and forth across international borders.

In 2004, the United States admitted 7,174 Liberian refugees, more than in any other year, bringing to nearly 23,500 the total number of Liberian refugees that the United States resettled from 1992 to 2004.

Unlike the Liberians who were resettled in the early 1990s, most recent arrivals do not have family connections in the United States; fewer than one third of the 2004 arrivals were reuniting with family members. Most of the recent arrivals are from rural areas of Liberia, and many lived in Ivory Coast as refugees for nearly 14 years. The largest resettlement sites for the 2004 caseload, in order of the number of arrivals, were Phoenix, Philadelphia, Providence, Houston, Dallas, St. Louis, Tucson, Buffalo, Jacksonville, and Staten Island.

Liberians in the United States

The 2000 U.S. census recorded 25,140 Liberians living in the United States, with the largest concentrations found in New York (13%), Minnesota (12%),

Most recent arrivals do not have family connections in the United States.

Maryland (11%), Pennsylvania (7%), and New Jersey (10%). Smaller communities were found in North Carolina (5%), Georgia (5%), and California (5%). Fewer than 10,000 of these were Liberian refugees who had been admitted for resettlement; many of the rest were Liberians who had entered the United States on student, business, or visitor visas in the 1980s and were granted temporary asylum and eventually permanent residency. The 14,000-plus Liberian refugees who have entered the United States since 2000 brings the total number of Liberians in the United States to well over 39,000.

In many cities with Liberian populations, there are both formal and informal Liberian community associations that may be willing to assist with the resettlement of the new arrivals. Service providers should consider collaborating with these organizations. In one large city, the existing Liberian community has developed welcome packets for the resettlement agencies to give to the refugees upon arrival. The packets include orientation information, including names and telephone numbers of Liberians in the community who can be of help to the newcomers.

General Adjustment Challenges

Unlike other refugee groups, Liberians have a special affinity for the United States. Americo-Liberians, descendants of the African Americans who founded the modern state of Liberia, consider America their original homeland. Even refugees from rural areas with no ancestral relationship to the United States feel a special connection to this country. This is a result of the intertwined histories of Liberia and the United States. Because Liberia is a country that was modeled after the United States in its government, banking, education, and social institutions, Liberians do not view United States culture as foreign.

In terms of resettlement, this view has both advantages and disadvantages. The obvious advantage is that Liberians, particularly those who have spent time in the urban areas of Liberia, will find certain aspects of life in the United States familiar. The disadvantage is that Liberians may arrive with false assumptions and unrealistic expectations that may impede the adjustment process.

The assumptions and expectations that Liberian refugees may have about life in the United States include the following:

- Americans will be well versed in the history of the two countries and know about Liberia and its recent problems.
- Life in America will be like the movies—everyone will have money and drive a new car.
- Americans will welcome Liberians as Liberians would open up their homes to Americans.
- Liberians will have much in common with their African Americans counterparts.
- Americans will understand Liberian English.

Liberians have a special affinity for the United States.

As a result of these assumptions, Liberians often expect their resettlement in the United States to be easy. Most experience various stages of culture shock as they attempt to adjust to a country that is quite different from the one they had imagined. Generally speaking, Liberians value frankness, and service providers should be polite but open and direct in discussing the realities that Liberians will face in the United States.

The new arrivals will have many more needs than did previously resettled Liberians. This is a direct result of several background factors: the prolonged refugee camp experience, comparatively low levels of formal education and exposure to modern urban life, lack of transferable employment skills, and inadequate family support.

The following three examples help to illustrate the backgrounds of many new arrivals and the complexity of the challenges faced by resettlement agencies in providing services to them.

- *Single grandmother with two grandchildren.* The grandmother is HIV positive, nonliterate, and without previous work experience.
- *Single man, 75 years old, with no formal education and several health problems.* Since his arrival, he has undergone surgery that has led to postoperative complications. He neither comprehends nor retains information and does not follow through with taking medicine or paying bills.
- *Single father with four children, ages 5 to 14.* The father has never taken care of children without assistance from his extended family.

In one large resettlement city, four resettlement agencies identified 33% of their Liberian caseload as needing follow-up or intensive medical care and another 17% as having special needs. Another resettlement agency in the same city recently reported that 20% of its Liberian caseload is made up of households headed by single women. Clearly, these single-parent households present greater logistical challenges than do their two-parent counterparts. If possible, service providers should arrange for intensive one-on-one assistance to single parents to help them adjust to their new responsibilities in the United States.

Another common feature of Liberian cases is the presence of attached, biologically unrelated minors—children under the age of 18 whose biological parents died or somehow became separated from their children during the civil war. These families will need help obtaining legal guardianship of these children.

Sorting out biological relationships in a Liberian family can present challenges. For one thing, families may be made up of children with different biological fathers, because many Liberian women were widowed or separated from their spouses for long periods, and new marriages or relationships were formed.

Moreover, the Liberian family is a flexible unit that easily expands to include others. Families typically consist of extended family members, which may include not only nephews, cousins, and unofficially adopted children, but also unrelated

The new arrivals will have many more needs than did previously resettled Liberians.

adults who fled Liberia with the family and have lived together with their adopted family ever since. In the United States, a Liberian family may continue to change size and composition, expanding as secondary migrants from other parts of the United States join the family or contracting as members of the household leave to join other families elsewhere.

Adding to the possible confusion is the Liberian custom of referring to a cousin or close friend as a brother or sister. There is no intention to mislead. Liberians, for the most part, simply consider all members of a household as part of their immediate family, and in at least one indigenous language the term for brother/sister is the same as the term for cousin. To distinguish relationships, one can ask if two people have the same ma ("mother") and pa ("father").

Language and Communication Style

With the exception of Americo-Liberians, a Liberian's first language is typically his or her indigenous language, with English spoken as a second language by those who have received some formal education. However, some indigenous Liberians raised and formally educated in the urban areas of Liberia may speak English as their first and perhaps only language.

As descendants of the African American founders of Liberia, Americo-Liberians speak English as their native language, although those who live in the rural areas are often fully bilingual in the local indigenous language and English.

While most Liberian refugees who were resettled in United States in the 1990s spoke English with some proficiency, service providers report that recent arrivals often speak little or no English. School-age children may or may not speak English. Those who lived in French-speaking countries of asylum may speak more French than English. Indeed, for some children raised in French-speaking countries, French has largely replaced the mother tongue.

Even in the case of English-speaking Liberians, service providers should anticipate some difficulties and possible misunderstandings in communication. The English that many Liberians speak incorporates many words not commonly used in American English. (For more on Liberian English, see the section "Language" in this profile.) English is often spoken in a way that sounds musical, with the word *oh* frequently added to the end of sentences. This can be seen in the common Liberian greeting, *How'd body-oh?* ("How's the body?" or "How are you?").

Another cultural practice that will be unfamiliar and perhaps even offensive to some Americans is the frank use of adjectives to describe a person's physical appearance. For example, a Liberian woman might refer to her case manger as *the fat one, the tall one, the dry* (skinny) *one,* and so on. Americans may also be taken aback to hear a Liberian compliment a heavy American on his or her weight. Generally, in rural Liberia, an overweight person is regarded as someone wealthy, and there is no stigma attached to body weight.

Liberians consider all members of a household as part of their immediate family.

Referring to someone's skin color is also very common among Liberians. The categories usually include *black, brown,* and *bright,* with the last term being applied to a light-complexioned Americo-Liberian or, in the United States, to a light-complexioned African American.

Age, too, is openly described. It is common to identify someone as either old or small ("young"): "That small boy at the hotel told me to see the old pa," a Liberian might say. While these descriptive phrases may be offensive to Americans, there is no malice or disrespect intended. In fact, *old ma* and *old pa* are terms of respect.

Areas of life that Americans generally consider private, such as age and personal finances, can be public topics of conversation among Liberians. Liberians may not hesitate to ask someone how old he or she is or how much money he or she makes. Again, this should not be seen as disrespectful. Service providers, however, may want to cover these areas in their initial orientations.

Another common practice in Liberia is to nod the head or do a quick intake of air to indicate agreement with the speaker. Service providers, however, should not assume comprehension when they see one of these signs. When communicating with rural Liberians, service providers should ask the refugees to explain their understanding of what has been communicated.

English-speaking Liberians may find it frustrating that their American caseworkers do not understand their English. If it is determined that instruction in American English is needed, the service providers should help the Liberians find a course that is appropriate to their needs and to their level of language proficiency.

Case Study: Communications

During her orientation for a Liberian family, Sue, a resettlement caseworker, underscores the importance of home safety. She tells the family to make sure to keep the front door of their apartment shut and locked. Periodically she asks the father if he understands, and he always replies with a nod of his head and a "Yes." One week later, Sue visits the family and finds the front door of the apartment wide open.

Discussion Questions

- *How should Sue handle the situation? She is clearly worried about the family's safety.*
- *What could Sue have done differently in the orientation to make sure that the family understood?*

Liberians may not hesitate to ask someone how old he or she is or how much money he or she makes.

Family and Parenting Issues

The African proverb "It takes a village to raise a child" is widely practiced in Liberia. Generally speaking, everyone looks out for one another in a Liberian village. Responsibility for raising children is widely shared within the family and the community. It is not uncommon for children to be cared for by someone other than their biological parents.

In a Liberian family, responsibility for small children is usually delegated to older siblings. In the event of a divorce or separation—not unusual in Liberia—the father typically assumes custody of the children and may delegate childcare responsibilities to the eldest child. War and refugee camp life have served to expand the cultural practice of delegating childcare responsibilities to older siblings.

With this practice in mind, it is understandable that Liberians will not approach childcare in the same manner as Americans. Service providers will need to be sensitive to Liberian attitudes and help Liberians understand the American approach to childrearing. In particular, service providers should alert refugees to the dangers (such as drowning, kidnapping, drugs, molestation, and car accidents) that children unsupervised by adults may encounter in the United States.

In addition, service providers should carefully monitor the new arrivals' adjustment to the United States and be willing to provide intervention, such as parenting classes, as needed. Parents, as well as older siblings, will need assistance in the preparation of nutritious, well-balanced meals and in home hygiene, particularly in the area of food preparation and storage.

Liberian parents will need to learn about legally acceptable forms of discipline in the United States, because in Liberia parents commonly use corporal punishment to discipline their children. It is common for Liberians to use the word beat when they are trying to correct a behavior. A parent's response to a child displaying inappropriate behavior might be, "I will beat you." But in this instance the word beat is more like a warning, similar in meaning to "I've had enough" or "Stop that right now." However, if a neighbor or teacher overheard this exchange it could lead to the parent being reported for potential child abuse.

There have been reports of behavioral problems with Liberian children in the public schools. Children have been disciplined, and in some cases, suspended from school for fighting and aggressive behavior. Children will need to understand what is and what is not acceptable behavior in the American classroom. Educators and service providers, for their part, can reduce the incidence of problems by ensuring that the children have someone to discuss their problems with and a mentor to help them develop appropriate problem-solving skills to cope with the myriad challenges they face in their new environment.

Finally, service providers should be aware of the practice among the various warring factions in Liberia of using child soldiers. While the United States government has not knowingly resettled Liberians who were child soldiers, service

Responsibility for small children is usually delegated to older siblings.

providers should be prepared for the possibility that some young Liberians saw service as child soldiers.

Case Study: Parenting

Fanta, a single mother from Liberia, listens carefully to her resettlement caseworker, because she wants to do everything right and start a new life for her and her children. Upon returning to her apartment, she is shocked to see the police at her home. The police have been called to the apartment to investigate a child neglect report. Fanta cannot understand the problem. She did not leave her baby alone while she went to the store; she left her in the care of her 8-year-old son.

Discussion Questions

- *What basic information did Fanta miss during the orientation?*
- *How can this situation be resolved?*

Education

Liberian refugees will arrive in the United States with varying amounts of education. Although education is highly valued in Liberian culture, literacy rates are very low. Before the civil war, school fees made it difficult to get an education in Liberia. Moreover, in the rural areas, children, especially girls, left school to help their parents with subsistence farming. It was not unusual for children to miss a year or more of schooling due to a lack of tuition or the need to help their families. Those who did attend school in Liberia would likely have studied in a school that emphasized rote learning and did not encourage independent thinking. (For more on Liberian schools, see the section "Education and Literacy" in this profile.)

One resettlement agency found that of the Liberian refugees with a rural background that it had resettled, 31% of the adults were nonliterate, with 90% of the women and 10% of the men unable to read or write; 37% had little or no formal education; and 100% of children under the age of 16 who were tested placed between a first- and third-grade reading level. One 15-year-old who had been enrolled in high school could only recognize 100 written English words.

For young refugees raised in refugee camps, the level of education depends on the camp they were in. Many refugees have attended schools operated by international organizations; these refugees may have certificates of completion. It is believed that refugees in Guinea and Ghana were more likely to attend schools than refugees who lived in the rural areas of Ivory Coast.

Grade placement in Liberia and in many of the camps is made by the last grade completed and not necessarily by age. Many children may arrive in the United States expecting to be placed in the next higher grade even if their age is sig-

Liberian refugees will arrive in the United States with varying amounts of education.

nificantly older. Although Liberian schools were modeled after American schools, grade levels are rarely equivalent. In most cases, eighth grade in Liberia would not be academically equivalent to eighth grade in the United States.

On the positive side, most Liberian children will be eager to begin school in the United States and will be active participants in the classroom. Unlike many American children, Liberian children are usually not shy about singing, acting, or answering questions.

Service providers will need to help parents understand what the schools expect of them and how they can participate in their children's education. Many young parents may not have had any schooling past the primary years and may not understand how to relate to a teacher or a school official. They might also hesitate to discuss problem areas or misunderstandings with a teacher out of a traditional belief that the teacher is always right. Service providers should assist parents in bridging this gap so parents can better provide their children with the support that they need.

Another area that should be addressed with all families is the sensitivities of U.S. school officials toward guns and physical threats of violence. It is common for children who have grown up in a war setting to play out violent scenes or pretend to shoot guns. Service providers should work closely with the schools to help educate school officials on the backgrounds of the Liberian refugee children.

Case Study: Education

> Sam, a 12-year old from Liberia, is having a difficult time at school. He actually loves school, but the other children make fun of him because of his accent and his reading level. One day during recess, a child starts a fight with Sam, and he tries to defend himself. The children get caught, and the other child blames Sam. Sam insists he didn't start the fight, but no one believes him. He gets suspended from school. Sam tells his parents, and although they believe him, they do not want to talk to the principal. Sam becomes depressed and withdrawn.

> **Discussion Questions**

> - *Why do you think Sam's parents aren't willing to meet with the principal?*
> - *How can Sam be helped in this situation?*

Employment

Generally, Liberians are eager to work and earn an income. At the same time, many are hoping for an education first. This hope may delay their entry into the workforce. There may even be an underlying belief among newly arrived refugees that "America will take care of me." Service providers will need to provide thorough and ongoing counseling about the need to work.

Although Liberian schools were modeled after American schools, grade levels are rarely equivalent.

Those who do enter the work force soon after arrival appear to adjust to it relatively easily. They are eager to learn new skills and enthusiastic about earning their own salary. For many, this will be the first time that they have ever earned their own money.

Liberian refugees have a wide variety of employment backgrounds, depending on where they are from in Liberia and where they lived as refugees. Liberians from urban areas will have more transferable work skills; some will have worked as teachers, mechanics, store attendants, bankers, and so forth. Liberians from the rural areas will have backgrounds primarily in subsistence farming; they may also have had some experience in marketing their goods. Generally, women do not have as much work experience as men, although some refugee women worked as housekeepers or childcare providers while in the refugee camps. Traditionally, women are the marketers in Liberia and are very skilled at bargaining and monitoring prices.

For the most part, Liberians will face the same challenges in finding and maintaining employment that many other refugee groups face. A lack of numeracy skills, English proficiency, transferable work skills, and familiarity with modern technology and appliances constitute common barriers to employment for Liberian refugees. For those in the work force, punctuality, regular attendance, and a steady work pace have emerged as problem areas. Service providers should ensure that Liberians understand the full scope of their work responsibilities, including the time requirements. Special attention should be given to the importance of punctuality in the U.S. workplace.

For single mothers, employment can be a particularly difficult challenge. Coordinating work, childcare, schooling, and household chores can be overwhelming for a single parent. One effective strategy, service providers have found, is the use of volunteers, who help guide the parents with childcare and household chores. Service providers may also direct the parent to appropriate youth programs for the children.

Liberians from rural areas will have backgrounds primarily in farming.

Case Study: Employment

George, an employment coordinator, was recently assigned his first Liberian case: a 58-year-old single mother with her two biological children, three nonbiological children, and her 77-year-old mother. The five children range in age from 5 to 16. This means that in a family of seven there is only one employable adult.

Discussion Questions

- *If you were George, how would you approach employment with this family?*
- *What steps would you advise the mother to take to help her family achieve self-sufficiency?*

Housing

Liberians from urban areas will be familiar with modern housing, but the majority of Liberian refugees come from rural areas with limited exposure to the kind of housing found in the United States. In rural Liberia, most of the living is done outdoors. Housing varies from stick and mud huts with thatched roofs to clay brick houses with zinc roofs. Most homes contain separate rooms for sleeping. The kitchen is typically outside and constructed with natural materials to provide a shaded and open-air area. Latrines and bathhouses are also outside. In urban areas of Liberian where there is indoor plumbing, it is common practice to discard toilet paper into a wastebasket instead of into the toilet due to poor plumbing. Service providers should review with refugees what should and should not be flushed down the toilet.

Most rural Liberian refugees will arrive having had minimal experience with electrical appliances, bathroom fixtures, and thermostats. This lack of knowledge can be dangerous: One refugee, after seeming to understand how to operate the stove and oven, collected wood, put it in the oven, lit it, closed the oven door, and then turned on the stove. Thorough orientations should be provided with no assumptions of prior knowledge.

Rural Liberians typically live with their extended families, usually within a village of their own ethnic group. For most, it will be a new experience to live in an apartment complex with diverse populations. Service providers should take extra care to go over the contents of the lease with the refugees, explaining both their rights and responsibilities, particularly with regard to the number of people who can live in an apartment.

Service providers should make sure that Liberians understand how much income they will have and what their financial obligations are, particularly in relation to housing. In rural areas, Liberians tend to live in the present and not make significant plans for the future. Helping Liberians understand the billing cycles in America, credit, and the consequences of not paying bills is vital for successful adjustment. For rural Liberians, the concept of homelessness is unimaginable. The possibility of eviction for not paying the rent may not completely sink in.

Legal Issues

Like other refugee groups, Liberians will need to understand their rights and responsibilities under U.S. law. One area of concern is bribery. Commonly practiced in many areas of Liberia, bribery may be viewed by Liberians as simply a form of tipping. In Liberia, it is not uncommon to "tip" a policeman to avoid a ticket, a headmaster to gain access to the next grade level, or a government official for faster service. Refugees will need to understand American attitudes toward this practice. In particular, they will need to understand the possible legal consequences of attempting to "tip" a police officer.

Most Liberians from rural areas will have limited exposure to the kinds of housing found in the United States.

There have been some reports of refugee women entering the sex trade industry. Women need to understand the laws of the United States with regard to prostitution. More importantly, they need to understand their rights and know how to get help if they need it.

Health and Well-Being

It is expected that Liberian refugees will arrive with numerous health issues. Preventive health care is extremely limited in Liberia and in the refugee camps. That fact, coupled with an unbalanced diet, means that illnesses such as malnutrition, anemia, and skin diseases are commonplace. Many Liberians will arrive with ongoing physical health care needs that require many hours of medical treatment and counseling.

Inadequate health care in the past, combined with cultural habits such as sharing food from one bowl and engaging in unprotected sex, has lead to the spread of communicable diseases. The Liberian refugee population, like other refugee populations, includes incidence of HIV/AIDS. For agencies not already working with HIV-positive refugees, information may be obtained by viewing the *Helping Refugees with Special Health Needs* link at www.refugeesusa.org. Service providers and health practitioners should also be aware that some ethnic groups in Liberia practice female circumcision, more commonly referred to in the United States as female genital mutilation (FMG).

Although traditional healing is widely practiced in the rural areas of Liberia, Liberians have great respect for Western medicine. Nevertheless, they bring their own cultural attitudes about medicine with them. For example, Liberian patients who are sick may feel cheated if a visit to the doctor does not result in an injection. At the same time, many Liberians are very hesitant to have their blood drawn. They believe that there is only so much blood in the human body and that blood that has been drained from the body will not be replenished.

Liberians have ways of describing their ailments that can cause misunderstandings among U.S. healthcare providers. When Liberians are sick, they may say, "I have a fresh cold." This statement is used for a variety of ailments and does not necessarily indicate symptoms that Americans associate with the common cold. If Liberians are tired or are generally not feeling well, they may say, "I have low blood." They may also say that that have malaria, because it is common to use the word *malaria* to indicate a general feeling of sickness. Health care professionals should know about this broad use of the word, while understanding that malaria is also a real possibility with Liberians, who have lived in areas where the illness is common.

Rural Liberians do not practice the same hygiene habits as Americans. While bathing daily—and among some groups, even twice a day—is the norm in Liberia, it is typically done with one bucket of water and a bar of soap. Liberians will be unfamiliar with the large selection of hygiene products in the United

Liberian refugees will arrive with numerous health issues.

States. Initial orientations should include the use of deodorant, tissues to clean the nose, and women's products such as sanitary pads.

Dental hygiene in the rural areas of Liberia and in refugee camps is typically accomplished by brushing the teeth with a stick. Resettlement staff should show new arrivals proper brushing techniques with a toothbrush and an appropriate amount of toothpaste. Few rural Liberians will have fillings; typically teeth were pulled if there were problems. It should be anticipated that many Liberians will need ongoing dental treatment.

Case Study: Health

In one week, Fatima was taken by her caseworker to the health department, a gynecologist, and her new primary health care physician. At each appointment, blood was taken. At the second appointment, Fatima informed her caseworker that she did not have enough blood. After much counseling, she agreed to allow them to draw blood. At the third appointment, she once again refused and told her caseworker that she did not have any blood left. Once again, the caseworker provided information and counseling and Fatima finally agreed. At the end of the appointment when they were departing the office, Fatima informed her case manager that the doctor was horrible—he took her blood and did not even give her any medication. She informed the caseworker that she wanted a new doctor.

Discussion Questions

- *Why do you think Fatima is not satisfied with her health care?*
- *What can help Fatima feel better about preventative health care in the United States?*

Mental Health

The civil war in Liberia was brutal. Refugees, while trying to flee, were forced to pass through various checkpoints, where they had to identify themselves and their ethnic group. Executions and torture were commonplace at checkpoints. Many Liberians were forced to watch, and some even to sing and dance, while a family member was killed or tortured. Even children were forced to watch. Horrible atrocities were committed against women, including gang rape and rape with objects such as rifles. There were also documented cases of babies being tortured and killed in front of their mothers.

One result of the war has been family separation. Many families were separated in their attempt to flee the country, and some family members were detained at checkpoints. It is common for Liberians to be uncertain about the whereabouts of family members. Many are presumed dead.

One result of the war has been family separation.

In the rural areas of Liberia, a person with a mental illness was widely believed to have been a victim of black magic, or *ju ju.* While Liberians may have mixed feelings about seeking mental or emotional help, service providers should make sure that the refugees understand the basic symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder and where and how they can seek confidential help. Liberians suffering from mental health problems may repeatedly complain of physical symptoms such as aches and pains and problems sleeping.

One strategy that has been particularly successful in working with rural Africans unfamiliar with American mental health practices is the group meeting. Led by an mental health practitioner who has worked with Liberians, a group meeting can provide a socially acceptable format for addressing problems. Once the group achieves a certain comfort level with the practitioner, individual appointments are made as needed. It is important for refugees to understand that their feelings are normal and that with the help of the appropriate professional, they can work through their problems.

Liberians suffering from mental health problems may complain of physical symptoms such as aches and pains and problems sleeping.

Recommended Reading and Viewing

For the general reader who would like to learn more about the people, history, and cultures of Liberia, the following books, films, and Web sites are recommended:

Books

African Women and Peace Support Group. (2003). *Liberian women peacemakers: Fighting for the right to be seen, heard and counted.* Trenton, NJ: African World Press. (Available from African World Press, Box 1892, Trenton, NJ 08607; awprsp@africanworld.com; 609-695-3200)
This report contains excerpts from interviews with women peacemakers as well as a chronology and narrative of the civil war in Liberia.

Clegg, C. A. (2004). *The price of liberty: African Americans and the making of Liberia.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina.
This book, by a historian, examines the impact of African American colonization on native Africans by looking at the experiences of North Carolinians who went to Liberia. Clegg argues that ultimately the emigrants constructed a settler society marred by many of the same exclusionary, oppressive characteristics common to modern colonial regimes.

Dunn, D. E. Liberia *(World Bibliographical Series, No. 157).* Oxford: Clio Press, 1995.
This extensive bibliography by one of Liberia's most respected scholars is broken down into sections. Entries are annotated.

Dunn, D. E., Burrowes, C. P., & Beyan, A. M. (Eds.). (2002). *Historical dictionary of Liberia* (2nd ed). Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.
With short paragraphs and essays on important events, topics, and people, this easy-to-use and highly recommended work is more than a dictionary.

Ellis, S. D. K. (1999). *The mask of anarchy: The destruction of Liberia and the religious dimensions of an African civil war.* New York: New York University Press.
This thought-provoking work examines the political, ethnic, cultural, and religious aspects of Liberian society that shaped the nature and development of the civil war.

Fleischman, J. (1994). Easy prey: *Child soldiers in Liberia.* New York: Human Rights Watch.
Although international law forbids the use of children under the age of 15 as soldiers, all factions in the Liberian civil war used child soldiers. This book examines the impact of this practice on the children, their families, and the society at large.

Gay, J. (2004). *The brightening shadow.* Northridge, CA: New World African Press. (Original work published 1980)
The second in a trilogy of novels, this book tells the story of Kpelle twin brothers growing up in Liberia in the 1950s and 1960s. One boy follows Kpelle tradition, while the other immerses himself in Western culture. The author is an American who taught for many years at Cuttington College in Liberia.

Gay, J. (2004). *Long day's anger.* Northridge, CA: New World African Press.
This novel, the third in Gay's trilogy of novels about Kpelle twin brothers, explores the Liberian civil war through the experiences of its characters.

Gay, J. (2004). *Red dust on the green leaves.* Northridge, CA: New World African Press. (Original work published 1973)
This novel, the first in Gay's trilogy of novels about Kpelle twin brothers, is set in the 1950s and 1960s.

Keenan, J. (Ed.). (1997). *Liberian cookhouse cooking.* Washington, DC: Friends of Liberia.
This introduction to Liberian cooking includes short commentaries, proverbs, and observations about Liberian traditions and peoples. (Available from www.fol.org)

Kieh, G. (2002). *Zones of conflict in Africa: Theories and cases.* Westport, CT: Praeger.
This book examines the current thinking on the root causes of African conflicts. The second half focuses on cases studies drawn from the Great Lakes Region, Liberia, Nigeria, and Zambia.

Lawyers Committee for Human Rights. (1986). *Liberia: A promise betrayed.* New York: Author.
Through firsthand accounts, this book documents the widespread abuses of President Doe's military government.

Malakpa, S. W. G. (2002). *The village boy.* Northridge, CA: New World African Press.
A political and social satire, this novel tells the story of a boy genius in rural Liberia.

Moran, M. (1990). *Civilized women: Gender and prestige in southeastern Liberia.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990.
This scholarly, well-written work illuminates the complex relationships between Americo-Liberians and indigenous Liberians.

Ruiz, H. (1992). *Uprooted Liberians: Casualties of a brutal war.* Washington, DC: United States Committee for Refugees.
With particular attention to the root causes of the Liberian civil war, this 32-page report provides a snapshot of the Liberian refugee situation in the mid-1990s.

Sankawulo, W. (2005). *Sundown at dawn: A Liberian odyssey.* Houston: Dusty Spark.
Written by the former interim head of state of Liberia, this novel provides insights into Liberian culture and politics and the Kpelle people, as it tells the story of one man's efforts to overcome challenging circumstances and obtain an education.

Singler, J. (1981). *An introduction to Liberian English.* East Lansing: Michigan State University.
Prepared for Peace Corps volunteers, this publication provides the nonspecialist with an introduction to the speech of Western-educated English speakers in Liberia. Although written more than 20 years ago, it remains current. (Out of print; limited availability)

Films

Barnes, D. C. (Director) & Kahlor, M. (2000). *Cry of the Pepperbird: A Story of Liberia* [Documentary film]. (Available through HCC-TV, Howard Community College, Columbia, MD; 410-772-4411; nkahlor@howardcc.edu)
This award-winning 50-minute video presents Liberia's history from its 19th-century founding to the time of the first civil war.

Bright, N. [Producer/Director/Writer] (2002). *Liberia: America's step-child* [Documentary film]. (Available from Documentary Educational Resources, 101 Morse St., Watertown, MA; http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/liberia/)
This 90-minute film by Liberian filmmaker Nancee Bright is an excellent introduction to the history and societies of Liberia.

Ivers, G. H. (Producer). (1997). *Song of the refugee: A message of hope from Africa* [Documentary film]. (Available through Episcopal Parish Services, http://www.episcopalparishservices.org/displayrecord.asp?EntryCode=SORE; 800-903-5541)
This film examines the plight of displaced persons from Liberia in refugee camps in Liberia and Ivory Coast, as well as the plight of other African refugee groups in Uganda and Rwanda. It features the Ugandan singer Samite.

Stack, J. (Producer/Director) & Brabazon, J. (Producer/Director). (2003). *Liberia: An uncivil war* [Documentary film]. (Available from International Documentary Association, http://www.gabrielfilms.com/])
Made for the Discovery Channel, this award-winning documentary vividly shows one of the most vicious periods of fighting in Liberia, in mid-2003, before the peace treaty was signed in August.

Web Sites

http://allafrica.com/liberia/
Current news stories from Liberia

http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/subjects/liberia/
The 19th-century story of Liberia's early history through letters of freed slaves relocated to Liberia

http://fol.org
Friends of Liberia Web site focusing on education, human rights, community development, and good governance; maintained by former Peace Corps volunteers, businesspeople, missionaries, and others who have lived and worked in Liberia

http://hrw.org/doc/?t=africa&c=liberi
Liberia page for Human Rights Watch

http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=Liberia
Basic information on the languages spoken in Liberia

http://www.onliberia.org
A vast Indiana University collection of scholarly and nonscholarly books, articles, documents, artifacts, and audio and visual material

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